

Session 4

BEING WITH WHAT'S DIFFICULT

Topic Overview

Unpleasant feelings, sensations, thoughts, or memories are common things we all must face when learning or practicing mindfulness. They are part of our full human experience, and can be safely welcomed, noticed, and let go as we learn to be open to the present moment. The open awareness of mindfulness means we meet the unpleasant or difficult without evaluating or judging.

This session will help students continue to build tolerance and the ability to self-manage by inviting and encountering a range of feelings and sensations—from unpleasant to neutral to pleasant. Rather than evaluating them as good/bad or ranking them, students will learn to label, observe, and release them.



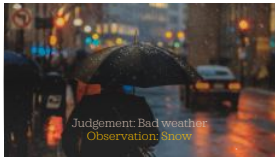
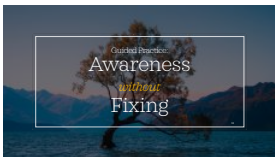
Student Goals

- Define “judgment” and understand how it is an obstacle to mindfulness
- Define and understand managing unpleasant emotions
- Build tolerance for experiencing unpleasant emotions and sensations
- Practice sitting with a difficulty without solving it
- Understand resistance and avoidance to unpleasant emotions or sensations
- Practice labeling “unpleasant,” “neutral,” and “pleasant” experiences




Teacher Goals


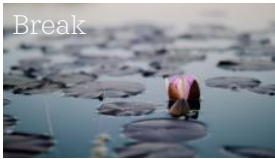
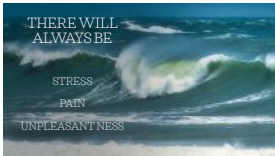
- Define “judgement”; “resistance”; “avoidance”
- Describe obstacles to mindfulness caused by judgement, resistance, and avoidance
- Lead practices to build tolerance for being with what’s difficult
- Maintain awareness of stress, trauma triggers, or other distress
- Balance attention on the group, individuals, and your own meditative consciousness

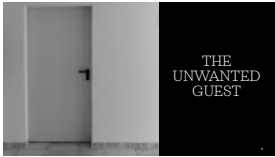
Lesson Script

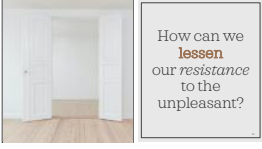
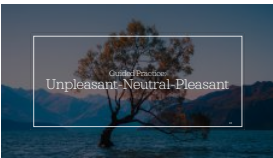
Slide	Script	Min.
	Welcome arriving students, check names and paperwork, set a tone of calm and invitation.	0
	<p>Welcome to Session 4. Today, we are going to not only grow aware of unpleasant feelings and sensations, but we will bring them to attention mindfully.</p> <p>Our goal today is not to cause anyone pain or harm. We want to build tolerance for the unpleasant and the difficult. We want to explore mindful responses so that we can manage the unpleasant in the moment and not be hijacked by the difficult or the unpleasant.</p> <p>Keep in mind your personal boundaries, comfort, and safety as we move into several practices that put us in touch with what's difficult.</p>	1
	<p>We'll start by exploring an obstacle to being with what's difficult: judgment. Forming an opinion happens quickly in our minds, and it's an automatic act in our brains. We judge and label our inner experiences as well as our environment, including people, events, the weather.</p> <p>Judging ourselves might look like this: We feel anger and label that feeling as "overreacting." Or we might laugh out loud in front of others and judge ourselves as "too loud."</p> <p>Judging outside ourselves might look like this: "That person is a jerk"; "This weather is terrible."</p> <p>When we say these judgements out loud, it's easier to see how reductive and subjective they are, and how they offer us little in terms of coping with our feelings or interacting positively with others.</p> <p>Practicing mindfulness, however, allows us to pay attention to the external and the internal with non-judgmental curiosity. Observing and accepting thoughts, emotions, and our surroundings, help reduce their harmful impact and enhance wellbeing.</p>	3
	<p>Let's move into a practice that will allow us to grow aware of our problems without rushing to fix them. Our automatic judgements and ascribing of labels to ourselves, others, and even objects around us, often lead to rushing into "solutions" instead of exercising patience, observation, and acceptance.</p> <p>It may sound passive at first, but non-judgmental open awareness can often help us redefine a "problem" into simply a</p>	10



	<p>fact. This ultimately frees us from a difficulty and unnecessary work.</p> <p>Now, let's witness our challenges without jumping to fix them. Find a position that is relaxed and alert. Take a few deep breaths. Bring the awareness to the breath. [Pause]</p> <p>Begin to tune in to your thoughts and bring to mind a problem you are working to solve. Is there something specific you want to find a solution to? [Pause]</p> <p>Bring the problem to awareness and continue to breath. [Pause]</p> <p>Notice the issue itself, instead of your thoughts about it. Notice who is involved in the problem. Notice where the issue is taking place. Notice what has already happened and where the problem rests right now. [Pause]</p> <p>With the problem in your mind, notice if you feel any discomfort around it. Bring the attention to the body, the sensations, the emotions that arise around this issue. [Pause]</p> <p>Maybe there's some fear of the unknown, insecurity, pain, grief, or a desire to plan something.</p> <p>Notice where in your body you sense discomfort. Name the discomfort. Name the sensation. Name the feelings that arise. [Pause]</p> <p>Whatever your experience is, look at the issue with tender awareness. [Pause]</p> <p>There's no need to do anything right now. Just be with the discomfort. [Pause]</p> <p>Observe when the mind jumps into the desire to fix the discomfort by naming it. "<i>Fixing</i>." Whenever the mind goes to judge or fix. Say, "<i>fixing</i>." [Pause]</p> <p>With the intention of meeting your experience with patience, offer yourself a few phrases of mindful care:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I see this discomfort. The mind wants to fix it. May I be with this problem. [Pause]</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I see this discomfort. The mind wants to fix it. May I be with this problem. [Pause]</p> <p>Now take a minute to ask yourself what can be done. You don't need a detailed plan. Just offer the simplest solution possible. For example, have a necessary conversation, ask for what is needed, express a concern, make a compromise, save some money. Allow a basic solution to arise, and don't dive more deeply into the story. [Pause]</p>	
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	Now bring the attention back to the breath. Back to the body seated in the chair, in this room. Feel the feet on the floor. Feel the attention returning to the present moment. Take one last deep, grounding breath. When ready, open the eyes.	
	<p>Thank you for completing that meditation. Let's take a moment to reflect on the experience. Feel free to write your answers or just think about them.</p> <p>[Allow for 1-2 minutes of individual reflection, then open sharing for 3 minutes.]</p>	5
	<p>Yet another challenge to mindfulness, in addition to our judgements, is our resistance. We push against. We say "no." We refuse.</p> <p>We resist for many reasons. Sometimes, it's to avoid pain or unpleasantness. Sometimes it's to keep from getting overwhelmed or to maintain control. Sometimes it's the only coping mechanism we can find at the moment. Sometimes we resist in order to keep telling ourselves a different story about something that's happened.</p> <p>The goal of this next practice is to explore what non-acceptance of emotions feels like in our bodies and to understand how resistance affects our wellbeing.</p> <p>We'll be bringing to mind something that is bothering us, something that's worrying perhaps. It can be from the past, present, or future. Try and bring to mind an experience or scenario that elicits an emotional reaction, but that is not highly reactive, traumatic, or overwhelming. Stopping at any point, taking a break, or re-grounding in the present is welcome. Listen to what may be needed to maintain a sense of safety.</p> <p>As we bring our issue to mind, let's see ourselves in the scenario.</p>	
	<p>Find a sitting position that is comfortable, alert but relaxed. You may want to move to a different space from the first practice. [Pause]</p> <p>Bring the attention to the breath. Notice the air moving in through the nostrils and filling the body. Notice the air as it leaves the body. Feel into your seat. Feel the feet on the floor. Breathe and notice. [Pause]</p> <p>Close the eyes or find soft focus on the floor. Let the gaze or the face become restful and soft. Pay attention to the breath, each inhale and exhale. [Pause for 3-4 breaths]</p> <p>Now bring the challenging scenario to mind. Recall the location, the other people, and yourself. Allow the scenario to appear in as much detail as possible. [Pause]</p>	10

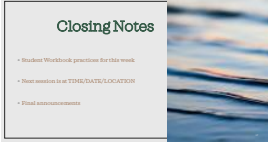

	<p>Recall anything being said. Recall actions and reactions. Recall details of the room or setting. Colors, textures, smells, light. Allow the scenario to be fully seen. [Pause]</p> <p>Notice the emotions that arise in response to recalling this scenario. Notice the thoughts in the mind arising. [Pause]</p> <p>Notice where the body is feeling the emotions. Bring the body parts to attention that are feeling a response to your scenario. [Pause]</p> <p>Now, say “no” to the emotions and thoughts. Try to resist, push them away, not feel any of them. Resist the feelings and sensations that are arising. [Pause]</p> <p>Slowly let your scenario leave the focus of attention. Bring the attention back to the present, to the seated position, the feet on the floor, the spine growing taller. Wiggle the fingers and toes and slowly open the eyes and return to the present.</p>	
	<p>Let's talk about what happened and how that felt. Turn to a partner and share responses to each of the questions on the screen.</p> <p>[Allow for 2 minutes of partner sharing, the invite sharing with the larger group for 3 minutes.]</p> <p>Resistance does not make feelings or sensations actually go away. Saying “no” to them does not relieve us from their presence. Maybe it will give us a temporary break, but the body continues to carry what we are trying to resist.</p> <p>Resistance denies us the full experience of being human, the full range of what is possible for us to feel. And we know there is no need to push feelings away. They will pass on their own, they always do.</p> <p>[Announce the break, time to return, locations of water and restrooms.]</p>	5
	<p>Break/Transition</p> <p>5-10 minutes, <i>depending on the conditions of the class</i></p>	
	<p>Welcome back. Let's dig a little more into the last meditation on resistance.</p> <p>In these practices, it's normal to wonder why someone would want to <i>be with</i> something unpleasant, or even painful. The default can become to avoid the unpleasant, not let go of the pleasant, and ignore the neutral.</p> <p>But we know from our human experience that there will always be unpleasant, painful, stressful circumstances in life. Pushing</p>	1

	<p>them away won't make them actually go away or prevent a new one from coming up.</p> <p>Resistance is something we can work with. We can soften our resistance and work toward letting go of the urge to say "no" to the unpleasant.</p>	
	<p>Let's consider a useful metaphor for resistance: the unwanted guest. We can close our eyes for this portion if desired.</p> <p>Imagine the doorbell rings. You open the door to a stranger. She is in a good mood, smiles, and has a positive attitude. You have a nice chat and then she leaves.</p> <p>The next day, the same person shows up again. You invite her in for a cup of coffee. You spend the afternoon together and have a lot of fun.</p> <p>Over time, a positive relationship is built. Every time the person visits, you open the door and let her in. She is welcome.</p> <p>One day, the doorbell rings and you are confronted with a different person. This person is in a bad mood, looks sad, and has a negative attitude. He is having a difficult time and asks if he may come in. You respond that he is not welcome and should leave. You immediately shut the door and try to forget that he was there.</p> <p>After a while, the doorbell rings again and as you are walking to the door, you are hoping to see the positive person. Unfortunately, it is the negative person again. Slightly irritated, you tell him that he is not allowed to come in and is certainly not welcomed. It does not matter how much you would like this person to stay away, he continues visiting you regularly.</p> <p>The negative person's visits begin to feel hostile and dangerous. You begin to fear his showing up. You begin dreading the possibility while trying to do other things, even during a visit from the pleasant person. You consider barricading your home against the negative visitor, but that would mean the positive person would never get in either.</p> <p>One thing is certain: you've never let the negative person into your home and heard what he has to say. The negative presence has turned you away completely, and you resist any kind of interaction that could possibly give you more information.</p> <p>[At this point, you can invite students to open their eyes.]</p> <p>Not allowing in the negative by closing the door-or suppressing, rejecting, resisting, saying "no"-doesn't allow us to be fully present to our own humanity or others'. We deny ourselves important information that negative emotions carry, and we</p>	5

	don't learn to regulate emotions. This all leads to additional, and unnecessary suffering.	
	<p>How can we lessen our resistance to the unpleasant?</p> <p>Step 1 is recognizing resistance as separate from an experience. Resistance also appears in the body. Tune into how resistance feels, and where it appears. Maybe tension in the shoulders. Maybe anger or fear. Maybe an ache in the chest or stomach. Identifying resistance is key.</p> <p>Step 2 is building up our tolerance to the unpleasant, so the urge to resist will lessen. Sit with the frustration of a traffic jam, the sensation of thirst or hunger, the tension of a difficult conversation. Practice inviting those unpleasant sensations and allowing them to pass.</p> <p>In these ways, we train ourselves for Step 3, which is to remember that they will pass <i>without</i> our having to resist. And the little and big things in life will activate us less.</p>	2
	<p>Let's move into the first of our final 2 practices for today's session. In this one, we will move from something unpleasant to something neutral to something pleasant. Please make sure that you don't overwhelm yourself with anything traumatizing or too difficult to bring to mind.</p> <p>Find a comfortable position, relaxed and alert. Allow the eyes to gently close if that feels okay to you. Take several deep breaths and notice each inhale and exhale. [Pause]</p> <p>Bring the attention to an unpleasant sensation in the body, a discomfort or tension, maybe a low-grade pain. Check the neck, shoulders, back for any sensation that might call the attention. Check the low back. Check the jaw, the head. [Pause]</p> <p>Label what arises: "Unpleasant." [Pause]</p> <p>Maybe the body is at neutral right now. That's okay. Notice what is there. There's nothing you <i>should</i> be feeling right now.</p> <p>Ask, "Which part of the experience is unpleasant?" [Pause]</p> <p>Let the information come. Label it. Maybe tightness. Pressure. Heat. [Pause]</p> <p>Breathe <i>into</i> this sensation. What happens to it? [Pause]</p> <p>Breathe into the sensation. [Pause for 3 breaths]</p> <p>Is there resistance? Is it hard or easy to stay with? Separate the resistance from the sensation. [Pause]</p> <p>Now take a deep breath and let go of the unpleasant sensation. Bring the attention to something neutral, resting, neither</p>	10

	<p>unpleasant nor pleasant. Scan the body for a neutral place and a neutral feeling. [Pause] Continue breathing.</p> <p>Ask, "What part of this is neutral?" Ask, "What does neutral feel like?" [Pause]</p> <p>Let the information come. Label it: "Neutral." [Pause]</p> <p>Breathe into the sensation. Hold the attention here. [Pause for 3 breaths] Is it hard or easy to stay with it?</p> <p>Now take a deep breath and let go of the neutral feeling. Scan the body for a pleasant sensation. It doesn't have to be big. Maybe a sense of calm, relaxation, looseness. The simple present attention of the moment can be pleasant. [Pause]</p> <p>Ask, "What part of this is pleasant?" Ask, "What does pleasant feel like?" [Pause]</p> <p>Let the information come. Label it: "Pleasant." [Pause]</p> <p>Breathe into the sensation. Hold the attention here. [Pause for 3 breaths] Is it hard or easy to stay with it?</p> <p>Now let go of the pleasant feeling. Bring the attention back to grounding, back to deep breaths in and out. Feel the seat in the chair. Feel the feet on the floor. Take a few more deep breaths. [Pause] When ready, open the eyes.</p>	
	<p>Thank you for completing that practice. Let's take a moment to journal, using writing to reflect and gather our thoughts, maybe show us something new and interesting about <i>unpleasant, neutral, pleasant</i>.</p> <p>[Allow 2 minutes for writing and 3-4 minutes for group sharing.]</p>	5
	<p>We've been building up our tolerance for the unpleasant. Our last practice for today will explore emotions with some visualizations, using our imaginations to guide our attention.</p> <p>Find a comfortable position. Breathe slowly, noticing the air coming into the body. Notice the air leaving. [Pause] Take a few deep, grounding breaths. [Pause]</p> <p>Continuing to breathe deeply, visualize a gently flowing stream. Notice the gentle current running. Water comes into your presence, then flows out. Watch it come and then leave. [Pause]</p> <p>Notice a big leaf float by. It sits on the surface of the stream. It's carried into view and then carried out. Watch it pass.</p> <p>Notice other things floating by. Natural objects caught in the current. Notice other things too. Thoughts pass by. There goes</p>	15

	<p>one about the past. There goes one someone you love. There goes a fear. There goes a memory. [Pause]</p> <p>All of these temporary, passing things flow into the field of attention. They are carried away. Nothing stays. [Pause]</p> <p>Now, imagine something coming down the current toward you. Visualize an orb—a softly glowing sphere, translucent, like glass, but pulsing with a vibrant color.</p> <p>More orbs come into view. They are being carried on the stream. They are every color, bright, dancing.</p> <p>Go ahead and pick one up. Reach for the color you are most drawn to—red, gold, blue, green, purple, black, white, gray, orange. Take it, hold it. Study it. Notice the different hues of the color, the shadows and light.</p> <p>Ask, “What feeling is this color? What emotion did I choose?” Feel the emotion pulsing in your hands. Feel it in the color of the orb. Label it. Say the label. [Pause]</p> <p>Notice how the orb feels. Notice the temperature, the weight, the surface texture. There is no changing its characteristics, only observing and describing. [Pause]</p> <p>Scan the body now, very slowly, looking for sensations that arise from holding the emotion in the hand. Start with the feet and move all the way up to the crown of the head. Notice where the feeling is in the body. [Pause]</p> <p>Stay with the feeling, accepting its presence wherever it sits. Notice the mind’s reaction. Accept the thoughts that arise from holding the chosen orb. [Pause]</p> <p>Notice the stream again. It continues to flow, carrying things in and out of view. Place the orb back into the stream. Set it down and allow it to be carried along with the rest. From view to out of view. Accept its release.</p> <p>Let these words flow in the mind:</p> <p><i>May I live peacefully alongside all emotions.</i></p> <p><i>May I accept what is happening in my life, moment by moment.</i></p> <p><i>May acceptance give me courage to face, not avoid, situations and people.</i></p> <p><i>May I live my life fully and freely, even with unpleasant feelings.</i></p> <p><i>May my loved ones enjoy this acceptance and freedom, too.</i></p>	
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	<p><i>May all of the world's people accept their feelings.</i></p> <p>Let's thank ourselves for the practice and acceptance. When ready, open the eyes.</p>	
 <p>Closing Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Workbook practices for this week • Next session is at TIME/DATE/LOCATION • Final announcements 	<p>[Answer any last questions, announce the next session date/time, offer contact information.]</p>	
 <p>Wish each other and ourselves well. CLOSING</p>		

Assessment

Student	P	D	NI
Attempted formal practices with open-minded alertness and safe boundaries. <i>Notes:</i>			
Participated in reflections and journaling.			
Engaged attentively with sharing partners.			
Teacher	P	D	NI
Facilitated understanding of mindfulness obstacles.			
Facilitated formal practices with appropriate pacing, with necessary adjustments.			
Balanced attention on the individual, group, and self's meditative consciousness.			

P = Proficient. Attempted and completed with demonstrated mastery, success, ability, or required skill.

D = Developing. Attempted with strong effort and partially demonstrated mastery or success. The basic concept is understood, and the individual requires minimal/some additional coaching or practice to enhance ability, develop skill, and achieve mastery.

NI = Needs Improvement. Attempted with partial or incomplete understanding of the basic concept. Additional instruction, repetition, research, discussion, coaching, and/or practice is required to strengthen understanding, promote ability, confer skills, and/or approach mastery.

Journal

Session 4 reflections, questions, and thoughts.

Teaching

Students

Practice

Other