

# **Mindfulness Skills for Daily Life**

## ***Core Concepts of Mindfulness***

Core concepts of mindfulness include attention, present-moment awareness, beginner's mind, non-judgment, non-striving, patience, letting be, over-identification, and mindful reactions and actions (rather than automatic ones). When we practice mindfulness, these elements seem to work together and build on each other. We also have the opportunity to notice and change how we relate to ourselves. Compassion, self-compassion, and loving-kindness practices are closely related to mindfulness skills, and can complement other aspects of mindfulness by building capacities of friendship and kindness towards ourselves. Try being mindful during daily activities, connecting with your body while getting out of bed, walking your dog, or eating a meal (Turow, 2017).

### **Tool #1: Diaphragmatic Breathing**

1. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly, just below your rib cage.
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose, letting the air in deeply, towards your lower belly. The hand on your chest should remain still, while the one on your belly should rise.
3. Tighten your abdominal muscles and let them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your belly should move down to its original position (Harvard Health, 2020).

### **Tool #2: Square Breathing**

1. Sitting upright, slowly exhale through your mouth, getting all the oxygen out of your lungs. Focus on this intention and be conscious of what you're doing.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose to the count of four. In this step, count to four very slowly in your head. Feel the air fill your lungs, one section at a time, until your lungs are completely full and the air moves into your abdomen.
3. Hold your breath for another slow count of four.
4. Exhale through your mouth for the same slow count of four, expelling the air from your lungs and abdomen. Be conscious of the feeling of the air leaving your lungs.

5. Hold your breath for the same slow count of four before repeating this process (Healthline, 2020).

### **Tool #3: Grounding**

1. Acknowledge 3 things you can see.
2. Acknowledge 3 things you can smell.
3. Acknowledge 3 things you can touch.

### **Tool #4: Breathing, Sensing, Seeing, and Moving**

1. Take a moment to easily breathe. Tip your head from side to side, allowing your neck to gently stretch on each side and let a few longer slower breaths move in and out.
2. Close your eyes and feel where in the body you are at ease, or comfortable. Sense whatever level of comfort you have. Breathe with what you notice.
3. Next, bring your head back up to center. Then open your eyes and slowly look right until your head is facing the right. Do the same on the left.
4. While you do this, let your eyes see what is around you. Notice if there is anything lovely around you, or anything your eyes enjoy seeing. Rest your eyes there for a moment. Notice your body sensations.
5. When you feel ready, end this exercise (LaDyne, 2020).

### **Tool #5: Easy Seeing and Sensing for Okayness**

1. Let your eyes scan the area around you. Look near, look far.
2. Allow your eyes to choose something they want to rest on. Ask your eyes what they like looking at.
3. As you look at it, let your gaze just rest there, soft and easy. You may even let your eyes soften to the point of blurring for a moment and then gently bring the object back into focus. The eyes are receiving the view you are resting on, not looking out to get the view.
4. As you let your eyes settle, notice how it feels in your body to be gazing at something pleasant. How does your body respond to those seeing practice you are doing? Scan your body for areas of release or relative ease. Attend to these subtle shifts in your body as you also see your chosen view.
5. Notice how your body feels. Attend to any areas of the body that have eased up a bit or relaxed somewhat with your seeing practice. Take in

the sensations of the areas that are okay. Breathe with this awareness for a few moments (LaDyne, 2020).

### **Tool #6: Seeing During Stress**

1. As the stress-reactivity begins to take hold, find a moment to take a seeing break.
2. Let your eyes look for something around you that does not contribute to the stress.
3. As you take your seeing break, can you feel how it affects your body? Is there anywhere in your body that releases even a degree of tension? Is there any subtle shift toward relief?
4. Let yourself see and feel the okay parts, just for a moment. This will soothe your system a bit and help you go back to the stressor you are facing with some more self-regulation on board (LaDyne, 2020).

### **Tool #7: Gentle Standing Stretched for Vagal Tone**

1. Stand comfortable with your feet close together. Reach your arms up overhead and interlace your fingers.
2. Keep your fingers interlaced. Turn the palms of your hands up toward the ceiling and stretch up long and tall. Breathe for a moment.
3. Next, reach your still interlaced hands, palms, upward, over to the right. Lengthen up and then tip your torso over so that your left side gets very long and open.
4. Reach back up to the center. Release your arms to rest alongside your body and relax. Stand and breathe there for a moment.
5. Notice if there is anywhere in your body that feels some ease, relief, or even subtle okayness. Take in those sensations for a moment (LaDyne, 2020).

### **Tool #8: Body Scan Meditation/Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

1. For a body scan meditation, direct your attention to each part of your body, noticing the sensations you feel as you move down your body. For progressive muscle relaxation, move through each body part and tense and relax each part.
2. Start at your scalp, forehead, eyes, and eyelids, nose, cheeks, lips, tongue, jaw.
3. Then focus on your neck, collarbone, shoulders, chest, and ribs.
4. Move your focus to your upper back and lower back.

5. Next direct your attention on your upper arms, elbows, lower arms, wrists, hands, and fingers.
6. After that, recognize your stomach a gut.
7. Notice your pelvis and bottom.
8. Finally, focus on your hips, thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet, and toes (Turow, 2017).

### **Tool #9: Loving Kindness**

1. To practice loving-kindness, find a comfortable position as you practice the silent repetition of phrases wishing yourself well. You can match each phrase to a full breath (inhale and exhale).
2. Examples of phrases include:
3. May I be safe.
4. May I be content.
5. May I be healthy.
6. May I live with ease (Turow, 2017).

### **Tool #10: Self-Compassion Toward Self-Critical Voices**

1. Notice moments of self-criticism gently, rather than “doubling up” by criticizing the criticism. How do you feel during the moment of self-criticism? Can you locate any bodily sensations that correspond to the self-criticism? Does the self-criticism elicit other emotions? Do you notice a part of yourself that is generating the self-criticism, and another part that feels criticized or wounded from the criticism? How do the different parts feel?
2. After noticing the self-criticism, you can respond to the underlying goal of the self-criticism in a validating and compassionate way, recognizing that you want to make progress in a particular area or were originally told this by someone else. Provide yourself with compassion and understanding for how the self-criticism emerged and how it feels.
3. Provide yourself with compassion about feeling criticized. Self-criticism hurts. It can feel hopeless and it adds another level of pain, because whatever we were criticizing ourselves about was probably already painful. Remind yourself that self-criticism is painful and you are on a journey of building a new pattern of relating to yourself (Turow, 2020).

### **Tool #11: Spot the Success**

1. Identify several things you have done well today.

2. Examples:
3. Got out of bed.
4. Took vitamins/medication.
5. Brushed teeth.
6. Showered.
7. Prepared and ate breakfast.
8. Talked to a friend.
9. Went for a walk.
10. Paid bills.
11. Went to work.
12. Did laundry.
13. Took contacts out.
14. Used digital wellness app.
15. Did calming nighttime routine (Turow, 2017).

### **Tool #12: Waves of Intrusion**

1. When we consider intrusions as waves, it helps reassure us that they have an arc to them, and that they will not last forever. It can also help us from overidentifying with intrusions, and to build the “observer” stance and self-confidence that we can get through the wave.
2. Imagine a wave -- it arrives, builds, crests, and falls away. Imagine the sights, sounds, and smells of the wave gathering strength and receding.
3. Pair the wave image with a minimally distressing experience and observe the ebb and flow of the feeling.
4. Bring the wave perspective to intrusive symptoms: first to less intense ones, then to more intense intrusions (Turow, 2017).

### **Tool #13: Center and Ground Meditation**

1. Close your eyes and take three slow breaths.
2. Visualize a light in the core of your body. What you consider your body’s core is up to you; some people locate it around the heart, others, the solar plexus or lower. What is important is that it makes sense to you as the location of your core.
3. Visualize a tendril of light growing down from your core toward the ground. See it reach down through the surface, deep into the earth’s core. Visualize your tendril of energy meeting the energy of the earth.

Draw some of the earth's energy up that tendril as if it were a straw, bringing it up into your body. Let the energy of the earth fill you.

4. If you are tired or low on energy, you can use this earth energy to replenish or rebalance yourself.

### **Tool #14: Compassionate Mindfulness**

1. Check in with your physical and emotional sensations right now, at this moment.
2. Notice the pain with a sense of kindness toward the pain, a spirit of care. You can stay with it, and offer it to your company, your kind presence. You might notice any sensations or changes that accompany observing your pain kindly.
3. Visualize holding the pain in your hands with tenderness. You might consider ways to soothe this pain -- by petting or patting it or giving the pain a hug. You can try to comfort the pain with words as well (e.g. "I am so sorry you are feeling this pain. I care about you. I am here to help. I can see how hard this is, and I want to take care of you and help you through this" (Turow, 2017).

### **Other Tools:**

1. Work toward finding balance in your life.
2. Be authentic with yourself and others.
3. Create a visualization to use when you feel overwhelmed.
4. Create a sacred space in your home.
5. Write a daily journal entry or guided journal entry with the hopes of learning who you are and what your values are.
6. Begin a commonplace journal with a collection of quotes that resonate with you.
7. Create a vision board with a collection of images, quotations, and other mixed media.
8. Write daily affirmations.
9. Organize your space and focus on not creating clutter with unwanted objects. Surround yourself with things you love.
10. Accept your limits.
11. Set healthy boundaries with others and recognize those who knock down those boundaries. Reassess these relationships.
12. Take care of your body.
13. Try to reduce the guilt associated with your self-care.

14. Explore your spiritual beliefs and connect with those beliefs, recognizing you are entitled to have any beliefs you have.

### **References**

- LaDyne, R. (2020). *The mind-body stress reset: Somatic practices to reduce overwhelm and increase well-being*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Harvard Health Publishing. (2020). *Learning diaphragmatic breathing*. Retrieved from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/lung-health-and-disease/learning-diaphragmatic-breathing>
- Healthline. (2020). *Box breathing*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/health/box-breathing>
- Turow, R. G. (2017). *Mindfulness skills for trauma and PTSD: Practice for recovery and resilience*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.
- Handout created by Samantha Willis, M.Ed., LPC, NCC, Registered Play Therapist