

# 10 Tips for Living More Mindfully

Former monk, Andy Puddicombe, lends tools to support your meditation practice.

By [Andy Puddicombe](#)



Illustration courtesy of Headspace

What follows are just a few of the most important ways to support your meditation practice and strengthen your practice of mindfulness in everyday life—what I call “headspace.” The theme that runs throughout is *awareness*, an understanding of both oneself and others. It’s about developing a gentle curiosity: watching, noticing, and observing what’s happening in every aspect of your life—how you act, how you speak, and how you think. It’s not about trying to be someone else: it’s about finding a sense of ease with you as you are, right now.

### **1. Perspective: *Choosing how you see your life***

For meditation to be effective, it doesn't really matter how you view your life. But it can be useful to acknowledge the general theme, because that way you can be more alert to the tendency to slip into negative patterns of thought. And it's this increased awareness that provides the potential for sustainable change.

It's also useful to notice how your perspective can shift—how one day you can get on a crowded train and not be too bothered about it, while on another occasion it appears to push every button you have. The good thing about this realisation is that clearly it's not what's happening *outside* of ourselves that causes us the most difficulty, but rather what's going on *inside* our own minds—which, thankfully, is something that can change.

Noticing these shifting perspectives from day to day, and from moment to moment, can provide a very strong support for your daily meditation.

## **2. Communication: *Relating to others***

If you want to find a greater sense of happiness through the practice of meditation, you'll need to notice that taking out your frustrations on others is unlikely to encourage a calm and clear mind. Communicating skillfully and sensitively with other people is therefore essential on the road to getting some headspace. This could mean applying a greater sense of restraint, empathy, or perspective to your relationships—or maybe all three!

That said, there are some people who, no matter how well intentioned *you* are, will still choose to pick a fight. In these situations there is often little you can do. Trying to empathize with them and recognising similar states of

mind within yourself can be helpful, but if someone is consistently unpleasant toward you, then it may be best to just stay clear, if you possibly can.

### **3. Appreciation: *Smelling the roses***

Have you ever noticed how much emphasis some people place on even the smallest amount of difficulty in their lives, and how little time they spend reflecting on moments of happiness? Part of the reason for this is the idea that happiness is somehow rightfully ours, and that everything else is therefore wrong or out of place.

The idea of taking time out to be grateful may sound a little trite to some, but it's essential if we want to get some more headspace. It's very difficult to be caught up in lots of distracting thoughts when there is a strong sense of appreciation in your life. And by developing a more heartfelt appreciation of what we have, we also begin to see more clearly what's missing in the lives of others.

### **4. Kindness: *Toward both yourself and others***

When you're kind to someone else, it feels good. It's not rocket science. It feels good to you and it feels good to them. It makes for a very happy, peaceful mind. But while you're at it, how about showing yourself some of that kindness, especially in the challenging process of learning to be more mindful? We live in a world with such high expectations that we can often be critical of our own progress in learning something new.

Fortunately, meditation has a strange way of bringing out the kindness in people, and practicing kindness in everyday life will feed back into your own meditation.

Kindness makes the mind softer, more malleable, and

easier to work with in your practice. It creates a mindset that is less judgmental and more accepting. Clearly this will have profound implications for our relationships with others.

### **5. Compassion: *In the shoes of others***

Compassion is not something that we can “do” or “create”; it already exists in each and every one of us. If you think of awareness as a clear blue sky, the same image can be applied to compassion. In fact, you could say that the blue sky represents both awareness and compassion in equal measure.

Sometimes compassion will arise spontaneously, like the clouds parting to reveal the blue sky. At other times we may have to make a conscious effort, which is a bit more like *imagining* what the blue sky looks like, even when it’s obscured by clouds. But the more you imagine this scenario, the more likely it is to happen naturally.

Compassion is a lot like empathy—putting ourselves in the shoes of another and experiencing a shared sense of understanding.

### **6. Balance: *A sense of equanimity***

The ebb and flow of life is not unlike the sea. Sure, sometimes it’s calm and serene, but at other times the waves can be so big that they threaten to overwhelm us. These fluctuations are an inevitable part of life. But when you forget this simple fact, it’s easy to get swept away by strong waves of difficult emotions.

By training the mind through meditation, it’s possible to develop a more balanced approach, and thus experience a greater sense of equanimity in life. This shouldn’t be confused with a boring existence where you float along in

life like some emotionless grey blob. In fact it's quite the opposite. Having greater awareness of your emotions means that, if anything, your experience of them will be heightened. It's just that in being less caught up in them, you will no longer feel as though you're at their mercy.

### **7. Acceptance: *Resistance is futile***

No matter how fortunate your circumstances are, life can at times be stressful and challenging. We often try to ignore this fact and therefore feel frustrated and disappointed when we don't get our own way. Just as we did when approaching compassion, it can be useful to think back to the blue sky analogy when you reflect on acceptance.

The journey to acceptance is about discovering what we need to let go of, rather than what we need to start doing. By noticing moments of resistance throughout the day, you can start to become more aware of what prevents acceptance from *naturally* arising. This in turn will allow you to view the thoughts and feelings that arise during your meditation with a much greater sense of ease.

### **8. Composure: *Letting go of impatience***

For many people, life nowadays has become so busy, so hectic, that an accompanying sense of impatience is perhaps inevitable. In such moments, you may notice your jaw tightening, your foot tapping, or your breath getting increasingly shallow. But by *noticing* the impatience with a genuine sense of curiosity, the very nature of the impatience begins to change. Somehow the momentum slows down and its grip is released.

Impatience is just as likely to show up in your meditation practice as it does in everyday life—one simply reflecting the other. In fact, if you're like most people, you may well find yourself asking, "Why am I not experiencing results more quickly?" But remember, meditation is not really about achievement and results—which is why it's such a nice change of pace from the rest of life. Instead, it's about learning to be aware, to rest in the space of natural awareness with a genuine sense of ease.

### **9. Dedication: *Sticking with it***

Mindfulness is about a fundamental shift in the way you relate to your thoughts and feelings. While that may sound exciting, or perhaps a little overwhelming, it's actually brought about by repeating the exercise briefly and often. So this means practicing meditation on a regular basis, no matter how you feel. Just as when you acquire any other skill, you'll become more confident and familiar with the feeling of mindfulness the more often you apply it.

By practicing in this way—a little but often—you can slowly start to build up a stable sense of awareness in your meditation, which will naturally feed through to the rest of your life. Conversely, being more mindful in everyday life will have a positive impact on your practice. If you're really clear in your motivation, knowing why you're learning meditation and being aware of the people around you who are likely to benefit from your increased sense of headspace, then you're unlikely to have trouble sitting down for ten short minutes each day.

### **10. Presence: *Living life skilfully***

Living skilfully can mean having the presence of mind to restrain yourself when you sense you are about to say or do something you'll later regret. It can also mean having the strength and stability of awareness to respond sensitively to difficult situations rather than reacting impulsively. So living skilfully requires a certain amount of discriminating wisdom.

Unfortunately, wisdom can't be learned from books or magazine articles, no matter how profound the writing. Instead, it arises from an *experiential* understanding of life, which meditation can help to enhance. Just as we saw that compassion and acceptance are analogous to the blue sky, so too can we experience simple presence. Wisdom isn't something you can "do" or "make happen" —it's there in all of us. By becoming more familiar with that space within ourselves and trusting our own instincts more fully, we can learn to *apply* this quality of discriminating wisdom in everyday life and begin to live more skilfully in the world.



Andy Puddicombe is a former Buddhist monk and the founder of Headspace, a project that aims to make meditation accessible and easy to learn.