


 ACT Meditation 5-10 min Client or group No

The Mindful Check-In

Mindfulness is one of the six core processes in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and refers to paying nonjudgmental, purposeful attention to the present moment just as it is [1]. As a core process of ACT, mindfulness facilitates psychological flexibility by supporting the ability to stay in the present moment and choose action guided by values, even in the presence of difficult internal experiences such as unhelpful thoughts and uncomfortable emotions [2]. Psychological flexibility has been linked to improved well-being, stress resilience, and adaptive emotional regulation [2, 3].

One of the most common challenges clients face is becoming identified with unhelpful thoughts and storylines, especially those that are evaluative, self-critical, or future-oriented [4]. These thoughts can dominate attention, taking clients away from the richness of the present moment [2, 4]. This “mindful check-in” exercise is designed to help clients shift their awareness from internal narratives to present-moment experience using somatic grounding and sensory awareness techniques [5]. It is often practised for 2-3 minutes at the beginning of each ACT session to bring the client into the here and now and get them present in the session [2].

Mindful check-ins support cognitive defusion (stepping back from thoughts), acceptance (making space for uncomfortable feelings), and establish contact with the present moment, thereby engaging three of ACT’s six core processes [2, 4, 5]. It is especially useful for providing the pause needed to support choosing values-based action over avoidance.

This brief practice uses evidence-based mindfulness techniques, including grounding [6], sensory noticing [5], and breath awareness [7]. These strategies are known to reduce experiential avoidance by helping to develop a more open, accepting relationship with internal experiences. Ultimately, practicing mindful check-ins support emotional regulation by building a client’s capacity to respond rather than react [2, 5, 7].

By incorporating this brief, practical tool into daily life, clients can develop the habit of returning to the “now,” helping them shift from mindlessness or rumination to mindful presence.



Author

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Goal

The goal of this exercise is to help clients practice shifting their attention from a reactive state based on identification with thoughts about the past or future to an embodied, present-moment awareness. By grounding attention in the body, breath, and sensory experience, clients can cultivate mindfulness and begin developing greater psychological flexibility.



Advice

- The following tool is a 'mindfulness check-in' script that can be read aloud to a client in a session, or group of clients in a workshop setting as required. Otherwise, it can be printed out and given to a client along with the downloadable MP3 as a short homework exercise.
- Encourage clients to use this exercise throughout the day, particularly when they feel distracted, emotionally overwhelmed, or disconnected. A 2- to 5-minute check-in can serve as a mental reset.
- This exercise can be used to support other tools, for example, to support responding rather than reacting during choice points. After practicing mindful grounding, clients might ask, "What's one small thing I can do next that moves me toward my values?"
- Normalize mind-wandering by reassuring clients that it's normal. Practicing mindful check-ins entails noticing when the mind has drifted and gently returning to the focus of the exercise.



References

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5. English, E. (2024). Mindfulness of body and feeling in *Crisis integration with acceptance and commitment therapy: Theory and practice*. (pp. 123-167) Routledge.
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The Mindful Check-In

Introduction

The 'mindfulness check-in' exercise provides a quick and easy method for connecting to the present moment in situations that stress or trigger you. By grounding in the feet, attending to the breath, and completing a short sensory awareness check-in you create a mindful pause that supports a response rather than a reaction.

Step 1: Grounding in the feet

Sit or stand comfortably.

(pause 5 seconds)

Close your eyes if it is safe to do so.

(pause 5 seconds)

Bring your attention to your feet.

(pause 5 seconds)

Notice the sensations: warmth, coolness, tingling, or the feeling of contact with the floor. Spend 30 seconds simply noticing.

(pause 30 seconds)

Step 2: Follow your breath

Now, shift your attention to your breath.

(pause 5 seconds)

Feel each inhale and exhale.

(pause 5 seconds)

Pay attention to how your chest and belly move with each breath.

(pause 5 seconds)

Gently count 10 full breaths, allowing your mind to settle.

(pause 60 seconds)



Step 3: The five senses check-in

Now, gently open your eyes and become aware of your surroundings using your senses.

(pause 5 seconds)

- Notice **5 things you can see** (shapes, colors, light, shadows).

(pause 20 seconds)

- Notice **4 things you can feel** (clothing, air, pressure, texture).

(pause 16 seconds)

- Notice **3 things you can hear** (ambient sounds, your breath, silence).

(pause 12 seconds)

- Notice **2 things you can smell** (or recall a favorite scent).

(pause 6 seconds)

- Notice **1 thing you can taste** (or imagine a flavor you enjoy).

(pause 5 seconds)

Step 4: Return to the breath

Close your eyes again.

(pause 5 seconds)

Place one hand on your belly. Notice the rise and fall as you breathe.

(pause 5 seconds)

Gently count 10 breaths. Let your attention rest on the sensation of breath without needing to change it.

(pause 60 seconds)

Step 5: Re-ground in the feet

Bring your attention once more to your feet.

(pause 5 seconds)

Feel the contact with the ground.

(pause 5 seconds)



Notice sensations again: pressure, temperature, texture.

(pause 5 seconds)

Allow yourself to feel connected to the earth beneath you.

(pause 5 seconds)

Step 6: Reflect and re-enter

When ready, open your eyes.

(pause 5 seconds)

Briefly reflect:

- *What do I notice now?*

(pause 5 seconds)

- *Where is my attention?*

(pause 5 seconds)

- *How do I feel compared to before?*

(pause 5 seconds)

Allow yourself to gently move into your next action with greater awareness.