

Engaging, Savoring, and Focusing

The three antidotes to cutting off, missing out, and doing things poorly are engaging, savoring, and focusing. It's useful to think of these as three broad classes of skills:

Engaging skills. The aim of these skills is to engage fully in your current activity and connect deeply with whomever or whatever is involved.

Savoring skills. The aim is to savor, enjoy, and appreciate your current activity - if it is something potentially pleasurable or enjoyable.

Focusing skills. The aim is to focus fully on whatever aspects of your current activity are most important (in order to do it well) while narrowing, broadening, sustaining, or refocusing your attention as required.

Notice when your attention wanders

In all of these skills, a major aim is to notice when your attention wanders off: when you lose focus, or get distracted, or disengage, or go onto auto-pilot. And as soon as you realise this has happened, the idea is to acknowledge it, and refocus on the task or activity.

Focusing, Engaging and Savoring In A Busy Life

People often say, "I don't have time to practice all this stuff! I'm BUSY!!!"

Yup, most of us are. And many of us find it hard to free up time to formally practice these types of exercises. So, do what you realistically can. 5-10 mins once or twice a day of formally practicing these skills is enough to make a difference. Most of us can find 5 -10 mins, even if it's in our lunchbreak, or in bed. And every bit counts. Even 2 minutes once a week beats nothing at all. And the good news is, even if you can't or won't formally practice these exercises, there are many other ways to develop these skills as we go through our day.

Here are a few examples:

1) Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, or having a shower. When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body as it gurgles down the hole. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower screen, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upwards. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo. Engage in it fully. Savor it.

When thoughts & feelings arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to the shower. Engage in it again. Savor and appreciate the experience.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what hooked you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2) Domestic Chores

Pick a chore that you normally try to rush through or distract yourself from; or one for which you just 'grit your teeth' and try to 'get through it'. For example: ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, making the kids' lunches. Aim to do this chore as a practice in developing your focusing and engaging skills. (As most chores are unpleasant, savoring won't usually play a role.)

E.g., when ironing clothes: notice the colour and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder. Focus on what you're doing, and engage in it fully.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts & feelings arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what hooked you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

3) Pleasurable Activities

What are some simple pleasurable activities you do regularly that you could practice savoring and appreciating? Pick activities that you tend to take for granted, or do in a distracted way, or zip through on auto-pilot, without truly savoring the pleasure or joy in the. Common examples: having a hot shower, drinking tea or coffee, patting the dog or cat, hugging someone you love, walking in nature, eating a yummy snack.

4) Social Interactions

When interacting socially with others, take the opportunity to focus & engage. Really notice what the other person is saying and doing: notice their facial expression, body posture, tone of voice, as well as listening to and engaging in the conversation. When you get hooked, acknowledge it, unhook yourself, and refocus. And of course, if it's a pleasurable social interaction, savor it.

5) Quick 'n' easy Exercises

There are many quick 'n' easy mindfulness exercises you can do throughout the day – e.g. while waiting in queues or at traffic lights you could practice dropping anchor or focusing on your breath; or when eating dinner, you could aim to really focus on and savor the first two mouthfuls. Be creative: if you look for opportunities to apply your focusing, engaging and savoring skills, you will find many every day!