

MINDFULNESS

How many times have you done something or said something that you wish you could take back? How many times have you found yourself unprepared for a situation, event, or opportunity? If these questions have triggered memories in your past or even something that happened today then listen up and let's talk about mindfulness.

As a teen the one area of your brain that will not be completely developed until you are age 25 is your prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is an executive function area of the brain and it is responsible for predicting the consequences of behavior. If you find yourself repeating behaviors that you are not proud of or if you have done things and you keep scratching your head wondering why you did such a thing, blame it on the prefrontal cortex. Because of your age it is not operating at its highest potential. However, this does not mean you cannot counteract this. The brain is a powerful machine and when you train it, feed it well, take good care of it, and challenge it in positive ways it will operate at a higher potential than normal. One way you can do that is to practice mindfulness on a daily basis.

Mindfulness is basically thinking before you act or speak. It doesn't matter if your prefrontal cortex is fully developed or not, you can certainly help it along by being mindful and avoiding behaviors that lead to negative consequences. Attitudes that relate to mindfulness include your character, integrity, kindness, respect, listening, civility and intellect. Allow me to take each attitude and explain it.

Your **character** is basically your reputation. So, think about the reputation you have right now. Is this what you want to carry with you for the rest of your life? Is this how you want people to see you and remember you? If not, you can be mindful and think about how your behavior comes off to other people and check it before you do something you may not be proud of later.

Integrity is basically how honest and trustworthy you are. If you encounter a situation where you have to decide to be honest or dishonest you can be mindful and remember how you want to be considered in life. You can remember that people will accept you when you are honest with them and will be less likely to trust you if you are dishonest.

Next, **kindness** is basically how you treat others. Are you kind to people, there for them when they need you or do you spend more time being rude and talking down to others? Be mindful about how you can practice random acts of kindness towards other people you encounter in your daily life.

Respect is pretty much about how courteous you are towards others. Do you ignore boundaries and disrespect people or do you hold them in positive regard and treat them the way you would like to be treated. Be mindful and show courtesy to other people.

Listening is about really paying attention to what others are saying and even what they are not saying. Good eye contact, making an effort to really understand what a person is

saying to you, nodding as they speak, repeating something they said for clarification and even paying attention to body language are all ways to be mindful when listening to others.

Civility is basically about your conduct. Are you out of control and destructive towards yourself and others? Be mindful about your behavior and how it can be construed or misconstrued by others based on your actions.

Lastly, **intellect** is your ability to express your intelligence to others and that has nothing to do with your IQ. This one is important because it can enhance your connections, opportunities, and impress employers, college admissions counselors, teachers, etc. Be mindful about learning and improving your knowledge, you never know who is watching or listening.

It's not always easy to think before we act or speak. However, we can practice the previous attitudes and present ourselves to the world in a positive light. As a teen, your brain is undergoing an enormous amount of change but you do have the power and will to choose how you present yourself to the world. Just remember to be mindful before you take any action or speak any word. I assure you life will go so much smoother in your relationships, your brain will thank you, and you will even feel better about yourself in the process.