

Establishing Safety

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.

Heart

Mind

Body

Breath

Environment

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



PURPOSE / EFFECTS:

Research has demonstrated a link between situations fearful to the self (like being confronted with death) and a decrease in personal willpower. In order to optimize our mental and emotional capacity, we must feel safe. The following methods promote a sense of safety that allows our mental resources to stop fending off outer threats and instead focus on our inner wellbeing.

METHOD:

Summary

Relax, meditate, and continually affirm your safety, while seeking help from others when necessary.

Long Version

1. Practice diaphragmatic breathing. By focusing your mental resources on your breath, you allow exterior threats to recede. Exercises that allow you to concentrate on the ebb and flow of your body often help to establish a sense of safety.

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This is because they center your attention on the internal and the personal rather than the external and interpersonal. You may want to try a full body awareness exercise if you find this helpful.

2. Relax the body. When we feel afraid and vulnerable, we tense our muscles; you can think of it as trying to create a coat of armor or as preparing for a physical conflict. Our muscles hold this tension and promulgate a continued sense of insecurity. The decrease in muscle tension resulting from physical relaxation also helps move blood flow from the muscle to the heart and brain, promoting clear thinking and wellbeing. A progressive relaxation technique helps your body to “forget” the fear that your mind might have already cleared.

3. Use a mantra or a statement that makes you feel peaceful and safe. You may want to select an affirmation using the method described here. One very powerful reminder comes from a folktale about King Solomon, in which this wise and great man is told that “this too shall pass.” Nothing in the human sphere is eternal. In the grand scheme of the universe, our minor fears and worries are ephemeral. If feeling threatened, remind yourself that “this too shall pass.”

4. Meditate in a safe place. The Buddha received his enlightenment with the Bodhi tree at his back, guarding his vulnerable side. You don’t need a tree to sit under. When you meditate, become aware of your space and its consequences on your physical safety. If you’re indoors, consider the safety and seclusion that comes from doors and walls.

If you’re outdoors on retreat, consider your isolation from the stresses of the “real world”. Treat your space as a sanctuary. You might want to use a basic relaxation meditation or posture meditation technique to enjoy the benefits of physical relaxation and meditative calm.

5. Seek refuge in others. Whether you talk to a therapist or just talk to a trusted and understanding friend, we can’t live without expressing our fears. No man or woman is an island. If you feel ashamed of your fear, you might want to begin by journaling it and then using this insight to talk to another. another child, you would validate their experience by reminding them that it is frustrating when a toy is taken and it is okay that they are feeling upset.

Another example would be if you or a friend were very nervous before a presentation, simply reminding yourself or friend that it makes sense to feel nervous before public speaking and that the majority of people feel this way so you/your friend are not alone.

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HISTORY:

Much of the historical writing on meditation promotes establishing safety; Buddhist teachings often focus on helping the student separate her or his animal fear response from her or his mind, promoting a detached sense of impenetrability. Prayers in many different traditions act as a way of reducing fear by letting anxiety go into the hands of God.

CAUTIONS:

Don't take this too far. Though the fear response can be detrimental to mental and physical wellbeing, it serves an obvious evolutionary purpose. When we feel unsafe, sometimes it's because we are unsafe. If a threat actually puts us at risk of real harm, we should listen to this fear and seek refuge using more permanent means.

NOTES:

Frank Herbert's 1965 science fiction novel *Dune* contains a prayer called the Litany Against Fear, which is a powerful mantra against feelings of threat:

I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer.

Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration.

I will face my fear.

I will permit it to pass over me and through me.

And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path.

Where the fear has gone there will be nothing.

Only I will remain.