

## INTRODUCTION

Hi. I'm Doctor Carlos McCormick and this is Collaborative Conversations with Carlos, a podcast where we discuss various aspects of Wake Technical Community College and the Community College movement.

If you want to find out more about the magnificent work Wake Tech is engaged in, and also learn about the many facets of the community college movement, keep listening as we will have a diverse collection of guests from students to community college presidents.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Let's get started.

Welcome to Collaborative Conversations with Carlos.

Joining us today is Eleanor Miles.

The goal of today's conversation is to discuss mindfulness.

Thank you for joining us today Eleanor.

Eleanor Miles from the ILC here at Wake Technical Community College.

How are you doing today?

ELEANOR MILES: I'm doing well, Carlos. I hope you are.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Doing just great and can't wait to hear this conversation.

Today's topic is mindfulness and mindfulness and then education.

But before we start talking a little bit about mindfulness, tell us a little bit about yourself, your role here at the college, and what excites you.

What do you like to do in your off time?

ELEANOR MILES: Well, I began my career teaching English 111 and 112 NC State University and then I switched to Wake Tech to the tutoring and the Individualized Learning Center and found that that was the job that I truly loved. The job, the career that includes the one-on-one tutoring the students.

And so in terms of what I truly enjoy, I enjoy my job and I know I'm truly lucky to be able to say that.

But I also I love to read. I love to do research that ends up applying to things like mindfulness

that works for me, but also works for students that I can help along the way, and staff and faculty members too.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Thanks for sharing that. And I have to send out a little plug to Eleanor.

Definitely, If you have an opportunity to work with her and the writing center, she actually I always tell people to go and see Miss Eleanor because she actually helped me get through my Doctoral program.

So Eleanor, I wanna thank you as always. Cause I couldn't have done it with without you.

So thank you very much.

ELEANOR MILES: Well, you're very welcome.

You're the best student ever.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Before we start talking again about mindfulness, talk a little bit about the Individualized Learning Center and what is its purpose here at the college?

ELEANOR MILES: So, I'm always happy to do that. I'm a firm believer in the benefits that we can give to students. We call it the ILC for short, but that's the Individualized Learning Center and we're Wake Tech's tutoring center.

And so students can come to us for one-on-one tutoring for any of their courses across the curriculum.

So I'm in the writing and study skills center, but we also have biology center, computer and math.

And within those; chemistry, physics as well as all levels of math are covered.

All the English classes are covered in the Writing Center, but we also help with psychology, papers, sociology papers because our degrees and English always transfer well to just how well any paper is written.

But what I love about Wake Tech's Tutoring Center is that we are professional tutors.

Many of the universities have a peer tutoring system and that works very well, but I think for the expert professional tutoring that students get at Wake Tech, that's the best way to learn.

We're guiding students toward being independent learners because we are not here to edit or

proofread papers.

We want them to become self-sufficient so that they can learn the writing process and learn the study skills to be successful in moving forward in the rest of their Wake Tech career.

But then to other parts of their life, whether they're transferring to another university or moving on to the business world.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Wonderful and one thing is it still free if you're a Wake Tech student?

ELEANOR MILES: Absolutely. You have to have a Wake Tech ID, a Wake Tech email address, but other than that, that is part of a student's Wake Tech tuition.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: That's very exciting and we can't thank you guys enough for what you do in the Individualized Learning Center and now on to mindfulness. Talk a little bit about mindfulness and where did it all start for you?

How did you become interested in in mindfulness?

ELEANOR MILES: Well, I learned about mindfulness because honestly, I was going through a personal crisis of my own and was needing to find a way to cope with my anxiety.

My younger son was running off the rails in a bad way, in his last years of high school.

And my now ex-husband and I were disagreeing about what to do as parents and at the same time my mother was failing mentally and physically, and there was a lot of stress in my life and I wanted to be sure that I could control this anxiety and still do my job very well.

So I tried the mindfulness practice and began to see that it was helping me.

So like I said, I like to research things.

I like to know more, so I found out about of course, that Duke Integrative Medicine called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and I took that eight week course and learned from the sessions learned about the practice and began a practice of my own then.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: So take us back a little bit from the standpoint and thank you for sharing that.

But can you kind of define mindfulness and where did this concept... when did it come about?

ELEANOR MILES: OK. I'll start with the definitions, because there are two. My favorite, and one's the classic one. My favorite one is from Dan Harris, and he's written a book *Inhabit the thought*.

But he says mindfulness is the ability to know what's happening in your head at any given any given moment without being carried away by it or acting out on it.

And when I read that, that just seemed really practical, and it seemed like something that I could really do.

The classic definition comes from Jon Kabat-Zinn, and that is just seems more abstract to me, but it really it really does cover the components, but it is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience, moment by moment.

And so that second one from Jon Kabat-Zinn, like I said, is the classic one because he actually founded the Mindful-based stress reduction program, the one that I participated in that is now globally accepted and very popular. He began his work at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, and he was working with cancer patients who were in a lot of pain and also had chronic anxiety.

And he was seeing the benefits as he worked for the university's Medical Center.

And that's where it all began.

And that he saw definite data come from this and began to expand his program.

Mindfulness has been around for thousands of years.

It began as a religious practice and one of the things that John Kabot Zinn wanted to do was to make it accessible to everyone no matter what, and so he has the secular version, which blends nicely.

If you have the religious practice, but also can be totally separate on its own, if you want to do it as a second or practice.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Wow. So can you kind of explain and thanks for walking us through that.

Explain the practice of mindfulness.

ELEANOR MILES: Yes. And I think the best way to do that is to give a short example. I'd like to do a little exercise, and so I'm gonna ask for everyone to be quiet for like 30 seconds.

So it'll be this pause on purpose, but I'm gonna give you a task process.

I'm gonna ask you to think about what the clear blue sky looks like in October in North Carolina.

That beautiful, bright blue, and maybe in the foreground some beautiful autumn colors. Try to

get that image and your mind. And then I'm just gonna time 30 seconds and see if you can keep your mind focused only on that image of the clear blue sky.

And I'll tell you when 30 seconds is up.

OK, that was about 30 seconds so that you could see what your mind does naturally.

So can you describe your experience where you able to keep your focus during that 30-second time period?

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Yeah, most definitely. And let me know if I did it wrong but I was thinking October clear blue skies.

But one of the things that we actually missed this year and I normally do in October on those nice days is going to the State Fair.

So I visualize myself being amongst thousands of people which we weren't able to do this year because of the pandemic.

But usually it's a nice blue sunny day, and that's kind of what I was visualizing.

ELEANOR MILES: And that's excellent. And so you come away with this positive feeling you taken a moment of not trying to do anything else except relax for a little bit.

But a lot of people try and moments of calm or the time of a mindfulness meditation to only think about the one image of the clear blue sky and nothing else but your mind turned to associations with it, which is what the human brain does.

That's that's like the default state for the human mind.

We start thinking about what that reminds us of, and we then we may start to get some thoughts in of maybe even regret.

I wish I could have done that this year.

I'm not saying that you were thinking that, but if you know at a longer amount of time, the mind kind of goes towards will I be able to do this again in the future by the Fall, will the Fair be open?

Sometimes we start thinking about the past and that's a little bit of what you're doing.

This is my past experience of of the time and some people judge themselves, but if you heard from Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition and we're doing this nonjudgmentally, we're not saying the only thing I thought of was that blue sky.

That picture that the whole time and that was it.

If our minds traveled to something else, and if we get caught up in the thought, then that's very natural.

A lot of practitioners, instead of an image focused on the breath and that seems easier for most people to just stay in the present moment of thinking about.

Well, I'm breathing in and and feeling it probably in the chest. This is where I feel it the most.

A little bit of transition, I feel the breath going out and not trying to force the depth of the breath and the frequency, but just in and out.

But inevitably, if we're doing it more than 30 seconds, 5 minutes is a good is a good measure to have as a beginner for that 5 minutes of time, your line may start going toward, you know, gosh, I've got 9 things to do after I've finished this project that I'm working on right now.

And then if that happens, the idea for the practitioner of mindfulness is just to notice it.

To call it a thought, to say, thought without judgment. Why did I start thinking about something else?

We don't do that.

We just say thought and then come back and notice the breath again.

But each time that we're noticing what our thoughts are doing, that's a moment of mindfulness.

We note it we come back to it as a breathing exercise.

It's gonna wander again, and then we say thought and we come back to it, and the idea is, the more we do this kind of exercise, the more we get used to noticing what we're thinking about.

And that and that sounds like of course, I know what I'm thinking about, but think of your average day when you're rushing from one thing to another, when you're anticipating what might be happening next.

When you're setting your goals, listening to a recording, the lecture and you've got 90 other things on your mind at the same time.

That goes on.

And then also our minds just naturally judge things.

We judge ourselves harshly, sometimes. We think as even if we're just going for a walk and this is one exercise that I recommend to for people.

If you're going for a walk, just notice in the course of of a 5 minutes of your of your walk, how many times do you start to judge?

Ohh that's really nice or I don't like that.

For example, that person's keeping their lawn so beautifully. But why can't I do mine like that?

You know, we get into self-judgment or that person who needs to the right.. their yard's a big mess. And you know, every once in a while we just get those things going in our heads or, you know, my feet are hurting or how much longer do I have to walk?

We're not really present with what we're doing and so that makes a big difference too.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Wow.

Wow, you you talk about walking and it's it's getting to to be Spring and summer and and beautiful time.

And one of my passions is, is to take long walks and oftentimes not necessarily judging other lawns, but I'm thinking about other things.

What are some things that for myself and others that are taking jobs or or or walks can do to kind of stay in the in the moment as they're being active instead of thinking about ohh what happened at work or the kids I have to to feel later on?

What are some strategies you think?

ELEANOR MILES: Oh oh, a good point.

So one of them truly is the breathing, which goes very well with the exercise.

Be wanting to maintain your steady breathing.

Think of think about only it's coming in. It's going out. It's coming in. It's coming out.

And then that in itself is is relaxing, but it's it's going along with your exercise as well.

What we're... what we're aiming for with the attitude that we go into an activity, it can be a walking meditation, running meditation, awareness of nature, a mindful moment or a guided meditation.

Any of those all work for mindfulness.

We go into them with certain attitudes and they're called the seven essential attitudes of mindfulness... I what I want to cover those.

But if you put them all together, they sound like a really nice way to live.

It's it's things like being nonjudgmental, patient, having a beginner's mind, letting go, acceptance, trust, and so these are all qualities that are part of the mindfulness experience.

And so the nonjudgmental I touched on a little bit already, but it's just, you know, going on in our minds all the time, just being aware of it is a mindful moment.

And then maybe you know another time, table that thought, but then think about well, am I generally taking a negative outlook on things, things or am I doing really well by focusing on things that are positive.

But in the moment, the idea of just staying in in the present, with the breath coming in and out and then you'll notice a thought.

Note it and come back to the breath in and out, and so it's it's really a great moment because you asked about having so many things that you're planning and your head and that's really that's really your brain activity you're doing.

And you're and so non striving is one of the essential attitudes as well.

And that doesn't mean you're not trying to reach gold, or do what you're supposed to do in the course of a day is quite the opposite.

It's just taking that little bit of time not to be doing something productive.

It's OK to give yourself permission not to be doing something, and so you're running.

You're in nature. Just notice it.

Notice your breath, but your senses can be open to the smells, the sights.

The sounds as well as you're doing the exercise.



The parts about acceptance or letting go sort of sound like you're gonna go like, well, nothing I can do.

But again, that's quite the opposite of that.

It's getting a more realistic look at what is going on in your world, and so as you're doing a mindfulness exercise a lot of times and thoughts come up and like I said, you can table them for later and go... OK, this is what's really popping up in my mind.

A whole lot. What can I do to address it?

If it's something from the past that you can't fix, you need to let go of that.

If it's something from the past that you can do some kind of restitution for, make a plan.

If it's something in the future that's totally out of your control, such as when or if there will be another State Fair in the fall, then let that go.

Come back to what can I truly make a plan about that will help my social life or my relationships with other people?

CARLOS MCCORMICK: So how do we translate that to student success?

What are some of the strategies and how do you guys in the Individualized Learning Center... Uh Use mindfulness to help students at Wake Tech be successful.

ELEANOR MILES: Uh. I teach the mindfulness practice during several of the workshops that I lead, and other tutors do as well.

Of course, because that that ability to be in the moment and to actually practice disciplining the thoughts how students in a variety of ways, it can help very much with getting a better ability to focus and pay attention.

And that's really essential in terms of a student's life. To be able to actually pay attention to what is on the page on the screen in front of them, using their time efficiently so that their minds aren't wandering and really looking at what has to be done, but during the time of the test, paying attention to it, but also students come to me for test anxiety and that's one of the workshops that we do.

The work with mindfulness also helps with that testing anxiety as well.

Because a practice of mindfulness generally helps people control their anxiety, just for that very reason of narrowing things down to what can I honestly do something about and letting go of what one psychologist Kelly McGonigal calls time traveling.

She calls it time traveling. You go back and get stuck in the past and start illuminating or we start worrying about something that we added absolutely can't fix, or we worry too much by catastrophic thinking.

So we keep ourselves focused with the mindfulness meditation, and that's the more we do that the more that disciplines our minds, we catch ourselves sooner when we realize that our minds wandering from the task at hand.

So I also do a workshop with stress how to you can't really manage stress.

You can't make it go away.

Everybody's life is gonna be stressful.

That's the nature of life.

But what do you do when you're stressed as one of the workshops that I lead. And the mindfulness practice is a part of the activity that helps you grasp the concepts about what to do in terms of a stressful life?

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Wow. Wow, exciting, what about faculty and staff?

As we're a leading and and guiding our students here at the college, what are some strategies that that you would share with our faculty and staff here at the college and how they potentially on a day-by-day basis utilize our mindfulness?

ELEANOR MILES: Uh, there's so many great resources out there that I would recommend to faculty and staff.

I do lead sessions like this periodically for professional development sessions to teach the mindfulness, but if someone as a mindfulness practice umm, then knowing about different guided meditations to use is is really great to know the the ones that I've found umm are the really the best from the university websites?

Umm, The Burke University of Berkeley in California, as the greater Good Science Center?

Umm, there's the Vanderbilt University has many resources... a reading list for example and so these are sources that... UCLA has the the MARC Center, Mindfulness Awareness Resource Center.

So looking at universities to see what connections they have with mindfulness programs and then go to that page about the center itself, oftentimes there are reading lists.

They're podcast located, particularly to the mindfulness, but you know that it's research based and educational in terms of its focus.

And so that's always making it, making it very credible.

But when I talk about guided meditation, that really is what I'd recommend to the students, and that's how I would recommend faculty start as well.

And that is so that you're not feeling the pressure when you're just beginning of... I've gotta sit down here by myself for five minutes and try to manage my thoughts.

The guided meditation is a recording that helps you to stay in the moment, and that's great as you're first starting the practice and the typical session will just begin.

You know, find a comfortable place to sit, whether you want to sit cross legged on the floor or in the chair in an upright position, your feet while the floor hands relaxed, and then the moderator will say now relax and notice your breath.

Notice the end breath, the pause, and that outbreath.

And so repeating that a couple of times and then maybe letting there be a moment of silence.

But then the the moderator comes back in and says if you have lost your focus, if your thoughts have traveled, make label them thought and come back to the breath.

So that's like an automatic reminder factored in knowing that most people's minds are going to wander after a certain point in a very calm and non non judgmental way, pulling the practitioner back to that breath in the moment and then you know another pause, another comment and that guided meditation, I still use them myself as long as I've been practicing because that that just helps me relax somebody else is helping me with this practice as as my backup.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: We're in the midst of what I call a horrific health pandemic.

What strategies would you share with individuals as a lot of different families are going through a variety of turmoil at this time and how might want utilize mindful mindfulness to get through what we're dealing with today in this horrific health pandemic?

ELEANOR MILES: Yes, it's it's such a big concern, but I think, umm, beginning a practice of mindfulness just beginning by pulling up a guided meditation or a podcast.

Because the very things that I was addressing in a very anxious moment of my life applies to so many people right now, during this pandemic.

Feelings of anxiety, feeling like, you know, we don't know what's gonna happen.

And then that leads when especially if we're isolated more than usual to our minds, just go and you know, straight to the worst thought ever.

And so noticing our thoughts through the mindfulness brings us back to here's what really is going on now.

Not the most awful thing I can possibly foresee.

I that may or may not happen, I don't know.

I've got to leave that. Let that go. Bring myself back... Accept what I can really do right now, and so that really leads, first of all to some really realistic goal setting.

This is what I can do in this moment in my life right now.

Um, because I started disciplining my thoughts from that time traveling I've brought them back from way in the future. I've let go of... I wish it were like this... Why can't it ever be like this? We can't change it. We can't fix it.

We've gotta say, how can I make it the best it can be right now? But again, noticing our thoughts and beginning that discipline of our thoughts is helpful in terms of worrying or or ruminating, but it also helps with relationships with other people.

We notice our thoughts more when we become a little less reactive, a little less judgmental.

I mentioned, you know the judgment the brain naturally does.

That's not good at this time, especially if you're a close proximity with the with family members, but also in the turmoil of the world.

Give other people a break.

They're feeling the anxiety and isolation as well, but that it really does work with that reactivity.

Again, the practice of noticing what you're thinking about gives you that practice... Just notice that in the moment more you notice this is just hit you in the face.

This has just happened, but that mindfulness practice goes... But what's behind it? But what's behind it? What's happening right now? What am I making up in my mind?

Past future emotions involved and I and there have been a couple of times in my life that I've actually noticed since I've been doing the mindfulness practice very dramatically that my my

former anxious self would have reacted much differently than the calm response that I had in the moment of anxiety.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Eleanor, how does one become proficient in mindfulness?

And is it something that individuals should inspire to do on a daily or a weekly basis?

ELEANOR MILES: Well, I just first like to say that there's no right or wrong way to do a mindfulness practice or to be mindful in one's life.

It is just a practice and being aware of it as I'm practicing, the more I practice, the more disciplined my mind becomes and then the more I will be aware of my thoughts during the course of the day.

But we are to go into it nonjudgmentally, so there's no good or bad meditation practice.

And really, as much time as you're comfortable with is what I would say, start at a reasonable small amount of time of five minutes spaced out during the week.

Not expecting yourself to have a chance to do it every single day when you're adding it as a new practice.

Ideally, I guess the building up to a 40-minute session is what the people who've been doing it for decades actually aspire to.

That's difficult. If you could fit one of those in during the week and then do shorter ones in the course of a week, that would be great.

But don't put pressure on yourself in terms of how many times I've I've done it.

How long did I have it last? Choose the times that that work for you. And like I said, build up if that's necessary. If you find a particular time that works for you, stick with that.

The main thing is just to keep noticing your thoughts and letting that help discipline your thoughts during the course of the day.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Thank you so much.

I don't know... this has been an enlightening and and wonderful conversation.

You have any other tips or strategies or other information that you'd like to share with the audience?

ELEANOR MILES: I would like to mention that there's a lot of scientific research very within the

last decades being done on mindfulness, because there's so many developments in the field of neuroscience.

And so these scientists are able actually to provide data because they have the instruments now to measure brain activity, to measure growth within the brain in certain sections and which areas are growing.

And that's fascinating to me to know that what those of us who have practiced mindfulness know, you know, quantitatively is different than the qualitative experience that we know.

We know anecdotally it works for me. I can tell you that all day long, but many people are very interested as I am to know that actually this is truly a process that's going on in the brain.

The certain areas of the brain that help us pay attention that help us not react strongly to events I've been talking in general about disciplining our thoughts, but that really is particular activity that is going on in the brain and that you can find lots of research articles from those university websites that gives specific detail about that.

But again, I think that's a fascinating part of it as well.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Thank you so much Eleanor is it's been wonderful.

And if you've enjoyed listening to Eleanor, we've already had discussions about future podcasts, so please tune in again in the near future, as we'll have Miss Eleanor Miles from my Individualized Learning Center here at Wake Technical Community College.

Thank you, Eleanor.

ELEANOR MILES: Thank you for having me, then enjoyed it very much.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Thanks for listening to collaborative conversations with Carlos. If you like the show and you want to know more, be sure to visit us at [waketech.edu](http://waketech.edu).

See you next time.