



Mindfulness Course For Health & Well Being

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

HANDOUT & PRACTICE GUIDANCE SESSION SIX: Thoughts Are Not Facts

Kindness

*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
You must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.*

You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice

Catches the thread of all sorrows

And you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,

Only kindness that ties your shoes

And sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,

Only kindness that raises its head

From the crowd of the world to say

It is I you have been looking for,

And then goes with you everywhere

Like a shadow or a friend.

Naomi Shihab Nye

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 6 MAIN PRACTICES AND DISCUSSIONS

- Sitting with thoughts - cinema screen, waterfall, river or clouds in sky
- Seeing thoughts as just thoughts - "John the Caretaker"
- Mindful Movement
- The moods, thoughts and alternative viewpoints exercise
- The Breathing Space - thought door
- Discuss Relapse Signatures

The Journey

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice --
though 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
with 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.

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 SIX: Thoughts Are Not Facts

GUIDED PRACTICE

- Practice with a selection of guided meditations for at least 40 minutes every day. Why not try from a wide range of mindfulness practices on www.freemindfulness.org or on the Insight Timer APP
- Continue to practice the regular breathing space three times a day
- Practice the Responsive Three minute Breathing Space whenever you notice unpleasant feelings or thoughts. When thoughts threaten to overwhelm, taking a breathing space (no matter how briefly) is always the first step. Try the THOUGHT DOOR when working with unpleasant experiences. Perhaps use some of the ideas on page 9 of this hand-out, "Ways you can see your thoughts differently."

EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS:

Remind yourself to keep bringing moment-to-moment awareness to everyday activities. Whenever you remember, check-in to your thoughts, gently acknowledging what is going through the mind and see if you can perhaps bring an attitude of allowing and letting be.



*If we give up evaluation, we give up downward social comparing.
If you never assume importance, you never lose it.*

Lao Tse, The Way of Life

Session 6 Thoughts Are Not Facts Practice Diary

Day 1:

What was the effect of reminding yourself to recognise thoughts as thoughts by pausing and saying "thinking" to yourself before returning to the breath?

What else did you notice?

I realised that "coming back to the breath" had become a bit automatic. It felt good to pause and take the time to see things more clearly and let go of thinking more consciously.

That's good - the simple (but often) not easy movement of pausing, recognising, labelling, and letting go of thoughts, repeated over and over again, is a very powerful way to build a different relationship to thoughts.

Day 2:

What happened when you made thoughts themselves the focus of your attention? Were any of the images or metaphors helpful?

Anything else?

When I first tried to focus on thoughts, they disappeared completely! Then, when I focussed on them in a movie, I could only remain "in the audience" for a few thoughts before I got drawn into the action. When I came to, I began thinking. I'll never be able to do this.

These are all very common experiences. It can be really helpful to include thoughts about the practice (such as "I'll never be able to do this") in the practice - to see them as passing mental events too. That way they won't or discourage you so much. You might play with relating to them as voices from the seat behind you in the theatre.

That reminds me of something that happened one day last week. I was really struggling to concentrate on my meditation. My mind was all over the place with stuff that's going on at work. I kept saying to myself, come back to the breath, come back to the breath, come back to the breath! I really thought it wasn't doing any good - maybe actually making me worse. Then something happened. I realised "this is not doing me any good" was another thought - an insidious, hidden thought - and so was "it's making me worse". I'd been looking for thoughts on the stage, but these didn't appear on the stage at all. They came from somewhere else entirely, just as you said. But once I'd seen them, it was amazing - the feeling of hopelessness dissolved.

Absolutely..... It's as if some of those thoughts come in disguise, so you don't even see them creeping into your consciousness - they're too well camouflaged against the background of feelings, and then they get caught up in the reaction of "not wanting to have" these feelings. It can be so difficult, can't it? It can be really helpful to take a moment, listen for the "voice from behind you" and shift attention into the body to discover what emotions might be giving birth to these subtle thoughts.

Day 3:

How did you respond to any charged, intrusive or persistent thoughts you encountered? What happened?

Anything else?

Worries about a meeting my boss tomorrow kept forcing their way into my mind. I kept labelling them "thinking" and coming back to the breath, but they still just kept on coming back.

Well done for persisting in that way. You might find it helpful to remember that emotionally charged thoughts are just the visible tip of the iceberg of most emotional "packages." The bulk of the 'berg - the body sensations and feelings - are submerged. Many people find this general rule helpful: when emotion related thoughts are around, acknowledge the thoughts, then drop down into the body to bring the awareness to the sensations and feelings that give birth to the thoughts.

Mindfulness invites us to see thoughts as part of a whole package.
We focus directly on the feeling that gives birth to the thought, rather than getting tangled in thoughts themselves.

Mindfully, gently we investigate

"What am I feeling in this moment?"

Day 4:

What was your attitude towards the thoughts you encountered? Were you impatient, irritated, wishing they weren't there, or accepting, interested, or just neutral toward them?

Anything else?

I surprised myself. Streams of worries and self-critical thoughts were cascading through my mind, as usual. But a corner of my mind remembered I could look at the thoughts. Then I became interested in them rather than swept away with them.

Wonderful! That's the crucial shift in perspective the practice asks of us - mindfulness gives us another place to stand. When thoughts and feelings seem like a huge torrent, and it feels like we're being hurled down with the force of the water, we move to stand behind the waterfall. We watch the thoughts and feelings cascade past. They are very close. You can feel the force of them, but they are not you.

As always, kindness is the foundation of skilful practice.

Kindness to your thoughts means gently reminding yourself that thoughts are not the enemy - allowing them to be here,

Holding them in a friendly, interested awareness.

Kindness to yourself means allowing yourself to be just as you already are in this moment.

Day 5 :

Make a note of any familiar, well-worn patterns of thinking you recognised. What effect did they have?

Anything else?

So many old routines: I'm not good enough. I can't do this. What will happen if.....? All the usual suspects

Humour is a great ally here. Once you can see these old patterns for what they really are, give them a wry smile, and welcome them in, however slightly. In this way, you begin to strip them of their power to upset and control you.

Day 6:

What form do your thoughts take? Do you experience them as words, images or pictures, or wordless, imageless "meanings"? If words, what is the tone of the voice?

Anything else?

I seemed to experience a mixture. Some thoughts came clearly as words in my head - often nagging voice. Other times there were images: when I felt rejected I saw an image of friends huddled together laughing and talking among themselves, without me.

Some people think mainly in words, others mainly in pictures. Sometimes there's a sense of meaning without words or images. When the same emotions keep coming back, it's always worth checking for any images that seem to crystallize the essence of the feeling - they might be keeping the emotion going.

"It's amazing to observe how much power we give unknowingly to uninvited thoughts:

'Do this, say that, remember, plan, obsess, judge.'

They have potential to drive us quite crazy, and often they do!"

- Joseph Goldstein.

THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS

THEME: Relating differently to thoughts. We free ourselves from the ruminative doing mode when we clearly see negative moods as passing states of mind, and negative thinking as the distorted products of those mind states. It can be liberating to realise that our thoughts are just thoughts - even the ones that try to insist that they are facts.

Our thoughts can have very powerful effects on how we feel and what we do. Often those thoughts are triggered and run off quite automatically. By becoming aware, over and over again, of the thoughts and images passing through the mind, and letting them go as we return our attention to the breath and the present moment, it is possible to get some distance and perspective on them. This can allow us to see that there may be other ways to think about situations, freeing us from the tyranny of the old thought patterns that automatically "pop into mind". Most importantly, we may eventually 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 provide us with an indication of what is going on deeper in the mind; we can "get hold of them" so that we can look them over from a number of different perspectives; by becoming very familiar with our own "top ten" of habitual, automatic, unhelpful thinking patterns, we can become more easily aware of (and change) the processes that might lead us into downward mood spirals.

It is particularly important to become aware of thoughts that may block or undermine practice, such as "There's no point in doing this," or "It's not going to work so why bother?" Such pessimistic, hopeless thought patterns are one of the most characteristic features of depressed mood states, and one of the main factors that stop us taking actions that would help us get out of those states. It follows that it is particularly important to recognise such thoughts as "negative thinking" and not automatically give up on efforts to apply skilful means to change how we feel.

Adapted from: *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy* by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale (2013).



The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.

Albert Einstein.

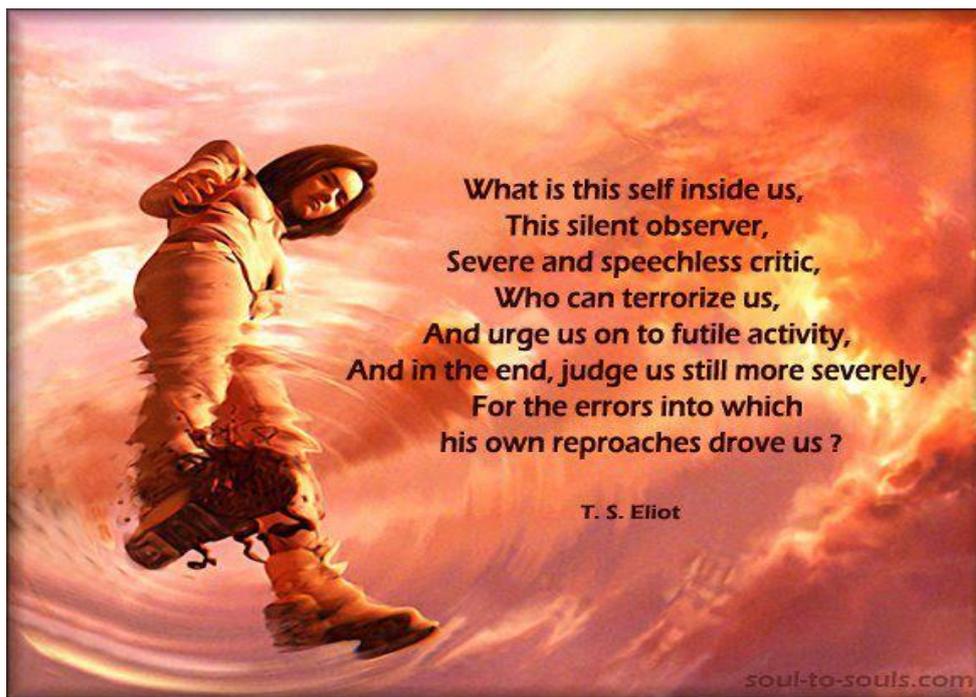
WAYS WE CAN SEE OUR THOUGHTS DIFFERENTLY

Here are some of the things you can do with your thoughts:

1. Just watch them come in and leave, without feeling that you have to follow them.
2. See if it is possible to notice the feelings that give rise to the thoughts: the "context" in which your thoughts are but one link in a chain of events.
3. View 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.
4. Write your thoughts down on paper. This lets you see them in a way that is less emotional and overwhelming. Also, the pause between having the thought and writing it down can give you a moment to respond to it differently.
5. For particularly difficult thoughts, it may be helpful to take another look at them intentionally, in a balanced, open state of mind, as part of your sitting practice. Let your "wise mind" give its perspective, perhaps labelling the feeling out of which, it arises, and holding a sense of curiosity, as best you can: "Ah, here is sadness"; "Here is the voice of depression"; "Here is the familiar harsh and critical voice."
- 6.

The keynote attitude to take with your thoughts is gentle interest and curiosity.

Adapted in part from M. Fennell, in Hawton, Salkovskis, Kirk, and Clark, 1989. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Psychiatric Problems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press).



WORKING WISELY WITH UNHAPPINESS OR DISTRESS

SEEING CLEARLY (NOTICING THE FIRST SIGNS OF UNHAPPINESS OR DISTRESS)

This worksheet offers an opportunity to increase your awareness of what happens for you when unhappiness or distress appears. The aim is, carefully and with curiosity, to investigate the thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and patterns of behaviour that tell you that you are feeling unhappy or distressed.

What triggers unhappiness or distress for you?

Triggers can be external (things that happen to you) or internal (e.g., thoughts, feelings, memories, concerns). Look out for small triggers as well as large ones—sometimes something that appears quite trivial can spark our feeling of upset or distress.

What sort of thoughts run through your mind when you first feel unhappiness or distress?

What emotions arise?

What happens in your body?

What do you do, or feel like doing?

Are there any old habits of thinking or behaviour that might unwittingly keep you stuck in unhappy or distressing states (e.g., ruminating, trying to suppress or turn away from painful thoughts and feelings, struggling with it instead of accepting and exploring it)?

STEPPING BACK FROM THOUGHTS?

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 patient, 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 through your mind.

On the other hand, when such a thought comes up, if you are able to step back from it and see it clearly, then you will be able to 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 more clear sightedness and a greater sense of manageability in your life.

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



Adapted from: *Full Catastrophe Living* (pp 69-70) by Jon Kabat-Zinn

USING THE BREATHING SPACE - EXTENDED INSTRUCTIONS

The Breathing Space - 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.

THE THOUGHT DOOR: What do I think are the implications of this event? What conclusions am I drawing from this situation? What do I think others will think of my failure? What does this say about me? What do I think this means for my future?

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 is to maintain awareness in the moment.

Dear Judging Mind

Dear judging mind.
How dare you find
Fault in others.
How dare you lay blame,
Secretive aggression under cover.
Criminal at large.

Dear judging mind.
How dare you find
Fault in me.
How dare you point out
All the flawed things you see.
An uncomfortable barrage.

Dear judging mind.
How dare you find
Fault in yourself.
Target and arrow, your chances of escape
Are narrow.

Judge, jury and executioner,
You are guilty as charged.

I've decided,
All that being said.
(Against my Lawyer's advice,
I hasten to add.)

That the next time I notice
That you're in my head.
I'm not going to attack you.
I'm going to smile instead.

I know we've had our differences.
I know you can be a pain.
But if we keep on like this
It's to nobody's gain.

So, let's make a pact!
I'll be civil when I spot you,
I'm not going to over-react.
And in exchange all you have to do
Is keep on being you.
Deal?

Maybe in time you'll develop a kinder side
But as far as I'm concerned
I accept you.

By Peter Morgan