

Session 8

MINDFULNESS FOR ANXIETY

Topic Overview

Anxiety is an ogre that lives inside us and blocks us from fully living the life we want to live.

-Tanya J. Peterson

A common goal for mindfulness practices is to alleviate anxiety. Open awareness of the present can help relieve us from anxiety's obsession with the future, and the racing, spinning feelings that accompany it. Our goals in this session include understanding anxiety, noticing how it manifests in sensations, emotions, and thoughts, and practicing several different ways to gently and compassionately manage it. The information in this session is not meant to diagnose or clinically treat any form of anxiety. However, the practices are designed to help bring calm, grounded, present-moment awareness to anxious moments. See Part 3 of the Teacher's Guidebook for national resources on mental health.


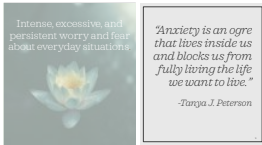
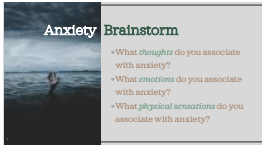

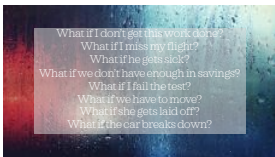
Student Goals

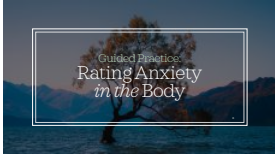
- Understand the definition of "anxiety."
- Understand the distinctions among "anxiety," "fear," "worry," and "rumination."
- Identify sources of anxiety and anxiety triggers.
- Locate and rate anxiety in the body.
- Separate anxious thoughts from emotions, sensations, and the self.



Teacher Goals





- Facilitate personal introspection into causes and sources of anxiety.
- Encourage open exploration of anxiety without overwhelm or trauma triggering.
- Leading group discussion with guided inquiry.
- Offer multiple approaches and practices to manage anxious thoughts.


Lesson Script


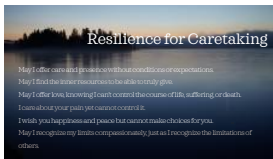
Slide	Script	Min.
	Welcome students, answer questions, fill out paperwork.	0
	Today, our topic is a challenge many of us face, perhaps occasionally or chronically. Anxiety is a struggle that can impede our performance or impact our relationships. This session will explore what anxiety looks and feels like and offer some mindfulness practices to build our resilience to anxiety or directly manage anxiety.	1
	<p>Let's begin with a brainstorm about anxiety. It looks and feels different for everyone.</p> <p>[Allow for 2 minutes of journaling or quiet reflection, then up to 5 minutes of group sharing and discussion.]</p> <p>Questions to facilitate discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the thoughts, emotions, and sensations changed over time? • How do others in your life experience and manage anxiety? • Are there any patterns of anxiety you notice? • Who shares a similar experience? • Whose experiences differ? <p>Anxiety is not itself bad. We all feel it sometimes, and it can even be purposeful. It can keep us vigilant, safe, observant, and concerned for others. But when feelings of worry become overwhelming, excessive, and debilitating, we experience unhealthy consequences.</p>	8
	<p>Let's distinguish between anxiety and fear, which are closely related but different in important ways.</p> <p>Fear is our psychological and physical response to danger. It's a feeling and an instinct designed for our protection and survival.</p> <p>[Review the slide's chart, Fear vs. Anxiety]</p>	3
	<p>Let's also distinguish between anxiety and worry. Like fear, worry has its uses. It can help us see problems, express concern, and find solutions. Worry turns into anxiety when we can no longer manage it, when our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and health are negatively impacted.</p> <p>Often, worries appear in the form of "what if" questions. <i>What if X happens? What if it doesn't? What if I don't get Y? What if I can't have Z?</i> If those thoughts churn in a cycle, it becomes known as <i>rumination</i>.</p>	3

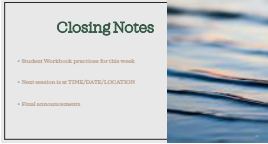

	<p>Worry, anxiety, and rumination center on irrational thinking and irrational fears. They're irrational because they cannot be prevented or predicted, they are unlikely, or they are without much evidence.</p>	
	<p>We can enhance our awareness of anxiety and our resilience to its effects with mindfulness. Using the senses to focus on the present moment moves us away from anxiety that spins out worries about the future.</p> <p>Here is our first practice to help us face anxiety by bringing awareness to how anxiety presents itself in the body. When we become familiar with where we feel our worry and fear, we can better shift our focus back to the present to stay grounded and calm.</p> <p>Find a comfortable seated position. Sit with an alert and relaxed posture. Take a deep, grounding breath. [Pause] Take a slow, cleansing exhale. [Pause]</p> <p>Bring to mind a situation that causes you anxiety. It can be a particular fear, an uncertainty, a place, a person. [Pause]</p> <p>It can be rational or irrational. Whatever we bring to mind, be sure it's not overwhelming or triggering. [Pause]</p> <p>Take a moment to examine the source of the anxiety. Put language to what is worrying. [Pause]</p> <p>"There is anxiety about financial security." "There is anxiety about the relationship ending." "There is anxiety about succeeding at work." "There is anxiety about speaking in front of others." "There is anxiety about receiving what I need."</p> <p>Find the right words to describe what the anxiety is about. [Pause]</p> <p>Draw your attention to the base of the feet, feeling the body grounded. Take three deep breaths, drawing air into the grounded body. [Pause]</p> <p>Now, with curiosity and compassion, begin to gently scan the body. Look for where the anxiety is physically manifesting.</p> <p>Start with the head, face, and neck. Move down through the shoulders and arms. Scan the chest and belly. Scan the lower body, down the legs to the bottom of the feet. [Pause]</p> <p>What are the sensations in these places? Hot, cold, tingling, sweating, numbness, swirling. Find the words to name the sensations and the places in the body. [Pause]</p> <p>If possible, rate the degree of each sensation on a scale of 1 to 10. [Pause]</p>	10

	<p>Focusing on whatever sensation is most prominent, begin to breathe into this part of the body. [Pause]</p> <p>Imagine each inhalation nourishing that part of the body. Imagine each exhalation softens the anxiety present.</p> <p>Breathe in calm, gentle energy. [Pause] Breathe out release and letting go. [Pause]</p> <p>Move onto the next part of the body where anxiety is registering. Breathe into that part of the body. Breathe out softness. [Pause for several breaths.]</p> <p>When ready, take a final grounding breath and slowly open the eyes.</p>	
 <p>Reflection</p> <p>» Where does anxiety arise in the body?</p> <p>» Compared to past practices, how is anxiety similar and different from other difficult emotions?</p>	<p>Thank you for that practice. Let's reflect on the experience. You may write your answers to the questions on the screen or sit and reflect on your thoughts.</p>	6
 <p>Anxiety Triggers</p> <p>List your most prevalent anxieties.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider patterns or themes. 2. Choose one significant source of anxiety. 3. What reminds you of this anxiety? 4. At what time of day does this anxiety peak? 5. What makes this anxiety worse? 	<p>Let's take a deeper look at our anxiety triggers. We all have certain areas of life that cause us anxiety, but there are also triggers that can set off anxiety outside those areas.</p> <p>If we can identify those triggers, we can strengthen our ability to stop the worry and anxiety before they start.</p> <p>Begin by writing a list of the most common or prevalent anxieties in life right now. Journal your answers to the next few questions continuously.</p> <p>[Allow 1-2 minutes of writing time per slide.]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider any patterns or themes to these anxieties. Are they mostly about a certain person? Do they center around your role as a partner, employee, parent, sibling, etc.? Are they about a particular issue, like finances, work, parenting, time, money, etc.? 2. Write down one significant source of anxiety. It can be a person, place, situation, relationship, obligation, future possibility. Be as specific as possible. For example, "disagreeing with my boss at work"; "traffic making me late"; "large social gatherings"; "bullies at school." 3. What reminds you of this worry? Be as specific as possible about the objects, words, sounds, memories, places, or people who contribute to bringing this anxiety to mind. 4. At what time of day does this anxiety seem to peak? 5. What makes this anxiety worse? Name specific habits, actions, choices, coping mechanisms, places, people, or situations that exacerbate the anxiety. 	12

	<p>Let's share our journaling with a partner. Review your answers (you don't have to read everything you wrote. Just give your partner a clear idea of the anxiety and its triggers).</p> <p>Then, brainstorm together some approaches that might be helpful when anxiety is triggered. What are some actions to take or helpful words for those moments?</p> <p>[Allow for 2 minutes of sharing and discussion per partner. Announce the break, time to return, location of bathrooms and water.]</p>	4
	<p>Break/Transition</p> <p>5-10 minutes, <i>depending on the conditions of the class</i></p>	
	<p>Welcome back. Let's approach anxiety another way, by distinguishing anxious thoughts about what is <i>possible</i> and rational thoughts about what is <i>probable</i>. Anything is possible, but not all possibilities are likely. Anxiety keeps us ruminating in every possible future outcome. Bringing the attention back to the probable can bring us out of that rumination and help bring catastrophic thoughts into perspective.</p> <p>Here's how we can separate the possible (but unlikely) from the probable.</p> <p>[Click through the slide to compare possible and probable outcomes.]</p> <p>Now let's think of our own anxieties and practice shrinking down catastrophic thoughts. On the left side of a blank page, write down 3-4 anxieties and what each one says is <i>possible</i>. Write 3-4 items as come to mind.</p> <p>[Allow for 2-3 minutes of writing.]</p> <p>Then, on the right side, refocus each item into what is <i>probable</i>.</p> <p>[Allow for 2-3 minutes of writing.]</p> <p>Who would like to read one item from their list, and show us the difference between the possible and probable?</p> <p>[Allow for 3-4 minutes of group sharing.]</p>	10
	<p>Here's another useful separation: thoughts are not the same as feelings. They can seem so similar that we confuse them for each other. But feelings are <i>emotional states aligned with physical responses in the body</i>. Thoughts are <i>interpretations and ideas</i>.</p> <p><i>Feeling:</i> I am upset because my daughter and I argued this morning.</p>	2

	<p><i>Thought:</i> We never get along anymore. <i>Feeling:</i> I am nervous about getting my son into this magnet school. <i>Thought:</i> His future depends on this outcome.</p> <p>Feelings are responses to situations. Thoughts are what we create.</p>	
	<p>Let's turn this into a practice. We'll reframe thoughts so that we aren't over-identified with them. When we separate the feeling of anxiety from our own thoughts, then separate the thoughts from ourselves, we can hold a healthy distance and notice what is happening. When we can notice what is happening, we can manage it better.</p> <p>In this practice, we'll respond to our anxious thoughts. These may arise at different times, in response to different things. Everyone will go at their own pace.</p> <p>The idea is to allow anxious thoughts to come to our attention. We don't try to bury them or distract ourselves from them. When they do arise, we breathe and then reframe.</p> <p>For example, the thought, "I'm afraid this relationship won't last," gets reframed with the words, "I am having the thought that . . ."</p> <p>"What if I lose my job?" >> "I am having the thought that it's possible I could lose my job."</p> <p>"Where am I going to find the money for these repairs?" >> "I am having the thought that there isn't enough money for these repairs right now."</p> <p>Now, find a comfortable seated position with the body alert and relaxed. Take a few deep breaths and feel the feet on the floor, the hands at rest. [Pause]</p> <p>Bring to attention a situation that causes anxiety. Avoid any that will overwhelm or trigger in this moment. Notice any anxious thoughts, the stories we tell ourselves about a situation. Allow them to find language.</p> <p>When an anxious thought arises, reframe it with the words, "I am having the thought that . . ." There is no need to change the words of the anxious thought-allow it to be as it is. Just add the words, "I am having the thought that . . ."</p> <p>[Allow the practice to continue for 8 more minutes. Offer encouragement or redirection as needed.]</p> <p>Repeat the reframing words as often as needed.</p> <p>Scan the body and pay attention to where anxiety is sitting in the body.</p>	10

	<p>Don't change the anxious thoughts, just reframe them.</p> <p>"I am having the thought that . . ."</p> <p>Don't try to block the thoughts, just reframe them.</p> <p>Anxious thoughts are stories we tell ourselves. The story is not who we are.</p> <p>[When time is up:]</p> <p>Bring the attention back to the body in the chair, back to the feet on the floor. Take a few grounding breaths as the spine lifts and the attention returns here to the room. When ready, open the eyes.</p>	
	<p>Thank you for that practice. It's important to remember that reframing anxious thoughts isn't meant to make them go away. But when we can separate the thoughts from ourselves and our feelings, we can see them more clearly. We can examine them, the situation, and possible solutions in ways that we can't when we are wrapped up in the anxious thought.</p> <p>Take a moment and reflect on the exercise.</p> <p>[Allow for 2 minutes of writing and up to 5 minutes of group sharing.]</p>	7
	<p>Our final practice today offers yet another way to approach anxious thoughts. In addition to reframing, we can also simply let them float away. Again, the goal is not to deny the anxious thoughts, but to separate from them and, when possible, release ourselves from them.</p> <p>Begin with a comfortable seated position. We can find new locations in the room for a change. Take a deep inhale and feel the body fill with air and expand. [Pause]</p> <p>Take a deep exhale and slowly let the air leave the body. [Pause] Let the eyes close or rest gently ahead of the feet.</p> <p>Visualize a bright sunny day, outside, in a serene, grassy spot. There are many pieces of nature available to help let anxious thoughts float away.</p> <p>There are dandelion puffs with seeds that can be released on the wind. There are small leaves that can be carried away on the wind or dropped into a moving stream of water to float out of sight. There are butterflies that can be gently held and released.</p> <p>Choose a handful of something that can be set down and released. [Pause]</p>	10

	<p>Allow a situation to come to mind that usually produces anxiety. Or, simply open the self to whatever thoughts want to arise in this moment. [Pause]</p> <p>When we recognize an anxious thought, picture it outside the self and on one of the objects in the hand. Visualize holding the anxious thought, feeling its contours and scant weight. [Pause]</p> <p>Inhale slowly and deeply. As we set the thought down into moving water or release it into the air, exhale strongly and deeply. Allow the breath to carry the thought and the object away. [Pause]</p> <p>Watch the thought and the object floating out of view. Do this with every anxious thought that arises. No need to go searching for anxious thoughts. Allow them to come into the consciousness themselves. Acknowledge them and repeat the process of visualizing the thought outside the self, in the object in the hand. Then release them into the water or air with a deep inhale and strong exhale.</p> <p>[Allow the practice to continue for 7 minutes, offering redirection or encouragement as needed.]</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>	1
 <p>Wish each other and ourselves well. CLOSING</p>		0

Assessment

Student	P	D	NI
Distinguished among <i>anxiety</i> , <i>worry</i> , <i>rumination</i> , and <i>fear</i> . <i>Notes:</i>			
Identified anxiety triggers and strategized possible responses.			
Practiced separating the self from thoughts and anxieties.			
Teacher	P	D	NI
Facilitated guided inquiry, written reflection, and partner sharing.			
Facilitated formal practices with attention to individual pacing and offered guidance and direction when needed.			
Offered troubleshooting techniques or feedback when necessary.			

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 8 reflections, questions, and thoughts.

Teaching

Students

Practice

Other