



**Mindfulness Based
Stress Reduction**
8 week programme
Course Handbook

Mindfulness is...a turning towards life.... To live life as if each moment is important, as if each moment counted and could be worked with, even if it is a moment of pain, sadness, despair or fear.

Jon Kabat Zinn -
Full Catastrophe Living

Mindfulness Approaches

Course Handbook

Welcome to this course handbook. This will accompany you during the eight week course and contains notes, diaries, quotes and readings to provide a background and support to your learning.

You may find it helpful to read the relevant session notes **after** taking part in that session, and you will find diaries for recording your reflections and specific homework tasks.

We would recommend that you do not read ahead to enable you to experience each session fresh, without any prior expectations. It can also be helpful not to get too involved in reading for the duration of the course, as this can move us into more of a cognitive or thinking mode of processing, which may interfere with the experiential process.

We will suggest some reading materials, and you may wish to reserve those until the end of the course. Alternatively, you may find that it can enrich your learning experience if you chose to read perhaps one or two pages or re-read some of the poems we will be using, and to use these for reflection.

This handbook will serve as a future reference point, as a memory book of what we will cover, and catalogue of resources which you can follow up at a later stage. It can also serve the purpose of a journal to chart your reflections throughout the course and thus deepen your learning.

We hope that you experience an enriching journey of transformation and discovery with us over the coming weeks.

Charlotte Procter

Alistair Wilson

July 2008

This version of the **Mindfulness Scotland** workbook was adapted in 2017 from the original and offered for use by NHS GG & C MBSR teachers as part of the **staff wellbeing initiative** led by the Health Improvement team, in collaboration with Mindfulness Scotland. Mindfulness Scotland have kindly granted permission for its publication in this form via the NHS GG&C Mindfulness App. **It cannot be used with other groups, or by other teachers without permission.**

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Guidelines for Participation and Practice

Background and aims

This eight week course is based upon the programmes of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, developed in the United States by Jon Kabat Zinn, and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, developed in the UK and Canada by Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Segal. It is also built up from our own personal experiences of mindfulness practice and we hope that it will provide rich sources of inspiration for you.

The aims of the course are to help you to develop an in-depth personal experience of mindfulness and to build the foundations of a sustained personal practice, with a view to applying this in your life and perhaps also in your professional work.

The course is primarily experiential, and we would like to invite you to immerse yourself as best as you can into this process. This means adopting an attitude of curiosity to your experience in the moment and suspending judgment as to whether or not you think these approaches will work for you. It means letting go of opinions and ideas, and putting aside for a while any plans you may hold about applying these skills in a personal or professional capacity when you have finished the course.

Preparation and attendance

We would very much like to encourage you to attend all of the group sessions, if at all possible. You are invited to wear loose and comfortable clothing for the course, appropriate for some gentle body movement and stretching. If you already use a meditation bench, stool or cushions, you are welcome to bring them along with you. There will be chairs we can use and yoga mats for the stretching and floor exercises.

If you are concerned about your health or ability to engage in some gentle stretching and floor based exercises based upon yoga, we would advise that you discuss this with your GP and that you are able to work safely within your own limitations, opting out of any exercises which you do not feel confident about. However, these exercises have been developed in programmes for people with a variety of health conditions, and will be relatively gentle. The primary aim is to practice movement with awareness whilst being fully sensitive to our body's needs in the moment.

We would like to suggest some background reading, although would caution against reading taking the place of practice as it can move us too much into thinking rather than experiencing. Reading one or two pages at a time may inspire us and support our practice, or you may choose to read nothing until the end of the course, allowing the experience to resonate deeply on its own. Please see the list of 'reading to get you started' at the end of this manual for some suggestions.

Personal practice and attitudes

We would like to remind you of the importance of personal practice and a commitment to around 30 – 40 minutes of daily mindfulness practice for the duration of this course. The more you are able to put into the course, the more stable your practice will feel at the end and the more confident you will feel about taking these approaches forward into your life.

It can be challenging to change our habits and to practice a new skill. We may find it difficult to carve out a regular practice time, and may need to negotiate with family, friends or colleagues to ensure that we protect this dedicated space and time, free from the distractions of everyday life.

We may find that, at times, we strongly resist this change in emphasis and habit in our lives, however strong our intention may be to develop these skills. We may notice our attempts to avoid the opportunity to practice, to find countless reasons why not to, and endless lists of other more important things which demand our time. We may find that we struggle with being quietly in our own company without distractions and without any obvious agendas; we may feel bored; we may fall asleep! We will notice how the ordinary mind is so used to distraction and dulled awareness and how much it resists change.

So, it is important to remind ourselves of why we are doing this in the first place and what our intentions are. This can provide a sense of direction and purpose which can propel us forwards, if ever we encounter difficulties or if our commitment wavers. You may find it helpful to reflect on the questions below before starting the course. You can look back to your responses as you progress as a reminder of your intention.

It is helpful to adopt an attitude of curiosity and open mindedness for the duration of the eight weeks, and to suspend judgment as to whether or not this will work for you. At the end of the course, you can reflect and make your own decision as to whether or not you will continue with the practices you have learned.

You will benefit from commencing this journey with the spirit of patience and commitment. This means not knowing what the outcome will be, or what will unfold, but trusting in the practices you are engaging in. It also means persevering, even when you feel you are making no progress or when things feel difficult.

Jon Kabat Zinn has described these practices as like “weaving a parachute”. We don’t want to start practicing when we are in difficulty and need to jump out of the plane. We want to be weaving the parachute day and night, just hoping that when we need the support of mindfulness practice, it has a better chance of supporting us.

What is my intention?

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 and in the world?

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?

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a life skill which can deepen our sense of well-being and fulfillment. It involves paying attention to what is occurring in our present moment experience, with an attitude of openness and non-judgmental acceptance. It engages all of our senses as we open to our entire experience, becoming aware of our body, emotions, thoughts and the external environment.

It is about “coming back to our senses”, being in touch with ourselves, with others and our surroundings in the present moment. It is a natural and an intuitive state of presence in which we can feel more connected, real and alive.

Mindfulness is a state of being which is accessible to every one of us. It is also a skill which we can cultivate more deeply in our lives. Some experience of mindful presence will have been felt by all of us during some moments of our lives, but perhaps we did not know what it was when we experienced it.

Perhaps we have felt this in more peaceful moments, when we have been present in places of natural beauty, and simply “breathing it in”, whether this was a beautiful sunset or standing next to the sea or a waterfall. Perhaps we have felt this in some heightened moments, being with a loved one, during the birth of a child, or even being present with someone who is dying. These are the moments we may be more likely to remember and are less likely to be distracted by other more trivial concerns. Maybe we have just felt qualities of such mindful presence when we have been fully engaged in an activity which we love, playing a musical instrument, dancing, riding a horse, or sitting on a sunny plaza on holiday, sipping a cappuccino.

We will be aware that this is not perhaps our usual mode of operation. During our stressful lives, our attention is usually dispersed. We are usually busy juggling a number of tasks and pre-occupations at the same time, and none of our actions or thoughts receives our full attention. We are usually leaping stressfully from one thing to the next, like a monkey in a tree, grabbing at things that interest us or demand our attention, then drifting on to something else, being distracted, day-dreaming, being caught up in our thoughts and worries about what happened yesterday and what we need to do tomorrow, only giving things half of our attention, not hearing fully what is said to us, pre-occupied with our own issues and concerns, judging our experiences constantly as good or bad according to our own preferences and often reacting against the way things actually are. This is our ordinary state of mind and not exactly a peaceful one. We can spend a good part of our lives like this, not being fully present and therefore missing most of the moments in which we live.

This habitual state of mind and being is unfortunately very familiar to us. We find we are living our lives on a sort of automatic pilot, relatively ungrounded, cut-off, out of touch with ourselves, our bodies and emotions. It sometimes feels as if we are “living in our heads” and our bodies are just vehicles for getting us around. Our stressful lives certainly contribute to this way of being, but when it becomes our habitual state, it can also be associated with a number of stress related health problems. Learning to reverse these habits and to cultivate positive ways of being will be greatly beneficial in making our lives happier and more wholesome.

When we can get in touch with qualities of mindfulness, we will feel a sense of coming back home to ourselves in a more meaningful way. We may find we can get in touch with a sense of brightness, clarity of purpose, playfulness, creativity and inner peace. It is said that mindfulness practitioners develop a more optimistic stance in their lives, and a courage which enables them to work with rather than avoid life's challenges. Certainly, mindfulness is not just about having more blissful moments, it is about being more fully present in our lives, remaining curious, embracing all of our experiences, and most importantly, changing the relationship we have towards our suffering.

Definitions of mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally. This kind of awareness nurtures greater awareness, clarity and acceptance of present moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of these moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realise the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.

Jon Kabat Zinn, '**Full Catastrophe Living**'

Mindfulness refers to keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality. It is the miracle by which we master and restore ourselves.

Thich Nhat Hanh, '**The Miracle of Mindfulness**'

Mindfulness is a universal human capacity – a way of paying attention to the present moment unfolding of experience – that can be cultivated, sustained and integrated into everyday life through in-depth inquiry, fuelled by the ongoing discipline of meditation practice. Its central aim is the relief of suffering and the uncovering of our essential nature.

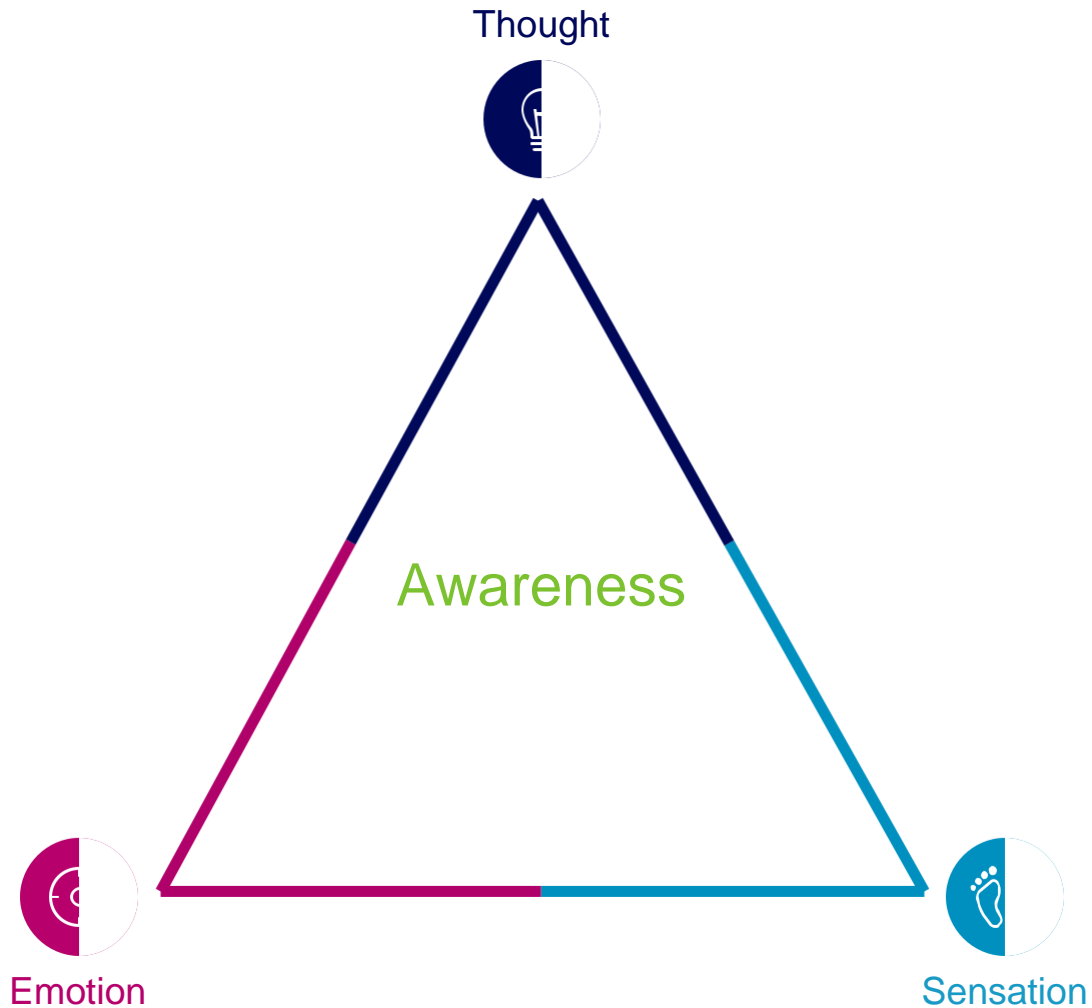
Saki Santorelli, '**Heal Thyself**'

Mindfulness is... a turning towards life.... To live life as if each moment is important, as if each moment counted and could be worked with, even if it is a moment of pain, sadness, despair or fear.

Jon Kabat Zinn '**Full Catastrophe Living**'

Triangle of awareness

When we experience an event with mindfulness, we can observe which of these domains of awareness is the strongest or the most dominant. We can try to create more balance in our awareness by asking about the other domains and trying to be aware of all three.



Useful poetry:

If I Had My Life to Live Over, Nadine Stair (85 year old)

The Summer Day, Mary Oliver, From *New and Selected Poems*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1992

Session one: Beginner's mind

Sometimes, when mindfulness arises it can feel as if we are seeing things for the first time with a freshness that can take us by surprise. This quality of mind has been referred to as “beginner’s mind”, and has some of the qualities of wonder and appreciation that a happy child can have in experiencing new things. When we walk past a tree, we are not stuck with the concept of “tree” that we hold in our minds (“I know what trees look like”), instead, we really see that particular tree with its blossoms, gnarled bark and unique individuality. In this way, mindfulness can help us to engage more fully with life, with its sheer impact and beauty, and can shake us from our habitual thinking, awakening a sense of awe and wonder. Even the most ordinary things can be seen with new eyes and we can appreciate the uniqueness and preciousness of all things.

When we are learning the practice of mindfulness, we are trying to foster this quality of “beginner’s mind”. A meditation teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, said that “in the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, in the expert’s mind there are few”. He was describing how we can close down our experience when we think we know, when we engage in the world through our habitual thoughts and concepts and when we have a jaded sense that “we have seen it all before”.

The raisin exercise

This is an opportunity to awaken a sense of “beginner’s mind” by exploring an object that is very familiar to us, as if we have never seen it before! It shows us how meditation practice can be very grounded in our every-day experience, in this case the act of eating. We practice opening up to this experience through our senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste, and by slowing down in a way that we can pay close attention to our experience.

We notice something about how the mind is constantly trying to distract us from being present, with a variety of thoughts and comments, judgments about liking and disliking, or how well we are doing, memories and associations, some of which can enhance the experience and some which pull us away.

We can reflect on how different this experience is from the way that we normally eat raisins (mindlessly by the handful!). We can also reflect on the quality and intensity of the taste when we are really present to experience it.

We may notice something about how we pay attention and the quality of awareness. There may be moments of dullness or distraction. There may be moments of clarity. Our perception of time may change in some way as we open up to the present moment of experiencing and tasting. We recognise that by paying attention we can deepen and enrich our moment by moment experience of living.

Automatic pilot

The raisin exercise reminds us that most of the time we can be lost in a form of “automatic pilot”, in which we are not fully paying attention. We may be driven by our agendas and habits of busyness without being fully aware of what we are doing. We may often be doing something and at the same time thinking of something else – perhaps worrying, or planning the next thing to do, judging or evaluating – literally being lost in thought, and less present in our real lives! We can actually lose significant chunks of our lives in this way, because we are not present for them. And, these are not just moments, they are our life! If we miss these moments, we miss our life.

When we are lost in automatic pilot, we are also unprotected – like a guard on duty falling asleep. We are more likely to “get our buttons pushed” and to respond in an unhelpful reactive manner. We are more likely to fall victim to our old habits of thinking and behaviour, which can increase the risk of worsening mood states, whether that is anxiety and stress, anger or depression.

With awareness, we can break out of these patterns and bring a more creative response to our experiences. We will find that we have more choice as to how we respond. We can become more aware of our thoughts, our emotions and our behaviour and what experiences push us into reactivity. We do not have to be continually trapped by the same old “mental ruts” that have caused us problems in the past.

The body scan

In the same way that we focused on the raisin, in this practice, we move our attention around the different parts of our body, as a means of anchoring ourselves in the present moment of sensing and experiencing. We will notice how complex the body is – a whole universe of sensation! The practice includes precise awareness of our detailed body parts, the sensations on the surface of the skin, the feelings from inside the body, including sensations perhaps of body organs and bones and the integrated movements of the breath through the body. We may notice sensations of discomfort, sensations of intensity, or sensations which are so subtle or almost absent from our awareness. We may also become aware of emotional responses, thoughts or stories associated with different body parts – our bodies have histories and our relationship to our body can be complicated. In this way we can start to see how rich and illuminating this practice can be.

We may start to notice more about the different ways in which we pay attention and the different qualities of awareness that are possible. We will learn about how attention can be very flexible. At one moment, we are paying detailed attention to a small body part, such as our big toe. At other moments, we are holding larger areas of the body in our awareness, such as both of our legs, from the ankles to the hips. We may start to notice the differences in experience if we are holding a mental image of the body in our mind’s eye (what we think our left arm looks like), or if we are just experiencing the pure sensations themselves.

Our aim here is to stay with the experience of the body in the present moment, allowing sensations to flow in and out of our awareness, as best we can. There is no right or wrong way for things to feel – there is no expectation that we will even feel relaxed. This is different to a relaxation exercise. We are just feeling what we are feeling, as much as we can allow ourselves to.

Through this practice, we start to notice a lot about the habits of the mind. Yes, we will get distracted – many times! We start to notice that the mind is addicted to distraction! We may not even notice that we are distracted for some time. But, when we do, we can congratulate ourselves for noticing, and we can invite our attention back, however many times is required. We may notice that the mind does not really want to be present a lot of the time – we may even find that it falls asleep! Sleepiness is commonly experienced when people start with this practice – perhaps we are just very tired, and we really notice this when we stop all of our activity for a while. It may also seem strange at first to practice wakefulness in this lying down position.

So much can be experienced in the practice of the body scan, and it can be a difficult practice for many people, especially if their relationship to their body and its history is complicated. If we choose to take forward this practice on a regular basis, we will start to notice a positive shift in our relationship to our body, through enhanced body awareness, perhaps in the development of self-kindness, appreciation and gratitude for our body and what it does for us. We may find that we can develop a more positive response to experiences of pain or suffering in the body and protect it from being the battle-ground of our anger, resentment, frustration and judgmental responses. More than anything, our bodies are the homes of our sensory organs, and it is through the felt sense of our bodies that we can deeply experience our lives.

Practicing mindfulness of the body

As we continue to practice the body scan, we will find that we can enhance the awareness of our bodies at different times during our day. We can bring awareness to our posture, being aware of what position we are in and what our bodies are doing at any given time. We may benefit from a brief body awareness scan, noticing any areas of tension and allowing them to release. We could try to ground ourselves in the present moment by bringing awareness to our feet as they touch the earth, and noticing parts of the body in contact with the furniture we rest upon. We could bring our attention to whatever tasks we are engaged in and notice how our bodies connect to those tasks through our senses: our sense of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. These brief and grounding body awareness practices can be invaluable at times when we are feeling stressed. They only take a few moments and can bring us back in touch with ourselves.

Any exercise, if practiced sensibly, can bring us into mindful awareness of our bodies. The practice of yoga and T'ai Chi can be particularly helpful in fostering a mindful body awareness. Even when we are walking, instead of focusing too rigidly upon our intended destination, we can allow our awareness to focus upon the sensations in the body and limbs as we move.

Mindfulness and eating

Mindfulness is:

- Deliberately paying attention, non-judgmentally.
- Mindfulness encompasses both internal processes and external environments.
- Mindfulness is being aware of what is present for you mentally, emotionally and physically in each moment.
- With practice, mindfulness cultivates the possibility of freeing yourself of reactive, habitual patterns of thinking, feeling and acting.
- Mindfulness promotes balance, choice, wisdom and acceptance of what is.

Mindful eating is:

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting your own inner wisdom.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor and taste.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, dislikes or neutral attitudes) without judgement.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.

Someone who eats mindfully:

- Acknowledges that there is no right or wrong way to eat but varying degrees of awareness surrounding the experience of food.
- Accepts that his/her eating experiences are unique.
- Is an individual who by choice, directs his/her awareness to all aspects of food and eating on a moment-by-moment basis.
- Is an individual who looks at the immediate choices and direct experiences associated with food and eating: not to the distant health outcome of that choice.
- Is aware of and reflects on the effects caused by unmindful eating.
- Experiences insight about how he/she can act to achieve specific health goals as he/she becomes more attuned to the direct experience of eating and feelings of health.
- Becomes aware of the interconnection of earth, living beings, and cultural practices and the impact of his/her food choices has on those systems.

Home practice – Week one

Beginner's mind

Formal mindfulness practice

- Practice the guided body scan **each day**.
- **Watch out for any expectations** you may have about what “should” be happening and any obstacles or perceived difficulties getting in the way of your practice. Watch out for judgments about getting it right, or about it not working.
- **Try to suspend judgment**. Simply come back to the practice – experience whatever you are experiencing – there is no right or wrong experience – just keep practicing it.

Informal mindfulness practice

- **Choose a routine activity each day** that you can practice with mindful awareness. You may wish to choose an activity during which you are habitually rushing or un-aware. This might be something like, cleaning your teeth, taking your shower in the morning, taking the dog for a walk, driving the car, washing up dishes, chopping vegetables for a meal. Whatever you choose, it can be helpful to focus on this same activity for the duration of the week. Practice coming into the present moment with all of your senses, fully engaged, as you take part in this exercise.
- **Bring awareness to eating** and look out for opportunities to practice eating in a mindful manner. This may be choosing to eat one meal with awareness – focusing on sensation, colour, texture, taste. Or perhaps you can choose to pay attention to one mindful mouthful.

Reflection and learning

- You may find it helpful to **keep a practice log** of your various practices and reflections. Use the home practice log on the next page to record your experiences, and to note anything that comes up that you may wish to ask about at the next meeting.
- This is a **personal record** and doesn't need to be shared.

Finding time:

Although you may benefit from longer practices, a shorter practice, or a couple of shorter practices at different times are better than none at all.

Remember to be gentle with yourself and let go of specific expectations

Home practice log

During your formal or informal practices of mindfulness, bring awareness to **physical sensations**, **thoughts** and **emotions** and your responses to them. Practice bringing awareness to distraction and note where your mind habitually goes.

Day/date	Mindfulness practice	Comments about what you noticed...

Session Two: Overcoming Obstacles and Non-striving

Overcoming obstacles

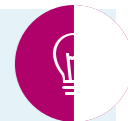
It is always very interesting to explore the obstacles and difficulties which have come up over the week and to recognise how universal they are. This is all powerful learning about the nature of the mind and the nature of our habitual tendencies. There is no need here for despondency; it is all a learning process of becoming more aware and awake in our lives.

We will be learning about working with distraction, with boredom, with sleepiness, with managing the demands in our life which seem determined to stop us from practicing. We will be working around these demands and working out how we can carve out a slot for these practices. We will be learning perhaps how difficult it may be for us to engage in activities with no obvious goal or purpose – a sort of “non-doing”, which may seem to our judging minds like an unearned luxury or waste of our time. We may find ourselves feeling frustrated, because it is “not working”, or because “we cannot do it right”. Then, perhaps we can remember that these are just thoughts!

There is no right way and no wrong way. There is no “success” or “failure”. There is no such thing as a “good” or “bad” mindfulness practice. There is just our experience, from one moment to the next. Our job is just to notice! To let it be as it is, without trying to change our experience.

If we have experienced any sense of struggle, it is probable that we have had some expectations about how things should have been. And caught up in these expectations, it is very likely there have been some judgments – self-judgments or judgments about the practices. We can start to see how our expectations can lead to disappointment or dissatisfaction, and how they can stop us from just experiencing what we are experiencing.

The thoughts, the expectations, the judgments – they are all add-ons – they are unnecessary – they are all just thoughts! We can try to drop them, and each time come back to what we are experiencing. It sounds simple, but it requires much persistence of effort, patience and a gentle kindness towards ourselves. Shunryu Suzuki said that “the life of mindfulness is one mistake after another”. We can let this reassure us, and see our mistakes and struggles as wonderful opportunities for learning about ourselves.



Tips for mindfulness practice

- Whatever your experience, just bring awareness to it.
- Maintain an attitude of openness and curiosity.
- Meet each experience with acceptance.
- Remind yourself that all experiences pass, even the unpleasant ones.
- Maintain a discipline of regular practice with an attitude of self-kindness.
- Let go of expectations, thoughts, judgments (they are all in the realm of thought), just let them go.
- Remember your intention and why you are persevering with this.

Breathing

Resting here, we are the breathing, we are the knowing, moment by moment, ... tasting the breath, smelling the breath, drinking in the breath, allowing yourself to be breathed, to be touched by the air, caressed by the air, to merge with the air in the lungs, across the skin, everywhere the air, everywhere the breath in the body, everywhere the knowing, and nowhere too.

Jon Kabat Zinn
From '**Coming to our Senses**'

Our breath is like a bridge connecting our bodies and our minds. In our daily lives, our bodies may be in one place and our minds somewhere else – in the past or in the future. This is called a state of distraction. The breath is a connection between the mind and the body. When you begin to breathe in and out mindfully, your body will come back to your mind, and your mind will go back to your body. You will be able to realize the oneness of body and mind and become fully present and fully alive in the here and the now. You will be in a position to touch life deeply in the moment. This is not difficult. Everyone can do it.

Thich Nhat Hanh
From '**Be Here Where You Are**'

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 anchor line grows taut and brings you back

Jon Kabat Zinn
From '**Coming to our Senses**'

Mindfulness of the breath

The breath is always with us and is the thread which connects every moment of our lives. We have been breathing since we were born, and will continue to breathe until we die. The breath is an exchange of energy and nourishment between the environment “outside” of us and the “internal” environment of our own body. Every living being has its own way of breathing and manifesting this exchange. It is as if the whole planet is breathing.

Each breath has its own flow and rhythm. It flows through us like a river, or like a wave undulating up and down, in and out. What we often think of as the breath, is actually the movement of the body as it accommodates to the process of breathing – the rhythm of the breathing body.

And as we pay attention we may notice the different distinct stages of the breath: the in-breath, the short pause at the top of the in-breath, the out-breath, and the pause at the ending of the out-breath. We may notice the point at which the breath enters the body – the subtle brushing sensations at the tip of the nostrils or somewhere inside the nasal cavity. We may notice the deep rising and the falling of the abdomen with our diaphragmatic breathing and the shallow movements of the chest and rib-cage as we breathe. Perhaps we can feel the movements of the breath in the back of our bodies, and throughout each part of our bodies, knowing that the breath has the capacity to nourish every organ and every cell.

We will start to notice how the breath changes with our moods. There are times when it feels, rapid, shallow, tight or restricted. There are times when it feels slow, deep and full. There are times when we hold the breath and it feels as if it momentarily stops. There are times when we try to control or interfere with the breath. There are times when we can just allow it to happen by itself, when we can trust the wisdom of the body. Sometimes, even bringing awareness to the breath may make us feel anxious, particularly if we have had any experience of breathing problems or symptoms of panic.

The breath can be a barometer as to how we are in any given moment. It can be used as a tool for tuning in to our experience, our body and our emotions. It can be used as an anchor, to ground us back into the present moment. It can be a support for our mindfulness meditation practice – it is always there – like a friend we return to again and again, whenever we are getting lost in our experience. All we need to do is to come back to our awareness of the breath: the sensations of the breath, the quality of the breath, the taste, the sound, the wonder of the breath.

Mindfulness of breathing can be practiced in a number of ways and situations, from an informal checking in with the breath at occasional moments throughout the day to the formal practice of meditation on the breath. Breathing with awareness or conscious breathing is a life saver. With practice we will find that we can apply it to a number of difficult situations in our lives: in managing anxiety and anger, in facing illness or pain, in dealing with the very real challenges of our everyday lives.

Each time we bring awareness to our breathing, whatever we are doing, we will immediately be more present with our experience.

Sitting meditation

Posture

In meditation it is said that our posture reflects our intention and our state of mind. If we can develop a correct posture then we will find it easier for our minds to settle and calm down. We will also feel stable and comfortable enough in our bodies to maintain a meditation posture for a longer period of time.

We can choose to practice sitting in a chair or using one of the floor based meditation postures which are illustrated here. If you choose a chair, try one which is relatively upright and which allows you to place your feet flatly upon the floor. Try to sit a little away from the back of the chair, so your back is self-supporting. It may help to place a small cushion at the small of the back for some support.

If you choose to sit on the floor, it will help to have a meditation cushion or bench to raise your buttocks off the floor. It is important that the knees are close to the ground, are not higher than the buttocks and that the thighs are sloping down toward the ground. This will support your back and maintain the small hollow in the small of your back. These postures involve either crossing your legs in front of you with one heel drawn towards the body and the other leg in front of it, or kneeling using a cushion or stool with your feet behind you.

The most important thing is to find a posture which is comfortable and which also supports a wakeful and alert state of mind. We do not want to doze or to fall asleep. Jon Kabat Zinn usually talks of sitting with a sense of dignity and reminds us to sit “as if our life depends upon it”. He usually adds “...and it probably does!” This reminds us again of the importance of what we are doing – learning to come home to ourselves and to witness ourselves fully, as if for the first time. So we sit, as if what we are doing is important to us, and to all of life, and to the whole Universe, if we like. So we find a posture which reflects this – upright, with the spine erect, but not rigid. Shunryu Suzuki says we should sit as if we are supporting the sky with our head. Other teachers remind us to sit as if we are a majestic mountain. We can really try to feel the grandeur and stability of the mountain in our posture. We feel our connection to the ground which supports us as we sit.

So, our back is upright, and we can become aware of the natural curvature of the spine and the soft arch in the lower back. The head is gently poised at the top of the spine, with our chin tucked in slightly. We relax our shoulders. We lower and soften the gaze of our eyes at about a 45 degree angle, or we gently close our eyes. The head, neck and shoulders are vertically aligned. The chest does not sink in, but gently lifts. We can imagine a golden thread pulling us up slightly from the top of our head. Our hands rest in our lap, hands down on our thighs, or facing palm upwards, cupped one inside the other.

If we lose our posture, it is very likely that our mind has wandered. We will have lost contact with the present moment. Correcting our posture will bring to mind back home to the body.

Mindfulness of the breath – sitting meditation

- **Settling the Mind:** We start to settle the mind by purposefully making the choice and intention to set aside time for meditation. First, we establish our posture and try to relax the body. It can help if we take a few deeper breaths at this stage, focusing particularly on the out-breath – the letting go, and letting go of any tension in the body at the same time. As we do this, we can try to focus the mind on the breath. There are a few options for this – we can follow and note to ourselves the four stages of the breath (in, pause, out, pause); we can follow a few in-out cycles naming “in” and “out”; alternatively, we can count with each breath, for a few breaths until we return to normal breathing.
- **Grounding our awareness:** We can start to bring awareness to the sensations of the body – the points of contact with the ground, the points of touch and pressure where parts of the body are resting against the chair, the floor, the mats and cushions. We can bring awareness to the sensations of holding our posture and feel the stability of that. We can sit like a majestic mountain, stable and strong.
- **Expanding body awareness:** We gradually broaden our awareness to include more and more sensations of the body. We can spend a few minutes scanning through the body systematically, or we can just open to sensation – whatever comes into our awareness. We can then become aware of the space around the body, noticing that it is resting on the ground with space all around.
- **Resting the mind:** As the body is starting to settle and feel grounded, the mind can begin to feel more tranquil and at rest. We let go of any sense of striving, trying to achieve or trying to do anything. We simply drop into the present moment and “just sit” in a relaxed and casual manner without any purpose or goal. We allow the mind to be open, alert and at rest. We will notice that the mind does not rest here for long and will soon be engaged with thought and we will have lost our mindfulness. We can then move on to the next stage which anchors us back to the present moment.
- **Tuning into the sensations of the breath in the body:** Gradually, we shift our awareness to the breath, and the sensations of the body breathing. Here we can move in really close to the breath: following the rising and the falling of the abdomen, the chest, the rib-cage; feeling the entry and exit point of the breath at the tip of the nostrils. We can rest our attention at a point in the body where the breath is felt most vividly, or we can follow an entire breath cycle, riding the waves of the breath, noting its flow, its changing qualities: shallow, deep, long, short, smooth, jagged, soothing, tangible, disappearing. We can watch for any tendency to want to control or change the breath, simply allowing the breathing to happen in its own way. We can let ourselves simply surrender to the breath, as if we are letting ourselves be breathed.
- **Working with Distraction:** Very soon we will notice that the mind has wandered into the realm of thinking, and has left the sensations of the breath and the body.

We will notice that there are many places that the mind likes to go to and that we have particular habitual places that we return to again and again: the past, the future, worries, planning, judging, evaluating, commentating, fantasizing – a vast variety of random thoughts. Sometimes considerable time passes in these reveries. As soon as we notice that the mind is no longer with the breath, we can congratulate ourselves for waking up! This is a moment of mindfulness. There is no need to judge ourselves – it is the nature of the mind to wander and we are learning more about how the mind is addicted to distraction. So, we simply acknowledge the fact that we have been thinking, and gently escort our attention back to the breath. Each time the mind wanders, and we recognise this fact, we gently and kindly bring ourselves back. This is the core of the meditation practice. We are learning to settle the mind. We are also cultivating qualities of patience, perseverance and concentration, with a kindly acceptance towards ourselves and our experience.

Non-striving

When we are learning a new skill, we usually have to apply a considerable amount of effort and try hard. Perhaps most things that we have learned or achieved in our lives have been the product of hard work and striving. Perhaps you have started to notice that in learning mindfulness techniques, trying hard can really get in the way and can create more tension and a sense of frustration.

There is something profoundly paradoxical about these practices – they are based on “non-doing”, and “non-striving”, free from expectations and goals. The effort involved is more relaxed, but there is still some applied effort. We often say that this effort needs to be “not too tight, and not too loose” – it is a bit like the balanced effort required in trying to catch a feather that is falling in front of us, and not like the effort required in balancing a page of figures.

The quality of non-striving is embedded in the quality of acceptance. If we are in pain, we just pay attention to the pain; if we are criticizing ourselves, we just pay attention to the judging mind; if we are experiencing pleasant sensations, we just pay attention to that. We do not strive to experience anything different from what we are feeling. There is just our experience of the present moment. We are not trying to get anywhere else, or to become anyone else. We are not trying to get rid of unpleasant experiences or trying to grasp after pleasant ones.

Gradually, with patience and regular practice, we will see ourselves moving closer towards our goals and intentions, but we will not get there by striving for them. The quality of non-striving is one of openness, of trusting in the process and of acceptance of whatever the present moment presents to us.

Home practice – Week two

Overcoming obstacles and non-striving

Formal mindfulness practice

- Once again **practice the guided body scan each day**. Keep a log of your experience, especially as things can change or deepen after this consistent period of practice.
- **Try adding a period of sitting meditation** – mindfulness of the breath for 10 – 15 minutes daily. You may wish to follow the first section of the guided practice or you can practice without guidance. Again, record your reactions on the home practice log.
- These practices can be done at different times of the day.

Informal mindfulness practice

- **Choose a different routine activity each day** that you can practice with mindful awareness. You may wish to choose an activity during which you are habitually rushing or un-aware. This might be something like:
 - cleaning your teeth
 - taking your shower
 - taking the dog for a walk
 - driving the car
 - washing up dishes
 - chopping vegetables for a meal
 - or a period of mindful eating.

Whatever you choose, it can be helpful to focus on this **same activity** for the duration of the week. Practice coming into the present moment with all of your senses, fully engaged, as you take part in this exercise.

- Pay attention to your experience of **pleasant events** over the next week and try to become aware of detailed body sensations, thoughts and emotions occurring with the pleasant event. Use the Pleasant Events Diary to record your experiences in as much detail as you can. Try to pay attention, if possible, to **one pleasant event each day** – it can be something planned, or something which spontaneously arises. Note on the diary how you feel as you recall the event.

Home practice log

During your formal or informal practices of mindfulness, bring awareness to **physical sensations, thoughts** and **emotions** and your responses to them. Practice bringing awareness to distraction and note where your mind habitually goes.

Day/date	Mindfulness practice	Comments about what you noticed...

Pleasant events diary

Day	What was the experience?	Were you aware of the pleasant feeling while it was happening?	How did your body feel, in detail, during it?
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thur			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

What moods or feelings were there?

What thoughts went through your mind at the time?

What impulses came along with the event?

What are your thoughts now as you write about it?

What moods or feelings were there?	What thoughts went through your mind at the time?	What impulses came along with the event?	What are your thoughts now as you write about it?

Session Three: Staying Present

If we can capture more of the moments of our lives, by being fully present and paying attention to what is being experienced, then we can more truly wake up to the fullness of our lives. The passing moments, may seem fleeting and often not very important, but they are our lives! We could say that it is only possible to live our lives in the present moment – everything else is just thought or activities of the mind.

We notice how the automatic pilot mode frequently pulls us out of present moment awareness and into the realm of thought. This is usually triggered from a reactive response of dissatisfaction, wanting to fix or grasp something, or wanting something to change. We tend to react in one of three following ways:

- **We experience boredom**, because something does not interest us or is not seen as useful to us, and we zone out of the present moment, probably to somewhere in our heads that we find more interesting!
- **We decide that we like an experience or sensation and that is it useful to us.** We try to fix and grasp it or stop it from ending. Usually this also ends up in the realm of thought, and we wonder how we may get to keep or to have more of it.
- **We decide that we do not like an experience or sensation** and that it is not useful to us. We try to make it go away, push it out of our awareness or think about how we will stop ourselves having such an experience again in the future.

When we get caught by one of these reactive responses, we have stopped being present and stopped engaging fully with our lives. By seeing life through the veil of our thoughts, our judgments, and our preferences (liking, disliking, boredom) we miss those awe inspiring moments, those heightened moments of waking up! Even the apparent ordinary moments of everyday life can be filled with wonder – seeing a small flower growing through a crack in a wall; hearing the passing of wild geese overhead as they begin their long migration; feeling the drops of Spring rain falling on our face as we walk.

Mindfulness with sound

Practice sitting with mindfulness of the breath and body awareness for a few moments, and then open up your awareness to hearing and include sound into the landscape of your awareness.

You may be aware of sounds far away from you giving you an expansiveness of awareness. You may be aware of sounds very close to you – even the sounds of your own body breathing. Sounds may be loud or subtle; they may be experienced as pleasant or unpleasant; jarring or calming. They may be continuous or intermittent. Be aware of the spaces between the sounds and the whole of the sound scape.

See if you can experience sound as pure sensation, without judging it and without getting caught in thinking about the sounds. We do not need to name what we are hearing, or to get lost in thoughts about liking or disliking. If we find that sound has acted as a trigger into any train of thought, once aware we can simply come back to hearing and let the hearing be our anchor in the present moment.

We do not need to chase after the sound or to push it away. We do not need to strain for sound, but simply to notice what sounds come to us as we bring awareness to hearing. We can note the qualities of the sound and notice how it touches us as we hear. Perhaps we will be aware of emotions arising in response. Perhaps we will be aware of the hairs standing up at the back of our necks. We can let our whole self participate in the experience of hearing, becoming one with the sound.

We can allow our awareness of sound to become expansive, broadening our awareness from the intimate sounds from the body, to sounds within the room or building, to sounds further and further away, or we can bring our awareness of sound gradually back to ourselves and our bodies, until we hear once again the subtle sounds of our body breathing.

We can practice mindfulness with sound as a formal meditation with sound as the anchor to the present moment, in the same way that we have used the breath. Or we can use mindfulness with sound at moments during our everyday lives when we choose to stop – listening to a piece of music, the sounds of nature, or even the silence.

'But listen to me for one moment,
Stop being sad
Hear blessings dropping their blossoms
All around you'

Rumi

Mindfulness in everyday life

Mindfulness “dots”

A useful reminder for mindfulness practice can be to use coloured sticky “dots”, which can be placed in locations where we will see them and remind us to come back to ourselves and the breath in a mindful way. It can be helpful to place the dots in places and on objects that we may often approach with lack of awareness or presence. When we see the dots, we can remember to take a breath, feel our feet on the ground, bring awareness to our posture, observe what we sense around us, and perhaps follow three whole breaths through our bodies. The dots can remind us to find a moment of stillness in our lives and to reconnect with ourselves in a positive way.

Everyday life also gives us ample opportunities to practice mindfulness with more extended periods of time, in which we can choose to bring mindful awareness to any of the everyday ordinary activities we perform usually on automatic pilot and without a great deal of awareness. This can transform mundane tasks into something much more pleasurable, and offer a chance to switch off from the stresses of rushing and trying to get things over with, or doing things with our minds on something else. Instead, we can practice being truly present in whatever we are doing and bring some sense of stillness into the heart of our doing.

Tasks giving opportunity for mindfulness practice

The following are some examples of activities we can choose to perform with mindful awareness. Unlike the mindfulness triggers, they involve practices which can endure for a number of minutes, or for more extended periods of time. The aim, wherever possible, is to just do one thing at a time, and to pay full attention to whatever you are doing. In a similar way to formal meditation practice, when you notice that your mind has wandered, or if you have drifted into multi-tasking, you can gently bring the attention back to the activity, over and over again until you have finished. See if any of the examples would fit into your own life, or come up with some examples of your own.

- Chopping vegetables for a meal
- Eating a meal
- Preparing and drinking a cup of tea or coffee
- Taking a shower or bath
- Brushing your teeth
- Brushing your hair
- Doing the washing up
- Cleaning the kitchen floor
- Taking an early morning walk
- Driving the car
- Walking up or down stairs
- Listening to music
- Having a conversation
- Greeting your family when you come home

The three minute breathing space

This practice was developed by Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Segal, who put together Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. In essence, it is a mini-meditation, an opportunity to become mindful in the midst of our lives. It provides a bridge between the formal practice of meditation which we will usually do on our own with time set aside for it, and the informal practice of mindfulness in our everyday lives as we go about our business.

The Breathing Space is not to be seen as “taking a break” or taking time-out from whatever is going on. Instead, it can be seen as encouraging a shift in mode, from Doing to Being, from Automatic Pilot to Awareness and deliberately changing our relationship to whatever we are experiencing.

It is traditionally seen as encompassing three distinct stages, which we can envisage in the form of an hour-glass. The first stage is BECOMING AWARE: we stop, we notice whatever is going on in our inner experience, in our thoughts, in our feelings and emotions, and in our body sensations – without trying to change anything. This is like the wide neck of the hour glass. The second stage is GATHERING: we draw our attention close to the breath and the breath sensations, experiencing fully the in breath and the out breath, using the breath to anchor us to the present moment, and we stay here for a little while (perhaps at least a third of the time we are practicing). This is like the narrow neck of the hour glass. The third stage is EXPANDING: from the breath, we expand our awareness to include the body sensations and anything we are experiencing physically, emotionally or within the mind. We also bring our awareness to the space around us and whatever we can experience there through our senses. We breathe into whatever is there, with a sense of acceptance – allowing ourselves to experience it, before moving on with the activities of our day. This is like the wide base of the hour-glass – expanding, open and held in awareness.

We can practice scheduling the breathing space into our daily lives, in the midst of our daily activities. In time, we will be able to introduce the breathing space more spontaneously, at times when we are feeling stressed or experiencing something unpleasant. In these situations, we are not using the breathing space to block out or to get rid of these difficult experiences. Instead, we will be learning to bring more awareness to our reactions and to notice how we might resist and fight against what is happening at these times. The breathing space can help us to befriend and to accept these unpleasant experiences which are there already and to enhance our ability to cope with them.

The three minute breathing space

At various times during the course of your day, see if it is possible to step out of “automatic pilot” for 3 minutes or thereabouts in the following way:

1. What's here? (becoming aware)

Notice your posture. Straighten your spine and generally relax the body.

With your eyes either open or closed, silently ask yourself:

“What is my experience right now ... in my thoughts ... my feelings ... and my bodily sensations?”

Recognise and accept your experience, even if it is unwanted.

2. Breathing (gathering)

Then, gently redirect your full attention to your breathing, to each in breath and to each out breath as they follow, one after the other. Try noting at the back of your mind: “Breathing in ... breathing out” or counting the breaths.

Do this for one or two minutes as best you can, using the breathing as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

3. Expanding outwards

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

Allow your attention to expand to the whole body – including any sense of discomfort, tension, or resistance. If these sensations are there, then bring your awareness to them by “breathing into them” on the in breath. Then, breathe out from those sensations, softening and opening with the out breath. If you wish, you can say to yourself on the out breath, “It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK. Let me feel it. It is here already so I may as well be present for it.”

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

You can adapt this to what works best for you. The aim is to simply maintain awareness in the present moment and to shift modes from doing to being, as best you can.

Mindfulness of movement

The mindful movement in the sequences we will follow are based upon Hatha yoga. The emphasis here is upon mindful awareness, and not upon achieving certain postures or results. It is important to approach these movements with an attitude of non-striving. The emphasis is on gentleness and kindly listening to our bodies – working up to, but not beyond what feels difficult. The movements arise from a spacious awareness and are conducted slowly. They involve maintaining an awareness of breathing as we move and at times breathing into the stretches or movements. It is not important to get through the entire sequences of movements described here. Often, we can say that “less is more”,

and the exploration may be around very subtle movements, bringing awareness also to the intentions emerging before the movements. The movements can also be explored in an imaginary way (without even moving), if any of them do not seem right for you.

The intention of these exercises is to bring awareness to movement in general, and to how the body moves. They can further enhance a sense of body awareness, and perhaps a sense of the body “working”, when we may be struggling with a sense of it not being as supple, healthy or able as it perhaps once was. Once again, these exercises are about befriending our experience of the body and “coming home” to ourselves.

This might mean working at times with pain, tension, stiffness or physical discomfort, or with degrees of unfitness, if we have not been able to work our bodies in this way for some time. Our intention here is not to ignore these experiences or to strive for a fitter or better body. Instead, it is to meet our experience with awareness and acceptance, without forcing anything – just going as far as we can, and working at the “edges” of what feels comfortable – if anything, doing a little less than we would like to, and honouring our limitations, whatever they are.

Over time, it may be our experience that we feel an improvement in flexibility, strength, balance and postural awareness. Our circulation may improve and we may find it easier to release tension in the body and to relax more fully. We may find that our sleep improves. We may also experience an increased confidence in our body, and even a sense of gratitude that on the whole, it continues to function as well as it does.

Whatever we practice in the form of movement, the intention is that it is embedded in awareness, with attitudes of gentleness, kindness and self-acceptance. At times we will be aware of unpleasant sensations associated with the movement, and we can bring awareness to how we respond to this. We may find that we can open to the experience of unpleasantness, without labeling it as painful or unwanted. This can be the start of a process of changing our relationship with aspects of our suffering.

Along with the body scan, mindful movement can help us to increase our general body awareness and sense of “embodiment”. We may find that over time our body awareness becomes more enhanced and continuous throughout the different moments of our day and in the in between moments, as we move from one activity to another.

Walking meditation

Another way of practicing mindful movement is to pay attention to the activity of walking, and to turn this into a mindfulness practice or meditation. When we practice walking meditation, we do not need to be going anywhere, and it can be helpful to let go of any sense of a destination or a purpose to the walking. The intention of walking meditation is just to walk!

When we practice walking meditation we practice bringing awareness to the whole experience of walking: the lifting and placing of the feet, the sensations of the soles of the feet touching the ground, with shifting sensations of pressure and touch; the shift in balance of the body from one side to the next; the movements throughout the whole body as we move; the flowing of the breath. There will also be awareness of the space in which we move, the varying surfaces upon which we step, the touch of the air on our skin, the changing views and sounds and smells coming through our senses: moment to moment

experiences, constantly flowing and changing.

There will be moments when we will notice that our mind has wandered into thinking, perhaps distracted by some of the sense experiences, or by some inner thought activities. Just as we would in the other mindfulness practices, we bring awareness to the fact that we are distracted, and gently bring our awareness back to the walking:

....lifting and placing; lifting and placing; breathing in and breathing out

We can let our body do the walking, trusting that the body knows what to do – we do not need to guide it with the mind. We can just allow the mind to observe and then gently notice the changing flow of experience. We can simply enjoy our walking.

Walking meditation can be practiced slowly and purposefully, and can involve choosing a path where we may walk back and forth or in a circle. We can bring awareness to the most subtle movements involved in walking. It can also be practiced at a natural pace where we can bring more awareness to a sense of movement in space and the energy of the body as we move. There may be other times when we can choose to bring awareness to walking when we are simply going about our lives: walking down the corridors in our place of work; walking through the car park; walking to our terminal at the airport; walking through a busy high street or down the aisles in the supermarket. We can help ourselves to stay present in the mundane aspects of our lives which we may otherwise regard as uninteresting or frustrating.

For Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese mindfulness teacher, walking meditation is a key mindfulness practice which helps us to engage fully with our lives. It is a practice which connects us to ourselves, to nature, to each other and to all of life.

Home practice – Week three

Staying present

Formal mindfulness practice

- **Practice mindful movement daily.** You may wish to use the CD of guided stretches. You can tailor the length of the practice to the time you have available. Be aware of particularly difficult body sensations, emotions or thoughts that arise during this practice and keep a log of your experience. Remember to work within your limitations and to listen to what is right for your body.
- **Continue with a period of sitting meditation each day** – mindfulness of the breath, for 10 – 15 minutes. You may wish to follow the first section of the guided practice or you can practice without guidance. Again, record your reactions on the home practice log.
- **Introduce the three minute breathing space** and schedule this into your life at pre planned times. You may build it around the routine activities of your day (e.g. on awakening, before falling asleep, before you switch on the computer, before or after eating, while sitting on the bus or before you start the car).

Informal mindfulness practice

- Pay attention to your experience of **unpleasant events** over the next week and try to become aware of detailed body sensations, thoughts and emotions occurring with the unpleasant event. Use the unpleasant events diary to record your experiences in as much detail as you can. Try to pay attention, if possible, to one **unpleasant event each day** – it can be something that you may anticipate, or something which spontaneously arises. Note on the diary how you feel as you recall the event.
- Introduce the **mindfulness “dots”** into your life, by placing them on objects in your immediate environment (e.g. on your computer, telephone, bathroom mirror, the key hole at your office door) and use them to act as triggers to remind you to take a breath and come back to full awareness.
- Hold the intention to be awake and to **stay present in your life** so you can capture more of the moments of your day and not drift into automatic pilot.

Home practice log

During your formal or informal practices of mindfulness, bring awareness to **physical sensations**, **thoughts** and **emotions** and your responses to them. Practice bringing awareness to distraction and note where your mind habitually goes.

Day/date	Mindfulness practice	Comments about what you noticed...

Unpleasant events diary

Day	What was the experience?	Were you aware of the unpleasant feeling while it was happening?	How did your body feel, in detail, during it?
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thur			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

What moods or feelings were there?

What thoughts went through your mind at the time?

What impulses came along with the event?

What are your thoughts now as you write about it?

What moods or feelings were there?	What thoughts went through your mind at the time?	What impulses came along with the event?	What are your thoughts now as you write about it?

Session Four: Staying With What is Difficult

Meditation on a difficulty

Bring to mind a current difficulty or open to a difficulty that is already present in your experience right now. This could be a physical pain, a worry, a regret, perhaps some unresolved emotional or interpersonal issue which still has resonance in this moment.

Tune into the physical sensations in the body where the problem is most strongly felt. This could be an actual pain or discomfort or it could be the place where tensing or bracing is occurring or where there is a “felt sense” of the emotion being experienced. Bring attention to this, and if possible, breathe into this area on the in breath and out from that area on the out breath.

Without trying to make the unpleasant experience go away, bring a sense of acceptance, curiosity and befriending to what is there. We can say, “What is this? Let’s see what is here. It is here already so I might as well feel it and be open to it”. Soften and open up around the difficulty, giving it space and allowing it to reveal itself. Hold it in awareness. Gradually, return to the breath and broaden awareness to the body as a whole and open to a fuller sense of being present.

Working with difficulties

Whether we are focusing on the body scan, mindfulness of movement, sitting meditation or merely observing the activities of our everyday lives, we will be aware that we frequently encounter experiences that we may find difficult or unpleasant. This could be a physical discomfort or pain. It could be the knowledge that a part of our body is not working as it should be. It could be a problematic memory, worry or concern about something going on in our lives currently. It could be an unpleasant emotional experience or state that we are struggling with. Usually, it will be something we do not like and we wish would go away!

Our relationship with the difficulties in our lives is an important contributor to how much we suffer. In fact, it could be said that the majority of our suffering is caused by our reaction to the difficulty. First there is the difficulty, say a pain in the back, then there is our reaction to this – we don’t like it; we want it to go away; we tell ourselves it is not fair; we tell ourselves that it will spoil our evening; we tell ourselves that we are always going to be struggling with this; we tell ourselves that we hate this pain that is ruining our lives!

We may notice how we tense around the difficulty, physically, emotionally and mentally. We brace ourselves, or else we may develop a stance of resignation and defeat around it. On the whole, our attitude is one of non-acceptance and aversion. We don’t want to accept the situation we are in – we want to resist it, fight against it, or push it away! This may be a useful stance against many external problems which we can resolve through active

problem-solving (we can go and tell the neighbour to turn off the loud music, or if that fails, we can consider going to the police or housing association). However, when it comes to our internal experience, trying to make an experience go away, often merely leads to suppression and frustration.

With mindfulness practice, we can bring awareness to our reactivity to difficult experience. We can notice the non-acceptance and aversion in our experience: the resisting, tensing, bracing, numbing, the pushing away – however it feels to us. We can notice how this does not make the problem go away, and how it increases our suffering. Suffering is the attitude of non-acceptance, along with the original difficulty or pain.

We can practice developing a stance of accepting what is there (that does not mean that we have to like it), and learning to soften around the problem, opening to it, and allowing it to be there. Just as in the Three Minute Breathing Space, we can say, “It’s OK. Whatever it is, it is OK. Let me feel it”, or “It is here already, so I might as well allow it to be here”. We can stop fighting, and let go of the reactive part we play in turning a difficulty into suffering.

Can we treat all of our experiences like guests arriving at a Guest House, as in Rumi’s poem? What about the death of a child, the news of a life-threatening illness, acknowledgement that we can never make up for the losses we may have experienced in a traumatic childhood? Can we open up to these as well, without getting lost in feelings of anger, resentment or despair? Can we “meet them at the door arriving and invite them in”? This is where we often need to speak of Radical Acceptance.

Tips for responding to difficulties mindfully



1. Acknowledge that the difficulty is there.
2. Ask yourself how you feel about what you are experiencing.
3. Notice how the difficulty is being experienced in the body and any tensing, bracing or resisting around it.
4. Can you recognise any aspect of non-acceptance in your experience?
5. Can you recognise that this type of suffering is part of the human condition and part of life?
6. Can you accept that it is there – even just in this moment?
7. Bring a sense of open and warm curiosity to the current experience of the problem and come in close to it with your awareness, if it feels possible:
 - a. What is my experience right now?
 - b. What is it like?
 - c. Let's see what is here!
8. Breathe with it and bring with this a sense of softening, opening and allowing.
9. If possible, breathe into it, exploring its textures, patterns and edges.
10. Allow yourself to feel it, just as it is. Allow it to express itself. Remember you are not trying to make it go away (even if you recognise that a part of you wants it to).
11. Stay with it as long as seems possible.
12. Gradually, broaden your awareness around the difficulty. Recognise that there is more to your current experience in this moment than this.
13. Use your breath, other body sensations or sound to anchor you to the present moment or shift your attention to another aspect of your experience.

How do we respond to pleasant and unpleasant events?

The exploration of our reactions to everyday pleasant and unpleasant events reveals habitual tendencies which we all have:

- We like pleasant events and we want to grasp hold of them, cling to them, make them last for longer or come back.
- We don't like unpleasant events, and we want them to end or go away, we try to get rid of them, push them away or numb ourselves so we don't feel them.

We react in the same way if these are external events or internal experiences. In this way, we can feel tossed about by life: not so much by the experiences themselves, but by our reactions to them. We can end up believing that we are entitled to pleasant events and that we should be able to avoid the unpleasant ones: especially if we are careful, if we are good, if we do the right things in life. When things go wrong, we can get caught up in beliefs that it is not fair, that it shouldn't be happening to us, that we are being punished, and so on. We forget that despite our reactions or our beliefs, life is full of experiences that we will sense as unpleasant, pleasant or neutral. And that all of these experiences are part of life! The variety is what gives life its texture and its depths.

However, what would it be like if we didn't compound our difficulties with strong habitual responses of reactivity, that turn unpleasant experiences into suffering?

The role of hope and fear, equanimity and reactivity

We may have noticed from our responses to pleasant and unpleasant events that there is a human tendency for us to be tossed about in our search for pleasure and in our avoidance of painful experiences. We habitually desire experiences which are pleasurable rather than unpleasant, we desire success rather than failure, gain rather than loss, praise rather than blame, being recognized rather than obscurity.

We can tend to become strongly attached to the positive aspects of these: pleasure, gain, success, praise and recognition, and want to cling to these experiences. However, things do not last, and in becoming attached to these experiences, we can set ourselves up for suffering, when the winds of opportunity change direction. The experiences of pain can feel all the worse when we have a sense of what we have lost. To fall from success, or praise or recognition into failure, blame or obscurity is all the greater if we have a sense that our well-being and happiness were dependent upon them.

We can sum up these reactive tendencies into two prime forces, those of hope and fear. Caught up in this is our sense of anticipation, expectation, wishing for things to be a certain way, expecting things to be a certain way, fearing things not turning out

the way we want, disappointment when they don't, and so on. We can recognize how often our thinking is dominated by our hopes and fears and how far this can take us from mindfulness of what is actually here and an open acceptance of life as it is. We can see how much these reactive forces can contribute to our day to day suffering.

Mindfulness and acceptance can help to anchor us when life tosses us about in this way. Eventually, through our practice, we can start to develop a stance of equanimity, which can offer us real freedom through the abandonment of hope and fear in our lives.

Home practice – Week four

Staying with what is difficult

Formal mindfulness practice

- On alternate days, practice mindful movement or sitting meditation for up to 45 minutes.
- For the movement, you can use the guidance or develop a sequence of your choosing, remembering to work within your limitations and to listen to what is right for your body.
- As always, be curious and record what you notice in the home practice log.

Informal mindfulness practice

- Bring particular awareness to any experiences of difficulty arising during the week, and use periods of your formal practice to work with this. Notice when you find yourself getting caught in reactivity or non-acceptance and see if you can practice bringing a willing acceptance to your experience.
- Continue to apply the three minute breathing space in a scheduled manner or try to apply it at times when you are struggling with something and apply the practice as a coping space for these difficult moments as they arise.
- Complete the reflection on “Half-Way Through: What am I learning?”

Finding time:

Although you may benefit from longer practices, a shorter practice, or a couple of shorter practices at different times are better than none at all.

Remember to be gentle with yourself and let go of specific expectations.

Home practice log

Day/date	Mindfulness practice	Comments about what you noticed...

Reflection: Half way through

We are now half way through this course and have completed four weeks of this journey of discovery in mindfulness. You may wish to spend a few minutes now reflecting on what you are learning and to set some aspirations of how you intend to make the best use of the remaining four weeks.

What am I learning or cultivating?

How am I changing?

What do I need to do to make the best use of the rest of the course?

Session Five: Working with Thoughts and Emotions

Mindfulness of thoughts and emotions

As we continue to practice mindfulness we learn that our thoughts and emotions can become useful objects of our awareness, and are not simply something that we need to regard as a problem. Through paying attention to our thoughts and the whole process of how we become engaged with them, we are able to learn a great deal about our mental habits and state of mind, and how our engagement with thoughts creates suffering. We are able to start to change our relationship with our thoughts and through this become less trapped by them.

As humans, we tend to spend a great deal of our time engaged in thinking. We could even say, as Eckhart Tolle describes it, that to be human means to be “lost in thought”! We may regard our thinking ability to be something very special, highly evolved and something which marks us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. But in fact our thinking and our relationship to our thinking can create a lot of problems for us. In fact, our relationship with our thoughts could be seen as the cause of the majority of the suffering we experience as human beings. Our thoughts can tend to have a powerful effect on us; in fact we could say that we are slaves to our thinking. Why is this? It seems that it is a lot to do with how we relate to our thoughts and the beliefs or attitudes we hold about them.

What are our beliefs or attitudes to our thoughts? Firstly, we tend to regard our thoughts as very important, and they are therefore usually very successful in sabotaging our attention and distracting us from meaningful activities or company we are engaged in, resulting in us blanking out mentally from whatever we are doing or saying in the present moment. Secondly, we tend to regard our thoughts as important because we believe that they define who we are – there is a strong identification with thought – this is who I am! And then, thirdly, we tend to get hooked into the content of our thoughts, the stories that they tell us and the meaning that they weave out of our experiences. In fact, we can get totally obsessed with this content as the latest soap opera of our lives! So much of this will be mere speculation, interpretation, evaluation, judging, predicting and so on. We come to believe our thoughts as facts even when we don't tend to believe all that others say to us or all that we read in the newspapers!

It may seem to us that we have little control over our thinking. We have a sense of thoughts automatically popping into our heads, often bound up with emotions, and they are frequently unpleasant and strong. We may find ourselves getting caught up in particular unhelpful thoughts patterns as personal habits. These often fall into three main areas of preoccupation: the past, the future and the present.

- **We get preoccupied with thoughts about the past:** going over old arguments or disagreements, regrets, resentments, opening old hurts, reveries, mulling over or trying to rewrite memories and so on.
- **We get preoccupied with thoughts about the future:** patterns of worrying, planning, fantasizing, dreaming and so on.
- **We get preoccupied with thoughts about the present:** making a running commentary of whatever is in our experience, or what we think should be, judging, evaluating, analyzing and so on.

And we seem to love getting preoccupied in these ways – our thoughts seem to provide us with constant entertainment and stimulation – they become our latest “gossip”! We seem to find our thoughts very interesting and often assume that others will find them interesting too! Sometimes we meet people who do not edit this internalized stream of commentary, and their speech shows us how this stream of thinking can be interminable, alienated and out of touch with the present moment, including the person they are talking to. It seems that we can be fearful of the mind quietening down, fearful of inner silence prevailing without our constant thoughts for company! Perhaps fearful of what we would get in touch with if we let go of this engagement with thought – if we are off our guard!

We will have noticed how hard it is for our attention to rest on something for very long and how the mind has a tendency to leap from one thing to the next, perhaps following associations, perhaps moving randomly and seemingly without reason. For this reason, we often talk about a butterfly-mind, or the mind is compared to a wild monkey leaping from one tree to the next, taking a bite from one fruit and without finishing it, moving on to the next one. This is the mind addicted to distraction! This is the mind that is easily bored. In fact, we have probably spent most of our lives training the mind in this way: it can multi-task, react quickly and scan the inner or outer environment for experiences it perceives to be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral and selecting according to its preferences. Our societies move at such a quick pace these days with the attention span of its people getting shorter and shorter. When we train the mind in mindfulness, we are attempting to turn around these tendencies and habits: we are training the mind to settle and stabilize and to calm the reactivity of the mind. Through this, we can find peace.

These are a few points in summary to explain our relationship with the activities of the mind:

- We are addicted to thought and the distraction it offers us from whatever we may be experiencing in the present moment.
- We believe thinking to be very important.
- We believe the content of our thoughts to be facts.
- We are preoccupied with the content of our thoughts.
- We find our thoughts entertaining, even when we are “thinking about our problems”.
- We fear we would be bored or lonely without our thoughts.
- We identify with our thoughts and believe that they define who we are. They shape our sense of self.
- We may be wary of and unfamiliar with a mind where thoughts have quietened down.
- We may be wary of getting in touch with certain emotional states underlying our thoughts.
- When our mind starts to settle, we tend to stir it up by engaging again in thought.

Difference between thoughts and thinking

You may have noticed that we are not able to stop our thoughts. Thoughts arise by themselves without us doing anything to create them. We could say that the mind “secretes” thoughts, just as the stomach secretes stomach acid. It is what the mind does and what it is best at.

When we are practicing mindfulness, we will learn that it is possible simply to allow thoughts to arise by themselves and to fade away by themselves, without getting involved with them in any way. When the mind is relatively calm and our mindfulness fairly steady, we will find that it is possible to observe this arising and fading away of thoughts, just as if we were sitting on the banks of a river, allowing the activities of our mind to flow by in front of us. Or, to use another metaphor, it is like we were sitting on the top of a hill and our thoughts and emotions are like the weather passing over head, with its rain clouds and storms and winds and clear skies. Whatever the activities of the mind, we remain seated, just observing, and not getting lost in the flow. In this way, our mindfulness remains strong.

The problem only starts to arise when we become engaged in thought or engaged in the content of our thoughts and get sucked into the vortex of thinking. This is when thought becomes thinking. Instead of sitting quietly on the bank of the river of thought, just observing the activities of the mind flowing by, we jump into the river and get carried along by its current. It really is like jumping on to the “thought train” and after a while, once we realize that we have been thinking, we find that we have already been carried some distance away from where we started.

Metaphors for working with thinking and emotions

When we practice mindfulness with our thoughts and emotions, we are entering into a different relationship with our inner experience, maintaining the stance of an impartial observer, and distinguishing between “thoughts” and “thinking”. This stance can be illustrated with the use of some metaphors, which we may find helpful in our mindfulness practice. Here are some commonly used ones:

1. We are sitting on the banks of a river and the water is flowing in front of us. The activities of our mind are represented by the flow and eddy of the river, or by the leaves which float past in the current. We remain sitting on the bank, just allowing the river to flow. When we get drawn into the thoughts, it is as if we have jumped into the river.
2. We are sitting on the top of the mountain and the weather is blowing over our head. The clear blue sky is our mind free of thoughts. The clouds and the wind are like our thoughts. We can remain sitting and just let them flow past without getting involved with them.

Home practice – Week five

Working with thoughts and emotions

Formal mindfulness practice

- **Maintain your daily formal practices of mindfulness**, working creatively and intuitively with different combinations of the body scan, mindful movement and sitting meditation.
- **Continue with the Three Minute Breathing Spaces** integrated into your daily life, at moments when you think about it or built around the routine activities of your day (e.g. on awakening, before falling asleep, before you switch on the computer, before or after eating, while sitting on the bus or before you start the car).

Informal mindfulness practice

- **Notice those moments when you feel stressed or are encountering difficulties**, and practice bringing mindful awareness to these experiences, perhaps using conscious breathing or integrating the Three Minute Breathing Space.
- **During your formal or informal practices of mindfulness, bring particular awareness to thoughts and emotions and your responses to them.** Practice bringing awareness to distraction and note where your mind habitually goes.

Finding time:

Although you may benefit from longer practices, a shorter practice, or a couple of shorter practices at different times are better than none at all.

Remember to be gentle with yourself and let go of specific expectations.



Home practice log

Day/date	Mindfulness practice	Comments about what you noticed...

Session Six: Silent Practice

This session of guided practice is an opportunity to immerse ourselves more deeply into the mindfulness practices we have been building up over the past few weeks. Much of the session will be spent in silence so we can deepen our experience of the practices, the spaces between them and explore the impact of being in silence while we are together as a group.

We invite you to come with your curiosity and openness and simply drop into the present moment, allowing the session to unfold in its own way. We will be moving through the guided practices in silence.

When we spend time in silence as a mindfulness practice, we have an opportunity to observe our experience more deeply. We have a chance to notice our reactions, our thought patterns and emotional responses. We can pay more attention to our body sensations, and the way the body moves as it goes between tasks. We can notice more clearly how the mind seeks out distraction. Watch out for the temptation to read any notices on the walls or the labels on food packets! We would like to encourage you to stay away from all reading, if possible, during the day.

In addition, we invite you to practice silence without making eye contact, but without shutting out your awareness or needing to stay apart from the group. Our focus is, therefore, a little more inward, so we can pay close attention to our mindfulness practice and whatever comes up for us as the day unfolds.

Reflections on silence and speech

It may help for us to reflect somewhat on our experience of silence and its associations as we prepare for the day. For some people, even the thought of having a day without speaking can feel daunting and bring up a lot of anxiety. Some say that they have never spent this long before without speaking, and even speak in their sleep!

We have all had previous experience of silence, some of which may have been positive, but it is likely that some of it may have been difficult for us and will have left some negative associations. We may associate silence with discomfort: not knowing what to say; walking into a room and experiencing people stopping talking; “being sent to Coventry”; being punished by other’s refusing to talk to you; angry silences; feelings of isolation or being alone. We may have used talking, or breaking silence with others, as a means of ending uncomfortable moments, seeking reassurance, being noticed or being seen. We may also have used silence with others as a means of communicating our anger, our disapproval, or our lack of interest.

We no doubt have also been in social occasions where, despite the words being spoken, there has not been any real meeting of people, where conversation has seemed empty and disconnected, devoid of a heart-felt quality, and failing to make any real connections. How much we can yearn in these situations for real contact, and the relief of being together with people without the need for small-talk, point-scoring, gossiping or the need to fill every gap with meaningless chatter.

There will have been times when we have connected to someone deeply in silence, and these can be profound moments: perhaps we are sitting on the side of the bed of someone who is sick or dying; perhaps we are sharing a precious moment with a loved one; or sharing a moment of true connection with another, where nothing needs to be said; or those privileged moments when we sit with another in a shared moment of understanding, each being held and witnessed by the other – the space between us energized, vibrant and alive. It is at these moments that time seems to stand still and we can appreciate the richness of connection and “being with” that can be experienced through silence.

In silence, we can find abundance and a wealth of communication. It occurs through a heightened sense of presence and intimacy in which our senses are open and live. It happens in those places where words seem superfluous: the soothing spaces after apologies which are well meaning; the knowing silences of forgiveness and acceptance; a loving gesture between people who know one another well; the sharing of an awe inspiring experience of shooting stars, a breathtaking sunset, or a velvety black midnight walk along a loch side!

And silence can become a wonderful offering when we encounter the wonders of nature and the mystery of all things that cannot be explained. We may find communion in nature through silence: watching the grass hopper eat out of our hand; standing still in the forest with only our breath, face to face with the young deer appearing behind the next tree! There is a quality in these moments that we will disturb or even destroy if we try to put it into words. Words are often clumsy and limiting and can imprison living experience into conceptual moulds that our minds grasp onto. They can take us away from direct experience and drive us into our heads where the vitality of experience is frozen and deadened by thoughts.

Poetry often makes the attempt to bridge the gap between awe-inspiring experiences and our desires to communicate them. Mary Oliver’s poem, “Stars”, shares the experience of awe and wonder at observing the night sky filled with stars, and the seeming intrusion of language – the words which appear to try to explain and make sense of what is being experienced, and which provide a barrier to the direct observing.

The poem is about the relationship between silence and the need to communicate. The words which come out of the silence are a celebration of what is observed and a gift in the form of the poem.

Loving kindness

Loving Kindness is a quality which goes hand in hand with the practice of mindfulness. In many ways, mindfulness and loving kindness are like the two wings of a bird. Loving Kindness is the “heartfulness” aspect of mindfulness and is the soil out of which our mindfulness can grow. It is in the meeting of ourselves and our experience with kindness – the welcoming and befriending of our experience whatever it is. It is a gentle open-hearted awareness and acceptance – the loving tolerance and the embracing aspect of our practice. We could say that practicing mindfulness in itself is an act of loving kindness. Jon Kabat Zinn describes it as a “radical act of love”.

Loving Kindness is often described as “universal loving kindness” as it is non-exclusive and non-possessive. It goes beyond ourselves and our chosen loved ones. It includes those we do not know very well and those we have not met. It also includes those people whom we do not like; those we find “difficult” in one way or another, perhaps even our “enemies”. In fact, loving kindness has no bounds and can reach out to all living beings, all life, even the planet itself. It arises from the recognition that all living beings desire happiness and well-being, and wish to be free from suffering and its causes. Through practicing loving kindness we touch the sense of shared humanity in all living beings and we realize that fundamentally we all want the same thing – to be happy.

Loving Kindness is an attitude of well-wishing, an aspiration for others and ourselves to be well and happy and free from suffering. Within it is the recognition that we are all inter-connected in so many ways. We see that when others are suffering, then we too suffer. We see that when others are happy and nourished, then this too benefits us. We can celebrate in the good fortune of others and feel a heart-felt compassion when we know that others are in difficulty. In practicing loving kindness, we lose a sense of our own separateness and exclusive pre-occupation with our own personal concerns.

The practice of loving kindness is a journey of expanding the boundaries of our loving concerns in ever-widening circles to a more inclusive loving tolerance. It is also a deepening of the journey of meeting ourselves more fully, enabling us truly to accept ourselves just as we are with our best interests at heart – not in an egotistical or selfish manner, but through complete and friendly acceptance.

This is the potential of the human heart: a love and kindness which is boundless, tolerant and knowing. That potential is already there in all of us, although often shrouded by the limited concerns and preoccupations of our everyday lives.

Loving Kindness is one of four limitless contemplations, which also include the practice of compassion (where loving kindness meets with suffering), sympathetic joy (a pleasure we feel in the good fortune of others) and equanimity (a balanced responsiveness to all things). All of these qualities will be developed naturally through the deep practice of mindfulness. They are also practices in their own right. They can shift our habitual mind states from selfish, limiting concerns to ways of being which deeply understand our interconnectedness with each other and with all of life.

The actual practice of loving kindness

In the formal practice of loving kindness, we begin as we would with any of our mindfulness practice: we settle the mind and ground ourselves in our own experience and body sensations. We connect with our breath and bring awareness to any wholesome or positive emotions which are already present.

We begin with developing loving kindness towards ourselves and allow our hearts to open with tenderness. For many people this can be the most difficult stage – they may accept the notion of kindness to others, but struggle with the idea of extending this to themselves due to problems of low self-esteem, attitudes of not-deserving or self-sacrificing.

In the mindfulness tradition, “charity has to begin at home” and we will be limited in our capacity to develop qualities of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity if we fail to develop these qualities for ourselves. If we maintain the separation between ourselves and others, applying different rules to each, then we are still practicing discrimination and unkindness.

It can sometimes help if we begin by bringing to mind someone who has loved and cherished us in our lives, simply for who we are – unconditionally! This may be someone who is still around in our lives, or someone who is no longer with us. We may have only experienced this for a moment in our lives; perhaps this has even been from an animal. If no-one comes to mind, then perhaps, we can imagine what it would feel like to be loved in this way, perhaps by an imaginary figure or a Higher Being.

In any case, we try to foster the feelings of what it is like to feel loved in this way – to receive the warm embrace of loving kindness from another. And then, we let go of the source of this loving regard and see if we can generate those feelings for ourselves.

It may help to use our imagination and to picture ourself as a young child standing in front of us (perhaps five or six years of age), if that allows the feelings of loving kindness to flow more easily. And we wish ourselves well, using traditional phrases if that helps, or phrases of our own:

May I be well.

May I be happy.

May I be free from suffering.

We repeat the phrases silently to ourselves, really meaning it. Perhaps we can say our name to ourselves, allowing our tone of voice to be gentle and kindly.

We are not trying to force anything or to squeeze out any particular feeling from our hearts. If things feel dry or distant, that is fine. That is our experience. We can allow whatever is there just to be there as it is. In time, we may find that our experience changes and deepens.

After a period of focusing loving kindness towards ourselves, we gradually let go of the image of ourselves and bring to mind someone in our lives whom we love dearly, silently saying their name. And we direct our feelings of loving kindness to that person, holding them in our warm embrace. If it helps, we can imagine them also as a young child and we can wish them well:

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

Maybe we know that our loved one is suffering or has suffered and that they cannot be free from their suffering just through our wishing it. The point here is to cultivate our intention of well-wishing – we may not be able to stop the suffering and pain, but we hold our loved one within the embrace of our loving kindness allowing any sensations of warmth and connection to build up within our hearts.

Gradually, we can let go of our loved one and broaden the circle of our awareness to include all of those with whom we share our day to day lives: our family, our neighbours, our colleagues, our friends, our pets. We can imagine them appearing in front of us, one by one, and silently saying their names. Among them, there will be those we do not feel close to, those whom we do not like or approve of, and those we do not know. There may be some among them whom we find difficult. But loving kindness does not need to be restricted to liking or closeness or approving. We can recognize that they are fellow human beings and we can still wish them well. If they are well, then perhaps they will be less problematic for us. We can wish them all well, opening our hearts to them, feeling the warm embrace of loving kindness reaching out to each of them.

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

And we can continue to expand our loving kindness, in ever widening circles, to include all those with whom we share our world. We can expand out in geographical circles or we can simply allow areas of the world to appear to us. We can bring to mind those people who have been involved in growing and preparing our food, making our clothes and other products which we use; people from across the globe whose lives are in so many ways connected to our own, even though we have never met. We may wish to bring to mind areas of the world where there is conflict or suffering. We can include animals, plant life, the environment, the earth itself, and all life everywhere! And we can wish them well:

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

Again, we may be sorely aware of the suffering and know that it is not within our capacity to bring it to healing. However, the point here is to work on our intention and our well wishing, and we can feel confident that this in itself will have a positive effect, even just for our own

state of mind. We are training the mind and the heart not to turn away, to feel connected and intimately involved, as best we can.

We bring this practice to a close by letting go of all objects of our loving kindness and coming back to ourselves – “the one who has loved us all of our lives, and who knows us by heart”, as Derek Walcott says in the poem, “Love After Love”. We can sit for a while and bask in the energy of loving kindness that we have generated.

Home practice – Week six

Silence

Formal mindfulness practice

- Continue to alternate and combine the **practices of your choice on a daily basis** and to reflect on what you are noticing in the home practice log.
- Introduce **Walking Meditation** (refer to p 35) as a form of mindful movement.

Informal mindfulness practice

- Continue to bring mindful awareness to the **activities of your everyday life**.
- Watch out for opportunities for **silent practice** (e.g. turning off the radio when you are driving, eating a meal in silence, finding quiet spaces for non-doing, taking a break from talking).

Home practice log

Day/date	Mindfulness practice	Comments about what you noticed...

Session Seven: Lifestyle and “Diet”

How can I best take care of myself?

Lifestyle and “diet”

If we practice a wise mindfulness with a sense of heartfulness and loving kindness, we will very likely notice over time that we wish to change our lifestyle to something that is more nourishing and wholesome. We will become more aware of the activities and conditions in our lives that nourish us and those that deplete us. We will begin to want to let go of those things which are unwholesome and take us away from ourselves and to embrace the conditions that support mindful living. Over time, we may find that we naturally choose to bring more simplicity into our lives, and to let go of many things which complicate our lives, including altering our relationship to time, work, material possessions, status and world stress.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a teacher of mindfulness uses the concept of “diet” to refer not only to what we consume in terms of food and drink, but also what we consume with all our senses. He invites us to draw our awareness to the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, and how this impacts upon our sense of well-being and consciousness. We can become aware of “toxins”, not only in what we eat or drink, but also in the things we read, the media, certain television programmes or magazines, films, conversations, and the numerous forms of advertising that invite themselves into our lives.

Through our mindfulness practice, we can become aware of how these things impact upon our state of mind when we digest them, raising the question of what elements of our lifestyle we need to let go of. We may be consuming a daily diet of violence, fear, anger, confusion, hopelessness and despair through a variety of sources, especially when we are open to taking in the bad news stories from around the world, with graphic details, images and sounds, as well as the daily bombardment of advertisements with their jingles, so skillful at getting “inside our heads”. And in this modern age of information technology, we are exposed to phenomenal amounts of information stimulation – fast, flashy and frenetic, which is perhaps conditioning our minds towards what Jon Kabat Zinn describes as a collective “attention deficit disorder society”.

Certainly a lot of the stresses of modern living are contributed to by the expectation that we are always connected and contactable through a variety of phones, emails and internet connections and that we are expected to keep informed and up to date. We can become addicted to this sensory bombardment, as a form of diversion and possibly a form of escape from ourselves. It trains our minds to become more unsettled with shorter attention spans and an inability to deal with boredom or lack of stimulation. It gives us endless extra things to react to and obsess about, which are not perhaps directly related to the more personal realities of our day to day lives. It can have a detrimental effect upon our communication and relationships with others as well as our relationship with ourselves.

Of course, this stressful way of living, has emerged from and been created by the human mind. In our practice of mindfulness, we are working at training and conditioning the mind in a different way, and through this, we can slowly begin to change our relationship to these

stressors and our appetite for them.

Reflection: What nourishes and depletes me?

**What nourishes me? What increases my sense of being alive and present?
(Up activities):**

**What depletes me? What decreases my sense of being alive and present?
(Down activities):**

How can I ensure that I have more of the conditions in my life that nourish me and increase the certainty of these conditions being present in my life?

How can I ensure that I have less of the conditions that deplete me and decrease the certainty of these conditions being present in my life? What can I let go of?

If I can create the perfect conditions for my well-being, what qualities will I get in touch with in myself?

Mindful communication

As we pay attention to our patterns of communication, we can become aware of how unmindful this can be at times. We may notice that we fail to listen deeply to the other person, because we are getting caught up in planning or rehearsing what we are going to say next, often interrupting or even finishing the other person's sentence for them, so we can get our air-space. We may find that our attention is not fully on the other person: that we are hearing through the veils of our own preconceived ideas, opinions, judgments and stories. We may feel urges to give advice, to educate, to interrogate, to explain, to analyse, to correct, to console, to reassure, to humour, to judge, to divert, to shut up, to disagree, to match against our own stories or theories. We may have a sense of our communications being rushed because of our agendas and pressures of time, because we are distracted, because we are lost in our thoughts, because we are not really interested. All of these habits can serve to derail effective communication.

Perhaps we talk too much and have lost the ability to deeply listen to another. It is said that the most precious gift we can give to another is our presence. Within our presence is the heart of empathy and deep understanding. With true empathy, we listen to another with our whole being and not just with our ears. We listen with a mind emptied of our own notions and ideas. We are able to fully hear the other person, not just the message, but also the emotions and needs underlying this. We are able to give the other person the space, without hurrying and without interruptions to speak their truth.

Communication reflection

- Are you aware of your particular unhelpful communication habits? Are you prepared to try to change them?
- What is your relationship to silence? How do you respond to gaps in conversation? Is your mind filled with inner chatter, even when you are not talking to another?
- How are you when you are listening to another? Do you tend to interrupt, or to try to turn the conversation around to your ideas, your experiences, and your agendas?
- Are you able to make choices as to whether or not you get involved in unwholesome conversations, such as unpleasant gossiping or general negativity?
- Do you notice how you are affected by the mind states of others through their conversations? What aspects of your own state of mind are revealed through your communication patterns?
- What types of communication do you find most wholesome and satisfactory? How do you feel after such interactions? What are the best conditions for bringing these about? How can you help others to ensure more nourishing communications?
- Listen to the inner dialogue in your mind? How do you speak to yourself? Are you aware of speaking to yourself with unkindness, with impatience, with irritability? How judging are your thoughts?
- Has your style of communication changed in any way through the practice of mindfulness? How is your ability to be present, to feel empathic and to listen deeply to another? Has this changed?
- Have you tried to build spaces into your life where you can practice silence and where there is no need to talk to another? Are you able to listen more deeply to yourself at these times?

Choiceless awareness

During our meditation journey we have practiced cultivating awareness using particular objects of attention to emphasise different aspects of our experience of the present moment. We have focused on mindfulness of tasting, mindfulness of body sensations, mindfulness of the breath, mindfulness of movement, mindfulness of sound, mindfulness of thoughts and emotions, mindfulness of experiences we judge to be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. With each of these objects of attention, we have explored their richness and depth, and our reactions to them. They have served as useful anchors, bringing us back to the present moment each time our minds wander away. They have helped us to cultivate qualities of attending and gradually, the capacity to start to settle our minds.

The mode of attending we cultivate in our meditation practice is not narrow or over-focused (as it can be when we are concentrating upon something): it does not exclude or block anything out from the field of awareness. Rather, it is like the ever widening concentric circles in a pond after a pebble has been dropped in. We come to notice that the objects of attention we have been exploring are not distinctly separated from one another: they are all held in a broader field of awareness and an ever changing landscape of sensation and experience.

The practice of choiceless awareness is one of dropping focus upon any particular object of awareness, and simply attending to whatever arises within our experience. In Zen practice it is described as “just sitting”. It is like sitting in the middle of those concentric circles, allowing our awareness to be open and expansive. Simply attending to whatever arises and to all aspects of our experience, arising and passing away, coming and going, appearing and disappearing – not holding to anything. The mind is like the radiant blue sky: clear, bright, totally accepting, fully knowing and recognizing, like a mirror, reflecting all that is there, clinging to nothing, pushing nothing away. The landscapes of our experience are like rainbows, bubbles arising on the stream, shadows and light patterns, continuously flowing and changing, leaving no trace.

In this practice, we rest in awareness itself. We even let go of the idea that we are “meditating” or doing anything at all. During a period of meditation practice, we can experiment with dropping the object of awareness and just sit for a few moments with a broad open awareness. It can be useful to end a period of practice in this way, or we may find that we drop into choiceless awareness in the middle of a practice session. This is not dropping into drowsiness, sleepiness or episodes where our mindfulness becomes foggy or out of focus. The qualities of choiceless awareness include a strong sense of clarity and wakefulness.

Once our mindfulness practice is somewhat stronger, we may choose to practice longer periods of choiceless awareness. Whatever arises in the moment comes into our experience, and we meet it, as best we can, with bare attention, with acceptance and without judging. We open to whatever comes, allowing it to arise, to show itself and to fade away, without interfering in any way. Just noticing, present moment attending, welcoming whatever comes, watching, witnessing as if we are sitting quietly on the banks of the river, just letting it all flow past. If we get lost, we simply return to a familiar object of awareness, such as the breath, to anchor us back into the present moment.

Homework practice – Week seven

Taking care of myself

Formal mindfulness practice

- **Continue to alternate and combine the practices of your choice on a daily basis.** Attempt to practice without guidance, finding your own way and pace around the practices.
- **Practice introducing periods of choiceless awareness for a few minutes at the end of a period of formal practice,** or experiment with whole periods of choiceless awareness, simply returning to a support such as the breath for a while, if you get lost, before returning to open sitting.

Informal mindfulness practice

- **Complete the reflection on “What nourishes and depletes me?”** and identify some changes that you may wish to make with your daily “diet” of sensory experience.
- **Focus on at least one form of communication each day** and reflect on some of the points listed in the box on pages 65.

Home practice log

Day/date	Mindfulness practice	Comments about what you noticed...

Session Eight: Ending, Letting Go and the Rest of Your Life

Where do you go from here?

The journey you have taken together over these past weeks has no doubt generated some momentum and you have been supported by one another in your practice. However, at this stage, it may feel that your practice is still fairly new and you may not all feel confident or ready to “go it alone”. This is entirely normal and understandable but it is also an opportunity to truly make these practices your own and to integrate them more fully into your lives.

One thing that will help is to keep in mind your commitment, and to why you have been cultivating this habit of mindfulness. Hopefully you have caught some rich glimpses during your practice over these weeks of why this is worthwhile, and why in essence it is essential for you to live your life in a mindful way. For many people, it is like the planting of a seed of mindfulness, or a seed of intention to live our lives in a more meaningful way. It is never easy to know how this seed will germinate, and when, and how the plant will be nourished and grow. It may feel at times that the seed is lying dormant, but for most people, it is not forgotten, and it is only a matter of waiting for the right time for it to be reawakened.

Jon Kabat Zinn says that the eighth week “is the rest of your life”. He reminds us to weave our parachute every day and not to leave our practice to those days when we are struggling or in real difficulty. The practices we have been learning are lifelong practices, and we continue to be beginners and to learn something new about our lives and the human condition. If we can keep the practices going, we will be rewarded with a growing momentum and deepening of experience, which can deeply enrich our lives.

If you do decide after this eight week experiment that you wish to continue with these practices, it is worth reflecting upon what you will need to maintain your commitment, your enthusiasm and your aspiration and what you need to set in place to support you with this.

If at all possible, we would recommend a continuation of the formal practices of mindfulness, in whatever form suits you the best, alongside the informal practices integrated into your everyday life. These are like two wings of a bird: they support and strengthen one another. In addition, it may be helpful to see if there is a local practice group, meditation class or teacher who can support you with your practice, sustain inspiration and help you to overcome any difficulties if and when they arise. If there is nothing available locally, perhaps you could see if there were a few friends or colleagues who would like to meet and practice together, perhaps listening to guided CDs and sharing experience.

We hope that you can use this handbook and recommended reading as a resource to assist you. In addition, we are including here some tips for keeping your practice going in all of the areas of your life.

Tips for practicing mindfulness: 5 essential points



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

From '**Breath by Breath**' by Larry Rosenberg

Tips for keeping formal practice going



- Aim to engage in a period of formal practice every day – even if you are having a “bad” day or very busy day.
- If sitting practice is your primary mindfulness practice, aim to sit for at least 20 minutes, and preferably for 30 or 40 minutes every day.
- If the body scan is your preferred primary practice, aim to do it every day for at least 20 minutes and preferably 30 – 40 minutes. Also try some sitting practice for at least 5 – 10 minutes each day.
- If the day is running away from you, try to sit for three minutes, or even for one minute. Allow that minute to be a concentrated period of non-doing, using the breath for calmness and stability.
- If possible, try to sit in the morning, even setting the alarm clock a little earlier before everyone else in the house has got up. Alternatively, try sitting when you come in from work, before lunch at home or in the office, last thing at night before you go to bed, or at any time at all.
- Practice some form of mindful movement a few times each week, taking care that you are practicing with awareness and resting between postures. If this is your primary practice of mindfulness, aim to practice for at least 30 minutes at a time.

Adapted from '**Full Catastrophe Living**', by Jon Kabat Zinn

Tips for keeping mindfulness going at work



- Take 5 – 30 minutes in the morning to be quiet and meditate: sit or lie down and be with yourself, gaze out of the window, listen to the sounds of nature or take a slow quiet walk.
- While your car is warming up, take a minute to quietly pay attention to breathing.
- While driving, become aware of body tension, e.g. hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel, shoulders raised, stomach tight, etc. consciously working at releasing and dissolving that tension. Does being tense help you to drive better? What does it feel like to relax and drive?
- Decide not to play the radio and be with yourself.
- Experiment with driving a little slower than you might usually.
- Pay attention to your breathing, to the sky and trees or the quality of your mind when you stop at the traffic lights.
- Take a moment to orient yourself to your workday once you park your car. Use the walk across the car park to step into your life: to know where you are and where you are going.
- While sitting at your desk, computer, etc., pay attention to bodily sensations, consciously attempting to relax and rid yourself of excess tension.
- Use your breaks to truly relax rather than simply “pausing”. For instance, instead of having coffee, a cigarette or reading, try taking a short walk.
- At lunch, changing your environment can be helpful.
- Try closing your door (if you have one) and take some time to consciously relax.
- Decide to “STOP” for 1 – 3 minutes every hour during the workday. Become aware of your breathing and bodily sensations, allowing the mind to settle.
- Use the everyday cues in your environment as reminders to “centre” yourself, e.g. the telephone ringing, sitting at the computer, etc.
- Take some time at lunchtime or other moments in the day to speak with close associates. Try choosing topics that are not necessarily work related.
- Choose to eat one or two lunches per week in silence. Use this time to eat slowly and be with yourself.
- At the end of the workday, try retracing today’s activities acknowledging and congratulating yourself for what you’ve accomplished and then make a list for tomorrow. You’ve done enough for today!
- Pay attention to your walk back to the car – breath in the air, feel the cold or warmth of your body. Can you open to and accept these environmental conditions and body sensations rather than resisting them? Listen to the sounds. Can you walk without feeling rushed? What happens when you slow down?

- While your car is warming up, sit quietly and consciously make the transition from work to home – take a moment to simply be – enjoy it for a moment.
- While driving, notice if you are rushing. What does it feel like? What could you do about it? Remember you've got more control than you might imagine.
- When you pull into the driveway of your home, take a minute to orient yourself to being with your family and entering your home.
- When you get home, change out of work clothes, and say hello to each of your family members or to the people you live with. Take a moment to look into their eyes. If possible, make the time to take 5 – 10 minutes to be quiet and still. If you live alone, feel what it is like to enter the quietness of your environment.

Adapted from Saki Santorelli 'Mindfulness and Mastery in the Workplace: 21 Ways to Reduce Stress During the Workday'

Reflection: Ending & continuing

Think back to why you came originally – what were your expectations and why did you stay?

What did you get out of coming, if anything? What did you learn?

What were the biggest costs? What sacrifices did you make?

What are your biggest blocks or obstacles to continuing?

What strategies might help you not to get stuck and to keep practicing?

Letting go

At this stage in the course, we can practice meeting the ending with full awareness: embracing and breathing it in and like the opening of a clenched hand, releasing it and letting it go. As in many areas of our lives, we will learn that letting go is not losing, but instead is an opening up to the unfolding of our lives. Having drunk from this well of abundance, feeling nourished, we can let go of the well, and take this replenishment into the rest of our lives.

Letting go, in order to let in
releasing, in order to receive
nature's coded messages become clearer
the less we try to see.

Trying hard, trying harder and harder
trying so very hard
is not the way.

We need commitment, yes
and focus
and hope and faith and trust
but most of all we need ease
a discipline of ease
not trying too hard at all.

You see "trying hard" has a cell-mate
called "giving up", admitting defeat
like black and white
like pushing and pulling
no peace there.

"Not yet", you say
"I'm not ready yet
to take the step beyond."
I know
I've stepped so slow myself,
still do
but love sweet sister,
like death
comes in a moment's heartbeat
then goes.

There are no ways to hold
except by letting go, and
letting it be a part of you
and you of it.

Stewart Mercer (reproduced with kind permission)

Home practice – Week eight

Ending, letting go and the rest of your life

- The rest of your life!
- Find your own way to nurture the seed of mindfulness in your life. Allow it to flourish and to grow. Allow the fruits of your practice to touch your life and the lives of others deeply and whole-heartedly.
- Aim to continue with a daily practice of some kind and if you stop, know that you can begin again any time! Just start again, free from guilt and self-criticism and re-discover the practices with a beginner's mind. Sometimes these breaks in practice can be a very rich learning experience.
- Embrace the rest of your life and enjoy the journey!
- May you be well, happy and free!

The formal practices you have learned:

- The raisin exercise (eating meditation)
- The body scan
- The sitting practice
- Mindful movement
 - - Mindful walking
- The three minute (three step) breathing space
- Loving Kindness

Informal practices and exercises

Mindful daily activities. Mindfulness dots. Pleasant and unpleasant events. Nourishing and depleting events. Mindful communication. Personal reflection with kindness and curiosity.

Reading Materials and Resources

Reading to get you started:

- **Full Catastrophe Living, revised edition: How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation** – Jon Kabat Zinn, 2013
- **The Mindful Way Through Depression: freeing yourself from chronic unhappiness** – Mark Williams, John Teasdale, 2007 (includes CD of guided meditations)
- **Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World** – Mark Williams and Danny Penman, 2011
- **Living Well With Pain And Illness: Using mindfulness to free yourself from suffering: The Mindful Way to Free Yourself from Suffering** – Vidyamala Burch, 2008
- **Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life** – Jon Kabat Zinn, 2016

Manuals and eight week workbooks

6. **The Mindful Way Workbook** – John Teasdale, Mark Williams, Zindel Segal, 2014
7. **Mindfulness in Eight Weeks: the revolutionary 8 week plan to clear your mind and calm your life** – Michael Chaskalson, 2014
8. **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Workbook** – Bob Stahl and Elisha Goldstein, 2014
9. **The Miracle of Mindfulness: The classic guide to meditation by the worlds most revered master (classic edition)** – Thich Nhat Hanh, 2008
10. **You Are Not Your Pain: Using Mindfulness to Relieve pain, reduce Stress, and Restore Well being: an eight week program** – Vidyamala Burch and Dr Danny Penman, 2015
11. **Insight Meditation Kit: A step-by-step course on how to meditate** – Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein, 2002

More in depth reading

General

- **Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life** – Jon Kabat Zinn, 2004
- **Coming to Our Senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness** – Jon Kabat Zinn, 2005
- **Heal Thy Self: Lessons on Mindfulness in Medicine** – Saki Santorelli, 2000
- **A Path with Heart** – Jack Kornfield, 2002
- **Sane New World: Taming the Mind** – Ruby Wax, 2014
- **Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise** – Thich Nhat Hanh, 2015
- **'Mindfulness for Dummies'** Shamash Alidina, 2014

Emotions

- **'Destructive Emotions and How We Can Overcome Them'**, Daniel Goleman, 2004
- **'Healing Emotions: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Mindfulness, Emotions and Health'**, Daniel Goleman, 2003

Anxiety

- **'Mindfulness for Unravelling Anxiety: Finding calm and clarity in uncertain times'**, Richard Gilpin, 2016

Pain

- **Mindfulness for Health: A practical guide to relieving pain, reducing stress and restoring wellbeing**, Vidyamala Burch and Dr Danny Penman, 2013

Depression

- **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: a new approach to preventing relapse**, Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, John Teasdale, 2002
- **Mindfulness for Black Dogs and Blue Days: Finding a Path Through Depression** Richard Gilpin, 2012

Work place

- **The Mindful Workplace: Developing Resilient Individuals and Resonant Organisations with MBSR**, Michael Chaskalson, 2011

Neuroscience

- **Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom**, Rick Hanson, 2009
- **The Emotional Life of Your Brain: How Its Unique Patterns Affect the Way You Think, Feel, and Live – and How You Can Change Them**, Sharon Begley and Richard Davidson, 2013
- **Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain: How a New Science Reveals Our Extraordinary Potential to Transform Ourselves**, Sharon Begley, 2007
- **Siddhartha's Brain: Unlocking the Ancient Science of Enlightenment**, James Kingsland, 2017

Breathing

- **The Art of Breathing**, Danny Penman, 2016
- **The Breathing Book: Vitality and Good Health Through Essential Breath Work**, Donna Farhi, 1996

Mindful walking

- **The Art of Mindful Walking**, Adam Ford, 2012

Mindful eating

- **Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food** by Jan Chozen Bays, 2014
- **Eating Mindfully: How to End Mindless Eating & Enjoy a Balanced Relationship with Food.** Second edition by Susan Albers, 2012
- **Mindful Eating, Mindful Life: How Mindfulness Can End Our Struggle with Weight Once and For All,** Thich Nhat Hanh and Lilian Cheung, 2015

Poetry

- **Soul Food: Nourishing Poems for Starved Minds,** Neil Astley and Pamela Robertson-Pearce, 2007
- **House of Light,** Mary Oliver, 1992
- **Rumi's Little Book of Life: The Garden of the Soul, the Heart and the Spirit,** Rumi, Maryam Mafi and Azima Melita Kolin, 2013

Art

- **Mindfulness: 25 Ways to Live in the Moment Through Art,** Christophe Andre, 2014

Parenting

- **Everyday Blessings: the Inner World of Mindful Parenting,** Jon and Myla Kabat Zinn, 2008

Online resources:

Academic and research centres

- Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, University of Massachusetts Medical School: www.umassmed.edu/cfm
- Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice, University of Wales, Bangor, UK: www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness
- Oxford Mindfulness Centre, University of Oxford: <http://oxfordmindfulness.org>
- Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy Developments: www.mbct.com; www.mbct.co.uk. Specifically useful for information and resources related to depression
- Centre for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison: <https://centerhealthyminds.org/about/overview>
- Mind and Life Institute: www.mindandlife.org
- Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom: www.wisebrain.org
- Mindful Awareness research Centre University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA): <http://marc.ucla.edu/about-marc>

UK Government Mindfulness Initiative

- The UK Mindfulness Initiative, all party parliamentary group:
www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/
- Mindful nation report:
www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/publications/mindful-nation-uk-report
- Mindfulness in the workplace:
www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/publications/building-the-case

Online mindfulness MBSR course (free)

- <https://palousemindfulness.com>

General information and resources

- Mindfulness Scotland. Local charity responsible for this resource: www.mindfulnessscotland.org
- Magazine style site: www.mindful.org
- Free mindfulness guided meditations: www.freemindfulness.org/download
- Mindfulness practice centre founded by Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh:
<http://plumvillage.org>
- Western Buddhist Vipassana teachings: <http://dharmaeed.org>

Mindful eating

- The Centre for Mindful Eating: <http://thecenterformindfuleating.org>
- Mindful Eating, Conscious Living: www.me-cl.com

You tube talks

- Richard Davidson '**Wellbeing is a skill**', 2015
- Richard Davidson and Jon Kabat Zinn '**Can Mindfulness increase our resilience to Stress?**', 2013
- Richard Davidson '**Davos 2015 – The human brain deconstructing Mindfulness**', 2015
- Jon Kabat-Zinn '**Healing from Within**' (PBS broadcast) 1993
- Michael Chaskalson '**Mindful Leadership: Bridge talk**', 2015
- Mark Williams '**Mindfulness for Life – with Mark Williams**', 2015
- Sharon Salzberg '**Sharon Salzberg on Loving Kindness**', 2015

People to explore on Twitter

- Jon Kabat-Zinn @jonkabat-zinn
- Centre For Mindfulness @umasscfm
- Jack Kornfield @Jackkornfield
- Everyday Mindfulness @everydaymindfulness

- Tich Nhat Hanh @thichnhathanh
- Sharon Salzberg @SharonSalzberg
- Center Healthy Minds @healthyminds

Apps (for the public with free elements)

- <https://insighttimer.com>
- <http://buddhify.com>

App for NHSGGC MBSR course participants:

Mindfulness Based Approaches, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

Android:

- https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.tactuum.quris.mindfulness&hl=en_GB

iTunes:

- <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/mindfulness-based-approaches/id1158023865?mt=8>

This list been compiled by the trustees and members of Mindfulness Scotland.

They represent resources that we have personally used and found to be helpful and accessible. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list and we encourage you to explore!

