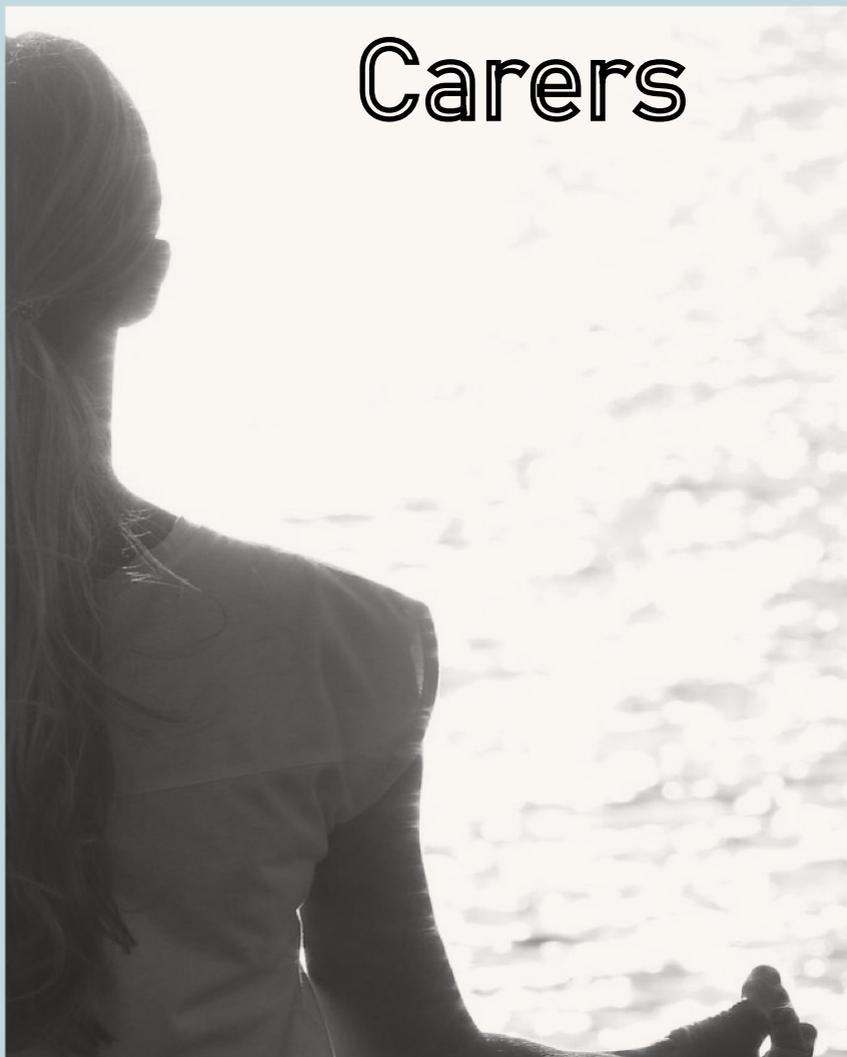




# Self-Compassion & Resilience Mindfulness for Carers



City & Hackney Carers Centre 2020

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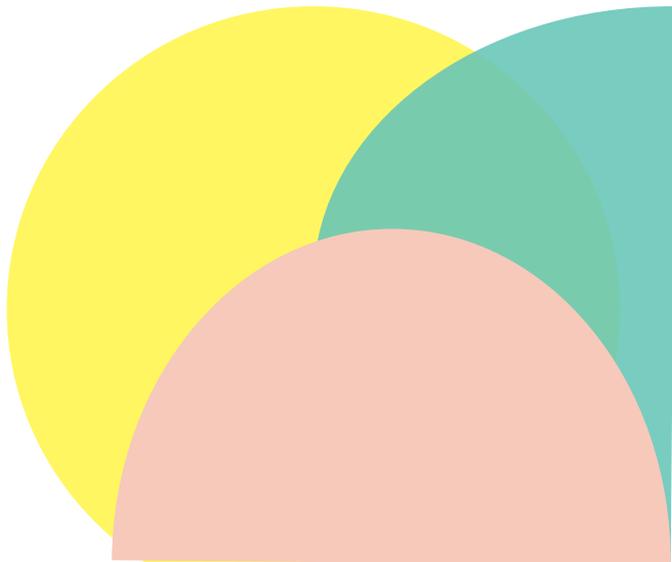
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This eight-session evidence-based mindfulness course for carers will focus on building self-compassion and resilience. As a full-time carer you are probably faced with unrelenting demands on your time and energy resulting in feelings of anxiety, depression, guilt, leading to high levels of stress.

The course is based off the Self Compassion and Mindfulness sessions developed by Centre for Mindfulness Studies (Rockman & Hurley, 2015) and it is recommended that you complete this over a 6-8 week time frame.

Through these sessions you will learn to will learn to focus on the present and to become more aware of your thoughts and feelings so that you are better able to manage them, instead of being overwhelmed by them.

Over time you will find yourself practicing self-compassion in daily life, decreasing self-criticism. You will improve your ability to manage difficult emotions such as stress and anxiety, cope with carer fatigue and promote self-appreciation.

You will need to find a quiet space and to have a pen and paper handy. Some people find it helpful to keep a journal .

Do you think you may need some additional guidance? We have recorded versions of each session on our [YouTube channel](#).

# Discovering Mindful Self-Compassion

## Session 1

**Self-compassion is the ability to turn understanding, acceptance, and love inward. Many people are able to extend compassion toward others but find it difficult to extend the same compassion toward themselves.**

Compassion is the ability to show empathy, love, and concern to people who are in difficulty, and self-compassion is simply the ability to direct these same emotions

Many otherwise compassionate people have a harder time showing compassion for themselves, sometimes out of a fear of engaging in self-indulgence or self-pity, but an inability to accept areas of weakness may lead to difficulty achieving emotional well-being. Biased awareness of experiences, even those that are painful, rather than ignoring or exaggerating their effect.

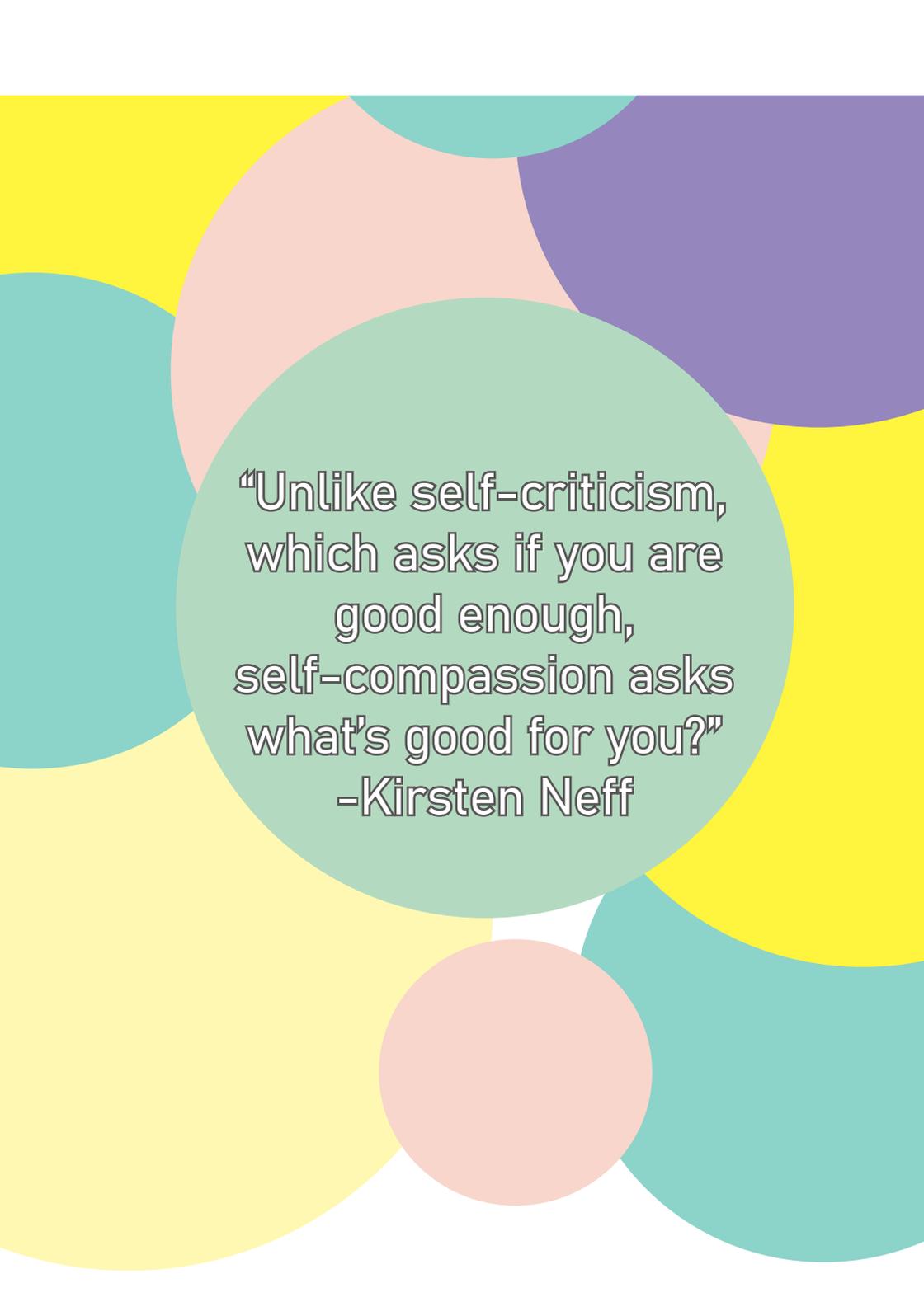
Kristin Neff, a self-compassion researcher, describes self-compassion as having three elements.

1. Self-kindness, or refraining from harsh criticism of the self
2. Recognizing one's own humanity, or the fact that all people are imperfect and all people experience pain.
3. Mindfulness, or maintaining a non-biased awareness of experiences, even those that are painful, rather than either ignoring or exaggerating their effect. Each session will support you in establishing mindfulness skills.

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Self-compassion is crucial for carers – it helps us forgive ourselves if mistakes are made, or tempers are lost and it allows us to acknowledge and comfort ourselves for the difficulties of our caring role. Developing self-compassion can help to decrease depression, anxiety and even carer burnout. This course will support you to tap into your compassionate self and to foster it. Making it easier to access during times of distress.

In this first session we will begin to explore your capacity to be self-compassionate. We will begin to establish mindfulness skills through two simple exercises.



“Unlike self-criticism,  
which asks if you are  
good enough,  
self-compassion asks  
what’s good for you?”  
-Kirsten Neff

## Exercise 1: How would you treat a friend?

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Grab a pen and paper, take 5-10 minutes to answer the following questions-

Thinking about times in the past where a loved one was struggling in some way, how do you usually respond in these situations? What is it that you normally do? What do you say? What is your tone of voice?

Now think about times when you have been struggling - How do you usually respond yourself in these situations? What is it that you normally do? What do you say? What is your tone of voice?

Do you notice a difference in how you treat yourself versus a loved one? Chances are you do. What factors cause you to treat yourself differing during times of suffering?

How do you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a loved one who is suffering?

Sometimes the easiest way to appreciate ourselves is by looking through the eyes of someone who loves us and makes us feel safe. So the next time you are struggling, why not try treating yourself like a friend and see what happens!

## Exercise 2: Self-compassionate Language

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What types of things do you typically judge or criticise yourself for?  
(Could be appearance, relationships, caring, etc.)

What language do you use with yourself when you notice a flaw or make mistakes?

Looking at the language you listed above, is it kind? Or is it more critical? How do you think you could reframe language to be more kind, supportive or understanding? To remember that you're only human and to acknowledge things as they are without blowing things out of proportion?

As you go about your day, and week, try to notice when you are using harsh or unkind language with yourself and try to reframe your internal dialogue so that it is more self-compassionate.

# Informal Mindfulness Practice: Soothing Touch

An easy way to soothe and comfort ourselves when we are feeling badly is to give ourselves a gentle hug or touch, or even by simply putting your hand on your heart and feeling with warmth of your hand. Doing this can feel awkward at first, you may even find yourself feeling embarrassed at first, but your body doesn't know that. Your body simply responds to the physical gesture of warmth, kindness and care.

**'Science shows that physical touch actually releases a neurochemical known as oxytocin which provides us with a sense of security, can soothe distress.'**

The next time you notice that you are feeling upset, tense or self-blaming/critical, try stroking your arm or face, gently rock your body, or put your arms around yourself and give a little squeeze. It's important that whatever action you choose conveys feelings of love, care and kindness.

## **Hand on heart exercise:**

1. Take two or three deep breaths. Ensure that they travel down through your lungs and into your tummy. Feel your stomach expand with the inhale. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

2. Now that we are centred, gently place your hand, whichever you prefer, on your heart. Feel the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand.

3. If you feel up to it, try placing both your hands on your chest. Notice the difference between one and two hands... the weight, pressure, warmth

on your chest. What about the pressure of your hand on top of the other? What are you feeling?

4. If you wish make small circles with your hand on your chest

5. Feel the rising and falling of chest as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

6. Stay with these feelings for as long as you want.

Try to do this exercise a few times over the week, or whenever you are feeling distressed. By doing so you'll start to develop a habit of physically comforting and being kind to yourself.

# Self-compassionate break

The three elements in this practice—mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness—all play important roles in increasing self-compassion.

**Mindfulness** allows people to step back and recognize that they are experiencing suffering, without judging suffering as something bad that they should try to avoid.

**Common humanity** helps to remind people of their connection with other people, as being who all experience suffering at some point or another. This reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation.

**Self-kindness** is an active expression of caring toward the self.



Difficult situations become even harder when we beat ourselves up over them, and being to think that we're less capable or worthy than other people. As you may have discovered in the last exercise, we often judge ourselves harsher than we judge others. That makes us feel isolated, unhappy, and even more stressed.

Rather than self-criticism, a healthier response is to treat yourself with compassion and understanding. Research shows that people who treat themselves with compassion rather than criticism in difficult times experience greater well-being.

For our next exercise, bring to mind someone who makes you feel moderately annoyed, or stressed out. It's important that these feelings are strong enough so that you can feel stress in your body but not get overwhelmed by the feelings. You can activate these feelings by visualising the situation until it makes you feel a little bit uncomfortable. Now, say to yourself:

**This is a moment of suffering**

(encouraging mindfulness and presence in the moment)

**Suffering is a part of life**

(common humanity – creating a sense of community)

Now, put your hands over your heart. Feel the warmth of your hands and their pressure. Notice your chest rising and falling beneath your hands. Focus on the rhythmic cycle of your breath. Now say to yourself:

**May I be kind to myself**

Come back to your breath and the sensations of your hand on your chest. Take a few more breaths and then say to yourself a few of the following phrases, or whatever works speak to you, in your situation and bring to you feelings of self-compassion.

May I be safe

May I be strong

May I forgive myself

May I protect myself

May I find peace in my heart

May I safely endure this discomfort

May I be happy and free from suffering

May I accept the circumstances of my life

May I learn to live with ease and well-being

The next time you are feeling similarly stressed, annoyed or badly repeat the six phrases to yourself whilst engaging with soothing touch.

# Practicing Mindfulness

## Session 2

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not be become overwhelmed or not overly reactive (judgmental) by what's going on around us.



Whenever you bring awareness to what you're directly experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you're being mindful. The practice of mindfulness often leads to a sense of balance and psychological well-being.

To cultivate mindfulness, you don't need to try to create any particular state of mind such as relaxation or focus. Instead, your task is to simply become aware of each thought, feeling, or sensation as it arises in the present moment and to let each thought, sensation, or feeling pass away without judgment or attachment.

**Mindfulness positively impacts our mental health by decreasing judgment and decreasing the amount of time we spend daydreaming about the past and the future. It can help to improve immune system function and may even cause structural changes in the brain.**

### What is Meditation?

Meditation is exploring. It's not a fixed destination. Your head doesn't become vacuumed free of thought, utterly undistracted. It's a special place where each and every moment is momentous. When we meditate we venture into the workings of our minds: our sensations (air blowing on our skin or a harsh smell wafting into the room), our emotions (love this, hate that, crave this, loathe that) and thoughts (wouldn't it be weird to see an elephant playing a trumpet).

Mindfulness meditation asks us to suspend judgment and unleash our natural curiosity about the workings of the mind, approaching our experience with warmth and kindness, to ourselves and others.

To begin, ensure you are in a comfortable position, either lying down, or sitting up in a chair with some back support. You can choose to now close your eyes, lower your gaze or to look softly at a place in the room.

# Meditation Exercise: Body Scan

1. Starting with your feet, notice what your feet are like. Are they warm or cool, dry or moist? If there is any discomfort there. If so, try to mentally soften the area.
2. Now bring a measure of gratitude to your feet. Your feet have such a small surface area, yet they hold up your entire body all day long. They work hard for us.
3. As we continue to focus our awareness on our body sensations, should you notice your mind wandering, simply return your attention to the sensations in your body. If you notice an area that is suddenly flooded with judgement or associations, put your hand on your heart again and breathe gently, then return to the simple body sensations.

**Now begin to move up your body, maintaining compassionate awareness of the sensations you move from one part of the body to the next. Make sure to bring gratitude, kindness and respect to each body part.**

5. Now, move upwards to the calves and shins, as we progress towards the head
6. Now move to your thighs
7. To your buttocks
8. To your stomach
9. To your chest
10. To your shoulder blades and upper back
11. To your hands – try making a fist, squeezing gently and then letting go.
12. To your forearms
13. Now the tops of your shoulders and the strength that is found within these.
14. Move to your neck
15. Now to your face. Notice of what facial expression you have. Perhaps bringing a gentle smile your face. Taking a moment of appreciation for the ability to see, smell, taste and hear.
16. Now move to the crown of your head. Give a moment of appreciation for our brain which is housed here and gives to us the ability to think, feel and love.
17. Now as you have paid attention to each individual body part, put your hand on heart again and give your entire body a final shower of affection. When ready, gently open your eyes.

# Default Network Mode

Let us take a moment to notice how you are feeling. Are you feeling more relaxed? Perhaps a little bit sleepy? And what about that inner voice that we so often struggle to silence or shut off. Is he or she present?

What we have hopefully just achieved through this meditation exercise is activation of what is known as the brain default network mode. Have you ever heard of it? You may not have not have heard of the DNM before, but I bet you are familiar with it. You actually experience it daily, in the form of the 'little voice inside your head'.

The default mode network is a large scale network of different areas in your brain which interact with one another. These connections among brain regions in the DMN are active when individuals are not focused on the external environment. It's most active when we are awake. When we do what human beings well — thinking about ourselves, remembering the past, imagining the future...anything but being focused on what's happening right now.

The DMN is useful because it's involved in our memory, particularly autobiographic episodic memories — These are daily memories that play a role in helping us make a model of the world, predict the future, based on past events. Although the default network mode is essential, it has its drawbacks, for example it is heavily involved in negative self-talk.

Luckily, mindfulness meditation has been proven to influence critical areas of the brain that are associated with awareness, stress, and empathy change. Through meditation people are able to help to improve control over emotions, and help to shut down that pesky inner voice.

This means that through maintaining a mindfulness practice over time one can foster increased levels of self-compassion and actually change some of the brain's structure to make it easier to activate this during times of self-critical thought.

# Meditation Exercise: Affectionate Breathing

Ensure that you are in a comfortable sitting position. Sit in a way that your bones are supporting your muscles and that you don't need any effort to remain in one position for the whole exercise.

Take three slow, easy, deep breaths to relax and let go of whatever burdens you may be carrying around with you today, let your eyelids gently close.

Now bring your attention to your breathing. Pay attention to where you notice your breathing most easily. Some people feel it at the nostrils, perhaps as a cool breeze on the upper lip. Other people can feel the chest rising and falling. Still others may feel the breath most clearly in the abdomen. Gently explore your body and discover where your breathing is easiest to notice.

Just sit and feel the breath for a while. When you notice your mind wandering as it does, simply bring your attention back to where you feel the breath.

Some people find it easier to pay attention to only part of the breath cycle – the in-breath or the out-breath. Notice when you feel your breath more easily. Just feel it then, and then take a little vacation. Just wait for the in-breath or the out-breath to return, whichever place you feel more strongly. Feel that breath and then wait for it to return again.

Now put your hand on your heart for a moment to remind yourself that you will be bringing kind attention to your breathing.

Be aware of how your breath nourishes you whether you are paying attention to it or not. Allow yourself to appreciate this automatic process that sustains your life wherever you go. See if you can incline towards your breathing with curiosity and gratitude.

You may notice your mind wandering away from the sensation of the breath—Don't worry about this, just gently return to the feeling of your breathing when you notice your mind has wandered.

Just for a moment, rest in the experience of your breath and body, and when you are ready open your eyes.



# Meditation Here & Now Object

This exercise will help you engage with and bring awareness to the here and now. Select an object such as a stone, or something that brings you feelings of calmness.

Any sense object (such as a stone) is able to bring us into the present moment and out of our sorrows (past) and worries (future) as long as we are able to be aware of our moment-to-moment experiences of the object.

Start by holding the stone or object in your hand, looking at it, simply enjoying looking at and feeling it

Gently close your eyes, bring your attention to the sensation of the object, the sensations of your fingers and palms. Is it soft, hard, warm, cold, smooth?

Now gently opening your eyes and lowering your gaze to the object, enjoy the sight of it. Focussing on how it looks in this moment.

Try to savour how the object feels in your hand, and its appearance. Turn it a few times in your fingers.

Contemplate how this object came into your possession. Perhaps thinking about its age, how this object appears in your hands.

Take note of any feelings that are present. Are they kind and supportive? If they are not, perhaps use this as a time to select another object that can be used to bring to mind comfort and compassion.

You can return to this exercise any time when you may be feeling distress or agitation to bring yourself to the present moment, and how you are interacting with this object.

## Meditation Exercise: Mindful Walking

If you find yourself with the time, try to plan a walk for 10 minutes or longer, anywhere you like. If you are unable to get out of the house, try walking on the spot in a quiet room or try using a virtual walking websites.

Stand still for a moment and anchor your attention to your body. Be aware of yourself in the standing posture. Feel your body. Recall that every living person wants to live peacefully and happily. Connect with the following:

**‘ Just like everyone else, I wish to be happy and free from suffering, may I be happy and free from suffering’.**

As you begin to walk, feel the sensations of your body, perhaps noting the soles of your feet or the air, hot or cold on your face. Keep your eyes softly focused, walking at a normal pace. After walking for a few minutes, repeat the following loving-kindness phrases to yourself:

**May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I live with ease.**

These phrases will help to keep your attention anchored in your body and to start evoke the attitude of loving kindness. Try to match up the phrases with each step or with each breath. You may find it more helpful to shorten the phrase to a single word.

When you notice the mind wandering simply return to the phrases. If you find yourself quickening to get to your destination faster, slow down and refocus your purpose. Do this with kindness, especially a feeling of gratitude towards your feet for supporting your entire body. Simply appreciate the experience of walking. After a few minutes, try if you can to expand loving-kindness to others. When someone catches your attention, or crosses your mind say to yourself:

**May you and I be safe. May you and I be happy. May you and I be healthy. May you and I live with ease.**

Now allow yourself to receive any expressions of kindness that may come your way. At the end of the walking period, stand still for a moment and repeat

**“May all beings be happy and free from suffering”**

# Practicing Loving-Kindness Mindfulness Session 3

## Meditation Exercise: Body Scan

To begin, ensure you are in a comfortable position, either lying down on the floor or a bed or sitting up in a chair with some back support. Allow your eyes to close, or to remain open with a soft gaze.

Place your hand on your heart and remember to be kind to yourself during this exercise. Take several long, slow, deep breaths. Breathing in fully and exhaling slowly. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Feel your stomach expand on an inhale and relax and let go as you exhale. Begin to let go of noises around you.

Begin to shift your attention from outside to inside yourself. If you are distracted by sounds in the room, simply notice this and bring your focus back to your breathing.

1. Slowly bring your attention down to your feet. Begin observing sensations in your feet. You might want to wiggle your toes a little, feeling your toes against your socks or shoes. Just notice, without judgment. Perhaps you don't feel anything at all. That is fine, too. Just allow yourself to feel the sensation of not feeling anything.

2. When you are ready, allow your mind to move its attention up to your ankles, calves, knees and thighs. Observe the sensations you are experiencing throughout your legs. Breathe into and breathe out of the legs. If your mind begins to wander gently notice this without judgment and bring your mind back to noticing the sensations in your legs. If you notice any discomfort, pain or stiffness, don't judge this. Just simply notice it. Observe how all sensations rise and fall, shift and change moment to moment. Notice how no sensation is permanent.

3. On the next out breath, move to the sensations in your lower back and pelvis. Softening and releasing as you breathe in and out. Slowly move your attention up to your mid back and upper back. You may become aware of sensations in the muscles, temperature or points of contact. With each outbreath, let go of any tension you are carrying. And then very gently shift your focus to your stomach. Perhaps you notice the feeling of clothing, or the belly rising or falling with each breath.

4. As you continue to breathe, bring your awareness to the chest and heart region and just notice your heartbeat. Observe how the chest rises during the in-hale and how the chest falls during the exhale. Let go of any judgments that may arise.

5. On the next outbreath, shift the focus to your hands and fingertips. See if you can channel your breathing into and out of this area as if you are breathing into and out from your hands.

6. On the next outbreath, shift the focus and bring your awareness up into your arms. Observe the sensations or lack of sensations that may be occurring there. You might notice some difference between the left arm and the right arm. As you exhale, you may experience the arm soften and release tensions.

7. Continue to breathe and shift focus to the neck, shoulder and throat region. This is an area where we often have tension. Be with the sensations here.. You may notice the shoulders moving along with the breath. Let go of any thoughts or stories you are telling about this area. As you breathe, you may feel tension rolling off your shoulders.

8. On the next outbreath, shift your focus and direct your attention to the scalp, head and face. Observe all of the sensations occurring there. What expression is on your face in this moment? Notice the movement of the air as you breathe into or out of the nostrils or mouth. As you exhale, you might notice the softening of any tension you may be holding.

9. And now, let your attention to expand out to include the entire body as a whole. Bring into your awareness the top of your head down to the bottom of your toes. Feel the gentle rhythm of the breath as it moves through the body. Put your hand on heart again and give your entire body a final shower of affection.

## Meditation Exercise: Affectionate Breathing

I would now like you to ensure that you are in a comfortable sitting position. Sit in a way that your bones are supporting your muscles and that you don't need any effort to remain in one position for the whole exercise.

To do this, try keeping your back straight and gently supported, with your shoulder blades slightly dropped and your chin gently tucked towards your chest. If you find this to be uncomfortable, shift your body back and forth until you find a position that is comfortable for you. If you feel you need to shift during the exercise, that's just fine.

Take three slow, easy, deep breaths to relax and let go of whatever burdens you may be carrying around with you today. Then let your eyelids gently close, or partially close, perhaps turn your gaze to the screen in front of you should you wish. Whichever makes you feel more comfortable.

1. Now bring your attention to your breathing. Pay attention to where you notice your breathing most easily. Gently explore your body and discover where your breathing is easiest to notice.

You may notice your mind wandering away from the sensation of the breath many times every minute. Don't worry about how often your mind wanders. Just gently return to the feeling of your breathing when you notice your mind has wandered.

2. Sit and feel the breath for a while. When you notice your mind wandering as it does, simply bring your attention back to where you feel the breath.

5. Now just for a moment, rest in the experience of your breath and body, and when you are ready gently open your eyes.

3. Now put your hand on your heart for a moment to remind yourself that you will be bringing kind attention to your breathing.

4. Be aware of how your breath nourishes you whether you are paying attention to it or not. Allow yourself to appreciate this automatic process that sustains your life wherever you go.

**“Breathing in I calm my  
body, breathing out I  
smile. Dwelling into the  
present moment. The  
only moment.”  
-Thich Nhat Hanh**

# Meditation Exercise: Kindness Towards a Benefactor

Take a few deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth to settle into your body and the present moment. Put your hands on your heart and remind yourself to bring loving attention to the present moment. Feel the warmth of your hands, the gentle pressure of your hands, feel your chest rise and fall beneath your hands with every breath.

Now bring your mind a person, or another living being who naturally makes you smile and brings you happiness. Let yourself feel what it's like to be in that being's presence. Allow yourself to enjoy the good company.

Recognise how vulnerable this loved one is, just like you, a person who is capable of getting sick or aging. A person who wishes to be happy and free. Thinking of that person, say out loud the following phrases. Allow yourself to feel the importance of your words.

**May you be safe....May you be peaceful**

**May you be healthy....May you live with ease**

If you notice that your mind has wandered, return to the words and image of the loved person. Savor any warm feelings that may arise. Go slow, spending a few minutes with this act. When you are ready add yourself to this circle of good will and love. Say out loud phrases of loving kindness.

**May you and I be safe....May you and I be peaceful**

**May you and I be healthy....May you and I live with ease**

Visualise your whole body in your mind's eye, notice any stress or uneasiness that may be lingering within you and offer kindness to yourself. Repeat phrases of loving kindness once more

**May I be safe....May I be peaceful**

**May I be healthy....May I live with ease**

Now take a few breaths and just rest, sit quietly in your own body. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.

# Reflective Exercise: What do I need?

1. Bring to your mind some difficulty you are experiencing in your life currently. Sit for a few moments and play that situation out in your head.
2. Focus your awareness on any thoughts, feelings, sensations or emotions that arise. Ask yourself, what am I experiencing right now?
3. Allow the thoughts, feelings, emotions or sensations to be there. Notice any aversive reactions
4. Investigate your experience with gently curiosity. Ask yourself
  - a. What most wants my attention?
  - b. How am I experiencing this in my body?
  - c. What am I believing?
  - d. What does this feeling want from me?
5. Now expand your awareness to the entire body

Take a few moments to come up with some kind, self-compassionate phrases that you can say to yourself when distress may arise within your mind and body. You can also use the phrases below.

May I be safe  
May I forgive myself  
May I be happy and free from suffering  
May I safely endure this discomfort  
May I find peace in my heart  
May I be strong  
May I protect myself  
May I learn to live with ease and well-being  
May I accept the circumstances of my life

In the future, use these phrases to direct loving-kindness inwards when you find yourself experiencing any aversive reactions.

# Reflective Exercise: Freedom from blame

Think about a trait you often judge yourself for, and that is an important part of your self-definition. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. How often do I display this trait? Who are you when you don't display this trait? Are you still you?
2. Are there particular circumstances that seem to draw out the trait, and others in which the trait is not apparent? Does this trait really define you if particular circumstances must be present in order for it to emerge?
3. What are the various causes and conditions that led to having the trait in the first place (early experiences, genetics, life pressures etc.)
4. Did you choose to have this trait, and do you have much choice about whether or not you display this trait? If not, why are you judging yourself for this trait?
5. What happens when you reframe your self-description so that you are not defining yourself in terms of this trait?

**Going forward to try to notice situations where there is criticism towards yourself or another. See if you can perhaps try to soften this criticism. What is it that you think you will need to hear during these moments? What do you think you will need to do?**



Some ideas for ensuring you hear what you need during those moments include:

- Phrases of loving-kindness
- Hand on heart exercise
- Recording of a loved one saying phrases of loving-kindness

# Finding Your Compassionate Voice

## Session 4

### **Meditation Exercise: Extending Loving-Kindness to Ourselves and Others**

In this practice, we'll be cultivating loving kindness. We all have within us, this natural capacity for loving-kindness or friendship that is unconditional and open, gentle and supportive. Loving-kindness is a natural opening of a compassionate heart to ourselves and to others. It's a wish that everyone be happy. We begin with developing loving-kindness toward ourselves allowing our hearts to open with tenderness.

Become comfortable in your sitting position with a relaxed but straight, posture, with your shoulders relaxed. Allow your hands to rest comfortably in your lap. Gently close your eyes.

Settling into awareness of the body and the breath. Feeling into your body right now, noticing what's here. Be open to whatever is to be experienced in the body in this moment. Connecting to the breath, notice the wave-like movements of the belly.

Now, allow yourself to remember and open up to your basic goodness. You might remember times you have been kind or generous. You might recall your natural desire to be happy and not to suffer. If acknowledging your own goodness is difficult, look at yourself through the eyes of someone who loves you. What does that person love about you?

And, as you experience this love notice how you feel in your body. Maybe you feel some warmth or heat in the face. A smile or a sense of expansiveness. This is loving-kindness, a natural feeling that is accessible to all of us, always. Rest with this feeling of open, unconditional love for a few minutes.

Let yourself bask in the energy of lovingkindness, breathing it in and breathing it out -inviting feelings of peace and acceptance.

Wish yourself well by extending the following words of loving-kindness to yourself:

**May I be filled with loving-kindness ...May I be held in loving - kindness...  
May I feel connected and calm... May I accept myself just as I am...May I  
be happy...May I know the natural joy of being alive**

Wish yourself again words of friendship and loving-kindness. Allow yourself to soften to these words.

Now open your circle of loving-kindness by bringing to mind someone who is dear to you. Someone whom you care about and who has always been supportive. Reflect on this person's basic goodness, sensing what it is in particular that you love about him or her. In your heart feel your appreciation for this dear one, and begin your simple offering...

**May you be filled with loving-kindness...May you be held in  
loving-kindness...May you feel my love now...May you accept yourself  
just as you are...May you be happy... May you know the natural joy of  
being alive**

Now bring to mind a "neutral" person. This is someone you might see regularly but don't know well, It might be a neighbour, or the person who runs the local shop Bring this person to mind now, and repeat the words of loving kindness.

**May you be filled with loving-kindness...May you be held in  
loving-kindness...May you feel my love now...May you accept yourself  
just as you are...May you be happy... May you know the natural joy of  
being alive**

And now, if it's possible for you, bring to mind someone with whom you've had a difficult relationship. Try to let go of feelings of resentment and dislike for this person. Reminding yourself to see this person as a whole being deserving of kindness. As someone who also suffers. Extend to this person the words of loving-kindness.

**May you be filled with loving-kindness...May you be held in  
loving-kindness...May you feel my love now...May you accept yourself  
just as you are...May you be happy... May you know the natural joy of  
being alive**

As this practice comes to a close, allow your awareness to open out in all directions, to yourself, a dear one, a neutral person, a difficult person and to all beings. Extend loving-kindness one final time.

**May all beings be filled with loving-kindness...May all beings be happy...  
May all beings awaken and be free...May all beings be happy**

# Self-Criticism as Safety Behaviour

Do you ever hear a little voice chattering away in your head that fills you with self-doubt? Perhaps you've heard it saying "You're not good enough". This is the voice of self-criticism. Unfortunately over time, we all get used to this voice, and are afraid to tell it to go away. You can think of this as your 'the inner bully'.

Early in life chances are that at some point, an adult used some harsh or unkind words to try to make you behave or to do the right thing. These experiences can imprint of us a deep belief that if we're really hard on ourselves we'll be able to become the people we're meant to be.

Does this really work? Or does it keep us from being the person that we want to be? Taking risks can be scary, and many people develop self-critical habits as a way to protect ourselves from experiencing pain, embarrassment or disappointment. Researchers have found that self-criticism is far more destructive than helpful. Neuroscientists suggest that self-criticism puts the brakes on our plans to take action, leaving us stuck in a cycle of rumination, procrastination, and loathing.

Kristen Neff suggests that though tapping into self-compassion we can break entrenched patterns of self-criticism, while still allowing us to be honest about our fears. Think of your self-compassionate voice as a wise and supportive friend. As someone who encourages you to see things in a clearer, more balanced way, and to help you remember that no one is perfect and to be kind, understanding, and accountable to yourself.

The three cores of self-compassion - mindfulness, connectedness, and self-kindness—help us to see that our self-critical voices are often unnecessarily harsh in a misguided effort to protect us. Instead of shaming, or blaming these voices for undermining our confidence, self-compassion can help reduce levels of stress, anxiety, and self-doubt.

Engaging with self-compassion helps us to generate more positive feelings that balance out our fears, allowing us to feel more calm and confident. It helps us to activate our brain's care-giving and awareness systems.. This makes us less self-conscious, less likely to compare ourselves to others, and less likely to feel insecure

# Reflective Exercise: Self-Compassion

How can you practice more self-compassion? Like with most things in life, practice makes perfect. The more you are able to practice being self-compassionate the better you get at it! Below are three simple exercises that can make a big difference.

## Exercise One:

Take a few minutes to identify what it is that you really want in life by thinking about the ways that you use self-criticism as a motivator (i.e. I'm too lazy or I'm too impulsive) because you think being hard on yourself will help you change.

Now, think of what language a wise and nurturing friend would use to gently point out how your behaviour is unproductive, while encouraging you to do something different? What's the most supportive message you can think of that's in line with your underlying wish to be healthy and happy as it relates to these changes? Write this down and put it somewhere you can see it each day.

## Exercise Two:

Keep a self-compassion journal for a week (or longer if you like). Write down anything you've felt bad about, anything you judged yourself for, or any difficult experience that has caused you pain. For each event, practice using your kindness, sense of connectedness to humanity, and mindfulness to process the event in a more self-compassionate way.

## Exercise Three:

Create a self-compassion mantra. Often the self-critical voice is quick to attack or challenge us. Try to gently counter this with using your self-compassionate voice and come up with your own compassionate sayings. For example you could say to yourself, "In most situations, I'm better than I think I am." Compassionate sayings can help slow down the negative spiral of self-doubt so you can mindfully attend to what is actually unfolding. Try to create your own self-compassion mantra by thinking about what a wise mentor or kind friend would say in these moments, and focus on these during times of self-doubt.

# Meditation Exercise: Finding your Compassionate Voice

Find a posture in which your body is comfortable and you feel supported for the length of the meditation. Let your eyes gently close, partially or fully. Taking a few slow, easy breaths, releasing any unnecessary tension in your body.

**Place a hand over your heart as a reminder that you're bringing not only awareness but affectionate awareness to your breathing and self. You can leave your hand or let it rest at any time.**

1. To begin, simply notice your breathing in your body. Feel your body breathing in and feel your body breathing it out. Now release the focus on your breath. Allow it to slip into the background of your awareness, begin to offer yourself words or phrases of loving-kindness that are meaningful to you. Whisper these words into your own ear.

2. Just let your body breathe you. Perhaps notice how your body is nourished on the in-breath and relaxes with the out-breath. Or perhaps now. There is nothing you need to do in this moment.

3. Now notice the rhythm of your breath, flowing in and flowing out. Feel your whole body subtly move with the breath, like the movement of the sea. Take some time to feel the natural rhythm of your breathing.

4. Your mind will naturally wander like a curious child. When that happens, just gently return to the rhythm of your breathing. This is mindfulness.

5. Allow your whole body to be gently held. Allow your breathing to rock and internally caress yourself.

6. If you like, try to give yourself over to your breathing, letting your breathing be all there is. Becoming the breath.

7. Continue to breathe for a few more minutes.

8. Now, gently release your attention to the breath, sitting quietly in your own experience, and allow yourself to feel whatever you're feeling and to be just as you are.

9. When you are ready, and no need to rush, open your eyes and go about your day knowing you can return to your breath and words of loving-kindness whenever you need.

# Equanimity Phrases

Equanimity describes a complete openness to experience, without being lost in reactions of love and hate. It can be interpreted as “balance”.

Equanimity is being able to hold all elements of your experience with wholeness, coherence, and harmony. It is a practice of finding freedom, no matter what life brings you..

Traditionally, one practices equanimity by repeating certain phrases during meditation practice. However, daily life can also be an opportunity to practice. Try repeating these phrases to yourself during difficulties that come up in everyday life:

**When you feel a general sense of uneasiness about yourself and your life, repeat:**

May I accept things just as they are.

May I accept myself just as I am.

So many people feel that they need to make certain changes before they can feel “good enough,” but we are all good enough just as we are.

**When someone you care about is suffering and there's nothing you can do to change their circumstances, repeat:**

I care.

I care about your pain.

Through this caring may your pain be eased.

The above phrase helps you cultivate compassion for other's suffering, without feeling like it's your responsibility to solve the world's problems.

**When bad things happen, repeat:**

I may not understand things and that is OK

Things are unfolding according to a natural order.

**When you have a few moments to meditate, take a comfortable seat, close your eyes, and repeat:**

Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I calm my mind.

May I be balanced.

May I be at peace.

## Reflective Exercise: Self-Compassionate Letter

Everyone has something about themselves that they don't like; something that causes them to feel shame, to feel insecure or not "good enough". Unfortunately this is the human condition to be imperfect, and feelings of inadequacy are part of life.

### Part One:

Try to write about an issue that you have that tends to make you feel inadequate or bad about yourself.

How does this aspect of yourself make you feel inside – sad, scared, insecure, angry?

What about the emotions that come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself?

This is just going to be between you and the paper, so please try to be as emotionally honest as possible and to avoid repressing any feelings whilst at the same time, not being over melodramatic.

Try to just feel your emotions exactly as they are, no more and no less – and then write about them.



## **Part Two:**

Think of an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting kind and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspect of yourself that you have just been writing about.

Reflect upon what this friend feels towards you and how you are loved and accepted exactly as you are with all your very human imperfections.

This friend recognises the limits of human nature and is kind and forgiving towards you. In his/her wisdom this friend understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened to you in your life to create you are as you are in this moment. Your particular inadequacy is connected to so many things you didn't necessarily choose: your genes, family history, life circumstances – all things that are out of your control.

## **Part Three**

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend – focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for.

What would this friend say to you about your “flaw” from the perspective of unlimited compassion? How would this friend convey the deep compassion he/she feels for you, especially for the pain you feel when you judge yourself so harshly?

What would this friend write in order to remind you that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses? And if you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, how would these suggestions embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion?

As you write to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend, try to fuse your letter with a strong sense of his/her acceptance, kindness, caring and desire for your health and happiness.

After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back and read it again, really letting the words sink in. Feel the compassion as it pours into you, soothing and comforting you like a cool breeze on a hot day.

# Living Deeply

## Session 5

### **Meditation Exercise: Loving-Kindness & Self-Compassion**

Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Fully or partially close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment. Put your hand on your heart for a moment as a reminder to be kind to yourself.

Form a mental image of yourself sitting down. Notice your posture as if you were seeing yourself from the outside as a third party.

Now bring your attention inside your body and feel the pulsation and vibration of your body. You heart beating, any sensations in your belly, tingling in your feet, hands or arms.

Locate your breathing where you can feel it most easily - for some it might be in your shoulders, the chest expanding with each inhale, or the release of the breath in your belly. Feel how your breath moves in your body. And when your attention wanders, gently return it to the movement of your breath within your body. Stay with your breath for a few minutes.

Also notice if you're holding any difficult emotions, such as any worries about the future or a person dear to you, maybe uneasiness about the past. Now taking a moment, reflect on how you are not alone in your discomfort. Bring to this meditation an understanding that every human body bears stress and worry throughout the day.

Now offer yourself goodwill because of what you're holding in your body right now. Say to yourself softly phrases of loving-kindness...

Now let sit with these phrases of loving kindness, letting yourself bask in them. Perhaps repeating to yourself the words safe...peaceful...kind...acceptance... when you notice your mind wandering as it may, return yourself to these words, or to the experience of discomfort in your body. Go slowly

If you are ever overwhelmed with emotion during this exercise or during every day life, remember you can always return to your breathing.

If you are able to, try to name the emotions as they arise in your body. Take a few minutes to note what emotions have become present as a result of this exercise.

See if you can find it in the physical body and soften that area if you feel you need to. If not, sit the pleasantness of the emotion, and explore this experience with gently curiosity. Take a few minutes to explore this experience

When you are comfortable return to your phrases of loving-kindness

**May I be safe**

**May I be peaceful**

**May I be kind to myself**

**May I accept myself as I am**

Finally take a few breaths and just rest, sitting quietly in your own body for the next few minutes.

Take comfort in knowing that you can return to the phrases or words of loving-kindness anytime you wish.

When you are ready, gently open your eyes.

# Mindful Movement Practice

Mindful movement is an effective way to reduce stress and its physical consequences. Bringing a mindful approach to your movements is an accessible and simple way to integrate mindfulness practice into your daily life to get out of your heads, into your body, to find the present moment. Don't rush the movements. Remember, present



moment awareness, in the midst of movement, is the single most important aspect of this practice. Don't worry so much about getting the movement "right." Instead bring a spirit of curiosity and care to each movement and see what happens.

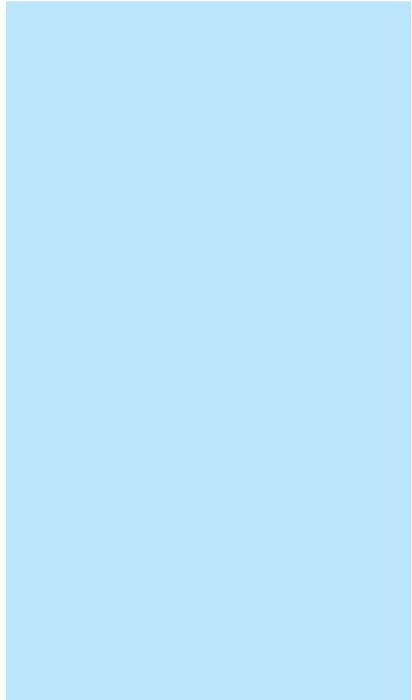
## **BLOSSOMING FLOWER ARMS:**

Begin sitting in a tall yoga seat and lift your arms out to the side, palms up, until your arms are shoulder level and parallel to the ground.

Breathing in, touch your shoulders with your fingertips, keeping your upper arms horizontal.

Breathing out, open your arms to the horizontal position, stretching your palms open.

**Q: How does this feel if you focus on energizing your fingers each time you extend your arms?**



## **FULL ARM CIRCLES:**

Begin sitting in a tall yoga seat and extend your arms in front of you and join your palms.

Breathing in, raise your arms up and separate your hands so your arms can stretch over your head.

Breathing out, continue the circle, arms circling back until your fingers point toward the ground.

Breathing in, lift your arms back and reverse the circle. Breathe out as you bring your palms together and your arms down in front of you.

**Q: Did one direction of arm circles feel more comfortable than the other today?**

## **MOVING FORWARD FOLDS:**

Begin sitting in a tall yoga seat. Take a breath in and bring your arms up above your head, palms forward.

Look up at the sky.

Breathing out, bend at your waist as you bring your arms down to touch the floor, your ankles, or your shins.

Release your neck.

From this position, breathe in, and keep your back straight as you come all the way back up to reach your fingers up toward the sky.

**Q: What parts of my body are getting stronger during this activity? Which are stretching?**



# What are Core Values?

Do you know what is one of the most common regrets people express? It's "I wish I had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me."

This begs the question- what stops people from living a life that's full and true to them?

People may have never defined or got clear on what's true to them. They never got clear on what their own deepest values are and what's meaningful to them. When we feel out of touch with the deepest and truest part of ourselves, it's all too common for people to just fall into just following societal norms and values (which are often very different from our own) instead of what we really want to do. Does this sound familiar?

People may also experience a lack of conscious awareness, or rather, a lack of mindfulness. Without mindfulness we tend to live much of our lives on 'autopilot' and when we're on autopilot we often fall into conditioned, mechanical patterns of thought and behaviour. Living in unawareness like this leads to a sense of discontent and disconnection from ourselves.

We all have values –they are unique to us. Our core values determine what's really important and meaningful to us. Values are who you are in your own deepest nature, not who you think you should be in order to fit in. They're like a compass that points us towards goodness and our "true north."

When the way you think, speak and behave match your values, life feels very good – you feel whole, content, in your power. But when these don't align with your personal values, then things feel... wrong. Life feels uneasy. You feel out of touch, discontented, restless, unhappy.

# Reflective Exercise: Finding your Core Values

Take a few minutes to complete the following three exercises.

## Exploration Exercise: Inspiration via Admiration:

Identify people you admire and write them down. This could be anyone even fictional characters. Next, identify the traits that you admire in these people. If you notice overlapping traits, write them down for each person! Next, connect these traits with your life experience. How have these traits played a role in your life? Are there any important life moments or decisions where these traits have shown up? What do these traits mean to you? Why did you pick them?

## Exploration Exercise: Self-Reflection

What do I care about most? Why? What traits show up when I act in-line with those things?

When am I at my best? What qualities are present when I'm in that state?

What have been some of my biggest "wins" in life? Why were they so important to me?

What are some of the most important insights/learnings in my life? Why did they leave such a mark?

Try to identify some possible values from your answers. Think about what traits first come to your mind and which feel most strongly in-line with you?

## Exploration Exercise: Making a Vow

In your own words, write out a promise, you make to yourself that describes how you will live according to your core values. For example, "may I be patient with myself when I make mistakes". Once you have made your vow, write this down and keep it somewhere you can see it easily.

# Meditation Exercise: Centering Meditation

Centering meditation is a technique for discovering a compassionate word of phrase that applied particularly to you and your current situation. Beginning practitioners of loving-kindness meditation can use centering meditation to discover their own personalised loving-kindness phrases.

To start, sit comfortably, close your eyes, or partially close them and take a few deep, relaxing breaths in (hold for a few seconds) and out.

Notice your body posture- sitting, not lying down, not standing and feel the sensations in your body. If you have any physical discomfort, gently touch it with your awareness. If you have emotional distress, notice it and let it be there.

Place one or two hands on your chest as a reminder to give yourself loving attention. Feel the warmth of your hands, their gentle pressure and the rhythmic rising and falling of your chest as you breathe.

Breathe in - Breathe out

Keep paying attention to your breathing, as you breath, let your awareness move deeply into the experience of breathing

Just continue to breath and open your awareness to the space between your out-breath and your in-breath. Feel that space. Let your awareness drop into the space between our outbreath and the next inbreath.

The breath comes seemingly out of nowhere – it's actually breathing you, keeping you healthy even when you're fast asleep.

Try now to go deeper into the empty space from which your breathing emerges from which the faintest movement originates. This is a field of great peace and freedom.

Just as your inbreath originates out of seemingly nowhere, your thoughts also emerge out of a deep, quiet invisible space.

When you're ready, listen for any words that may bubble up. Open yourself up to a word or phrase that might be just what you need to hear right now. If a word or phrase were to appear from the bottom of your heart what would it be?

Take a few minutes to do this. Breathe, relax and open yourself to the words that might bubble up from deep inside. If no words arise, just stay with your breath. If a few words arise, roll them over in your mind and select the one that's perfect for you at this time in your life. Some possibilities might be..."love", "let it be", "I love you" "Yes" "Trust" or "Peace".

When you have a word or phrase, allow yourself to savour it, rolling it over and over again in your mind. If you notice that your mind wanders, bring it ever so gently back to the word or words.

After a while, when you are ready, let go of what you're doing and simply be with your inner experience, letting yourself just be as you are.

Slowly open your eyes when you are ready.

# Managing Difficult Emotions

## Session 6

### **Meditation Exercise: Soften, Soothe, Allow**

This exercise is designed as a tool to be used when you're in the middle of a difficult situation. We aim to soothe ourselves, in the way a mother might soothe her child when they are in pain. We tap into the affiliative system that we are born with, giving ourselves what we need to acknowledge and address our pain, then continue to function as healthy adults.

Please find a comfortable position, close your eyes and take three relaxing breaths. Place your hand on your heart for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room and to bring kindness to yourself.

#### **First you will practice labelling emotions**

Let yourself recall a mild to moderately difficult situation that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, loved on in pain or the covid-19 pandemic. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem – choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it. One you have this mind, clearly visualise the situation. Who was there? What was said? What happened?

Now see if you can name the strongest emotion – a difficult emotion – associated with that situation – Anger? Sadness? Grief? Confusion? Fear?

Perhaps the more difficult emotions are the positive ones... Happiness? Acceptance? Repeat the name of the motion to yourself in a gentle, understanding voice, as if you are validating for a friend what he or she may be feelings: "That's confusion" "That's joy".

## **Now you will practice mindfulness of the emotions in the body**

Now try to expand your awareness to your body as a whole.

Recall the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it the most. In your mind's eye, sweep your body from head to toes, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.

Now choose a single location in your body where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension or an aching feeling like ache in the chest or back.

In your mind, incline gently towards that spot.

## **Now you will try to soften, soothe and allow**

**Soften** into that location in your body. Let the muscles be soft without a requirement that they become soft, like applying heat to sore muscles. You can say, 'soft, soft, soft' quietly to yourself to enhance the process if you wish. Remember that you are not trying to make the sensation go away – you are just being with them with loving awareness.

**Soothe** yourself for struggling in this way.

Put your hand over your heart and feel your body breathe. Perhaps kind words arise in your mind. If you wish, you can also direct kindness to the part of your body that is under stress by placing your hand in that place. Or just repeat 'soothe...soothe...soothe' to yourself.

**Allow** the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go as it pleases, like a guest in your own home. You can repeat 'allow....allow....allow'.

'Soften, soothe and allow'. 'Soften, soothe and allow'. You can use these three words like a mantra, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness towards your suffering. If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better.

Slowly open your eyes when you're ready

# Reflective Exercise: Working with Shame

Shame is a very difficult emotion that can make it very difficult to access self-compassion. By exploring what makes us feel shameful or perhaps blame ourselves for things we can't control it can help us to redefine our relationship with the harsh inner critic and to be able to better tolerate shame as and when it arises in the future. Meeting it where it is, instead of being overcome by it.

Step 1: Think of a behaviour you feel very badly about (something you would like to change and/or that you beat yourself up about).

Step 2: Write down, or think about what you regularly say to yourself about this behaviour

Step 3: Reflect on your mental natter about this behaviour and note the feelings that arise.

Step 4: Take a few minutes to explore why you might criticise yourself. What is the inner critic trying to accomplish? What might it be trying to do for you?

Step 5: If the critic has a function, what is it? If you feel like it write down what the role of your self-critic has been.

Step 6: Now, let the critic know it has served you well, that it had good intentions and that it was trying its best to help you. But now it's time for you to let him or her go.

Step 7: Now close your eyes for a moment, imagine the behaviour, noticing what is in your body. Soften the body and offer yourself words of kind reassurance for its presence.

Step 8: Open your eyes.

# Meditation Exercise: Loving-Kindness Towards a Difficult Person

When done correctly, this meditation takes about 15 minutes.

To prepare for this meditation, I would like you to find a comfortable sitting position. Straight back, supported by the muscles in your abdomen. See if you can draw height through your obliques and lats.

Take five deep, satisfying breaths in to centre yourself in the present moment. On the final breath, perhaps taking a moment to be thankful for the luxury of breath that you have.

Bring to mind phrases of loving kindness for yourself or perhaps for an important person in your life. If you are struggling to find the words or phrases you could try to use one of the following

**May I be safe**  
**May I forgive myself**  
**May I be strong**  
**May I be happy and free from suffering**  
**May I protect myself**  
**May I safely endure this discomfort**  
**May I find peace in my heart**  
**May I learn to live with ease and well-being**  
**May I accept the circumstances of my life**

Place a hand or two on your heart as a reminder to bring loving attention to yourself.

Now bring an image of your 'difficult person' to mind. Remind yourself that the difficult person is struggling to find his or her way through life and, in so doing, is causing pain. Say to yourself, "Just as I wish to be peaceful and free from suffering, may you, too find inner peace

Repeat the following phrases softly, keeping the image of the difficult person in your mind while sensing the value of your words

**May you be safe**  
**May you be peaceful**  
**May you be healthy**  
**May you live with ease**

Feelings of aversion, disgust, anger, guilt, shame or sadness may immediately arise. The phrases may sound hollow alongside these emotions. Give a label to the emotion you're feeling such as 'sadness' or 'anger' and practice compassion for yourself perhaps saying to yourself 'may I be safe'.

When you are feeling better, try again with the difficult person. 99% of loving kindness meditation for the difficult person may actually be compassionate meditate for oneself. If this is the case, try using self-compassionate phrases like:

**May I be kind to myself**  
**May I accept myself just as I am**

If you in fact you did not find yourself struggling, continue to think of the difficult person and to be present with your phrases or words of loving kindness.

Go back and forth between yourself and the difficult person. Extending your words or phrases of loving kindness. Make sure the energy of good will pervades your meditation session.

Before your end, release the difficult person and say...

**May I and all beings be safe**  
**May I and all beings be peaceful**  
**May I and all beings be healthy**  
**May I and all beings live with ease**



# Transforming Relationships

## Session 7

### **Meditation Exercise: Loving-Kindness Towards a Difficult Person**

Find a comfortable sitting position. Straight back, supported by the muscles in your abdomen. See if you can draw height through your obliques and lats.

Take five deep, satisfying breaths in to centre yourself in the present moment. On the final breath, perhaps taking a moment to be thankful for the luxury of breath that you have.

Bring to mind phrases of loving kindness for yourself or perhaps for an important person in your life. If you are struggling to find the words or phrases you could try to use one of the following

**May I be safe**  
**May I forgive myself**  
**May I be strong**  
**May I be happy and free from suffering**  
**May I protect myself**  
**May I safely endure this discomfort**  
**May I find peace in my heart**  
**May I learn to live with ease and well-being**  
**May I accept the circumstances of my life**

Place a hand or two on your heart as a reminder to bring loving attention to yourself.

Now bring an image of your 'difficult person' to mind. Remind yourself that the difficult person is struggling to find his or her way through life and, in so doing, is causing pain.

Say to yourself, "Just as I wish to be peaceful and free from suffering, may you, too find inner peace"

Repeat the following phrases softly, keeping the image of the difficult person in your mind while sensing the value of your words.

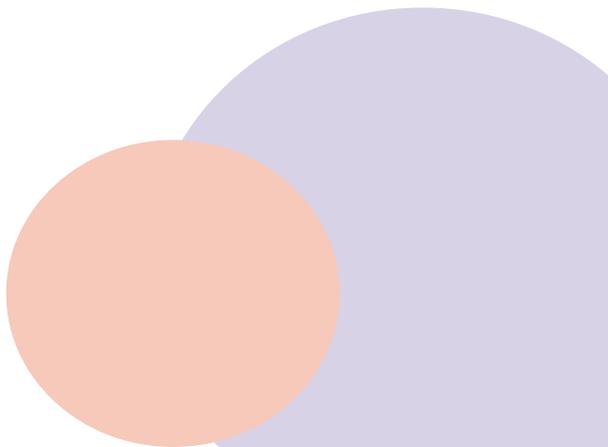
**May you be safe**  
**May you be peaceful**  
**May you be healthy**  
**May you live with ease**

Feelings of aversion, disgust, anger, guilt, shame or sadness may immediately arise. The phrases may sound hollow alongside these emotions. Give a label to the emotion you're feeling such as 'sadness' or 'anger' and and practice compassion for yourself perhaps saying to yourself 'may I be safe'.

Go back and forth between yourself and the difficult person. Extending your words or phrases of loving kindness. Make sure the energy of good will pervades your meditation session.

Before your end, release the difficult person and say...

**May I and all beings be safe**  
**May I and all beings be peaceful**  
**May I and all beings be healthy**  
**May I and all beings live with ease**



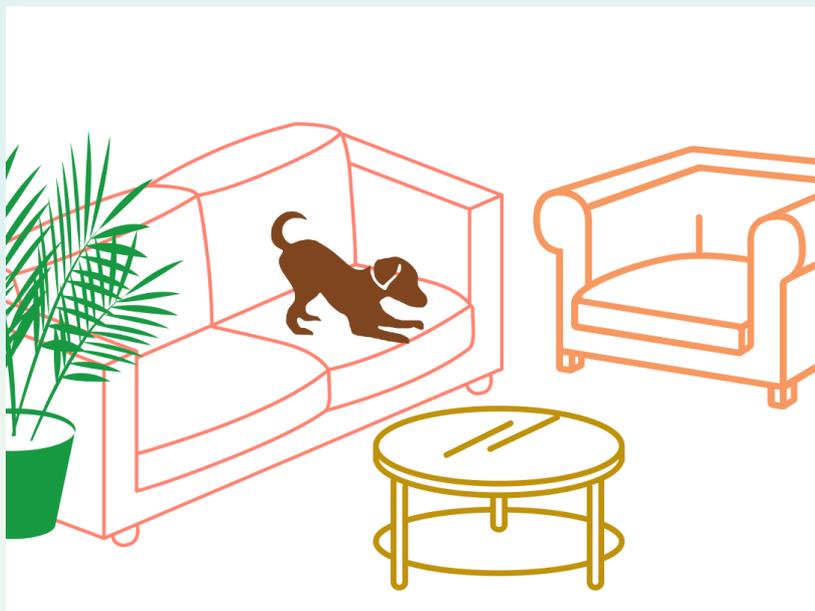
## Meditation Exercise: Compassionate Friend

Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Gently close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body. Put one or two hands over your heart just for a moment to remind yourself to give yourself loving attention.

Now imagine yourself in a room that is safe, cosy and comfortable – a perfect room, just the way you'd like it. The lighting is perfect, the furniture is just right, the smell makes you feel at calm, content and at peace. Make yourself comfortable in this room.

In a few minutes time you'll receive a visitor to your room, a light being who embodies the qualities of strength, wisdom, warmth and unconditional acceptance. This being may be a known person like a grandparent who passed away, or it could just be a warm, loving presence without any particular form. This being of light would like to visit you for a while.

Your room has a door that only you can open. Please go to the door and open it for your compassionate friend who is coming to visit. Invite him or her in.



Place yourself at just the right distance from your compassionate friend – not too close and not too far. Just enjoy the company of this loving being. See our compassionate friend in your mind's eye and enjoy his or her good company. There is nothing special you need to do except savour the moment.

Your compassionate friend would like to tell you something now, something that is just what you need to hear right now in your life. Listen carefully to what your compassionate friend has come to say. If no words come, that's okay too, just share his or her good company. That's a blessing in itself, to be present with your friend, comfortable in silence, listening out for anything that perhaps you should hear.

Soon your friend will be leaving again, but before that happens, your friend would like to give you something, a material object. As you place our hands together, your friend reaches out and puts an object in your hands, or perhaps the object simply appears in your hands. This object, it has a special meaning to you, what is it? What did you receive from your compassionate friend? Look over it carefully. Why did you receive this object? How do you feel having it in your possession?

Soon it's time for your friend to leave, but he or she can return anytime. Open the door, enjoy his or her good company for a last moment, and then bid your friend a loving goodbye.

You are now alone in your room again. Let yourself savour what just happened, enjoying the words and object that was given to you. Know that you can invite your friend back anytime.

And when you are ready, walk towards the door, take one final long look at your room. Open the door and walk out to the other side. Knowing you can return to this room too at any time you wish.

When you are ready open your eyes.

# Reflective Exercise: Soft Feelings Behind Hard Feelings

Take five to 10 minutes to think about and answer the questions below.

1. Sitting quietly, reflect upon a recent situation in which you experienced strong feelings of anger and/or resentment.
2. Notice what is happening in your mind and body. What do you feel? What stories are present?
3. Now, sitting with the breath, see if you can relax and scan the body for any additional feelings. You might ask yourself, "is there anything I need that I am not getting in this situation?"
4. If not, try holding the hard feelings compassionately. If "softer feelings" (i.e. sadness or shame) arise, hold those compassionately as well. Notice what is happening in the mind and body.
5. Gently ask yourself what you need now, in this moment. How might you give yourself what you need?

## Reflective Exercise: Letting Go of Resentment

Bring into awareness the story or situation and the accompanying feelings and reactions that you feel it is time to let go of.

During the next few minutes try to name them gently (i.e. anger, grief) and hold them compassionately. Continue to breathe.

Gently ask yourself, "Do I have to continue to replay this story?" "Do I have to hold onto these feelings?" "Is it time to let go?"

If you do not yet feel ready to let go, give yourself compassion for not being ready. If you are ready, say to yourself, "letting go, letting go". Softly repeat the phrase for the next few minutes.

Soften the body and feel any space that arises as you let go. If any of the feelings or thoughts return. That's perfectly fine. In those moments, simply return to softening and the phrase - "letting go, letting go."

# Informal Mindfulness Practice: Forgiveness of Yourself and Others

We all make mistakes. This is because every thought and action is the product of a universe of invisible causes stretching back through time and outward across the planet.

When we make a mistake, it's natural to feel remorse. Remorse is a useful emotion that alters us to a mistake. However, when we resist the experiences of remorse, perhaps because we are embarrassed than remorse may turn into guilt, shame, rumination, defensiveness and reprisal.

A healthy response to our own mistakes is **self-forgiveness**.

There are 4 steps:

1. Open to the natural pain of remorse
2. Recognise that it's only human to make mistakes, and try to understand some factors leading to your mistake
3. Offer forgiveness to yourself, perhaps by saying ' may I forgive myself for what I have done, wittingly or unwittingly, to have caused harm'.
4. Resolve not to repeat the same mistake.

**Why forgive others?** Because it's often the best thing we can do for ourselves. Forgiveness is a way of letting go of pain. When we forgive others, we release the pain of anger and bitterness, but we can only forgive others after we have validated our own pain and learned to comfort ourselves. Here are the steps

1. Open to the pain that another person caused you
2. Offer yourself compassion for how you have suffered, perhaps by saying: 'may I be safe. May I be peaceful. May I be healthy. May I be free from suffering.'
3. Try to understand the forces that made this person act badly, or that shaped his or her personality (e.g. financial stress, difficult childhood, low self-esteem, cultural factors)
4. Offer forgiveness to the other person by saying ' may I forgive you for what you have done, wittingly or unwittingly, to have caused me harm.'
5. Resolve not to be harmed again.

# Embracing Your Life

## Session 8

### **Meditation Exercise: Loving-Kindness for All Beings**

Become comfortable in your chair or cushion, sitting with a relaxed but straight, posture, with your shoulders relaxed. Allow your hands to rest comfortably in your lap. Gently close your eyes.

Once you have found a comfortable sitting position, spend a few moments offering loving-kindness toward a benefactor, yourself, a neutral person and a difficult person.

As you extend loving-kindness toward all beings, notice the spaciousness in the body and see if you can notice your breath extending out, past the body.

Settling into awareness of the body and the breath. Feeling into our body right now noticing what's here. Open yourself to whatever is to be experienced in the body in this moment. Connecting to the breath and noticing the wave-like movements of the belly.

In this practice, you'll be cultivating loving kindness. We all have within us, this natural capacity for Loving-kindness. Or for friendship that is unconditional and open, gentle, supportive. Loving-kindness is a natural opening of a compassionate heart to ourselves and to others. It's a wish that everyone be happy.

We begin with developing lovingkindness toward ourselves, allowing our hearts to open with tenderness. Allow yourself to remember and open up to your basic goodness. You might remember times you have been kind or generous. You might recall your natural desire to be happy and not to suffer. If acknowledging your own goodness is difficult, look at yourself through the eyes of someone who loves you. What does that person love about you? It may help to use your imagination to allow tender feelings of kindness to flow more easily

And, as you experience this love notice how you feel in your body. Maybe you feel some warmth or heat in the face. A gentle smile a or sense of expansiveness. This is loving-kindness, a natural feeling that is accessible to all of us always. Resting with this feeling of open, unconditional love for a few minutes.

Let yourself bask in the energy of loving-kindness, breathing it in and breathing it out - inviting feelings of peace and acceptance.

Begin now to wish yourself well by extending the following words of loving-kindness to yourself.

May I be filled with lovingkindness  
May I be held in loving kindness  
May I feel connected and calm  
May I accept myself just as I am  
May I be happy  
May I know the natural joy of being alive

And, now repeating in the mind these words of friendship and kindness to yourself once again

May I be filled with lovingkindness  
May I be held in loving kindness  
May I feel connected and calm  
May I accept myself just as I am  
May I be happy  
May I know the natural joy of being alive

Now open your circle of loving-kindness by bringing to mind **someone who is dear to you**. Someone whom you care about and who has always been supportive. Reflect on this person's basic goodness, sensing what it is in particular that you love about him or her.

May you be filled with loving kindness  
May you be held in lovingkindness  
May you feel my love now  
May you accept yourself just as you are  
May you be happy  
May you know the natural joy of being alive

Now bring to mind a **“neutral” person**. This is someone you might see regularly but don't know well. It might be a neighbour, or the person who runs the local shop. Bring this person to mind now, and repeat the words of loving-kindness.

May you be filled with lovingkindness  
May you be held in lovingkindness  
May you feel my love now  
May you accept yourself just as you are  
May you be happy  
May you know the natural joy of being alive

And now, if it's possible for you, bring to mind someone with whom you've had a **difficult relationship**. Perhaps it's someone you don't like to feel sympathy or compassion for. Seeing if it's possible to let go of feelings of resentment and dislike for this person. Reminding yourself to see this person as a whole being deserving of love and kindness. As someone who feels pain and anxiety- as someone who also suffers.

Seeing if it's possible to extend to this person the words of loving kindness in your mind.

May you be filled with lovingkindness  
May you be held in lovingkindness  
May you feel my love now  
May you accept yourself just as you are  
May you be happy  
May you know the natural joy of being alive

Now, allow your awareness to open out in all directions yourself, a dear one, a neutral person and a difficult person and of all beings. Aware of all the joys and sorrows that all beings experience.

May all beings be filled with lovingkindness  
May all beings be happy  
May all beings awaken and be free  
May all beings be happy

And now, bringing this practice to a close by coming back to extend kindness to yourself. Sitting for a while and basking in the energy of loving-kindness that may have been generated here

# Keys to Maintaining Your Self-Compassionate

It is maintaining (or striving for) a happy medium between:

Self-kindness and Self-judgment  
Common Humanity and Isolation  
Avoidance and over-identification

There are some key themes that you might be very familiar with: empathy, kindness, forgiveness, caring, tenderness, and various synonyms for acceptance and non-judgment. But because so much of our mental activity is ingrained or instinctual, it can take some conscious effort at first to start practicing self-compassion.

Important tips to remember:

## **1.Treat yourself as you'd treat a friend –**

One good place to start is by thinking about how you would treat others that you care about. So while we can't always take away others' pain, we can validate its existence and provide support to help them get through it and grow. This means, let yourself make mistakes and care for yourself as you'd treat others.

## **2.Becoming more self-aware –**

Instead of 'beating ourselves up for beating ourselves up', try to become aware of your internal narrative and use this as a positive starting point for changing self-talk. You can try, releasing statements, self- acceptance of short comings, mindfulness practice and try not to judge yourself too quickly

## **3.Re (gain) perspective**

Try to zoom out to remind yourselves once more that you're connected to others. That we're part of a much bigger picture—common humanity—and adjust our focus accordingly. Let go of the need for outside validation (do not tie your happiness to outside influences) and reach out to others (you are not alone).

# Meditation Exercise: Cultivating Happiness and Gratitude

To begin this mindfulness meditation on gratitude, start with something simple you are experiencing at this moment.

It could be the side of a tree swaying gently in the wind, or the warmth of sunlight on your skin, or maybe the experience of comfort from the chair you are sitting in, or the simple wonder of pausing in the midst of our busy life to engage with this practice right now.

Choose one thing to notice and allow it fully into your experience.

Let appreciation and gratitude arise and fill your body and mind.

Now think of someone you don't know well but who has supported your experience today in some way. It could be a bus driver, the person who stacked the fruit in the grocery store, or the author of the book that you are reading right now.

Allow yourself to feel how you've benefited from the gift of their work. Allow yourself to feel appreciation and gratitude.

Think about the tools that you use that support your work and your life. Your computer, your books, buildings, equipment.

Choose one thing and consider all that was needed for its creation. Appreciate and feel gratitude that you have access to these tools.

Feel gratitude for people you work and live with.

Think of a particular person whose work or effort directly supports your work in life. Appreciate their contribution, their good intention, saying in your mind to them, "Thank you."

Now bring to mind someone you care about. Picture them in your mind.

Think about what this person means to you. What you appreciate about them, who they are, what you have an experience together, the experience that they've had in your life.

As you imagine them, notice what feelings you are experiencing, what sensations you detect in your body, especially those in the area of your heart.

Let yourself express gratitude towards them. Thanking them for being who they are and for their presence in your life. Imagine them receiving your gratitude.

Now bring to mind something, in particular, you are grateful for today. Feel the appreciation and gratitude for its presence in your life.

As you bring these things to mind for what you're grateful, allow yourself to rest in the experience.

When you cultivate the practice of gratitude, you may even find yourself able to be grateful for difficult or unpleasant experiences.

If you'd like to bring to mind an experience in your life that is challenging, one for which you'd like to be able to express gratitude.

Offer your gratitude and appreciation. Thank this challenge for what it may offer you. Gratitude for our body, gratitude for our mind, gratitude for the simple fact of being alive at this moment.

Finally, appreciate the opportunity to pause and experience this very practice of gratitude in itself. For all that you have brought to mind during this meditation, for all of the countless gifts in your life, say, "Thank you."

To all the people, to all that is around you, and part of you. For all that you have experienced in your life, for all of this, thank you.

Allow the sense of gratitude to fill you completely as you breathe in and breath out. Settling on the breath right here, right now, fully alive and present in this very moment.

Finish with a full deep breath in and a long slow breath out. Gently and slowly open your eyes and return your awareness to the place where you are.

## Informal Practice: Mindful Eating

Begin by connecting to your breath and body, feel your feet on the ground and notice your experience in this moment. Notice any thoughts, sensations or emotions you are experiencing.

Tune into the awareness or sensation that you have in your body of feeling hungry, thirsty or maybe even feeling full. If you were going to eat or drink something right now, what is your body hungry for? What is it thirsty for?

Now, bring your attention to the item in your hand and imagine that you are seeing it for the first time. Observe with curiosity as you pay attention and notice the colour, shape, texture, and size.

Imagine what it took for this item to get to your hands: sunshine, water, time, processing, and shipping. You may choose to be aware of gratitude for everyone involved in the cultivation and preparation of this item.

Now place the item between your fingers and feel the texture, temperature and ridges. You may notice smoothness or stickiness. Continue to breathe and be fully present in this moment.

Take the piece of food and bring it toward your nose and smell with your full awareness. Notice if you have any memories, sensations or reactions in your body.

With full awareness of your hand moving toward your mouth, place the object into your mouth without chewing or swallowing it. Just allow it to be in your mouth, roll it around to different parts of your mouth and tongue. Notice the flavour and texture. Notice the physical sensations within your body, especially your mouth and your gut.

Next take just one bite and notice the flavour, notice the change of texture. Then very slowly begin to chew this piece of food, and notice the parts of your mouth that are involved in chewing. Notice the sound and movement of chewing, as you continue to notice the sensations and flavour.

When you are ready, swallow this item and notice the path that it follows from your mouth and throat into your stomach. Notice the sensation and taste that may linger in your mouth. Connect again to your body and your breath and notice your experience in this moment.

# Exercise: Self-Appreciation

List ten things about yourself that you really like or appreciate. The qualities you list don't have to be ones you display all the time. As you write down each quality, see if you can notice any uncomfortable feelings – embarrassment, fear of vanity, unfamiliarity?

If discomfort comes up, remind yourself that you are not claiming you're better than anyone else, nor that you're perfect. You're simply noting the good qualities that you sometimes display. See if you can acknowledge and enjoy the positive qualities you have, lingering over them and really taking them in.

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