

# How to follow the course

This handbook is to compliment the course materials and to act a reminder. In each session we look at a different exercise/practice to develop our focus, attention and awareness in a mindful way.

There is no need to sit in a special way, just find a comfortable chair that you can be supported in having an upright yet soft posture. Read first, before you listen. Somewhere quiet. Or use headphones. Eyes slightly open. Just listen and sit.

Once you get to know the routine, you may guide yourself and explore. When you finish, sit for a few moments longer and rest. Each exercise starts and finishes with a soft bell. Just follow it. Do not expect to find it easy. Everyone has a busy mind and a restless body. It takes time.

Develop kindness and humour in the thought that we are all the same. We just come back to the present moment and sit in it. Resting, breathing, noticing. It sounds so simple, yet this helps to develop complex neural changes in the brain which builds your resilience to change, daily life and difficult moments. It supports your mind to stop reacting to events and towards responding in more positive ways.

It is a good idea to think and reflect why you are doing this course. For what reason? Use the answer or answers before you do each practice. This helps to re orientate our mind towards the practice and to frame the experience. It is called your intention.

I do this because...



# Attitude

To get the best out of anything we need to start to cultivate the attitudes that will support it to happen. With mindful practice we approach with an attitude of **curiosity** and **openness**.

We must resist trying to do it or to get it right. There is nothing to get right, all we are doing is noticing what is happening right now without judgement. We are gently training the mind to understand that it can allow the body to sit and allow the distractions in the mind to be there without being drawn in and getting attached. Slowly breaking down old habits and thinking patterns by noticing them and not reacting, just being curious while we enjoy sitting and taking a break for our daily routines.

We should want to do it, not think we have to do it. As we develop this attitude in our approach to mindfulness we may find other attitudes start to develop over time. No matter how negative or strong our distractions in the mind used to be we will be able to be with them in more productive ways.

Remembering that we are not trying to push anything away or stop our thinking. We can be with whatever is happening. Jon Kabat-Zinn called these the 7 Attitudes of Mindfulness.

- Letting go
- Acceptance
- Beginners mind
- Patience
- Trust
- Non striving



# Calming the mind

Before we even begin to calm our mind, we need to experience what our mind is doing in the present moment. We need to know what we are dealing with. To do that we first sit quietly and still for 1- 3 minutes. Just notice what happens while you sit.

## What did you notice?

It would be very rare indeed for anyone to experience a calm mind free from any kind of thought. Left alone, it is distracted by so much that we just follow it out of habit. This leads us into thinking and doing things that can be negative.

By focusing on our breathing or sounds we move from distraction to paying attention. Which creates strength in the muscle of the mind to be less distracted and to know what to do when you are. Just following our breathing all the way in and all the way out we can create an equal rhythm on which we can deepen and soften.

Every time the mind wanders off we can come back to this rhythm. Be curious to the qualities of breathing and what it is like to slow down and just rest on the breath. Notice how long it takes for the mind to wander less and remain with your focus.

If we find that focusing on breathing is uncomfortable or difficult we can rest our attention on the sounds around.

Do this for 5-10 minutes, a couple of times in the day for a week.

Informally sitting quiet for a minute and noticing thoughts, sensations and emotions. Perhaps putting a reminder in our diaries.





# 3 Minute Breathing Space

Finding the time in the day is almost impossible for us to do. We are so consumed by what is happening and not aware of how we are. This exercise can be done anywhere, when you have 3 minutes between tasks. It teaches us how to find space and time in the day to practice and remain calm and focused on what is around.

Thinking of an hour glass shape, we widen our awareness to the whole body for a minute. Checking how it feels and sensing ourselves in the space around.

We then gather in our breath and focus for a minute on the in and out of breathing, slowly deepening the breath and moving it down into the body. The final minute is then letting go and become aware once again of the whole body, noticing any changes in how you are.

Use before going to a meeting before sitting down to study or any task. Be more present. After you finish the exercise, notice how you are and take this with you into your daily routines, without holding onto it too much. It will melt away as you become involved in the next thing.

Formally incorporate this into your day as a way of getting used to a set routine. Maybe in the morning before you start the day or before lunch.

Informally we can begin to notice when we feel tired or tense, use this routine to get used to sitting and paying attention to what is going on. Allowing your experience to be just as it is.



# Body Scan

To cultivate and grow our awareness we can spend time to notice sensations within the body to help the mind learn how to direct focus and attention inward. Most of our lives have been spent with an outside focus which can condition habits that drive us to look for happiness, satisfaction and calm in the environment outside of us. As many of us know we can soon tire of outside influences and then keep on looking for distractions.

Using the body scan to relax and pay attention, in a systematic way, to any and all sensations we are experiencing in the moment. Taking our time to become aware of the slightest sensations as we scan bit by bit through the body.

Starting at the feet or the head and moving up or down each body part, taking time to lie down or take a few moments away from the desk, while we sit.

This is not about making sensations happen, this is about be open to what we are feeling. Many of us spend a life of trying to get away from our feelings and this practice can be a good way to reverse that.



## Full Practice

Once we are comfortable with settling the mind, you can now start the full practice which develops our ability to sit longer, notice more without too much judgement and learn how to bring the mind back using the support of breath or sound.

This can take you 10-20 minutes according to ability and motivation to practice. Always reminding ourselves of why we are doing it. Very useful in teaching the mind to focus on a single thing and also focus on something you may want to reflect on. We learn to face and be with whatever it is that has arisen, or brought up intentionally for us to look at. Slowly we learn to sit longer and just experience what is happening.

Very quickly we will be distracted, let it be there as you gently refocus on the breath or start listening to the sounds around you.

Allow the distractions to be there in the background, while the support of breath or sound is in the foreground.

No need to focus too tightly, allow the distraction and the support to exist together. Eventually you will just be with the support. Then let go and repeat. Do this several times a week if you can. Daily practice is best, but we need to be realistic and kind about our expectations.





# Remembering Kindness

Practising the skills of mindfulness is sometimes not very easy. Our minds are so conditioned for the busyness of life that it finds it hard to just sit and breathe for a while. This can have the knock on effect on our thinking and we find ourselves being negative about the whole thing or being critical towards ourselves in that we can't do it so it must be me.

This is just a trick of the mind, we can help it by bringing forward in our imagination memories of kindness.

First we sit, settle, ground and rest. Then we bring to mind a memory of when we were kind to someone and notice all of the qualities of this experience. Then think about times when we have received kindness. This helps the mind to learn that kindness is key to all of this. We must take an attitude of being kind to ourselves. We can not do this unless the mind is aware of what kindness is and how it makes us feel.

Sometimes we are uncomfortable with kindness, this is fine too. We learn to sit and nurture it and ourselves. Practice this occasionally to develop your sense of kindness.

With all positive sensations and emotions, it is a good idea to get a sense that we can soak up this experience into our bodies and minds. Even pretending we can do this will help the mind to connect with the body.



# Compassionate Break

There are many times in the week that we will feel the full effects of a distracted mind and strong emotions in the body which feel as if they take over. This is not unusual for anyone, but we do feel as if it is just us in that moment.

These moments will come at the drop of a hat when you least expect it to happen. It is these moments that we need to give our self a compassionate break. Making a conscious effort to:

- Recognise that this is a difficult moment right now for me.
- Understand that other people in the world are experience the same thing right now.
- How can I be more kind to myself in this moment.

Doing these 3 steps is a good way to break the pattern of negative thinking. We actively stop and move our thinking towards others and being kind to ourselves. Instead of closing down around our problem and feeling bad.





# Loving Kindness

Once we have developed a regular routine of practising we can now move towards opening our minds to others and wishing them well. This has the effect of training the mind to think about others and to allow them into our experience.

This is especially useful when we are negative toward others, or angry with a particular person. We learn to open to this feeling instead of contracting around it. This in turn allows us to let things go more easily.

We become familiar with allowing people to pop up into our imagination and then use a series of phrases to then sit and notice how they feel in the body.

As usual we start with a full practice and then bring a person that we have no problem with, to mind. Once we can do this we then can also do this for ourselves. Do not try and think of someone on purpose, allow your mind to present someone. This helps to learn how to allow and trust the mind.

When we wish ourselves well, it may be difficult. Stick with it, it will allow us to be kinder to self and more relaxed with our self.



# Observing

Learning how to let go and just watch our thoughts, sensations and emotions is difficult for many of us. Helping to cultivate a sense of observing them is very helpful. We do this in this exercise by starting with a full practice and moving more toward our imagination to help our learning.

We then imagine that we are watching all things as if we were on river bank. Sitting back and just observing. No need to interact or get involved in anything. Just being curious about what is going on right now. By just watching and allowing things to float by, we train the mind to not jump in straight away. We may notice just how busy we are without trying to action anything.

When we notice something we allow it to be there a little longer than usual, actively paying attention to it, before coming back to the support of breath and sound.

When we do come back we may notice subtle attitudes that were not visible to us before. EG Wanting to stay with the distraction or wanting to push it away. Just sit back and watch and learn.

Developing the ability to watch in this way can support us in daily life. We begin to notice when we engage or 'jump in'. It can be humorous at times because we catch ourselves doing it. It can also be a saviour, as this skill will prevent you for unconscious negative interaction with yourself and other people.



# S.T.O.P

In our daily routines when our conditioning and habitual actions start to become more noticeable, we will start to catch ourselves being dragged into our busy minds. Most of the time we don't have the time to sit for any length of time to explore and learn from this, like the observing exercise.

We can however allow our selves to STOP and do a mini observing type exercise at any point in the day. This can be very useful in reinforcing our intentions and our practice. It can also allow us to find a little space in the day.

**Stop:** Notice that things are busy and distracting.

**Take a breath:** Slow soothing breathing

**Observe:** What can you see, what can you hear?

**Proceed:** Regain composure and move on.





# R.A.I.N

As we become more aware of how we are when we do the exercise, there will be times when difficult moments arise. This is part of life and now we have the skills to be with this moments and help it to move along. We start as usual. Then we pay attention to what is arising in the moment. We refocus on:

**Recognising** what is around in our thoughts, sensations and emotions and make an effort to label it.

**Allowing** what ever it is to be there and notice its effects.

**Investigate** more deeply again on body sensations, thoughts associated with it and also other possible emotions.

**Non-identify**, we ask ourselves if what I am experiencing is really me or is it just passing through?

This especially useful in teaching the mind that everything we experience as 'I', is usually not the case, as we over identify with all our distractions and make them feel real and threatening. We solidify our experience and so it feels more painful.

In reality they are just passing through, like visitors to a guest house. You are like the manager of the guest house, letting people in and allowing them to stay for a while, until they are ready to leave. We can help all our distractions move on quicker when we realise that they are not us, in fact they are just like guests, moving on.



# What next?

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