

# **MINDFULNESS**

## **TOOLKIT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT**

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# MINDFULNESS TOOLKIT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

This *Law Enforcement Mindfulness Toolkit* offers easy access to meditation practices that promote officer wellness when performed on a regular basis. While occupational stress and trauma are common in law enforcement, mindfulness is one way to help mitigate the potential negative outcomes.

This toolkit is equipped with accessible and convenient meditation practices for officers, civilian employees, and family members to help cultivate skills for stress management, situational awareness, interpersonal relations, mind-state regulation, and increased focus.<sup>i,ii</sup>

Officers who have participated in mindfulness training have reported significantly reduced anxiety, perceived stress, and PTSD symptoms, three months after completing the training.<sup>iii,iv</sup> Studies have also shown mindfulness can increase positive emotions and social connections.<sup>v</sup> In addition, officers have been found to have improved quality of sleep three months after completing a mindfulness training routine.<sup>vi</sup>

There have been many positive outcomes found in people who practice mindfulness techniques. Studies have found that using mindfulness practices can improve pain management among people who experience chronic pain.<sup>vii</sup> It also has been found to help lower blood pressure, especially those who have been found to have stage 2 hypertension.<sup>viii,ix</sup>



**What does it mean to be present? Community police presence is our call of duty and connects us with people through a variety of emotional and potentially dangerous situations... Police presence is essential in these aspects.”**

**Sergeant Jason Newton, Colorado Springs Police Department.<sup>xv</sup>**

In 2017, after responding to a mass violence incident in their jurisdiction, the Dallas Police Department, in Dallas, Texas, began to implement a mindfulness program to assist officers who were struggling; They received funding to train over 350 officers.<sup>x</sup> The training, known as Strategic Memory Advanced Reasoning Training (SMART), provides officers with techniques to better understand their bodies and regulate their response to situations based on self-awareness.<sup>xi</sup> In the training, officers learned taking as little as a five-minute period of not focusing on a stressor during the day can help them reset their mind. Officers who have gone through the training are also advised to drive home in silence with their radios turned off so their brain can unwind and let go of the stressors for the day.<sup>xii</sup>

Mindfulness can also benefit an officer's relationship with their family by helping them to reconnect and strengthen their bond. Practicing mindfulness as a family provides an opportunity to spend time together and create a family tradition/hobby that is practiced daily. By creating these moments of mindfulness, an officer can build a better connection with their family and help fix any perceived distance with them.<sup>xiii</sup> It can also help officers set examples for their families about becoming resilient to everyday stressors as they can show them ways to overcome a stressful situation and not let it ruin the day.<sup>xiv</sup>

The benefit of these practices comes from repetition which can be challenging for law enforcement personnel who often have unpredictable and busy schedules with rotating hours. Consider the following times to practice meditation.

- **Before the start of a shift**
- **After clearing a call**
- **Before leaving work and arriving home**
- **During a lunch break or other break while at work**
- **Before going to sleep**

**The goal of mindfulness is to train your brain to gravitate towards healthy responses, especially in moments of chaos and stress.**

Just as leadership skills afford you the confidence to make difficult decisions, challenge others to assess their thoughts and actions, and empower those around you, mindfulness can prepare you to further assess your own thoughts, keep yourself grounded in a positive frame of mind, and train your brain to have a healthy response. There are a variety of ways to practice mindfulness and choosing a mindfulness strategy depends on your physical circumstance and your current state of mind.



**Mindfulness Meditation Video Library** - Each video provides a quick exercise that can be done in a short period of time.



## 2-Minute Guided Mindfulness Videos

### Square Breathing Exercise



### 3 Breaths Exercise



### 3/2/1 Exercise



### Stop/Drop/Roll Exercise



### Long Exhale Exercise



## 5-Minute Guided Mindfulness Videos

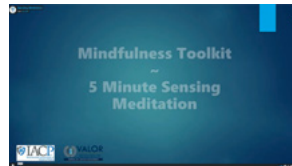
### Breathing Exercise



### Listening Exercise



### Sensing Exercise



### Visualizing Exercise



### Moving Exercise



**Gina Rollo White**, who co-developed this toolkit, will walk you through the Mindfulness mediation video series and also provided the written exercises. Gina has over 15 years of experience as a mind-body teacher, educator, researcher, and author. She has a master's degree in Mindfulness Studies with an emphasis on first responders. Gina has spent the last seven years developing and delivering trauma sensitive mindfulness trainings (Tactical Brain Training®)\*, programs and workshops tailored for law enforcement, corrections, fire, EMS, healthcare, and other trauma sensitive communities. She has worked with leadership teams from dozens of police, sheriff, and fire departments and is an active member of the Trauma Informed Community Network, VA.

\*Tactical Brain Training®: <http://www.mindfuljunkie.com/#tactical-brain-training-section>

## Meditation Exercises

Each of the following meditation practices can be adapted based on time and situation. The descriptions serve as an overview and offer suggestions on how to practice each meditation. Use these as examples to establish your own practice.



### Breathing Meditation

#### BENEFITS:

Breathing meditation helps the brain learn to observe what is happening in the present moment without judgment. It can help you recognize different aspects occurring in a situation and help to focus your attention where it is needed most.

#### HOW TO PRACTICE IT:

1

**Find a seated position.** Sit in a way that is comfortable, but not too relaxed. You should have a feeling of sitting “upright but not uptight.” Allow your eyes to gently close or focus on a single point.

2

**Notice your breath.** Bring your attention to how you are breathing. There is no right or wrong way to breathe, just breathe naturally. Notice as your belly or chest rises and falls.

3

**Slow your breathing.** After a few breaths, begin to slow down your inhales and exhales. Focus on making your exhale longer than your inhale. To do this, try counting during your breathing. You can begin by making your inhale a three count and exhale a seven count.

4

**Monitor your thoughts.** The goal is to focus your attention gently on the breath, but as you breathe, you will notice that your mind will wander. Thoughts will come and go. You may even get caught up in a story, not realizing that you have been “thinking” until the end of the story. Having a wandering mind is normal and will continue to happen during the entire meditation. Notice that your mind is wandering as it occurs.

5

**Refocus your attention on your breath.** When you catch your mind in a thought, notice it (maybe even acknowledge what you are thinking by saying the word to yourself “thinking”), and guide your attention back to your breath (maybe say to yourself “breathing in, breathing out”). Try not to get caught up in judging or interpreting your thoughts. Simply notice that you were thinking and return your attention to the breath. Many beginning meditators think of a wandering mind as a failure or evidence that they can’t meditate. In fact, the process of recognizing distraction and returning to the breath, again and again, is the essence of this meditation.



## Listening Meditation

### BENEFITS:

Listening meditation is good for focusing your attention. It can help you learn to notice things you may have become desensitized to. The more you practice, the better you will become at catching yourself when you get distracted and redirecting your attention back to your intended task.

### HOW TO PRACTICE IT:

1

**Find a seated position.** Sit in a way that is comfortable, but not too relaxed. You should have a feeling of sitting 'upright,' but not uptight.' Allow your eyes to gently close or focus on a single point.

2

**Notice what you hear.** Be still, allow your hearing to be sensitive, and listen to sounds as they occur. During moments of silence, notice the quality of the silence. Sounds will come and go; no need to seek them out.

3

**Notice the mind.** The goal of this meditation is to focus your attention on sounds in the present moment, without thinking about or interpreting the sounds. When you hear a sound, you will find that you often name it or interpret it (e.g., Door opening or dog barking). Notice that you named it and move on. Once again, just listen and be present.

4

**Release judgment.** Allow yourself to notice the sounds without judgment (e.g., "Why do I keep doing that?" Or "why can I not just notice it as a sound?"). When judgments arise, gently let them go and refocus your mind on listening again.



## Body Scan Meditation

### BENEFITS:

Body scan meditation activates the connection between your mind and body. By focusing on different parts of your body in the meditation, you strengthen the link between physical and emotional states of awareness. This practice can help bring awareness and reduce real-time stress, anxiety, and physical pain.

### HOW TO PRACTICE IT:

1

**Find a comfortable position.** You can practice this meditation seated or lying down. Come to a position that allows you to relax without falling asleep.

2

**Notice your body.** Allow your eyes to gently close and bring your awareness and thoughts to your body. Notice the contact points of your body on the floor or the weight of your body on a chair.

3

**Release any tension in your body.** Inhale and exhale a few times. With every exhale, allow your body to soften and relax onto a comfortable surface or seated position.

4

**Bring your attention to different places in your body.** Notice where your feet make contact with the floor, if you are lying down notice your heels and legs making contact with the floor, sensing whether they feel heavy or soft. Bring your awareness to your legs, first your calves, then your knees, and lastly, your thighs. Continue like this through your entire body. Starting at your belly, then your back, shoulders, and chest, continuing through your head, neck, and face. Notice the sensations (temperature, tension, tingling, etc.) And allow each part of your body to relax with each exhale.



## Naming Meditation

### BENEFITS:

Naming meditation helps you identify your triggers and calm reactive mind states. You will learn to identify feelings and thoughts as they arise so that you can reduce and de-escalate automatic reactions. When you name an emotion (e.g., “this is anger” or “this is frustration”), you create more space to choose how to respond to the situation at hand.

### HOW TO PRACTICE IT:

1

**Find a seated position.** Sit in a way that is comfortable, but not too relaxed. You should have a feeling of sitting “upright but not uptight.” Allow your eyes to gently close or focus on a single point.

2

**Notice your breath.** Shift your attention to how you are breathing. There is no right or wrong way to breathe; just breathe naturally. After a few breaths, begin to slow your inhales and exhales.

3

**Notice your thoughts.** As you breathe, you will notice that your mind wanders. Thoughts will come and go. Do not worry; this is normal.

4

**Name your thoughts.** When you become aware of a thought, try naming it. For example, if you start thinking about something stressful at work, say to yourself, “stress.” If you notice uncomfortable sensations in your body, say to yourself, “pain.” Other labels might include “distraction,” “edgy,” “anxiety,” “judgement,” etc.

5

**Return to your breath.** After you give a name to the thought, guide your awareness back to your breathing. When your mind wanders again, name it again and come back to your breath.



## Walking Meditation

### BENEFITS:

Mindful walking meditation will help you connect with your body. It is an active practice that can help reduce anxiety and calm the mind. It is useful in moments when it feels difficult to sit still.

### HOW TO PRACTICE IT:

1

**Find a location.** Walking can be done indoors or outdoors, but if there is an opportunity to walk outdoors, take it! You can do this meditation anytime you are walking, such as at the grocery store or on the way to your car.

2

**Notice your body.** Begin by standing still and noticing your feet on the ground. Take a slow, deep breath, and set your gaze on what is in front of you.

3

**Walk forward slowly.** Walk 10 to 15 paces forward, slightly slower than your normal pace. Notice the feeling of your feet on the ground and the sensations involved in walking. If an impulse to move quickly arises, notice it, and continue forward at a slow pace.

4

**Breathe With Every Step.** Focus your attention on your inhales and exhales as you walk. With each step, try to repeat in your mind “step, step, step.” If you notice your mind getting distracted, gently guide your awareness back to your breath.

5

**Notice your movement.** Notice the sensation of your body as you move. First notice your foot touch the ground, then lift off the ground, and finally return to the ground again. Move slowly and purposefully. Repeat in your mind “right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot.”

6

**Turn around.** At the end of 10 to 15 paces, come to a stopping place, and take a slow breath. Then turn around and walk back using the same process. Continue like this for ten to fifteen minutes.

I tell recruits: ‘You will see a lot of human suffering. And to endure a career of that, and not be tainted with cynicism or overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the difficulties you see every day, you’re going to need a self-management tool. You’re going to need a body-mind practice, whether it’s mindfulness meditation or yoga or something else.’”

Retired Police Chief Richard Biehl, Dayton, Ohio Police Department<sup>xvi</sup>

### Tips on Sustaining a Practice



Have an open mind.



Set aside a few minutes each day to practice.



Create a feasible plan.



Find a secure, comfortable location for meditation.



Set specific goals.



Explore what works for you.



Ensure that your goals are measurable.



Adapt as needed.



Set goals that are relevant for your life, needs, and circumstances.



Don't overthink it.



Commit to a schedule.



Have patience in yourself and know this is a work in progress.



## Daily Mindfulness Training Plan

In addition to the mindfulness exercises, included to the right is a **Daily Planner template** to mark down all exercises done for the week and to set time each day to follow the exercise of your choice. These exercises will be optimal in keeping you within your window of tolerance. The window of tolerance is a state of mind that allows you to function most effectively and be “able to readily receive, process, and integrate information and otherwise respond to the demands of everyday life without much difficulty.”<sup>xvii</sup>

### Daily Mindfulness Practices

Use this **Daily Planner template** to log your daily mindfulness exercises. Logging which exercise is most effective for you, will allow you to develop a weekly routine to keep you in your window of tolerance.

Another good way to track your training and progress is through a calendar or smartphone planner application. There are also smart phone applications that allow you to log your thoughts and provide step by step timed walk throughs for mindfulness exercises.

Practicing mindfulness, just many other aspects of life, is not something where results may come overnight. Consistency is required. For instance, in a study for mindfulness on police officers, results showed that after the first session there was little change in symptoms in stress, while on average 7 weeks after the training, occupational stress and PTSD symptoms were significantly improved.<sup>xviii</sup> This is something to have in mind as mindfulness is a process is a constant work in progress and will take time. Ideally, mindfulness is something that should be practiced everyday for as much time as you can dedicate. Many of the exercises presented through this resource should be practiced everyday for about six months.<sup>xix</sup>



	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

**Click Here  
for a fillable  
Daily Mindfulness  
Practices form**

***Create a practice that works for you. Practice what works.***

***Do it on your own time. Measure your success.***

***Commit to being mindful.***

## Endnotes

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	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
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Saturday			
Sunday			

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