

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

SESSION 5 HANDOUT

Allowing / Letting Be

Adapted from Zindel Segal et al. © 2013 The Guilford Press

Turning Towards the Difficult

In Session 5 we extend our formal practice to begin deliberately to turn toward and approach painful experiences with kindness. The basic guideline in this practice is to become mindfully aware of whatever is most predominant in our moment-by-moment experience. If the mind is being repeatedly drawn to particular thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations, the first step is to intentionally cultivate a gentle and friendly awareness of whatever is pulling for our attention, over and over.

The second step is to notice, as best as we can, how we are relating to whatever arises in the body or mind. Our reactions may determine whether they are passing events or if they will persist. Often we can be with an arising thought, feeling, or body sensation but in a non-allowing, reactive way. If we like it, we may become attached to it, and try to hold on to it. On the other hand, if we dislike it, then we may experience fear or irritation, tense up and contract, or try to push it away. Each of these responses is the opposite of allowing.

Letting Go & Letting Be

The easiest way to relax is first, to stop trying to make things different. Allowing experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on. Through cultivating a 'willingness to experience,' we settle back into awareness of what is already present. We let it be – we simply notice and observe whatever is already present. This is the way to relate to experiences that have a strong pull on our attention, however powerful they seem. When we see them clearly, it helps prevent us from getting pulled into brooding or obsessing about them, or trying to suppress or avoid them. We begin the process of freeing ourselves. We open up the possibility of a skillful and compassionate response rather than a knee-jerk reaction, automatically using old (and often unhelpful) strategies.

A New Practice

While meditating, we explored a new way of approaching the difficult. If we noticed that awareness kept being pulled away from the breath (or other focus of attention) to particular sensations in the body associated with physical discomfort, emotions, or feelings, the first step was to become mindfully aware of those physical sensations, to deliberately move the focus of attention to the part of the body where those sensations were strongest. The breath provided a useful vehicle to do this – just as you practiced in the body scan – we took a gentle and friendly approach to that part of the body by 'breathing into' it on the in-breath, and 'breathing out' from it on the out-breath.

Acceptance is not resignation. Acceptance, as a vital first step, allows us to become fully aware of difficulties, and then, if appropriate, to respond in a skillful way.

Breathing Space – Extended Instructions

Use the *Breathing Space – Extended Instructions* when you are troubled in thoughts or feelings.

Awareness

Observe – bring the focus of awareness to your inner experience and notice what is happening in your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

Describe, acknowledge, identify – put experiences into words, for example, say in your mind, ‘a feeling of anger is arising’ or ‘self-critical thoughts are here.’

Redirecting Attention

Gently redirect your full attention to the sensations themselves.

Once the attention has moved to the bodily sensations and you have the item in the field of awareness, say to yourself, ‘It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK. Let me feel it.’ Then, just stay with the awareness of these bodily sensations and your relationship to them, breathing with them, accepting them, letting them be. It may be helpful to repeat, ‘It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK. I can feel it,’ using each out-breath to soften and open to the sensations of which you become aware.

If necessary, because the sensations are too intense, focus on the sensations of breathing in and out (expanding on the inhalation and softening on the exhalation).

Expanding Attention

Allow your attention to expand to the whole body – especially to any sense of discomfort, tension, or resistance. If these sensations are still there, then take your awareness there by ‘breathing into them’ on the in-breath. Then, breathe out and continue softening and opening with the out-breath.

Become aware of and adjust your posture and facial expression.

As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.

DSM Criteria for MDE & GAD

Major Depressive Episode

Five or more of the following symptoms, one of which should be depressed mood or anhedonia must be present for at least two weeks:

- Depressed mood
- Loss of pleasure in usual activities (anhedonia)
- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- Inability to concentrate
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- A. At least 6 months of "excessive anxiety and worry" about a variety of events and situations. Generally, "excessive" can be interpreted as more than would be expected for a particular situation or event. Most people become anxious over certain things, but the intensity of the anxiety typically corresponds to the situation.
- B. There is significant difficulty in controlling the anxiety and worry. If someone has a very difficult struggle to regain control, relax, or cope with the anxiety and worry, then this requirement is met.
- C. The presence for most days over the previous six months of 3 or more (only 1 for children) of the following symptoms:
 1. Feeling wound-up, tense, or restless
 2. Easily becoming fatigued or worn-out
 3. Concentration problems
 4. Irritability
 5. Significant tension in muscles
 6. Difficulty with sleep
- D. The symptoms are not part of another mental disorder.
- E. The symptoms cause "clinically significant distress" or problems functioning in daily life. "Clinically significant" is the part that relies on the perspective of the treatment provider. Some people can have many of the aforementioned symptoms and cope with them well enough to maintain a high level of functioning.

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,

still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

– Jelaluddin Rumi

13th century poet, Islamic scholar, and Sufi mystic

Translation by Coleman Barks

HOME PRACTICE

1. Practice Sitting Meditation daily (alternate days, with and without guidance – when without guidance, sit with silence for 30-40 minutes) and record your reactions.
2. Three-Minute Breathing Space: Practise three times a day at times that you have decided in advance. Circle a **3** on the Home Practice Log each time you do it and note any comments or difficulties.
3. Three-Minute Responsive Breathing Space: Practise whenever you notice unpleasant feelings. Record at least one time you do it by circling a **3Responsive** on the Home Practice Log and note any comments or difficulties.

**Thank you for giving the home practice for each week
your best efforts and intentions.**