



mindfulness for **life**

Course Handbook



**Oxford
Mindfulness
Centre**



**Oxford
Mindfulness
Foundation**

NAME:

This handbook was written by Paul Bernard, Chris Cullen and Willem Kuyken, with input from Melanie Fennell, Marie Johansson, Zindel Segal, Christina Surawy, Mark Williams and Alison Yiangou. It benefited greatly from the editorial assistance of Daniel Brett and Lucy Palmer. The handbook draws extensively from the ‘handouts’ in the book Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for Depression by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale (2nd edition, Guilford Press, 2013). It also includes elements from other sources, which are acknowledged. The original work is the intellectual property of the authors and the University of Oxford Mindfulness Centre. Please do not distribute or reproduce without permission of the authors.

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Welcome to Mindfulness for Life! This handbook aims to support your learning and inspire you during the Mindfulness for Life course. It includes information, guidance and poetry as well as spaces for you to make written notes about the practices that you do at home. Most of the learning in the course is experiential learning – the home practices will be your most important teachers.

The course includes eight classes and each class has its own section in the handbook. Just as our lives unfold from moment to moment, Mindfulness for Life unfolds from class to class. The sections of the handbook are designed to be read after you have attended the relevant class. You are encouraged not to read sections of the handbook that correspond to classes later in the course.

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Please do not read ahead.

Please bring the handbook to every session.

The Oxford Mindfulness Centre is a collaboration between the University of Oxford and the Oxford Mindfulness Foundation. The Oxford Mindfulness Foundation is a registered charity which delivers mindfulness teaching and training within the collaboration.

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FOREWORD

In the same way that physical exercise is recognised as supporting physical health, there is a growing recognition that mindfulness training and cognitive-behavioural therapies can support our mental health and well-being.

Mindfulness is rooted within ancient wisdom and practices, whereas cognitive behavioural methods were developed within modern psychological science. They have different perspectives, but each offers specific ways to a common end - becoming more familiar with the mind and learning to work with it more skilfully. The combination of the two approaches has great potential to alleviate suffering and enable people to flourish and live their lives more fully.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is an 8-week programme developed by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale with a particular focus on people with repeated episodes of depression. MBCT has been shown to be effective in numerous randomised controlled trials, and is recommended as a treatment for recurrent depression by bodies such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

But what about the rest of the population who might also benefit from the potentially transformative power of such a programme? Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Life (shortened to Mindfulness for Life), built on the framework of the original MBCT programme, is designed to be relevant to all of us. It is for use in mainstream, everyday settings and aims to be of benefit to people across the spectrum of mental health and well-being.

Mindfulness for Life takes participants through a structured curriculum that promotes the cultivation of understanding, skills and attitudes that can really change things for people. The learning is largely experiential and is based on learning mindfulness both in 'formal' practices and in everyday life. The programme offers a new way to work with difficulties that we encounter in our lives but also a different way of relating to ourselves and others – a way that includes more contentment, appreciation, wisdom and compassion.

Everything we do at the University of Oxford Mindfulness Centre builds from our world-leading research. This course is no different - we have started a programme of research to evaluate this course's acceptability and effectiveness and preliminary findings suggest it supports mental health and well-being.

Paul Bernard, Chris Cullen and Willem Kuyken

SESSION 1



**WAKING UP FROM
AUTOMATIC PILOT**

A DEFINITION OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges when we pay attention in a particular way: in the present moment, with curiosity and kindness, to things as they are.

AWARENESS AND AUTOMATIC PILOT

Contrast these two situations:

- **Scenario 1:** you're going for a walk with a young child in the woods. You move slowly, stopping often, seeing through his or her young eyes the extraordinary richness of simple objects. Seeing as if for the first time.
- **Scenario 2:** you're driving your car on a familiar route. You suddenly realise that, for miles, you have been quite unaware of your surroundings, totally lost in thoughts about other things. You have been driving on automatic pilot.

The two scenarios illustrate the difference between really living life as it happens and our more usual way of rushing through life without seeing, tasting, smelling, or touching it.

Just as we often drive on automatic pilot, careful observation reveals that we actually live on automatic pilot much of the time.

On automatic pilot we are not really present, not really tuned in, only dimly aware of the richness and fullness of life. When we are 'out of touch' in this way, the mind may slip into unhelpful habits of thinking and feeling. We may react to situations without really noticing what is happening.

When we practise mindfulness, we intentionally bring awareness to our moment to moment experience. We notice thoughts, feelings and body sensations as they arise. In doing so, we step out of automatic pilot and become more fully present, more in touch with ourselves and the world around us. When we live with more awareness, we are less likely to react to life and we are more able to respond to it... with choice and with freedom.

SMALL FRUIT – BIG MESSAGE

Did you notice how your experience of eating the raisin was transformed by the simple act of focusing on it? Many people say that they 'got their money's worth' out of eating for the first time in years. What normally happens to all that taste? It just disappears. Unnoticed. Raisins are so insignificant; we tend to eat them by the handful, while doing something 'more important'. And if it was only the taste we were missing, this might not matter too much. But once you see the difference that paying full attention can make to the small things in life, you start to get an inkling of the cost of inattention. Just think of all the pleasures of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching that are drifting by you unnoticed. You may well be missing vast portions of your daily life. You only ever have a moment to live, this moment, and yet we all tend to live in the past or in the future. We only rarely notice what is arising in the present moment. *From: Mindfulness: a Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World*

ATTITUDES THAT CAN SUPPORT OUR MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Learning mindfulness does involve following guidance and mastering ‘techniques’ but the approach that we bring to our practice is just as important, or more so. The following attitudes are seen as some of the essential foundations that can help our mindfulness practice to flourish.

Non-judging - we tend to constantly judge our experience (as right or wrong, good or bad, etc.) and this can make it hard for us to see what is really here. Bringing a non-judging attitude to our practice enables us to observe, allow and be with whatever arises. It does not mean letting go of discernment and judgement about ourselves and the world.

Patience - being in a rush to achieve results from our practice will tend to take us out of the present moment and thereby undermine our mindfulness. An attitude of patience helps us to allow things to unfold in their own time.

Beginner’s mind - it is easy for our beliefs about what we know to get in the way of seeing things as they really are. When we bring an attitude of beginner’s mind, we experience things as if for the first time. We ask ourselves “what is actually here right now?”

Trust - many of us tend to trust the judgement of authority figures and look outside of ourselves for ‘the truth’ and for guidance. It is important in our practice that we learn to listen to our own feelings and intuitions and begin to honour and trust what we hear. Our mindfulness practice becomes our teacher.

Non-striving - in our everyday lives, many of our actions are done in order to achieve something or get somewhere. In many situations, the harder we try, the more likely we are to succeed. This approach tends to be counter-productive in cultivating mindfulness and it is usually more helpful to bring a non-striving attitude to our practice. We learn to let go of trying to make things happen.

Acceptance - we often waste a lot of energy refusing to see what is here and struggling against the way things are. In our mindfulness practice we cultivate acceptance by being with each moment as it is. This does not mean that we have to like or accept everything about ourselves and the world. A willingness to see and accept the reality of how things are is often a necessary first step before taking action that may lead to change.

Letting go - when we look inward, we soon notice how the mind wants to hold on to what is pleasant in our experience and reject what is unpleasant. Our practice will benefit from us learning to sometimes let go of these tendencies and instead to simply observe, allow, let be.

Befriending - Befriending involves being curious, friendly and kind, and is a capacity that we can all develop towards ourselves and our experiences. It is available to all of us, and extends kindness and warmth to all our experience, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.

Compassion - We have all experienced moments of compassion when the heart trembles in the face of pain, distress and suffering, whether our own or others; when we can be open to the vulnerability that is part of the human experience. Compassion is this orientation of mind alongside the capacity to meet and respond to pain with kindness, empathy, equanimity and patience and intention to alleviate the suffering.

Appreciation - It takes only a small step out of automatic pilot and into awareness to really enjoy a piece of music, notice the stars in the sky, the sunlight glistening on the leaves, the people we love around us, a good meal, or all that is right in our bodies in any given moment. These moments are available to us all the time, if we choose to attend to them. They offer a glimpse of a more enduring contentment.

Gratitude – Most of us have a natural tendency to give plenty of attention to what is ‘wrong’ in our lives but we often take the good things for granted. Gratitude is noticing and bringing an attitude of thankfulness to the many aspects of our lives that are going well. This can be gratitude for seemingly trivial things, like a moment of kindness a stranger shows us, or more seemingly profound things, like a loving relationship or our health. Gratitude is neither sentimental, a denial of the difficult, nor necessarily easy. It is a training that intentionally sets out to develop a changed attitude of mind.

Generosity – we easily forget that we have the power to bring moments of happiness and joy to others. Developing the habit of generosity is a great thing to do for others and is also very helpful to ourselves.

Adapted from ‘Full Catastrophe Living’ by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Mindfulness: Ancient wisdom meets modern psychology by Christina Feldman and Willem Kuyken.

LOOKING BACK: A PARTICIPANT'S EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING THE BODY SCAN

'For the first few days I wasn't sure what I was doing and the practice felt like a burden. While I was listening to the body scan I kept wandering off, and then I would worry about whether I was doing it right. My mind was all over the place. I tried too hard to stop it, I think.

Another problem at the start was the message about accepting things as they are now. I thought that was totally unreasonable. I thought to myself "I can't do that" and got it into a whole debate with myself.

Slowly I learned to just put the body scan audio track on and, as best I could, follow the instructions. I didn't worry if concerns came in, I did as the teacher suggested, noticing this and coming back to my body, many hundreds of times! Gradually my mind seemed to get a bit steadier, and I was able to follow the instructions and see what was happening in my body and mind a bit better.

After a few days I relaxed more, I stopped worrying if I was thinking about anything else. When I gave up worrying about it, I actually stopped the flights of fantasy. If I did think of something else, I just noticed it, picked up the track again and came back to my body, like I said it seemed like lots of times. Gradually the flights of fantasy reduced. I was happy to listen to the instructions and then I started to get some value from it.

Soon I had developed it so that I could actually feel the breath going down to the base of my foot. Sometimes I didn't feel anything, but then I thought "If there's no feeling then I can be satisfied with the fact there is no feeling."

It's not something you can do half a dozen times. It's got to be a daily thing. It becomes more real the more that you try it. I began to look forward to it.'

PRACTISING APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE

Attention is like Teflon for pleasant experiences, but like Velcro for unpleasant experiences.

Our brains evolved for survival and reproduction, rather than for happiness and peace of mind. This biological heritage seems to have left us with a natural tendency to give plenty of attention to what's wrong and to what might be a threat. Noticing and giving time to what is lovely doesn't flow so easily for most of us, especially when we're under stress, but there are steps we can take to train ourselves to bring awareness to the lovely and nourishing aspects of our lives.

Just making a mental note that something is pleasant, uplifting or beautiful can be helpful. Much more powerful is to pause and appreciate and bring awareness to the details of physical sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that arise. By learning to 'turn good facts into good experiences' in this way, we can deepen the appreciation and gratitude that we have for these enjoyable moments and thus increase the nourishment that they give us. The intention is that this can become a part of your everyday life.

ON WASHING THE DISHES

To my mind, the idea that doing the dishes is unpleasant can occur only when you are not doing them. Once you are standing in front of the sink with your sleeves rolled up and your hands in warm water, it really is not so bad. I enjoy taking my time with each dish, being fully aware of the dish, the water, and each movement of my hands. I know that if I hurry in order to go and have a cup of tea, the time will be unpleasant...

Washing the dishes is at the same time a means and an end. Not only do we do the dishes in order to have clean dishes, we also do the dishes just to do the dishes, to live fully in each moment while washing them.

If I am incapable of washing dishes joyfully, if I want to finish them quickly so I can go and have a cup of tea, I will be equally incapable of drinking the tea joyfully. With the cup in my hands I will be thinking about what to do next, and the fragrance and the flavour of the tea, together with the pleasure of drinking it, will be lost. I will always be dragged into the future, never able to live in the present moment.

Thich Nhat Hanh

HOME PRACTICE FOLLOWING SESSION 1

1. Do a **Body Scan**, using the audio track, every day this week. Don't expect to feel anything in particular from doing the practice. In fact, as best you can, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience. Don't judge it, just keep doing it, and we'll talk next week about how it went..
2. Choose **one routine** activity in your daily life and make a deliberate effort to bring moment to moment awareness to that activity each time you do it, just as we did in the raisin exercise. Possibilities include waking up in the morning, brushing your teeth, showering, drying your body, getting dressed, eating a meal or a snack, taking out the rubbish, shopping, and so forth. Just like during the raisin exercise, 'zero in' on knowing what you are doing as you are doing it. Notice body sensations, thoughts and feelings as they arise.

NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Ten Finger Gratitude Practice: bring to mind ten things for which you are grateful, counting them on your fingers and opening to and savouring the sensations of gratitude in the body as best you can.

Note: Feel free to use the Home Practice Notes page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

You will be given information about how to access the audio recordings that you will need for the home practice during the course.

It's important to practise being mindful in our everyday lives because that is where we need it most.

HOME PRACTICE NOTES

Feel free to use this page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

[illegible]

PLEASE REMEMBER NOT TO READ AHEAD.

SESSION 2

ANOTHER WAY OF
BEING: KEEPING THE
BODY IN MIND

KEEPING THE BODY IN MIND

The aim of this course is to become more aware, more often. During your first week, you may have become more aware of just how much thinking the mind does! It is all too easy, especially when we are on automatic pilot, to get lost in our thoughts: planning, problem-solving, remembering, daydreaming and worrying. Most of us spend much of our lives 'in our heads' and that usually means knowing about our experience through concepts and ideas, in other words, knowing indirectly.

By tuning in to physical sensations, we can 'anchor' ourselves in the present moment and become lost in our thinking less often. By 'keeping the body in mind' in this way, we can use a different kind of knowing, one that involves feeling and sensing - knowing experientially, directly, intuitively.

In the first week of the course, you practised intentionally bringing awareness to physical sensations during the body scan practice and when doing routine practical activities. During the week explore keeping the body in mind while speaking and listening. When doing this practice, give 50% of your attention to your own body and 50% to the person / people that you are talking to. See if it would be helpful for this practice to become part of your everyday life.

Helpful 'anchors' for attention include the sensations of contact between feet and floor, the sensations of sitting, the feel of the hands, and the sensations of breathing. These anchors can be steadying and resourcing for us in the midst of life's difficulties and demands.

The home practice this week includes the body scan again. This meditation provides an opportunity to practise bringing an interested and friendly awareness to the way things are in each moment, without needing to change what we find.

Mr Duffy lived a short distance from his body...
From 'The Dubliners' by James Joyce.

WALKING DOWN THE STREET': THE POWER OF INTERPRETATIONS

In the 'walking down the street' exercise, in the class, we looked at the way we interpret events and experiences and how powerfully our thoughts and interpretations can influence our emotional reactions, physical sensations and behaviour. We saw how:

- Different people interpret the same event differently
- Each of us might interpret the same event differently at different times (depending on what mood we're in or what has just happened before, for example)
- Our interpretations are often shaped by old habits of mind and by the views that we have about ourselves and the world

We try to make sense of events and experiences by thinking about them and giving them meaning. We are unaware of many of our thoughts and interpretations but they play a major role in determining our reactions to events, situations and people. We may find ourselves feeling anxious or getting snappy but, because we haven't noticed our thoughts about what was going on, have no idea why! Becoming more aware of our thoughts can help us to make more sense of how we feel, how we behave and how we react to the world around us.

As we become more aware, we may notice some habitual patterns of thinking. One pattern that many of us have is to judge our experience as being not quite right, not good enough, not what we wanted. It's all too easy to get lost in powerful patterns of judgemental thinking that can take us down well-worn paths which lead to us feeling bad, reacting in unhelpful ways and losing awareness of the moment. Becoming more aware of our habitual patterns of thinking is a crucial first step in moving towards freeing ourselves from their powerful grip.

THE EXPERIENCES CALENDAR: NOTICING EXPERIENCES AND REACTIONS

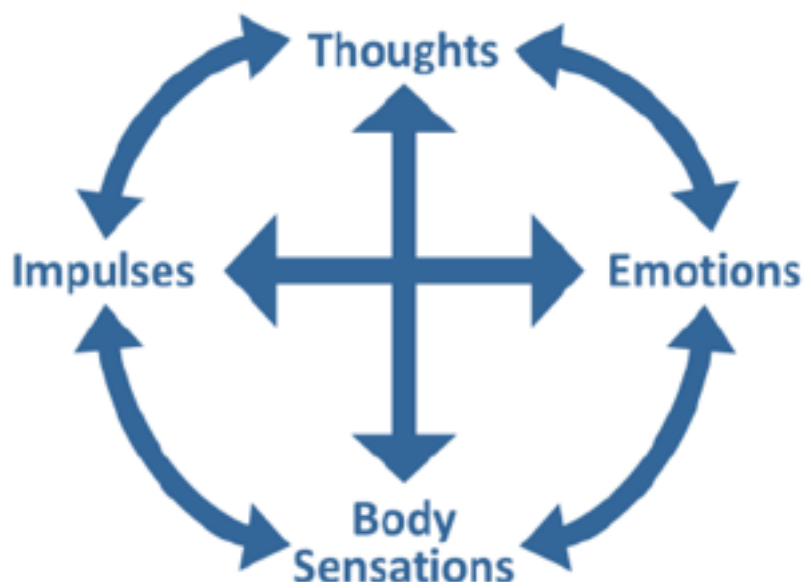
Keeping a calendar of experiences is a useful way to become more aware of the body sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that make up our experience and learn more about our relationship with them.

Quite often, especially when on automatic pilot and when living in our heads, we relate to our experiences as 'blobs'. Focusing attention on the separate elements of experiences –sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses – allows us to 'de-blob'. When we do this we can notice the details of what is here and we can see how the elements of our experience change and unfold from moment to moment.

Over the weeks you will be encouraged to record some pleasant and some unpleasant experiences on the calendar. You may notice that the mind often immediately comes to a sense that an experience is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. A sense of pleasantness or unpleasantness can quickly lead to the mind wanting to hold on to or get rid of. Bringing mindfulness to bear at these moments may allow us simply to experience the moment as it is.

As well as noticing the sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that make up our experience, you may also become aware of any reactions to these elements of experience. You might ask yourself the question: "what is the weather pattern in body and mind, and what reactions to this weather do I notice?"

None of this is easy. It takes patience and persistence!



THE BREATH

Breath is life. You could think of the breath as being like a thread or chain that links and connects all the events of your life from birth, the beginning, to death, the end. The breath is always there every moment, moving by itself like a river.

Have you ever noticed how the breath changes with our moods? Short and shallow when we're tense or angry, faster when we're excited, slow and full when we're happy, and almost disappearing when we're afraid. It's there with us all the time. It can be used as a tool, like an anchor, to bring stability to the body and mind when we deliberately choose to become aware of it. We can tune into it at any moment during everyday life.

Mostly, we're not in touch with our breathing it's just there, forgotten. So one of the first things we do in mindfulness is to get in touch with it. We notice how the breath changes with our moods, our thoughts, our body movements. We don't have to control the breath. Just notice it and get to know it, like a friend. All that is necessary is to observe, watch, and feel the breath with a sense of interest in a relaxed manner.

With practice, we become more aware of our breathing. We can use it to direct our awareness to different aspects of our lives. For example, to relax tense muscles, or focus on a situation that requires attention. Breath can also be used to help deal with pain, anger, relationships or the stress of daily life. During this course, we will be exploring this in great detail.

Karen Ryder

SITTING WITH THE BREATH

1. Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor, with your buttocks supported by cushions or a low stool. If you use a chair, it is very helpful to sit away from the back of the chair, so that your spine is self-supporting. If you sit on the floor, it is helpful if your knees can actually touch the floor; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortably and firmly supported. Whatever you sit on, arrange things so that your knees are lower than your hips.
2. Allow your back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, have the feet flat on the floor with the legs uncrossed. Gently close your eyes.
3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations, just as in the body scan.
4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath moves in and out of your body. (When you first try this practice, it may be helpful to place your hand on your lower abdomen and become aware of the changing

pattern of sensations where your hand makes contact with your abdomen. Having “tuned in” to the physical sensations in this area in this way, you can remove your hand and continue to focus on the sensations in the abdominal wall).

5. Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each in-breath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each out-breath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen all the way through as the breath enters your body on the in-breath, and all the way through as the breath leaves your body on the out-breath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses between one in-breath and the following out-breath, and between one out-breath and the following in-breath.
6. There is no need to try to control the breathing in any way - simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is.
7. Sooner or later (usually sooner), your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along—whatever. This is perfectly OK - it's simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently congratulate yourself—you have come back and are once more aware of your experience! You may want to acknowledge briefly where the mind has been (“Ah, there's thinking”). Then, gently escort the awareness back to a focus on the changing pattern of physical sensations in the lower abdomen, renewing the intention to pay attention to the ongoing in-breath or out-breath, whichever you find.
8. However often you notice that the mind has wandered (and this will quite likely happen over and over and over again), as best you can, congratulate yourself each time on reconnecting with your experience in the moment, gently escorting the attention back to the breath, and simply resume following in awareness the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each in-breath and out-breath.
9. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.
10. Continue with the practice for 10-15 minutes, or longer if you wish, perhaps reminding yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience in each moment, as best you can, using the breath as an anchor to gently reconnect with the here and now each time you notice that your mind has wandered and is no longer down in the abdomen, following the breath.

TIPS FOR THE BODY SCAN

1. Regardless of what happens, just do it! If you fall asleep, lose concentration, keep thinking of other things, keep focusing on the wrong bit of body or don't feeling anything... these are your experiences in the moment, just be aware of them.
2. If your mind is wandering a lot, simply mentally note the thoughts (as passing events) and then bring the mind gently back to the practice.
3. Let go of ideas of 'success', 'failure', 'doing it really well', or 'trying to purify the body'. This is not a competition. It is not a skill you need to strive for. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. As best you can, bring an attitude of openness and curiosity.
4. Let go of any expectations about what the Body Scan will do for you: imagine it as a seed you have planted. The more you poke around and interfere, the less it will be able to develop. So with the Body Scan, just give it the right conditions peace and quiet, regular and frequent practice that is all. The more you try and influence what it will do for you, the less it will do.
5. Try approaching your experience in each moment with the kindly attitude: "OK, that's just the way things are right now". If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, they will only distract you from doing anything else. Be aware, be non-striving, be in the moment, see things clearly, just do it.

HOME PRACTICE

FOLLOWING SESSION 2

1. Practise the **Body Scan** every day over the next week. See the page entitled 'Tips for the Body Scan'. You may wish to write something about your experiences on the Home Practice Notes page.
2. Complete the **Experiences Calendar**: this week the calendar focuses on **pleasant** experiences. Make sure to bring awareness to at least one pleasant experience each day. Use this as an opportunity to become really aware of the sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that arise, at the time. Notice and record, in detail, the precise nature and location of bodily sensations and use the actual words or images in which the thoughts came. You will also be invited to continue this practice throughout the rest of the course.
3. Do a **Sitting with Breath** Practice for 5-10 minutes every day this week. See the guidance on page 18-19.

NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

50:50 Attention. Continue keeping the body in mind when listening and speaking.

Continue with the **10 Finger Gratitude Practice**.

With the new habits in everyday life set out above, make a commitment at the start of day and each week to when and where you might do this. As with any new habit this sort of planning helps it become part of your life (rather than something you have to remember to do).

We often spend so much time in our head that we forget we have a body at all.

EXPERIENCES CALENDAR

Bring awareness to the details of a pleasant experience as it is happening.

Use these questions to focus your attention on the details. Write the entry later.

What impulses or behaviours did you notice?	Wanted to sit and relax and enjoy the tea... but I didn't have time!		
What thoughts went through your mind?	"I love this fleece!" "How nice to be warm..."		
What moods and feelings accompanied the experience?	Comfort, pleasure.		
How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	Feelings of warmth from inside and out, softness of fleece against skin, tension in shoulders releasing		
What was the pleasant experience?	It was a cold day. I put on my favourite fleece and made myself a cup of tea.		
Day	Example	Day 1	Day 2

Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6

HOME PRACTICE NOTES

Feel free to use this page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

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PLEASE REMEMBER NOT TO READ AHEAD.

SESSION 3

GATHERING THE
SCATTERED MIND

GATHERING THE SCATTERED MIND

This week we practise resting awareness on the breath, and on the body as it sits and moves. We also become familiar with the 3-Step Breathing Space.

The mind is often scattered and lost in thought because it is working away in the background trying to complete unfinished tasks from the past and strive for goals in the future. In mindfulness training, we are learning intentionally to step out of such states of 'automatic pilot' and to 'come back' to the anchor of the breathing body in the here and now.

The breath and body offer an ever-present focus which we can use to reconnect us with the present, to gather and settle the mind, and to ease ourselves from states of 'driven-doing' into those of 'mindful-being', both in formal meditation and as we go about the activities of our day.

FOCUSING ON THE BODY BREATHING

- Brings you back to this very moment - the here and now.
- Is always available as an anchor and haven, no matter where you are.
- Can change your experience by connecting you with a wider space and broader perspective from which to view things.

MINDFUL MOVEMENT ALLOWS US TO

- Build on the foundation of the body scan in learning how we can bring awareness to and 'inhabit' body experiences and sensations in movement as well as in stillness.
- See old habitual patterns of the mind - especially those that emphasize unhelpful striving.
- Work with physical boundaries and intensity and learn acceptance of our limits.
- Learn new ways of taking care of ourselves.

EMOTIONS, FEELINGS AND THE BODY

In our evolutionary history, emotions have been around for much longer than our ability to think. The range and variety of human emotions evolved in order to maximise our chances of survival in different sorts of situations. Fear, for example, prepares the brain and the body to flee from what is threatening and dangerous. Contentment, on the other hand, lets us know that things seem safe and that we can relax into whatever we are doing.

When talking about the subjective experience of an emotion, we often use the words feel and feelings. So we might say “I feel afraid” or “I have a feeling of contentment”. Of course, we also use the words feel and feelings to refer to physical sensations, “I feel warm” or “I have a painful feeling in my knee”.

We are emotional beings. Our emotions are a fundamental part of who we are and influence pretty much everything that we experience and do. They put the dread in dreadful and the joy in joyful. They can motivate us to act with cruelty or with kindness.

Despite their importance to us, we are quite often unaware of our emotions, sometimes even when they are having a major impact on how we are thinking and behaving. Being aware of emotions comes more naturally to some than to others and is also often harder for people who’ve had difficult and traumatic experiences. All of us sometimes try to avoid difficult feelings by pushing them down or diverting our attention elsewhere. At other times we choose to have an indirect experience of emotions, by being in our heads and thinking about them rather than actually feeling them. Sometimes we are just too busy or distracted to notice our emotional state.

The body offers us a way to become more aware of our emotions more often. Tuning into physical sensations and ‘inhabiting the body’ brings us closer to the direct experience of how we are feeling. Noticing sensations of muscular tension in the shoulders may help us to become aware of feelings of tiredness and irritability that are making us snappy with a colleague. Tuning into the sensations of warmth in the chest may help us realise the depth of our fondness for the person that we’re with.

Being more aware of emotions can be uncomfortable. We may become unsettled and uncertain, especially when we experience difficult feelings more fully than we are used to. When this happens, it is often helpful to continue tuning in to the details of physical sensations... as we have been learning on the course so far, this can help to ground us in the present moment, steady the mind and prevent us from getting lost in thinking.

The movement practices give us opportunities to bring awareness to a range of sensations and feelings. We may notice a tendency to want the pleasant ones to continue and the unpleasant ones to cease. We can investigate the possibility of ‘staying with’ sensations and feelings, without holding on or pushing away, experiencing them more fully and bringing a spirit of kindness and compassion to ourselves as we do this.

STAYING PRESENT

Remember to use your body as a way to awareness. It can be as simple as staying mindful of your posture. You are probably sitting as you read this. What are the sensations in your body at this moment? When you finish reading and stand, feel the movements of standing, of walking to the next activity, of how you lie down at the end of the day. Be in your body as you move, as you reach for something, as you turn. It is as simple as that.

Just patiently practise feeling what is there and the body is always there until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements you make. If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do. Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it?

It is very simple. Practise again and again bringing your attention back to your body. This basic effort, which paradoxically is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day.

*Adapted from:
Joseph Goldstein
Insight Meditation*

THE 3-STEP BREATHING SPACE

STEP 1. BECOMING AWARE

Becoming more aware of how things are in this moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture, whether sitting or standing and if possible, closing your eyes. Then bringing your awareness to your inner experience and acknowledging it, asking yourself:

- What **body sensations** are here right now?
- What **moods and feelings** are here?
- What **thoughts** are going through the mind?

STEP 2. GATHERING

Then re-directing your attention to focus on physical sensations associated with breathing. Bringing the mind to settle on the breath, wherever you feel it most vividly. Tuning into these sensations for the full duration of the in-breath and the full duration of the out-breath.

STEP 3. EXPANDING

Then expanding the field of awareness around the breath, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture and facial expression.

As best you can, bring this wider awareness to the next moments of your day.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of Automatic Pilot and reconnect with the present moment. Each time we do a breathing space we become aware of the breath and our wider experience.

THE BREATHING SPACE SETS US UP TO ENCOUNTER LIFE IN A DIFFERENT FRAME OF MIND, COMING FULLY HOME TO THE PRESENT, RATHER THAN JUST GIVING OURSELVES A BREAK FROM THINKING.

Why don't we just go straight to Step 2 – gathering attention on the breath? Isn't that the key skill we are learning? What's the point of Steps 1 and 3?

Learning to switch attention to the breath is a very useful way to step out of rumination, worry, obsessive planning, etc. But if that's all we did, we'd just be changing WHAT the mind is working on, rather than HOW its working – most likely we'd still be in doing mode. Steps 1 and 3 are there to help us shift to being mode – to change HOW the mind is working as well as WHAT it is working on.

So what happens in Step 1?

In Step 1 we bring thoughts, feelings, and body sensations into the scope of conscious rather than automatic processing. By deliberately bringing an interested awareness to our inner experience, even if it is difficult or unpleasant, we strengthen the approach to tendencies of the mind and weaken the tendency to avoid. We also do our best to see thoughts, feelings, and sensations for what they are – just events passing through the mind, rather than realities or infallible messages that something is wrong.

And in Step 3?

In Step 3, having gathered and settled the mind as best we can, we expand our awareness so that we can include all our experience of the body in that moment (not just the breath) in the scope of being mode. In that way, we have prepared the mind so that we can greet all life experience in being mode as we exit the 3-minute breathing space and reconnect with our day. And, if there are difficult or unpleasant experiences around, we have already prepared ourselves to receive them with openness and acceptance by deliberately cultivating a gentler attitude to any discomfort we experience in the body in Step 3.

HOME PRACTICE

FOLLOWING SESSION 3

This week we use some formal practices that involve movement. If you have any neck, back or other health difficulties that may be made worse by these stretches and postures, please make your own decisions as to which (if any) of the movements to do.

1. Practise the **Stretch and Breath** (guided by the audio track) on days 1, 3 and 5
2. Practise the **Mindful Movement** (guided by the audio track) on days 2, 4 and 6.
3. Continue with the **Experiences Calendar** but this week with a focus on unpleasant experiences. Bring awareness to at least one unpleasant experience each day, filling in the calendar each evening. Use this to help you become more aware of the sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that arise, at the time.

NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

50:50 Attention. Continue keeping the body in mind when listening and speaking.

Continue with the **10 Finger Gratitude Practice**.

Bring the **3-Step Breathing Spaces** into everyday life, maybe at key moments in your day like when you get out of bed, arrive at work or home, and get into bed at the end of the day.

With these new habits in everyday life, make a commitment to when and where you might do this. As with any new habit this sort of planning will help them become part of your life (rather than something you have to remember to do).

NOTES

EXPERIENCES CALENDAR

Bring awareness to the details of an unpleasant experience as it is happening.
Use these questions to focus your attention on the details. Write the entry later.

What impulses or behaviours did you notice?	An urge to say something critical in return. I said nothing and walked away.		
What thoughts went through your mind?	"He's probably right"		
What moods and feelings accompanied the experience?	Annoyed, disappointed, sad		
How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	Feeling of emptiness / hollowness in my chest. Sensations of tightness in the neck.		
What was the unpleasant experience?	A colleague said something critical about what I had just been doing.		
Day	Example	Day 1	Day 2

Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6

POSTURES FOR SITTING PRACTICE

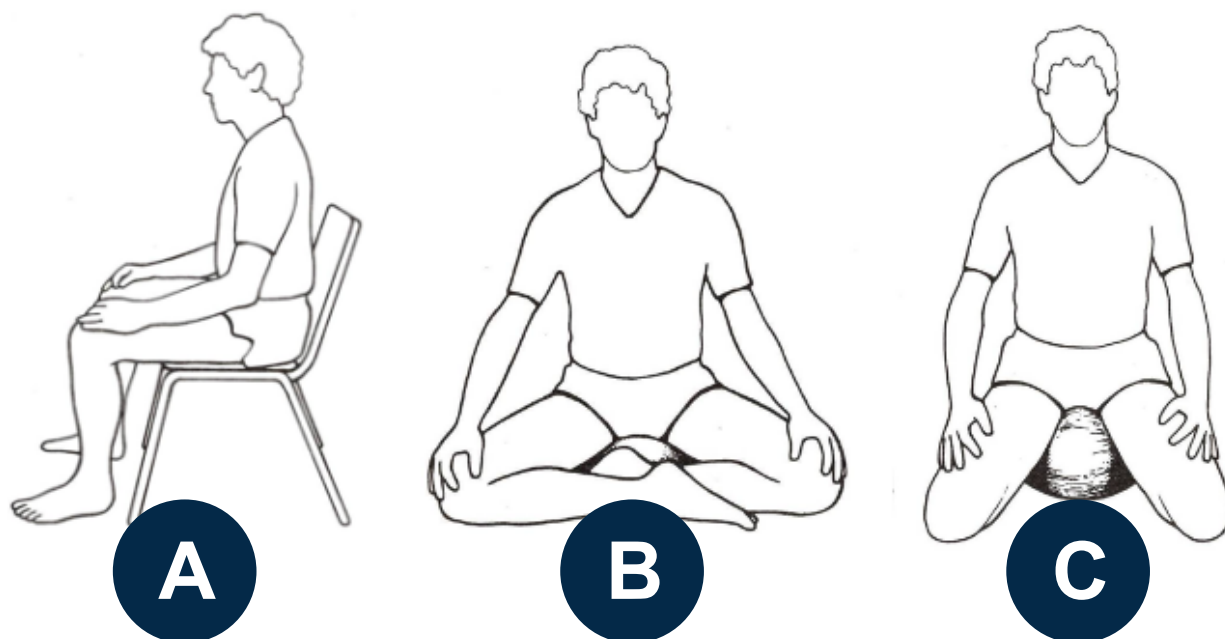
When we do sitting practice, our posture can be seen as the physical counterpart of the attitudes that we bring to the practice. It is helpful to adopt an erect and dignified posture, with the head, neck, and back aligned vertically.

If sitting on a chair, choose one that has a straight back and that allows your feet to be flat on the floor. If at all possible, sit away from the back of the chair so that your spine is self-supporting - see Figure A.

If sitting on a meditation stool, you may want to put a mat or rug underneath it so that your knees and lower legs are comfortable.

If sitting on the floor, use a firm, thick cushion (or pillow folded over once or twice) which raises your buttocks off the floor three to six inches – see Figures B and C, for examples. Figure B involves drawing one heel in close to the body and draping the other leg in front of it; Figure C involves kneeling with the cushion between the feet.

Whatever you sit on, try to arrange things so that your knees are lower than your hips. Experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortably and firmly supported.



STRETCH AND BREATH POSTURES

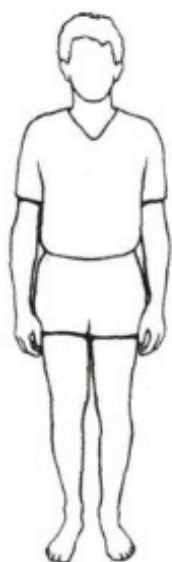


FIGURE A

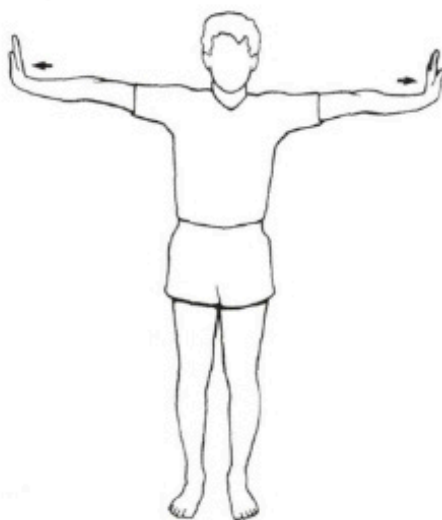


FIGURE B

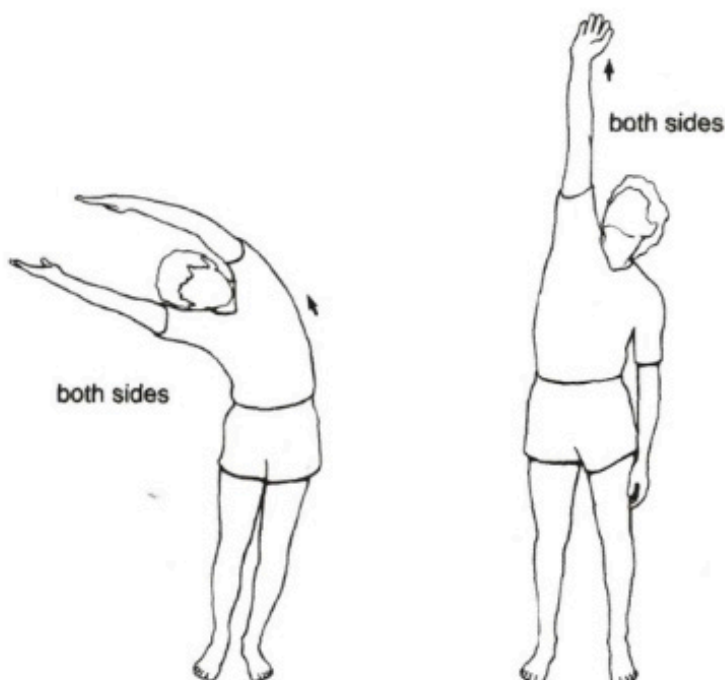


FIGURE C



FIGURE D

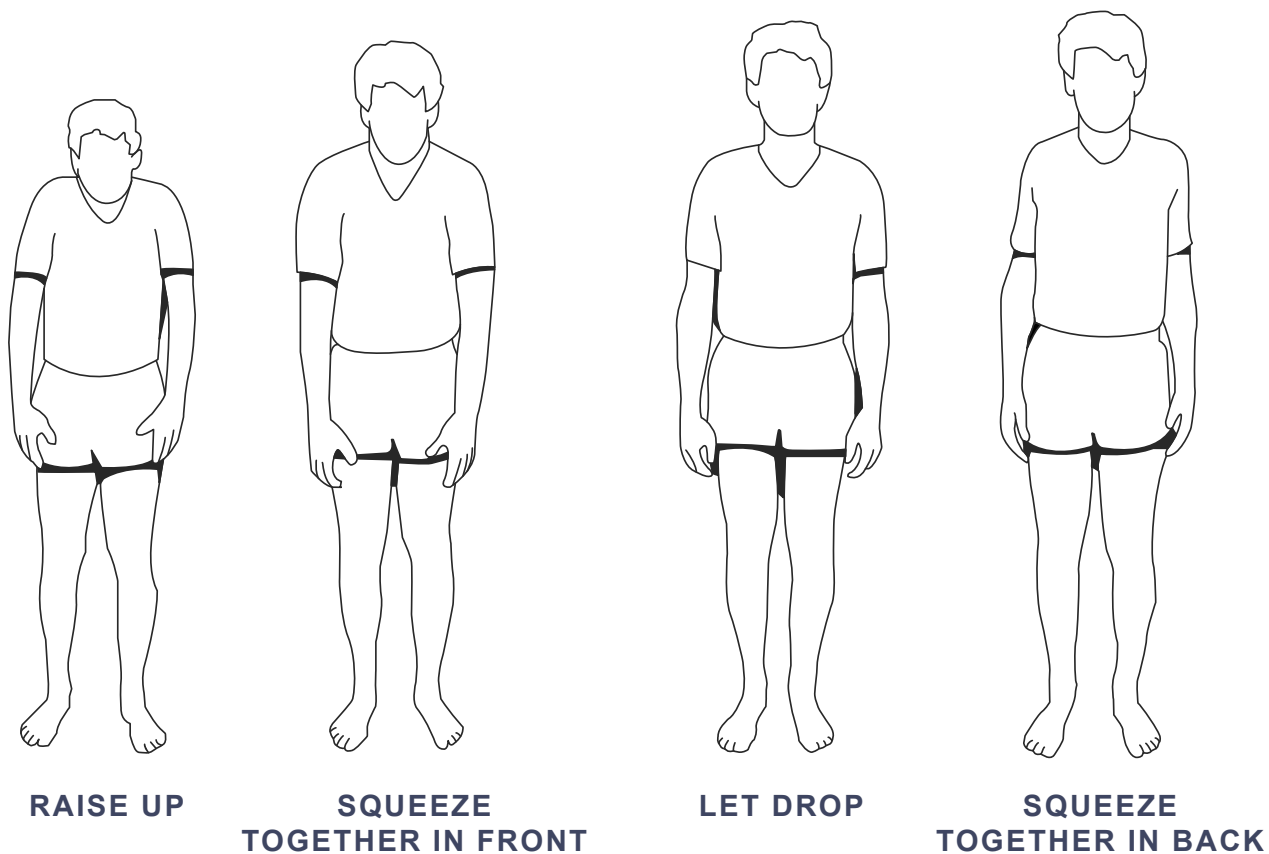


FIGURE E

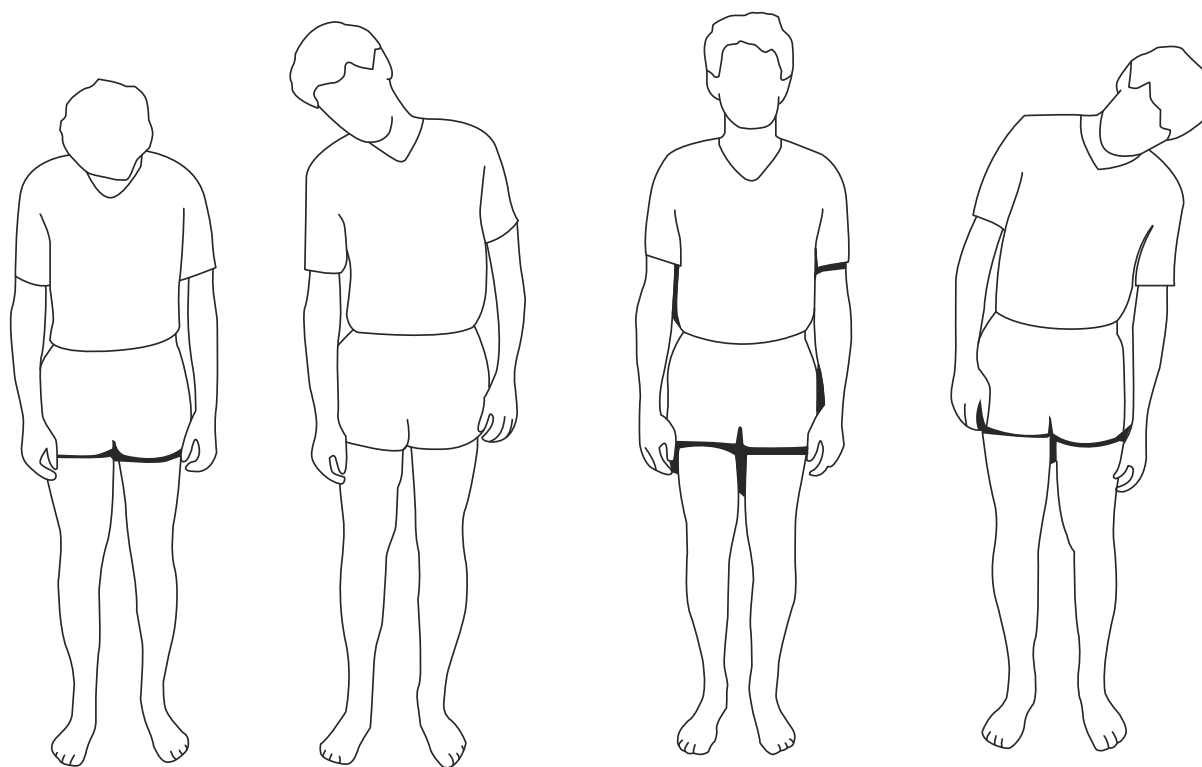


FIGURE F

MINDFUL MOVEMENT POSTURES



FIGURE 1

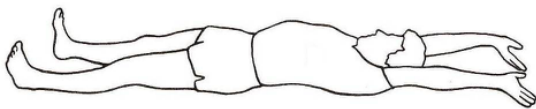


FIGURE 2

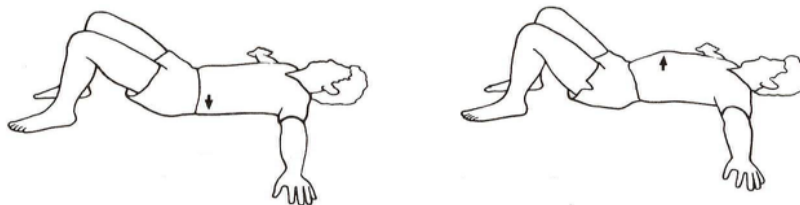


FIGURE 3

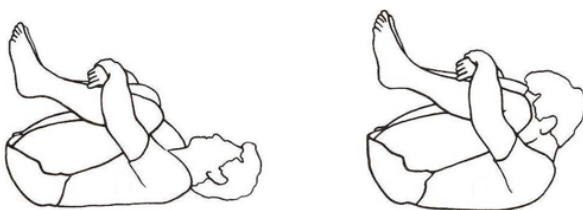


FIGURE 4

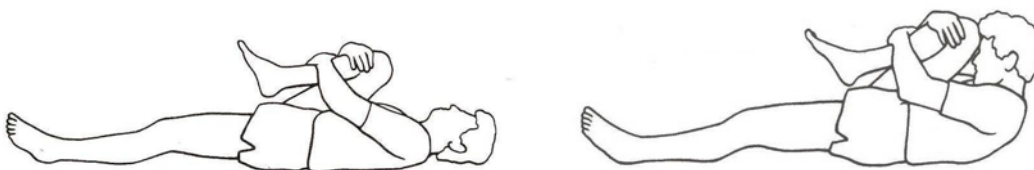


FIGURE 5

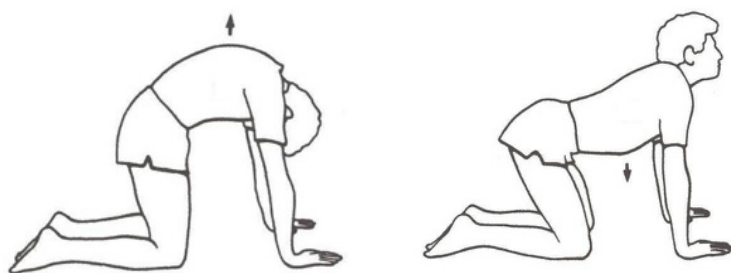


FIGURE 6

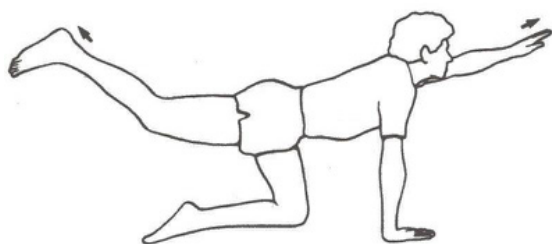


FIGURE 7

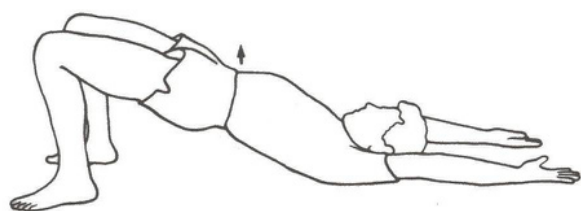


FIGURE 8

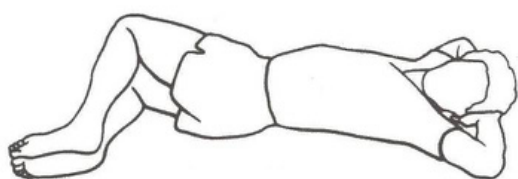


FIGURE 9

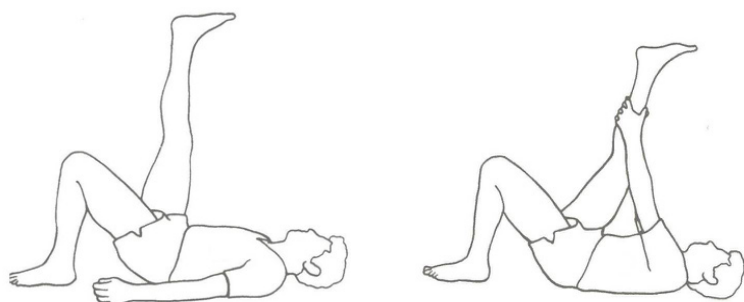
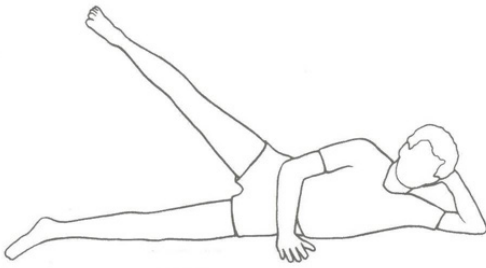
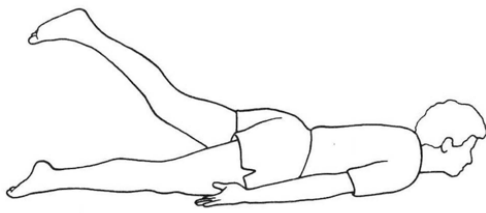
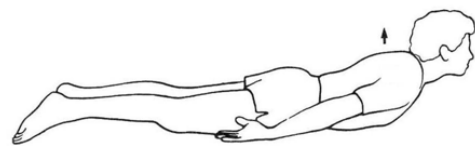


FIGURE 10

**FIGURE 11****FIGURE 12****FIGURE 13****FIGURE 14****FIGURE 15**

HOME PRACTICE NOTES

Feel free to use this page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

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PLEASE REMEMBER NOT TO READ AHEAD.

SESSION 4



RECOGNISING REACTIVITY

RECOGNISING REACTIVITY

Difficult things are part and parcel of life itself. It is how we handle those things, that makes the difference between whether they rule our lives or whether we can relate to them more lightly. Becoming more aware of the sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses evoked by events, gives us the possibility of freeing ourselves from habitual, automatic ways of reacting, so that we can, instead, respond in more skilful ways.

In general, we react to experience in one of three ways:

- with spacing out, or boredom, so that we tune out from the present moment and go off somewhere else ‘in our heads.’
- with wanting to hold on to things - not allowing ourselves to let go of experiences that we are having right now, or wishing we were having experiences that we are not having right now.
- with wanting it to go away, being angry with it - wanting to get rid of experiences that we are having right now, or avoid experiences that may be coming along that we do not want.

Each of these ways of reacting can cause problems, particularly the tendency to react to unpleasant experience with aversion. For now, the main issue is to become more aware of our experience and potential moments of aversion, so that we can respond mindfully rather than react automatically.

Regularly practising sitting meditation gives us many opportunities to notice when we have drifted away from awareness of the moment, to note with a friendly interest whatever it was that took our attention away, and to gently bring our attention back to our chosen focus. Deliberately using the 3-Step Breathing Space whenever we notice unpleasant feelings, or a sense of “tightening” or “holding” in the body, provides an opportunity to cultivate our capacity to respond rather than react. We create a space in which we can see things from a wider perspective and notice the choices and freedoms that we have.

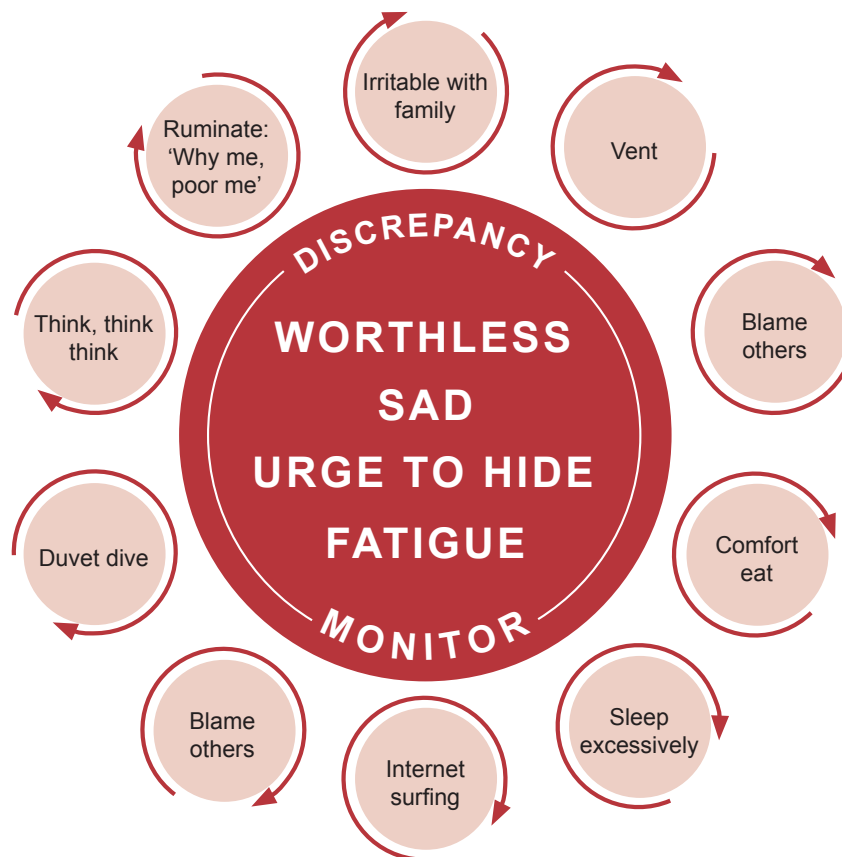
REACTIVITY

The tendency to react automatically to things that happen in our external world is hard-wired within us and can help us to meet our needs and stay safe. Sources of pleasure such as food and companionship are important for our health and survival and so they elicit an instinctive attraction - we seek them out, move towards and try to prolong and intensify them. By contrast, things, people and situations that lead to physical pain or emotional distress naturally elicit the opposite reaction: a sense of aversion and a desire to avoid or move away.

It's not just the external world that can 'press our buttons' in this way. Internal experiences can lead to very similar patterns of reactivity. We may find ourselves repeatedly drawn to daydreaming about that planned holiday in the sun, whereas a worry or a sense of vague unease may very quickly bring aversion and wanting the mind to think and feel differently.

As we saw in the 'vicious flower' exercise during the class this week, when we experience pain or distress the mind often takes a route that seem to offer a way out but in fact keeps difficulties going or makes them worse. Reactivity to an event or an experience, especially when aversion and fear are present, can sometimes take us off down a well-worn path of difficult thoughts, feelings and unhelpful behaviours.

THE VICIOUS FLOWER



THE TWO ARROWS OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

Some suggest that pain (physical or emotional) can lead to two kinds of suffering: primary suffering is the unavoidable experience of distress caused by the pain itself. Secondary suffering is the added distress that comes with the anger, fear, rumination and resentment that often characterize our reactions to the pain.

This recalls some ancient teaching about our relationship with the inevitable pain and distress that are part of our lives. The teaching tells of a man who is pierced first by one arrow and then shortly afterwards by another. The first arrow represents the unavoidable pain and suffering that we experience in our lives. The second arrow represents how we sometimes, unintentionally, increase our pain and suffering by our reactions to the first arrow.

Our experience teaches us that it is sometimes possible to relate to pain and distress quite differently. We can bring a kind and gentle awareness to the sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that unfold. We feel the aversion and the tug to move away but we allow our experience to be as it is. Breathing with it rather than bracing against it. We hold ourselves with compassion. We are only pierced by the first arrow.

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

‘Not wanting to experience unpleasant feelings means we try to keep difficult or uncomfortable experiences at a distance – we don’t look closely at them. This means they can seem like vaguely threatening ‘big bad blobs.’ Notice carefully when you ‘de-blob’ unpleasant experiences by focussing attention closely on them – homing in on their separate components – body sensations, feelings and thoughts.’

From: The Mindful Way Workbook by John Teasdale, Mark G. Williams and Zindel V. Segal

BALANCING WHAT IS REACTIVE

What is it that is reactive? Our minds are reactive: liking and disliking, judging and comparing, clinging and condemning. Our minds are like a balance scale, and as long as we're identified with these judgments and preferences, likes and dislikes, wants and aversions, our minds are continually thrown out of balance, caught in a tiring whirlwind of reactivity. It is through the power of mindfulness that we can come to a place of balance and rest. Mindfulness is that quality of attention which notices without choosing, without preference; it is a choiceless awareness that, like the sun, shines on all things equally.

Can we make our awareness so inclusive that we're willing to be attentive to the whole range of our experience? It's somewhat like going on a long journey in a strange land, a journey that takes us through many different kinds of terrain -through mountains and jungle, desert and rain forest. If we have the mind of a true explorer, when we're in the mountains we're not thinking, "Oh, if only I were in the desert now." And when we're in the desert we're not daydreaming of rain forests. If there's a real sense of exploration, we're interested in every new place that we come to.

The experience of our meditation is a similar kind of journey; it's the journey into ourselves through every aspect of our experience. There are ups and downs, highs and lows, time when it's pleasant and times of pain. There is nothing at all that is outside of our practice because our practice is to explore the totality of who we are. This takes a tremendous amount of willingness. Are we willing to be with the full range of what's going on?

There is a line from a song written some years ago that relates to this: "Some people say that life is strange, but what I'd like to know is, compared to what?". It's all part of it. There is nothing that is outside of our practice. The different experiences of physical sensation, of pleasure or pain, the different emotions of happiness or sadness, depression or elation, interest or boredom, all are part of the journey. Is it possible to open to each one of these states, to become mindful of each one in a balanced way so that we can begin to understand their true nature?

Jack Kornfield
Seeking the Heart of Wisdom

HOME PRACTICE

FOLLOWING SESSION 4

Do a Sitting Practice every day this week. Remember the Home Practice Notes page is there to help you reflect on any issues that arise or that you'd like to bring to the next session. There is a worksheet on the next page "Working wisely with reactivity." This is to support you to build on what was covered in the last session; you are welcome to use it as part of the home practice this week if it supports your learning. We will build on it in the next session.

NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Continue keeping the body in mind when listening and speaking this week by practising **50:50 Attention**.

Continue with the **10 Finger Gratitude Practice**: bring to mind ten things for which you are grateful, counting them on your fingers and opening to and savouring the sensations of gratitude in the body as best you can.

Continue with **bringing full awareness to at least one experience** each day. This week and for future weeks, feel free to use any experiences that you choose, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This practice can help you become more aware of the sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that arise, at the time; but only do this if you find it supports your learning.

Daily walking practice: you are invited to identify a stretch of corridor, pavement or footpath that you walk each day and that takes no more than two minutes to walk along. Make this your [secret!] walking path and practise devoting attention to the soles of the feet and / or the movement of the feet and legs when you walk this stretch each day. When the mind wanders, gently escort it back. Use the sensations in the feet and legs as an anchor that connects you to the present moment.

3-Step Breathing Space: practise this 3 times a day, at set times that you have decided in advance. In addition, you might like to begin to take a Breathing Space at times when you notice that you are having difficulty staying present or when you are feeling stressed or thrown off balance to support you responding to these difficulties.

With these new habits in everyday life, when might you do this each day? This planning will help these nourishing activities to become part of your life.

WORKING WISELY WITH REACTIVITY

NOTICING THE FIRST SIGNS

Losing our balance and getting lost in reactivity is part of being human. Sometimes life seems just too stressful to cope with. Difficult moods, such as sadness, anxiety and irritability, can take hold of us. We may get caught up in negative thinking or in patterns of behaviour that create distress for ourselves and those around us.

What do you notice when these things are beginning to happen to you? Physical tension? Frequent worries? Easily irritated? Poor sleep? This worksheet offers an opportunity to increase your awareness of the signs that reactivity is beginning to take hold. Recognising these early warning signs, and realising what is going on, may put you in a better position to respond in a helpful way.

WHAT ARE YOUR TRIGGERS?

- Triggers can be external (things that happen in your life), or internal (thoughts, feelings, memories, worries).
- Look out for small triggers as well as large ones – sometimes something that appears quite trivial can spark a downward spiral.

What do you notice in your body at these times?

What feelings and moods tend to arise?

What sort of thoughts run through your mind?

What do you do, or feel like doing?

What about habits of thinking or behaviour that might inadvertently keep things difficult or make things worse? The sort of things you looked at in the vicious flower exercise - for example, going over things again and again in your mind or avoiding things instead of facing up to them?

HOME PRACTICE NOTES

Feel free to use this page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

PLEASE REMEMBER NOT TO READ AHEAD.

SESSION 5

ALLOWING AND
LETTING BE

ALLOWING AND LETTING BE

When we are in the grips of reactivity, difficulties can quickly and easily lead to a sequence of negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours that can be like a ‘second arrow’ which increases our distress. Much as we hope that our reactions will help, they often act to keep the problem going or to make it worse.

In this session we explored a new way of working with difficulties: *approaching and befriending them*.

Befriending our experience involves turning towards it and holding it with kindness and care, even when it is unpleasant and painful. We explored this with a ‘befriending’ practice where we used the phrases:

**“SAFE AND WELL
PEACEFUL
EASE AND KINDNESS”**

The befriending practice helps to cultivate intentions of good will to ourselves and others, building our capacity to meet our experience in new ways.

By now, the 3-Step Breathing Space is hopefully becoming a helpful everyday practice for you. Incorporating an attitude of befriending into the breathing space gives you a way of bringing kindness and interest, in any moment, to things as they are. This is a different face of the Breathing Space, each time we do a Breathing Space we bring awareness to our experience as it is – the ‘many faces of the Breathing Space.’

When a difficulty comes to mind, the brain’s habitual reaction is to treat it as an enemy and so to shut down its creative ‘approach’ systems. For some difficulties this may be helpful, but when we are remembering the past or anticipating the future, the difficulty is playing out in our heads and not for real, so this is unnecessary. In fact, it ends up locking things down and blocking creativity...

Kindness transforms things: the ‘aversion’ pathways in the mind are switched off and the ‘approach’ ones switched on instead. This change in attitude enhances openness, creativity, and happiness, while at the same time dissolving the fear, guilt, anxiety and stresses that lead to exhaustion and chronic discontent.

From Mindfulness: a Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Prof Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman.

WORKING WITH DIFFICULTIES IN A NEW WAY

In the session this week we looked at a new way of working with difficulties. You are invited to continue exploring this as part of your home practice. The core of this new approach is a shift from a natural tendency to avoid or fix our experience towards a stance of allowing and letting be.

In working with difficulties in this new way, you will use many of the skills and attitudes that you have been developing in the course so far. These include steadying the mind, being kind to yourself and knowing and respecting your limits.

The approach can be used when the mind wanders from your chosen focus of attention, especially when you notice that the mind is repeatedly getting entangled in difficult patterns of thinking and feeling. You can also practise this new way of working, if you choose to, by deliberately bringing a difficulty to mind. The approach is best learned during formal practice but can then be used as a way of relating to difficulties that arise in our everyday lives.

1. The first step is always to **steady the mind** and **resource yourself** by bringing the attention to an anchor in the body, in the way that you have been practising over the weeks. During a sitting practice the anchor would most often be the breath or a sense of the body as a whole, but other anchors such as the soles of the feet or the sensations of sitting can be useful to explore as well – some people find these more steadying. As you anchor your attention, as best you can, hold yourself with **kindness**.
2. The next step is to bring attention to how your body is reacting to the difficulty – noticing any physical sense of contraction, pushing away or bracing against. This may be felt as tightening, discomfort or intensity and can be located in the belly, chest, throat, or elsewhere. It is sometimes felt as a more general sense of agitation in the body as a whole.
3. When you have identified where and how the difficulty is reflected in the body, see if it is possible to practise bringing a sense of **allowing** and **letting** be to these difficult sensations. You may find it helpful to say to yourself something like “It’s okay. It’s okay to let myself feel this...”
4. If you are feeling sufficiently steady and resourced you may wish to take things further by carefully bringing interest and attention to where the sensations are at their most intense. You could choose to investigate the sensations by breathing into them and out from them, as we practised in the body scan. You might wish to try bringing a sense of **softening** and **opening** on the outbreath, perhaps saying the words “softening” and “opening” to yourself if this feels helpful.

If it feels that focussing in on the difficult sensations might be unhelpful, you might instead choose to maintain an awareness of the sensations but keep most of your attention at your anchor. It may feel more possible to simply allow the difficult sensations to be there and breathe with the experience.

5. If at any point you find yourself becoming overwhelmed or getting caught up in thinking, take your attention back to the anchor so as to steady and resource yourself (“using the brake rather than the accelerator”).
6. In the midst of these moments of difficulty, it is usually very helpful to bring a sense of kindness and compassion to yourself. You may wish to make a gesture of self-care by placing a hand on your chest/heart area.

This practice of relating to difficulty through the body is sometimes more helpful than trying to work things out with the thinking mind or allowing feelings to overwhelm us. It is a powerful way to develop our capacity for responding rather than reacting and enables us to hold difficulties in a more spacious awareness. We can see situations more clearly and so discern what might be the most appropriate, wise and compassionate response.

WORKING WITH DIFFICULTIES THROUGH THE BODY

It's usually more skilful to work with the body because the mind can become too goal-orientated when directly facing a difficulty. It will want to help by suppressing negativity or by trying desperately to analyse and solve whatever is troubling you. Working with the mind in this context is just too difficult. Focusing on the body, by contrast, puts a tiny sliver of space between you and the problem, so that you don't immediately become entangled with it. In a sense you are using the body to turn towards difficulty rather than using the analysing mind. You are processing the same raw material, but it is held within a different mode of mind, letting the deepest, wisest part of the mind-body do its own work.

From Mindfulness: a Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Prof Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Kindness towards ourselves and others plays an indispensable part in sustainable well-being. Amidst the pressures of modern life, it's all too easy for our default attitude to slip into one of negativity, which primes us for persistent critical thought patterns about ourselves and others. These patterns make us more vulnerable to low moods and reactivity that undermine our well-being and make our relationships more difficult.

An integral aspect of mindfulness practice is the cultivation of a friendly attitude towards ourselves and others. Research repeatedly shows that this not only improves our mood, and weakens negative thought patterns, but also makes us more resourceful and versatile in creative problem solving and in responding to the challenges that life brings.

During this course, we are exploring some ancient ways of cultivating a kinder mind. One of the most powerful of these is simply to increase the number of kind and compassionate actions that we do each day. These don't need to be dramatic or large-scale: greeting someone with a smile, helping a colleague with a difficult task, offering a seat to someone in need, saying "thank you" to those who clean the office. These simple actions can be ways of contributing to a kinder internal and external environment and lifting the spirits of others and ourselves.

Over the coming week, you are invited to perform at least one 'random act of kindness' each day, and to notice how this feels. What sensations do you notice in the body immediately after doing this? How does it affect your mood?

THE MANY FACES OF THE BREATHING SPACE: EXTRA GUIDANCE

You have been practising the Breathing Space 3 times a day and when you feel you need it. We suggest that whenever you feel troubled in body or mind, a very helpful first step is to take a Breathing Space. Here is some extra guidance that may help at these times.

1. BECOMING AWARE

We have already practised recognising as fully as we can what's happening in our internal experience, noticing whatever sensations, moods, feelings and thoughts are present. Now you may find it helpful to identify and describe what you find: "Tension is here in the shoulders." "Self-critical thoughts are here." "This is anxiety... it feels like this."

2. GATHERING

We have already practised deliberately gathering and redirecting the attention to the breath or to another anchor such as the sensations of the feet on the ground. Consciously breathing with these sensations for at least five breaths can be steadying and resourcing.

Now you might find it helpful to say some words to yourself to steady the attention - words such as: "Breathing in... breathing out..." or to count the breaths – "Breathing in 1... breathing out 1... breathing in 2... breathing out 2... etc."

3. EXPANDING

We have already practised allowing the attention to expand to include the sensations of the whole body, and perhaps even having a sense that the whole of our experience is held in a spacious awareness.

Now you might find it helpful to practise allowing your experience to be just as it is, however it is. You may find it helpful to say some words to yourself – words such as: "Allowing... allowing..." "Letting things be..." "Breathing with... breathing with..." You might also try putting a hand on your heart area as a gesture of self-care and self-compassion.

'As best you can, bring this sense of spacious awareness into the next moments of your day. In this way the Breathing Space opens our awareness to the full range of experience and has as many faces as we have experiences! That's why we've called it the 'Many Faces of the Breathing Space.'

THE GUEST HOUSE

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,*

*still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Jelaluddin Rumi
The Essential Rumi
Translated by Coleman Barks (Harper, San Francisco)

HOME PRACTICE

FOLLOWING SESSION 5

1. **Sitting Practice:** continue doing this, using the audio track, on days 1, 3, 5.
2. **Working with Difficulty:** practise this, using the audio track, on days 2, 4 and 6.
3. **3-Step Breathing Space:** practise this 3 times a day, at set times that you have decided in advance. You might also take a Breathing Space at times when you notice that you are having difficulty staying present or when you are stressed or thrown off balance. You may wish to experiment with using the extra guidance that is offered above.

NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

50:50 Attention. Continue keeping the body in mind when listening and speaking. Continue with the **10 Finger Gratitude Practice.**

3-Step Breathing Spaces: practise this 3 times a day, at set times that you have decided in advance. You might also take a Breathing Space at times when you notice that you are having difficulty staying present or when you are feeling stressed or thrown off balance. You may wish to experiment with using the extra guidance that is offered above.

Daily walking practice.

Random Acts of Kindness: See the guidance for this above. Try increasing the number of kind and compassionate actions that you perform each day, and notice the effects on your body sensations, thoughts and mood just after you have performed these. Notice too that we don't have to feel kind in order to act in a kind way and to experience the benefits of doing so.

With these new habits in everyday life, when might you do this each day? This planning will help these nourishing activities to become part of your life.

HOME PRACTICE NOTES

Feel free to use this page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface. The overall appearance is that of a clean, unused piece of stationery or notebook paper.

PLEASE REMEMBER NOT TO READ AHEAD.

SESSION 6

RESPONDING
SKILFULLY:
THOUGHTS ARE
NOT FACTS

RESPONDING SKILFULLY: THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS

It is amazing to observe how much power we give unknowingly to uninvited thoughts: “Do this, say that, remember, plan, obsess, judge.” They have the potential to drive us quite crazy, and they often do!

From thoughts come actions. From actions come all sorts of consequences. In which thoughts will we invest? Our great task is to see them clearly, so that we can choose which ones to act on and which simply to let be.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN

Our thoughts can have very powerful effects on how we feel and what we do. As we explored in the class this week, thoughts and feelings / moods are closely related to one another and often work in tandem. We know from our experience that cheerful feelings generate happy thoughts, angry feelings lead to irritable thoughts, and so on. And of course, the influence works in both directions so that the thinking patterns keep the feelings going... and often make them stronger. When our thinking and feelings are ‘in sync’ and reinforcing each other in this way, thoughts can really look and feel like ‘the truth’ and it is particularly hard to see them as ‘just thoughts’.

By becoming aware, over and over again, of the thoughts and images passing through the mind, and letting go of them as we return our attention to the body / breath, it is possible to get some distance and perspective on our thinking. We may eventually come to realise ‘deep in our bones’ that thoughts are only mental events (including the ones that say they are not), that thoughts are not facts, and that we are not our thoughts. Stepping back from thoughts in this way strengthens our ability to avoid getting caught up in, and carried away by, reactivity and the unhelpful patterns that it often leads to.

Thoughts are always mental representations of situations, usually infused with unconscious beliefs, interpretations, assumptions and emotional implications rather than constituting those situations themselves.

The mind’s running commentary on the world is like a rumour. It might be true, it might only be partially true – or it might be completely wrong. Unfortunately the mind often finds it very difficult to detect the difference between fact and fiction once it has begun to construct a mental model of the world.

From Mindfulness: a Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Prof Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman.

RESPONSIVENESS AND COMPASSION

During this course, we have learnt that when we become aware of difficult body sensations, feelings and thoughts, we can choose to respond rather than react. Stepping back and responding, with kindness, can nip reactive negative thinking in the bud. Moreover, it opens the possibility of acting in ways that support good mental health and well-being.

If, with stable attention, we carefully observe the unfolding processes of the mind during a time of difficulty, it is possible to directly experience sensations, thoughts, feelings and impulses... just as they are. We recognise pain and bring kindness and interest to it. "Ah, here is pain... it's like this." Turning towards our experience and allowing it to be just as we find it, can be the beginning of a different kind of response. Instead of asking "Why do I feel this way?" we ask ourselves "What does this moment need?" Mindfulness slows things down so that we can see the unfolding cascade of sensations, feelings and thoughts. It creates the gap for a response born out of care and compassion.

In the class this week we explored responsiveness. The exercise we did had similarities with the 'vicious flower' from session 4, but instead of petals of reactivity we discovered more skilful responses. In the same way that water in a river passes around a rock, we can sometimes find ways to enable our experience to flow more naturally. Stable attention, interwoven with kindness and compassion alters our psychological landscape. We cease to divide the world, inwardly and outwardly, into friends and enemies to be pursued or avoided. Dis-ease, 'discrepancy thinking', self-criticism, resentment, conflict, all the habits of thinking and behaviour that drive reactivity are seen as just that, unhelpful habits. We discover that our capacity to establish caring and compassionate relationships in the world is deeply rooted in our capacity to establish a caring and compassionate relationship with ourselves. Over time these capacities, and our confidence in them, grow and flourish.

As we have already begun to explore, the wisest and most helpful response to suffering and difficulty is compassion, rather than judgement and blame [of self and others]. Pausing in order more fully to acknowledge and hold difficult experience in compassionate attention - breathing with it in kindness rather than bracing against it in judgement – helps to support clearer seeing of difficult situations and so enables more wise, attuned and compassionate responses.

We can bring responsiveness to moments of difficulty and pain but equally to moments of happiness, humour, beauty and love. We recognise and turn towards these experiences. "Ah, here is gladness... it's like this." Savouring and appreciating these experiences more fully, especially when felt in the body, can nourish us and support our well-being. We can cultivate the habit of opening our eyes to all that is good in our lives, including the many blessings that we tend to overlook.

STEPPING BACK FROM THOUGHT

It is remarkable how liberating it feels to be able to see that your thoughts are just thoughts and that they are not 'you' or 'reality'. For instance, if you have the thought that you have to get a certain number of things done today and you don't recognize it as a thought but act as if it's 'the truth', then you have created a reality in that moment in which you really believe that those things must all be done today.

One course participant, Peter, who had had a heart attack and wanted to prevent another one, came to a dramatic realization of this one night when he found himself washing his car at ten o'clock at night with the floodlights on in the driveway. It struck him that he didn't have to be doing this. It was just the inevitable result of a whole day spent trying to fit everything in that he thought needed doing today. As he saw what he was doing to himself, he also saw that he had been unable to question the truth of his original conviction that everything had to get done today, because he was already so completely caught up in believing it.

If you find yourself behaving in similar ways, it is likely that you will also feel driven, tense, and anxious without even known why, just as Peter did. So if the thought of how much you have to get done today comes up while you are meditating, you will have to be very attentive to it as a thought or you may be up and doing things before you know it, without any awareness that you decided to stop sitting simply because a thought came through your mind.

On the other hand, when such a thought comes up, if you are able to step back from it and see it clearly, then you will be able to prioritize things and make sensible decisions about what really does need doing. You will know when to call it quits during the day. So the simple act of recognizing your thoughts as thoughts can free you from the distorted reality they often create and allow for more clear-sightedness and a greater sense of manageability in your life.

This liberation from the tyranny of the thinking mind comes directly out of the meditation practice itself. When we spend some time each day in a state of non-doing, observing the flow of the breath and the activity of our mind and body without getting caught up in that activity, we are cultivating calmness and mindfulness hand in hand. As the mind develops stability and is less caught up in the content of thinking, we strengthen the mind's ability to concentrate and to be calm. And each time we recognize a thought as a thought when it arises, and we register its content and discern the strength of its hold on us and consider its accuracy, each time we let go of it and come back to our breathing and to a sense of our body, we are strengthening mindfulness. We are coming to know ourselves better and becoming more accepting of ourselves, not as we would like to be but as we actually are.

Adapted from:

Full Catastrophe Living (pp. 69-70), By Jon Kabat-Zinn

THE TRAIN OF ASSOCIATIONS

The thinking level of mind pervades our lives; consciously or unconsciously, we all spend much or most of our lives there. But meditation is a different process that does not involve discursive thought or reflection. Because meditation is not thought, through the continuous process of silent observation, new kinds of understanding emerge.

We do not need to fight with thoughts or struggle against them or judge them. Rather, we can simply choose not to follow the thoughts once we are aware that they have arisen.

When we lose ourselves in thought, identification is strong. Thought sweeps our mind and carries it away, and in a very short time we can be carried far indeed. We hop on a train of association, not knowing that we have hopped on, and certainly not knowing the destination. Somewhere down the line we may wake up and realise that we have been thinking, that we have been taken for a ride. And when we step down from the train, it may be in a very different mental environment from where we jumped aboard.

Take a few moments right now to look directly at the thoughts arising in your mind. As an exercise, you might close your eyes and imagine yourself sitting in a cinema watching an empty screen. Simply wait for thoughts to arise. Because you are not doing anything except waiting for thoughts to appear, you may become aware of them very quickly. What exactly are they? What happens to them? Thoughts are like magic displays that seem real when we are lost in them, but then vanish upon inspection.

But what about the strong thoughts that affect us? We are watching, watching, watching, and then all of a sudden - whoosh! - gone, we are lost in that one. What is that about? What are the mind states or the particular kinds of thoughts that catch us again and again, so that we forget that they are just empty phenomena passing on?

It is amazing to observe how much power we give unknowingly to uninvited thoughts: "Do this, say that, remember, plan, obsess, judge." They can drive us quite crazy, and they often do!

The kinds of thoughts we have, and the impact they have on our lives, depend on our understanding of things. If we are in the clear, powerful space of just seeing thoughts arising and passing, then it does not really matter what kind of thinking appears in the mind; we can see them for the passing show that they are.

From thoughts come actions. From actions come all sorts of consequences. Which thoughts will we invest in? Our great task is to see them clearly, so that we can choose which to act on and which simply to let be.

*Adapted from:
Insight Meditation
by Joseph Goldstein*

WAYS YOU CAN SEE YOUR THOUGHTS DIFFERENTLY

Here are some of the ways in which one can practise relating skilfully to difficult thoughts:

1. Try watching thoughts arrive and leave, without feeling that you have to follow them. You could practise viewing them as buses that come along and want to take you for a ride. Anchoring your attention in the breath or body is a way to stay on the pavement rather than getting on the bus, or to disembark from the bus if you notice that you have been carried away. We don't have to get rid of difficult thoughts... we can just practise letting them come and go.
2. Try viewing your thoughts as mental events rather than facts. Thoughts are always representations of situations rather than being the situations themselves. It's good to remember that if we're in a troubled mood, we're probably not seeing the situation clearly. As the song says, "It ain't necessarily so"... situations, and our thoughts and feelings about them, change.
3. Relate to thoughts in the same way you would to sounds: letting thoughts be 'just thoughts', just as we have practised letting sounds be 'just sounds.'
4. Identify repetitive thought patterns with labels: "judging", "planning", "worrying", "catastrophising". What are your current top ten thoughts?
5. Write difficult or repetitive thoughts down on paper. This lets you see them in a way that is less emotional and overwhelming. In addition, the pause between having the thought and writing it down can give you a moment for unhooking or stepping back from believing the thought.
6. You might be able to notice some underlying feelings that are 'giving birth to' the difficult thoughts and you may also notice some associated body sensations. See if it's possible to bring a kind and interested awareness to these feelings and sensations.
7. For particularly difficult thoughts, it may be helpful to take another look at them intentionally, in a balanced, open state of mind when this feels available to you. In your calmest moments, how do you view this thought or situation? What does your 'wise mind' have to say about this?

YOUR OWN ‘TOP TEN’

Most of us have familiar negative thought patterns that recur again and again. Naming our patterns can help us to recognise them when they start up. For example, ‘Ah, I know this pattern. This is my “I’m a failure” pattern...This is my “I’ve got too much to do” pattern.’ The more we recognise these as patterns, the less likely they are to ‘press our buttons’, and the more likely we are to relate to them, not *from* them.

Do you have your own ‘top ten’? If so, it may be helpful to identify them and record them here.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

As best you can, bringing an attitude of gentle interest and curiosity to your thoughts and images. If you notice yourself going round in circles or getting caught up in self-judgement, pause and bring your attention back to sensations in the body, before returning your attention to thoughts and feelings.

WHEN YOU BECOME AWARE OF DIFFICULT THOUGHTS

During your practice, or at other times, when you become aware of negative thoughts and images in your mind, you may wish to hold the thoughts in awareness, with an attitude of gentle interest, and consider the following:

Perhaps I am confusing a thought with a fact?

Perhaps I am jumping to conclusions?

Perhaps I am thinking in black-and-white terms?

Perhaps I am condemning myself totally because of one thing?

Perhaps I am concentrating on my weaknesses and forgetting my strengths?

Perhaps I am blaming myself for something that isn't my fault?

Perhaps I am judging myself?

Perhaps I am setting unrealistically high standards for myself, so that I will fail?

Perhaps I am mind reading/crystal ball gazing?

Perhaps I am expecting perfection?

Perhaps I am overestimating disaster?

As best you can, bring an attitude of gentle interest to your thoughts.

HOME PRACTICE

FOLLOWING SESSION 6

Select a **variety of formal mindfulness practices** to make up a minimum of 40 minutes every day. You might like to select practices that you have found particularly helpful during the course, as well as trying others that you may have struggled with. It is fine to choose two shorter practices for your 40-minute practice time (e.g. 20 mins + 20 mins).

There is a worksheet on the next page “Responding skilfully.” This is to support you with building on what was covered in the course so far; you are welcome to use it as part of the home practice this week if it supports your learning. You will build on it in the remainder of the course and beyond the end of the course.

NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

50:50 Attention. Continue keeping the body in mind when listening and speaking.

10 Finger Gratitude Practice.

3-Step Breathing Spaces. Continue with these as a regular part of your day, but also as a way to be present to all your experiences in a different way and as a first step before taking a wider view of thoughts.

Daily Walking Practice.

Random Acts of Kindness.

With these new habits in everyday life, when might you do this each day? This planning will help these nourishing activities to become part of your life.

RESPONDING SKILFULLY

In the home practice after session 4, you were invited to use a worksheet to reflect upon the times when you find yourself getting lost in reactivity – those times when difficult moods or negative patterns of thinking and behaving are beginning to take hold. That first worksheet asked you to identify some early warning signs (sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses) that this is happening to you. This second sheet concerns how you might respond skilfully at these times. How might you best take care of yourself? How might you bring a wise and compassionate response to yourself and to your situation?

In the past, what has helped at these times? What has enabled you to move from reacting to responding?

What might be a skilful response at these times? What would support your well-being and the well-being of others? You may wish to include things that you explored in the ‘responding skilfully’ exercise in the session.

How could you best care for yourself at these times? How could you respond to the turmoil of thoughts and feelings without adding to them? What things might you do? Who might you contact? How could you respond skilfully and with compassion to the distress that you feel?

HOME PRACTICE NOTES

Feel free to use this page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

PLEASE REMEMBER NOT TO READ AHEAD.

SESSION 7

HOW CAN I BEST TAKE
CARE OF MYSELF?

LIVING WITH CARE AND RESPONSIVENESS

In the session this week, we considered the question: “How do I spend my time? And do the choices that I make about this really support my well-being and that of those around me?” It’s important to note that this question is as much about ‘how’ as about ‘what’: the way – or mode of mind - in which we do what we have to do is as powerful as the actual activities themselves in shaping our general well-being and our ability to deal skilfully with ourselves and our lives.

In the session this week we asked ourselves the following questions:

1. Of the things that I do, what **nourishes** me? What lifts my mood, energises me, helps me to feel calm and centred? What increases my sense of actually being alive and present, rather than merely existing? (**‘N’** activities)
2. Of the things that I do, what **depletes** me? What pulls me down, drains my energy, leads me to feel tense and fragmented? What decreases my sense of actually being alive and present? What makes me feel I am merely existing, or worse? (**‘D’** activities)
3. Accepting that there are some aspects of my life that I simply cannot change, how can I increase the time and energy that I give to **‘N’** activities and decrease the time and energy I give to **‘D’** activities?
4. Could I learn to approach **‘D’** activities in a different way? Being fully present with them, even if I find them boring or unpleasant – bringing ‘raisin mind’ to them instead of judging them or wishing that they were not there? Doing them in a mindful rather than driven mode?
5. Could I learn to approach **‘N’** activities in a different way? Being more present to them, savouring them and letting myself open more fully to the enjoyment or nourishment that they offer?

By being present in more of our moments, and making wiser and more compassionate choices about what we really need in those moments, we can use the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of activities to support our well-being and our capacity to meet life’s difficulties with a sense of resource.

This is true both within the general patterns of daily life and it’s especially important when we are facing periods of stress and difficulty. We can practice and cultivate activities day-by-day that will help us to resource, nourish and care for ourselves at times when we are struggling to cope. Establishing these habits of self-care when things are generally going well can mean that they are available to support us when things are difficult.

One of the simplest ways to take care of your physical and mental well-being is to take daily physical exercise. You may wish to aim for at least one brisk 10 minute walk a day and also, if at all possible, other types of exercise such as mindful stretching, yoga, swimming, jogging, etc. Once exercise is part of your daily routine, it will be readily available as a rhythm and support when things are difficult.

The balance of nourishment and depletion in our lives is crucial to our well-being. The more that we feel depleted, the more the climate of our minds and lives will be characterized by aversion and negativity, which will prime us to be reactive. The more we feel nourished, the more there will be a basic default level of well-being that supports a spacious relationship with, and responsiveness to, the unexpected events and difficulties that inevitably arise in our lives. It is sometimes said that a key part of the art of well-being and happiness is ‘selective watering in the gardens of our hearts and lives’ – learning to cultivate that which nourishes, resources and uplifts us, and learning how not to feed more difficult, depleting and self-sabotaging habits.

Midst the demands of life, it’s easy to put off doing what really nourishes us until we have completed all of our duties and obligations. If we adopt this approach we may end up waiting a long time, or only rarely doing the things that we actually most value. One of the gifts of doing a course like this, is the reminder that our time and our lives are precious, not least because none of us knows how long we have to live. The reflective exercise on nourishment and depletion can be a way of reminding ourselves to give more priority to those activities and experiences that we hold most dear, that most give us a sense of living in line with our deeper values, aspirations and loves. Even small adjustments of our schedule, or of our attitude within it, can be enough to give a sense of living more fully and more in tune with our deeper selves, such that we feel more alive and more in touch with a sense of flourishing.

THE TWO WOLVES

There is an ancient tale of a child being taught by a grandparent about cruelty in the world and how it comes about. “A fight is going on inside me” the grandparent says to the child. “It’s a fight between two wolves. One wolf is mean-spirited and angry, and the other wolf is understanding and kind.” The child asks the grandparent which wolf will win the fight. The grandparent answers “The one that I choose to feed... will be the one that will win the fight.”

AFTER THE BREATHING SPACE:

TAKING ACTION TO SUPPORT WELL-BEING, ESPECIALLY AT TIMES WHEN THINGS ARE DIFFICULT

After re-establishing a sense of expanded awareness in the third step of the Breathing Space, it may feel appropriate to take some *considered* action that supports our well-being.

In response to persistent difficult thoughts and feelings, for example, the following activities may be particularly helpful:

1. Do something pleasurable.
2. Do something that will give you a sense of accomplishment or satisfaction.
3. Act mindfully.
4. Choose not to do anything.

Ask yourself: “How can I best take care of myself right now? What do I need for myself right now – this includes the possibility of choosing to do nothing?”

Try some of the following:

DO SOMETHING PLEASURABLE

Be kind to your body

Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to your favourite food; have your favourite hot drink. What feels like the best way to take care of myself right now?

Engage in enjoyable activities

Go for a walk (maybe with the dog or a friend); visit a friend; do your favourite hobby; do some gardening; take some exercise; phone a friend; spend time with someone you like; cook a meal; go shopping; watch something funny or uplifting on TV; read something that gives you pleasure; listen to music that makes you feel good. What feels like the best way to take care of myself right now?

One of the secrets of a happy life is continuous small treats - *Iris Murdoch*

DO SOMETHING THAT GIVES YOU A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT OR SATISFACTION ('TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS')

Clean the house; clear out a cupboard or drawer; catch up with letter writing; do some work; pay a bill; do something that you have been putting off doing.

It may be helpful to break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time. Make sure you treat yourself kindly and with respect, and congratulate yourself whenever you complete a task or a part of a task.

ACT MINDFULLY

When we are stressed, or when our mood goes down, our minds often become preoccupied with worries and ruminations. We may find ourselves going over and over things that have happened, trying to make sense of why we feel the way we do, or anxiously wondering about the future. The end result is that our attention is not really on what we are doing – we are lost in our heads, rather than focussed on what is happening right here and now. This may mean that activities that might ordinarily nourish us become depleting instead.

Notice when your mind has been hijacked by negative thoughts that take you away from being present. When this happens, make an intention to focus your entire attention on what you are doing right now. Keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in the present (e.g. “Now I am walking down the stairs... I can feel the banister beneath my hand... now I’m walking into the kitchen... I’m turning on the light...”). Be aware of your breathing as you do things; be aware of the contact of your feet with the floor as you walk.

CHOOSE NOT TO DO ANYTHING

Notice when there is an urge to do something, perhaps driven by a need to escape or strive towards self-improvement. If you are someone prone to “compulsive busyness,” or meeting everything as a problem to be solved or a project to be completed, notice these urges, feelings and thoughts, with kindness, patience and care. The best thing may be to *choose not to do something*.

REMEMBER

Be open-minded

Whatever you choose to do, perform your action as an experiment. Don’t pre-judge how you will feel after it is completed. Keep an open mind about whether doing this will be helpful in any way.

Aim for a broad range

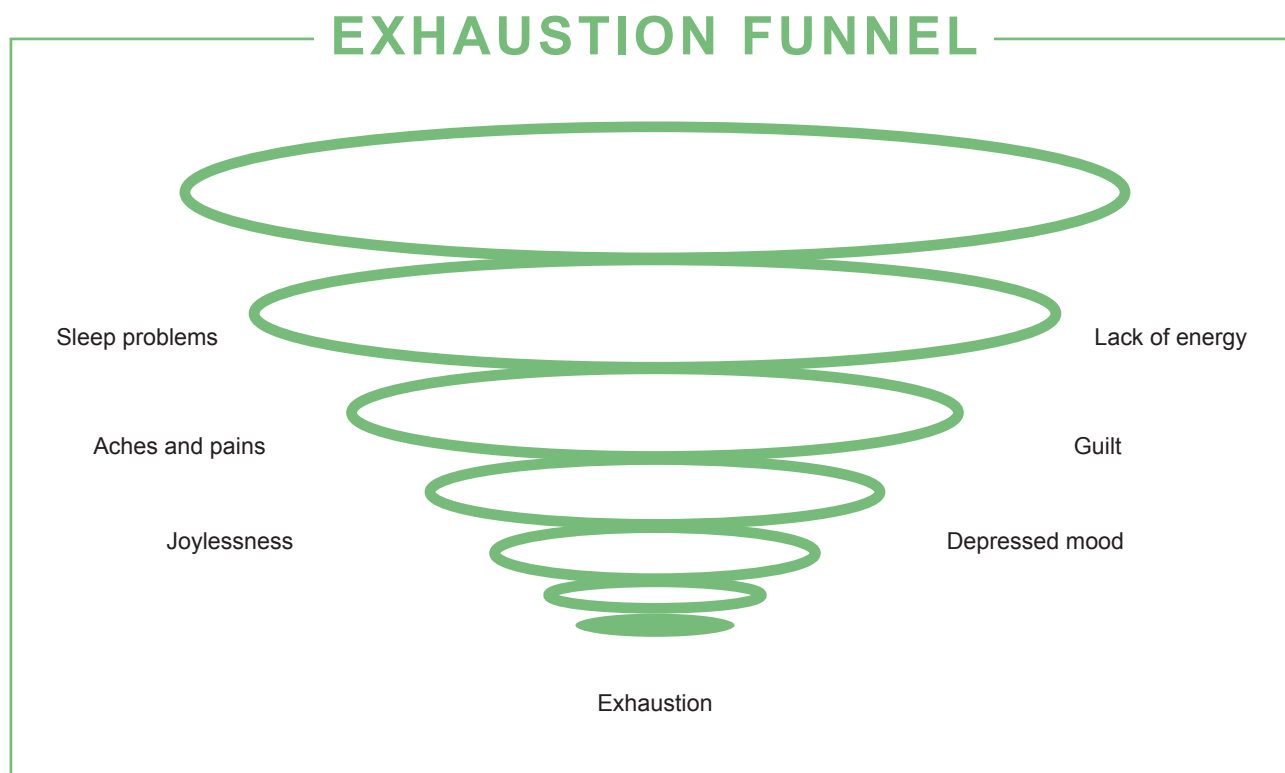
Consider a range of activities and don’t limit yourself to a favourite few. Sometimes trying new behaviours can be interesting in itself. ‘Exploring’ and ‘enquiring’ often works against ‘withdrawal’ and ‘retreat’.

Don’t expect miracles

Carry out what you have planned to do as best you can. Even a 1% change in your pattern of activities, increasing those that nourish you and decreasing those that deplete you, can be helpful in building your sense of resilience in the face of difficulties.

Try different approaches

Learn for yourself when it is helpful to adopt one approach versus another. Mindfulness is a lifelong practice and we’re always learning.



The exhaustion funnel illustrates a process that can easily happen to us. The narrowing area of the circles represents the narrowing of our lives that takes place when we give up the things that we enjoy but that seem 'optional'. We stop doing activities that would nourish us, leaving only work or other stressors that often deplete our resources.

Professor Marie Asberg suggests that those of us who continue downwards are likely to be those who are most conscientious, or those whose self-confidence is closely dependent on their performance, i.e. those who are often seen as the most hard-working.

The diagram also shows the sequence of accumulating 'symptoms' that may be experienced, as the funnel narrows and we become more and more exhausted.

HOME PRACTICE FOLLOWING SESSION 7

Selecting from the different practices that we have done during the course, choose and establish **a pattern of daily practice** that you intend to follow over the next 2-3 months.

NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

50:50 Attention. Continue keeping the body in mind when listening and speaking.

10 Finger Gratitude Practice.

3-Step Breathing Spaces.

Daily Walking Practice.

Random Acts of Kindness.

With these new habits in everyday life, when might you do this each day? This planning will help these nourishing activities to become part of your life.

HOME PRACTICE NOTES

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PLEASE REMEMBER NOT TO READ AHEAD.

SESSION 8



MINDFULNESS FOR
LIFE

AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

The advantages of awareness, acceptance and **responding** mindfully to situations, rather than **reacting** to them impulsively and habitually, has been a recurring theme throughout this course.

Seeing with clarity and bringing acceptance to a difficulty may often be the springboard for some form of skilful action directed at achieving change in the inner or outer world. Of course, there are also situations and feelings that it may be very difficult, or impossible, to change. In this situation, rather than ‘banging your head against a brick wall’, the wisest and most compassionate response is sometimes to practise allowing and accepting our feelings about the situation, and seeing if it’s possible to hold the situation [together with our reactions to it] in a spacious and kind awareness.

The ‘Serenity Prayer’ asks for:

Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

Where do we find this grace, this courage, this wisdom? At some level, we already have these qualities - our task is to realise them (make them real), and moment by moment awareness can be a great ally in this. As we’ve explored, taking regular Breathing Spaces is a way of accessing these qualities in the midst of life’s difficulties and delights.

DAILY FORMAL PRACTICE

Keeping up a daily practice is like learning a new language: practising a few phrases each day keeps the learning alive. A manageable amount each day is better than doing long practices only occasionally. We encourage you to protect time within your busy lives to do some kind of formal practice every day, even if it is only for 5 minutes. Formal practices are like ‘pauses’ within the busyness of our lives. However brief these pauses may be, if we are really present and aware they can be transformative for us.

Jon Kabat-Zinn says that mindfulness practice is rather like weaving a parachute: it’s better to do some of the weaving every day, rather than leaving it all until you are just about to jump out of the plane!

Coming on this course has involved a lot of time and effort on your part. If you never do any formal mindfulness practice again, chances are your life will be different and better. But the evidence suggests that people who benefit most from MBCT in the long run are the ones who keep going with some form of mindfulness practice – even if it’s only for a few minutes a day. To enjoy the benefits from the time and effort that you’ve already invested, it’s helpful to remember that, just like learning a new language, a little practice keeps a new skill alive and available.

From Mindfulness: a Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Prof Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman.

DAILY INFORMAL PRACTICE

1. **3-Step Breathing Spaces** – **regularly** at set-times in order to check in with yourself during the day, and also **responsively** at other times (e.g., when things are particularly difficult or delightful). A breathing space can be a way of resourcing and grounding yourself to respond with more clarity and compassion to the difficult, and with greater appreciation to the nourishing and delightful. Taking a Breathing Space is the recommended ‘first response’ anytime that we notice that we are feeling off-balance. It opens up the possibility of responding rather than reacting.
2. **50:50 Attention** – keeping the body in mind when listening and speaking. Perhaps identify a particular person or a particular anticipated conversation. Use anchors for your attention (feet, seat, breath).
3. **10 Finger Gratitude Exercise** – reminding yourself daily of what you’re grateful for in your life at this time, including the small blessings that we so easily overlook. Keeping the sense of appreciation fresh by tuning into sensations of appreciation in your body in the present moment
4. **Daily Walking Practice** – using times when you are walking between places at work or in daily life to ground and resource yourself by practising mindfulness of the sensations of walking – the soles of the feet in contact with the ground or the movement of the legs and /or whole body as you walk.
5. **Experiences Calendar** – tune into the sensations, feelings, thoughts, and impulses that make up our experiences. This can be a powerful way of loosening the grip of the patterns of reactivity and suffering that we sometimes fall into.
6. **Random acts of kindness** – Increase the number of kind and compassionate actions that you perform each day, and notice the effects on your body sensations, thoughts and mood just after you have performed these.

MOTIVATION

It is not always obvious what regular mindfulness practice is doing for us... so how do we find the motivation to continue? It can be helpful to connect our intention to practise with a positive reason for doing so. Knowing that mindfulness is helpful for something that's really important to us is likely to support our efforts to continue with practice.

So it may be helpful to ask yourself: ***“What is it in my life that I value most? And how might mindfulness help me with this?”***

In the light of this, you might like to remember, clarify and further establish your intentions for continuing practice now that the course has ended. As the saying goes, “Practise as if your life depended on it, as in many ways it does!”

Continuing to practise because you tell yourself that you ‘should’ probably won’t work. The skilful alternative is to identify some positive reason that will help sustain your practice – to give you the motivation to do it whether you feel like it or not. Clear intention is what carries us through, so that we practise whether we feel like it or not – not by forcing ourselves but by reminding ourselves of what we truly value.

Adapted from Mindfulness Way Workbook by Teasdale, Segal and Williams.

DAILY MINDFULNESS

- When you first wake up in the morning, before you get out of bed, bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.
- Notice changes in your posture. Be aware of how your body and mind feel when you move from lying down to sitting, to standing, to walking. Notice each time you make a transition from one posture to the next.
- Whenever you hear a phone ring, a bird sing, a train pass by, laughter, a car horn, the wind, the sound of a door closing use any sound like the bell of mindfulness. Really listen, being present and awake.
- Throughout the day, take a few moments to bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.
- Whenever you eat or drink something, take a minute and breathe. Look at your food and realise that the food was connected to something which nourished its growth. Can you see the sunlight, the rain, the earth, the farmer, the trucker in your food? Pay attention as you eat, consciously consuming this food for your physical health. Bring awareness to seeing your food, smelling your food, tasting your food, chewing your food, and swallowing your food.
- Notice your body while walking or standing. Take a moment to notice your posture. Pay attention to the contact of the ground under your feet. Feel the air on your face, arms, legs as you walk. Are you rushing?
- Bring awareness to listening and talking. When listening can you listen without agreeing or disagreeing, liking or disliking, or planning what you will say when it is your turn? When talking can you just say what you need to say without overstating or understating? Can you notice how your mind and body feel?
- Whenever you are waiting in a line, use this time to notice standing and breathing. Feel the contact of your feet on the floor and how your body feels. Bring attention to the rising and falling of your abdomen. Are you feeling impatient?
- Be aware of any points of tightness in your body throughout the day. See if you can breathe into them and, as you exhale, let go of excess tension. Is there tension stored anywhere in your body? For example - your neck, shoulders, stomach, jaw, or lower back. If possible, stretch or do some yoga once a day.
- Focus attention on your daily activities - such as brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, washing up, putting on your shoes, doing your job. Bring mindfulness to each activity.
- Before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes and bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.
- Whenever you feel you have 'lost it', when life feels really hard, or when your practice has been hard to sustain; remember that you can always come back to the breath. No matter how long you've been away, you can always start over again, in this moment, right here, right now.

Daily Mindfulness adapted from: Madeline Klyne, Instructor, Stress Reduction Clinic, University of Massachusetts Center (personal communication). Copyright Madeline Klyne. Adapted by permission.

Now might be a good time to remind yourself of the attitudes that can help our mindfulness practice to flourish:

- Non-judging
- Patience
- Beginner's mind
- Trust
- Non-striving
- Acceptance
- Letting go
- Befriending
- Compassion
- Appreciation
- Gratitude
- Generosity

These 'foundational attitudes' are described and explained on pages 8 – 9 of this handbook.

FIVE TIPS FOR SUSTAINING A DAILY MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

1. Do some practice, no matter how brief, every day.

The ‘everydayness’ of practice is hugely important as a way to keep mindfulness fresh, available, ready for you whenever you need it most—because you never know when that will be! Internationally respected meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein recommends that his students sit down to practice every day—even if only for ten seconds. Experience suggests that, most often, those ten seconds will be enough to encourage you to sit for longer.

2. If at all possible, do the practice at the same time, in the same place, each day.

That way mindfulness gets built into the very fabric of your daily routine. Then, just as with brushing your teeth, you don’t have to ponder whether to do it or not—you do it because that’s what you always do at that point in your day.

3. See practice as a way to nourish yourself, rather than another thing on your ‘to do list’.

Remember that the practice won’t always feel nourishing—as much as you can, let the practice be as it is, letting go of your ideas of how it should be or of regarding it as part of a ‘project’ of self-improvement.

4. Explore ways to practise with other people.

Practising regularly with others—in what is often called a ‘sitting group’—is one of the most powerful ways to keep your practice vital and alive. If you learned mindfulness with a group, look out for opportunities for reunions and practice days. Everyone can benefit from finding a mindfulness ‘buddy’ with whom to practice and share experiences from time to time. Even if it’s only one person, joining with others to practise and share experiences is hugely, and often surprisingly, supportive.

5. Remember, you can always begin again.

The essence of mindfulness practice is letting go of the past and starting afresh in each new moment (as you’ve already practised many, many times in coming back to the breath when the mind has wandered). In the same way, if you find that you haven’t practised for a while, rather than criticising yourself or ruminating about why, **just begin again, right there and then, by taking a 3-Step Breathing Space.**

FIVE MORE TIPS

1. When possible, do just one thing at a time.
2. Pay full attention to what you are doing.
3. When the mind wanders from what you are doing, bring it back.
4. Repeat Step 3 several billion times.
5. Investigate your distractions.

*From Breath by Breath
by Larry Rosenberg.*

RESOURCES

There are many resources available to support further learning and continuing practice. We have listed a small selection of websites, apps, etc below and have also included some poetry and pieces of writing that we hope you will enjoy and be inspired by. For a complete list of resources, please go to the first website in the list below.

WEBSITES

www.oxfordmindfulness.org (this site includes an up to date and much fuller list of resources)

www.guilford.com/MBCT_audio (this includes some audios by different MBCT teachers)

www.stressreductiontapes.com (Jon Kabat-Zinn's guided meditations)

www.mindful.org (Has a monthly magazine you can subscribe to)

Mindfulness Network: www.mindfulness-network.org (offers retreats and personal practice mentoring)

<https://insighttimer.com> (If you want to choose your own length of time for a meditation, and the frequency of chimes or bells, e.g. 25 mins with bells every 5 mins). We also recommend the recorded practices in this app recorded by MBCT teachers such as Mark Williams.

APPS

Oxford Mindfulness MBCT App. The Oxford App includes the audio tracks of practices from a similar but different course. It also has a section that includes meditations of varying lengths, designed to support people to continue and deepen their practice after completing a course. The app is available free of charge from the Apple app store or at the following website: <http://mbctapp.oxfordmindfulness.org>

Headspace

SOCIAL MEDIA

www.facebook.com/oxfordmindfulness

Twitter

@omc_mindfulness

@WillemKuyken

@mindfuleveryday

BOOKS

Mark Williams and Danny Penman. Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World

Jon Kabat-Zinn. Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the present moment and your life.

Jon Kabat-Zinn. Full Catastrophe Living (Revised edition)

Jon Kabat-Zinn. Wherever You Go, There You Are

Kate Carne. Seven Secrets of Mindfulness: how to keep your everyday practice alive.

Christina Feldman and Willem Kuyken. Mindfulness: Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Psychology.

John Teasdale, Mark Williams & Zindel Segal. The Mindful Way Workbook.

POEMS

THE SUMMER DAY

Who made the world?
 Who made the swan, and the black bear?
 Who made the grasshopper?
 This grasshopper, I mean
 the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
 the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
 who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down
 who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
 Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
 Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
 I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
 I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
 into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
 how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
 which is what I have been doing all day.
 Tell me, what else should I have done?
 Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
 Tell me, what is it you plan to do
 with your one wild and precious life?

*Mary Oliver "House of Light."
 Beacon Press, Boston.*

LOVE AFTER LOVE

The time will come when, with elation,
 you will greet yourself arriving
 at your own door, in your own mirror,
 and each will smile at the other's welcome

 and say, sit here. Eat.
 You will love again the stranger who was your self.
 Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all

 your life, whom you have ignored
 for another, who knows you by heart.
 Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

 the photographs, the desperate notes,
 peel your own image from the mirror. Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott, Collected Poems 1948-1984, New York, Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1986.

IF I HAD MY LIFE TO LIVE OVER

I'd like to make more mistakes next time.

I'd relax, I would limber up. I would be sillier than I had been on this trip. I would take fewer things seriously. I would take more chances. I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would perhaps have more actual troubles, but I'd have fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I'm one of those people who live sensibly and sanely hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had to do it over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else. Just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day. I've been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat, and a parachute. If I had to do it again, I would travel lighter than I have.

If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would go to more dances. I would ride more merry go rounds. I would pick more daisies.

Nadine Stair, 85 years old, Louisville, Kentucky

POEMS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS

Chapter I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost... I am hopeless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it there.
I still fall in... it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter V

I walk down another street.

Portia Nelson

GO AMONG TREES AND SIT STILL

I go among trees and sit still.
 All my stirring becomes quiet
 Around me like circles on water
 My tasks lie in their places
 Where I left them, asleep like cattle...
 Then what I am afraid of comes.
 I live for a while in its sight.
 What I fear in it leaves it,
 And the fear of it leaves me.
 It sings, and I hear its song.

Wendell Berry from Sabbaths, 1987, North Point Press

WALK SLOWLY

It only takes a reminder to breathe,
 a moment to be still, and just like that,
 something in me settles, softens, makes
 space for imperfection. The harsh voice
 of judgment drops to a whisper and I
 remember again that life isn't a relay
 race; that we will all cross the finish
 line; that waking up to life is what we
 were born for. As many times as I
 forget, catch myself charging forward
 without even knowing where I'm going,
 that many times I can make the choice
 to stop, to breathe, and be, and walk
 slowly into the mystery.

Danna Faulds

HOKUSAI SAYS

Hokusai says look carefully.
He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing

He says look forward to getting old.
He says keep changing,
you just get more who you really are.
He says get stuck, accept it, repeat
yourself as long as it is interesting.

He says keep doing what you love.

He says keep praying.
He says every one of us is a child,
every one of us is ancient
every one of us has a body.
He says every one of us is frightened.
He says every one of us has to find
a way to live with fear.

He says everything is alive --
shells, buildings, people, fish,
mountains, trees, wood is alive.
Water is alive.

Everything has its own life.

Everything lives inside us.

He says live with the world inside you.

He says it doesn't matter if you draw,
or write books. It doesn't matter
if you saw wood, or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home
and stare at the ants on your veranda
or the shadows of the trees
and grasses in your garden.

It matters that you care.

It matters that you feel.

It matters that you notice.

It matters that life lives through you.

Contentment is life living through you.

Joy is life living through you.

Satisfaction and strength

is life living through you.

Peace is life living through you.

He says don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid.

Look, feel, let life take you by the hand.

Let life live through you.

Roger Keyes

NOTES



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Foundation**

Oxford Mindfulness Foundation
The Wheelhouse
Angel Court
81 St Clements
Oxford, OX4 1AW

+44 (0)1865 238 568

www.oxfordmindfulness.org