

Observe Walk #2

For Adults or Parents with Teens.

We have all heard that living mindfully increases happiness, but what is mindfulness? Mindfulness is... experiencing and participating fully in the present moment, without judgment. One of the ways mindfulness can be developed is through observation and conversation about what it is your senses are telling you, especially when walking in nature.

It sounds fairly simple, but how is it done? Why is it that when I try to clear my mind, it fills with thousands of thoughts immediately? The answer is that mindfulness is a practice, just like practicing any other skill. When you do it more frequently, it becomes easier. Part of practicing mindfulness is not judging yourself for your imperfect mindfulness practice. When your mind wanders, simply and gently bring it back.

This Mindfulness Walk will help you engage with nature and with loved ones, helping to bring you into the present moment. Do this walk alone, with your child, or with another companion. The recommended trail is the **Four Seasons Trail**, but you can use it on any trail by reading the prompts whenever you want during your walk. Please read slowly, with pauses.

Turtle Pond - Find a spot a little way from others where you can gaze out at the pond. Plant your feet and feel yourself arrive. Put away distractions. Zip phones into pockets.

Now take several deep breaths, breathing out as slowly as you can. Notice your surroundings in detail. Pay attention to your senses. Pick out one favorite part of the scene in front of you.

Now, if you have a companion, share what you have enjoyed. From the pond, take a right and follow it until **Post 21**.



Expectations - Look out at the prairie grasses, noticing all of the different textures, and the sound of the grasses blowing in the wind. Become aware of your feelings about the person next to you. These feelings come from the past... Based on the past, we predict the future.

Mindfulness is about living in the NOW. Pause and allow the present moment to exist without past or future. Looking at the beauty in front of you, pretend that you have only existed for this moment. Right now, you have control over your actions. Step into this moment and be in beauty. **Take a left, until you reach the big white cedar tree.**

Hope - This tree is called the Arbor Vitae, the tree of life. Let your gaze be pulled up the trunk, and the branches to the sky.

Think about all the storms this tree has endured, and yet it continues to grow strong.

Remember, like the tree, we are all doing the best we can with the skills and resources available despite all that is swirling around us ... AND we all can try to do better. We all get caught up in emotions moment to moment. We all make mistakes. Take the time now to remember and focus on the true goal, setting aside self-judgment. Now that you have re-focused, what can you do in this time, in these moments, to build happiness and show love? Each moment is fresh, with no mistakes in it.

Curve to the right into the woods, stopping at the crossroads.

Self Love - You cannot give what you do not have. Take this time to nourish yourself. Silently drink in the beauty around you. Recognize any negative self talk, or "shoulds", and change those thoughts to be more positive in nature. Remove judgment.

Continue following the trail to the left until you reach a big maple tree.

Love of others - Think of the wonderful qualities of your family or companion(s). Think of what makes them unique, what you appreciate about them the most. What can you do in these moments of life, to show your love, to improve your relationships?

As you walk back towards the pond, pick up a pebble. In that pebble, as you walk, put something that has been holding you back or weighing you down. This can come in the form of future worries, past regrets, grief, or loss

Turtle Pond - As you gaze out at the pond again, reflect on the gains you have made on this walk. Check in with yourself. If judgment has crept back in, gently change them to remove "bad" or "good" and to think of them as just existing. Put judgment into the pebble in your hands.

As you look at the scene, allow it to fill you. When you are ready, gently drop your pebble into the pond.