

Oxford
Mindfulness
Centre



Oxford Mindfulness Foundation

Introductory

Introducing Mindfulness

Course Handbook

www.oxfordmindfulness.org

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Kind regards,
OMF Team

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About this Handbook

Welcome to the Introducing Mindfulness 3-session course.

This handbook aims to support your learning and practice as we move through the three sessions.

It includes information about the sessions and guidance about the home practice, as well as spaces for you to make written notes about the practices that you do at home. Most of the learning in the course is experiential learning – the home practices will be your most important teachers.

The course includes three sessions and each session has its own section in the handbook. Each session builds on the learning and experience of the previous session.

The sections of the handbook are designed to be read after you have attended the relevant session.

You are encouraged not to read ahead in the handbook, but instead come to the learning in each session with a 'beginner's mind' – a fresh approach with no preconceptions or expectations.

We hope you enjoy the course.

Foreword

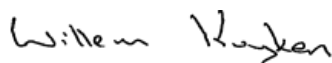
In the same way that physical exercise is recognised as supporting physical health, there is a growing recognition that mindfulness training and cognitive-behavioural therapies can support our mental health and well-being.

Mindfulness is rooted within ancient wisdom and practices, whereas cognitive behavioural methods were developed within modern psychological science. They have different perspectives, but each offers specific ways to a common end - becoming more familiar with the mind and learning to work with it more skilfully. The combination of the two approaches, originally in the form of the 8-week Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programme, has great potential to ease suffering and enable people to flourish and live their lives more fully.

The Introducing Mindfulness course is built on the framework of the original MBCT programme, and is designed to be relevant to all of us. It is for use in everyday settings, offering a taste of 3 key MBCT themes and practices, and exploring how these can support us personally and more broadly within our life/work context.

The learning is mainly centred around key practices during the sessions, and those you are encouraged to continue to do through your days in between sessions and beyond them.

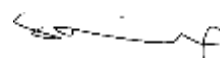
Everything we do at the University of Oxford Mindfulness Centre builds from our world-leading research. This course is no different - we have started a programme of research to evaluate its acceptability and effectiveness and look forward to seeing the result in the fullness of time.



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Introducing Mindfulness Session 1

**Paying attention with
curiosity and care**

A definition of mindfulness

Attention is the gateway to experience

With mindfulness training we can learn how to choose what we pay attention to and how we pay attention to it. Attention is the gateway to experience. Attention is a key skill; we use it in every aspect our life. William James, one of the first modern psychologists put it this way ,

“...without selective interest, experience is utter chaos.”

If we allow our attention to wander without any sense of purpose, it is not only chaos, but can also make us hostage to whatever in the world is most able to capture our attention. If this is 24/7 news, it creates a heightened and exhausting state of unease and anxiety. If it's social media, we absorb the stories of whatever we are reading in our media streams, including how success, attractiveness, or worth are defined. If our minds are left to wander, habit will take over, we'll attend to what we've always attended to, even if that is unhelpful.

Choosing where and how to place attention

Standing back to see what is grabbing our attention is the first step to exercising “selective interest.” Attention is sometimes described as being like a flashlight. We can choose what we shine the flashlight's beam on. Everything outside that focal point of the beam moves from shade to darkness. We can also use different lenses. We can use each of our different senses; for example, seeing, hearing, touching, sensing in our bodies. Or we can think about, imagine or describe things with words.

It can be tremendously empowering to know that we can, to an extent, choose what we attend to. For example, we can choose to update on the news just once a day. We can turn off the notifications on our phone. We can choose to appreciate aspects of our lives, such as our loved ones, the natural world around us and people who inspire us. The following practice is an exercise in taking the flashlight of your attention and choosing where to shine it.

Practice 1: The flashlight of attention

1. Notice where your attention is right now, where is the flashlight shining?

Now, making a clear choice to take hold of the ‘flashlight of attention’ and moving it to ...

2. The **soles of your feet** – what do you notice, what sensations are in the flashlight beam, which sensations are most clear?
3. Your **hands**, what are you aware of in your hands. Maybe rubbing your hands together and see what this feels like, where the hands are in contact with one another and where there is movement.
4. How about your **stomach?** sensing the movement as you breathe, keeping the flashlight beam here through a few breaths
5. Now we’re going to move from the body to **the mind**. Taking your attention and turning to something or someone in your life that you’re a bit worried about, not a big thing, something minor or small. Allowing your attention to hold this person or thing in awareness. What are you feeling right now?
6. Now taking your attention and bringing into awareness something or someone in your life that you appreciate, that you’re grateful for, perhaps a specific recent event that you enjoyed or felt good about, allowing your attention to hold this person or event in awareness. What are you feeling right now?
7. Now come back to your **feet, hands, stomach, the whole of your body** sitting here breathing, just as it.

Key points

What do we learn from this?

We learn that we can take our attention, intentionally, and move it around, bringing into the foreground, into the centre of the flashlight beam, different experiences in our bodies and in our mind. Instead of our experience being “utter chaos,” we are taking hold of the flashlight and **choosing where we place our attention**. The more we do this and feel a sense of confidence, the more we start to have a sense that we can choose where we place our attention.

We start to see the **effects of these choices**. What happens if I read news 24/7, what happens if, when I go for a walk, I choose to really tune into the world around me. What happens when, if someone I care about is talking, I choose to really pay attention to what they're saying, how they're saying it and how it's landing with me, rather than planning what I am going to say next?

What does it mean to pay attention in a particular way, non-judgmentally?

This involves our attitude, and **how we pay attention**. To use the flashlight idea again, we can choose **different lens filters**; for example, we can choose to be interested in what we notice, and even develop attitudes of **kindness, friendliness, care and balance** in our attention. It is really hard to be interested and judgemental at the same time. It is really hard to be caring and harsh at the same time. By developing these attitudes, we can change the whole landscape of our minds.

Consider the exercise we did just now. How would it be to have a lens of interest and friendliness? What about a lens of judgment?

What are the benefits of doing this?

Starting to learn these skills in attention can seem like a big ask. It is, but research evidence clearly suggests that our **attention can be trained** and that it's worth it - we can feel more in control and happier when we're choosing where and how we place our attention. It can help us see our experiences in any moment more clearly (sensations, impulses, moods and thoughts).

In each moment we can **stop and notice**; for example, are we energised or tired, excited or scared, distracted or focused? It can reveal the richness of our experiences. Eating good food, drinking tea or coffee, being with a loved one, **can all be enriched if we're fully present**. It can slow everything down, so we can see our experience unfolding in real time.

We can see the moment our attention is hijacked, what happens in reaction to a pleasant or unpleasant experience, how we tend to react to criticism, praise, boredom, adrenaline surges, and so on.

Each time our attention wanders is a chance to do something radically different. We can recognise and get curious by asking, "At what point did my mind wander, where did it go, what was so captivating about this?" Mind wandering is normal, it can even be creative, relaxing and helpful, and even life-saving. If there is an immediate external threat, we're hard-wired to turn to and pay attention to that threat.

The Scientist

Training our attention is not easy, but as a foundational skill it changes everything. We're beginning to choose what we attend to.

**"The faculty of bringing back a wandering mind, over and over again,
is the very root of judgment, character, and will."**

William James - in one of the first really good psychological
descriptions of attention.

How can we train our attention?

We'll start by offering a practice that gathers our attention and grounds our attention in our bodies. You can either guide yourself using the guidance here or use the Introducing Mindfulness recordings of guided practices on the OMF website: We recommend starting with the 10-minute Body Scan practice. Ideally this is a practice you do every day, at least for a period of time. Perhaps one of the easiest ways of integrating it into your day is to do it in bed just before going to sleep, or first thing in the morning, before starting the rest of your day .

Practice 2: Body scan-paying attention to our bodies, on purpose, with interest and care

Ideally this practice is done lying down, but you can also do it sitting or standing – whatever feels comfortable for your body. You can also do this practice at different times. If you don't have much time, one possibility is in bed before you go to sleep to help you switch your mind off for the day. **Set an intention to bring interest and care to sensations in each part of the body.**

Each time you notice that the mind wanders, and it will - that's what minds do – just notice where it went to, and then gently return attention to sensations of touch or temperature, aches or itches, warmth or coolness... Remembering that there is no special way to feel... simply feeling sensations in the body as you scan through it.

Scanning through your body

Beginning by feeling the **points of contact** of the body with whatever is supporting you. Connecting with those parts of the body to feel steady... and grounded... and having a sense of the **body as a whole**... the space the body takes up... Noticing **what's here in the body now**... itches, tingles, or aches... softness, warmth, or comfort... places of tension... or places of ease... investigating with friendly interest and care... what's here now in the body?

And when you're ready, gathering attention and moving it down through **both legs and into the toes**... tuning in to any sensations here... then expanding attention to include the **whole of the feet** - toes, balls of the feet, arch, heels, top of the feet.. then continuing in this way, moving through the body, zooming attention in and out as you explore any and all sensations here as they change... **ankles... lower legs... knees... upper legs...**

Then moving attention to the **pelvis**. Becoming aware of the bony structure of the pelvic girdle... the hips and hip joints... and the soft tissue housed inside... aches, itches, gurgles or rumbles... aware of sensations in the pelvic region...

Or perhaps simply noticing the points of contact of the buttocks with the floor, bed or chair... experiencing what is here... on the surface and within.

Now, moving attention into the **torso**... tuning into a sense of the shape of the torso... and sensations as the torso moves... the rise and fall of the chest... and the stretching and releasing of the belly as you breathe... aware of **sensations of breathing** here... and moving attention into the **lower back**... and the **upper back**, including the **shoulder blades** and **shoulders** ... then on down to through both **upper arms, elbows, lower arms, wrists and hands**... moving attention all the way out to the **fingertips and thumb-tips**... exploring any sensations of contact, touch, temperature... the **whole hand**... palm of hand... back of hand... both hands together... then back up through the **wrists, lower arms, elbows, upper arms and shoulders**, and moving attention to the **neck and throat** area. Exploring any sensations of air moving through the throat here.

Now, letting go of the sense of neck and throat, and moving up into the **jaw**, the **chin**... and the **mouth**, including in this a sense of **lips, tongue, teeth, roof of mouth**. On an out-breath, letting go... and moving on up to the **nose**... perhaps aware of the movement of air as you breathe... warmth or coolness... dryness or moisture..... and the **cheeks**... .. and to the **eyes**... the **eyebrows**... the **muscles around the eyes**... **the eye sockets**... the **eyeballs**... and then moving attention up to explore the **forehead**. Now zooming out and exploring the **sides...back and top of the head**...getting a sense of the head as a whole... the space it takes up... And finally, zooming out still further to a sense of **the body as a whole**... just lying here, breathing, experiencing... resting in awareness... as best you can, allowing yourself to be exactly as you are, allowing your body to be exactly as you find it... right here... right now.

As we bring this practice to a close, ask yourself, is there a part of the body you felt most able to anchor your awareness in? Your hands, feet or belly maybe? This can be something you can return to in any moment to anchor and steady yourself.

Key points

What is learned when we do this practice?

At its very simplest our experience is made up of **stimuli and reactions**. Stimuli can be internal (e.g., sensations or thoughts) or external (e.g., sounds). Our reactions are the ways in which our bodies and minds register, make sense of and adjust and/or take action to the constant flow of stimuli.

We can become more aware of different aspects of our experience: **bodily sensations, moods, thoughts**, images and cognitive processes (planning, remembering, mind wandering), and **impulses** and the context within which they arise.

We continue to learn that can pay attention on purpose, and each time our mind wanders we can notice this and bring it back, training our attention.

Finally, we start to develop a greater awareness of our bodies, something that is key to using mindfulness skilfully to navigate through our days; something we'll return to.

Velcro and Teflon mind.

As you do this practice you'll notice something that all minds do, which has been referred to as Velcro and Teflon mind. Like **Velcro**, our mind can clasp onto unpleasant things. Like **Teflon**, our mind can move over pleasant experiences without making direct contact with them. Mindfulness practices can reveal how easy it is for our attention to move towards difficult things and get preoccupied with body and mind states such as agitation, sleepiness, aches and pains. The mind gets caught up in difficulties like Velcro. We can also see how it glosses over all that is right in any moment, as though it were covered in smooth Teflon.

Protective awareness.

Our minds can be very wise, **making good choices** about what to pay attention to. Perhaps the most obvious example is in the midst of danger, when our minds are automatically drawn towards the threat and give it full attention so we can react to stay safe. For example, yesterday I was about to cross the road, and out of nowhere a car veered dangerously towards me. I grabbed the person I was with, and we stepped back very automatically and quickly onto the sidewalk. Everything else became irrelevant - the conversation we were having, all the surroundings - my attention was solely focused on the car's direction of travel

and pulling back onto the sidewalk. In the same way, when there is too much going on, and we feel over-whelmed, our minds can shut down or at least shut out what it can't manage. Immediately after a major loss or bereavement, we can be quite numb, for example, unable to process all that's happened and is happening.

Mindfulness training helps us become more familiar with these tendencies of the mind, and perhaps even begin to use them more adaptively, knowing when it is helpful to open and when to close. The idea of **anchoring our attention**, choosing a place to gather and steady ourselves is also a form of **protective awareness**. We're learning that whatever conditions we find ourselves in we can always anchor our attention. It may sometimes be much harder than others, in the midst of a storm for example, but we can also learn that different conditions require different anchors. We'll return to this, but first, it is good to recognize our natural protective awareness and start to trust it. This is the start of a lifelong journey.

Mindfulness of everyday activities

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” - Annie Dillard

There is a very simple way to become more mindful. We don't have to look very far – our everyday life is already here waiting for us to pay attention to it. It simply involves making an adjustment in how we approach our day, choosing to pay attention, on purpose with qualities of interest and care. This is sometimes called 'beginner's mind'. When infants and toddlers encounter something for the first time, they have a sense of awe and wonder. Beginner's mind is recapturing this sense of seeing things, as if for the first time. What follows is a good example of this:

Sophia was taking care of her grandson, Noah. She'd brought some fresh strawberries and handed one to Noah in his high chair. He squashed it in his hands, with delight at its softness and the way, as he crushed it, the texture changed to mush. Then he put his hands and the strawberry to his mouth. His eyes lit up and his whole face creased with the sweetness of the strawberry first on his lips, and then when he realised he really liked it, into his mouth. In that moment he looked like he'd discovered something amazing, which he had, the feel and taste of a fresh strawberry.

Sophia passed Noah a second strawberry and took one herself, mirroring his every move as they both enjoyed the feel, smell and taste of the fresh strawberries. It was just the two of them, and Sophia loved abandoning convention about how to eat, choosing instead to eat the strawberry exactly as Noah did.

Beginner's mind means approaching our everyday experience with this sense of **openness to the fullness and richness** of it, not assuming we know how something will taste, what someone will say, how we'll feel in a particular situation. We may put a strawberry in our mouth with an expectation of how it will be and not actually pause and experience how it is in reality.

Our days are full of activities that we tend to do quite **automatically**, for very good reasons, so that we can pay attention to other things while we do it. The classic example is driving on the highway, while also talking to a friend. But our everyday activities provide so many **chances throughout the day to pay attention**, to come back to the present moment, and realise that these everyday moments are not distractions on the way to doing something else, **they are our lives**.

When we pay attention to small moments it can add depth and vibrancy to our lives. For example the moment someone shows us a kindness, a cherry tree in blossom, greeting someone we care about who we haven't seen for a while, eating, the first cup of coffee or tea of the day, and so on. If we can be more fully present to these moments in our day, we can more fully experience the joy, beauty, connection, pleasures and rewards of our lives. It is a simple effect: **paying attention to these moments more than likely enriches our life**. There are also many moments in the day we perhaps write off as "dead space;" getting dressed, brushing our hair, commuting, dropping children off at school, waiting for a bus or train to arrive, or an elevator to get to our floor These are all moments we can take a breath and connect with ourselves, how am I doing right now, how is my mind (e.g., calm, agitated), how is my body (e.g., energized, tired)? These can be moments to come back to ourselves and make adjustments throughout our day.

Practice 3: Mindfulness of everyday activities.

Consider all the everyday things we do: washing our hands; showering; brushing our hair; walking from place to place; eating; drinking; natural pauses/gaps in the day; commuting; waiting for people; attending to the notifications on our mobile phone; talking to people; the moment we wake up; the moments before we fall asleep....

Each of these provide **an opportunity pay attention to our sensations, moods, impulses and thoughts**. For example, as we wash our hands, can we come back to the direct experience of the water, soap, and our hands moving across each other? As we eat, can we really taste, smell and savor our food? In the shower you might bring your attention to the sensations of the water on your skin, or if you're eating your breakfast, the smell and taste of the food.

Being mindful while carrying out everyday activities can become **more advanced**. As we **interact with others**, can we be more aware of how our bodies, moods, impulses and thoughts are changing through the interaction? Can we really pay attention to what they're saying, verbally and non-verbally?

What about in more **charged situations**? Can we tune in to how the charge is registering in our bodies? What is it triggering for us in terms of moods, impulses and thoughts?

Throughout the day, lift and broaden your gaze, both literally and metaphorically. What do you see? Are there things you're missing because you're either not looking or you've made up your mind very quickly what is there? Can you see it with it beginner's mind?

What's that like?

Key points

- Throughout the day, **pay attention to everyday activities**, with a sense of curiosity and interest – beginner's mind.

- Raise and broaden your gaze to see more of the world, perhaps **noticing things you might not normally see**.
- As you become more familiar with this, **try staying aware during more charged moments**, to see how your mind and body register these moments.

The Scientist

Studies have shown that **how people approach their day** can impact more on well-being than what they are doing throughout their day. These studies show that bringing moments of mindfulness and appreciation to our day predicts our downstream well-being. The implication is that it can really pay off to try, as best we can, to approach our day with a sense of intentionality and awareness. Of course, our basic temperament and life circumstances are important, but how we relate to each moment and each day is something we can change – these are skills that we can learn. The implication is clear, choosing to bring a sense of appreciation into our day can improve our well-being.

Key points

Training our attention is a **key foundational skill**.

As we **step back**, we see how much our mind wanders.

We learn about how we **relate to pleasant and unpleasant experiences**.

We start to have a sense of **being able to choose what we attend to and how we attend to it**.

Realising we have this choice can create a **sense of great freedom** – we don't have to be held captive by external pulls and pushes on our attention.

We can start **paying attention in ways that serve us best**

Home practice following session 1

1. Do a 10 minute **Body Scan**, using the audio track, every day this week. Don't expect to feel anything in particular from doing the practice. In fact, as best you can, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience. Don't judge it, just keep doing it, and we'll talk next week about how it went..
2. **Ten Finger Gratitude Practice:** bring to mind ten things for which you are grateful, counting them on your fingers and opening to and savouring the sensations of gratitude in the body as best you can.
3. Choose **one routine** activity in your daily life and make a deliberate effort to bring moment-to-moment awareness to that activity each time you do it.

Possibilities include waking up in the morning, brushing your teeth, showering, drying your body, getting dressed, eating a meal or a snack, taking out the rubbish, shopping, and so forth. Explore how it is to zoom in and experience fully what you are doing as you are doing it. Notice body sensations, thoughts and feelings as they arise.

Please note:

1. These practices are for you, to support you in your daily life. No 'oughts or 'shoulds'. No-one is checking up on you. Your practice is a relationship between you and you. Please engage with them in a way that supports your learning.
2. Feel free to use the home practice notes page opposite to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

Home practice notes

Feel free to use this page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session

Introducing Mindfulness Session 2

**Learning new ways
of being**

Perspective: Learning new ways of being

Learning mindfulness starts with the foundational skill of gathering our scattered minds and **stabilising our attention**. This awareness and stability helps us to see and recognize the climate of our minds and bodies – perhaps a sense of tension or ease, excitement or fear, focus or reverie, for example.

Thinking mode

Perhaps the most familiar mode for many of us is when we **think about what's happening** and use words and images to describe it. In this mode we represent our experience with **words and ideas**. This is excitement or fear, for example. I'll call this “**thinking mode**.” This extraordinary mode enables us to be creative, plan, and have a rich set of personal memories. We can re-create the world in imagination.

As a species it has enabled us to send humans into space, create the complex digital technologies that are part of everyday life, write novels, create historical narratives and produce political manifestos. It's what has enabled us to make the progress that means we have a much better chance of living into old age and it is what we'll use to address the challenges of climate change. **Thinking mode is what helps us to plan, get educated, get a job, learn from our mistakes, and so on.**

While a great asset, thinking mode of mind can also be a liability. For example, emotional and relationship problems are sometimes made worse by our over-thinking and attempts to solve them with our thinking mind. These problems often need something else-careful listening, empathy and good communication, for example.

Thinking mode can also create problematic thinking loops, where we beat ourselves up for failing to meet goals, where we worry about things that may or may not happen, where we fantasize about the sort of person we want to be, and so on and so on. Besides, **there are dimensions of our lives that are not helped by thinking**-making love and simple appreciation of nature, to give just two examples.

Experiential or 'being' mode

There is another mode of being in which we experience the world more directly, in the present moment, with all its detail and richness; be that our inner world of sensations, moods, impulses or thoughts, or; our outer world.

In this mode experiences unfold moment-to-moment without being elaborated by thinking about them or turning them into words or ideas. A sensation is simply a sensation, a mood a mood, an impulse an impulse, a thought a thought. I'll call this "experiential" or "being" mode. This mode is available to us in any moment. We can gather our minds, stabilise our attention and choose to step into this experiential mode. See practice 1 below.

Practice 1: Noting the body's 'climate'

1. Pause and **turn your attention inward**. Can you sense how your body is just now? Tense? Tired? Full of energy? Hungry?
2. Try scanning your body from your feet, up through your legs, pelvis, torso, hands, arms, shoulders, neck and head. Note any **sensations in the body**, whether they are **pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral**.
3. No need to try to change anything; **simply note any sensations in your body**. Being with whatever you become aware of in your body, allowing it to be exactly as it is, without judging it.
4. Any sensations of discomfort or **any pleasant sensations**, or any parts of your body that seem to have nothing much going on? Is there any overall sense in this moment, for example of calm or agitation, safety, or being on edge, resting in the moment or impatience?

Adapting, connecting and keeping safe

We share this rich experiential mode with other species. It provides us with information about changes in our internal and external world; cues about safety, satiety, energy/fatigue and so on. This makes sense because in our evolutionary history we had to continually **register and respond to key cues in our world** that enable us to adapt in ways that **help us survive**.

In this mode we have learned throughout our lives what to do to keep safe, to ensure we drink and eat enough, and to stay connected with others. Can we stay as we are or do we need to move to safety? Should we eat or drink, or are we OK? Should we rest, or can we be active? Are we with people we can trust, or do we need to be alert to possible threats from the people around us? This is as true for us as any social animals - a group of gazelles on the African savanna, a pack of wolves in Siberia or a family of ravens. The minds of these other social species have evolved in much the same way to scan the internal and external world and adapt in every moment to ensure they remain safe, watered, fed, connected to their “family” unit and so on. We tend to give our thinking mind a lot of importance, and it is important. But our **experiential mode of mind** provides **information about safety, connection, comfort, discomfort** and so on; which is also important. If we learn to really tune in and listen to this information it can be reliable and invaluable.

The experiential mode also allows us to savour many positives in life. For example, the sun on our face, the way music, or art more generally, makes us feel, the touch of a loved one, the taste of food. It can also powerfully connect us to negative emotions, sensations and experiences, of physical pain or emotions like anger and fear. This can be difficult; but provides an important source of information to guide wise action.

Because it has evolved to support our survival, experiential mode is quite good at making sense of social situations-providing us with a sense of the dynamics of our social group, for example.

On the other hand, experiential mode is **not suited to helping us with situations or problems that need planning or analysis**. Also, in the midst of a **very challenging** situation it can be over-whelming to be in touch with our bodies and minds – as the saying

goes, if the room is on fire we need to just get out as fast as possible. Also, individuals with histories of mental health problems and/or trauma may have understandably learned to avoid this mode of mind because it brings to mind strong negative memories and emotions, which may be overwhelming.

Stepping back and taking a different perspective

Mindfulness develops a real **familiarity with these modes of mind**, so that we can really recognise the landscape of our minds and bodies. We can know when we're in thinking or sensing/experiencing modes of mind, or maybe a mixture of the two. This is the ability to **stand back from our experience**. It is a deliberate stance, in which we choose to step back and take a different perspective. It is as though we can step into a hot air balloon and look down on our lives. Crucially, from this perspective, we are able to see experiences, sensations as sensations, moods as moods, impulses as impulses, thoughts as thoughts. Rather than being carried away by our experience, we're able to see **sensations, moods, impulses, thoughts and images come and go**.

It is a perspective from which we can ask, **“Where is it skillful to place my attention, and how?”** By taking this different perspective we have the option to stop and ask, **“Is this helpful?”** The space that is created makes it possible for us to take this **decentered perspective**. From this perspective it is more possible to sit with difficult thoughts or experiences that may previously have tipped into automatic, understandable reactions or just felt overwhelming. It is a space in which it is possible to **choose how to respond in any given moment**, a theme we will return to later.

Choice and freedom

Each of these modes of mind is a way of being that serves us in different ways, helping us to make sense of and navigate our way through the world. We'll introduce a mindfulness practice that supports us in any moment to pause, recognize what's happening, stabilise ourselves, and create the possibility of intentionally choosing which mode will best serve us in that moment. This is a mindfulness skill that can be very powerful because it opens up a sense of choice and freedom in any moment.

A really important place from which to start exploring this sense of choice is the Breathing Space practice.

Practice 2: The breathing space

Step 1. Becoming Aware

Become more aware of how things are in this moment by deliberately adopting an upright, even and dignified posture, whether sitting or standing and, if possible, closing your eyes. Then bringing your awareness to your inner experience and acknowledging it, asking yourself:

- What body sensations are here right now?
- What moods and feelings are here?
- What thoughts are going through the mind?

Step 2. Gathering

Then redirecting your attention to focus on physical sensations associated with breathing. Bringing the mind to settle on the breath, wherever you feel it most vividly. Tuning into these sensations for the full length of the in-breath and the full length of the out-breath.

Step 3. Expanding

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

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

Note. Adapted from Teasdale, Williams and Segal (2014, p. 183).

Key points

What might we learn when we do this practice?

Gathering - The Breathing Space can help us in a number of important ways. We are able to gather our minds, whatever state our minds are in – scattered, frantic, agitated, sleepy, alert.

Recognising - We become better and better at recognising and labelling our experiences, be that sensations in our body, moods, impulses or thoughts.

Anchoring - We learn that we can always “anchor” our attention. We learn which anchors work best at different times. We learn that the body is always available as an anchor, sometimes the best anchor is the feet, sometimes the hands, sometimes the breath, it depends.

Shifting out of autopilot - We learn to intentionally shift out of autopilot and between thinking and experiential modes of mind. Finally, the Breathing Space is always available as a way to recognize, allow, anchor ourselves and step back from what is happening.

Taking care of ourselves, taking care of others - One of the most important lessons we learn when we become more aware, is the current state of our body and mind.

Our cell phones have battery indicators, when they're low we charge them. Modern cars have lights that flash, telling us when to get them serviced, when we've forgotten to put on our seat belts, when the oil level is low, and so on. Mindfulness enables us to better read these indicators for our minds and our bodies. It can help us to **know when our minds and bodies need something and as we become more attuned**, what is needed.

Self-care

Psychologists know quite a lot about what supports our well-being, and it's not rocket science. Well-being is maintained by:

- Adequate sleep
- A healthy diet
- Exercise
- Positive social connections
- Doing things that give us a sense of accomplishment and that we enjoy.

In the same way that we “practice” a sport or a musical instrument to get better at it, we can practice doing what supports our well-being. We can find ourselves making excuses, “I don't have time,” “it's self-indulgent.” But that's like saying I don't have time to charge my phone battery or fuel my car. We too need to charge our battery and fuel ourselves - it is foundational for us to live our lives.

It is key to ask ourselves the questions, “**What keeps my mind and body healthy?**” and “**How can I make this self-care a part of my life?**”

Even though some of these ideas are really simple, the changes we need to do to make it part of our life need attention. **Good sleep habits** are an example of this, sleep is one of the most important things we can do to take care of ourselves.

Choosing to shift our attention intentionally between pleasant, unpleasant and neutral experiences.

Remember the idea of the ‘**velcro**’ and ‘**teflon**’ mind? We invited you to start noticing your own particular tendencies. What are you most likely to **get stuck on** and what are you least likely to **savour**?

We introduced the Breathing Space as a way of intentionally pausing, anchoring and becoming aware. Throughout our day, using the Breathing Space, we can start to recognize small moments that the mind labels, automatically and very quickly – “ah, that's pleasant,”

or “ah that’s unpleasant.” If we can bring awareness to these moments we see how automatically and quickly “teflon” and “velcro” mind can set in

Mindfulness training involves a certain orientation of mind, discipline and rigorous honesty. We are learning to bring awareness to very quick, **automatic processes**, to lift our gaze beyond what we normally notice, to see all that is **pleasant and right in any moment** and in our lives. We are choosing to recognise, allow and savour these moments.

A cup of coffee or tea, the smile of a stranger, the kindness of someone at home or at work, a task completed, a show on TV that we enjoy, the feeling after exercising, the smell and taste of good food, dawn, dusk, the sun breaking through the clouds, and so on.

When we encounter everyday pleasant experiences, it is a small step to bring attention intentionally to seeing, touching and listening more wholeheartedly – to really feel the breeze on the skin, hear the laughter of friends, the touch of a lover. By bringing attention to these bodily sensations, moods, impulses, thoughts and images, they can be savoured **and enjoyed**. For example, I always love standing in the arrival hall of an airport, train or bus station, watching people being reunited. It’s a great way to see the pleasure of being together again having been separated, the connection that comes from a hug or a kiss. Mindfulness can open us up to experiencing more of our lives in this way, really alive to moments of joy.

Key points

As soon as we become more aware of and able to discriminate pleasant and unpleasant moments we can begin to **rebalance our attention**. This is a launch pad for taking better care of ourselves. If it is true that with our attention we create the world of our experience, this rebalancing is a profound skill because we potentially **start reshaping our minds and our experience of the world**. We can start to dismantle the tendencies towards teflon and velcro attention. We start to recognize, allow and be with pleasant and unpleasant experiences with curiosity, friendliness and care.

The Breathing Space is a way of **gathering our attention, creating a pause and a different perspective**. We learn that we have access to both thinking and experiential modes of mind, which can serve us at different times and in different ways. In time we can learn to use them to better care for ourselves and to re-orient ourselves towards **appreciation and joy**.

Home practice following session 2

1. **Bring the 3-Step Breathing Spaces into everyday life**, maybe at key moments in your day like when you get out of bed, arrive at work or home, and get into bed at the end of the day. You can guide yourself through these, but if you want a reminder of the 3 steps, you can use the guided version (see your handout for this session). It can be easy to forget to do this, so you could also set an alarm at key moments in your day to remind yourself.
2. **Continue with your 10-finger appreciation practice**: bring to mind ten things for which you are grateful, counting them on your fingers and opening to and savouring the sensations of gratitude in the body as best you can.
3. **Continue to bring mindful awareness to your daily life**, making a deliberate effort to bring moment-to-moment awareness to that activity each time you do it. Possibilities include waking up in the morning, brushing your teeth, showering, drying your body, getting dressed, eating a meal or a snack, taking out the rubbish, shopping, etc. Explore how it is to zoom in and experience fully what you are doing as you are doing it. Notice body sensations, thoughts and feelings as they arise.

Introducing Mindfulness Session 3

Responding (not reacting)

Responding (not reacting)

**“Between stimulus and response, there is a space.
In that space is the present moment.
In that moment we can choose our response.
With our response we shape our lives and the world.”**

Stephen R. Covey, 1989, on Viktor Frankl

We've seen how **paying attention on purpose** can slow everything down, so that we start to recognise the different links in the chain of reactivity. In those moments when we feel a bit overwhelmed and have an impulse to scroll through social media, head to the kitchen for a snack or take a nap to take our mind off it. Instead of getting stuck on difficulties ('velcro mind') and skating over the good moments in our lives (Teflon mind), we are able to **recognize and stay with a broad range of experiences**, both pleasant and unpleasant. We can stay with the gnarly feeling without acting on the impulse to react out of habit. We can **recognize and savour pleasant moments**.

Turning towards and allowing

Turning towards and allowing experiences to be as they are, with a curious, **kindly attention** supports this **different kind of response**. The more we learn, we can step back and respond differently, the better we get at it and the more our confidence grows. We start to see what the mind attends to on autopilot, what we can **choose to attend to** and what we can't, which habits we starve or feed. This is not trivial. Quite the opposite, they are profound because they will shape our minds, and so they will **shape our lives**. Mindfulness training creates a space in which we can choose to respond more skillfully so that we shape our minds and lives in the ways we want to.

Exercise: What makes you more likely to react vs respond?

Think back over the last few weeks, to days or moments where you felt gripped by reactivity or habit.

What makes you more likely to be reactive? Use **Box A** to note some of these.

What supports you to be more responsive? Use **Box B** to note some of these.

We've started with what we know from research and experience. These lists are really a life-long inquiry, so don't worry about getting this right, it's just a start.

Box A - What makes you more likely to react?

Box B - What supports you to be more responsive?

Key points

Taking a Breathing Space **creates space**, a pause.

Recognising, allowing, and decentering from our experience is a key step in responding, rather than reacting. The **context for any moment** powerfully shapes our capacity to respond.

Knowing what supports us to be more responsive enables us to **take care of ourselves** better so we can be more responsive.

How can we use all of this to begin to respond (rather than react)?

We can put together everything we've done so far and add one more step – an **action step**. In any moment or situation, having paused, we can ask, *“What in this moment will support both my well-being and the well-being of those around me?”*

This pause + action step can apply to **small moments**, for example how we relate when our phone buzzes a notification from our favourite app; more **substantial moments**, for example when we feel hurt because someone we care about says something thoughtless to us; or the **larger issues facing the world**, the choices we make that we know affect climate change, for example. In each moment, pausing, gathering our attention and becoming aware then allow us to choose an **appropriate response**.

This is where the 'responsive breathing space' comes in.

Practice: The Responsive Breathing Space

Step 1. Becoming Aware

Become more aware of how things are in this moment by sitting or standing with an upright and dignified posture, and closing your eyes or lowering your gaze a little.

Then, turn your attention inwards, and asking yourself:

- “What body sensations are here right now?”
- “What moods and feelings are here?”
- “What thoughts are going through the mind?”

Step 2. Gathering

Then, redirecting your attention (using the image of attention as a flashlight, if that's helpful) to focus on any physical sensations in the body that feel steadying. This might be the sense of feet in contact with the ground, or the body in contact with whatever you're sitting on (if you are sitting), the weight and contact of the hands in the lap or sides of the body, or sensations in the body of breathing. Just spend a moment really tuning into these sensations. Not needing them to be any particular way - just sensing them exactly as they are.

Step 3. Expanding

Then, expanding the 'flashlight' of attention, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your position, and even the space around your body.

Step 4: Responding skillfully

With a sense of curiosity and care, asking yourself:

- “What would be a helpful response in this moment?”
- “What would support my well-being?”
- “What would support the well-being of others?”

Note. Adapted from Teasdale, Williams and Segal (2014, p. 183).

Ling's story

After her teenage daughter's parents' evening Ling got into the car and said, "We need to go to a supermarket, the fridge is pretty empty."

Ling's daughter rolled her eyes and said, "Do we have to, I have so much homework to do – can't you drop me home and then go and do it?"

Ling felt a 'red mist' come over her and an impulse to lash out.

These thoughts ran through her mind: "I've had a long day too, the fridge is largely empty because you kids just help yourselves to what you want, when you want it, and now you want me to do all the shopping while you sit at home! I am a single parent; don't you know how hard that is?"

Ling took a deep breath and tuned into the sensations of her hands on the steering wheel - they were gripping the steering wheel really tightly, and her knuckles were white. She very deliberately loosened her grip and, at the same time, felt the grip of her anger loosen a bit too.

Choosing not to say anything, Ling checked her posture in the driving seat, and adjusted herself so she was steadier and more upright. Under her breath she asked herself the question, "What would be a helpful response right now?"

These steps enabled Ling to respond rather than reacting by talking to her daughter and figuring out something that worked for both of them – yes, she'd go to the supermarket, and she'd go to her favourite supermarket, which was a bit more expensive but would be quiet at this time of the evening. Meanwhile, her daughter agreed she would empty the dishwasher at home and, when Ling got back from the supermarket, would help her unpack the shopping.

Ling noticed that, during her conversation, the 'red mist' cleared.

Later, when she got home from the supermarket, not only had her daughter emptied the dishwasher, she had made Ling a cup of tea and asked her about her day.

Patience

**Do you have the patience to wait
 Till your mud settles and the water is clear?
 Can you remain unmoving
 Till the right action arises by itself? - Tao Te Ching**

Key learning points from all three sessions

- Mindfulness is a natural capacity we all have to bring attention to our present moment experience, in a particular way, with interest, friendliness and care.
- Mindfulness practice is a training that develops this capacity.
- Developing our mindfulness skills can enhance our mental health and well-being.
- There are three foundational mindfulness skills that we can learn:
 1. Focus. Paying attention, on purpose, to our present-moment experience.
 2. Perspective. Different modes of being and knowing, and the ability to choose which mode is best suited to which situations.
 3. Responding rather than reacting.

Many philosophical, contemplative and religious traditions have a version of this saying:

**“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot
 change, the courage to change the things I can,
 and the wisdom to know the difference.” - Reinhold Niebuhr**

When these three foundational skills come together, this becomes more possible because we've created a **space between stimulus and response**. We use that space to choose what best serves our **well-being and the well-being of others**.

The story of the two wolves opposite, captures this sense of the power of how we choose to respond to our thoughts, moods, impulses as well as the world around us.

Next steps: Where do we go from here?

We hope your journey through these three sessions of the Introducing Mindfulness course has been interesting, and that the skills you have learned have proved useful.

As we mentioned at the start of the course, a bit like training a muscle, it is with the continuing practice of mindfulness that you are most likely to see ongoing benefits

Having said that, you may feel that this has been just the right amount of mindfulness experience for you. Perhaps you will return to some of the practices you have explored during the course, or to the reading and notes you've taken in this booklet.

Exploring further

Alternatively, you may be interested in exploring mindfulness further. Maybe you'd like to read more about mindfulness practice, theory, or research evidence. There are many resources on the OMF website you may find helpful, which include reading lists and free audio sessions

Or perhaps you'd like to deepen your understanding and mindfulness experience further. If so, the next logical step will be to try a more extensive mindfulness course. For example:

Mindfulness for Life is an in-depth programme intended to cultivate lasting and sustainable change. It offers a different way of living that supports people to work with challenges, including recurring patterns of thought and behaviour that create difficulty, but also to savour life and to flourish

The course runs for 8 live weekly sessions of 2.25 hours, plus a longer practice day. You can find out more about these courses on the OMF website

Finding Peace in a Frantic World is a 6-8 week course of 90-minute sessions. It introduces mindfulness skills and how to use them to improve wellbeing and resilience to stress. It has been found to be effective with adults in workplaces, University students and school teachers.

Please note: The OMF currently only offers this course in universities and partnership with organisations. If you would like to offer bespoke courses in your organisation and partner with the OMF, please contact the admin team via admin@oxfordmindfulness.org

After an 8-week course

After completing these longer courses, there are several other courses and events available to help support the ongoing development of your mindfulness practice and skills. You can find out more about what's on offer via the OMF webpage and various information sessions which are offered regularly.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about any of the above.

Whatever your next steps may be, we'd like to say a heartfelt thank you for joining us in these Introducing Mindfulness sessions, and wish you the very best for the future.

With warm regards,

The OMF Team

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