



WorkLifePsych



First steps in
Psychological **Flexibility**

Part two:
Present moment
awareness

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Episode summary

In this second episode of the series, Richard and Ross explore the first of the skills in the ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy/Theory) model: present moment awareness. They look at its benefits, how they personally bring it to life, and share some simple ways you can build it into your routines.

What is present moment awareness?

It's all about becoming more aware of where your attention is in any given moment. We talked about the disruptive nature of 'mental time travel' in the last episode, and present moment awareness is the opposite. Rather than get lost in thoughts about the past or anxieties about the future, we bring our focus on the moment we're actually in, so we can take action there.

What's in it for me?

As we explained in our first episode, when we go time-travelling in our mind, we can feel lots of the unpleasant and distracting emotions about the future and the past - right in the here and now. This can take us away from the present moment and where our focus could optimally be placed.

Being present in the moment allows us to notice what's there, how we feel about it, and what options we have for intentional responses and behaviours. So rather than respond automatically or without regard for what's going on, we get to notice and be more intentional. This could be noticing how someone else is feeling, noticing the mood in a room, or noticing our own rising emotions.

And if we're able to bring our focus to the present moment, then we can be more skilful at whatever it is we're doing. Whether it's listening to our spouse, writing an important email, or paying attention in a lecture. Rather than sit in 'autopilot' mode, we fully engage with what's going on, so we can do more of whatever is important in that moment.

So what do I need to do?

We describe a few simple ways to build this skill in this episode, including:

- Noticing your breath and bringing your focus to your breath as you sit still
- Going for a 'mindful walk', where you can practice noticing what's happening around you
- Using exercise, such as running or cycling, as an opportunity to notice
- Doing household chores in a more mindful way

Research shows that little and often is the best approach when it comes to building this skill. Be gentle with yourself and simply practice noticing where your focus is. It's not about 'clearing your mind of thoughts' or somehow controlling everything you're thinking and feeling. You're simply becoming an observer of your thoughts.

Other resources mentioned in this episode

Apps you can use to build your mindful focus:

- Buddify app – <https://buddhify.com>
- Balance app – <https://balanceapp.com>
- Headspace app – <https://www.headspace.com>

Killingsworth and Gilbert 2010 – A wandering mind is an unhappy mind: <https://dtg.sites.fas.harvard.edu/KILLINGSWORTH%20&%20GILBERT%20%282010%29.pdf>

Videos

A video exploring the difference between intentional planning and other forms of thoughts about the future: Are you planning, predicting or playwriting? <https://youtu.be/9F53bsXmzb4>

Relevant podcast episodes

Ep 075: Mindfulness interventions at work – <https://www.worklifepsych.com/podcast/ep-075-mindfulness-interventions-at-work-with-antonia-dietmann/>

Ep 126: first steps in mindfulness – <https://www.worklifepsych.com/podcast/126/>

Relevant blog posts

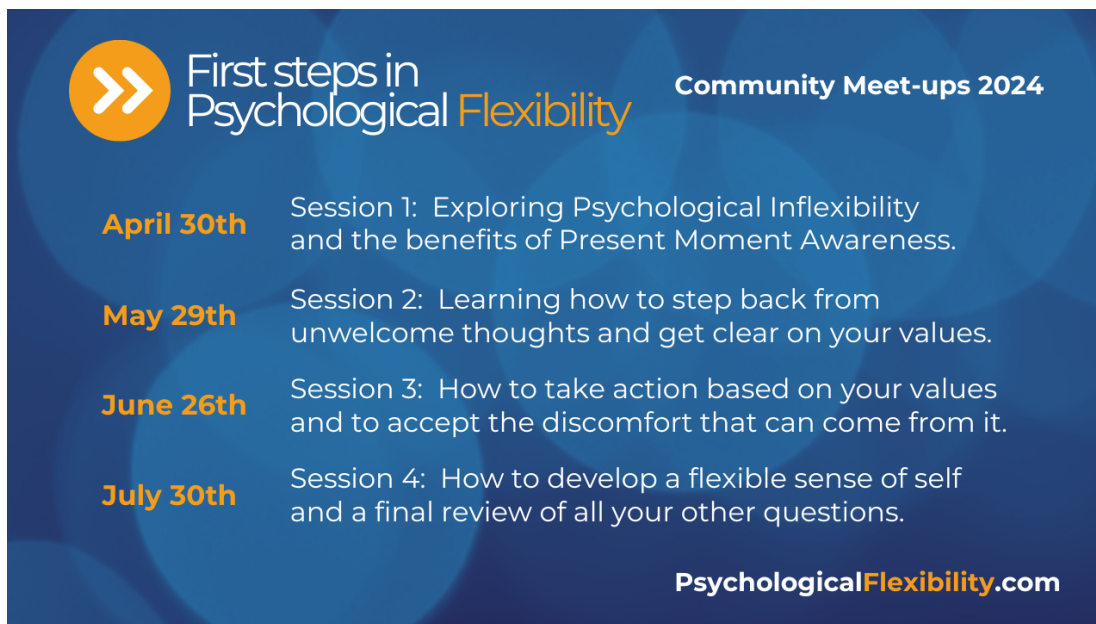
Five common myths about mindfulness: debunked – <https://www.worklifepsych.com/five-common-myths-about-mindfulness-debunked/>

Mindfulness: how to avoid mental time-travel – <https://www.worklifepsych.com/mindfulness-how-to-avoid-mental-time-travel/>

Join us online to find out more

From April onwards, we'll be hosting live online Q&A sessions to answer all your questions about psychological flexibility and your learning journey. The sessions are completely free to join, you just need to be a member of the WorkLifePsych Community to attend. Don't worry - that's free too! You can sign up today at [WorkLifePsych.club](https://worklifepsych.club).

The dates of these sessions are outlined below and you can find all the details of how to join via the 'Events' menu once you're logged in to worklifepsych.club.



First steps in Psychological Flexibility **Community Meet-ups 2024**

April 30th Session 1: Exploring Psychological Inflexibility and the benefits of Present Moment Awareness.

May 29th Session 2: Learning how to step back from unwelcome thoughts and get clear on your values.

June 26th Session 3: How to take action based on your values and to accept the discomfort that can come from it.

July 30th Session 4: How to develop a flexible sense of self and a final review of all your other questions.

PsychologicalFlexibility.com

Get in touch with your questions

If you can't join us for the live Q&A session feel free to get in touch with questions and comments about the series. We'll cover them off in the Q&A and publish the recording afterwards so you can stay involved - no matter what timezone you're in!

Email your thoughts to podcast@worklifepsych.com

Find out more about your hosts

Who is Dr. Richard MacKinnon?

Richard is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and Chartered Coaching Psychologist with over twenty years of experience as a practitioner psychologist. Originally from Dublin, Richard has made London his home.

He founded WorkLifePsych in 2014 to bring evidence-based people development solutions to his clients. He provides coaching, training and development programmes to support clients' wellbeing, productivity and interpersonal effectiveness at work. Find out more about him on [his website](#). He publishes 'My Pocket Psych' every two weeks.

Who is Ross McIntosh?

After a career of over 20 years in central government in senior HR roles Ross left the Civil Service and returned to study, pursuing an MSc in Organisational Psychology at City, University of London. On the course he discovered a branch of behavioural science that resonated with him in such a profound way that he decided to find ways to share the skills with people in organisations in every sector, from the NHS and Teachers to Hedge Fund Managers, Global Tech and Professional Ballet Dancers.

He's now a researcher and honorary visiting lecturer in organisational psychology at City, as well as the presenter of the '[People Soup](#)' podcast.