



Southcentral
Foundation

Mindful Living

50 Mindfulness
Exercises for Groups
and Individuals

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INTRODUCTION

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice traced back thousands of years with its origins based in Buddhist philosophical teachings that gives us the ability to control our attention. It teaches us to focus on the present moment — in doing so, we let go of thoughts that keep us nervously attached to the past or the future. It is a mental superpower of sorts that allowed our ancestors, and those that continue to live a subsistence lifestyle, to patiently pay attention to subtle changes in their environment in order to survive harsh Alaskan conditions. It is part of the skillset that allows the seal hunter to sit for hours and watch a hole in the ice without becoming distracted, and therefore, to act skillfully when presented with a split second opportunity.

For many of us, our modern world does not require mindfulness to hunt for food or to survive out on the tundra. However, when people choose to practice mindfulness more often, it enhances the quality of their lives and their relationships. Research suggests that those who actively practice present-focused awareness, without judgmental thoughts about what they notice, live a calmer and more mentally and physically healthy life. Mindfulness allows us to control our state of mind in order to pay attention to what we choose to pay attention to in any given moment, rather than being steered aimlessly by our wandering thoughts.

As with most skills, mindfulness is a practice that takes time and commitment. The good news is, most people already practice being mindful in small ways throughout their day and might not even realize it! Going for a walk in nature, focusing on a task such as beadwork or sewing, dancing and singing — these are all opportunities to practice being mindful and there are thousands more ways to do so. This book includes 50 creative mindfulness exercises that can enhance one's mindfulness practice, alone, or in a group environment or a family setting.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Welcome to Mindful Living, we are pleased that you are ready to learn and practice ways to increase your own awareness and emotional resilience. These mindfulness activities range from fun ice-breaker types of activities to more introspective and meditative exercises in order to offer you an example of the vast range of how mindfulness can be practiced.

Each mindfulness activity offers practitioners (that's you) several guidelines to help you determine if the activity you choose will suit your particular needs. We indicate if the activity can be used in a group or if it's best used individually for self-practice.

Individual



Group



Both



We list materials needed, if there are any, so that you can be prepared before you begin. We offer a short overview that addresses “what’s the point?” This describes how each activity can be helpful for those who may be just starting your mindfulness journey. The optional discussion helps prompt thoughtful discussions about how we experience the activity, which can also increase self-awareness and strengthen our mindfulness practice.

Our last guideline is referred to as skill reference; this particular segment is created specifically for therapists, counselors, teachers or individuals who have been learning dialectical behavior therapy and are familiar with DBT coursework and concepts. This highlight of DBT specific skills allows the above mentioned individuals a quick reference to incorporate DBT lessons with their chosen mindfulness activities as part of the DBT skills facilitation. If this last indicator does not apply to you or sounds confusing, don't worry about it! This book is written for everyone to use and includes everyday language and terminologies so it can be enjoyed by all ages and skill levels. If you are interested in learning more about DBT, please contact Southcentral Foundation's Behavioral Health clinic and ask to speak with a case manager who can offer you information about the many learning circles (groups) that we currently offer.

Lastly, it doesn't stop here. Mindfulness can be applied to assist with many different issues, mental health conditions, and with varied types of participants. If you cannot find something in this booklet that suits you, please do not give up. There are a myriad of options online for additional types of mindfulness activities, educational lectures, and trainings. As with most things like diet, exercise, or learning a new skill; we are most likely to master mindfulness when we find a way to engage that we enjoy, and continue to practice, practice, practice.

ALASKAN ESCAPE



Instruction

Close your eyes if you're comfortable and consider the following scenario — you have a friend who lives somewhere in the Lower 48. They have never been to Alaska before. Your friend calls you one afternoon and says they're saving up for a vacation and are considering a trip up north to visit you. They say, "I just can't imagine what Alaska is like in person ... where is one of your favorite places to go? Tell me all about it so I can envision what it would be like to come up there and explore your home state." Take a moment and identify one of your favorite Alaskan escapes. Describe what it looks like, feels like, and sounds like. Consider even the smallest details and the reasons this particular spot feels special to you.

What's the Point?

This exercise challenges us to flex our imagination muscles, so to speak. It involves a practice known as guided imagery, a form of mindfulness that can help us to cope with difficult experiences by psychologically escaping to a more pleasant place. What's more, this exercise offers us an opportunity to practice gratitude for one of our favorite Alaskan places or experiences. We have so many places to escape to in this beautiful state and mindfulness helps us to fully embrace this. Once you've identified one (or a few) of your favorite places, remember that you can re-connect with this pleasant experience anytime you need to take a mental break.

Optional Discussion

Notice your current state of being — any emotions, sensations, body language of yourself or other members of the group, etc. Were you able to create a vivid image of your favorite Alaskan escape? Did your internal experience shift as you connected with this? If so, how?

Skill Reference

IMPROVE the Movement Skills and Self-soothe.

ALASKA NATIVE VALUE REFLECTION



Instruction

Take a moment to reflect on the following question, “How does mindfulness reflect Alaska Native values and ways of being?” Note, this reflection does not have to be specific to Native people — it can be expanded to family values, community values, and/or values specific to living in Alaska.

What’s the Point?

This activity honors all the similarities between mindfulness and Alaska Native values — and there are several. Although mindfulness is often associated with Buddhism, these practices also closely reflect Indigenous cultural ways that have been around for thousands of years. Some examples include the following: being observant, patient, and humble, recognizing the interconnectedness of all living things, appreciating humor, embracing seasonal changes, and many skills that contribute to subsistence lifestyles. After all, the most mindful hunter, fisher, gardener, and gatherer is the most successful.

Overall, this reflection serves to remind us that we wouldn’t be here today if our ancestors weren’t living in mindful ways necessary to survive and thrive, especially in the harshest of conditions like the Arctic. No matter our cultural background, in many ways, mindfulness is rooted in the very existence of us all.

Optional Discussion

Explore any responses — did you experience any particular memories? Images? Did you notice any emotional responses?

Skill Reference

Observe and Describe.

ALPHABET AWARENESS



Instruction

Bring your attention to the space around you. Notice all of the things in the room or area you're in — all the objects, pieces of furniture, any other people, etc. Begin to identify something in the area that begins with each letter of the alphabet. If you're in a group setting, take turns identifying something in the room in alphabetical order. See if you can make it all the way from A to Z, you'll probably have to get creative and if so, even better! Scan the environment for subtle details, materials, parts, and items that would otherwise be easy to overlook.

What's the Point?

Mindfulness exercises that narrow our focus to the present environment can calm us down when we are feeling anxious — this is also known as grounding. Additionally, when we engage our focus on something specific it helps us to manage overwhelming thoughts because we have given the mind a job, so to speak. Otherwise, as many of us are aware, our minds have the potential to bounce from one subject to the next in a manner that is both overwhelming and often unproductive.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice? What is your energy like now in comparison to when you began this exercise? Is there any difference in your mood, stress, or anxiety level?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, One-mindfully, and Wise Mind ACCEPTS.



BALL THROW — VERBAL TONE TWIST



Materials

One soft ball or object that can be thrown or passed between participants.

Instruction

This activity can be done sitting but may be easier standing. Ask participants to form a circle facing each other. The first person holds the ball and makes a declaration about something that makes them happy (this could be a person, object or activity) but does so in a contradicting voice such as anger or sadness. This sounds easy, but it can be quite challenging! After making the declaration, for example, “I love puppies!” in an angry tone, this person tosses the ball to another participant. The participant who caught the ball now does the same thing; exclaim something they enjoy with a contradicting tone; this continues until everyone has had the chance to participate a few times.

What’s the Point?

It’s fun! This is an excellent icebreaker and a get-to-know-you activity for groups that may be working together longer term. Lightheartedness and laughter are key elements to forming healthy relationships and helping individuals (especially those with anxiety) to practice participating fully and being all in.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice as we were doing this activity? Were you thinking about other things, or did you feel engaged and present? Were there any thoughts or observations, concerns about being able to catch the ball? Was this relatively easy or did you find it challenging?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Participate, and Mindfulness of Emotions.

BLIND TEAM DRAWING



Materials

Two to three copies of a picture printed in color (nature and/or animal scenes work well), a white board, and markers.

Instruction

Select a volunteer to draw on the white board. Distribute copies of your chosen image to the rest of the group and make sure the drawer cannot see. Instruct the group to take turns describing one aspect of the picture to the drawer. For example, they might say, “There is a small, round body of water in the bottom left of the image.” The goal is for the group to describe the picture to the drawer so that he or she can re-create the image on the white board as closely as possible.

What’s the Point?

Effective communication! This exercise involves several mindfulness skills — observe, describe, nonjudgment, participate, and effectiveness. It also challenges group members to notice any urges, for instance, to speak out of turn, and to manage these skillfully.

Optional Discussion

Describe your observations. Did you notice judgment and were you able to let go of it? Were you able to detach from expectations? Perhaps there were feelings related to being excited or frustrated while engaged in this activity — what did you notice?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Nonjudgmentally, Participate, and Effectively.



BODY PARTS APPRECIATION



Instruction

Take this opportunity to identify a part of your body that you often overlook and send it gratitude for loyally serving you. For example, you might focus your attention on your legs, your lungs, your eyes, etc. If you find this difficult, it might help to think about what it would be like if that part of your body did not exist or could not function. Either way, send that part of your body love and appreciation as you continue to take deep belly breaths. You might say, “I’m so thankful for my strong legs, they allow me to stand and walk to where I need to go.” Whichever part you choose, take a deep breath, and consider all the ways that body part functions for you, plus what you’re able to accomplish because of this part. In a group setting, each member can take turns sharing their chosen body part and how and why they are grateful for this part.

What’s the Point?

This practice highlights the power of gratitude, specifically for our bodies and the many ways they help us function on a daily basis. Most of us ignore our bodies, unless they do not work as well as before or have become injured. When we do pay attention to certain parts, there is often judgment attached. And yet, our bodies and their parts continue to serve us day after day, until (for whatever reason) they no longer can. So rather than wait until we face a harsh reminder of our physical limitations (due to age, illness, or injury), it is important to take the time and recognize how amazing our bodies truly are.

Optional Discussion

What part did you choose and why? What did you notice that you may have easily overlooked before? Do you tend to be pleased with your body, or critical? How does this impact your mood or self-esteem? If you practiced this in a group, were you able to share other’s gratitude if they chose a body part different than yours? This is a great way to consider new ways to be grateful for what we have!

Skill Reference

PLEASE and Nonjudgmentally.

BODY SCAN



Instruction

Get into a comfortable position; feel free to lie down if you'd like. Take a deep breath and close your eyes if you're comfortable or fix your gaze on a point on the floor. Begin to turn your attention inward into your body. Continue to take deep, belly breaths. Begin at the top of your head, and slowly bring your attention to each aspect of your body until you reach your feet. Take a moment and bring your attention to each part of your body as though you are scanning it with a flashlight and pause. What do you notice? Notice how each part of your body feels in this moment. Slow down and be specific. Do you notice tension or discomfort? How about temperature? Check for areas that feel tingly or tense. You may even notice there aren't many sensations at all. Whatever you do, take your time exploring and observing each body part as you continue to breathe deeply, and just notice.

What's the Point?

This practice is meant to connect us with our bodies — something that many people struggle to do. Those who struggle with anxiety or depression often experience a sense of disconnect from their bodies, and this often spikes even more anxiety. Some might find this exercise to be uncomfortable or confusing, and that's okay. The point is to take a moment and ground yourself in your body and to connect with what's going on in a curious manner. What we notice can be very informative about our current mood and mental state. This information can help us to understand what might be missing, and what we need to achieve a sense of balance. The more we practice connecting with our bodies, the more we can learn to ground ourselves in the here-and-now when our thoughts and feelings attempt to take us elsewhere.

Optional Discussion

Describe what you observed.

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, and Wise Mind ACCEPTS.



CHANGING APPEARANCE



Instruction

Identify a group member to be the focus of this activity. Before stepping outside with them, prompt the group to visually observe this person's appearance. After stepping outside with this participant, instruct them to change a few subtle aspects of their appearance. For instance, they can roll up their sleeves, remove a piece of jewelry, change the part in their hair, etc. Next, return to the room and challenge the other group members to observe the participant and describe what has changed about their appearance.

What's the Point?

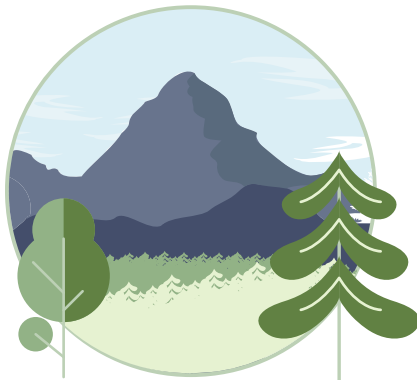
This exercise requires group members to be very observant, a core mindfulness skill. When people operate in “auto-pilot” mode, they seldom notice subtle changes in their surroundings. What's more, those who are anxious are often hyper-focused on themselves and therefore miss cues and changes in others. Being observant of others reminds us to notice external changes that often occur all around us and helps us to remain grounded in the here-and-now, rather than overly-focused on ourselves.

Optional Discussion

Ask participants to observe and describe their experience after the exercise is complete. Encourage them to share observations for both experiences of observing others and of being observed.

Skill Reference

Mindfulness of Others, Participate, One-Mindfully, Observe, and Describe.



COLLECTING PLEASANT MEMORIES



Materials

Clock or timer.

Instruction

Close your eyes if you're comfortable, and reflect on a recent pleasant experience. This can be something small, like an opportunity to sleep in and wake up to a warm cup of coffee. Feel free to connect with something big, like a fun family gathering or creating a goal for your life. Take your time, take deep breaths and visualize whatever recent memory elicits positive feelings for you. Notice what shifts for you as you connect with your pleasant memory. Stay focused and present with this pleasant memory. You might notice that your mood has improved or that tension in your body has relaxed. Take a moment and allow yourself to observe and enjoy these changes.

What's the Point?

It is important to actively embody our positive experiences from time to time. When we do this, we further transfer these to long-term memory and often experience mood improvement. Interestingly, the human brain is programmed to remember unpleasant experiences, which likely helped us to evolve as a species (so we don't make the same mistake twice). This means that it is essential to actively connect with happy memories, or else our minds might become bogged down with more difficult memories. Additionally, we benefit from other's positive experiences — responding to other people's joy with an empathic, positive response can also bring us joy. How cool is that!

Optional Discussion

Share your memory with the group. Encourage other group members to ask questions in order to obtain a vivid description of the event. Observe and describe any emotional shifts you experience when you connect with a pleasant memory.

Skill Reference

Mindfulness of Others, Observe, and Describe.

COLOR IDENTIFICATION



Instruction

This activity involves being present and mindful about our surrounding environment. The facilitator will call out any color of choice. One by one, each participant will take turns identifying something in the room that has that color on it. Once everyone has had a turn, the facilitator chooses another color. The group again takes turns identifying and naming objects in the room that possess the identified color. This can go for a few rounds, depending on the size of the group.

What's the Point?

This activity encourages us to be present in the here and now. Whatever happened earlier in the day or what needs to get done later can be set aside as our attention is drawn in with being present and active. This simple observation-based activity can be helpful in situations when people are anxious and need to feel calm and grounded.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice as we were doing this activity? Were you thinking about other things, or did you feel engaged and present? Describe any thoughts or observations.

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, and Wise Mind ACCEPTS.



COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION



Materials

Several heart-shaped pieces of paper and markers.

Instruction

Pass out one to three hearts per group member. Instruct everyone to write encouraging statement, words, or pictures on your paper heart and place it in the center of the room face down. Each group member then picks up one to three hearts, and takes turns reading their heart(s) out loud to the group.

What's the Point?

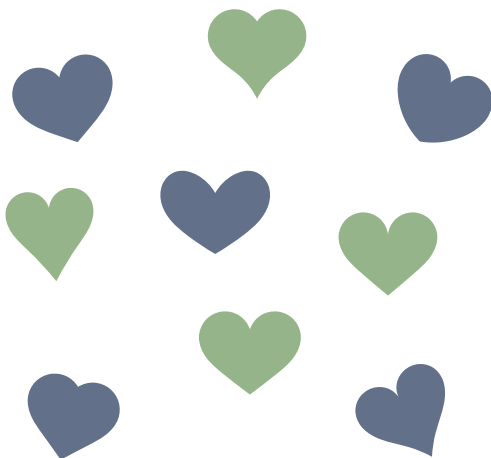
This activity demonstrates the power of compassion and validation. It can also be used to reflect on one's feeling state, before and after engaging in the activity.

Optional Discussion

Describe your experience of writing on the hearts. Describe your experience of reading your heart's message. What was it like to listen to others read theirs?

Skill Reference

Nonjudgmentally, Loving Kindness, Mindfulness of Emotions, and Validation.



CONNECTION



Materials

Personal objects, for instance, a watch, keys, a planner, etc.

Instruction

Identify a personal object that you're comfortable sharing with the group. Pass your personal object to the person to your right. Simply sit with the object you received and observe it, as well as any thoughts, feelings, or sensations you experience as you hold the object. Notice aspects about the object and explore any feelings of connectedness toward the person it belongs to. Sit with the object for one minute then return it to that person.

What's the Point?

This activity is meant to illustrate a feeling of connectivity. It also hones our attention to a single object, which involves several mindfulness skills, including observation, willingness, description, and full participation in the current moment. It is a great way to practice your ability to stay tuned in and focused.

Optional Discussion

How was that for you? What did you observe? Did you feel more connected to the other person, if so how?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, and Building Relationships.



DOOR AND KEY GUIDED IMAGERY



Instruction

Get into a comfortable position. Take a deep breath, and if you're comfortable, close your eyes. Imagine that you're holding a key in your hand. Look at it, what do you notice? What does it look like and how does it feel to hold? Imagine that you're standing in front of a door with a lock on it. What does the lock look like? How about the door, what kind of qualities does it have? Imagine that you use the key to unlock the door in front of you. What happens next? Sit with this image and just notice ... do you see? How do you feel? Are there any sensations or urges? Sit with this feeling for a moment. Come back to this room when you're ready.

What's the Point?

This guided meditation often elicits a variety of emotional responses, and that's okay. It offers a few basic instructions and allows us to project our feelings and beliefs onto the rest of the details. Our response to the key is often symbolic of our feelings of empowerment, and our confidence in ourselves. Our response to the lock and other aspects of the door are often symbolic of our feelings about being challenged or facing barriers in our lives. Lastly, our response to what lies behind the door represents our feelings about the future. Our willingness to open the door and whether or not we're ready to step through it can be very symbolic of our readiness to move forward in life, as well as our willingness to embrace what might be next.

Optional Discussion

Describe your experience with this exercise. What images did you see? What feelings did you feel in response to these images? Describe any thoughts, urges, or sensations. What do you think your response reveals about you?

Skill Reference

Willingness vs. Willfulness.

EMBODYING AN EMOTIONAL RESOURCE



Instruction

Take a moment and think about one of your favorite emotional resources, something that you consider a source of support when you're feeling stressed. It might be your journal, a pet, your favorite place to sit in nature — choose something that soothes you when you're upset. Once you've chosen your resource, focus on an image of yourself engaged with what you have chosen. Focus on any sights, sounds, tactile stimulation, smells, and/or tastes involved with the resource. Notice what happens in your body as you connect with this image. Are there any changes in posture, facial expression, tension or energy? Where in your body do you notice any sensations?

What's the Point?

Everyone possesses resources — personal strengths or sources of support that help us to cope with life. Sometimes we struggle to notice these resources, but they do exist, otherwise we might not be here today. It is important to take inventory of our resources from time to time. This exercise encourages us to discover the power of one of our favorite resources in order to embody the experience this elicits and, therefore, feel more regulated. The more we practice the more easily we can utilize this skill to feel good, calm, and safe.

Optional Discussion

Describe what you observed. Focus on any physical sensations you noticed. If you have a hard time connecting with your body, focus on the emotion, and ask yourself, "How do you know you feel that way?" For instance, if you feel joy, where in your body do you notice sensations of joy? Also, how would you rate your overall tension in comparison to before you completed this exercise?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Self-soothe, and IMPROVE the Moment.

GARDEN MEDITATION



Materials

Script.

Instruction

“Your mind is a garden, your thoughts are the seeds. You can grow flowers, or you can grow weeds.” Set a timer for one minute, and reflect on the current state of your garden.

What’s the Point?

This quote illustrates the power of our thoughts. It offers a visual analogy of one’s mental state, and is an opportunity to be mindful of this.

Optional Discussion

What does your current garden look like? Describe it in detail.

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, and Mindfulness of Thoughts.



GRIEF MEDITATION



Instruction

Take a moment to get settled into a comfortable, yet alert, position. Close your eyes if you'd like, and begin to take slow, deep, belly breaths. Connect with your inner wise mind, and ask, "What is something that I am having a hard time fully accepting? What do I need to let go of and grieve?" Notice any feelings of sadness or tension and check-in about how this might be related to something or someone that you've lost, either recently or even years ago. Once you have an idea of something you might be struggling to accept, make a commitment to moving forward and repeat to yourself (out loud, or in your head) the following:

1. This is a moment of pain.
2. Pain is a part of life, and I am not alone in this experience.
3. What do I need to take care of myself right now?

Consider the following: Perhaps you need some fresh air, to take a nap with your pet, to listen to a soothing playlist, to call someone you love ... whatever it is, make an inner commitment to doing at least one thing today to treat yourself with kindness.

What's the Point?

Despite the human tendency to resist painful feelings, pain a guaranteed part of life that we will all experience at times. This grief meditation can have a powerful impact on one's ability to progress through stages of grief in a healthy, more present manner. Mindfulness, compassion, and a sense of community are essential factors that help us to heal from grief, rather than become stuck in it. Keep in mind that grief is not always about death; we can grieve when we have lost an opportunity or ability, a job we enjoy or a close friendship after they have left the state. Practice these steps again and again, as needed, when you experience waves of grief or sadness, alone, or even with your loved ones.

Optional Discussion

What was that like for you? What feelings, images, thoughts, or sensations did you notice?

Skill Reference

Radical Acceptance, Self-soothe, Loving Kindness, and Validation.

GRATITUDE



Instruction

This activity can be done seated and works best when practiced in a group setting where participants are able to face each other in a circle. You can say to the group the following:

“This mindfulness activity offers us all an opportunity to reflect on things in our lives that we are grateful for but may often overlook. Take a moment and consider what’s going well for you. It is important to recognize a balance of what’s going well in your life both internally and externally. First, ask yourself, ‘What is something that is going well for me on the outside?’, For instance, you could recognize your supportive friends or something small like the shoes on your feet. Identify at least two things you are grateful for externally. Now, take a deep breath and turn your attention inward. Identify one thing that you are grateful for that comes from you — for example, your sense of humor, your creativity, or your ability to climb a mountain or your willingness to work on your health and wellbeing. Whatever quality you choose, make sure that it is an internal quality that you are grateful for.”

What’s the Point?

Research suggests that a regular gratitude practice significantly increases our overall well-being. In fact, identifying what we are grateful for is proven to benefit us in the following ways: increased optimism, sleep improvement, reduced stress-related heart disease, increased motivation, improved relationships, greater relaxation, and an overall boost in well-being. As with all mindfulness activities, this takes practice; the more we practice gratitude, the more easily and readily we can experience, feeling good as a result of our focus on what we are grateful for.

Optional Discussion

What do you notice when you practice gratitude? What did you observe in regard to emotions, images, sensations, and urges?

Skill Reference

IMPROVE the Moment, Loving Kindness, and Wise Mind ACCEPTS.

GROUP WORD ASSOCIATION



Instruction

There are several ways to play this mindfulness game; this is just one of many. This activity can also be done sitting or standing if you'd like. The group leader explains, "This activity requires full participation and attention! I am going to call out a word and as we go around the room (clockwise) each participant is going to share the first thing that comes to mind from the last thing stated (the person on their right)!" For example, lead says: Black car! Next person: Night Rider! Next person: 80's! Next person: Fanny packs! Next person: Rubik's Cube! Next person: Impossible! Next person: Mission impossible! And so on... until it comes back to the first person who started, who can re-iterate their initial word: black car. This is a little bit like the telephone game but with more energy.

What's the Point?

This word association game can get movement and energy back into a tired or anxious group. Additionally, because each answer is dependent on the previous participant's answer, nobody can try to control or predict how to respond. Essentially, this forces everyone to be "tuned in" and to "go with the flow."

Optional Discussion

Were there any themes? What did you notice? What emotions did you experience?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Mindfulness of Thoughts, and Nonjudgmentally.



GUIDED IMAGERY OF FAVORITE HOBBY



Instruction

This is an exercise we could all benefit from, especially during stressful times when we need a distraction or something more pleasant to focus on. Think of a situation in which you often become anxious or triggered — for instance, feeling stuck in a small cramped space, feeling nervous during a medical exam or procedure, having social anxiety in a crowded space, public speaking, traveling, etc. Now identify one of your favorite hobbies, such as a sport, activity or family ritual, etc. What could you focus on in this stressful situation in order to anchor your mind to something more calm and pleasant? Close your eyes, and picture yourself engaged in one of your favorite hobbies.

Explore this scene in great detail, and give yourself permission to leave the current environment in order to connect with a resource that comforts you.

What's the Point?

Our imagination is powerful, and we can use it to our benefit if we learn how. This exercise teaches us to engage in an imagined hobby in order to distract ourselves from current pain or discomfort. Sometimes, it is important to use present-focused mindfulness to connect more fully with our current surroundings. Other times, it is more effective to mentally escape our current surroundings to help cope with a stressful situation. This exercise reminds us that mindfulness is all about being able to pay attention to what we choose to pay attention to in any moment, and in this case, it's about choosing to pay attention to our imagination.

Optional Discussion

What did you imagine? How was this for you? Were you able to get lost in your imagined hobby? If not, when your attention drifts, were you able to bring your focus back to the hobby?

Skill Reference

IMPROVE the Moment Skills.

HAND SCAN



Instruction

Find a comfortable place to settle and choose a hand that will be the focus of today's meditation. Start by looking at your hand, really noticing it; skin texture, color, shape of your fingers, are there any cuts or dry skin spots? Are your nails short, long, painted? Touch your hand with your face or your other hand, notice how it feels. Now take some time to consider what all this hand does for you throughout your day. It helps you to eat, scratches itches, writes, types, drives, wears a ring ... Lastly, focus your awareness on all of the amazing things this hand does for you and how blessed you are to have the use of this amazing body part.

What's the Point?

This is an activity that encourages participants to slow down and be present using their noticing skills of observe and describe, as well as practicing gratitude.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice? Were you able to remain present and one-minded with your hand? Do you have a stronger sense of appreciation for your hand? What are some reasons you're feeling grateful?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, and One-mindedly.



“HI MY NAME IS” — QUESTION AND ANSWER

Instruction

Stand in a circle, and take turns doing the following: introduce yourself to the person to your left, that person will introduce their name, and then you ask them a question about themselves. For example, someone would say, “Hi my name is Sarah” to the person to the left. That person would respond, “Hi Sarah, I’m Logan” and Sarah would respond with one get-to-know-you-type of question. For instance, “Logan, what’s your favorite color, who is one person that you admire, what’s the last thing you watched on television or how many siblings do you have?” Repeat these steps around the circle until everyone has participated.

What’s the Point?

This exercise helps to build relationships. It also promotes mindful interaction because the questions and responses happen without preparation and in an organic fashion. Participants are functioning with the group’s attention on them and if that is typically not comfortable, than this can also be a good opportunity to improve to being the focus of positive attention.

Optional Discussion

What was that like for you? Describe what you observed. Did you notice discomfort ... excitement ... anticipation? Take stock of the physical and emotional sensations that may have come up for you, as well as any thoughts about engaging in this activity.

Skill Reference

Participate, One-Mindfully, and Mindfulness of Others.



“I AM” STATEMENT



Materials

List to prompt characteristics.

Active	Caring	Friendly	Mature
Artistic	Cheerful	Fun	Proud
Bold	Confident	Funny	Quiet
Brave	Determined	Generous	Respectful
Brilliant	Energetic	Loving	Responsible
Busy	Fair	Loyal	

Instruction

Give each group member a moment to reflect on and choose three positive characteristics about themselves. This can include a role (I am an older sister), a talent (I am a basketball player), or personality characteristic (I am kind). Next, take turns sharing the “I am” statements out loud. Instruct the other group members to repeat the “I am” statement with enthusiasm before the identified person moves on to the next statement.

What’s the Point?

This activity is meant to increase a sense of validity and connection. Many people often criticize or judge themselves in a manner that is emotionally dysregulating. “I am” statements are like mantras, they can significantly strengthen our sense of identity and purpose.

Optional Discussion

Describe your experience — what did you notice? How was it to say your “I am” statement out loud? How was it to have it repeated back to you by the group?

Skill Reference

Nonjudgmentally, Validation, and Building Relationships.

“I WANT!”



Instruction

Challenge each participant to identify three things they want in their lives – this could be anything in the world. Examples include: “I want a closer relationship with my son ... I want a job ... I want to get in shape ... I want a million dollars!” Stand in a circle and take turns. Instruct the first participant to begin by assertively stating one thing they want, “I want (a freezer full of red salmon)!” Instruct the rest of the group to respond in unison by enthusiastically repeating, “You deserve (a freezer full of red salmon)!” Repeat this process around the circle until all three identified wants are expressed and validated by the group.

What’s the Point?

Our thoughts and words are powerful. In fact, they play a large part in forming our realities. Therefore, why not make a conscious effort to think positively rather than negatively? Just like the idea of creating a vision board (a visual representation of our life dreams and goals often in the form of a collage), asserting our wishes out loud helps us to identify what matters to us and steers us on a path toward those goals. So next time you catch yourself thinking about what you don’t want, re-frame that thought into what you do want. You will be that much more mindful and intentional about your future.

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Participate, and Mindfulness of Thoughts





LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION



Instruction

Abridged by authors — Loving Kindness Meditation from (Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series three, Jon Kabat-Zinn, <http://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/>)

In this meditation on loving kindness, allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of “doing” to a mode of “non-doing” or of simply being. As your body becomes still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing. Bring awareness to the movement of your breath as it comes into your body and as it leaves your body. No need to change the breath in any way; simply be aware of it and of the feelings associated with breathing. Observe the breath deep down in your belly. Feel the abdomen as it expands gently on the in-breath, and as it falls back towards your spine on the out-breath. Be totally here and present in each moment with each breath. Do not try to do anything, do not try to get to any place, just simply be with your breath. Give full care and attention to each in-breath and to each out-breath. If distracting thoughts arise, it’s okay, that’s part of being human, simply acknowledge them, then return your focus to the practice.

We will begin by now bringing to mind someone for whom you have deep feelings of love. See or sense this person and notice your feelings for them arise in your body. It may be simply a smile that spreads across your face, or your chest might become warm. Whatever the effects, allow them to be felt.

Now let go of this person in your imagination, and keep in awareness the positive feelings that have arisen. Good. Bring yourself to mind now. Keep the positive feelings with you. And see if you can offer loving kindness to yourself, by letting these words become your words ...

May I be happy

May I be healthy

May I ride the waves of my life

May I live in peace

No matter what I am given

Notice the feelings that arise and let them be, as you look within yourself with mindfulness and compassion.

When you are ready, try offering loving kindness to someone who supports you, who has been on your side. If this is difficult consider a kind neighbor, a teacher, medical provider, or pet. Bring this person to mind, imagine them seated across from you, and allow these words to become your words ...

May you be happy
May you be healthy
May you ride the waves of your life
May you live in peace
No matter what you are given

Notice the sensations and feelings that arise within you and allow yourself to experience sitting with these feelings and sensations for a few moments. Bring your awareness back to the room, your body, your breathing; breathing in deeply and allow yourself to become aware and present.

What's the Point?

This type of grounding meditation is a great way to center yourself, bringing gratitude and joy into your life by practicing good thoughts and meaningful intentions towards yourself and others.

Optional Discussion

Describe your experience. What was it like to send compassion to others? How about to yourself? How could you benefit from doing this more often? Would you be willing to? If not, what are the barriers?

Skill Reference

One-mindfully and Nonjudgmentally.

MINDFUL CONVERSATION



Instruction

Instruct everyone to get into pairs. Explain that the goal is to engage in mindful conversation – using observation and fully participating in the moment, without judgment or assumptions about one another. Offer a topic for the group to focus on, for instance “talk about your favorite TV show or movie.” The group can also choose their own topic. Instruct the pairs to identify one person to begin as the speaker and the other person to focus on listening and responding mindfully. Challenge the listener to focus 100% of their attention on the speaker’s words, tone, body language, and overall energy. The listener can ask questions, but their main job is to listen as mindfully as possible. Set the timer for two minutes. After two minutes, instruct the pairs to switch roles and set the timer for another two minutes.

What’s the Point?

Research suggests that a large part of social anxiety is due to being overly focused on oneself. When this happens, we become even more anxious and awkward in our interactions – sort of like a self-fulfilling prophecy. For instance, when an anxious person worries about the impression they’re making on others, they inevitably create awkward tension in the conversation that just perpetuates the anxiety. Therefore, being mindful of others not only strengthens our connections with others and allows for more genuine interactions, but it is also a great way to prevent anxiety.

Optional Discussion

Describe what you observed as the talker. Describe what you observed as the listener. How was your anxiety level? Did anything interfere with your ability to focus on the speaker in a mindful and nonjudgmental manner? If so, what?

Skill Reference

Mindfulness of Others, Observe, Describe, Participate, and Nonjudgmentally.



MINDFUL SMELLING



Materials

Various objects with a pleasant or interesting scent – such as a few bags of tea with the labels removed, lotion, flowers, scented oils, gum, etc.

Instruction

Pass around the scented objects. Spend a moment in full observation-mode. Notice the various smells, sensations, and emotions that arise as you focus on this object.

What's the Point?

Smell is a great way to be mindful – it anchors us to the current moment. Additionally, smell often connects us to memories. This happens because the part of the brain responsible for smelling, (the olfactory bulb) is next to our memory center (the hippocampus). Hence why certain smells can be very nostalgic.

Optional Discussion

Describe what you observed. Did you have any emotional response to the smells? Did this experience evoke any memories for you?

Skill Reference

Observe and Describe.



MINDFUL TASTING



Materials

Bite-sized chocolate, food, or candy. (Please be aware of any food allergies in your group.)

Instruction

This activity can be done seated. Pass around one piece of chocolate to each participant and explain that taste is one of five senses that we can utilize to engage in mindfulness. Say the following: “Take your time opening the foil wrapper: slowly and with intention – noticing the way the foil feels and sounds as you unwrap the candy. Take a moment to observe the shape, weight, smell, and feel of this piece of chocolate before popping in to your mouth. Instead of biting, allow the chocolate to slowly melt in your mouth, enjoying the smell and taste, noticing as the texture hanging as it melts.” Notice any thoughts, emotions, or urges. Allow time for this activity as needed.

What’s the Point?

Mindful eating is actually used to help manage compulsive overeating and food addiction. It also allows us to fully engage in and enjoy what we are eating! Food is meant to be enjoyed and can add to our quality of life.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice as we engaged in this activity? Did the instruction help you pace yourself and pay attention, did you find it distracting? Was it difficult to slow down?

Skill Reference

PLEASE, Observe, Describe, and One-mindfully.

MINDFUL VISUAL EXPLORATION



Instruction

Take a few minutes and visually observe the space around you. Focus on three items in the space that you have never noticed before – the more subtle, the better. Try to identify at least three things you’ve never seen in the room, even if you’re very familiar with this space.

What’s the Point?

So often, we mindlessly enter an environment and do not stop to appreciate the tiniest of details within that space. This exercise can ground us in the here-and-now – it challenges us to narrow our attention to subtle characteristics about the visual space around us, and therefore, it settles our minds onto something specific.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice?

Skill Reference

Observe and Describe.



MOOSE, BEAR, EAGLE



Instruction

This activity requires at least a few people and can be done in one big group, or groups of three. Instruct everyone to stand in a circle with their backs toward one another. On the count of three, everyone will turn around and simultaneously gesture moose (hands spread on side of head like antlers), bear (hands up in the air like claws), or eagle (arms spread like wings). The goal is to get each group member to choose the same animal at the same time, but only through nonverbal observation. The first group to complete this goal 'wins.'

What's the Point?

This is a fun one! Although, this exercise can be challenging to those who struggle with social anxiety, that's kind of the point! This is an activity that promotes mindful attention because the group members must focus on each other's responses in order to complete the shared goal. It also challenges us to fully participate with others and to let go of any fears of judgment.

Optional Discussion

Describe what you observed and experienced. Did you come up with a strategy? What did you notice? Was your group able to match up?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Participate, Effectively, Mindfulness of Others.



MUSIC CHALLENGE



Materials

Music-playing device.

Instruction

Prepare your music ahead of time and choose a high-energy song, preferably, one without lyrics. Instruct the group to get into a comfortable position and to visualize a calming scene. Ask everyone to raise a hand when they have accessed their scene. Instruct everyone to just notice their thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they focus on their calm image. Begin playing the music and continue for 90 seconds. Pause the music and instruct everyone to bring their attention back to the room.

What's the Point?

With practice, our mindfulness skills strengthen like a muscle. This exercise puts our mindfulness muscle to the test. The purpose of this is not to judge the music, but rather, to practice our ability to focus on what we choose to focus on – in this case, a calming image. The music acts as a distraction and tests our ability to maintain focus. If you find that your calming scene somehow adapts to the music, this is also skillful and demonstrates your ability to be psychologically flexible. And that's what mindfulness is all about!

Optional Discussion

What did you notice? Discuss your experience, including thoughts, images, feelings, and sensations. Did this change with the music, if so how?

Skill Reference

Mindfulness of Thoughts, Mindfulness of Emotions, Observe, Describe, Nonjudgmentally, and IMPROVE the Movement Skill.

NAME GAME



Instruction

In a group, the first person says their name, for instance, “Sally Jenkins.” The person to the left has to think of a famous name that begins the same letter as the previous last name (“J” for “Jenkins”), for instance, “John Lennon.” Next, the person to the left must think of a name that begins with the last name “L” for “Lennon.” If someone is able to think of a response in which both the first and last name begin with that letter, for instance, “Lyle Lovett,” then the direction switches back to the right. Go around the circle for five minutes or so.

What’s the Point?

This exercise engages one’s thought processes in a present-focused manner. It can be used as a distraction technique to tolerate distress, when needed, or as a playful way to exercise one’s mind. Additionally, it can be an opportunity to playfully engage in competition and promote energy and humor.

Optional Discussion

Discuss what this was like for you. What emotions did you experience, what observations did you make? Did you notice any urges? How about judgments?

Skill Reference

One-mindfully, Participate, and Wise Mind ACCEPTS.



NONVERBAL BOUNDARY SETTING



Instruction

Instruct the group to get into pairs. The goal is to take turns nonverbally setting a boundary with the other person. Start by having each pair stand across from each other with ample space between them. Instruct them to take turns to nonverbally communicate “no” when your partner attempts to cross their boundary. Next, nonverbally invite their partner to move closer to their boundary. Switch roles and repeat the above steps. Pay close attention to any thoughts, feelings, urges, or sensations that arise for you in both roles – setting and receiving boundaries.

What’s the Point?

This exercise strengthens our awareness of interpersonal tendencies – our willingness to set limits with others, say no, and say yes. It offers valuable information about how we experience both setting and receiving boundaries. Using our body language, instead of words, allows us to tap into our automatic ways of being that are less driven by conscious thoughts. This can be a powerful exercise. For instance, some people struggle to set nonverbal boundaries and may feel somewhat triggered by this experience and others may find that they feel hurt or rejected when someone else sets a boundary with them. Some may find that they struggle with feeling closer to their partner in terms of physical proximity or “closeness.” It is important to normalize this and use this exercise as an opportunity to gain insight into how we respond, mentally and physically, to boundary setting.

Optional Discussion

Discuss what it was like for you to communicate setting and receiving boundaries? What did you notice physically? Emotionally? What kinds of thoughts did you experience?

Skill Reference

DEAR MAN, GIVE, and FAST.

OBSERVE FEELINGS AND DESCRIBE THROUGH ART



Materials

Paper and colored writing utensils.

Instruction

Observe your current feeling state. What emotion are you experiencing? Do you notice an obvious emotion, or are you feeling emotionally mixed? Whatever the feeling, just notice it. Hand out paper and writing utensils and instruct the group to draw their feelings on the paper. Encourage them to create a visual representation of their feelings, using colors, shapes, shading, whatever they'd like – there are no right or wrong ways to do this.

What's the Point?

This activity promotes feeling identification and expression. Additionally, it engages the creative part of the brain and the body by utilizing tactile stimulation. Engaging in creativity has the additional perk of promoting self-awareness and improving our mood!

Optional Discussion

Share what you created, and describe your experience.

Skill Reference

Nonjudgmentally, Observe, and Participate.



OFF WITH YOUR SHOE! (NON-DOMINANT HAND EXERCISE)



Instruction

Using your non-dominant hand (whichever hand you do not write with) take off your shoes, pause to observe and then put the shoes back on with your non-dominant hand.

What's the Point?

When we engage in everyday activities in a different way than usual, this challenges us to be mindful. When we do things the same way all the time, repetitively and systematically, we no longer have to think about what we are doing; in essence we are on “auto-pilot.” In order to break that habit of being “tuned out” we can simply break one aspect of the habit or routine in order to help snap us into the here and now. Try it with other things: brushing your teeth, eating, or using your phone with your non-dominant hand and just observe what happens!

Optional Discussion

What did you notice? Were you able to do this easily? This is an excellent moment to extend gratitude for the use of both our hands!

Skill Reference

One-mindfully, Observe, and Describe.



POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS



Materials

Printed copies of any positive affirmations (these can also be easy to find online):

- I am healthy and happy.
- Wealth is pouring into my life.
- I am sailing on the river of wealth.
- I am getting wealthier each day.
- My body is healthy and functioning in a very good way.
- I have a lot of energy.
- I study and comprehend fast.
- My mind is calm.
- I am calm and relaxed in every situation.
- My thoughts are under my control.
- I radiate love and happiness.
- I am surrounded by love.
- I have the perfect job for me.
- I am living in the house of my dreams.
- I have good and loving relations with my wife/husband.
- I am enough.
- My presence is my power.
- I have a wonderful and satisfying job.
- I have the means to travel abroad, whenever I want to.
- I am successful in whatever I do.
- I am living in alignment with my values and purpose.
- Everything is getting better every day.

Instruction

Read one or several positive affirmations. Another option is to pass out lists of positive affirmations and each group member then takes turns reading one. Take your time, slow down, and allow for a moment of silence after each affirmation in order to reflect – observe and describe any responses.

What's the Point?

Our thoughts are powerful tools that we can use to shift our focus in a positive direction when we're being mindful. Positive affirmations are a way to practice this. Positive thoughts can create a ripple effect in our lives, one that has an impact on our health, mood, relationships, and the quality of our work. Additionally, when we practice positive affirmations often, this benefits the people around us because we ultimately spread those thoughts internally and externally.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice in response to the affirmations? Did one resonate with you more than another? Did you notice any judgments that might have come up for you?

Skill Reference

IMPROVE the Moment Skills, Validation, and Loving Kindness.



POWER POSES AND MANTRA



Materials

Timer, printed examples of power poses (optional).

Instruction

Instruct everyone to stand up. Show the group examples of power poses (you can find these online). Instruct everyone to choose a pose, and to stand in that pose for 90 seconds. Setting a timer is helpful.

What's the Point?

Research suggests that body language strongly impacts our relationship with ourselves and others. Specifically, our bodies communicate our sense of confidence or weakness. If we stand in a powerful position for one to two minutes before an important event, we are likely to feel more confident and therefore seem more confident to others. As a result, we can achieve our optimal performance and become confident. For more information on this, check out a Ted Talk by Amy Cuddy called “Your body language shapes who you are,” by scanning the QR code below or visit <https://bit.ly/3A7bE3e>.

Optional Discussion

What was that like for you? Did you notice any shifts in your sense of self? Have you done this before or would you do it now? Would you be willing to try this before an important or stressful event, such as an interview, exam, or difficult discussion?

Skill Reference

DEAR MAN, Willing Hands, and Half-smiling.



PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION



Instruction

Get into a comfortable position, you can sit or lay down. This exercise involves two steps, focused muscle tension followed by relaxation. It is essential to take a deep breath each time you tense a muscle group, and to release your breath each time you relax that area. Begin at the top of your body, take a deep breath, and scrunch your forehead while closing your eyes tight. Then release your breath, relax your forehead and open your eyes. Notice the difference between the tension and the relaxation. Take a deep breath, now clench your teeth and tense your cheek muscles. Then release, relax, and notice the difference. Take a deep breath, raise your shoulders toward your ears, and tense this area for a moment. Then release your breath and relax. Take a deep breath, tense your upper arms, then release and relax. Take another breath, now clench your fists for a moment, then release and relax. Take a deep breath, flex your abdominal muscles, then release and relax. Take a breath, tense your thigh muscles, then release and relax. Take a breath, flex your calf muscles for a moment, and relax. And finally, take a deep breath and tense your feet and toes for a moment, then release and relax. Note: If you are in a public setting, try only focusing on your toes. This can be done discretely and it can be just as effective as a full body activity.

What's the Point?

People who struggle with anxiety are often physically tense and disconnected from their bodies at the same time. Engaging our muscles helps to ground our body and focus our minds in the current moment. Purposefully tensing and releasing muscles helps them become more relaxed, which helps the nervous system to calm down as well. Progressive muscle relaxation can be used anytime, anywhere. It is especially helpful to aid with anxious feelings, pain issues, insomnia, and overall stress.

Optional Discussion

How was this for you? What did you notice? How would you rate your anxiety/stress level before and after the exercise?

Skill Reference

TIPP Skill, Observe, and Describe.

PULLING WEEDS MEDITATION



Instruction

Find a comfortable and upright place to sit. Take a few deep breaths, then watch the flow of your breath as it enters and leaves.

Now bring your focus to your heart, and as you breathe in feel as if your heart is opening and softening; as you breathe out, release any tension or resistance (allow a few moments for this). Good. Now visualize yourself walking in a beautiful but overgrown garden. All sorts of colorful flowers surround you, but among them are numerous weeds. Find a place to sit amidst the plants and with awareness mindfully begin to remove the weeds. Each one represents a negative aspect of yourself or your life. Name it as you remove it, and watch it leave your mind as you discard. The more weeds you remove the lighter you feel, as if a weight is being removed from you. As you do this, the flowers are growing stronger and brighter. Stay here as long as you like. You may not have time to pull up all the weeds, so before you leave reassure them that you will be back again to remove some more. When you are ready, silently repeat three times, “May I be happy, may my mind be like a beautiful garden.” Take a deep breath and let it go.

What’s the Point?

This exercise gives us an opportunity to escape to a beautiful place. It also empowers us to let go of negativity or that which is not serving us, and to focus on what brings us joy. Additionally, the image of pulling weeds is symbolic of mindfulness because it reminds us to let go of the past and to evolve with the present – it reminds us that our circumstances are always in a state of change and that we have a choice to fully participate in these changes in an effective manner, or to passively stand idle while our “weeds” take over.

Optional Discussion

Were you able to pull your weeds, if not, what got in the way? If so, what did you notice? Did you notice any changes in your body from the beginning of this activity to the end? How could you benefit from a practice like this in the future?

Skill Reference

Mindfulness of Emotions and IMPROVE the Moment Skills.

RHYTHM



Instruction

This activity is a challenging one! Ask participants to sit or stand in a circle. The group leader starts off with a simple combination of clapping and snapping in any rhythm they would like (for example, two claps and two snaps). This person keeps this rhythm going until the person to their immediate left can pick up this rhythm and join in. It is important for one person to join in at a time. This pattern continues around the circle until everyone joins in and adds to the chosen rhythm. As soon as everyone is in sync, the lead then changes the combination to a different rhythm (for instance, three snaps and one clap). While everyone in the circle continues with the original rhythm, the person to the leader's immediate left changes to the new rhythm. One by one, each participant has to keep the old rhythm until it is their turn to shift and match to the new rhythm. This is way more tricky than it sounds, and it's fun! See how long you can last!

What's the Point?

This activity challenges us to engage our observation and mimicking skills to stay tuned in and alert to what is going on around us. This requires all of our attention to keep pace with what the group is doing and not getting pulled into the second rhythm prematurely. Using sound and participation as a mechanism for mindfulness can be challenging and fun.

Optional Discussion

What came up for you while engaging in this activity? Were you able to 'tune in'? If not, what got in the way?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Participate, One-mindfully, and Nonjudgmentally.

SEASONAL SENSES



Materials

None needed although it is helpful to write down the five senses on a board: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste.

Instruction

Depending on the time of year, or upcoming seasonal change – identify a season like to focus on for this activity. You can say to participants “in this mindfulness activity, we are going to identify things that remind us of (this season), using our five senses.” Starting with one sense, say taste, each participant can share something that relates to this season. When everyone has had a turn, change to the next sense, and so on.

Example: Winter season

- Smell = cinnamon
- Taste = hot chocolate
- Sound = snow crunching under my boot
- Touch = wool hat on my head
- Sight = rainbow colored Christmas lights on my house

What's the Point?

This is one way to help with transition and easing into another season; it gives us things to look forward to and reminds us what to be grateful for. Every season comes with a unique opportunity to take in special sights, changes in nature, various smells, foods, objects, and activities. Hearing other people's examples also gives us other perspectives of what to consider and be grateful for that we might not have considered on our own.

Optional Discussion

Reflect on other people's examples. Were there any surprises? What else did you observe?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, and Self-soothe.

SENSORY COUNTING



Instruction

This practice can be done alone or in a group setting with everyone taking turns. Take a moment to observe the space you're in. Identify five things you can see, five things you can hear, and five things you can touch. If you'd like to take this practice a step further, name one to two details about each of those things. For instance, "I feel the wooden arm rest... it is cold and has grooves."

What's the Point?

When we engage our senses and focus on the current moment, our anxiety-level decreases. Anxiety is often paired with what feels like a free floating, out-of-body experience. When we consciously shift our attention to our surroundings, we become settled into our bodies and the here-and-now. Additionally, this exercise settles the mind because it gives it something to focus on. Engage in this activity anywhere, anytime when you're feeling scattered or anxious.

Optional Discussion

Describe what you notice as a result of counting sensory stimuli. Was there a shift in your anxiety level?

Skill Reference

Observe and Describe.



SIGHT

SOUND

TASTE

SMELL

TOUCH



SHORT STORY ABOUT KINDNESS



Materials

A copy of the story below.

Instruction

Read, or ask a group member to read, the following:

A Native Elder was visiting with his grandson on the Yukon River. They found a group of family members on the banks, shouting in anger at each other. Smiling, the elder turned to his grandson and asked, "Why do people in anger shout at each other?"

The grandson thought for a while, and then said, "Because when we lose our calm, we shout."

"But, why should you shout when the other person is just next to you? You can just as well tell him what you have to say in a soft manner," asked the Elder.

The grandson gave more answers but none satisfied the Elder. Finally the Elder explained:

"When two people are angry at each other, the distance between their hearts is larger. To cover that distance they must shout to be able to hear each other. The angrier they are, the stronger they will have to shout to hear each other to cover that great distance.

What happens when two people fall in love? They don't shout at each other but talk softly, because their hearts are very close. The distance between them is either nonexistent or very small ... "

The Elder continued, "When they love each other even more, what happens? They do not speak, only whisper and they get even closer to each other in their love. Finally, as a lovely old couple-they need not even whisper, they only look at each other and that's all that is needed to convey. That is how close two people are when they love each other."

He looked at his grandson and said, "So when you argue, do not let your hearts get distant. Do not shout in anger. Do not say words that distance you from each other more, or else there will come a day when the distance is so great that you will not be able to find the path to return."

What's the Point?

Alaska Native values are rooted in rich life lessons, and those lessons are especially effective when taught through story. This short story offers an important reminder about the importance of kindness and how compassionate communication protects our relationships. In addition, reading a story aloud engages the reader in the current moment by stimulating auditory and visual sensations, both of which are core mindfulness skills.

Optional Discussion

Reflect on the story. What is the moral? What resonates with you about the message in this story? What emotions did you experience as you listened?

Skill Reference

GIVE, Loving Kindness, Mindfulness of Emotions, and Wise Mind.

SHORT STORY, “THE MAGICAL MUSTARD SEED”



Materials

A copy of the story below.

Instruction

Read, or ask a group member to read the following:

There is an old Chinese tale about a woman whose only son died. In her grief, she went to the holy man and asked, “What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?”

Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, “Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life.” The woman went off at once in search of that magical mustard seed.

She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door, and said, “I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me.”

They told her, “You’ve certainly come to the wrong place,” and began to describe all the tragic things that recently had befallen them.

The woman said to herself, “Who is better able to help these poor, unfortunate people than I, who have had misfortune of my own?”

She stayed to comfort them, then went on in search of a home that had never known sorrow. But wherever she turned, in hotels and in other places, she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune.

The woman became so involved in helping others cope with their sorrows that she eventually let go of her own. She would later come to understand that it was the quest to find the magical mustard seed that drove away her suffering.

What's the Point?

The story illustrates several DBT concepts. It teaches us the value in finding meaning in our pain as a way to heal from grief. It teaches us the importance of contributing to others and in doing so, gaining some distraction from our pain. Giving back to others also benefits us by offering us an increased sense of humanity and perspective. This story is also a strong example of a dialectic – that losing a loved one is an incredibly difficult experience, yet if when we're willing to connect with others, we realize that we are not alone in our suffering.

Optional Discussion

Reflect on the story; what is the moral? What about this story resonates with you? What emotions did you experience as you listened? How does this story relate to DBT concepts?

Skill Reference

IMPROVE the Movement Skills, ACCEPTS skills, and Dialectical Thinking.



SNOW GLOBE



Instruction

Imagine something — a person, situation, or event that has been troubling for you in the last few days. Take a moment and picture what this “troubling thing” is; what does it look like, sound like, what is the circumstance? As you focus on this troubling situation, start to bring awareness into your own body; do you notice tension, pain, or even an emotion such as agitation or anger? (Pause) Very good. Now, return to the image of this troubling situation, and imagine what it would look like if you could pause everything— kind of like freezing the event or person in time, good! Now imagine shrinking this situation down small, really small—small enough that you can now place this troubling situation into a beautiful glass snow globe. Very good. Picture what it looks like to be frozen still, stuck in this calm still snow globe setting, and when you’re ready... shake it up! Shake up that snow globe and imagine all the snow and glitter flying all around the troubling scene you’ve created. If you’d like, you can even imagine bits and pieces of this scene flying all over the place as you shake. Very good. When you’re done having fun shaking this thing up, you can decide to place this snow globe away; you can picture a tall bookshelf that is just out of reach most of the time, imagine getting on a stool, putting this snow globe away, knowing that it’s available if and when you want it, but also acknowledging that now that it’s been put away you don’t have to see it or think about it if you don’t want to.

What’s the Point?

This is a light-hearted activity brings awareness into what we feel, what is triggering our feeling, and then how to decrease the emotional impact through imagination and humor.

Optional Discussion

What are some observations about this activity? What was it like to imagine pausing, shrinking and then shaking up the image of something or someone that has been troubling or frustrating for you?

Skill Reference

Mindfulness of Emotions, Mindfulness of Feelings, IMPROVE the Moment Skills, Wise Mind ACCEPTS.

THOUGHTS ARE POWERFUL



Instruction

This activity demonstrates the power of thought and how our thoughts directly impact our bodies. Ask participants to check in initially with their mood today; using fingers to reflect their current mood and level of agitation right now in this moment from zero to 10, with 10 being “most agitated” and zero being “not agitated at all.” Instruct them to think about a person in their lives or a recent situation that involved another person that was unpleasant, uncomfortable, and caused some level of distress.

Picture an image of the most distressing part of this situation; the look on their face, the tone in their voice. Focus on this for a moment (pause) does everyone have an image? Good. Now bring awareness to your mood and your body. How are you feeling? Are you experiencing discomfort or tightness in your body? Just notice. Good. Use your fingers to indicate your current level of agitation; zero is “no agitation” and 10 is “the highest agitation level.” Wonderful. Now I want you to think about a person in your life or a recent event that involved another person where the interaction was pleasant; perhaps they held the door open for you, paid you a compliment, smiled when they saw you. Does everyone have a positive memory? Good. Focus on this image and the most pleasant part of this interaction; the smile, the tone, the gesture. Bringing awareness again to your mood and body, notice how you are feeling now. As you focus on this pleasant interaction, indicate with your fingers what level of distress you are experiencing now: zero to 10. Very good.

What’s the Point?

This activity demonstrates the immediate and powerful impact of our own thoughts. Teaching the “mind-body” connection to students, friends, kids, etc. is a wonderful way to help empower people to make small changes that have lasting positive impacts.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice? Did your emotional state shift, if so how? What are some ways you could benefit from this activity if you practiced it regularly?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, One-mindfully, and IMPROVE the Moment.

THREE FUN FACTS



Instruction

Instruct everyone to begin by holding up three fingers. Next, each person in the group takes a turn sharing a random fun fact about themselves; this could be something they have accomplished, a place they have traveled, a superstition they may believe in, their favorite color.... anything goes here! If anyone else in the group has in common the fun fact being shared, they put one finger down. This continues until everyone has shared and all the fingers in the group are down.

What's the Point?

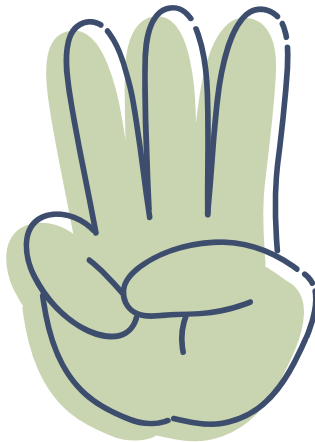
This is an easy way to engage everyone in the room to practice listening and paying attention. It's also a fun way to get to know your group a little better. It challenges us to be vulnerable and to let go of perceived judgment. Everyone gains from connecting and sharing when we're willing to put ourselves out there!

Optional Discussion

Were you able to fully participate? What did you notice?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Participate, Building Relationships, and Mindfulness of Others.



TWO TRUTHS, ONE LIE



Instruction

Instruct each person to share three fun facts about themselves (this can also be themed, for instance, name three places you've been, or three former Halloween costumes); however, only two facts are true and one is a lie. The rest of the group then takes turns guessing which fun fact is the lie.

What's the Point?

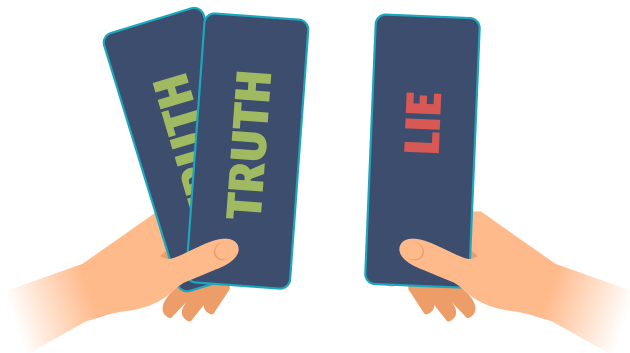
This mindfulness exercise strengthens connections between people. It also illustrates the importance of being open minded to one another and our unique characteristics, instead of making assumptions about people and their experiences.

Optional Discussion

Observe and describe any reactions, judgements, or assumptions.

Skill Reference

Building Relationships, Mindfulness of Others, and Nonjudgmentally.



WHAT I LIKE!



Instruction

Instruct everyone to stand in a circle. One at a time, each person announces to the group (with conviction) something that they like and then stomps their feet. If participants agree with this statement and also like this “thing,” they stomp their feet as well. Move around the circle clockwise until each participant gets to has shared three “what I like!” topics with the group.

What’s the Point?

Group-cohesiveness is an important part of any group being able to work well together. This allows individuals the opportunity to feel connected with other group members and to experience confidence in sharing information about “things I like” while receiving support and positive feedback. Additionally, this is a great way to inject some energy into a tired group.

Optional Discussion

What did you notice? Were you surprised by what you or others shared?

Skill Deference

Observe, Describe, Participate, Building Relationships, and Mindfulness of Others.



WHAT I LIKE ABOUT YOU!



Instruction

This activity challenges participants to engage in both giving and receiving gratitude. This might sound simple, but it's more challenging that you might think! Stand in a circle and face each other. The first "gratitude recipient" takes a small step forward. Starting with the person to their left and move clockwise, each participant identifies something about this person they like, admire, enjoy, or are grateful for. The "receiver" of the positive feedback simply takes in each statement without agreement, disagreement, or any response at all. This continues until everyone has had the chance to receive positive feedback from the group.

What's the Point?

Many people struggle with negative self-talk and judgment about themselves. This activity forces us to be the center of attention for a moment, and to hear positive feedback about ourselves. This activity also emphasizes mindful connection and relationship building.

Optional Discussion

What was that like for you? Describe what you observed in regard to thoughts, judgments, emotional reactions, or physical sensations, etc.

Skill Reference

Building Relationships and Mindfulness of Others.



WORD ASSOCIATIONS



Materials

List of words, pen, and paper.

Instruction

Hand out a pen and piece of paper to all participants. The facilitator will call out words and pause so that each participant can write down their initial reaction to each word. It can be helpful to remind participants, “don’t overthink this!” After the prompting words are shared, the facilitator will re-read each prompt and moving clockwise, each participant will share their associations with the group. This is a light and often humorous way to get folks grounded and tuned in. Below is a sample you can use, but feel free to come up with your own words for this activity:

- Summer
- Red
- Vacation
- Soft
- Curious
- Crunchy
- Rock
- Freedom
- Water
- Fun

Optional Discussion

What did you notice? Was there doubt, did you notice judgments, did this feel silly or fun? Did you notice more similarities or differences between group members' answers? How might our emotional state or mood impact our answers?

Skill Reference

Observe, Describe, Mindfulness of Thoughts, and Nonjudgmentally.

“YES!” ACTIVITY



Instruction

This activity is designed to get some energy flowing in the room. Stand in a circle and instruct each participant to take a turn stating their name and three things about themselves. *If this is challenging for folks, you can choose any other type of category such as: three places I’ve been, three foods I enjoy, three pet peeves. After each statement (including the person’s name) the group replies “Yes!” in unison. It might look like this:

Participant: “My name is Sarah

Group: “YES!”

Participant: “I like pizza!”

Group: “YES!”

Participant: “I like sunsets!”

Group: “YES”

Participant: “I like this group!”

Group: “YES!”

Move to the next group member until everyone has had a chance to participate.

What’s the Point?

There is something very invigorating about having a group work together and use a positive word (yes!) to do so. Growing up, kids are often told “no” and we become much more accustomed to hearing that type of feedback, sometimes we even expect it. This activity offers a playful and engaged level of acceptance and positivity. It can be used anytime, but also as an ice-breaker, or “getting to know you” activity for a forming group. It helps people connect with similarities and personal interests they may not otherwise know about.

Optional Discussion

How was this for you? Were there any thoughts, judgments or surprises in engaging in this activity? What were some overlaps or similarities between participants?

Skill Reference

Nonjudgmentally, One-mindfully, and Validation.

DBT SKILL REFERENCE LIST

As noted in the prefix of this book, the authors have identified dialectical behavior therapy skills to use in conjunction with each mindfulness activity. We have included this section to briefly describe each skill as a reference to folks who are interested, or for those who may be using these mindfulness activities in a clinical context. If you are interested in more ways to learn about DBT, please refer to the “Resources” section where we have offered additional information for both mindfulness and DBT related materials.

MINDFULNESS SKILLS

The primary goal of mindfulness skills is to teach us to control our focus on the “here and now.” This present-moment awareness enables us to enjoy our current experiences, and to connect more authentically with ourselves, our experiences, and with others. It helps us to be less influenced by things in the past or by our worries about the future what have a negative impact on our functioning and mood. Mindfulness teaches us to intentionally steer our concentration; it is a skill that takes practice and with time becomes easier and more enjoyable.

Wise Mind

A combination of ‘emotion mind’ (emotionally-driven) and ‘reasonable mind’ (problem solving and logically-driven). For example, if you’re angry at a friend, explaining your anger in a gentle manner using your words and not your fists.

Observe

Just notice. Allow yourself to experience the moment and whatever is happening. Examples of things to observe include objects, events, emotions, thoughts, situations, and the way your body feels.

Describe

Use words to explain what you observe. Do not interpret; we can only describe the facts we have observed through our five senses. Examples of things to describe include objects, events, emotions, thoughts, situations, and the way your body feels.

Participate

Become completely involved in an activity. Lose yourself in what you are doing in the moment. For example, this happens when you become fully emerged in a book, dancing, cooking, playing sports, etc.

Nonjudgmentally

Describe what you observe through facts and not opinions. See things as neither good nor bad, but rather just as it is. Values, emotions, and preferences are not judgments. For example, instead of saying, “He is stupid,” you could say, “He just doesn’t understand.”

Effectively

Focus on what works. Do what is necessary in a situation without focusing on what is fair. For example, instead of thinking how frustrated you are with a situation; focus on what you need to do to get through it.

One-mindfully

Do things in the moment, one at a time. Focus your mind and awareness on the current activity rather than splitting your attention among several thoughts and activities. For example, focus completely on a conversation, a chore, eating, etc.



EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS

The goals for emotion regulation are aimed towards being able to effectively respond to our emotional state. It offers us an overview of different emotions, helps us understand what they do for us, and how to manage emotions so we don't feel so overwhelmed and controlled by them! These skills are best practiced daily and just as with all other skills, become easier the more we master them over time.

Check the Facts

Take a moment to analyze information about a situation rather than mindlessly reacting to emotions, assumptions, or opinions. For example, someone who is afraid of flying will be able to manage their anxiety more effectively if they look up statistics and recognize that the odds of being in a plane crash are 1 out of 11 million.

Opposite Action

Change an emotion by controlling an urge, and acting in an opposite way. For instance, when you are angry and you decide to gently avoid the situation.

Problem Solving

When faced with a barrier to one's goals, creatively exploring options and organizing steps necessary to move forward; for example, brain-storming ways to get my children to do their chores if they are not responding to my verbal requests.

Build Mastery

Dedicating time and effort to a task in order to gradually improve one's skills. An example of this includes learning and practicing to speak Yup'ik in order to eventually become fluent in the language.

Cope Ahead

When you have identified an upcoming stressor, create a plan to manage this as effectively as possible and visualize yourself using skills. For example, preparing for a job interview via role plays and guided imagery.

PLEASE

To manage emotions by maintaining balance in all areas of physical health (treating physical illness, eating healthy foods, avoiding substance abuse, sleep hygiene, and regular exercise). For instance, recognizing how your mood instantly seems to improve after your daily power walk.

Mindfulness of Emotions

To observe and experience the 'waves' of your emotions, without becoming attached to the experience or stuck in judgment. For instance, to recognize feelings of anger and recognize that this is OK and it is temporary.



INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS

The goal for interpersonal effectiveness skills is to help us become more aware and effective in our interactions with others, as well as how to manage stress and conflicts in relationships. It teaches skills such as effective communication to ask for what we need and want, increased awareness of how others may perceive us, and how to create more meaningful relationships with others. This skill also helps us determine if the relationships we are in are healthy, and if not, how we can end them effectively.

GIVE

A set of skills that help us to speak assertively, while also protecting the relationship; be **G**entle in how you deliver your message; act **I**nterested in what the other person has to say; **V**alidate the other person's experience; use an **E**asy manner and consider how to lighten the situation. For example, "It seems like this is hard for you... do you need some space to think about it?"

DEAR MAN

A set of skills that (when used in this order) help us to speak assertively and set boundaries more effectively; **D**escribe the situation with facts only; **E**xpress your feelings about the situation; **A**ssert what you need; **R**einforce the positive effects of your request; stay **M**indful of your focus and do not get distracted; **A**ppear confident, consider your voice tone, eye contact, and body language; **N**egotiate as needed. For example, "(D) You said that you would call if you were going to be late... (E) I was worried about you... (A) I need you to check in with me when this happens... (R) this will help us to get along better ... (N) at least text me."

FAST

A set of skills that help us to speak assertively, while also maintaining self-respect; be **F**air to yourself and the other person; do not **A**pologize for having a different opinion or for disagreeing; **S**tick to your values; be **T**ruthful even if honesty is uncomfortable. For instance, "No, I'm not going to work extra this weekend... I need to spend time with my family."

Dialectical Thinking

Be open-minded to multiple truths; recognizing and embracing that two opposites can both be valid at the same time. For example, “I love you and the answer is no.”

Mindfulness of Others

Be observant, non-judgmental, and engaged in the present moment while interacting with people.

Building Relationships

Be intentional about connecting with people in more meaningful ways, whether just briefly or to increase regular social rituals.

Loving Kindness

A mindfulness practice designed to increase compassion for ourselves, our loved ones, our communities, and the whole world (specifically, in that order when used as a form of meditation).

Validation

The ally to recognize another person's perspective; acknowledging that someone's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors have causes and are, therefore, understandable.

DISTRESS TOLERANCE SKILLS

The primary goal in distress tolerance is to help us through more intense and out-of-the-ordinary occurrences, such as a crisis. The skills learned in this module teach us ways to deal with high-stress situations that we need to get through, without making the situation worse with dangerous or destructive coping (such as using substances). Another primary goal of distress tolerance is to learn to accept reality as it is, so that we can move forward in our lives more effectively, enjoyably, and productively.

Wise Mind ACCEPTS

A variety of distraction techniques that help us to avoid destructive urges when faced with stress; **A**ctivities such as hobbies, exercise, cleaning, etc.; **C**ontributing to others through volunteer work, creating a gift, helping an Elder, etc.; **C**omparing yourself or your situation to a less fortunate person or situation; doing something that elicits a different **E**motion, for instance watching a funny movie; **P**ushing away reminders of the situation, for example, by creating an imaginary wall between yourself and the stressor; distracting yourself with **T**houghts that require effort, such as counting colors, reading a book, or doing puzzle; engaging in activities elicit physical **S**ensations, for instance, holding an ice cube or playing with clay.

Self-soothe

Taking care of yourself by treating your five senses to some of your favorite sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and textures; for example, eating your favorite food, listening to music that you like, wearing your favorite scarf, and looking at photos that spark joy.

IMPROVE the Movement Skills

A variety of skills that can improve a negative situation, even in small ways; Using **I**magery to escape to one of your favorite places — perhaps a warm, sunny beach; finding ways to create **M**eaning or purpose to the pain that you're feeling; opening yourself to 'something bigger' through **P**rayer; engaging in activities that **R**elax your body, for instance, taking a sauna; focusing your entire attention to **O**ne thing in the moment, and one thing only; giving yourself permission to take a brief **V**acation, even if just for ten minutes; stating words of **E**ncouragement — “I can do this! I've survived worse.”

Pros and Cons

Consider the positive and negative aspects of any given choice, especially when you're faced with an urge to give into destructive behavior; for example, identifying the pros/cons of using alcohol vs. not using alcohol to cope with stress.

Radical Acceptance

Let go of fighting reality, especially when it cannot be changed. For instance, if you're stuck working a job you dislike and there are no other options at this time, you will suffer less if you fully accept the limits of your situation rather than complain and/or call in sick.

Turning the Mind

Because radical acceptance is an ongoing process, you will likely need to make a conscious effort to turn toward acceptance over and over again. For instance, you might need to accept that you need to take medication with every dose.

Willingness vs. Willfulness

Be willing and open to do what is effective, rather than cling onto a willful stance that goes against acceptance. For example, I am willing to do chores in order to improve my life and manage my time; if I'm being willful, the chores will stack up and I will get behind.

TIPP Skills

A skillset that involves managing stress by directly calming the body. This involves cold temperature, intense exercise, paced breathing, and/or progressive muscle relaxation.

Mindfulness of Thoughts

Be observant, curious, nonjudgmental, and unattached to our thoughts. For example, picturing our thoughts as clouds that come and go through our minds.

Half Smiling

Be mindful of facial tension and shifting toward a soft, subtle, relaxed smile, especially if we're struggling with stress.

Willing Hands

Be mindful of tension in our hands and arms and shifting toward a relaxed posture with open palms, especially if we're struggling with stress.



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