

Mindful Space Cardiff

Mindfulness Course Handbook

Section 2 – Turning towards difficulty

8-WEEK COURSE IN MINDFULNESS (MBSR/MBCT)

8 Tuesday evening sessions via zoom: 8 June – 27 July 2021

HALF-DAY ONLINE RETREAT

Saturday 17 July (10.00am-1.00pm)

MEMBERS' WORKSHOPS

Friday 6 and Wednesday 18 August, 7-9pm are workshops for 8-week course graduates. You're very welcome to attend one of these.

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Mindful Space

Learning to live in the moment

Session Four – Loops and Patterns; Reacting to Unwanted Experiences

- “I can’t meditate”, “I have no time to meditate”
- Seeing thoughts as thoughts, Mark Williams
- Stress triggers and reactions
- *I said to the wanting creature inside me*, Kabir
- Home practice

No one has ever been able to control their thinking, although people may tell the story of how they have. I don’t let go of my thoughts. I meet them with understanding. Then they let go of me.

Byron Katie

Rather than waiting to win the internal struggle with your own self so that your life can begin (you can choose to live now and live fully) – with, not in spite of your past, with your memories, with your fears and with your sadness.

Steven Hayes, *Get out of your Mind and into your Life*

“I can’t meditate”, “I have no time to meditate”

- Be gentle with yourself in the struggle to meditate. Avoid trying to batter yourself into submission! Try cajoling instead
- Remember that meditation is difficult – as difficult as learning a new language. Keep your expectations of yourself low and make sure each step is small and do-able
- Get your family on board. Explain to them what you are doing and why. Ask for their support
- Ask yourself, ‘What do I have to lose if I don’t meditate?’ Weigh up how much it matters to you
- Get a meditation buddy, someone you can feedback to. Contact them each week to discuss your progress
- Feel the reluctance/inertia/fear and do it anyway
- Draw/create a mental image of yourself deep in contented meditation. Visualise this image when you are struggling to sit down to meditate
- Follow Pema Chodron’s advice and ‘start where you are’. Let go of any past struggles and frustrations and begin your practice, today, now.
- Find one meditation writer you really connect with. Draw on them as a source of inspiration
- Remember mindfulness meditation isn’t about aiming to achieving a state of bliss/calmness/whatever. It is about being with and accepting yourself and your experience exactly as it is, in this moment
- Set up a physical meditation reminder in your house, eg. a post-it on the fridge
- Treat yourself to a beautiful meditation gadget/prop, eg. a meditation cushion, posh incense, a little statue, an orchid
- Write a meditation journal
- Rather than approaching meditation as a chore see it as a gift to yourself
- If it’s helpful, draw on the Buddhist idea of your ‘inner jewel’- the hidden potential for deep realisation and enlightenment that each of us contains
- Set a timer to ring half-way through your meditation. When it rings stop meditating. Wiggle and stretch, then return to your meditation.

Seeing thoughts as thoughts

Through mindfulness we can cultivate a new and very different relationship to (our thoughts), allowing them simply to be here without analysing them, trying to work out where they came from, or trying to get rid of them in any way. In awareness we see them immediately for what they actually are: constructions, mysterious creations of the mind, mental events that may or may not accurately reflect reality. We come to realise that our thoughts are not facts. Nor are they really “mine” or “me”...

Mindfulness practice invites us to see more clearly the link between thoughts and feelings. But our task is not only to become more aware of our thoughts, but to become aware of them in a different way, to relate to them from within the being mode of mind. In being mode it becomes much clearer which thoughts are helpful and which are (not)...

Carried Away by a Thought Stream (seeing our thoughts as a film on a screen)

... It is helpful to notice any emotional or intensity directed at any element of the story line (of our thoughts) and then, gently and compassionately, to escort the mind back to its seat (in the cinema), back to observing the play of thoughts and feelings. If at any time you feel your mind has become unfocused and scattered, or if it repeatedly gets drawn into the drama of your thinking and imagining, it is always possible to come back to the sensations of the breath in the body, using the breath as an anchor to gently steady and stabilise your attention.

It is important to acknowledge the difficulty of this practice; we are so used to living inside our thoughts rather than attending to them that it can be extraordinarily challenging to maintain a mindful relationship to thinking for any length of time.

Williams, Teasdale, Segal and Kabat-Zinn,
The Mindful Way through Depression, p164

Stress Triggers and Reactions

PRIMARY SUFFERING		SECONDARY SUFFERING	
TRIGGER EVENT	BODILY/EMOTIONAL RESPONSE	THOUGHTS/ IMAGES	BEHAVIOUR/ IMPULSE
Step on drawing pin	Sensations of intense pain, tightness of anger in the chest	'Who left this here?', 'Why is everyone so careless!'	Shout at children
After yet another job interview, I am not offered the post	Physical heaviness, tightness in stomach, tingling in the eyes	'Again! I'm never going to get a job', 'What's wrong with me?'	Drink a bottle of wine, don't answer the phone
Stuck in traffic	Tightness in chest, increased pulse rate	'I'm going to be late'	Grip steering wheel tighter
Monday morning	Emptiness, heaviness	'I can't face going to work'	Stay in bed
I'm trying to meditate and can't concentrate	Frustrated, head feels tight, restlessness in my legs	I'm not in the right mood, I'll try again late	Get up and do something else

I said to the wanting-creature inside me

I said to the wanting-creature inside me:
What is this river you want to cross?
There are no travellers on the river-road, and no road.
Do you see anyone moving about on that bank, or nesting?

There is no river at all, and no boat, and no boatman.
There is no tow-rope either, and no one to pull it.
There is no ground, no sky, no time, no bank, no ford!

And there is no body, and no mind!
Do you believe there is some place that will make the soul less thirsty?
In that great absence you will find nothing.

Be strong then, and enter into your own body;
there you have a solid place for your feet.
Think about it carefully!
Don't go off somewhere else!

Kabir says this: just throw away all thoughts of imaginary things,
and stand firm in that which you are.

Kabir, *The Kabir Book*

Home Practice - Session Four

Joseph Goldstein, "Pick an amount of time that you can really commit to doing every day. It is the everydayness that is going to build the practice."

1. BREATHING SPACE: Include a breathing space twice in your day

- Which ones will you try: 5 things or Conscious breathing?

When will you do it? (First thing, lunchtime, last thing, mid-morning? Another time?)

2. MEDITATION: Meditate every day this week

- Read through the handout, 'I can't meditate'. Choose one or two suggestions that might be helpful for you
- I suggest you meditate for 25/30 minutes.
- Alternate between the body scan and the mindfulness of breathing
- Keep a record of your practice
- During meditation and during your day, pay attention to your stress triggers and loops. Notice the pull into thought and action. Experiment with staying present with your experience.

How long will aim to meditate for? (10 mins/ 15 mins/ 20 mins/25 mins/30 mins)

3. JOY

- Choose one simple thing that gives you pleasure: eg. listening to music, walking in nature, singing, reading poetry, looking at old photographs. Make time to do this activity twice over the next week. Can you bring present moment awareness to the experience.

What will you do?

Signed:

Date:

Session Five – Your Pain is Not You

- Compassionate Acceptance Meditation, Vidyamala
- Working with difficulty: RAIN
- Your pain is not you, Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Home practice

Pain x resistance = suffering.

Christopher Germer, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*

Surrender is the simple but profound wisdom of yielding to rather than opposing the flow of life.... (it) is a purely inner phenomenon. It does not mean that on the outer level you cannot take action and change the situation.

Eckhart Tolle, *Practising the Power of Now*

The Bandaged Place, Rumi (1207-1273 AD)

Trust your wound to a Teacher's surgery.
Flies collect on a wound. They cover it,
those flies of your self-protecting feelings,
your love for what you think is yours.

Let a Teacher wave away the flies
and put a plaster on the wound.

Don't turn your head. Keep looking
at the bandaged place. That's where
the Light enters you.
And don't believe for a moment
that you're healing yourself.

Working with difficulty: RAIN, Tara Brach

Recognise what's happening

- How am I feeling? Tired? Angry? Agitated? Depressed?
- Recognising this as a moment of suffering

Acceptance/ Allow

- Allowing this moment to be as it is
- 'Welcome' the emotion – 'Welcome anger'

Investigate with kindness

- How am I experiencing this in the body?
- How's my body telling me I'm scared?

Nurture

Soothe the part of you that is distressed with compassionate words, self-care and gentle touch. Offer yourself the same kindness you would offer a good friend. (You could also add - It's NOT about me. This is part of our 'common humanity'. You are not limited to this, you are not defined by this. It's not personal.

Compassionate Acceptance Meditation

In this meditation you're going to learn how to very, very gently turn towards your experience of pain or difficulty and to meet it with tenderness, kindness and compassion. This will help to soften or dissolve secondary resistance and suffering. And you'll learn how to bathe your pain or difficulty, as well as any resistance you may feel, in a kindly, tender breath, moment by moment.

Preparation

Establish a comfortable posture. Gently surrender the weight of your body to gravity, so it settles and rests on the chair. Can you let go into a sense of how gravity gently draws your body down towards the floor and holds you and supports you?

The Meditation

Gradually gather your awareness around the breath in the whole body, allowing yourself to be rocked and cradled by the breath - the front, the sides and the back of the body. Feel the breath deeply inside. Can you rest your awareness inside the breath as it rhythmically and gently moves the body?

And now, with great tenderness, gently open your awareness to include your pain, discomfort, fatigue or difficulty of whatever kind you're experiencing. Include it in your awareness with the kind of attitude that you would naturally have towards a loved one who was hurting or injured. Softly breathe with this experience for a few moments. If this feels frightening, then breathe with the fear with gentleness, coming back to rest your awareness on the breath in the body, over and over.

Now, allowing your awareness to become a little more focused, investigate the texture of pain or discomfort. What do you feel? Do you notice the way the sensations are always changing and how no two moments are precisely the same? You may feel a sense of relief in your heart, now that you're finally turning towards your difficulty and meeting it with kindness and curiosity, rather than being locked in battle with it, which just leads to more suffering and tension. And what about your thoughts and emotions about your pain or difficulty? Can you let them come and go moment by moment, neither suppressing them nor over-identifying with them? Can you let them go as you rest with the basic sensations in the body, moment by moment, held by the kindly breath? Be sure to cultivate an attitude that is patient, gentle and tender. If your experience is a little overwhelming, you can broaden your awareness to include other aspects of the moment. Notice sounds, smells, the temperature in the room perhaps; allow your sensations of pain or discomfort to take place within a broad and open field of awareness that includes many things as they arise and pass away.

And now saturate the breath with self-compassion: as you breathe in, imagine a sense of kindness flowing into your whole body; and as you breathe out, imagine the kindness seeping ever deeper; saturating the body with warmth and compassion. Breathe in and out with a deep sense of kindness, care, tenderness and compassion towards yourself.

Allow the whole body, including any pain or discomfort that may be present, to be rocked and cradled by the breath. And if you still feel dominated by resistance, then allow that to be saturated by the kindly, gentle breath. Accept all of your experience with great tenderness.

Conclusion

Very gently begin to bring this meditation to a close. Expand your awareness to include sounds inside and outside the room. Open your eyes and allow your awareness to remain deep inside your body as you begin to gently move, with an attitude of kindness and care towards yourself. Then, very gradually, re-engage with the activities of the day, seeing if you can bring this quality of self-compassion with you and allowing kindness to flow into your experience, over and over again.

Adapted from Vidyamala Burch, *Mindfulness for Health*

Your Pain is Not You, Jon Kabat-Zinn

The next time you hit your thumb or bang your shin on a car door, you can perform a little experiment in mindfulness. See if you can observe the explosion of sensations and the expanding shell of screamed epithets, groans and violent body movements that ensue... As you observe the sensations in the hurt area, notice how they are changing, how sensations of stinging, throbbing, burning, cutting, rending, shooting, aching and many others may flow in rapid succession through the region... Keep following the flow of sensations...

In conducting this little experiment, you may notice, if your concentration is strong, a center of calmness within yourself from which you can observe the entire episode unfold. It can feel as if ... it were not 'your' pain so much as just pain. Perhaps you felt a sense of being calm 'within' the pain or 'behind' the pain...

If you try to bring mindfulness to exactly what you are feeling in those moments when you hurt yourself accidentally, you will probably find that **how** you relate to the sensations you experience makes a big difference in the degree of pain you actually feel and how much you suffer... It can be quite a revelation to discover that you have a range of options for dealing with physical pain, even very intense pain, aside from just being automatically overwhelmed by it.

It may also strike you at a certain point, particularly if there is a moment of calmness in the midst of the inner turmoil, that your awareness of sensations, thoughts and feelings is **different from** the sensations, the thoughts and the feelings themselves – the part of 'you' that is aware is not itself in pain or ruled by these thoughts or feelings at all... When practising the (meditations) you may come to notice that when you identify with your thoughts or feelings or with the sensations in your body... there is much greater turmoil and suffering than when you dwell as the non-judgemental observer of it all, identifying with the knower, with awareness itself.

1. JKZ talks about the possibility of feeling as if it were not "your" pain so much as just pain. What is your experience of this? (*Full Catastrophe Living*, p283)

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2. He then suggests that;
when you identify with your thoughts or feelings or with the sensations in your body ... there is much greater turmoil and suffering than when you dwell as the non-judgmental observer of it all, identifying with the knower, with awareness itself.

What do you understand by the concept of 'identifying with your pain/thoughts/feelings'?

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Home Practice – Session Five

Feel free to adapt these activities to suit you and your week ahead.

1. REFLECTION AND RESETTING INTENTION

This will be the last three weeks of home practice on the course. Reflect on:

- What brought you on the course?
- What is your intention for your home practice for these 3 weeks?

What's your intention for the rest of the course?

2. MEDITATION

- Meditate every day this week for 30/35 minutes. I suggest alternating between the Mindfulness of breathing, the Body scan and Compassionate Acceptance. Keep a note of your practice.
- Try gently nudging the edge of your comfort zone. Experiment with: Eyes open or closed; Listening to a Dropbox track/CD or not; Sitting on the floor or a chair
- During meditation and at other times pay attention to sensations in the body, particularly to unpleasant sensations. Try out RAIN; Recognise the difficulty; Allow it; Investigate with kindness; Nurture it

Which changes will you try?

3. BREATHING SPACE

Spend a couple of minutes every day doing a breathing activity:

- Conscious breathing, 'breathing in I know I'm breathing in...'
- 5 things
- Three-minute breathing space

Signed:

Date:

Session Six – Drop the Storyline: Mindfulness of Emotions

- What are emotions?
- How does mindfulness help us with emotions?
- *The guest house*, Rumi
- *Drop the storyline*, Pema Chodron
- Home practice

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... tension, unhappiness or exhaustion aren't 'problems' that can be solved. They are emotions. They reflect states of mind and body. As such, they cannot be solved - only felt. Once you've felt them - that is, acknowledged their existence - and let go of the tendency to explain or get rid of them, they are much more likely to vanish naturally, like the mist on a spring morning.

Mark Williams, *Mindfulness; Finding peace in a frantic world*

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Learning to Stay

The pith instruction is, Stay... stay ... just stay. Learning to stay with ourselves in meditation is like training a dog. If we train a dog by beating it, we'll end up with an obedient but very inflexible and rather terrified dog. The dog may obey ... but he will also be neurotic and confused. By contrast, training with kindness results in someone who is flexible and confident, who doesn't become upset when situations are unpredictable and insecure.

So whenever we wander off, we gently encourage ourselves to 'stay' and settle down. Are we experiencing restlessness? Stay! Discursive mind? Stay! Are fear and loathing out of control? Stay! Aching knees and throbbing back? Stay! What's for lunch? Stay! I can't stand another minute! Stay! That is how to cultivate steadfastness.

Pema Chodron, *The Places that Scare You*

What are emotions?

- Examples: fear, sadness, disgust, joy, anger, surprise
- Activated by an internal or external event
- Help us to rapidly organise our behaviour to achieve an objective like running away
- Governed by parts of our brains that evolved a long time ago to help us survive
- Rich and complex involving nervous system, hormones, attention, thoughts and memories. Effects facial expression, body posture and internal experience
- Interaction of these 'older' parts of the brain with the more recently evolved cognitive abilities leads to worry and rumination
- Emotion regulation is a natural process. However we often try to control things by distracting, numbing, avoiding and supressing

How does mindfulness help us with emotions?

- Being in the present moment avoids worry and rumination
- Focus on the breathe grounds and soothes
- Grounding avoids overwhelm
- Turning towards our feeling by naming them gives us some distance
- Using our soothing skills on ourselves reduces intensity and urgency

The Guest House, Rumi (1207-1273AD)

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

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

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

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

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

(The Essential Rumi, translations by Coleman Barks)

Drop the story line

Many people, including long-time practitioners, use meditation as a means of escaping difficult emotions. It is possible to misuse the label 'thinking' as a way of pushing negativity away. No matter how many times we've been instructed to stay open to whatever arises, we still can use meditation as repression. Transformation occurs only when we remember, breath by breath, year after year, to move toward our emotional distress without condemning or justifying our experience.

Trungpa Rinpoche describes emotion as a combination of self-existing energy and thoughts. Emotion can't proliferate without our internal conversations. If we're angry when we sit down to meditate, we are instructed to label the thoughts 'thinking' and let them go. Yet below the thoughts something remains – a vital, pulsing energy. There is nothing wrong, nothing harmful about that underlying energy. Our practice is to stay with it, to experience it, to leave it as it is...

When emotional distress arises uninvited, we let the story line go and abide with the energy. This is a felt experience, not a verbal commentary on what is happening. We can feel the energy in our bodies. If we can stay with it, neither acting it out nor repressing it, it wakes us up.

Pema Chodron, *The Places that Scare You*

Home Practice - Session Six

Feel free to adapt these activities to suit you and your week ahead.

1. MEDITATION AND UNWANTED GUESTS

- Meditate every day this week for 35/40 minutes.
- Reread the Guest House. Become curious about your own unwanted guests. They may appear in meditation or in the rest of your day. Experiment with 'welcoming and entertaining them all'!

What guests do you often meet?

2. MINDFULNESS

- Choose one simple activity to do mindfully every day this week. Notice and allow yourself to fully experience each facet of the activity.
- Eat one meal mindfully this week. Take your time to notice and enjoy the look, the smell, the feel and taste of your food. Place your fork or spoon on the table after you take each bite. Be conscious of chewing and swallowing.
- Several times during the week try doing some walking meditation.

Where will you do the walking meditation?

3. BREATHING SPACE AND PAUSES

- A couple of times every day do a breathing space.
- Pay attention to the small interruptions and delays during your day - red traffic lights, waiting for the kettle to boil or a document to download. Notice where your attention goes. Can you allow them to be opportunities to pause and rest?

What opportunities are there to pause during your day?

Signed:

Date:

HOME PRACTICE – SESSION ...			
Day	Exercise	Done?	Comments and observations
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
SESSION ...			
Day	Exercise	Done?	Comments and observations
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
SESSION ...			
Day	Exercise	Done?	Comments and observations
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

