



Penn Program for Mindfulness

Week 5: Minding Your Emotions

Emotions Matter

Emotions play a central role in your stress reactions. This is not surprising, since they are central to your whole experience of life. They are the actual substance of the joys that you seek and the sorrows that chase you into hiding. They provide the motivation that leads you into action or away from what you fear. It is the driving energy of emotions, toward or away from a thing, event or even a thought, that fuels your cycle of reactivity. As you now begin to more closely examine the thoughts that interact to create a stress reaction, you also need to explore your emotional landscape more carefully and directly.

The usual experience of emotions is neither concise nor direct. Emotions tend to form the background of experience. Like the soundtrack of a movie, they create a context without necessarily drawing attention to themselves. You tend to notice them more substantially only when they become intense. Intense emotions tend to fuel reactivity and drive you into activity. Their intensity tends to make it difficult for you to rest with them and experience them clearly and objectively. You *become* the reaction instead of noticing it. Less dramatic emotions often hide just outside of your awareness, affecting you in ways you don't notice, shifting and changing as you look at them. They can be surprisingly hard to see. When you try to hold them still they dissolve, like the morning mist in the bright sun.

You miss a lot when you don't notice emotions. Although you have words to describe them, such as joy, sorrow, love, hate, desire, and revulsion, the actual emotions themselves have infinitely more variations and textures than any simple words can suggest. Emotions, even the difficult ones, enrich and deepen the experi-

ence of your life.

Learning from Emotions

Mindfulness is a powerful tool for learning about your emotional life. But, emotions can be even more difficult to investigate than thoughts. At least a thought has information that you can identify and check for accuracy. You can say a thought out loud, or re-create the mental image, and examine the information that you find. Thoughts are always about *something*. Emotions are not even about feelings. They are the feelings themselves, the raw substance of your actual joy and sorrow, with all of its infinite variability. You can't play them back or repeat them later to get a second chance to experience them, or return to the past to see exactly what you felt in that moment. The truth of emotions is in how they feel, and you can only feel them when they occur. To explore emotions, to bring them fully into your experience and meet them with mindfulness, you have to catch them right on the spot, in the moment that they happen. This requires a moment-by-moment awareness of your experience that may be difficult to sustain at first. There are real and very important benefits to bringing mindfulness to your emotional life. If you learn to follow your emotional reactions more closely, you are no longer blind-sided by reactivity. Instead of realizing that you are upset only after you burst into tears or explode in anger, you can follow the path of the gradually building storm so that there is plenty of opportunity to change your course.

Working with Emotions

Your emotions contain energy, and you are sometimes caught by surprise by the intensity of that energy. You may handle the energy of your emotions by either discharging it so that it affects your behavior and the

people around you, or by containing and suppressing it so you don't feel it at all. Emotions may discharge when you have a tantrum, burst into tears, raise your voice or fist. When you suppress your emotions you may not feel them at all. When suppression becomes a habit, you start to feel less and less of your experience. However, the feelings that you suppress can return later to affect your mental and physical health. Mindfulness will help you to find a better way of managing emotions without suppressing or acting out. The space between suppression and outburst is the possibility of feeling all that the emotion expresses without needing to react. If you experience the emotion carefully you find that it is less substantial than you might have feared. It is fluid,

constantly changing, evaporating right before your eyes if you hold steady, take a breath, and wait. Learning about your emotions is a critically important part of learning about yourself. You start to notice emotions that you tend to ignore because they are uncomfortable or because you don't think that you "should" feel that way. Since you do feel that way already, regardless of your judgment about it, you might as well acknowledge the feelings that you really have. There is always a reason for what you feel, whether you understand it or approve of it. Your feelings occur independently of your judgments or thoughts about them. Mindfulness of emotions can change your relationship to our inner world.

Week Five Homework

Daily Mindfulness Practices: On Alternate Days

A. Walking Meditation: 30 minutes (Walking 1a and 1b), and Silent Sitting 10 minutes (Sitting with Silence)

OR

B. Guided Movement 20 minutes (your choice of routine from week 4) and Sitting 20 minutes. You can choose any of the previous practices or sit in silence if you prefer.)

The Mindfulness Practice Tracker on the last page of this handout may help you to clarify these choices.

- "20 Breaths", two times a day.
- For this week, make your "Stop, Breathe, Be" practice an opportunity to feel. You can call it "Stop, Breathe, Feel." Do this at moments when you are having a strong emotion and see exactly what that emotion feels like. Then do it when you are not aware of emotion at all. Is anything happening? Look closely. Use the instructions on the next page to guide this practice.

Informal Practice

- Try to explore your emotions, especially when you are in a stressful event. Look closely at your reaction, and try to discover the component of your reaction that is what you feel. Make the distinction between how you feel (the emotion) and what information you believe (the thought).
- Notice if you have a tendency to have a particular type of emotion when you are stressed. Identify the sensation, the 'feeling' that is associated with that emotion, and look for more subtle versions of that feeling during less intense situations. Notice how the feeling changes from moment to moment. See if you can experience the emotion separately from the content of your thoughts and beliefs. Can you experience a 'pure' emotion, without any content?

OPTIONAL Readings: Full Catastrophe Living

- Chapter 21: Working with Symptoms: Listening to Your Body
- Chapter 24: Working with Emotional Pain
- Chapter 25: Working Fear, Panic, and Anxiety

Exploring Emotions With Mindfulness

1. Check in.

Notice where your body and mind are right now. Acknowledge any tension in your body and your mind. You don't have to change anything. Just notice the feeling that is experienced and felt in the body which acts as the container of emotions. Notice any distractions that would draw the attention elsewhere. Leave those distractions behind and sense inside.

2. Start with the body.

If you are sensing emotions during a formal mindfulness practice using the breath as your object of focus, expand your awareness of the breath to include the whole body. Feel for restlessness, discomfort, and places of tension or increased sensation. When you neutrally inquire into the body, where is your attention drawn? Feel into those areas with your awareness. Do the same kind of inquiry as you go about your day. How do you feel right now?

3. Listen in the present.

You won't find emotions in the past or future, even though your stories, memories of the past, and predictions for the future will call them up. The emotions themselves are only found in the present. Stay with what is happening inside, right now.

4. Look for the sensation.

Start with a strong emotion, and catch it right when it happens. What is the "feeling" of the emotion? Is it localized in a particular place? Does it have a unique quality or sensation? Look for more subtle experiences of the same feeling. Look more closely for it when you do not think there is any emotion present. Try to catch it early, and then follow it to watch it grow and change.

5. Look for the energy.

Look for the energetic aspect of the emotion to see how it "drives" other events. The energy can attempt to move outward and find discharge in behavior (for instance, raising your voice). It may create movement in you thoughts, amplifying or distorting stress reactions, You may attempt to suppress the energy, adding to tightening in the body in an attempt to hold it in or push it away. Notice the "automatic pilot" quality you experience that are reactions to strong emotional energy.

6. Then relax and breathe.

Don't try to change how you feel. Let the sensation and the energy flow and take its natural course. Like water flowing downstream, it will shift and change in its own time. Even the most violent torrent eventually finds its way to the sea, where it spreads out, softens, and relaxes into the ocean. Trust the process and let the emotions flow through you. All you need to do is to stay present and aware of the emotions. Emotions find their own balance within you if you don't fight to change them. Your awareness itself will prevent the usual "automatic pilot" reactions from taking hold. You can trust yourself.



Exploring Emotions With Mindfulness

Instructions: Just as you did with thoughts, you can use mindfulness to capture the details of emotions and the events and reactions surrounding them. Use the template below to organize your investigation. Begin with a strong emotion, and try to catch it right in its moment. As soon as you notice the emotion, feel into it and see if you can experience it fully. If you find it helpful, use the breath to keep your attention on it. How do you experience it? What does it feel like? What event preceded it? What would it lead you to do next? Notice how the emotion takes on content. Then see if you can experience the emotion as energy and sensation, separate from the content. Look for patterns, the typical cycles of emotions, thoughts and behaviors that you tend to have, and notice the dynamic interplay between them.

Day 1

What emotion is it? Give it a name. _____

Now describe the experience of the emotion. Where is it located? How is it felt? List the underlying sensations below. Notice any tendency to describe the emotion as a thought, that is, what you think, instead of how you feel. Look beyond the content to find underlying energy and sensation. Check to see the relationship between the thought and the emotion.

Day 2

What emotion is it? Give it a name. _____

Now describe the experience of the emotion. Where is it located? How is it felt? List the underlying sensations below. Notice any tendency to describe the emotion as a thought, that is, what you think, instead of how you feel. Look beyond the content to find underlying energy and sensation. Check to see the relationship between the thought and the emotion.

Day 3

What emotion is it? Give it a name. _____

Now describe the experience of the emotion. Where is it located? How is it felt? List the underlying sensations below. Notice any tendency to describe the emotion as a thought, that is, what you think, instead of how you feel. Look beyond the content to find underlying energy and sensation. Check to see the relationship between the thought and the emotion.

Exploring Emotions With Mindfulness

Day 4

What emotion is it? Give it a name. _____

Now describe the experience of the emotion. Where is it located? How is it felt? List the underlying sensations below. Notice any tendency to describe the emotion as a thought, that is, what you think, instead of how you feel. Look beyond the content to find underlying energy and sensation. Check to see the relationship between the thought and the emotion.

Day 5

What emotion is it? Give it a name. _____

Now describe the experience of the emotion. Where is it located? How is it felt? List the underlying sensations below. Notice any tendency to describe the emotion as a thought, that is, what you think, instead of how you feel. Look beyond the content to find underlying energy and sensation. Check to see the relationship between the thought and the emotion.

Day 6

What emotion is it? Give it a name. _____

Now describe the experience of the emotion. Where is it located? How is it felt? List the underlying sensations below. Notice any tendency to describe the emotion as a thought, that is, what you think, instead of how you feel. Look beyond the content to find underlying energy and sensation. Check to see the relationship between the thought and the emotion.



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:
Walking Meditation (30 minutes)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
Silent Sitting (10 minutes)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
Above Two Practices (yellow) OR Below Two Practices (green) on each day						
Guided Movement (15 minutes)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
Sitting (20 minutes)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (1)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (2)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
Stop, Breathe, Be	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

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Mindfulness

Mindfulness-Based Tools for Living

3930 Chestnut Street, 4th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19104
www.pennmedicine.org/mindfulness
215.615.2775