

Mindfulness Course For Health & Well Being

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

PRACTICE RECORD & WORKBOOK

SESSION FOUR: Recognising Aversion

*He who binds to himself a joy
Does the wingéd life destroy.
But he who kisseth a joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.*

William Blake.

These hand-outs have been developed by Mindfulness Practitioners and Mindfulness Service User Volunteers, using a range of resources that include Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1991), Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale (2013), The Mindful Way through Depression by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2007) and The Mindful Way Workbook: An 8-Week Program to Free Yourself from Depression and Emotional Distress by John Teasdale, Mark Williams and Zindel Segal (2014).

SESSION 4 MAIN PRACTICES AND DISCUSSIONS

- Guided sitting
- Walking or stretching practice
- What is stress and how thinking may increase our suffering
- Responsive Three minute breathing space, responding to difficulty

WILD GEESE



You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours and I will tell you about mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clear blue air,

are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -

over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.

GUIDANCE ON HOME PRACTICE

Home practice is the way to help make yourself more aware of how you live your life. Practicing daily between sessions will help improve your confidence and skills in using mindfulness.

SESSION FOUR: Recognising Aversion

GUIDED PRACTICE

- Practice the 40 minute **Guided Sitting** for the next 7 days and record your experience, even if very briefly, on the recording sheets.
- Optionally you can alternate *Guided Sitting Meditation* with **Mindful Walking or Movement practice**.
- **Regular Three Minute Breathing Space** - continue to practice three times a day at the times that you have decided in advance. Record each time you do it on the practice record sheet and note any comments or difficulties.
- **Responsive Three minute Breathing Space** - practice WHENEVER YOU NOTICE UNPLEASANT or painful FEELINGS. Record each time you do it on the practice record sheet and note any comments, observations, or difficulties that may arise.

EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS:

- 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.

<p>An activity I will carry out mindfully is:</p> <hr/>
<p>During this activity I may pay particular attention to</p> <hr/>

WEEK 4 - Daily Practice Diary

Each time you begin this practice, remind yourself to **look out for experiences of aversion**:

- Move in close to any uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings, sensations or thoughts and notice how you are reacting to them, especially in the body.
- See if you can, little by little, come to recognise the effects of aversion. What does aversion feel like? Where and how do you experience it in the body? What effect does it have on our thinking?
- What is your own "aversion signature" (the characteristic pattern of body sensations by which you recognise that aversion is present)?
- As you get to know aversion, see if it's helpful to actually say to yourself, "Here's Aversion" whenever you notice it arising.
- From day to day, make a note of your observations in the spaces provided.

Day 1 Mindful Sitting Practice: When you encountered unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or sensations, where were the sensations most intense in the body?

What else did you notice during the sitting?

When I was worrying, I could feel my whole body tensing up, especially my face and shoulders.

Great noticing! Keep on exploring where the body reacts most intensely. It may be the same each time or it may be different. The act of bringing gentle, interested, mindful awareness to investigate is itself healing.

Investigating experience here means bringing a kind, interested attention to the experience itself, rather than thinking analytically about the experience.

Day 2 Mindful Sitting Practice: What differences in awareness did you notice between when you focussed on the breath and when you focussed on sound?

What else did you notice during the sitting?

I loved the sense of spaciousness and openness with sound!

Yes, it can feel like opening all the doors and windows of the mind! You are learning how to focus narrowly (the breath) and widely (sound awareness). Both are very useful. So is knowing how and when to move from one to the other.

Day 3 Mindful Sitting Practice: What happens when you resist unpleasant feelings? Does it feel pleasant or unpleasant?

What else did you notice during the sitting?

I'm puzzled. When I worry or ruminate about feeling sad, I'm focussing on my emotions - but rumination, etc., are said to be forms of aversion, which is about wanting to avoid experiencing unpleasant feelings. Can you clarify?

When we ruminate or worry, we are thinking about painful emotions - NOT actually feeling them directly.

Rumination and worry are subtle ways to avoid experiencing the full intensity of unpleasant and painful feelings. And the thinking is all about finding ways to be rid of the unwanted emotions or reduce any threat.

Day 4 Mindful Sitting: How did you respond to any sensations of physical discomfort?

What else did you notice during the sitting?

I find that if I sit for a long time, my legs fall asleep and my back aches. I don't want to move, but sometimes it gets too painful not to.

You might like to try deliberately, and very gently focusing your attention on the part of the body where the experience of discomfort is most intense, bringing awareness right into the sensations there. Continue to explore the sensations knowing that it's fine to bring attention back to the breath, or to move mindfully at any time.

Day 5 Mindful Sitting: When you became aware of aversion, how did you respond to it?

Anything else that struck you as interesting?

I tried to stop the sense of "not wanting" and pushing away, but it didn't work - in fact it just seemed to make things worse.

You've noticed something really important. Once we see the problems aversion can create, it's natural to try to get rid of it- but that's just piling on more aversion. The best way to respond to aversion is to recognise it for what it is (perhaps saying "aversion" to yourself), treat it with respect, and let it be there until it passes in its own time, continuing to explore how it affects your body, with as gentle and soft awareness as possible.

The skilful response to aversion is to

- (1) Recognise it for what it is,
- (2) Name it ("aversion"),
- (3) Treat it with respect, willingly allowing it to be present until it passes, as
- (4) You continue to explore, with gentle soft attention, how it affects your body.

Day 6 Mindful Sitting: Look out for how aversion usually affects your body- perhaps frowning, tightness in your chest or stomach, tension in your shoulders. This is your ("aversion signature") - write it in the box below.

My Aversion Signature is:

What else did you notice?

It varies a bit from time to time, but most often I feel aversion as a contraction of the forehead, tension in the shoulders and clenching my hands

Seeing all that is really helpful. You can now use that pattern of body sensations as a cue to tip you off that you are reacting with aversion- we'll say more about what you do then next week.

Recognising Aversion

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

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

- With spacing out, or boredom, so that we switch 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 we are having right now, or to avoid experiences that may be coming which we do not want.

As we discuss further in class, each of these ways of reacting can cause problems, particularly the tendency to react to unpleasant feelings with aversion. For now, the main issue is to become more aware of our experience, so that we can respond mindfully rather than react automatically.

Regularly practicing sitting meditation gives us many opportunities to notice when we have drifted away from awareness of the moment, to note with a friendly awareness whatever it was that took our attention away and to gently and firmly bring our attention back to our focus, 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*.

STRESS

Stress is a normal physical response to events that make us feel threatened or upset your balance in some way. When we sense danger - whether it's real or imagined - the body's defences kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the "fight-or-flight" reaction, or the *stress response*.

The stress response is the body's way of protecting us. In emergency situations, stress can save our life - giving the extra strength to defend ourselves for example, or spurring us to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident.

The Body's Stress Response

When we perceive a threat, the nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones rouse the body for emergency action.

The heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and the senses become sharper. These physical changes increase our strength and stamina, speed our reaction time, and enhance our focus - preparing us to either fight or flee from the danger at hand.

The body doesn't distinguish between physical and psychological threats. When we are stressed over a busy schedule, an argument with a friend, a traffic jam, or a mountain of bills, the body reacts just as strongly as if we are facing a life-or-death situation.

Feeling constantly stressed causes us different problems, which in turn cause more stress.

We can't stop challenging life situations happening - but we can change how we respond to stressors.

Reacting Versus Responding

REACTING

Bottling up feelings

Ignoring the fact that we're stressed

Which may lead to:

Unhelpful coping mechanisms:

- Overworking
- Overeating
- Hyperactivity
- Alcohol
- Cigarettes
- Drugs
- Overspending
- Arguing/fighting

Leading to mind-body exhaustion

RESPONDING

MINDFULNESS LEADS TO:

Awareness of thoughts

Awareness of feelings

Awareness of the body, muscle tension, breathing

Awareness of the full content of experience

Leads to the opportunity for:

- Active coping
- Problem solving
- Emotion-focused strategies
- Acceptance of difficulties/limitations
- Planning/reframing
- Looking at things differently

Leads to re-establishing balance more quickly

USING THE RESPONSIVE BREATHING SPACE

Responsive to Unpleasant Experiences
For use when troubled by thoughts & feelings

STEP 1. BECOMING AWARE

Observe - bring the focus of awareness to your inner experience and notice what is happening in your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations.

DESCRIBE, ACKNOWLEDGE, IDENTIFY - put experiences into words, for example saying in your *mind* "A feeling of anger is arising" or "Self-critical thoughts are here". Turning toward any sense of emotional discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging their presence. Perhaps quickly scanning the body to pick up any sensations of tightness or bracing.

STEP 2. GATHERING

Gently redirect your full attention to focus on the breath. Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out. Try noting 'at the back of your mind': "Breathing in ... Breathing out" or counting: "Inhaling, one ... exhaling one; ... inhaling two ..." etc..

Using the breathing to anchor yourself in the present.

STEP 3. EXPANDING

Allow your attention to expand to the whole body - especially to 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 feel it".

Become aware of and adjust posture and facial expression. As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.

Summary of Intentions for the Breathing Space

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

The key skill in using Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is to maintain awareness in the moment.

Nothing else.

STAYING PRESENT DURING YOUR PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Remember to use your body as a way to increase 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 practice 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. Practice again and again bringing your attention back to your body. This basic effort, which paradoxically is 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; J Goldstein (1993): Insight Meditation