Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Course Workbook

This workbook contains material to back up the instructions and discussion that we will have on our course. Please read the relevant session’s notes after each week. The home practice for each session is detailed at the end of that week’s session notes.

It can be useful to keep a note of your experiences as the course progresses and there’s a space in the workbook for this. The notes you make are for your use only and there is no need for them to be seen by anyone else.

Enjoy and Explore
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Introduction

“Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally, to things as they are.” ¹

“There is nothing cold, analytical or unfeeling about [mindfulness]. The overall tenor of mindfulness practice is gentle, appreciative and nurturing.

Another way to think of it would be ‘heartfulness’.” ²

1  Williams et al The Mindful Way Through Depression (2007)
What is my intention or purpose in engaging in this course?

What do I hope for, for myself?

How do I want this to change the way that I live my life?

How do I want this to benefit the people in my life?

What are my deepest hopes and aspirations?

Can I express this in the form of a personal vow or aspiration which communicates my whole-hearted intention?
**Home Practice is an Important Part of the Course!**

The mental patterns we will be working to change are likely to have been with us for some time. Such patterns are usually habitual and automatic, and we will only succeed in changing them if we put time and effort into learning new approaches.

Making the time to do home practice is a challenge that is part of this course and it is really worth doing so. A useful attitude to adopt is “I'll give this a go with an open mind. At the end of the course I’ll decide whether I've learned anything useful and what I can take away with me.” In order for you really to know whether this approach can be a useful part of your life, you need to engage with it fully during these 8-weeks.

We will use part of each session to reflect on our experiences of the home practice during the week, discussing any difficulties that you may experience with the practice. Much of what we will learn on the course may be drawn from these experiences.

**Facing difficulties**

A central aim of MBSR is to learn how to be more fully aware and present in each moment. This makes life more enjoyable, interesting, vivid and fulfilling. It also means facing up to whatever is present, even when it is unpleasant or difficult. Acknowledging and facing up to difficulties is, in the long run, the most effective way to reduce unhappiness.

On our course we will learn gentle and effective ways of facing difficulties and we’ll be supported to do that.

**Patience and Persistence**

Because we will be working to change deeply established mental patterns, the course will involve investing considerable time and effort, some effects of which may only become apparent later. It’s like gardening – you have to prepare the soil, plant seeds, make sure they are watered and nourished – and then wait patiently for the results.

We encourage you to approach this course in the same spirit of patience and persistence, committing yourself to putting the time and effort into what will be asking of you while accepting, with patience, that the fruit of your effort may not show right away.
Session 1

Automatic Pilot

In a car we can sometimes drive for miles on automatic pilot, without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really present, moment-by-moment, for much of our lives. We can often be miles away without knowing it.

On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our buttons pressed. Our thoughts, feelings and sensations, as well as events in the world around us – many of which we may be only dimly aware of – can trigger habits of thinking that are unhelpful and lead to stress.

By becoming more aware, from moment to moment, of our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, as well as the world around us, we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice. *We do not have to go down the same old mental ruts that have caused problems in the past.*

The aim of this course is to increase awareness so that we can respond to situations with choice, rather than react automatically. We do that by practising becoming more aware of where our attention is, and deliberately changing the way we pay attention, over and over again. Mindfulness is not about trying to get anywhere. Rather, it is simply a matter of being aware of where and how we are and allowing ourselves to be that.

To begin with, we consciously place our attention in different parts of the body, using each part of the body as a focus to anchor our awareness in the moment. We train ourselves to place our attention and awareness in different places at will, thus enabling us to enter more deeply into our present experience. The process of entering more deeply into our current experience is the aim of the Body Scan exercise, which forms the main home practice exercise for next week.
Aims

1. The aim of the programme is to learn new and more effective ways of handling our moods and emotions.

2. We do this by focusing on the small changes in thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that are linked to mood fluctuations.

3. To focus on these changes we have to become more aware of them.

4. The raisin exercise shows how our attention is not always placed fully in the moment – we are often not ‘at home’.

5. It also shows us how, by being more aware of each moment, we can actually alter our experience and the effects it has on us.

6. The body scan helps us gain control over our attention, enabling us to enter more deeply into our present experience.
Stress

“A particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his/her resources and endangering his/her well being.”

Home Practice for Week Following Session 1

- Do the Body Scan 6 times before we meet again, by listening to the Body Scan Meditation’

- Don’t expect to achieve anything while doing the Body Scan. Rather, as best you can, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience. As best you can, don’t judge it, just keep doing it, and we’ll talk about it next week.

- If you would like to, record your experience on the Home Practice Record Form each time you listen to the Body Scan. Make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting. The Home Practice Form is for your own record only.

- Choose a 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, driving, taking out the rubbish, shopping, starting the car – anything that you do every day – just make a point of knowing what you are doing as you are actually doing it.

Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you’re doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what’s happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity. For example, when you’re in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again, and again, you’ll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.
2. Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors—something mundane that you have to do to make your life work—and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes, notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder. If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you’re doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

3. Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savour every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you’re doing.

4. Eating Mindfully

Note any times when you find yourself able to become more deeply aware of what you eat in the same way you noticed the raisin. Eat at least one meal "mindfully" (not necessarily slowly!) in the way that you ate the raisin.
Home Practice Record

If you want to, record on the Home Practice Record Form anything that comes up in your home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

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Session 2

Consolidating body awareness

“The present is the only time that any of us have to be alive – to know anything – to perceive – to learn – to act – to change – to heal.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn – Full Catastrophe Living

On this course, our aim is to be more aware more often. One factor that prevents us from being fully present in each moment is our automatic tendency to judge our experience, as if it’s not quite right in some way, it’s not what should be happening, it isn’t good enough and it’s not what we expected or wanted. Judgments like these can lead to sequences of thoughts about blame, or what needs to be changed, or how things could or should be different. Such thoughts often take us, quite automatically, down well-worn paths in our minds. We can lose our awareness of the moment and, with that, our freedom to choose what, if any, action needs to be taken.

We can regain that freedom if, to begin with, we simply acknowledge the actuality of the situation we are in, without falling into our usual automatic tendency to judge, to fix, or to want things to be other than they are. The body scan exercise provides an opportunity to practise bringing an interested and friendly awareness to the way things are in each moment, without needing to do anything to change them. The aim of the exercise is not to achieve some special state of relaxation. All you need to do is simply bring awareness to bear as the instructions suggest. That is all.

Tips for the body scan

• Regardless of what happens, ‘just do it!’ So, if you fall asleep, lose concentration, keep thinking of other things, keep focusing on the wrong bit of body, don’t feel anything... these are your experiences in the moment, just be aware of them.

• If your mind wanders a lot, simply note the thoughts as passing events and then bring the mind gently back to the body scan.

• Let go of ideas of success or failure, of ‘doing it really well’ or ‘trying to purify the body’. This isn’t a competition and it’s not a skill you need to strive for. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. Just do it with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

• 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’s all. The more you try and influence what it will do for you, the less it is likely to do.

- Try approaching your experience in each moment with the attitude: "OK, that's just the way things are right now". If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, the upsetting feelings will only distract you from doing anything else. As best you can, be aware, be non-striving, be in the moment, accept things as they are – just do it.

Contacting the Breath

To get in touch with your breath moving in the body right now, you might try lying down and placing one hand over your belly and feel it moving as the breath moves in and out of the body. You may notice, in this position, that the abdominal wall rises and falls. See if you can pick up on that movement, first with your hand, then without your hand, just by 'putting your mind in your belly'. There is no need to control the breath. Allow it to flow naturally as it will, noticing as best you can, the pattern of physical sensations. Resting here in awareness; with the feeling of the breath moving in the body in this way, with the rising and falling of the abdomen with each in breath and out breath, from moment to moment.

This short practice can help to focus the mind on ‘being with’ the sensations arising in the body from moment to moment, rather than merely thinking about them.
Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation

Settling

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 on a low stool or meditation bench. 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, although that may not happen at the beginning; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortably and firmly supported.

2. Allow the 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 the eyes if that is comfortable. If not, let the gaze fall unfocused on the floor four or five feet out from you.

Bringing awareness to the body

3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact, and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and with whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations.

Focusing on the sensations of breathing

4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath moves in and out of the body, just as you did in the previous exercise.

5. Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall balloons out and rises with each in-breath, and on the sensations of gentle deflation as the abdominal wall falls with each out breath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the abdomen for the full duration of the in-breath and the full duration of 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.

And if the mind wanders......?

7. Sooner or later (usually sooner), the 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 might like to briefly acknowledge where the mind has been (perhaps making a light mental note: “thinking, thinking”). Then, gently escorting the awareness back to the breath sensations in the belly, renewing the intention to pay attention to this in-breath or this out-breath, whichever is here when you return.

8. However often you notice that the mind has wandered (and this will quite likely happen over and over and over again), each time, as best you can, congratulate yourself for reconnecting with your experience in the moment, briefly acknowledge where the mind has been, gently escort the attention back to the breath, and simply resume following, in awareness, the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each in-breath, with each out-breath.

9. As best you can, bring a quality of kindliness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.

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?

From Mary Oliver: New and Selected Poems
Boston Beacon Press 1992

Home Practice for Week Following Session 2

1. Use the Body Scan again for 6 days. Record your reactions on the record form.

2. At a different time, practise 10 minutes Mindfulness Of Breathing for 6 days. Being with your breath in this way each day provides an opportunity to become aware of what it feels like to be connected and present in the moment without having to do anything.

3. Complete the Pleasant Events Diary (one entry per day).

Use this as an opportunity to become more fully aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations that are around in one pleasant event each day. Notice and record as soon as you can, in detail. For example, record the actual words or images that thoughts occurred in, and the precise nature and location of bodily sensations.

4. Choose a new routine activity to be especially mindful of – brushing your teeth, washing dishes, taking a shower, taking out rubbish, reading to your children, shopping, eating, driving etc.
Pleasant Events

Be aware of a pleasant event *at the time it is happening*. Use these questions to focus your attention on the details of the experience as it is happening. Write it down later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was the experience?</th>
<th>Were you aware of the pleasant feelings while the event was happening?</th>
<th>How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?</th>
<th>What moods, feelings and thoughts accompanied this event?</th>
<th>What thoughts are in your mind now, as you write this down?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Example: Heading home at the end of my shift - stopping, hearing a bird sing.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Lightness across the face, aware of shoulders dropping, uplift of corners of mouth.</td>
<td>Relief, pleasure, &quot;That's good&quot; &quot;How lovely (the bird)&quot;, &quot;it's so nice to be outside.&quot;</td>
<td>It was such a small thing but I'm glad I noticed it.</td>
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Session 3

Mindfulness of the Body in Movement

“Use the breath as an anchor to tether your attention to the present moment. Your thinking mind will drift here and there, depending on the currents and winds moving in the mind until, at some point, the anchorline grows taut and brings you back.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Meditations for Everyday Life

Focusing on the breath:

- brings you back to this very moment – the here and now is always available as an anchor and a haven, no matter where you are.

- can actually change your experience by connecting you with a wider space and broader perspective from which to view things.

Being Mindful and Aware

When we were very young, we were much more physical and aware of our sensations.

As we have grown older, we have become less grounded and aware – and more likely to live life in ‘automatic pilot’ – half asleep, lost in the past, worrying about the future.

Practising being more grounded helps us to wake up to our lives. Being more aware of our physical sensations and our mind states allows us to be more present – here and now.

Coming to our Senses!
Mindfulness is about paying attention, deliberately, and without judgement, as best you can, to what is going on in your body and your mind and in the world around you.

Mindful Exercises
This practice is primarily designed to help us to become more aware of our bodies, and of the feelings and emotions associated with it.

How to approach these exercises
With mindful exercises, we try to turn the mind around, opening our awareness to what is actually here, approaching rather than avoiding...
unpleasant sensations in the body, finding a way to drop our defences, allowing ourselves to experience our bodies as they are in each moment.

To do this, we need a considerable dose of curiosity, kindness, and courage, as well as a new perspective.

Working the Edge
The bodily discomfort we almost inevitably encounter when we practise some of the mindful exercises provides an ideal situation to learn how to approach the difficult and unwanted with curiosity, gentleness, kindness and courage. The skills we learn in this situation of physical discomfort can be applied later to the situations of emotional discomfort that, ultimately, we are probably more interested in.

Imagine we have our hands above our heads, stretching upwards with our whole bodies, and it is beginning to feel uncomfortable in our shoulders and upper arms. One possibility (the avoidance option) is to back off as soon as we feel any discomfort, perhaps immediately lowering our arms, and taking our attention to some other part of the body, or even out of the body altogether, maybe into a stream of thoughts or images. Another possibility (the unkind option) is to grit our teeth, tell ourselves we just have to put up with the increasing pain and discomfort, and not make a fuss, as if this were the aim of the practice, and put even more effort into pushing ourselves to stretch further; here, too, we are likely to ‘numb out’ from awareness of the physical sensations in the region of the body experiencing the discomfort.

Working the edge (mindfully) involves approaching the whole situation in a spirit of gentle nurturing of ourselves, using this particular stretch as an opportunity to extend our ways of relating to discomfort, by striking a balance between, on the one hand, the tendency to withdraw at the first sign of discomfort (which would just reinforce our avoidant tendencies) and, on the other hand, forcing ourselves to meet some standard of endurance that we have set for ourselves in the doing mode.

We find that balance by a process of trial and error; as best we can, we direct our attention right into the area of intensity, using the breath as a vehicle to bring awareness into that region, just as we do in the body scan. We then explore, with a gentle curiosity, what we find there in terms of physical sensations, fluxing and changing as they do, as best we can sensing them directly, perhaps focusing on any changes in intensity over time. The idea is not to hold a posture until it is painful. It is rather to move into the zone where we experience the limit of the movement in any particular stretch or posture, and then linger here without forcing or pushing through strong sensations, while keeping attention on the sensations themselves, as best we can. We focus on the actual physical qualities of these sensations, on any sense of tightness, holding, burning, trembling, or shaking, breathing with the
sensations, as best we can allowing our thoughts about what it means to feel these things simply come and go in awareness.

With stretches, we can find the right zone for ‘working the edge’ by varying the stretch itself. This gives us some sense of control, a way in which we can take a kindly, gentle nurturing orientation toward ourselves while still learning how to do things differently. With intense physical sensations that arise for reasons other than stretching (such as pains in the knees from sitting for a long time) and with emotional discomfort, where we cannot control the source of the discomfort, we can still take care of ourselves by embracing whatever we are feeling in awareness, with the same qualities of kindness and gentle investigating that we bring to exploring the intensity of a stretch. We don’t try to force things beyond our limit of the moment. We move into and embrace the intensity until we sense that we have reached our tolerance limit of the moment. Then, we intentionally and caringly shift our attention from the region of greatest intensity, ready to return when we have ‘gathered and regrouped’ our resources. It’s a bit like just getting your big toe in the water to test the temperature. You don’t have to throw yourself in all at once.

Mindful stretches and mindful movement are particularly useful when we feel ourselves sliding into stressed or otherwise unhelpful modes of mind. We can play the Mindful Exercises instructions and recover our clarity of mind just by attending mindfully to the body’s movements and sensations as we gently move. When our mood has deteriorated quite quickly, when we may already be finding it difficult to concentrate, it is helpful to be able to focus on the powerful body sensations that arise as we move and stretch our bodies. And this gentle, but demanding, physical activity can also have a direct enlivening and arousing effect that will cut through the lethargy that we may begin to feel as our unhappiness deepens.

**The Breathing Space**
The breathing space provides a way to step out of Automatic Pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment.

1. **Awareness**
Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. If possible, close your eyes.

Then bring the focus of awareness to your inner experience and ask: “What is my experience right now...in thoughts...feelings...and in bodily sensations?”

It may be helpful to put experiences into words e.g. say in your mind, “A feeling of anger is arising” or... “Self-critical thoughts are here.” As best you can, fully register and acknowledge your experience, even if it is unwanted.
2. Gathering Attention
Gently gather and redirect your full attention to the breath.

Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out.

Perhaps noting, at the back of your mind: “Breathing in... Breathing out...” or counting: “Inhaling, one...Exhaling, one; Inhaling, two...etc.”

Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

3. Expand Attention
Allow the field of your awareness to expand around your breathing so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, including, especially, any sense of discomfort, tension, or resistance. If these sensations are there, then take your awareness there by “breathing in to them” on the in-breath. Then, breathe out from those sensations, softening and opening with the out-breath. Say to yourself on the out-breath “it’s okay, whatever it is, it’s okay: let me be open to it”.

Become aware of and, if necessary, adjust your posture and facial expression.

As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.
Autobiography in Five Chapters

1) 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.

2) 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'm in the same place. But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

3) I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is 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.

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

5) I walk down another street.

- Portia Nelson
Home Practice for Week Following Session 3

1. Practise Mindful Exercises using the download or listening online daily for 6 days. The point of movement is to provide a direct way to connect with the body. The body is a place where the emotions often get expressed, under the surface and without our awareness. Thoughts and emotions also affect our bodies. Working with our bodies directly gives us a place to experience more of ourselves, and to connect-up our experience of body, feelings and thoughts.

The movements activate the body and mind, providing a direct way to connect with awareness of the body, and can dispel tiredness.

Record any reactions on your record form if you wish to.

2. At a different time or following the Mindful Exercises practise the Mindfulness of Breath and Body each day using the download or listening online. Record your reactions on the record form if you wish.

3. Practise using the 3 minute breathing space three times each day, at times that you have decided in advance.

4. Complete the Unpleasant Events Diary (one entry per day) – use this as an opportunity to become really aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations that are around in one unpleasant event each day at the time that they are occurring. Notice and record as soon as you can, in detail. Put down the actual words or images that thoughts came in, and the precise nature and location of bodily sensations.

- What are the unpleasant events that ‘pull you off centre’, or ‘get you down’ (no matter how big or small)?

- What do you most want not to look at?

- Notice when you move into ‘automatic pilot’ – under what circumstances does this occur?

As best you can, try to ‘capture’ with awareness the moments of your day.
**Home Practice Record**

If you want to, record on the Home Practice Record Form anything that comes up in your home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

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### Unpleasant Events

Be aware of an unpleasant event *at the time it is happening*. Use these questions to focus your attention on the details of the experience as it is happening. Write it down later.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was the experience?</th>
<th>Were you aware of the unpleasant feelings while the event was happening?</th>
<th>How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?</th>
<th>What moods, feelings and thoughts accompanied this event?</th>
<th>What thoughts are in your mind now, as you write this down?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Example: Waiting for the cable company to come out and fix our line. Realise that I am missing an important meeting at work.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Temples throbbing, tightness in my neck and shoulders, pacing back and forth.</td>
<td>Angry, helpless. &quot;Is this what they mean by service?&quot; &quot;They don't have to be responsible, they have a monopoly.&quot; &quot;This is one meeting I didn't want to miss.&quot;</td>
<td>I hope I don't have to go through that again soon.</td>
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Session 4

Responding Instead of Reacting

The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Struggle comes from not accepting what is present.

What is Stress?

Each of us is subject much of the time to a changing set of stressors – events that produce stress. These may be external, in the form of the biological, physical, social, economic and political forces that impinge from outside; or they may be internal – the difficult thoughts and feelings that arise in all of us from time to time. There is nothing wrong with having difficult thoughts and feelings. We all do, and we’re not to blame for them. But we can learn to do something about them.

The trouble is that we tend to react to stressors, both internal and external, in a way that produces yet more stress.

There are two levels of stressors. The first level comprises all the external and internal pressures that play upon us simply as a part of our being human. Then there are second level stressors that are all internal and largely unconscious, and consist of our stressed reactions to the first level.

In ancient times, people sometimes used powerful darts as a weapon of war. If you were struck by one of them, you really felt it. Taking that as an analogy, the Buddha spoke of two darts. The first dart consists in the suffering that arises just from being human. We often don’t get what we want. All too often we instead get what we don’t want. And even when we do get what we want, it’s impossible to hold onto it forever. That’s all part of what it means to be human. But the way in which we usually deal with the pain and difficulty that comes our way causes us to be struck by a second dart – one that is self-generated.

Human beings tend to react to painful feelings with aversion. That’s how we’re wired up, we don’t like pain, or even discomfort, and we spend much of our time trying to rid ourselves of it. To that end, we adopt a variety of strategies, many of them unconscious. In the presence of
pain or discomfort we may, for example, tend to tune out and go blank, or we may get into fantasies and daydreams. Or else we might go on the attack, giving rise to feelings of anger, or blame. Or we may immediately look about for a fix – “something must be able to take this pain away – now!” Or else we may grasp for a new, more pleasant experience, to take our pain away.

All of these reactions are ultimately unhelpful. Grasping, blanking, getting angry and so on all produce their own kinds of pain and so a vicious cycle comes into being:

**1st Level Stressor → Stress-Reaction → 2nd Level Stressor → Further Stress-Reaction → and so on....**

Take for instance an experience that you may be familiar with. You’re walking around your home at night, barefoot, without bothering to switch on the light, and you stub your toe, quite painfully, on the heavy briefcase your partner left lying in an unaccustomed place. The first level stressor is the simple physical pain you feel as soon as that happens. But then second-level stress kicks in as you move on to tell yourself a story about what happened. Maybe your story is against your partner, how he or she is always so sloppy and inconsiderate. Or maybe it’s against yourself – how foolish not to have worn shoes, or not to have turned on the light. Or maybe it’s a bit of both. In any event, your body tightens, your brow furrows, and long after the pain has faded you’re still involved in the second-level stress.

For many people, second-level stress of one kind or another marks the whole of their lives, leading to maladaptive coping strategies, such as denial, fantasy, workaholism, worry, unhelpful rumination, busyness, substance abuse, overeating and so on. Since these are variously ineffective, they contribute to the stress-reaction rather than diminish it.

**Stress-reactions v. stress-responses**

In MBSR the core skill is learning to replace unconscious stress-reactions with conscious stress-responses.

Stressors are unavoidable, but if we respond to them with awareness it is possible to institute adaptive, healthy, coping strategies as opposed to maladaptive ones. Moment-by-moment awareness allows us to exert control and to influence the flow of events at those times where we are most likely to react automatically and so fall into the stress-reaction cycle.

Stress-reactions, of their nature, happen automatically and mainly unconsciously. By being aware, conscious of the situations we find ourselves in, therefore, we immediately change things. This is the deciding factor in whether we go down the path of stress-reaction or that of stress-response. Remaining centered in the moment of stress, we are able to recognize both the stressfulness of the situation and our impulses to react. Being conscious in the present, we learn to recognize such agitations for what they are. They are not the whole of reality, they are just bundles of passing thoughts, feelings and sensations – and that changes everything.
Learning to Respond Rather Than React

Difficult things are part of life. It is how we handle them that determine the extent to which they rule our lives. We can learn to relate more lightly to them. By becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations evoked by events, we can free ourselves from habitual, automatic, ways of reacting and, instead, mindfully respond in more skilful ways.

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

- with indifference – switching out of the present moment and going off somewhere else in our minds.
- with wanting – wishing we were having experiences that we are not having right now, or trying to hold on to experiences that we are having right now.
- with aversion – wanting to get rid of experiences that we are having right now, or trying to 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 feelings with aversion. The main issue is to become more aware of our experience so that we can respond mindfully rather than react automatically.

Sitting Meditation can be a kind of laboratory, where, under the particular conditions we have set up, we can become aware of how we tend to react to things and also to begin to see how, instead of reacting, we might begin to do things differently.

Regularly practising Sitting Meditation gives us many opportunities to notice when we have drifted away from awareness of the moment and, with a friendly awareness, to note whatever it was that took our attention away, gently and firmly bringing our attention back to our focus of attention, reconnecting with moment-by-moment awareness. At other times of the day, deliberately using the Breathing Space whenever we notice unpleasant feelings, or a sense of tightening or ‘holding’ in the body, provides an opportunity to begin to respond rather than react.

“Bringing awareness to the elements of events gives more degrees of freedom than is offered by those same events once they have assembled into habitual patterns.”
(Williams, 2008, p. 730, emphasis in original)

In order to respond, rather than react, we need awareness. Our bodies, with all their present-moment feelings and sensations, are an invaluable anchor for that awareness. They are always there to return to, enabling us to remain focussed in the present moment.
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.  

2 Adapted from Joseph Goldstein, Insight Meditation.

Mindful Walking

1. Find a place where you can walk up and down without feeling concerned about whether people can see you. It can be inside or outside.

2. Stand at one end of your walking lane, with your feet parallel to each other, about four to six inches apart, and your knees "unlocked" so that they can gently flex. Allow your arms to hang loosely by your sides, or hold your hands loosely together in front of your body. Direct your gaze, softly, straight ahead.

3. Bring the focus of your awareness to the bottoms of your feet, getting a direct sense of the physical sensations of the contact of the feet with the ground and of the weight of your body transmitted through your legs and feet to the ground. You may find it helpful to flex the knees slightly a few times to get a clearer sense of the sensations in the feet and legs.
4. Allow the left heel to slowly rise from the ground, noticing the sensations in the calf muscles as you do so, and continue, allowing the whole of the left foot to gently lift, as the weight is shifted entirely to the right leg. Bring awareness to the sensations in the left foot and leg as you carefully move it forward and allow the left heel to come in contact with the ground. Allow the rest of the left foot to make contact with the ground, experiencing the weight of the body shifting forward onto the left leg and foot, as the right heel comes off the ground.

5. With the weight fully transferred to the left leg, allow the rest of the right foot to lift, and move it slowly forward, aware of the changing patterns of sensations in the foot and leg as you do so. Focus your attention on the right heel as it makes contact with the ground. Be aware of the weight now shifting forward onto the whole of the right foot as it is placed gently on the ground, and the rising of the left heel again.

6. In this way, slowly move from one end of the walking lane to the other, aware in particular of the sensations in the bottoms of the feet and heels as they make contact with the ground, and of the sensations in the muscles of the legs as they swing forward.

7. When you come to the end of the lane, turn slowly around, aware of and appreciating the complex pattern of movements through which the body changes direction, and continue walking.

8. Walk up and down in this way, aware, as best you can, of the sensations in the feet and legs, and of the contact of the feet with the ground. Keep your gaze directed softly ahead.

9. When you notice that the mind has wandered away from awareness of the sensations of walking, gently escort the focus of attention back to the sensations in the feet and legs, using the sensations as the feet contact the ground, in particular, as an "anchor" to reconnect with the present moment, just as you used the breath in the sitting meditation. If the mind is very agitated, it is helpful to stop for a moment, and just stand here, feet together, until both mind and body re-stabilize themselves. Then resume the mindful walking.

10. Continue to walk for ten to fifteen minutes, or longer if you wish.

11. To begin with, walk at a pace that is slower than usual, to give yourself a better chance to be fully aware of the sensations of walking. Once you feel comfortable with walking slowly with awareness, you can experiment, as well, with walking at faster speeds up to and beyond normal walking speed. If you are feeling particularly agitated, it may be helpful to begin walking fast, with awareness, and to slow down naturally as you settle.

12. As often as you can, bring the same kind of awareness that you cultivate in walking meditation to your normal, everyday, experiences of walking.
Home Practice for Week Following Session 4

1. Practise the Mindfulness of Breath and Body Meditation for six out of the seven days.

2. As well, and at another time if you wish, do 15-20 minutes of mindful movement practice or mindful walking. Record what your practice is each day and your reactions to it on the record sheet if you wish to.

3. Practise the Three Minute Breathing Space at least three times a day. Either when you think of it or connecting it to 3 regular activities you do or places you go to everyday (e.g. on waking up and / or going to bed; before a programme you regularly watch; before eating; after washing your hands; on first sitting down in your car, or on the bus, or at your desk.)

4. In addition, practise the Three Minute Breathing Space whenever you notice unpleasant feelings or come to feel unbalanced.

5. Reflect on the Halfway Review questions below.

Halfway Review

Take some time to reflect on:

- What am I learning through this process?
- What do I need to do over the next 4 weeks to get the most out of the rest of the course?
**Home Practice Record**

If you want to, record on the Home Practice Record Form anything that comes up in your home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

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Session 5

Acceptance: Allowing / Letting Be

“Acceptance means seeing things as they actually are in the present.”
- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living

As we saw last week, instead of automatically reacting to stressors we can mindfully respond to them, and in order to do that we need first of all to experience the stressor just as it is, in the present moment. In other words we need to accept it and let it be.

This attitude of accepting and letting be is something we can systematically cultivate in practice. We do that by following two simple steps;

Firstly, as best we can, we deliberately and intentionally take a gentle, friendly, awareness to whatever thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations our mind is repeatedly drawn towards. Then we become aware of how we relate to whatever arises there.

Sometimes we experience our thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations in a non-accepting, reactive, way. If we like them, we hold onto them, becoming attached. If we don’t like them, because they are painful, unpleasant, or uncomfortable, we contract, trying to push the experience away out of fear, irritation, or annoyance. Each of these responses is the opposite of acceptance.

The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Accepting experience means making space for whatever is going on rather than trying to create some other state. Through acceptance we settle into an awareness of what is present. Letting it be, we just sit with an awareness of whatever is present.

If we notice that our awareness keeps being pulled away from the breath, or any other focus of attention, to particular sensations in the body associated with physical discomfort, feelings or emotions, the first step is to become mindfully aware of those physical sensations, deliberately moving the focus of our awareness to that part of the body where those sensations are strongest. The breath provides a useful vehicle to do this. Just as we practised in the Body Scan, we can take a gentle and friendly awareness to that part of the body by ‘breathing into’ that part on the in-breath, and ‘breathing out’ from it on the out-breath.

Once our attention has moved to the bodily sensations and we have what is pulling at our attention inside our field of awareness, we can, as best we are able, allow ourselves simply to accept what is going on. We can say to ourselves “It’s okay. Whatever it is, it’s okay. It’s already here. Let me feel it.” Staying with the awareness of these bodily sensations and our
relationship to them, breathing with them, we can accept them and let them be. Perhaps repeat – “It’s okay. Whatever it is, it’s okay. It’s already here. Let me feel it.” – using each out-breath to soften and open to the difficult sensations.

Acceptance is not resignation. Rather, it allows us – as a vital first step – to become fully aware of difficulties, and then, if appropriate, to respond in a skilful way, rather than reacting in knee-jerk fashion by automatically running our familiar and often unhelpful strategies for dealing with them.

**Responding to Difficulties with the 3 Minute Breathing Space**

When we are troubled by difficult thoughts, feelings, or sensations, practising the three minute breathing space may be a first step in responding wisely, rather than simply reacting to them.

As we saw in session 3, the breathing space begins with us deliberately adopting an upright, dignified posture, and bringing our attention to our experience in the present moment. When engaging with this practice in response to a difficulty, we pay particular attention to the difficult experience, acknowledging and identifying it. Perhaps putting the experience into words. For instance, we could say in our mind: “Feelings of anger are arising...” or “Self-critical thoughts are here...” or “Pain is here...”. These simple acknowledgements are the vital first step in allowing our experience to be our experience.

Then, we gently focus our full attention on to the breathing. As best we can, fully experiencing each in-breath and each out-breath as they follow one another. As we have seen, the breath can work as an anchor, bringing us into the present and helping us tune in to a state of awareness and stillness. We don’t use the breath here as an avoidance mechanism, a way of tuning out of the difficulty, rather we use it to gently sharpen our focus, increasing our capacity for a calm, kindly awareness.

Finally, we expand that awareness around the breathing to the whole body, and the space it takes up, as if the whole body is breathing. In the case of difficulty, we could take the breath to any discomfort, tension or resistance we experience, ‘breathing in’ to the sensations and, while breathing out, allowing them to soften and open. We can also try saying to ourselves: “It's okay to feel what I'm feeling.” Or, “It's okay not to feel okay.” In this way, we simply allow things to be, just as they already are.

Maintaining a sense of the space within us and around us, as best we can holding everything in awareness; to whatever extent we can, we then bring this quality of expanded awareness to the next moments of our day.

In this way, we try to hold difficult experiences in a wider field of awareness when we notice them, letting them be rather than engaging in battle with them.
Thus the breathing space can give us a way to step out of automatic-pilot mode when dealing with difficulties, and to reconnect with the present moment and our own innate wisdom.

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 honorably.
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

Home Practice for Week Following Session 5

1. Practise the Mindfulness of Breath and Body for at least six of the next seven days. Record what happens on the record form if you like.

2. Practise the Three Minute Breathing Space three times each day. Either when you think of it or connect it to 3 regular activities you do, or places you are, everyday (for instance, on waking up and going to bed; before a programme you regularly watch; before eating; on first sitting down in your car; or on the bus; or at your desk.)

3. Whenever you notice yourself starting to feel stressed, practise the three minute breathing to explore ways of responding with greater mindfulness and more friendliness to yourself and the situation.

4. Bring awareness to moments of reaction and explore options for responding with greater mindfulness and creativity. Do this during your meditation practice also. Practise opening up space for responding in the present moment. Explore how using the breath can bring you into the present moment.

5. When you find yourself willing to ‘embrace the unwanted’, what does that feel like?
**Home Practice Record**

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Session 6

Recognising thoughts and emotions as just mental events

“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’... 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.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*

Our thoughts can have powerful effects on how we feel and what we do. Often, thoughts are triggered and then run quite automatically. By becoming aware, over and over again, of the thoughts and images passing through the mind and, as best we can, letting go of them and returning our attention to the breath and the present moment, we can begin to get some distance and perspective on them.

That allows us to see that thoughts are just mental events, not truth, reality, or “me”, and that there may be other ways to think about situations. This can free us from the tyranny of some of the old, familiar, unhelpful thought patterns that can automatically pop into mind.

Eventually, we may crucially come to realise, deep in our bones, that all thoughts are only mental events – including the thoughts that say they are not. Thoughts are not facts; and we are not our thoughts.

Thoughts and images can often provide us with an indication of what is going on deeper in the mind. It is also possible to get hold of them, and look them over from a number of different perspectives. By becoming more familiar with our habitual, automatic, unhelpful thinking patterns we can become more aware of, and change, the processes that lead us into unhelpful downward mood spirals.

Using the Breathing Space: Thoughts

At the end of the Breathing Space, if you’re still troubled by thoughts, here are some of the things you can do:

- Watch them come and go without feeling that you have to follow them.

- See your thought as a mental event rather than a fact. It may be true that this event often occurs with other feelings. It is tempting to think of it as being true. But it is still up to you to decide whether it is true and how you want to deal with it.
• Write them down. This can let you see them in a way which is less emotional and overwhelming. The pause between having the thought and writing it down can give you a moment to reflect on its meaning.

• For particularly difficult thoughts, it may be helpful intentionally to take another look at them later in a balanced open state of mind, as part of your sitting practice – let your ‘wise mind’ give its perspective.

**Being Mindfully Curious about Unhelpful Thinking Patterns**

• **Mind-reading:** “He thinks I’m stupid / boring / unattractive.”

• **Crystal-ball gazing:** “I’m not going to enjoy this.”

• **Over-estimating the negative:** “This is going to be a total disaster.”

• **Eternalising:** “I’ll never manage this.” “I’ll always feel like this.”

• **Expecting perfection:** “I / people shouldn’t ever make mistakes.”

• **Over-generalising:** “This is difficult – everything’s such an effort.”

• **Judgementalism:** “I wasn’t able to do that – I’m just not good enough.”

• **Taking the blame:** “When things go wrong, it’s my fault.”

**Relating to Thoughts: 1**

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

One course participant, Peter, who'd had a heart attack and wanted to prevent another one, came to a dramatic realisation of this one night when he found himself washing his car at 10 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 knowing 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 into 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 prioritise 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 recognising your thoughts as thoughts can free you from the distorted reality they often create and allow for clearer sightedness and a greater sense of manageability in your life.

The 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 if each time we recognise a thought as a thought when it arises and register its content and discern the strength of its hold on us and the accuracy of its content, then we let go of it and come back to our breathing and a sense of our body, we are strengthening mindfulness. We come to know ourselves better and become more accepting of ourselves not as we would like to be but as we actually are.

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living p. 69 - 70.

Relating to Thoughts: 2

The thinking level of the 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. 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.

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.

Take a few moments right now to look directly at the thoughts arising in your mind. As an exercise, imagine yourself sitting in a cinema watching an empty screen. Simply wait for thoughts to arise. Because you are not doing any thing 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 vanish upon inspection.

But what about the strong thoughts that affect us? We are watching, watching, watching and then all of a sudden - whoosh! - we are gone, lost in a thought. What is it 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 have the potential to drive us crazy, and they often do!

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

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

- Joseph Goldstein
The Cookie Thief

A woman was waiting at an airport one night
With several long hours before her flight
She hunted for a book in the airport shop
Bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop

She was engrossed in her book but happened to see
That the man beside her as bold as could be Grabbed a cookie or two from the bag between Which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene

She munched cookies and watched the clock
As this gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock
She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by
Thinking "If I wasn't so nice I'd blacken his eye"

With each cookie she took he took one too
And when only one was left she wondered what he'd do
With a smile on his face and a nervous laugh
He took the last cookie and broke it in half

He offered her half as he ate the other
She snatched it from him and thought "Oh brother
This guy has some nerve and he's also rude
Why he didn't even show any gratitude"

She had never known when she had been so galled
And sighed with relief when her flight was called
She gathered her belongings and headed for the gate
Refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate

She boarded the plane and sank in her seat
Then sought her book which was almost complete
As she reached in her baggage she gasped with surprise
There was her bag of cookies in front of her eyes

"If mine are here" she moaned with despair "Then the others were his and he tried to share" "Too late to apologize she realized with grief" That she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief

- Valerie Cox, A Matter of Perspective
Two Kinds of Intelligence

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields or knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.

The Essential Rumi

Home Practice for Week Following Session 6

1. Practise Mindfulness of Breath, Body, Sounds and Thoughts using the download or listening online for 6 days. Experiment with times of the day that seem to work for you in each day. Be flexible and open-minded. If you like, record your practice routine and reactions to it on the record form.

2. Practise the Three Minute Breathing Space three times each day. Either when you think of it or connect it to 3 regular activities you do, or places you are, everyday (for instance, on waking up and going to bed; before a programme you regularly watch; before eating; on first sitting down in your car; or on the bus; or at your desk.)

3. Whenever you notice yourself starting to feel stressed, practise the three minute breathing space to explore ways of responding with greater mindfulness and friendliness to yourself and the situation, paying particular attention to thoughts, as described earlier in the handout.

4. Notice how you are relating to your thoughts day-to-day, as well as in the meditation practice
**Home Practice Record**

If you want to, record on the Home Practice Record Form anything that comes up in your home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

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Session 7

How Can I Best Take Care of Myself?
Bringing Awareness to Times of Difficulty

By being actually present in more of our moments and making mindful decisions about what we really need in each of those moments, we can use activity to become more aware and alert, and to regulate our mode of mind.

For example, one of the simplest ways to take care of your physical and mental well-being is to take daily physical exercise – as a minimum, aim for three brisk, 10-minute walks a day and also, if at all possible, other types of exercise, such as a mindful stretching, yoga, swimming, jogging, and so on. Once exercise is in your daily routine, it is a readily available response in times of stress.

The breathing space provides a way to remind us to use activity to respond skilfully to stress.

Using the Breathing Space: The Action Step

After reconnecting with an expanded awareness in the breathing space, it may feel appropriate to take some considered action. In dealing with troubled feelings, the following activities may be particularly helpful:

1. Do something pleasurable.
2. Do something that will give you a sense of satisfaction or mastery.
3. Act mindfully.

Ask yourself: What do I need for myself right now? How can I best take care of myself right now?

Try some of the following:

1. **Do something pleasurable.**
   
   *Be kind to your body*: Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to your favourite food without feeling guilty; have your favourite hot drink; give yourself a facial or manicure.

   *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.

2. **Do something that gives you a sense of mastery, satisfaction, achievement, or control.**
Clean the house; clear out a cupboard or drawer; catch up with letter writing; do some work; pay a bill; do something that you been putting off doing; take some exercise (N.B. It's especially important to congratulate yourself whenever you complete a task or part of a task and to break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time.)

3. Act mindfully.
Focus your entire attention on just what you're doing right now; keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in the present (e.g., "Now I'm walking down the stairs... now I can feel the banister beneath my hand... now I'm walking into the kitchen... now I'm turning on the light..."); be aware of your breathing as you do other things; be aware of the contact of your feet with the floor as you walk.

Remember

1. Try to perform your action as an experiment. Try not to prejudge how you will feel after it is completed. Keep an open mind about whether doing this will be helpful in any way.

2. Consider a range of activities and don't limit yourself to a favoured few. Sometimes trying new behaviours can be interesting in itself. "Exploring" and "enquiring" often work against "withdrawal" and "retreat."

3. Don't expect miracles. Try to carry out what you have planned as best you can. Putting extra pressure on yourself by expecting this to alter things dramatically may be unrealistic. Rather, activities are helpful in building your overall sense of control in the face of shifts in your mood.

Stress Indicators

(warning signs)
e.g. Cramming too much in – sense of compulsion, headaches, irritability, going to bed later, sleeplessness, procrastination, etc.
## Actions/Strategies

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<th>Helpful</th>
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<td>e.g. Eating too much / not eating, more coffee/painkillers, unhelpful self-talk/guilt, avoidance, working harder, mindless telly, drink etc.</td>
<td>e.g. Listening to music, going for a run/physical exercise, turn telly off, talk with friends, do some tidying, have a bath, etc.</td>
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**Home Practice for Week Following Session 7**

1. From all the different forms of formal mindfulness practice that you have experienced in the course, settle on a form of practice that you intend to use on a regular, daily basis for the next 5 weeks. This will give you an opportunity to experience a form of practice which you could comfortably maintain after the course finishes next week. Record your reaction to this.

2. Practise the three-minute breathing space three times a day, at times that you have decided in advance.

3. Whenever you notice unpleasant thoughts or feelings practise the three-minute breathing space to address the difficulty and follow that with an action step.

4. Notice your own stress indicators and perhaps list them on the sheet on the previous page. Then consider what you tend to do when stressed. What is helpful, what is unhelpful? Again, you might list these on the sheet above. When you’ve done that, you might think about and prepare some strategies to use when you notice one or another stress indicator in your daily life.

_____________________________________________________________________________________

“You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life*
**Home Practice Record**

If you want to, record on the Home Practice Record Form anything that comes up in your home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

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Session 8

Acceptance and Change

The advantages of awareness, acceptance, and of mindfully responding to situations rather than running off pre-programmed automatic reactions, has been a recurring theme throughout this course.

Acceptance can lead on to some form of skilful action directed at bringing about desirable change in our inner or outer worlds. But there are also situations and feelings that it can be very difficult, even impossible, to change. In such situations, there is the danger that, by carrying on trying to solve an insoluble problem, or by refusing to accept the reality of the situation we are in, we may end up banging our heads against a brick wall, exhausting ourselves, and increasing our experience of helplessness, stress or low mood. In such situations we can still retain some sense of dignity and control by making a conscious, mindful, decision not to try to exert control, but rather to accept the situation as it is – if possible with a kindly attitude to the situation and our reactions to it.

Choosing not to act is less likely to increase our sense of helplessness and stress, than being forced to give up attempts at control after repeated failures.

The Serenity Prayer asks for:

Grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

Where do we find this grace, this courage, and this wisdom? At some level, we already have all of these qualities - our task is to real-ise them that is, make them real, and an excellent way to do that is through moment-by-moment mindful awareness

Five steps for practising mindfulness throughout the day:

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're doing, bring it back.
4. Repeat step number three several billion times.
5. Investigate your distractions
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 the sound like a ‘bell of mindfulness,’ reminding you to come back to yourself. 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, and the trucker in your food? Pay attention as you eat, consciously consuming this food for your physical health. Bring awareness to your food, seeing it, smelling it, tasting it, chewing it and swallowing it.

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, and legs as you walk. Are you rushing?

Bring awareness to listening and talking. 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?

When waiting in a queue, use the time to notice your standing and breathing. Feel the contact of your feet with the floor and how your body feels. Bring your attention to the rising and falling of your abdomen. Are you feeling impatient?
Be aware of any tightness in your body throughout the day. Breathe into it and, as you exhale, let go of excess tension. Is there tension stored anywhere in your body? Your neck, shoulders, stomach, jaw, or lower back... If possible stretch or do yoga or chi kung once a day. Focus attention on your daily activities – 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 five mindful breaths.

The Journey

One day you finally knew 
what you had to do, and began, 
though the voices around you 
kept shouting their bad advice – 
the whole house 
began to tremble 
and you felt the old tug at your ankles. 
“Mend my life!” 
each voice cried. 
But you didn’t stop. 
You knew what you had to do, 
though the wind pried its stiff fingers 
at the very foundations, 
though their melancholy 
was terrible. 
It was already late 
enough, and a wild night, 
and the road full of fallen branches and stones. 
But little by little, 
as you left their voices behind, 
the stars began to burn 
through the sheets of clouds, 
and there was a new voice 
which you slowly 
recognized as your own, 
that kept you company 
as you strode deeper and deeper 
into the world, 
determined to do 
the only thing you could do – 
determined to save 
the only life you could save.

Mary Oliver, from Dreamwork 
The future

Remember: weave your parachute every day, rather than leaving it to the time you have to jump from the plane!

Decide, right now, what your regular pattern of practice will be over the next weeks, and stick to it as best you can.

Also, remember the breathing space — regular practice provides a way of checking in with yourself a few times a day. Let it also be your first response in times of difficulty, stress, or unhappiness.

Whatever happens, KEEP BREATHING!

What did I learn?

What sacrifices have I made to do this course?

What are my biggest blocks or obstacles to continuing the practice?

What can I do to help myself not get stuck, and to continue practising?