

UNIT 1. Welcome and introductions

In this unit, you will learn what mindfulness and self-care mean, explore their benefits and understand why they are especially helpful for people who have experienced migration, displacement or trauma.

Take your time. This is your space to reflect and learn at your own pace.



UNIT 1. What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of paying **focused, non-judgmental** attention to the **present moment**. It involves being aware of your **thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations** and **the environment around** you without reacting to them.

Examples of mindfulness practices:

- *Breathing exercises:* Focusing on your breath - noticing the inhale and exhale. If your mind wanders, gently bring your focus back to your breath.
- *Body scan meditation:* Starting from your toes, slowly bringing awareness to each part of your body. Noticing any sensations (warmth, tightness, tingling) without judgment.
- *Mindful walking:* Walking slowly and intentionally, paying attention to the movement of your feet and the feeling of the ground beneath you. Noticing the sounds, smells and sights around you.
- *Mindful eating:* Eating slowly, savouring each bite and paying attention to the taste, texture and aroma of the food.
- *Meditation:* Sitting comfortably, closing your eyes and focusing on your breath. Inhaling deeply, then exhaling slowly. Gently returning your focus to your breath if your mind wanders.

UNIT 1. What is Self-care?

Self-care is the **intentional practice** of taking actions to **preserve** or **improve** your health and well-being, especially when dealing with stress or trauma.

Examples of self-care practices:

- *Rest and sleep:* Prioritising getting 7-9 hours of restful sleep each night.
- *Physical activity:* Engaging in regular physical activity like walking, yoga or stretching.
- *Hydration and nutrition:* Drinking plenty of water and eating a balanced diet with fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- *Social connections:* Spending time with loved ones or connect with others through social activities, even virtually.
- *Creative expression:* Engaging in hobbies like drawing, writing, music or crafting.
- *Relaxation techniques:* Practicing deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation or just taking warm baths to unwind.
- *Setting boundaries:* Saying no to demands or activities that overwhelm you and prioritising your well-being.

UNIT I. Benefits of mindfulness and self-care

Mindfulness:

- Helps manage emotions by allowing us to notice our thoughts and feelings without getting overwhelmed.
- Uses grounding techniques (like breathing exercises) to reduce fear or panic.
- Promotes present-moment awareness, helping us focus on what we can control.
- Improves our ability to stay calm in stressful situations.

Self-care:

- Helps the body recover, reduces stress and supports emotional balance, easing the impact of trauma.
- Having a regular self-care routine creates a sense of control and stability, especially in uncertain times.
- Provides time for relaxation and restoration, preventing burnout.
- Strengthens physical and mental health, allowing us to better cope with challenges.

UNIT I. Benefits of mindfulness and self-care

Both: Mindfulness and Self-care:

- Builds resilience, increases self-awareness and helps us feel more connected to ourselves and the world around us, leading to better mental health.
- Encourages healthier coping strategies and reduces reliance on harmful behaviours.
- Fosters a sense of safety and well-being, even in difficult situations and circumstances.

UNIT I. Importance for migrants and refugees

Migration can be a transformative yet highly challenging process.

Refugees and migrants often face a variety of stressors before, during, and after their “journeys” - including war, persecution, family separation, dangerous travel routes, uncertainty about legal status, difficulties integrating into new communities and other.

These experiences can impact mental health, increase vulnerability to trauma and reduce access to coping resources.



UNIT 1. Importance for migrants and refugees

Key stressors affecting refugee and migrant wellbeing include:

BEFORE MIGRATION:

- Exposure to war, violence, discrimination or oppression
- Loss of home, employment or access to education/ healthcare
- Separation from loved ones or communities
- Pre-existing trauma or health conditions

DURING MIGRATION:

- Dangerous travel conditions, lack of food or shelter
- Exploitation, trafficking or abuse
- Long periods of uncertainty, fear and isolation
- Language and communication barriers

AFTER MIGRATION:

- Legal uncertainty or asylum rejections
- Difficulties accessing healthcare, housing and employment
- Social exclusion, racism or discrimination
- Ongoing grief, guilt or survivor's shame

These experiences may lead to long-term emotional impacts such as anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms or emotional numbness. Traditional psychological support is not always available - but mindfulness and self-care techniques can empower individuals to begin their own healing journey, at their own pace and within their cultural context.

UNIT I. Importance for migrants and refugees

WHY MINDFULNESS AND SELF-CARE ARE HELPFUL:

- ❖ **REGULATES STRESS.** Helps calm the nervous system and reduces the physical effects of stress.
- ❖ **IMPROVES SLEEP.** Encourages relaxation and reduces racing thoughts that interfere with rest.
- ❖ **BUILDS EMOTIONAL STRENGTH.** Increases your ability to manage strong emotions like fear, sadness, or anger.
- ❖ **SUPPORTS FOCUS AND CLARITY.** Trains your attention and reduces mental distractions.
- ❖ **ENCOURAGES SELF-COMPASSION.** Helps you treat yourself with kindness during difficult times.
- ❖ **STRENGTHENS BODY AWARENESS.** Helps you notice early signs of burnout, anxiety or tension.