



# KEEPING AN OPEN MIND

To be open-minded is to be receptive to new ideas and information, even when they challenge your beliefs and understanding of the world. Open-minded people consider differing views and opinions with curiosity and a desire to understand. They seek out new perspectives in their efforts to learn, grow, and make more informed choices.

## Why It's Hard to Be Open-Minded

While being open-minded has tremendous benefits, it's not easy. For most people, it takes conscious effort. That's because the human mind tends to streamline perceptions and reactions with energy-saving shortcuts. For example, people tend to sort information into categories based on their previous experience and interpret new information based on their beliefs. When new information or ideas are encountered that don't fit those categories or that challenge those beliefs, it's easier to reject the new information or distort your understanding of it than it is to rethink your categories or beliefs. Other mental shortcuts include stereotyping people, judging people based on first impressions or single characteristics, and making snap decisions.

If you are struggling and can't manage it on your own, it may be time to contact a professional.

CARE WorkLife Solutions offers sessions with our experienced master level counselors. Sessions can be in person or virtual – whichever you are comfortable with, and are completely confidential and at no cost to you.

## HOW TO BE MORE OPEN-MINDED

### **Be humble about what you know and don't know.**

Researchers call this practicing intellectual humility:

- » Recognize that your understanding of the world isn't perfect and that perspectives other than your own are valid.
- » Accept that there are gray areas in life, where choices aren't black and white.
- » Be aware of your biases—the ways your thoughts and perceptions may be distorted by your brain's shortcuts or your past experiences.

**Be curious.** Cultivate your desire to inquire, explore, learn, and understand. People tend to have a strong natural curiosity in childhood, then allow it to weaken as they grow older:

- » Be open to all information, not just information that confirms what you already believe.
- » Read a variety of books, articles, and online content. Online information is easy to access, but you need to be alert to the ways search engines and social media limit your exposure to different views by curating what you see to match what you already believe.
- » Seek out other perspectives. Make a point of talking with people and reading the writings of people who have views or backgrounds that are different from yours, or who have discovered information that challenges your understanding and beliefs.

### **Spend time with people who have different ideas and perspectives.**

Widen your circle of friends to include people who are different from you. Find the areas where you agree, but don't be afraid to explore those where you don't. Being a good listener with someone who agrees with you or has a similar background is easy. Challenge yourself to really listen to friends and acquaintances when they share ideas, opinions, and experiences that don't fit easily with your own view of the world.

**Slow down.** Initial reactions and snap judgments are often driven by emotion, habit, and unconscious bias. Sometimes they're right, but not always. When you have a quick reaction to something, especially a negative reaction, slow down and consider why that might be. Challenge your rational self to consider more positive and accepting responses.

**Calm down.** When you're anxious, upset, or under pressure, it's hard to be open-minded. Snap judgments and quick negative reactions tend to take over. When you find this happening, step back from the situation and calm down. Reconsider the issue, or reengage in the conversation later when you are more relaxed.

**Reframe negative thoughts.** Positive reframing is the technique of looking at things in new ways to find the positive in them—the opportunities in change, the good in other people, and the strengths in yourself.

**Embrace new experiences.** Step out of your comfort zone. Try something new. Do something spontaneous. Listen to a different style of music. Try food you've never had before. Accept an invitation to lunch or coffee with a new neighbor or work colleague. Read books written by people from other cultures. Breaking out of your routine and trying new experiences can help you realize that there is more than one way to live life and view the world.

**Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a form of meditation in which you focus on what you are experiencing as you meditate, accept those feelings and sensations, and bring yourself to be in the present moment, without thoughts of the past or future. With its focus on acceptance and being in the present moment, the practice of mindfulness can help you let go of worries about the future, regrets about the past, and negative thinking about new experiences. Mindfulness can help bring out your natural curiosity and open your mind to new perspectives and ideas.