

# Expanding your awareness

This is an exercise you can do anywhere at any time. No matter where you are right now, you can practise it. While you are reading these instructions your attention is probably going to be focused very closely on the words on the page. When you have finished reading these instructions we would like you to put them down, lift your head, and slowly expand your awareness outwards.

Gently open up to the various different aspects of your experience as they are right now: everything going on around you that you can perceive with your five senses – everything you can see, hear, feel, smell, taste; everything that is going on inside you – any thoughts that are appearing and then retreating in your mind; any feelings or sensations under your skin; anything else that is there. You don't need to focus in on any of them particularly – just let them be; allow them all to wash over you and just allow yourself to experience them.

When you feel ready, perhaps allow your attention to flit about a bit. Let it come to rest for a moment on one particular aspect of your experience – a sound you can hear, a sensation you can feel, a thought you are having. Then, in a moment, allow it to move on and focus on something else. And before your attention has time to get too comfortable there, allow it to move on again. Like a bee, buzzing from flower to flower, let your attention wander, drink in whatever is available where it lands, and then move on. Sometimes you may like the spot where your attention lands. Other times you may find it really unpleasant. Whether you find it pleasant or unpleasant, try to bring a quality of openness, curiosity and willingness to it. Allow it to be what it is, notice it, engage with it, and then move on.

*An exercise from: ACTivate Your Life: An Acceptance and Commitment  
Therapy Workbook for Building a Life that is Rich, Fulfilling and Fun  
by Joe Oliver , Jon Hill, Eric Morris*

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When you feel ready, relax your focus once more and allow the whole of your experience into the frame again. Whatever is going on around you or within you, make space for it all by expanding your awareness. Notice whatever is there with gentle curiosity, knowing everything is as it should be.

What was that like?

What did you notice as you expanded your awareness to take in everything at once?

Some people immediately find it to be a calming experience, experiencing themselves as almost being at one with everything around and within them. Others can find it uncomfortable, overwhelmed by the volume of data and sensation. Whatever your experience was, it is fine. As always, there is no right or wrong. It is just useful to practise the skill of expanding your awareness outwards: first noticing when you are becoming so focused on something that you are losing the ability to make values-based choices about how you act; then consciously and purposefully allowing the spotlight of your attention to grow and expand; then just noticing how the world looks from this more expansive vantage point, and making a decision about how you want to be and behave in that moment.

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