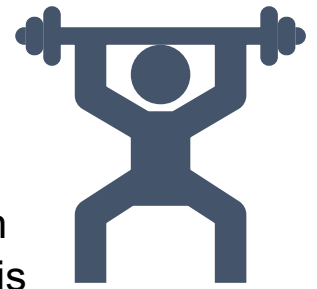


# Strengthening Your Psychological Flexibility



Being psychologically flexible is a skillset that helps us align our actions with our values and the things that we enjoy even when uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or emotions arise. It is a combination of skills that require practice and regular use to maintain. Below are some practices you can use to strengthen your psychological flexibility muscles. These practices are adapted from [Steven C. Hayes' Acceptance and Commitment Therapy toolkit](#).

1

**Be Open:** The first skill is approaching life with a willingness to accept our internal experiences rather than resist them, no matter what experience may arise. To practice:

Look around the room and choose three objects. Start by looking at the first, as you take it in, think to yourself, “No, those do not belong—that needs to change! No, I don’t like it.” Repeat this a few times. Now, move onto the next object and repeat this process. As you do this, try to notice how it feels to look at those objects as you tell them no?

Now, look around the room at those same three objects. Start with the first, and as you look, actively think in your mind, “Yes, those belong. Yes, it is okay. Yes.” Repeat this a few times. How does it feel to look at those objects and actively accept them? Did you feel differently when you were taking a “no” approach versus a “yes” approach?



The important thing to take from this practice is that by greeting our experiences with openness can lead to more flexibility in how we respond. If we try to avoid or resist an uncomfortable thought, feeling, or emotion, we add to the distress that it’s causing and our actions often become rigid, creating suffering. If we accept the uncomfortable thought, feeling, or emotion as part of the human experience, and continue to move on with what is important to us, we minimize our suffering.



2

**Be Aware:** The next skill to practice is being aware by paying attention to our internal experiences, our surroundings, and other sensory experiences. A way of thinking of this is to, ‘pay attention on purpose while being curious about what is happening.’

Being mindful helps us to stay present in the moment, instead of getting caught up in worrying about the past or the future. Practicing mindfulness does not have to be complicated. You can practice mindfulness in two minutes or less:



Set a timer for two minutes. Rest your feet flat on the floor. Straighten your back, relax your shoulders, and let your hands rest on your lap or at your side. Rest your gaze on the floor. Focus on your breathing. Notice how your breath feels as it flows into your lungs. If your mind wanders, acknowledge it, and then refocus on your breathing. Keep practicing until your timer ends.

How do you feel after practicing for two minutes? Even brief practices can help strengthen our mindfulness muscles! You can incorporate mindfulness throughout your day by doing things “mindfully:” simply slow down and pay attention to what is happening internally. For example: brush your teeth, but slow down and think about each step as you do it. Notice how the toothbrush feels in your hand as you brush your teeth.

Practicing being mindful helps us to stay in the present, even during difficult experiences.

3

**Be Engaged:** The third skill is to stay in tune with our values to help guide our actions. There are lots of ways to practice this, but one simple way is to think about how your life might change over the next year and how you can be fully yourself while also supporting the people you care about. Then, take some time to write it down. What will be important to you over the next year? What attributes or qualities are important to you, and what kind of person do you want to be? How might this show up in your actions? Set a timer for 5 minutes and write down your thoughts.

