



Penn Program for Mindfulness

Week 4: Bringing Mindfulness to Life

Next Steps

Our main focus thus far has been on the cultivation of mindfulness through formal meditation practices. At this point you may not have tremendous confidence in the stability of your meditation or mindfulness, although you may be getting better at noticing the actual qualities of your mind as you experience it in your practice. It is important to remember that mindfulness does not change what has already happened, or how things are right now, but simply allows your mind to be as it is, without criticism or struggle. You have probably observed how the mind is often jumpy and unsettled. It wanders constantly. Real mindfulness practice begins when we accept that this is how our mind is. True resting in meditation and a deeper peace within yourself begins with acceptance, and acceptance begins with the present moment. It won't work to wait for a moment that you really like before you accept it!

Acceptance may be difficult to find, but even if you dislike the way your mind behaves, it is still the only mind that you have. There is no point in looking for a better one. If you are going to use meditation as a tool to understand your heart and mind, then you will need to start with the experience that you actually have. Otherwise you are just exploring our fantasies. Paradoxically, when you give up the fantasy of achieving meditative bliss and allow your awareness to meet whatever happens with simplicity and directness, you begin to find a deeper stability within yourself. Then, you are no longer fighting with yourself and your world.

It is easier to *describe* this process of acceptance than it is to actually practice it. Allowing yourself to be just as you are is surprisingly difficult. You have likely spent a lifetime struggling to change yourself and your life. Accepting yourself as you are, imperfect and in flux, is not as familiar or comfortable at first.

Acceptance doesn't mean that you like the present moment, or that you don't want to change. It means that you are able to experience the truth of this moment. Once you recognize and allow how it is, you can decide where your next step should be.

Although it might feel like you have just begun this process, it is time to move on to the next step. You are now going to begin the use of "informal" mindfulness—the ongoing awareness of your moment-by-moment experience during activity—as a tool to manage stress and recapture balance. However, formal mindfulness practice is still the foundation of this journey. It will be difficult to actually practice what is discussed in class without it. The ongoing cultivation of a personal mindfulness practice is necessary in order to use the tools of mindfulness in real life.

"Stress" works well as a focus for our program because it relates to many things that affect us most deeply. When you use mindfulness to manage stress, you explore what causes you unhappiness and distress, and what makes you happy. You have to be honest with yourself. Rather than rehash your old ideas, you are required to look freshly at each experience. There is always something that you can learn about yourself. With more accurate information about your life events

and your reactions to them you can make better choices and avoid unnecessary stress. You might decide to confront your fears and reach for what you really want in life. This might seem like a big job, but it happens just one moment at a time. The moment that you are in is all that you need.

Week Four Homework

Daily Mindfulness Practices:

- Each day, practice one of the guided movement exercises (Standing, Lying or Seated Movement Practices).
- And**
- the 20-minute Guided Sitting Meditation practice (Sitting 4).
- You may substitute the sitting practice with the Body Scan OR a second movement practice.

Also:

- Continue to practice “Stop, Breathe, Be” as often as you can remember. Use it as a way to recapture your present moment if your attention becomes uneven or jumpy. Begin to connect with the feeling of “dropping down” out of the turbulence of thoughts and into the steadiness of the breath without working so hard; just let go of the struggle and reconnect.
- Take a “20 Breaths” break at least three times a day.
- Create a Daily Practice Grid if you find it helpful, or plan your practice in whatever way works for you.

Informal Practice:

Catch your moments. Try to bring awareness into your life. Use your awareness of the body as an anchor; bring your attention back to the specific sensation of movement and stretch that you feel all day long, and use it to stay in the present.

Fill in the “Thoughts and Stress” calendar, each day noting at least six thoughts that occur during stressful events and reactions. Also note the emotion that accompanies them, and record these thoughts and the emotion on the calendar.

OPTIONAL Readings: Full Catastrophe Living

- Chapter 6: Cultivating Strength, Balance, and Flexibility: Yoga is Meditation,
- Chapter 12: Glimpses of Wholeness, Delusions of Separateness
- Chapter 13: On Healing



Common Stress-Related Errors in Thinking

We can easily develop bad habits in the way we think. In psychology, these bad habits are known as “cognitive distortions” and like any other bad habit, we usually don’t notice them when they are happening. Cognitive distortions are “bad” habits because the thoughts are inaccurate. If we don’t notice that our thoughts are inaccurate when they occur, we believe them and act as if those thoughts are true. Often our inaccurate thoughts create trouble. When we act on them, everyone is in for a more difficult time. Here are some common ways that stress distorts our thinking.

Overgeneralization: involves taking one situation and making a general rule about other situations, without testing the accuracy of that rule for different circumstances. For example, if you go to a party and feel self-conscious you might catch yourself thinking, “I never do anything right.” Key words such as never, always, all, everyone, and nobody, often indicate the habit of overgeneralization.

Global Labeling: is the habit of applying stereotyped labels to whole classes of people, things, behaviors, and experiences. For example, Doctors are all more stupid than I am, or Doctors are all smarter than I am are both generalizations. (Which one are you likely to think?) Neither is true, and both will create problems if they are believed. Global Labeling is related to overgeneralization, but uses labels instead of rules to group things in a distorted way.

Focusing on the Negative: is selective hearing or seeing that only notices what is negative. For example, you have a great time at a party, but only remember that you spilled wine on the tablecloth. Catastrophizing is a type of focusing on the negative that we think will happen in the future. The thought “this is going to be a complete disaster!!!” might feel true but is probably not really accurate.

Polarized thinking: puts everything in terms of extremes. This is also called “black and white thinking.” If I’m not the best in the class, I must be the worst. If I’m not perfect, I’m a failure. This habit of thinking doesn’t acknowledge the many shades of gray that make up the world.

Self-Blame: puts you at the center of the universe and then blames you for everything that goes wrong there. The most common symptom of self-blame is constant apologizing for things regardless of whether or not you had any control over them. “I’m so sorry that I picked a rainy day for our picnic.”

Personalization: also puts you in the center of the universe, but more generally. Good or bad, it’s all about you. Rather than being empowering, personalization makes us feel like we’re always under critical observation.

Mind Reading: is the habit of assuming that everyone thinks the way you do – projecting your feelings onto them and then proceeding as if your projections were facts. If you operate with lots of “hunches” about what others think, you may be mind reading.

Control Fallacies: take two possible forms. Either we think we are in control of everything or we think we are in control of nothing. Either we are responsible for everything that happens in our world, or we are powerless, a helpless victim in the face of circumstances. Both beliefs are inaccurate.

Emotional Reasoning: relies on feelings to interpret reality. You don’t use your intellect to examine the accuracy of your emotions. If you feel anxious, you must, in fact, be in danger. If you feel ashamed, you must have done something wrong. You don’t recognize and challenge the judgmental “self-talk” that may be driving the emotions.

Thoughts and Stress

Instructions: Each day try to catch the thoughts that spontaneously occur in your mind during stressful events. Notice enough stressful events to catch six thoughts each day. Do your best to note and record the *actual* thought, not just the general idea of what the thought was about. Also note the most prominent emotion in the moment of one of the events.

Day One

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What was a prominent emotion that you felt during one of the reactions? _____

Day Two

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What was a prominent emotion that you felt during one of the reactions? _____

Day Three

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What was a prominent emotion that you felt during one of the reactions? _____

Thoughts and Stress

Day Four

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What was a prominent emotion that you felt during one of the reactions? _____

Day Five

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What was a prominent emotion that you felt during one of the reactions? _____

Day Six

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What was a prominent emotion that you felt during one of the reactions? _____

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Mindfulness

Mindfulness-Based Tools for Living

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Mindfulness Practice Tracker

Daily Practice Guide Instructions: Use the first day following class for the date column on your practice grid. Schedule a time for each practice everyday. Write the time that you intend to practice on the line provided. When you complete each scheduled practice put a check on the line provided.

Practice	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Guided Sitting Meditation	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
Movement	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
Body Scan OR 2nd Movement	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (1)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (2)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (3)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
Stop, Breathe, Be						

