MINDFULNESS MEDITATION STUDENT WORKBOOK

SESSION 1

Introduction to MINDFULNESS

After you have attended Session 1, take some time each day this week to practice and develop the mindfulness techniques you've learned.

The following exercises, meditations, and journal topics will give you something to focus on each day between sessions. Feel free to complete them in any order you like, and even to repeat any exercise you find helpful or interesting. Let yourself be led by your needs and interests this week.

Session 1 Contents:

- Journal Topics
- Breath Awareness Meditation
- Finding Meaning in Daily Activities
- Grounding
- Identifying Core Beliefs
- Identifying Personal Values
- Operating on Autopilot
- Witnessing Your Thoughts

Session 1 Journal Topics:

- Reflect on what led you to this mindfulness course. What emotions, events, relationships, needs, or desires have brought you here?
- 2 What are your personal or professional goals for this course? Are there skills you would like to gain? Knowledge you would like to gain for everyday life? A big or small change you would like to make?
- 3. What life or work experiences have already given you some experience with mindfulness and meditation? Where can you draw on previous knowledge or skills?
- Try keeping a daily emotions journal. Note when you experience strong feelings, what they seem to be in response to, and how you process them.

Breath Awareness Meditation

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:

Stress is an extremely unhealthy condition. It causes the body to release the chemical cortisol, which has been shown to reduce brain and organ function, among many other dangerous effects. Modern society inadvertently encourages a state of almost continuous stress in people.

This is a meditation that encourages physical and mental relaxation, which can greatly reduce the effects of stress on the body and mind.

METHOD:

Summary

Sit still and pay close attention to your breathing process.

Long Version

Take a reposed, seated posture. Your back should be straight and your body as relaxed as possible. Close your eyes, and bring your attention to your breathing process. Simply notice you are breathing. Do not attempt to change your breath in any way. Breath sim- ply and normally.

> Try to notice both the in breath and the out breath; the inhale and the exhale. "Notice" means to actually feel the breathing in your body with your body. It is not necessary to visualize your breathing or to think about it in any way except to notice it with your somatic awareness.

> Each time your attention wanders from the act of breathing, return it to noticing the breath. Do this gently and without judgment.

> Remember to really feel into the act of breathing.

If you want to go more deeply into this, concentrate on each area of breathing in turn. Here is an example sequence:

- Notice how the air feels moving through your nostrils on both the in breath and the out breath.
- Notice how the air feels moving through your mouth and throat. You may feel a sort of slightly raspy or ragged feeling as the air moves through your throat. This is normal and also something to feel into.
- Notice how the air feels as it fills and empties your chest cavity. Feel how your rib cage rises slowly with each in breath, and gently deflates with each out breath.
- Notice how your back expands and contracts with each breath. Actually feel it shifting and changing as you breath.
- Notice how the belly expands outward with each in breath and pulls inward with each in breath. Allow your attention to fully enter the body sensation of the belly moving with each breath.
- Now allow your attention to cover your entire body at once as you breath in and out. Closely notice all the sensations of the body as it breathes.

- > Repeat this sequence over and over, giving each step your full attention as you do it.
- > Suggested time is at least 10 minutes. Thirty minutes is better, if you are capable of it.

HISTORY:

Breath awareness is probably the oldest meditation technique, and is certainly the most universally known. It can be found, for example, in the **Anapanasati Sutta**, a scripture which summarizes the Buddha's teaching on breath awareness mediation.

Anapanasati means "breath awareness meditation in Pali. The Buddha had learned the basic technique from his own teachers, which means that it existed at least as far back as 500 BCE, although it was probably already ancient at the time.

Here is a page with an extensive history of breath awareness meditation, particularly in Buddhism.

CAUTIONS:

If you have any difficulties breathing, you should work with a qualified instructor.

NOTES:

- If you find yourself distracted by a lot of mental chatter, you can use verbal labeling as an aid to concentration.
- For example, on the in breath, mentally say to yourself, "Breathing in." On the out breath, say, "Breathing out."
- Another possibility is to mentally count each breath.

Finding Meaning in Daily Activities

Date / Time:	What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.				
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- > how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
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- > the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
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- > 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

At the end of each day please write out brief answers to these questions.

1. What did I learn today about what makes something meaningful?

2. What about me, my expectations, my quality of presence, my openness and so on contribute to something being meaningful or not?

Finding Meaning in Daily Activities

3. In what ways did I block something being meaningful today?



Grounding

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In our modern day world, as many find themselves 'caught up in the mind,' we often lack a full sense of being 'grounded.'

When we are grounded, we are deeply present with the body, with the breath, and with the world around and within us. The mind is at greater ease and we move through our day with greater presence.

The good news is that when we are feeling ungrounded, a simple grounding practice can bring us back into the earth and into our bodies. This simple exercise is an example of that.

PRACTICE:

1. Come into a comfortable seated position, ensuring the spine is straight, the shoulders are relaxed, and the eyes are gently closed.

2. Take five full breaths, slowly and steadily, as you drop deeper into this present moment. As you breathe, let the belly be soft to encourage the breath to flow as deep as is comfortable.

Grounding

3. After these five grounding breaths, shift your attention to the earth beneath you. Depending on how you are seated (you may be cross-legged on the floor, seated on a chair, or in some other position), tune into whatever physical reality supports you. Hold your attention on the areas of your body that are in direct contact with what is beneath you. Stay present with this for ten to fifteen full breaths.

4. Then, gently shift your attention to hold the fullness of your body in your awareness. Note what it feels like to be in or with your physical body right now. Observe whatever sensations might be here for ten to fifteen full breaths.

5. Come back to the breath for another minute of mindful breathing. Remain attuned to the sensations of each breath cycle.

6. When you feel ready, gently open your eyes and begin to reflect upon your experience of this practice.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How did it feel to ground yourself in this way? Which parts of it were the most settling for you (i.e. connecting with the earth, with the breath, or with your body)?

2. How did your sense of presence change from before the practice to the end of it? Reflect upon any shifts that occurred in both mind and body.

Identifying Core Beliefs

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PURPOSE / EFFECTS:

Below many of our automatic thoughts lie core beliefs and assumptions that create and influence our day-to-day thoughts and worldview. By identifying these core beliefs we can begin to challenge them and come up with new, more realistic views that often include a more positive outlook about ourselves, our lives, other people, and the future.

METHOD:

Summary

When you realize that you are upset, examine your thoughts in that moment, including those murmuring in the background of awareness. Pick a thought that seems particularly prominent, central, or at the heart of the upset, and then ask yourself if even deeper assumptions or beliefs underlie this thought, such as ideas about yourself, the world, or life that reach back into your childhood.

When you find deeper assumptions, write them down... and then ask yourself again if there are even deeper views or perspectives beneath these thoughts. Don't be obsessive about this process, and let yourself do it for only a few minutes at a time. And once you find a core belief, then step back and ask yourself if it is really true.

Long Version

- When you realize that you are upset and experiencing negative emotions, recognize what thoughts are occurring and write down a particularly gripping or distressing thought.
- Next, ask yourself, "What would happen if this thought were true? What would it say/mean about me or my situation?".
- Draw a downward arrow below your first thought and write down the answer to these questions below the arrow. Then ask yourself again, "What would happen if this next thought were true? What would it say/mean about me or my situation?"
- Write down the answer again and keep doing this process until you cannot answer it anymore and come to a solid conclusion, which is a core belief.
- Recognize and identify this core belief and begin to question and challenge its validity.
 - 1. Ask yourself, "Is this belief always true 100% all of the time?"
 - 2. Additionally, see Disputing Negative Thoughts and Common Errors in Thinking for more help challenging this belief.
- This method can also be done with core views about others and the world. Starting with a negative thought about other people or the world, ask yourself, "What would happen if this was true? "What would it say or mean about others/ the world?"

HISTORY:

Identifying core beliefs and assumptions using this downward arrow technique is a common practice in cognitive behavioral therapy and was created by Dr. David Burns. The method presented here was adapted from Dr. Burns' Vertical Arrow Technique in his book, The Feeling Good Handbook. It was also adapted from Dr. Nancy Padesky and Dr. Dennis Greenberger's Downward Arrow Technique in their book, Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think.

CAUTIONS:

It is quite possible to be unaware of our core beliefs. Discovering them can sometimes be disheartening or it can be painful to realize that these views have been influencing our lives for many years.

Please be gentle with yourself for having whatever beliefs you do. Try to remember that you are more than your beliefs and assumptions and beliefs can be changed.



Identifying Personal Values

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PURPOSE / EFFECTS:

Amidst the constant stress and activities in our daily lives it is easy to lose track of what we truly care about and value. Identifying and working to further incorporate personal values into our lives can not only be fulfilling but also deepen our sense of purpose and meaning.

METHOD:

Summary

Make a list of the personal qualities and values you most resonate with and specific ways that you can incorporate them into your life.

Long Version

The word "values" has many definitions, but in this case it means personal qualities and ways of living that you believe in and resonate with. Psychologist Steven Hayes describes values as "chosen life directions" that are "vitalizing, uplifting, and empowering". A value is not merely a goal, but can be thought of as a continuous process, direction, and way of living that helps direct us toward various goals and live a meaningful life.

Identifying your values:

There are various ways to identify your personal values including choosing which domains or areas in your life are most important to you, and specifically what you value within each domain. Which areas of your life and how many you choose can vary.

They can include relationships, work/career achievement, parenting, self-care (health, leisure, etc.), spirituality, community involvement, and education/learning.

- Begin by taking some time to reflect deeply on what areas of your life and ways of living give you the most meaning, interest and sense of fulfillment.
- Feel free to use any of the areas listed above or think of your own.
- After you have chosen a few areas, evaluate how important each one is to you and rank them accordingly.
- Next, closely and honestly examine how present this value is expressed in your current life, including daily activities, lifestyle and relationships.
- Make note of any values that are highly ranked but not highly present in your life.
- Begin to brainstorm and list any concrete ways that you can make this value more prevalent in your life. These do not need to be major life changes but can be small actions or activities. For example, if you value spending time with your family, perhaps making an effort to have family dinner together four times a week, or read a bed time story to your children every other night.
- Continue to think of different ways to further incorporate your values into your life and test them out, noting what works and most importantly, enjoy the exploration!

HISTORY:

Identifying and incorporating personal values into one's life is a long-standing tradition emphasized in many cultures and religions. The practice specifically described here was adapted from the work of leading clinical psychologists Steven Hayes, Susan Orsillo, and Lizabeth Roemer.

CAUTIONS:

Realizing that we are not truly living the life we want to live or embodying what we value can be difficult and even painful. Please remember that above all, maintaining a compassionate and gentle approach to yourself and discoveries is critical to the process and for creating real change.



Operating on Autopilot

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1. Habitual routines in our daily lives help us get things done efficiently and oftentimes more quickly as we rely on that automatic response instead of taking time to stop and think about what we are doing, but sometimes operating on autopilot can counterproductive.

2. This is especially true with stress and anxiety. When you condition yourself to automatic responses you may impulsively react to stressful situations based on past conditioning without realizing you can choose a different response. Mindfulness offers a different solution.

3. Mindfulness helps you to focus on what you are doing and why you are doing it. If you look at things with a beginner's mind, like you are seeing it for the first time, you may see other possibilities available to you.

4. Adversity causes some people to freeze up with apprehension and revert to that conditioned response of past situations but mindfulness can help you to see things differently and view adversity as a challenge, offering you the opportunity to learn and grow instead of shutting down and operating on autopilot.

5. Do a self-evaluation. Do you have habitual patterns resulting from anxiety or stress? For example, do you bite your nails when you are nervous? Do you eat more or less when you are anxious?

Operating on Autopilot

6. Do you say things you wish you hadn't when you are upset? Do you continually repeat certain actions to get temporary relief from obsessive thoughts? Write down any habitual patterns you have that come to mind.

7. Consider your response to the previous question, do you have any habitual behaviors that could be contributing to you stress and anxiety?

8. For example, do you constantly stay up late instead of getting a good night's rest? Do you run yourself ragged trying to do everything for everybody instead of taking care of yourself?

Operating on Autopilot

9. Do you eat unhealthy fast food to save time rather than eat healthy, well-balanced meals? Write down any habitual behaviors that could be contributing to your stress, anxiety, or other adversities in your life.

10. People are creatures of habit. Some habits can be beneficial, like eating healthy and getting regular exercise, and some are detrimental, like not getting enough rest and overworking or overdoing. Most of us have a combination of both.

11. Applying mindfulness to your life can help you identify these patterns, giving you the opportunity to make changes.

12. Over the next week, make a conscious effort to be mindful of your habits, both healthy and unhealthy, and notice if you make any different choices with this awareness.

13. How will you take what you learned from this forward into your life?



Witnessing Your Thoughts

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How often do we stop to curiously witness the nature of our thoughts as if we were an outside observer of them? When caught in a less-than mindful state, our thoughts tend to take over our identity, defining who we believe ourselves to be and directing our perception of the world.

However, as we practice witnessing our thoughts from a place of slight separation, we get to know them in a different way. We start to uncover patterns and habits in our thinking, which naturally helps us to learn, grow, and evolve in nourishing ways.

PRACTICE:

1. Begin by coming into a seated position. Whether on the floor or in a chair, ensure that the spine is straight and the shoulders are relaxed. Set a timer for five to ten minutes.

2. Take five full breaths to ground yourself. Notice the sensations associated with each inhalation and each exhalation.

3. After those five breaths, continue to breathe naturally but see if you might broaden your awareness. Pay particular attention to what rises in the mind.

Witnessing Your Thoughts

4. As thoughts come up, notice them without becoming involved in the direction they are heading it. Without judging, suppressing, denying, or becoming enamoured by your thoughts, watch what moves through you as if you were an elder watching the movements of the community. Notice what rises and subsides in your awareness.

5. As you watch your thoughts pass by, embracing compassion and curiosity as you get to know your experience in a new way. Observe the emotions and beliefs your inner dialogue triggers, as well as what the imagery looks like. If emotions are present, notice where they present themselves in the physical body.

6. It is quite likely that the mind will entrance you with its images and/or its words. When this happens – even if you realize you have been 'lost in thought' for a couple of minutes – compassionately come back to the silence within. Make note of what arises next.

7. Continue until the alarm rings. Come back to your breath and when you are ready, open your eyes.

NOTES:

Be patient with yourself as you practice this. This is a form of silent meditation, which can take quite a bit of time to sink into. Even if during your first, second, or hundredth session has you lost in thought, harness patience, compassion, and curiosity for your experience.

You might liken the quiet space within yourself to be the clear blue sky – and your thoughts to be the clouds that pass by. This metaphor might help you to remain unattached to the mental movements that arise. Watch from the point of view of the open sky.

You might also use a grounding phrase like 'coming back' to denote the return to presence. Any other mantras that are helpful for you can be used in conjunction with this practice.