



Emotional Skills Course—Session 4

Mindful observation of Emotions and Thoughts

Mindfulness to Current Emotion

Myths about Emotions

Mindfulness Describe Skill

Skills Practice for the week:

Mindfulness to Current Emotion

Reflect on overall learning, plan how to continue
using skills

“Emotion regulation” is a term used to describe a person’s ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience. People unconsciously use emotion regulation strategies to cope with difficult situations many times throughout each day. Most of us use a variety of emotion regulation strategies and are able to apply them to different situations in order to adapt to the demands of our environment. Some of these are healthy, some are not.

When you're emotional, you don't have to respond right away. Here are some ways to begin practicing:

1. Observe your thoughts in a non-judgmental way. You don't have to push them away or change them. Watch them float by like clouds in the sky.
2. Describe your experience and thoughts without judging them. For example, "I am angry, and I feel my stomach tightening."
3. Focus on the present. Bring yourself into this moment
4. Feel your emotions. Experience your feelings, but don't try to control or change them.
5. Ask yourself what you feel is true in your wise mind.



Psychologists refer to the tendency to avoid unwanted experiences as **Experiential Avoidance**, and this process can actually lead to greater anxiety and a reduced quality of life.

The problem with avoidance is that it can often produce the very results that you are trying to avoid. For example, a common theme with experiential avoidance is this type of anxious cycle:



Letting Go of Emotional Suffering: Mindfulness of Your Current Emotion

Guided Mindfulness Practice—Practicing Mindfulness to Current Emotion

First, take a breath as deeply and slowly as possible in through your nose, then breathe out, slowly and controlled out of your nose, pausing slightly before inhaling again.

Now, as you take a second breath, just notice the emotion you are experiencing right now. Label that emotion by its name as you exhale.

As you continue to breathe in and out, I want you to imagine that your emotion is an ocean wave rolling in from sea and you are sitting upon the shore watching the wave of emotion, just observing it. As you watch the wave of emotion, notice the intensity of it. Is it like an incoming tide, full and intense or is it a low tide wave gently lapping upon the shore? Just notice its intensity without judging it or losing sight of your breath.

You are simply an observer. If you have an urge to respond or react to the emotion, that is okay. Just notice the urge and try to turn your mind back toward observing your emotion.

Now bring your awareness to your body. What does it feel like in your body as you observe your emotion? Are your muscles tense or relaxed? Just notice the sensations the emotion causes, again without either judging or responding to any urges. You are just observing. Continue breathing deeply and slowly until you are ready to bring your awareness back into the room.

OBSERVE YOUR EMOTION

- NOTE its presence.
- Step BACK.
- Get UNSTUCK from the emotion.

EXPERIENCE YOUR EMOTION FULLY

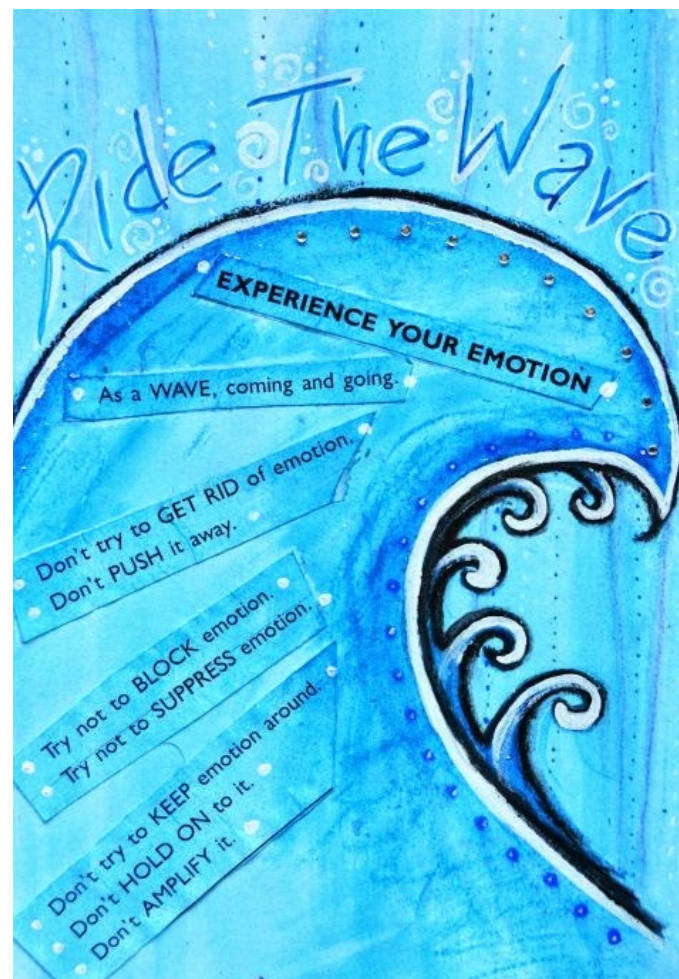
- As a WAVE, coming and going.
- Try not to BLOCK emotion.
- Try not to PUSH the emotion AWAY.
- Don't try to KEEP the emotion around.
- Don't try to INCREASE the emotion.
- Just be a witness to your emotion.

REMEMBER: YOU ARE NOT YOUR EMOTION

- Do not ACT on the sensation of urgency.
- Remember when you have felt DIFFERENT.
- Describe your emotion by saying "I have the feeling of _____", rather than, "I am _____."
- Notice OTHER feelings that you have at the same time you feel the strong emotion.

PRACTICE RESPECTING, LOVING YOUR EMOTION

- Don't JUDGE your emotion.
- Practice WILLINGNESS with your emotion.
- Radically ACCEPT your emotion.



What makes it hard to regulate emotions?

Biology

Some people are born feeling emotions more strongly than others.

Hormones can change how we manage emotions.

Lack of skill

Some people don't learn how to regulate their emotions when growing up.

Reinforcement of emotional behaviour

Our environment and the people around us may reward us when we are highly emotional, or punish us when we regulate our emotions well.

Emotional overload

We may be so overwhelmed by an emotion that our skills breakdown – we can't think, follow instructions or work out what to do next.

Emotion myths

Beliefs about emotions might get in the way of our ability to regulate emotions.

Emotion Myths?

There is a right way to feel in every situation

Challenge: _____

Letting others know that I am feeling bad is a weakness

Challenge: _____

Negative feelings are bad and destructive

Challenge: _____

Being emotional means being out of control

Challenge: _____

If others don't approve of my feelings, I obviously shouldn't feel the way I do

Challenge: _____

Acting on your emotions is the mark of a truly free individual

Challenge: _____

My emotions are who I am

Challenge: _____

Emotions should always be trusted

Challenge: _____

The 'Describe' Mindfulness Skill

Mindfully **Observing** means to just notice the thing we are focusing on—without adding a story. **Describe is putting words to what we Observe**, whether that's a sensation, emotion or thought.

To practice the Describe mindfulness skill **we describe by just sticking to the facts**, without adding our own interpretations or assumptions. When we Describe, we label emotions as emotions, thoughts as thoughts and sensations as sensations, without adding any:

- Opinions
- Labels
- Concepts
- Assumptions
- Judgements



The **Describe** mindfulness skill is a tool to help us *not* mistake our every thought or feeling for a fact. *For example:* Feeling like you are unlovable doesn't mean that it's true. Describe helps us not jump to conclusions that make us feel bad about ourselves or our relationships without checking the facts.

An example of **Describe** in action

Imagine you're at a coffee shop with a good friend.

Your friend keeps shifting in their seat and turning their head while you talk which makes you feel anxious. You then begin to interpret their behaviour and jump to conclusions, like they're annoyed with you, or bored, or they don't like you anymore.

If you mistake your interpretation of their behaviour as factual, you may start to get angry or hurt, thinking "*What did I do wrong, why are they mad at me?*" Or "*This always happens, my friends turn on me, I can't trust anyone,*" creating a painful story in your head that changes the way you interact with your friend.

The Describe mindfulness skill keeps you from weaving negative (or positive) stories about what you notice without checking the facts.

The facts in this example are that your friend is shifting in their seat and turning their head – that's it.

Sticking with the facts might make you curious about what's going on with your friend, prompting you to talk with them about what you're noticing. Maybe their back hurts or they're worried about running into an ex, or something completely different.

Whatever your friend tells you, you've saved yourself a lot of unnecessary suffering by not buying into your perception of the facts.

Mindfully Describe—Practice

Taking an activity we're all familiar with, mindfully describe the process.

Include each stage including actions, sounds, smells, touch, etc. Describe aloud, taking turns to develop the narrative.



The Inner Critic

Lots of us feel that our psychological problems are related to low self-esteem, feeling negative and judgemental towards ourselves—especially when we fail or things don't go as we planned. If we have experienced criticism when growing up, from teachers, parents or maybe our peers, these harsh words can become internalised into what is often called our 'inner critic', a harsh bullying voice that undermines our confidence and punishes us when we are less than perfect.



Attempts to build self esteem have been used in schools and colleges to try to counteract the impact of our inner critics and free us of those harsh judgemental and doubting voices.

The Problem with Self-Esteem. Self-esteem refers to how positively we view ourselves. The idea of being 'average' is for most people a painful thought. Our super-competitive society constantly judges people on their quality of attractiveness, wealth, intelligence and popularity—amongst other things. Building self-esteem requires people to view themselves as better than average - even though **most of us will be in the average range for most things**. Self-esteem often requires a comparison to others: to feel that we're "better" than other people in some way. This can work when things are going well, but self-esteem tends to plummet when things go badly!

Self-esteem versus self-compassion

Self-compassion is different. Self-compassion requires no comparison to others, but rather involves being warm and understanding toward yourself - even at times of failure. Self-compassion is available whether you are feeling up or down. In fact, it is often stronger when things are not going your way. Psychologists think that self-compassion works because it deactivates the threat system (associated with feelings of insecurity, defensiveness, and the limbic system) and activates the self-soothing system (associated with feelings of secure attachment and safeness).

Ideas for practicing self-compassion

Identify and challenge beliefs and myths that get in the way of showing kindness to yourself. For many, self-compassion is associated with all those bad "self" terms: self-pity, self-serving, self-indulgent, self-centred, just plain selfish. We may believe that if we aren't blaming and punishing ourselves for something, we risk becoming a 'bad person' or an egotist. We may have thoughts that we don't deserve compassion.



Spend time remembering that we aren't really alone in our suffering—that hardship and struggle are deeply embedded in the human condition.

Practice acceptance, of the imperfection of life, of the imperfection of ourselves. Rather than trying to push away negative thoughts, accept that they come and go in everyone's minds. Label them: 'I'm having a self-critical thought'. Mindfully allow them to pass, don't judge yourself for having them. Don't hold on to them. Remind yourself that having a thought doesn't make it real.

Practice speaking to yourself with a compassionate voice - especially when things are difficult or go wrong. Allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling. Acknowledge your painful feelings. Speak kindly to yourself.

Giving yourself permission to be human is one way to accept your flaws, and remind yourself that you're not alone in being imperfect.

For resources and ideas visit: <https://self-compassion.org>

Module 4 Skills Practice							
Skills Plan	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Mindfulness to Current Emotion							
How did it go?							
Reflect on overall learning							
How did it go?							

Mindfulness Of Your Current Emotion: Letting Go Of Emotional Suffering

Identify a negative emotional reaction this week and practice the following steps:

1. Briefly describe the situation leading to your emotion:

2. Name the Emotion:

3. Observe your emotion.

Step back from the emotion and describe the experiences (i.e. thoughts, urges, body sensations and what parts of your body are involved):

4. Identify and describe any parts of the experience that come and go like a wave (e.g., thoughts, body sensations, urges), and describe your efforts to let them come and go without trying to push away or cling to these experiences:

5. Explain how it is that you are not your emotion and how you can have an emotional urge without acting on it:

6. How long did it take for your worry about this emotion to go down?

7. Describe parts of your emotional reaction that you are open to accepting:

8. Rate how much you were suffering from this emotion before and after practicing this skill (0-100; 0 = no suffering, 100 = extreme suffering).

a. Pre: _____

b. Post: _____



Mindful Listening

Most of the time we are surrounded by a whole range of environmental noises and most of them barely register in our awareness.

Much like the noise inside our minds, external noises often go unnoticed. The noise in our minds and the noises in the world around us both form an invisible backdrop to our lives.

Stop and notice some of the sounds around you right now.... The traffic passing by, distant voices, the birds outside. All these sounds present you with an opportunity to practice mindful listening.

Let the sounds you hear be your anchor to the present moment. Don't judge what you hear or analyse the sounds, just listen, observe and experience them. If you become restless or impatient, notice these feelings and allow them, but don't react to them.

Stay with the sounds.

Listen intently, but without straining.

This is all about being "here and now" - nothing more.



Practicing Loving Kindness

Find a comfortable posture ideally sitting straight, alert and supported. Find a soft gaze just ahead. Take a few deep breaths. Bring your mind and body into a calm state and try to feel your contact with the surface on which you are sitting.

Becoming aware of the present moment, start thinking about someone with who you share an emotional connection – it may be a partner, child, parent, or friend. Notice how you feel as you start thinking about this person for who you feel so strongly.

Next, wish something good for that person. You could use words like – *‘I wish happiness for you’, ‘I wish that you are always loved’, ‘I wish you know that I will always be there for you’.*

As you wish these things for the person, try to imagine yourself telling this in person, and think about how the other person would have reacted.

Now, holding the same feelings you have towards this person you care for, turn your mind towards yourself.

Repeat the words to yourself in silence, and complete awareness – *“May I be peaceful,” “May I be happy,” “May I be safe.”*

Pause for a while to contemplate what the words truly mean and try to gauge how they are making you feel inside.

Take your own time to do this and remember that there is nothing right or wrong here.

