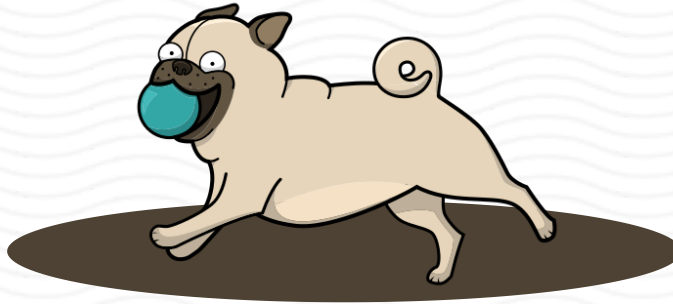




Lori Gill Psychotherapy
Holistic Wellness for Health

Training The Mind: Training a Puppy



During meditation practice, we train our mind like we would train a puppy.

Like our mind, a puppy is chaotic and constantly getting themselves into trouble. One moment they're investigating a bug, the next they're chewing on the sofa, and a moment later they're stuck behind the washing machine. Does that sound familiar? It should. Our minds are just like puppies. They're constantly darting between distractions, creating imaginary futures, replaying past events, and getting lost in over-analyzing every experience.

When training a puppy, one of the first things we do is teach it to sit. We hope to accomplish something similar for our minds during meditation practice. In meditation, we choose to focus on one thing, like our breath. The purpose is to be mindful and fully in-the-moment, instead of chasing after thoughts and emotions.

It's common for people practicing meditation to become discouraged when they can't get the puppy in their head to stay perfectly still, but how many of us have ever met a perfectly behaved puppy? It's called meditation "practice" for a reason— we're working with our mind and encouraging it to sit more frequently and for longer periods.

It's actually a beautiful moment of clarity when our mind catches itself overthinking. That's the moment when we reward the puppy in our head with a pat and a smile. In that moment, we gently lead our puppy-mind back to the present moment - to our breath, our surroundings - to whatever focus of attention we have chosen.

Puppies respond best when rewarded and not when unnecessarily punished. The first day we bring a puppy home, we don't hope to have them trained in 24 hours. Pushing a puppy too far and too fast rarely has positive or beneficial results. When we start with shorter meditation periods, we can stop while still enjoying the practice, and before it becomes too frustrating. This will make sure the puppy-mind keeps wanting to come back for more practice."

Adapted from Tsomo, L. (2019). Mindfulness Meditation: Why Training Your Mind is Like Training a Puppy. Retrieved from: <https://www.happify.com/hd/why-training-your-mind-is-like-training-a-puppy/>