



# Penn Program for Mindfulness

## Week 7: Taking Care of Yourself

### Caring for Yourself

Mindfulness is much more than a way to manage stress. It is a powerful tool for self-compassion, healing and growth. Sharon Salzberg, an influential mindfulness teacher, says that mindfulness has two wings which together act like the wings of a bird: wisdom and compassion. When the warmth of compassion joins with the wisdom of awareness your practice takes you much further. Compassion for ourselves and others develops naturally with the deepening of awareness that comes from practice. Compassion is simply the consequence of seeing clearly, feeling, and understanding.

When we begin to look directly at our own difficulty and suffering, the warmth of self-compassion can spontaneously arise. Once we get past the habit of looking away or reacting we feel moved to care for the part of us that hurts, just like we might feel moved to hold a child who is frightened or in pain. You could begin to notice that it is easier to let go of the habit of harsh self-criticism or judgment, or to feel a growing acceptance of yourself as you are. You are able to hold what is difficult with warmth and caring instead of anxiety or contempt. Then, when you see similar difficulties and suffering in others, the same uncontrived compassion emerges.

### Your Inner Compass

Mindfulness can help you to reconnect with what matters most to you. It's surprisingly easy to lose sight of your most important goals for a bit, or to get lost along the way. It happens to everyone. You take one step, then another, and sometimes your direction is dictated by convenience or inertia rather than what really matters. Step by step, you end up in a place far from where you want to be.

When that happens you can use your practice to reconnect with your inner compass. Your inner compass is the place inside that knows what is best for you, the place where you feel your truth. When it's time for a redirection, your inner compass knows which path to take. We tend to ignore this

truth when it is uncomfortable or inconvenient. But the steadiness that you've cultivated during these weeks of practice allows you to see clearly, to accept where you are, and to feel the integrity of your truth. This deeper knowing helps you to redirect. Instead of avoiding difficulty you may choose to persevere. Maybe tolerating that difficulty will lead to something that you care about deeply. You stay because that's what you decided you want, not because you were fearful or uncertain. Or maybe it's time chart a new course. Only you can decide. You might need to sit with uncertainty for quite a while before you are sure. It's hard to sit with uncertainty and ambivalence, to tolerate both sides without suppressing or ignoring one.

You can do it, but not all at once. It probably took you a long time to get to this point, and you can only start from where you are now. The next step begins right here. Your path forward will happen just like the path that led you here: one step at a time. But if you take time to feel underneath the surface to your deeper truth it will help you to chart your course. Your practice will help you to accept what can't be changed and to reach for what matters most.

### Making Mindfulness Yours

You can't learn about mindfulness in the abstract or from a book alone. You have to get your hands around it, to work with it until you make it yours. It's like using a new recipe; getting the recipe is just the very first step. You still have to gather the ingredients, bring them into the kitchen, and get things cooking. Later, with more experience, you will gain confidence in your ability to adjust the recipe so that it is perfect for you.

So now it's time to roll up your sleeves and get in to the kitchen. It's time to learn how to make mindfulness yours. You have the freedom to customize what you have been taught so that it works for you. It can help you to take care of yourself, to open your heart, or to connect with your inner compass. It can lead you to find depth and meaning in the life that you already have.

## Week Seven Home Practice

### Daily Mindfulness Practices:

- It's up to you! You decided how to practice, now it's time to make it happen.
- Be sure to include formal practice for at least 30 minutes every day, doing whatever practices you choose.
- Practice the way that you would like to practice after the class is over. Find the best way to bring mindfulness into your life.
- Reassess, recalibrate, and readjust whenever that would be helpful.

### Informal Practices:

- Check in to connect with what matters most, then stay true to your intention. Don't wait until tomorrow to take the next step. Change is a gradual process. Start where you are and take one step at a time.
- Look for the moments of peace, beauty and kindness that you find in the world and within yourself. Reach out to touch what is here. Pause to savor what you find.
- Look for the things and people that support and nourish you. Pause to feel gratitude for them.
- Try a more structured gratitude practice. At the end of the day think about three things that you are grateful for and write them down. You can use the record in the next page.
- Consider writing a letter to someone who has helped you to express your appreciation for what they have given. It isn't necessary to give that person the letter, but feel free to offer it if you wish.

### Readings: Full Catastrophe Living

- Chapter 33: New Beginnings
- Chapter 34: Keeping Up the Formal Practice
- Chapter 35: Keeping Up the Informal Practice
- Chapter 36: The Way of Awareness





## Gratitude Journal

At the end of each day recall three things for which you are grateful. Write a brief note or phrase about each of these in the lines below.

### Day One

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Day Two

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Day Three

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Day Four

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Day Five

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Day Six

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

