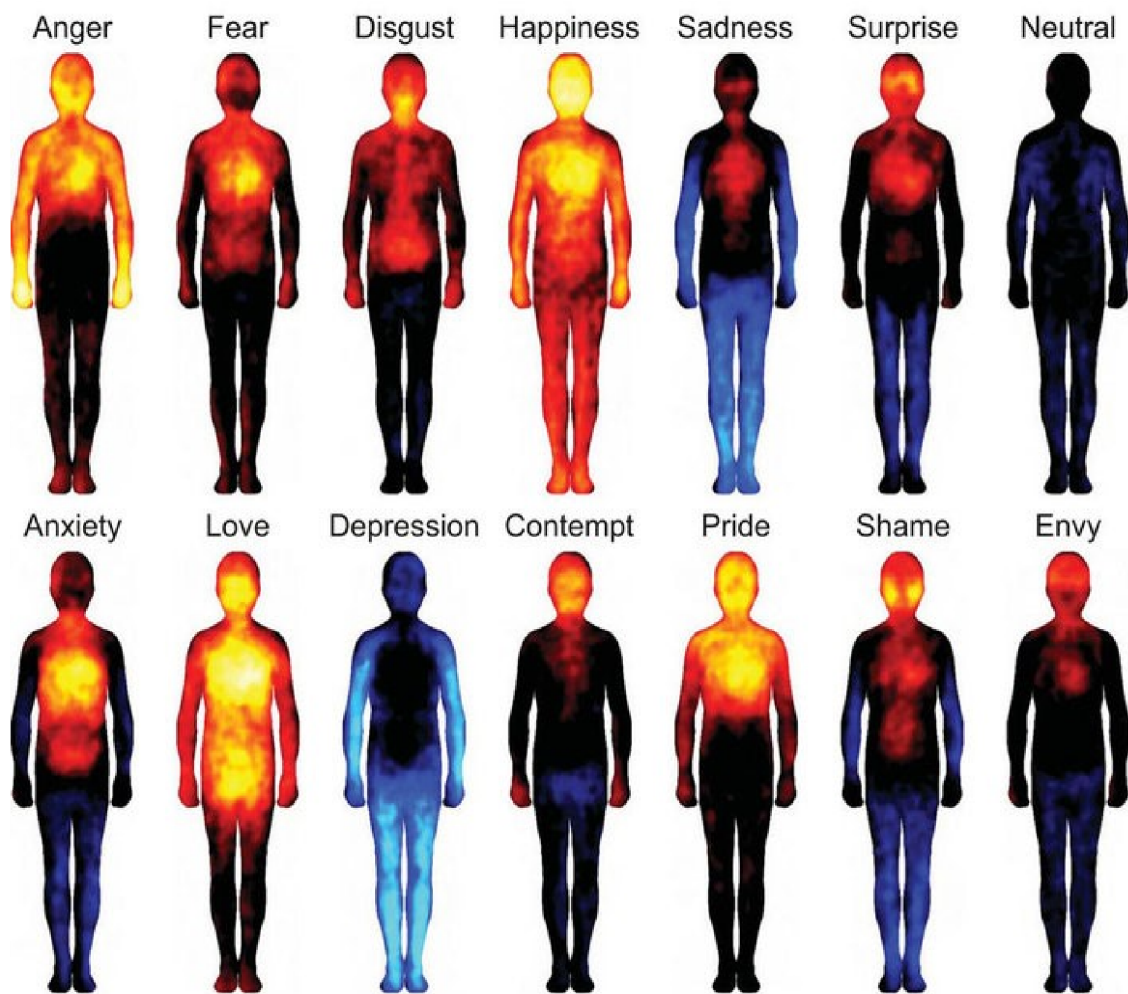




## Emotional Skills Course



# Group Agreement

- Phones on silent.
- We ask that you have your video cameras on if possible and mics on mute when not speaking.
- We will do our best to come to everyone during discussions, but we do have to be mindful of time.
- Please can we ask that you be mindful of what you say so we can keep everyone safe. So, we ask, for example, not to talk about past traumas, abuse and self harm, drugs etc.
- Free from distractions.
- If anyone is struggling or feels uncomfortable with the topic of conversation, please take a few minutes away from the group. You can also use the numbers on the following page.
- Confidentiality. Please ensure that your space is confidential and you do not have others in the room with you. This means you can feel safe in the sharing of knowledge. It is important not to disclose any information that you do not feel comfortable sharing with the group.
- All discussions are kept confidential and are not discussed outside of the group setting.



# Useful helplines and crisis support

**Mindline (24/7):** 01823 276892

**Shout (24/7):** Text SHOUT to 85258

**Samaritans (24/7):** 116 123

**Life threatening/emergency situations (24/7):** 999

**Urgent medical help and advice but not a life-threatening situation (24/7):** 111

## Local Crisis Spaces in Somerset to get out of hours support:

**Taunton (Mind in Somerset):** Monday – Sunday: 6PM – 11:00PM Saturday and Sunday 12-4PM

*Sussex Lodge, 44 Station Rd, Taunton Somerset TA1 1NS*

**Yeovil (Mind in Somerset):** Monday – Sunday: 6PM – 11:00PM Saturday and Sunday 12-4PM

*Yeovil Foyer, Peter St, Yeovil BA20 1PN*

**Bridgwater (Second Step):** Friday – Monday: 6PM – 11:00PM

*Town hall, High St, Bridgwater, TA6 3BL*

**Mendip (Second Step):** Sunday – Monday 6PM- 11PM

Please phone **01823 276 892** before so they know that you are coming, and note that they cannot take anyone under eighteen or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Due to health and safety procedures they cannot guarantee there is an accessible toilet facility on site.

Further information: <https://www.mindinsomerset.org.uk/get-support/crisis-space/>





## **Emotional Skills Course—Session 1**

The Limbic System  
Goals Of Mindfulness Practice  
Mindful Breathing  
Mindful Observing

**Skills Practice for the week:**  
Mindful Breathing Daily Practice  
Mindful Observing Daily Practice

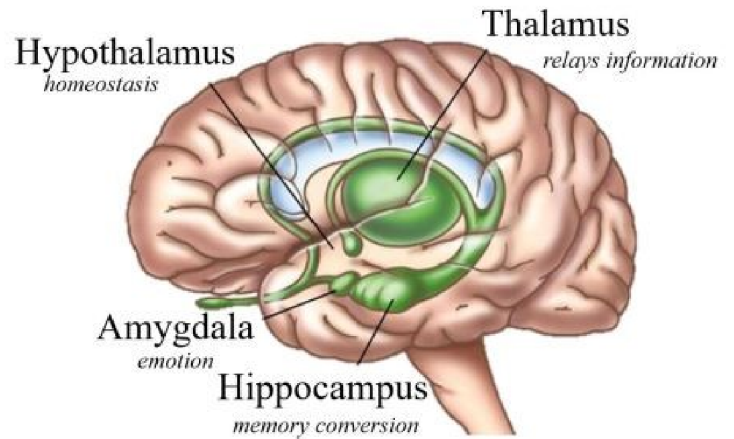
## Our brains are the products of millions of years of evolution

Different parts of our brain work together to create our perceptions and feelings.

Our mental and emotional characteristics exist because they were useful or even essential in helping our ancestors to survive.

Our brilliant brains have helped humans to become the most successful creatures on the planet, but they also make us vulnerable to difficulties with our emotions and thoughts.

## The Limbic System



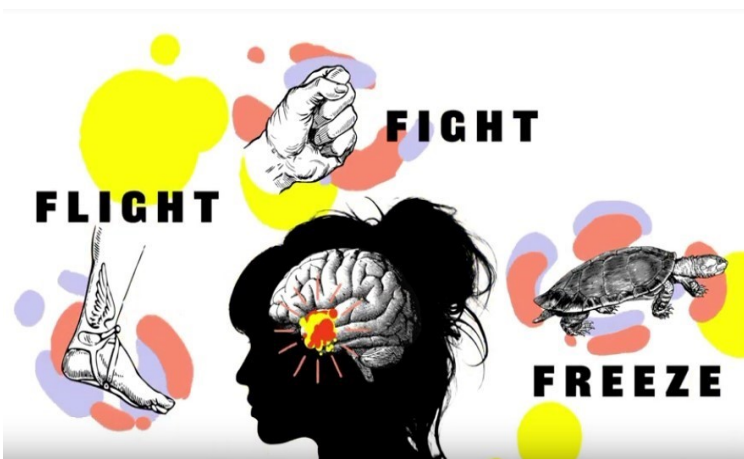
In the limbic brain there is the amygdala, which registers memories of pleasant or frightening experiences and is closely linked to emotions.

The hypothalamus plays a role in triggering the sympathetic nervous system which is a part of any emotional reaction. The key features of this are the “survival” traits: e.g.: looking for signs of danger (through sounds, vision or smell); freezing, fleeing or fighting when sensing danger; being hyper focused and seeking safety.

Thousands of years ago we faced daily threats to our survival: tigers and other predators, cold, hunger, warring tribes.

In today’s world, most triggers for anxiety are more subtle: conflict with people, taking exams, career uncertainty, financial stressors.

Our bodies don’t know the difference: our physiological and psychological responses are the same today as they were thousands of years ago.





# Fight or Flight Response

**Lightheaded/dizzy.** Result of our faster breathing. It's ok - take a long deep breath.

**Breathing faster and shallower.** Body is trying to get more oxygen. It's ok - take a long deep breath into your belly and breath out slowly.

**Tummy upset/churning.** Your body is redirecting blood flow to your muscles. It's ok - take a long deep breath and have a drink of water.

**Jelly Legs or tingling in feet and hands.** Blood is going to larger muscles. It's ok - use breathing to relax the body.

**Racing thoughts - mind is going to worst case scenario.** It's ok - your mind is looking out for threats and trying to help you prepare. Focus on your senses and your surroundings to calm thoughts.

**Tight throat and chest.** Your body is tensing. It's ok - use Progressive Muscle Relaxation to release tension in the body.

**Heart rate increasing.** Body trying to pump blood to muscles. It's ok - you are not in danger. Take long deep breaths.

**Feeling hot/sweating.** Side effect of adrenaline response, body is trying to cool down. It's ok - use breathing to relax the body.

iaspt  
International Association of Applied Sport Psychology  
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What we learn in our childhoods, with their unique experiences and caregivers, can cause us problems as adults.

Harsh childhood conditions that are threatening, involve extreme stress, neglect, or poor responses from caregivers, shape our brains in ways that can make our limbic systems more reactive, leading to problems regulating our emotions.

Through repetition and practice we can change our brain's stress responses as adults. Evidence based practices include:

Mindfulness practice has been shown to reduce the reactivity and dominance of the amygdala.

Tai chi decreases anxiety and depression and improves cognition. There is growing evidence that Yoga has similar benefits. Tai Chi may also help us manage symptoms of some chronic diseases, such as fibromyalgia and COPD.

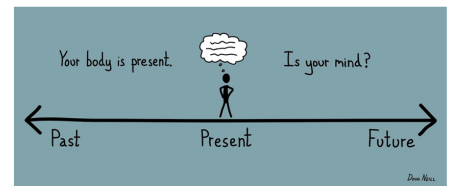
Paying mindful attention to the breath calms the amygdala and the sympathetic nervous system. 3

**Set your mind and body free with tai chi.**

**When you are mindful, you are able to savor the pleasures of life, and you will become fully engaged in whatever you're doing.**

## Goals of Core Mindfulness skills

- Reduce suffering and increase happiness
- Increase control of your mind - taking hold of your mind
- Experience reality as it is



Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.

Mindfulness is a practice, do one thing at a time and bring your mind back when it wanders.

The most basic way to do mindful breathing is to focus your attention on your breath, the inhale and exhale. You can do this while standing, but ideally you'll be sitting or even lying in a comfortable position. Your eyes may be open or closed, or you can maintain a soft gaze, with your eyes partly closed but not focusing on anything in particular. It can help to set aside a time for this exercise, but it can also help to practice it when you're feeling particularly stressed or anxious. Experts believe a regular practice of mindful breathing can make it easier to do in difficult situations.

Sometimes, especially when trying to calm yourself in a stressful moment, it might help to start by taking a deep inhale through your nostrils (3 seconds), hold your breath (2 seconds), and a long exhale through your mouth (4 seconds). Otherwise, observe each breath without trying to adjust it; it may help to focus on the rise and fall of your chest or the sensation through your nostrils. As you do so, you may find that your mind wanders, distracted by thoughts or bodily sensations. That's OK. You can notice that this is happening and try to gently bring your attention back to your breath.

[https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/mindful\\_breathing](https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/mindful_breathing)

Another way to practice mindfulness is to observe: paying attention to your sensations as you complete a task. When you notice your mind wandering, gently bring it back to the task.

You can do this with anything which allows you to focus—distracting activities such as watching TV or scrolling through the internet are difficult to do mindfully because, by their very nature, they pull your attention away. Household chores, eating, making a drink, colouring, walking, showering, brushing your teeth and listening to music can all be done in a way where you focus on the sensations in your body and bring your mind to attend to the activity you are doing.

Our minds naturally move to the past, thinking about things that have happened, or move to the future as we plan what we will do. We also regularly make judgements: whether we are doing things right, worrying about what other people think or if something negative will happen. When your mind does this, notice: 'I'm having a judgemental thought' or 'my mind has wandered', and gently return your attention to the thing you are observing.

**Module 1 Skills Practice**

<b>Skills Plan</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
<b>Mindfulness Activity 1</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							
<b>Mindfulness Activity 2</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							





## **Emotional Skills Course—Session 2**

TIPP skill

Mindfulness Five Things

Window of Tolerance

PLEASE

### **Skills Practice for the week:**

TIPP skill

Three elements of PLEASE



# Crisis Survival - TIPP



## T – Temperature

Change your body temperature using cold water or ice.



## I – Intense exercise

Walk quickly. Climb the stairs. Jump up and down. Run on the spot.



## P – Paced breathing

Breathe in to the count of 5, hold then breath out to the count of 7.



## P – Paired muscle relaxation

Tense your muscles when breathing in and relax them when breathing out.

(Linhart, 2014)

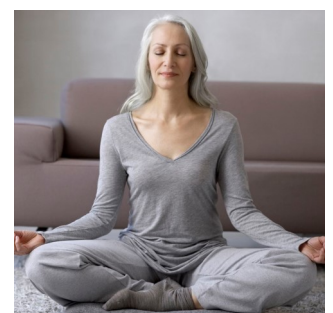
The Tipp Skills are used for taking down your levels of emotion quickly. The techniques focus on activating your parasympathetic nervous system, in order to shift your arousal state.

Practicing TIPP can help if you have problems sleeping due to feeling stressed.

Regular use can take down levels of reactivity overall.

## Research into techniques to activate the vagus nerve is underway. Some preliminary findings have shown positive results:

- In one study on 61 people, tai chi increased heart rate variability and, therefore, likely vagus activation.
- Chanting, energetic singing, and choral singing may stimulate the vagus nerve indirectly, especially in people who are able to relax during the sessions.
- Cold exposure may stimulate the vagus nerve and rest-and-digest system.
- Some animal studies have looked at the potential effects of probiotics on the vagus nerve.
- Laughing may stimulate the vagus nerve and have other health benefits.
- Deep and slow breathing may boost vagus nerve activity and relaxation. Yogis say you should try to breathe from your belly at about 6 breaths per minute.
- Mild exercise stimulates gut flow in animals – and vagus nerve activation was needed to initiate this response. Thus, some scientists hypothesize that exercise may stimulate the vagus nerve.
- Positive thoughts and social connection may stimulate the vagus nerve and promote joy, serenity, and compassion.
- Studies suggest that at least three types of meditation may stimulate the vagus nerve indirectly. In small studies, loving-kindness meditation, mindfulness meditation, and Om chanting increased heart rate variability, which is linked to vagal tone.



## MINDFULNESS—5 things

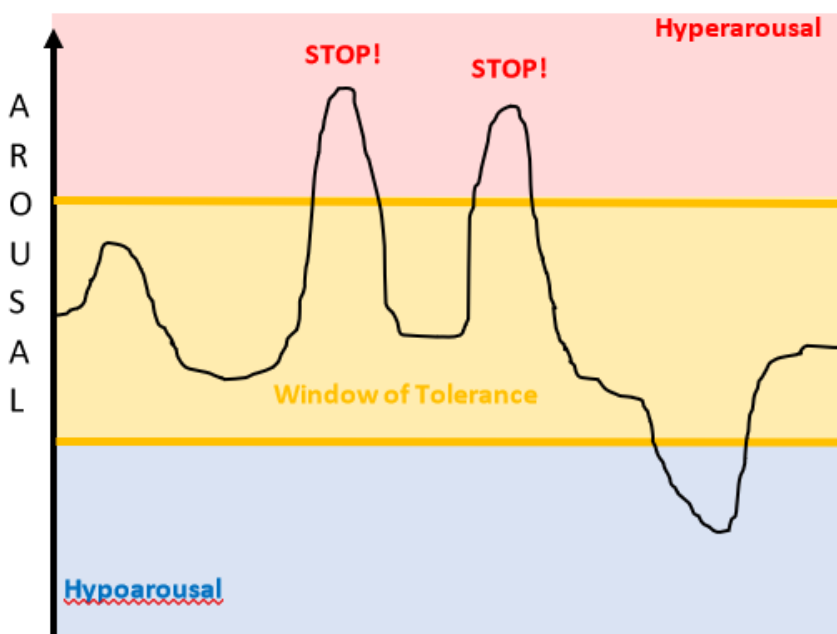
To help feel grounded and more able to think properly



## Increasing our Window of Tolerance

**Overwhelm!** Choices are lost and your body wants to **fight or run away**. Reactions just take over.

Everyday things can shrink our window of tolerance, such as not getting enough sleep or not eating much.



Here, you feel like you **can cope**. You may feel stressed and you will experience emotions, but they don't bother you too much. This is the **ideal place** to be!

Our window of tolerance can get bigger by taking care of our basic needs. This helps things to feel more manageable.

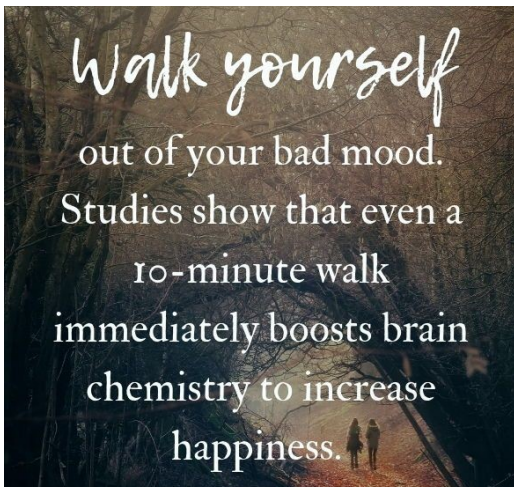
**Numb, disconnected, freeze.**

Here your body **shuts down**. You don't make choices about how you act, your reactions take over.

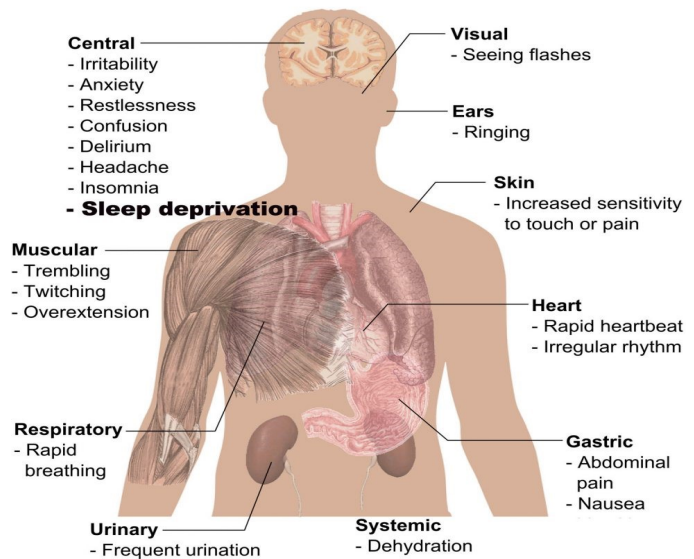
## PLEASE Skill

For reducing vulnerability to overwhelming emotional reactions

- Treat **P**hysical **L** illness
- Balance **E**ating
- Avoid mood-**A**ltering drugs
- Balance **S**leep
- Get **E**xercise



## SIDE EFFECTS OF CAFFEINE



Taking care of your physical self can make you less vulnerable to overwhelming emotions and disconnection.

What three things can you change this week to better protect yourself and help yourself to manage better when things are challenging?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Module 2 Skills Practice**

Skills Plan	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>TIPP skill</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							
<b>3 elements of PLEASE</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							

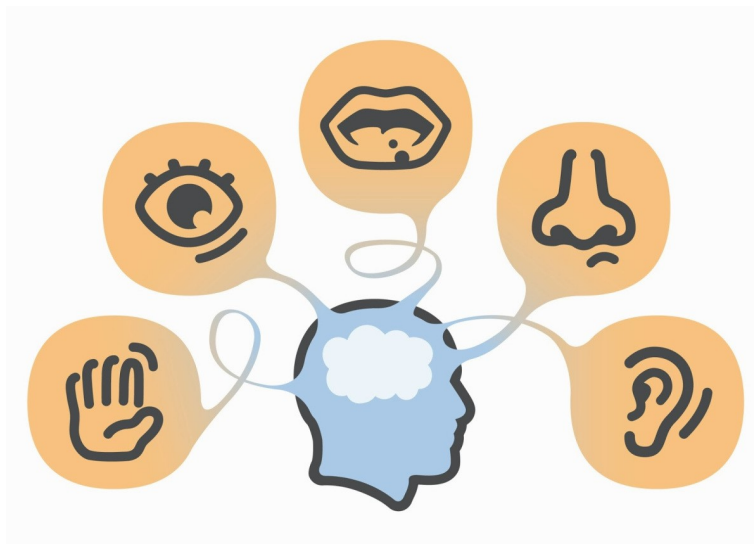
## Mindfulness practice—grounding with the five senses

### *Notice five, four, three, two, one.*

This is a simple exercise to centre yourself and engage with your environment in the here and now.

Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Look around and notice five things that you can see. You may want to give them a descriptive label, for example ‘a brown chair, a white ceiling’.
2. Listen carefully and notice four things that you can hear.
3. Notice three things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
4. Notice two things that you can smell.
5. Notice one thing that you can taste.



Reflect on how this practice makes you feel. Is it easy or hard? Does your mind wander or can you keep a mindful focus?





## **Emotional Skills Course—Session 3**

Recognising Emotions

The Wave of Emotion

STOP skill

Using techniques to self soothe

### **Skills Practice for the week:**

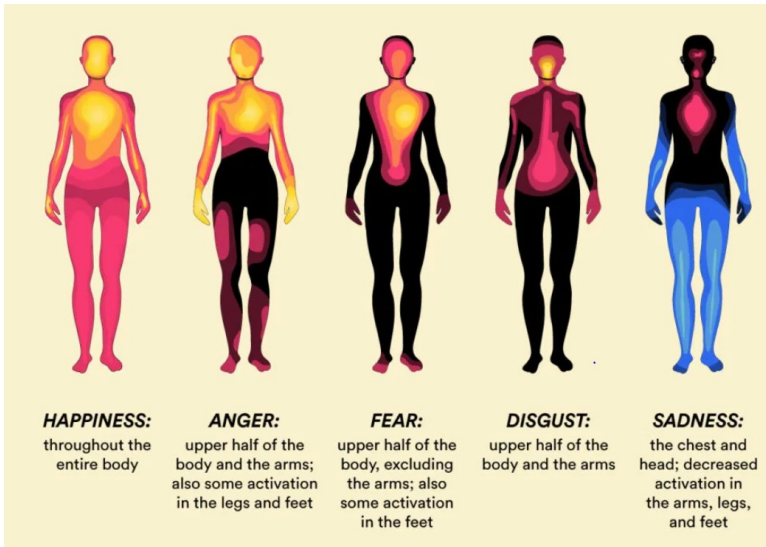
Identifying the wave of emotion

Rehearse STOP

## Recognising emotions

Emotions help us communicate, make decisions, warn us of danger and motivate us to get what we want or need. People who lose the emotional processing areas of the brain become unable to function effectively.

Reminding ourselves that our emotions are natural and that our feelings are part of being human can help us to be kinder and less judgemental to ourselves.



These are some of our core emotions.

What others do we regularly feel?

List some below:

Emotions motivate us to behave in certain ways—called <i>action urges</i> .		
Emotion	Purpose of the emotion	Emotion action urge
Anger	Helps us overcome barriers to getting what we want. Helps us assert ourselves.	
Sadness	Helps us hold close the things we care about. Protects us from loss.	
Fear	Helps us spot danger and escape from it.	

### Important questions to ask ourselves:

What is the emotion I'm feeling? Can I label it? Where can I feel it in my body? Do I have an urge attached—what is it making me want to do? Can I sit with this emotion for a moment—not try to suppress or hold on to it.

This breathing exercise can help you to reduce stress in the moment. If you practice it regularly, you may also find that it helps you feel calmer generally. The more you practice, the more effective this technique becomes.

- We call this exercise 7/11 breathing, because you breathe in for a count of 7 and out for 11.
- If there is ever a time when you find that breathing for that long isn't possible, it doesn't matter. As long as your out breath is much longer than your in breath, it will still work. We call it 7/11 because it sounds like the shop opening hours, so people are more likely to remember it.
- Aim your breath deep into your stomach. It might help if you hold your hands on your stomach, so you can feel it swelling up as you breathe in.
- Allow your lungs to empty, then breathe deeply into your stomach while counting to 7.
- Once you reach 7, breathe out gently to the count of 11, so that the out breath is much longer
- Repeat this for 2 to 3 minutes or until you feel calm and relaxed



## BE KIND TO YOUR MIND



### 7-11 Breathing Technique

Step 1:



Count internally from 1-7 on the inhale

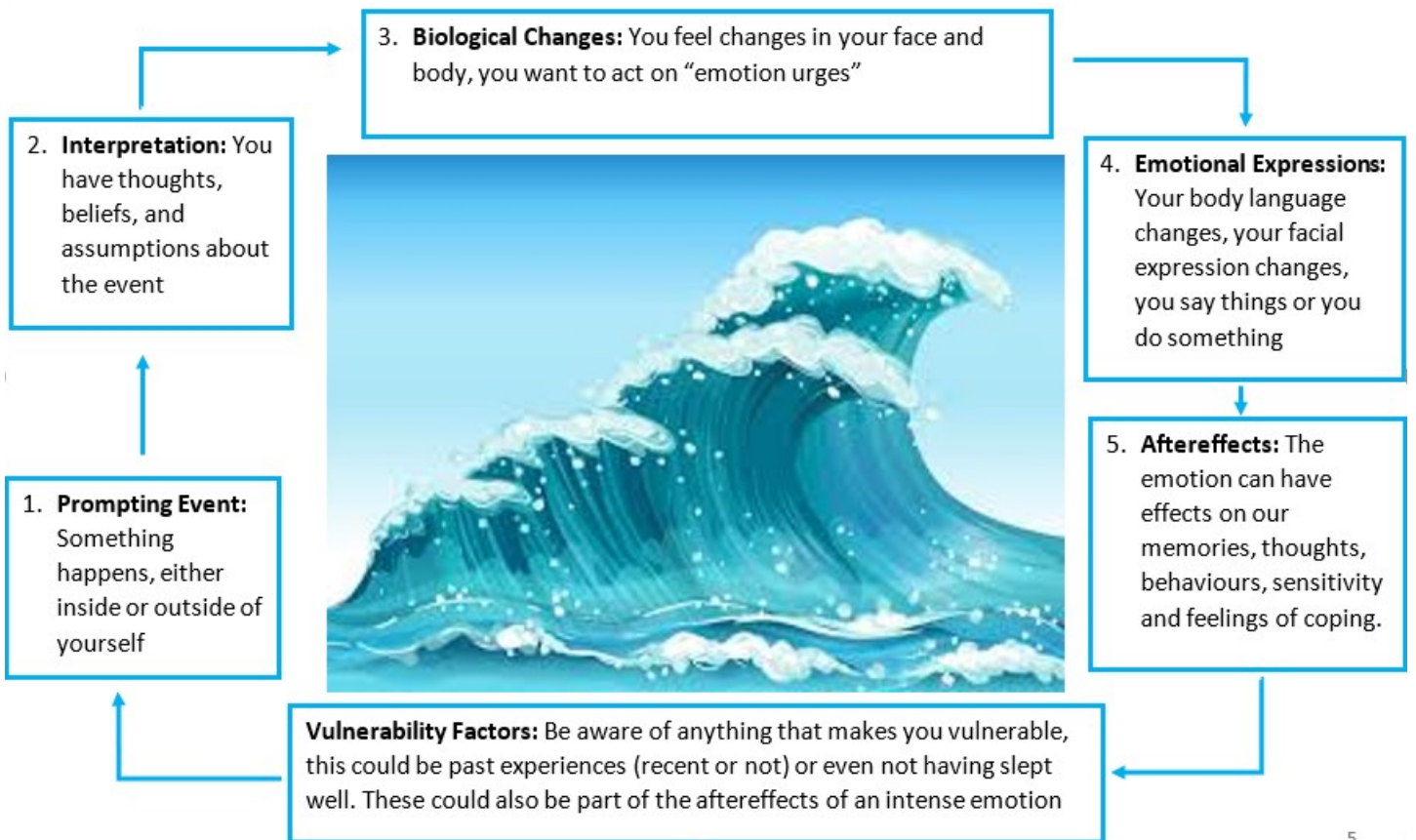
Step 2:



Count internally from 1-11 on the exhale

#### Use this technique to:

- Destress
- Relax
- Re-energize
- Reduce Anxiety



## The STOP Skill: How to Not Make a Bad Situation Worse



The STOP skill can be thought of as an “emergency mindfulness” skill to use when emotions are high.

The STOP skill can prevent a difficult moment from becoming the start of a bigger problem.

If you can anticipate an upcoming situation when you might need it, think through ahead of time what it would be like to use it.

A time this week when the STOP skill might be helpful is:

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	<b>DON'T REACT. STAY IN CONTROL.</b>
	<b>A STEP BACK. A DEEP BREATH. DON'T ACT IMPULSIVELY.</b>
	<b>WHAT ARE YOU FEELING OR THINKING? WHAT ARE OTHERS SAYING OR DOING?</b>
	<b>MINDFULLY THINK ABOUT YOUR GOALS &amp; ACTIONS.</b>

# Self-Soothe Using the Senses



## Sight

Look at the stars  
Watch the clouds  
Artwork or photos



## Sound

Gentle music  
White noise  
Nature sounds



## Smell

Essential oils  
Flowers  
A favourite scent



## Taste

Cup of tea  
Something sweet  
Your favourite food



## Touch

Soft comfy clothes  
Warm bath or shower  
Cuddles with pets



## Movement

Gentle rocking  
Swinging  
Stretching

The key thing to hold in mind is that self-soothing is most effective when it's done mindfully.

Bring your full attention to the experience, observing it fully with your senses.

Stay in the moment by bringing your attention back when it wanders.

Don't use things which remind you of distressing experiences.

See if you can participate fully in the experience, engaging with your mind and body.

## 7 things I could do to self-soothe using the senses:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_

The soothe system is activated by kindness and compassion, for ourselves and in relation to others.

Feeling compassion towards ourselves is good for us. It counteracts our 'inner critic', and improves our mental health.

It can be difficult to feel compassion towards ourselves - it can go against what we've been taught.

Some ways to show ourselves compassion:

Eat or drink something delicious **and** healthy— remind yourself that this is self-care.

Remind yourself that nobody's perfect It's natural to make mistakes—**everyone** does.

Do something just for you, because it makes you feel good.



Recognise when you do something well— and compliment yourself.



**Module 3 Skills Practice**

Skills Plan	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Identifying Wave of Emotion</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							
<b>STOP</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							



# Recognising the wave of emotion—practice at home

**3 Biological Changes:** What did you notice in your body or face? What did you want to do

**2 Interpretation:** What did you think, believe or assume about the situation?

**1 Prompting Event:** What happened just before?



**Vulnerability Factors:** What might have made you made you vulnerable to the emotion?

**4 Emotional Expressions:** What was your facial expression? What did you say and do? \_\_\_\_\_

**5 Aftereffects:** What effect did this have on your memory, emotions, behaviours and thoughts?

What happened before you **STOPped**?



**S**<sub>top</sub>

How did you **STOP**? What did you do?

**T**<sub>ake a step back</sub>

How did you **Take a step back**? What did you do?

**O**<sub>bserve</sub>

What did you **Observe** about yourself and the things around you?

**P**<sub>roceed mindfully</sub>

What did you do next? How did you **Proceed mindfully**?

What was the **outcome**? Did you notice anything different from using **STOP**?



## **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

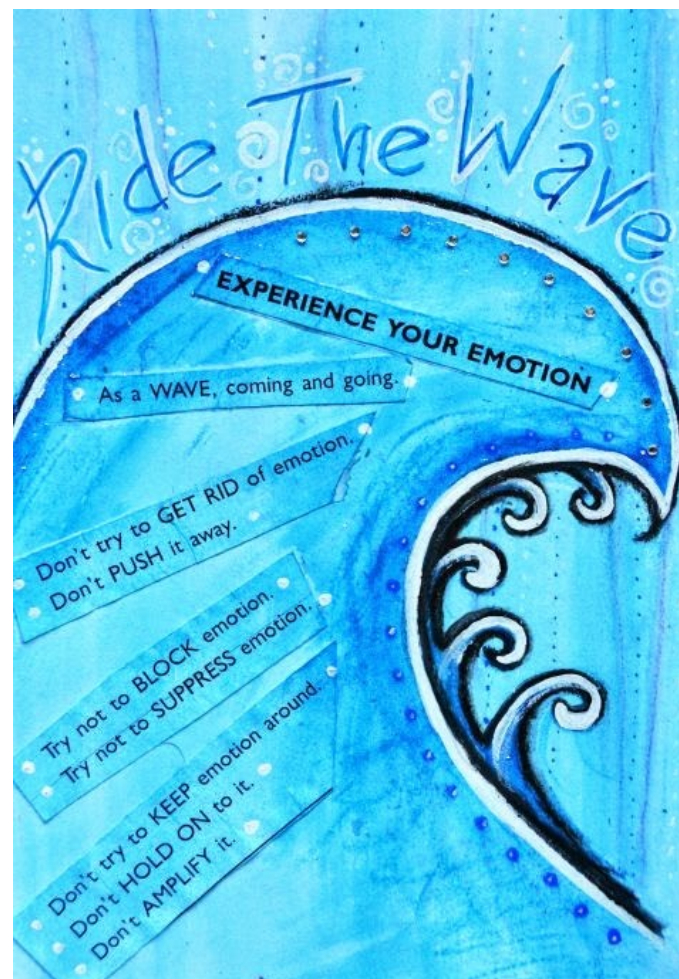
- As a WAVE, coming and going.
- Try not to BLOCK emotion.
- Try not to PUSH the emotion AWAY.
- Don't try to KEEP the emotion around.
- Don't try to INCREASE the emotion.
- Just be a witness to your emotion.

#### 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
<b>Mindfulness to Current Emotion</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							
<b>Reflect on overall learning</b>							
<b>How did it go?</b>							

## 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:

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2. Name the Emotion:

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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):

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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:

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

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

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

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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 do'nt 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.

