

Session 8 Teacher Deep Dive

Troubleshooting

Among the challenges students may face during class, especially during formal practices, are distraction, boredom, restlessness, and fatigue. Teachers themselves face these regularly. This deep dive will provide practical tips for acknowledging these difficulties and refocusing the attention with gentle compassion. It may take practice or several attempts, but these techniques have proven helpful in helping the mind settle and relax back into mindful awareness. You can offer these tips to students as needed, when the challenges arise. You may also choose to provide all these practices proactively during an extra few minutes of class time.

Distractions

Some would say this is the most common challenge to meditation in general. Our internal voices, memories, worries, and feelings can jar us out of the present moment. But this is normal and even expected, so reassure students and yourself that distractions are common. This can help ease frustration and impatience.

Preventing distractions:

- Find a dedicated quiet space for practice
- Set aside adequate time for meditation practice
- Schedule formal practices with enough buffer time between other obligations
- If possible, clear urgent tasks before meditating
- Try not to enter a practice too hungry or too full
- Set a comfortable room temperature if possible
- Block distracting noise or movements (close curtains, doors, windows)
- Turn off all electronics

Handling distractions during a practice:

- Acknowledge the distraction
- Notice and name what the distraction is (feeling, sensation, memory, sound, worry, etc.)
- Gently remind the self that distractions are normal and avoid negative self-talk
- Separate the distraction from the self ("there is worry here;" "there is anxiety here"; "there is planning here," etc.)
- Watch the distraction like a person on the street, only briefly and with openness, curiosity, and separateness

Boredom

Boredom is closely tied to distraction, since it often leads the mind to wander. Boredom also shows up differently in different people. It's not always a simple lack of engagement. Boredom can look like:

- Distraction
- Craving more stimulus, engagement, or input
- Seeking more excitement or novelty

- Wishing to be elsewhere
- Dislike of the current task

Acknowledging and engaging with our boredom helps build tolerance for lower levels of stimuli, making it easier and more pleasant to encounter quiet, spaciousness, stillness, and solitude.

Handling boredom during a practice:

- Acknowledge the boredom
- More specifically name the feeling or desire (“I want to be somewhere else”; “I wish this were more fun”; etc.)
- Acknowledge the language of any negative self-talk (“I should be better at this”; “This is a waste”; “Why am I here?”; “This is pointless”; etc.)
- Name the sensations arising (heat, tingling, tension, etc.)
- Bring the attention to the breath
- Separate the self from the boredom

Restlessness

Many of the same sensations are associated with both restlessness and boredom. Restlessness, however, brings an excess of energy and desire for movement—all of which can lead to seeking distraction or stimuli.

Preventing restlessness:

- Begin a practice with mindful movement (a walk, stretch, yoga, etc.)
- Exercise earlier in the day to channel energy
- Consolidate to-do list items so the mind can feel less scattered and anxious to act

Handling restlessness during a practice:

- Acknowledge, name, and welcome the sensation of restlessness
- Locate where restlessness arises in the body
- Acknowledge the language of restless thoughts
- Allow for a break and small mindful movements during the practice

Fatigue

Feeling tired or falling asleep is also normal during a practice. Sleep is a common coping mechanism for boredom and an avoidance method for difficult feelings or sensations. Keeping the mind alert *and* relaxed will take practice.

Preventing fatigue:

- Be sure to get adequate sleep at night
- Arrive at the practice not too hungry or too full
- Choose a time of day when you are usually alert
- Practice with a partner or group
- Vary the location

- Choose a location with plenty of natural light

Handling fatigue during a practice:

- Choose a seated position, instead of lying down
- Keep the eyes open with soft focus during practice, instead of closed
- Acknowledge the feeling of drowsiness
- Recognize the benefits of the body's relaxed, calm state
- Observe fatigue as separate from the self
- Use a fan or lower the room temperature
- Adjust the posture to straighten the spine and lift the head