

Mindful Listening

Heather Janney – UF/IFAS Extension Columbia County, County Extension Director/4-H Agent II

[Mindfulness](#), being alert and present in the moment is what can help in this. For the average person, photographers could be looked at as being mindful by using their senses. They look around them for the beauty through the lens of their camera. When a sound is heard it draws their attention to something new, something else to be captured. They smell something and find the source of it to capture that moment. When a photographer feels a breeze on their skin, they try to find something that shows this rush of air. Now it's not taken into account that photographers are thinking through the aperture, exposure, and focus of these subjects and they could be comparing them with previous photos or thinking of other locations that might be similar or other opportunities to take a photo. However, if they stay simple, in that moment, moving on auto focus, letting everything fall into the hands of the camera and trusting it will adjust for the best capture, that's when they are being mindful.

Mindfully listening

One of the easiest things to use as an [anchor](#) in practicing mindfulness is your hearing. Mindfully listening includes only focusing on the things around you: the noises and sounds that are around you. The techniques for practicing mindfulness are very simple. For it to work for you though, you must first focus on the simplicities of the sounds. A mindful posture is the beginning of focusing on any of these things. It includes facing forward, having your back upright, stillness, quietness, being relaxed yet alert, and letting your eyes close. Our minds will naturally wander away because they are happy to jump around. Most of what we do every day is training our mind to multi-task and to not stay on one thing: cell phones, texting, Facebook, Twitter. All of these things train the mind to move quickly. This tendency to not stay focused is what makes mindfulness uncomfortable in the beginning.



Source: William Iven

This tendency to not stay focused is what makes mindfulness uncomfortable in the beginning.

Things to notice

First of all, noticing your breath coming in and out of your mouth, nose, and/or chest can be a good point to start. You'll also notice how it feels coming in and out. Choose what it is that you'll be listening to: birds singing, trucks going by on the road, the a/c unit running outside your window, or a song or piece of music. Just listen to it. If its something on a phone or other device, you can try using headphones to help you tune out the other noises around you. Try and focus on that one sound. Notice things about the sound: pitches, changes in the volume, shifts in the sound. Thoughts will arise in your mind but try to push them away and bring yourself back to the sound you selected. Lose yourself in these sounds. Once you get towards the end and are ready to wrap up listening mindfully, you'll want to reflect on what you heard and how you mind, body, and breath feel. Do you feel differently? Are you calm? Frustrated? Anxious? Think about those feelings or [emotions](#) and what about the sound that made you feel that way.

Special things to consider

Mindfully listening is a time to listen without judgement, criticism, or interruption while also being aware of your own internal thoughts and reactions. Right now, while people of the United States are working to become much better at working together and respecting one another regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or creed, its a great time to start practicing listening mindfully to conversations. Notice your thoughts and reactions when someone talks. What exactly about what they've said makes you feel that way? Is there more information or research that you need to read to have an educated response to a situation? Think through those thoughts and [respond rather than react](#) when something isn't quite what you normally would agree with. You must use [emotional intelligence and practice emotional awareness](#) with yourself in the world to keep our peaceful environment.



UF/IFAS Photo: Sally Lanigan

Listening mindfully is a way that we can start to make the world a calmer and much more pleasant place for all of our fellow human beings. What will you try and listen mindfully to first?