

# Why you should give the gift of mindfulness this New Year

January 4 2023, by Jeremy David Engels

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The start of another year can feel magical to many of us. Even though the days remain short and dark, the flip of the calendar can make it seem new beginnings with new resolutions are possible.

Mindfulness scholars and teachers [like me](#) call resolutions "[habit breakers](#)," as they can overcome patterns that no longer serve individuals. However, research suggests that many resolutions fail by the end of January.

But a [key to ensuring that resolutions stick](#) is to choose one that will make a meaningful difference in your life. Seeing a real, tangible benefit can provide inspiration to keep going when all of life is telling us to let things go back to how they were before.

[Living more mindfully](#) is a common New Year's [resolution](#). This year, try gifting it to others.

## **The meaning of mindfulness**

Mindfulness has been shown to have a number of meaningful health benefits—it can help reduce anxiety and promote healing in those [suffering](#) from long-term chronic illness.

The [practice](#) is based on an insight first described by ancient Buddhist texts that human beings have the capacity to observe experience [without being caught up in it](#). This means, simply and wonderfully, that it is possible to observe ourselves having a craving, or a happy thought, or even a scary emotion, without reacting in the moment in a way that amplifies the feeling or sends the mind spiraling off into thinking about old memories or anticipating events.

This practice can help [calm the mind and the body](#) as we learn not to react to experience with likes and dislikes or judgments of good and bad. It does not make us cold or apathetic but [more fully present](#).

## **Mindfulness in a distracted world**

One of the challenges of practicing mindfulness in our contemporary world is that there has been a profound transformation in human [attention](#). The artist Jenny Odell [argues](#) that in our "attention economy" [human attention](#) has been transformed into a commodity that big corporations buy and sell. This economy rests on a technological revolution of mobile phones and [social media](#) that makes it possible for corporations to reach us with content that can capture and monetize our focus, at every moment, every day, and no matter where we may be.

The needy little devices most people carry in their pockets and wear on their wrists, incessantly beeping and buzzing and chirping, are a perpetual diversion from the [present moment](#). The result is that it can feel as though our ability to focus, and be fully present, [has been stolen](#).

But mindfulness can help us resist the attention economy and savor the things that make life special, like being together with those we love.

## **The gift of mindfulness**

While most mindfulness research focuses on the individual benefits of the practice, [scholars like me argue](#) that we not only practice mindfulness for ourselves but that we can also practice it for others. It can help us build stronger, healthier relationships.

The sad truth is that living in the attention economy, most of us have become [bad listeners](#). However, just as it is possible to watch ourselves having an experience without reacting, it's possible to watch another person have an experience without getting tied up in reactivity and judgment. It's possible simply to be present.

The gift of mindfulness is a practice of listening with [compassion](#) to another person describe their experiences. To give this gift means putting away your phone, turning off social media, and setting aside

other common distractions. It means practicing being fully present in another person's presence and [listening](#) to them with complete attention, without reacting with judgment, while resisting the urge to make the interaction about you.

If we judge the value of gifts [based on how much they cost](#), this gift may seem worthless. But in a distracted world, I argue, it is a [precious one](#).

It is not a gift that you will wrap, or put inside a card; it's not one you will have to name as a [gift](#) or draw attention to. It's something you can do right now.

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