

## Praise for *The Mindfulness Toolbox*

“This is a must-have book for every therapist using mindfulness approaches with clients. From the 10 ‘Tips’ thru the 40 ‘Tools’, Donald Altman shares his considerable wisdom, along with a sense of respect for both the client—and the therapist. At the same time, the material is presented in a light and very usable style, from the clear outlines to the many client handouts.”

—Jean L. Kristeller, Ph.D., Research and clinical psychologist, and developer of Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT)

“The ceaselessly creative Donald Altman, in his never-ending quest to make mindfulness practice accessible to anyone motivated to learn it, has once again broached new ground in elaborating simple, useful techniques for applying mindfulness in everyday life. *The Mindfulness Toolbox* is a veritable wonderland of user-friendly implements of mindfulness practice, all laid out to maximize a new (and maybe not-so-new) practitioner’s ability to effectively use applied mindfulness. *The Mindfulness Toolbox* will be a tremendous aid and benefit to all people who practice and teach mindfulness.”

—Jeffrey M. Schwartz, MD, author of *Brain Lock and You Are Not Your Brain*

“Much like any healing prescription, *The Mindfulness Toolbox* skillfully reduces pain and fosters balance by getting to the root cause of the symptoms. If you want to expand your mindfulness repertoire, you won’t find a more complete and practical set of key techniques, handouts, and ideas. You’ll even be guided as to which tools fit together, such as tools for sensing the body, tools for meditation, and tools for getting into the present moment. With a large dose of awareness, clarity, precision, simplicity, and insight, Donald Altman has given us a potent and worthwhile medicine for inviting well-being, acceptance, and inner peace.”

—Paul Harrison, creator and producer of *The Mindfulness Movie*, and author of *Where’s My Zen?* and *The Ten Paradoxes: The Science of Where’s My Zen?*

“Mindfulness has swept through the mental health profession in the past several decades and plays a major role in important modalities such as DBT, ACT, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression, Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention and others. Whether or not you are trained in any of these modalities, *The Mindfulness Toolbox* by Donald Altman is the resource you need to strengthen your use of mindfulness with a wide variety of clients. Altman is an experienced and loving guide to lead you through the mindfulness landscape. His new book presents a comprehensive set of highly practical, effective techniques, tools and handouts that will enable you to skillfully utilize mindfulness in your clinical work. The easy-to-use interventions for anxiety, depression, stress and pain are described in clear language that reflects the kindness and beauty of mindfulness. *The Mindfulness Toolbox* will not only improve your effectiveness with clients, it will also enable you to more fully integrate into your personal life the emotional, psychological and spiritual wealth offered by mindfulness practice. If you have any interest in mindfulness, you should have *The Mindfulness Toolbox* as a resource.”

—Terry Fralich, LPC, JD, author of *The Five Core Skills of Mindfulness and Cultivating Lasting Happiness*

“*The Mindfulness Toolbox* is a treasure trove of resources for healing and belongs in every clinician’s office. It teaches simple, effective ways to reduce suffering and increase happiness. Well worth reading!”

—Mary NurrieStearns, author of *Yoga For Anxiety, Yoga For Emotional Trauma, and Yoga Mind, Peaceful Mind*

“Donald Altman’s newest book, *The Mindfulness Toolbox*, is an important work for how it will reduce emotional and physical suffering in the world. Highly practical and well-organized, the book tackles the key areas of stress, anxiety, depression, and pain. The evident care and attention given to the guided scripts and handouts will help build the therapeutic relationship with patients—all the while guiding them gently and persistently toward a more expansive awareness and a deepened sense of self-compassion and self-acceptance. I highly recommend it.”

—Christopher Kennedy Lawford, best-selling author, *Symptoms of Withdrawal, Recover to Live, and What Addicts Know*

“In an era of high popularity for anything labeled with the word ‘Mindfulness,’ Altman has written a user-friendly and practical book that is as fun to read as it is helpful. He provides great handouts and suggestions for how to describe mindfulness to clients so that they can gain peace of mind when feeling anxious and optimism in the face of depression. Highly recommended.”

—John B. Arden, PhD, author of the *Brain Bible*

“There is an old Russian fable about a swan, a pike and a crawfish pulling a horse cart in three different directions, with a predictable result: the cart is hopelessly stuck. Sometimes I think of the field of psychotherapy as too being pulled in all kinds of different directions. Each school of thought, each wave of thinking, each clinical breakthrough not only moves the field along some relative continuum of evolution, but also asunder. The novelty junkies that we all are, we don’t miss a beat: we rush to update and to upgrade our clinical software with each CEU we earn. Clinician-authors such as Donald Altman pull the field back together. They hold it grounded and unified around such ancient centers of therapeutic gravity as awareness and mindfulness. Altman’s collection of tips and tools on how to introduce clients to the know-how of mindfulness has a powerfully anchoring force of field-tested clinical wisdom. Each of Altman’s 50 mindfulness tips is a spoke on a wheel of wellbeing. Roll with it, clinician, if you feel professionally struck.”

—Pavel Somov, Ph.D., author of *Anger Management Jumpstart, Present Perfect and Eating the Moment*

“Donald Altman’s new book, *The Mindfulness Toolbox* brings you practical, wise, and helpful techniques from a seasoned expert. With an easy-going writing style, Altman gives tips for therapists and clients plus clear exercises in every chapter for overcoming common psychological problems mindfully. He also gives useful handouts to lead clients into the experience. But the book reaches deeper, as Altman communicates the essence of mindfulness through classic stories and his own profound understandings from years of personal practice and teaching. The therapist already using mindfulness will find many ideas and techniques, and those new to mindfulness will be well guided. We recommend this book to anyone who would like to integrate this important, evidence-based method into his or her treatments, and to those who would like to deepen their own practice.”

—C. Alexander Simpkins, PhD and Annellen M. Simpkins, PhD, PESI presenters, clinicians, and authors of 28 books including *The Yoga and Mindfulness Therapy Workbook, The Tao of Bipolar: Using Meditation and Mindfulness to Bring Balance and Peace, Zen Meditation in Psychotherapy, Meditation and Yoga in Psychotherapy, Neuroscience for Clinicians, and The Dao of Neuroscience*



# **THE MINDFULNESS TOOLBOX**

*50 Practical Mindfulness Tips, Tools, and Handouts  
for Anxiety, Depression, Stress, and Pain*

*by*

DONALD ALTMAN, M.A., LPC

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This book is dedicated to peace  
and all who seek peace,  
within and without.

May each grain of mindfulness  
be a blessing of awakening  
on behalf of all who suffer.

May each grain of mindfulness  
be an instrument of peace and love  
for the benefit and well-being of all.

# About the Author



Donald Altman, M.A., LPC is a psychotherapist, award-winning writer, former Buddhist monk, and adjunct faculty at *Portland State University*. A featured expert in *The Mindfulness Movie*, he is the author of several pioneering books on how to integrate ancient mindfulness into modern life, including *One-Minute Mindfulness*, *The Mindfulness Code*, *The Joy Compass*, *Living-Kindness*, *Art of the Inner Meal*, and *12-Weeks to Mindful Eating*. Donald has served as Vice-President of *The Center for Mindful Eating* and conducts mindfulness workshops nationally.

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Finally, this book would not have been possible without numerous friends, associates, colleagues, clients, workshop participants, and others—who helped me explore, practice, and deepen mindfulness each day. I am especially indebted to my mother, Barbara, for her gentle spirit and love, and to my entire family for the priceless lessons in mindfulness that I got free of charge!

# Introduction

Given today's technology and medicine, I don't think anyone would choose to switch places with our ancestors. And yet, the statistics related to the percentage of those struggling with clinically diagnosable anxiety and depression are truly staggering. Add to that the number of people suffering from stress-related physical and emotional issues—a number that the American Psychological Association reports as almost seven in ten persons. Then, there are those who are distraught and unable to find abiding peace because of painful conditions, whether chronic or temporary.

Why is this pandemic of suffering so pervasive? Teacher and author J. Krishnamurti once advised, "It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society." Rather than focus on the symptoms—the visible signs of *dis-ease*—it can be a worthwhile endeavor to investigate the root causes of emotional dysregulation and imbalance. Trying to fix only the symptoms is like the homeowner who paints over a water-stained wall in the living room without looking into the actual cause of the leak. The paint may look nice and cover up the problem for a while, but the water stain will eventually reappear and more damage will be done to the building's infrastructure.

As social and holistic beings with a hundred billion neurons in our brains, we are far too complex for simplistic answers. We need to look more deeply, and we can attempt this by considering the entire environment with which we interact. That's where mindfulness comes into the picture. Mindfulness is an approach for directly confronting those difficult questions and situations that arrive at our doorstep each day. Instead of shielding us from uncomfortable truths, mindfulness pinches us gently, but firmly—reminding us to awaken to the way things are, which is a stable and valuable vantage point from which to cultivate change. What is more, the experience of mindfulness runs the gamut from the micro to the macro—from sensate-focusing to an expansive, transpersonal consciousness.

One central theme that runs throughout *The Mindfulness Toolbox* is this: *You can only change that which you are first aware of.* Mindfulness empowers those who practice it because it offers freedom of choice. It can dramatically alter *how* we experience the daily stress pollutants of chaos, confusion, loss, anger, grief, and fear that confront every human. In what is probably one of the most transitional periods in history, mindfulness is a life preserver of resilience that keeps us afloat and invites the healing salves of acceptance and compassion. Fundamentally, it brings us into greater balance with both the stressful external world and our internal experience of mind, body, and thoughts. **Mindfulness is a powerful, scientifically proven medicine for breaking free from harmful emotional ruts and mindless habits in order to live with full awareness and greater freedom.**

## WHY THE MINDFULNESS TOOLBOX

The idea and vision behind *The Mindfulness Toolbox* is to offer therapists a comprehensive set of highly practical, effective handouts and tools—not found elsewhere in any one source—for helping clients deal with a wide range of issues. Whether you need effective handouts and tools for pain, stress, anxiety, or depression, they can be found in this book. This approach also integrates the latest in brain research, whose findings are very compatible with mindfulness. Neuroscience has demonstrated that where and how we place our attention, the very thoughts we have, and even how we observe our breath, can change the physical structure of the brain—as well as alter hundreds of biological processes in the body.

Mindful awareness invites a very different kind of awareness, one that dramatically alters our *experience* of that depression, that anxious thought, that sensation of pain, or that stressful event. This new experience breaks old mindsets and maladaptive coping mechanisms, as well as rewires the brain's neural pathways. Sometimes, this allows for a whole new meaning or understanding to evolve around one's difficulties. At other times, it stimulates the growth of personal wisdom through which a more accepting, less self-critical, and open perspective takes root.

While this book is based on many core mindfulness concepts, the handouts and practices are not meant to be a step-by-step training in mindfulness. Rather, they are targeted interventions that put to use basic mindfulness practices of breath awareness, mind and thought awareness, and body-movement awareness. These concepts do not even need to be presented as “mindfulness” tools or practices. As explored in Tip #1, *Expanding Your Mindfulness Vocabulary*, it is always a good idea to adapt your description of mindfulness in a way that clients can best understand it.

As you guide clients through material in this book, some may express the desire to learn more about mindfulness or seek to become a serious mindfulness student. (This is not unusual, because practicing mindfulness is like eating a potato chip—you enjoy it so much that you can't stop after having just one). For motivated individuals, there are many ways to guide them toward a more systematic practice of mindfulness. There exist many in-person trainings at local mindfulness centers or retreat centers—many of which can be found on the Internet. There are also instructional courses, such as my own guidebook, *A Course in Mindfulness*, a self-paced instructional workbook that includes guided audio meditations (see **Bibliography/References**).

In addition to tuning in to the delicate rhythms of one's mind and body, there is yet another important benefit to this persistent, gentle path of greater presence and awakening. These practices inevitably get clients out of themselves and closer to the truth of the connectedness between all living things. Mindfulness sparks what I like to call *We-Thou* awareness. This is similar to what Martin Buber called the *I-Thou* relationship, and what Buddhist monk and author Thich Nhat Hanh has referred to as our state of *interbeing*. This shift from *I* to *We* is more than a major shift in perspective. It is a paradigm shift toward transpersonal awareness.

What does this mean? By cultivating *We-Thou* awareness, individuals can get free from the often limited, distorted, and narrow *I-centric* view of life that entraps them. From the *I-centric* perspective, others are seen as separate and isolated *objects* that must be moved about and manipulated like chess pieces in order to stay safe and survive in a dangerous world. Defending the *I-centric* view leads to isolation, pain, and suffering because it fosters fear and mistrust. In contrast, the *We-Thou* perspective encourages sustainable, long-lasting and loving relationships with others, as well as with all living beings and ‘mother’ Earth that supports us all. It promotes a compassionate viewpoint and the understanding that all persons have suffered in some way.

After all, don't all humans—indeed, all living beings—seek to feel safe, healthy, peaceful, and secure? **In sum, mindfulness benefits and empowers clients by providing them with the skills necessary to gain a broader understanding, acceptance, and sense of compassion for themselves and their situation.**

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK AND ITS FOUR KEY FEATURES

There is no single way to use this book. If you have clients with particular issues, it's simple to refer to the *Table of Contents* to find the Section you're interested in: *Mindfulness Tools for Anxiety*, *Mindfulness Tools for Depression*, *Mindfulness Tools for Stress*, and *Mindfulness Tools for Pain*. There you will find brief descriptions of the interventions. First, however, it will help to understand the four unique features of *The Mindfulness Toolbox* and the handouts it contains.

The first of these unique features is Section 1 – *Mindfulness Tips for Therapists*. Begin by reviewing this introductory section, even if you find a specific mindfulness intervention that you want to use with a client. This section provides general tips and ideas that can make your treatment more effective. It lays the groundwork for increasing your own understanding of mindfulness, as well as helping clients to clearly see the benefits. Section 1 also features several handouts for clients. In addition, each individual chapter, or 'Tool,' contains its own bulleted *Tips for Working with Clients* which target issues specifically related to that intervention.

The second unique feature is the *integration of learning styles*. By understanding a client's learning style, you can tap into how this individual most readily "gets" or learns new information. There are nine different learning styles listed and explained in Tip #3, *Tapping into a Client's Learning Style*. It can be helpful to get familiar with these. If a client possesses an especially strong visual learning style, for example, you may decide to start with a visual-oriented mindfulness practice over one that focuses on hearing or the body. One of the first things you'll see at the top of each chapter, or Tool, is a list of learning styles that fit with that tool. A quick glance at this list will save you time by more accurately identifying a practice that works best for that client, and the client will feel more understood.

The third unique feature of this guidebook is that several of the handouts are written as *readable scripts* that you can use as guided meditations during a therapy session. In this way, you can directly guide clients through the practice for the very first time. You also have the option of recording the script for those clients who find it helpful to hear the words guiding them.

The fourth special feature is that *closely related Tools are cross-referenced throughout* and can be grouped together. For example, there are many different ways to drop into the body as a sensate-focusing practice—sometimes the emphasis may be on pain; at other times it may be on anxiety or on depression. While each has a slightly different focus, complementary practices can be grouped together for clients. To quickly find which practices can be bundled together, just look at the bullet-pointed *Tips for Working with Clients* section. This cross-referencing provides clients with a broader range of concepts to work with, as well as deepening their understanding of a particular topic, or practice.

In addition to the above-mentioned features, *The Mindfulness Toolbox* contains specialized writing areas for *Reflections* throughout. This offers clients the perfect place to journal and process their experiences. Included are many follow-up questions and homework for daily practice. These can easily be used to help track a client's progress and to help clients use the skills on a more consistent basis. **The four special features in this book will give you a roadmap**

**and concrete methods for working with clients while employing mindfulness skills that can be used over and over again.**

It is my hope that this book contributes to bringing more wellness and balance into the lives of those you are working with. May you continue the journey of reducing suffering and changing lives for the better.



**Section 1**

**ESSENTIAL MINDFULNESS TIPS FOR  
THERAPISTS**



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# Tip #1

## Expanding the Mindfulness Vocabulary

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### THOUGHTS FOR THERAPISTS

Have you ever mentioned the word *meditation* or *mindful* to a client, only to be greeted by a panicked expression or negative response?

There are a great many people who would benefit from a mindfulness practice for reducing pain, anxiety, depression, or stress. Sometimes, however, an individual may have a history or personal religious background that acts as a negative filter that blocks them from opening up to such practices. When this occurs, it helps to be prepared with a broader and more expansive mindfulness vocabulary—one that doesn't depend on words like *mindfulness* or *meditation*.

By expanding your mindfulness vocabulary, you might find a wonderful and creative way to enter a client's world. Sometimes it could be a metaphor for mindfulness or meditation, such as getting in the zone; other times you might simply use another, more generic term, such as paying attention or observing with non-judgment. What follows are some ideas for expanding your vocabulary. Use the ideas below, or let them serve as springboards for enhancing your own personal mindfulness terminology.

### MINDFULNESS IN TRADITIONAL VOCABULARY

Historically, the ancient Sanskrit word *sati* was used to define the ability to observe things with a sense of what could be termed *bare awareness*. In other words, just noticing things for what they are without adding or subtracting anything. This means observing thoughts, sensations in the body, and emotions in an impartial and neutral way. Potentially, all of our experiences could be viewed in this way. This can be thought of as a safe way of distancing from negativity or a personal bias. Learning to observe things in this more objective way, of course, takes lots of time, practice, and patience.

### MODERN DEFINITIONS FOR MINDFULNESS

So, how can we start to bring this more traditional idea into the modern world and connect with our clients? Below are several ways to describe mindfulness that use concepts that fit with our modern language and sensibility.

- opening to the moment
- noticing the truth of change
- an open-hearted acceptance of this moment
- living in the *what-is* as opposed to the *what-if*
- getting freed from habit and reactivity

- acceptance and letting-go
- focusing on the moment
- changing the history channel
- loving awareness
- tuning-in
- moment-to-moment awareness of the breath
- stop, look, and listen
- non-dual awareness
- unplugging
- finding the center
- prayerfulness
- leaving the busy mind by dropping into the body
- awareness that doesn't take sides
- inner hospitality
- cultivating a neutral, detached awareness

## FINDING A BROADER VOCABULARY FOR MINDFULNESS

In travelling around the country and facilitating mindfulness workshops, I've always enjoyed the process that occurs when therapists get into small groups to brainstorm other words or phrases that can be used to help their clients grasp mindfulness. You might notice that some phrases or words work better for a certain population—such as children, people in pain, substance addiction, etc.—while many will work for people in general.

Some of ideas included here are metaphors for sports (*getting in the zone* and *getting into the game*) or how we use technology (*hitting the pause button* and *changing the channel*). What follows is a useful handout that can help patients identify the word or phrase that works best for them. Everyone has a different sensibility and learning style that will help to find the right terminology, image, or metaphor. Have fun working with clients as they explore options that you can use and adapt together.

## CONCLUSIONS

Having the right mindfulness vocabulary—one that fits the client—can create a bridge and build the therapeutic relationship. This is a creative process, and the client may or may not use the exact words from the handout. For example, in the sports film *For the Love of the Game*, the main character (a baseball pitcher played by Kevin Costner) uses a mindfulness practice that he calls *clear the mechanism* in order to block out all distractions, get totally focused, and ready to pitch!

The handout is a starting point from which to broaden and explore mindfulness. Keep in mind, too, that visual imagery—such as a soothing color—as well as physical movement or gestures can be another way to access mindfulness. In addition, the words someone uses may also be a clue as to what mindfulness practices they will find most useful.

## HANDOUT: GETTING INTO THE PRESENT MOMENT

**Instructions:** There are many words to use when thinking about getting into the present moment. This handout contains many different words and phrases to describe how to think about leaving stress, anxiety, and negative thoughts behind.

Look over this list and find what words or phrases connect with you. Or, you might come up with your own words that help you connect with being calm and present. Use this list as a starting point. **Circle the words or phrases that you like the best.**

- chill-axin'
- getting into the game
- hitting the pause button
- in the eye of the hurricane
- clarity
- impartial witness/spectator
- coming back to your senses
- be here now
- the present moment
- making friends with your mind
- watching and observing
- curiosity; being curious
- picturing the ocean or a river
- changing your relationship to thoughts and feelings
- putting on the right gear for stormy weather
- getting in the zone
- getting in touch
- patience
- peace, calm, and stillness
- taking a breath
- changing the channel
- focused attention
- surfing the moment
- in the flow
- non-judging awareness
- non-blaming; openness
- acceptance of this moment
- creating space (from negativity)

**Reflections:** If you have other words or phrases not listed above, write these here:

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What is an example of a good time and place that you could put your favorite word or words to use?

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What do you see as the biggest challenge you will face when trying to use your word or phrase for getting in the present moment?

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