



# HOW DO YOU HANDLE IT WHEN SOMEONE CUTS YOU OFF?

Do you tell yourself they are stupid, idiots, and shouldn't be on the road?

Not only do these generalizations not accurately reflect the facts, they increase our own stress level, negatively impacting our mood.

A better way of handling the situation is with mindfulness.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the act of consciously focusing on the present moment, without judgment and

without attachment to the moment. It involves noticing what is going on around you and within you, engaging all your senses.

The opposite of acting mindfully is acting automatically, habitually, or out of urges or impulse. Mindfulness is acting with deliberate thought and consideration.

Imagine you are driving your car. Next thing you know you arrive at your destination and realize you don't actually remember driving there.

Perhaps you were on your way to the store and next thing you know you're on the route to work, without noticing that you had deviated from your original destination until several minutes had passed.

These are examples of driving automatically, without thought or consideration. Chances are you were deep in thought about the past or the future. Either way, you were not in the present.

Now imagine you are driving mindfully.

You notice anything that is unusual—a new building going up, a police car parked by the side of the road, two pedestrians that appear to be deep in conversation. You observe the flowers growing by the side of the road and the new street sign and road construction. You observe that it's a sunny day and that there is a slight smell of oil in the air from a nearby diesel truck.

As you are driving, the car beside you cuts in a little close, perhaps not seeing you, and you have to slow down to make room. You notice how you are feeling—you observe whether you are alert or tired, stressed or at peace.

You observe any thoughts that come into your mind. You acknowledge the thoughts, then put them out of your mind as you focus on driving.

You are driving with intention and without judgment.

You are not judging the driver who cut you off, the person speeding by you, or the person who is going under the speed limit. You merely observe and acknowledge.

While many people find it challenging to be mindful and present all the time, some people find it challenging to be mindful at any time.

Some people live their lives on automatic pilot—judging and reacting to external and internal stimuli without conscious thought, too focused on regrets and disappointments from the past or worries about the future, to relax and enjoy the present moment.

When we train ourselves to be observant—to notice without judgment, to stay focused in the present, we increase our ability to remain calm. We are able to make rational decisions that reflect our true intentions and values rather than our mood and emotions in the moment.

Letting go of judgment is an important component of mindfulness. Not only do we let go of judging others or situations, we let go of judging ourselves, our own reactions, and our own thoughts. We cultivate curiosity and acceptance.

Acceptance doesn't mean that we like everything we see, hear, or experience, it simply means that we accept the reality of it.

Rather than focusing on how people 'should' be or how people 'should' behave, we accept that people behave in ways consistent with their values, beliefs, personality and circumstance, to expect them to behave otherwise is not realistic or helpful.

When we let go of judgment, we not only improve our personal relationships, we minimize the frustration and stress that we often experience when we focus on how things 'should' be.

The more we think judgemental thoughts, the more worked up we become. We may become so indignant that we have impulses to act in ways that have negative consequences—engaging in road rage behaviour, or shouting and swearing in the car, upsetting our passengers.

The other important aspect of mindfulness is being in the moment. There is a saying that depression is caused by dwelling on the past, while anxiety is caused by worrying about the future.

For most of us, when we focus on the present, we have more peace. The reason we are calmer when focused on the present is because, while not perfect, the present is usually okay.

We have our basic needs met, we have food, clothing, shelter, water, and people who love and care about us.

When you practice training your mind to stay in the present, you can use this skill to help you get through stressful times.

When you find yourself ruminating about the past or future, your trained mind can be coaxed back into the present. As you learn to observe your thoughts and emotions, you can calm and soothe yourself, using rational thoughts and your intuition to help you make wise decisions.

If you would like learn more about how to bring mindfulness and its benefits into your life, contact Walmsley, your EFAP provider and speak to a counsellor.

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