Mindfulness

Primary and Secondary Experience

Stressful things can happen: we might be stuck in a traffic jam, or having a communication difficulty, or feeling low about something that has happened. That’s our actual, direct experience, and we can’t do very much about it. However, we often cause ourselves extra, unnecessary stress by *reacting* to that experience*,* with various thoughts, feelings and judgments. For instance, let’s say you are under pressure to finish a job by a certain time. You might have such thoughts as ‘’ I’ll never get everything done in time’’, ‘’ Why did I agree to do this in the first place?’’, accompanied by feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, resentment, accompanied by judgements such as ‘’This is a stupid job’’ (judgement about the job) or ‘’I’m useless at this’’ (judgement about self)

These kinds of reactions often tend to proliferate or escalate – one thought leading to others, leading to more feelings, leading to more judgements. They’re also obsessional, trapping us in the problem that we’re trying to solve. Before we know it we’re drowning in a sea of despair.

We call our direct experience *primary experience* and all the reactions to that *secondary experience.* Mindfulness helps us to deal with stressful situations by continually coming back to our primary experience.

Primary

experience

Reaction

(

Judgements, thoughts,

feelings)

Reaction

Reaction

Secondary Experience

mental proliferation

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Ok so you might still be under pressure to get that job done, which you may experience as unpleasant, but that’s all. You don’t have to cope with all the extra negative thoughts and feelings that your mind has conjured up.