



**MINDFULNESS &  
MENTAL HEALTH**

**STAFF/TEACHERS**

# Contents and Introduction

This workshop content has been specifically designed for the use of staff/facilitators who are returning to work at school after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The techniques and exercises introduced here are designed to encourage the user to become aware of their actions, reactions and interactions with themselves and others. The resources provided here are aimed at supporting the staff/facilitator with the intention of creating a balanced and calm environment, so that they may feel supported, effectively support their colleagues and children in their class.

The intention of this workshop is to encourage a growth-mindset in the user, lowering levels of anxiety/stress and creating an opportunity for a bonding experience if practiced in a group. It is hoped that the use of mindful awareness will inspire consideration for use by other educators or care givers.

All of the following techniques can be practiced at any free moment during the day, unless recommended otherwise.

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**It is recommended that the individual starts the day with one exercise and finishes the day with one exercise in order to maintain balance of mind.**

# RESOURCES AND THEMES



## RESOURCES

### For Sensory Observation Exercises:

- A journal exercise book

### For Movement Exercises:

- A Timer (a phone timer is fine but the phone needs to be switched to flight mode to minimise external distractions.)

### For Breathing Exercises:

- A Timer (a phone timer is fine but the phone needs to be switched to flight mode to minimise external distractions.)

### For Visualisation Exercises:

- 'The Lake' written text (found under the Visualisation Technique heading)



## KEY THEMES

### • The following themes will be explored:

- Letting go of tension and anxiety through movement.
- Shifting focus to the present moment.
- Awareness of the changing states of our emotions.
- Understanding that all feelings are impermanent.
- Acceptance of feelings without trying/wanting to change them.
- Experience visualisation/imagination techniques.
- Experience how visualisation techniques can calm us down and allow us experience a feeling of peace.
- Understanding how our experience of positive aspects of visualisation can be used whenever we want.
- Awareness how our breathing pattern can effect our state of mind.
- Integrating breathing patterns into every-day activities.
- Improved awareness of the present moment.
- Awareness of the breath.
- Understanding how our body and our breathing are connected.
- Increased focus and decreased levels of anxiety.
- Openness and active listening without judgement.
- Creating stronger bonds in group dynamics.
- Space, trust and authenticity.
- Safe spaces communication.
- Space to build trength and security.

# CHALLENGES, GROUP SIZE & OUTCOMES

## POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

- Individuals who have suffered trauma or are vulnerable may find it difficult to connect with their feelings.
- External influences and duties may make it challenging to engage in the practice.

Advice and tips on how to manage some of these challenges can be found below, under 'Tips for Engaging in Mindfulness' (page 3 and 4.)

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

The practice of 'Mindfulness' is an awareness of the present moment. Often our mind is 'full' of other thoughts/feelings that take us away from the experience of this present moment.

When practicing mindfulness, we try to limit the amount of outside thoughts/feelings that interfere with our attention on the now, and bring our focus to the present.

## GROUP SIZE

It is recommended that the techniques are carried out individually or in small groups. To allow each person the time to be heard and express their experiences, it is recommended that the groups do not exceed 6 adults. Given the sensitivity of the current circumstances, it is recommended that groups are kept smaller to reduce the risk of cross-contamination. It is therefore necessary to take the government guidelines into consideration when assessing group sizes.

# TIPS FOR ENGAGING IN MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

Like learning anything new, it is important to keep up the continuity of practice in order to train the brain to focus on the 'now'. As such, Mindfulness activities should be practiced daily, at least once, in order to strengthen focus, improve concentration and curb any feelings of anxiety which may be present.

It is important that mindfulness is to be practiced without judgement. There is no 'correct' or 'incorrect' in mindfulness, as each individual's truth is unique to themselves.

Creating an environment where everyone is safe to engage in these practices is of utmost importance, not only for their own benefit, but as a leading example of how mindful living can be of benefit to others. Those individuals who feel that the practices raises personal underlying issues should remember the purpose of mindful practice which is to objectively view the ever changing state of emotions and to try bringing their attention to the present moment. The group exercise creates an environment where participants can openly share their experiences, feelings and any difficulties they may be experiencing. With an knowledge that this space exists, the participants will be supported and strengthened through to the active listening engagement of the other participants in the group.

Everyone should attempt to join in with the activities in whatever way they are able. Although, at first the process of introspection may be challenging, it is a poignant and necessary process in order to curb anxiety and the effect of external stressors have on our ability to behave calmly.

It is recommended that external stressors such as mobile phones are switched off or put on flight mode in order to minimise distractions.

As each individual begins the process of a mindfulness, they will begin to feel more comfortable accessing the emotions and experiences that come along with them. Sometimes these experiences can be challenging and sometimes they are joyous but again, it is important not to hold expectations. Remember that each participant will walk upon their path of awareness when they are ready to do so and allowing them the space to do so with sensitivity and support is of utmost importance. Remember that the process of being self-aware is a life-long process.



# AGREEMENTS FOR THE PRACTICE



It is a nice idea to set some agreements for yourself before entering into the mindfulness practice. Before beginning each mindfulness session, remind yourself of these in order to keep the practice strong and effective. If any difficulties/issues arise during the practice, remind yourself (or your colleague/s if working in a group) that in order to get maximum benefit, specific agreements need to be adhered to.

Here are some examples of some agreements that you could follow:

1. We respect our own opinions and those of other people.
2. We will listen to the experience and feelings of others and ourselves.
3. We will be silent.
4. We will allow space for other person finish explaining their experience before talking ourselves.
5. We will not laugh at other peoples contributions or experiences, we must acknowledge that our behaviour can have an impact on other peoples feelings.
6. We will try to remember that we are in a safe space.
7. We will remember that all the normal school rules apply.
8. We will keep our phone/radios/contact devices away from the practice area (or in flight mode if needed for the exercise) in order to give our full attention to the practice.
9. If we find the process difficult, we will attempt it later in the day or the following day. We will stay open to the practice and the process of introspection.
10. If I am struggling with something, I will in the practice, I will remember that I am not alone and share my difficulties, understanding that sharing and being heard can help heal the difficulties.

# MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES



## WALKING MEDITATION

This activity not only combines the physical activity of movement in order to help us calm our minds and thoughts, but it also focuses our attention on the present moment. Allowing ourselves to concentrate on what is happening now reduces anxiety. This exercise can be practiced with others but it is advisable to practice it alone given the current COVID-19 social distancing regulations.

### Outcomes:

- Improved awareness of the present moment.
- Awareness of the breath.
- Understanding how our body and our breathing are connected.
- Letting go of tension and anxiety through movement.
- Shifting focus to the present moment.

**Length of Activity:** 10-15 minutes

**Minimum Number of Students:**

1 person

### Set-Up

Individual to work on their own in a quiet space away from distractions.

### Materials

A timer (If using a phone timer, please make sure the phone is set to flight mode to avoid distractions)

### Interaction Point

Individual work.

**Please see next page for a step by step guide**



# MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES

## Step by Step:

1. Find yourself a quiet space with minimal or no distractions. This could be inside a classroom or outside in the playground. If you choose to work outside in the playground, please make sure that you are not going to be coming in to contact with any other people in order to maintain social distancing.
2. Set the timer to 10 minutes. (If using a phone timer, please make sure the phone is set to flight mode to avoid distractions)
3. Slowly, start walking forward. This can be around in a circle or in a straight line and back.
4. Bring your attention to your breath.
5. Keep your attention on your breath as you slowly walk, if it helps you can repeat 'in' as you breath in and 'out' as you breath out. (As you practice the technique more frequently, you do not have to use the mental verbalisation of the words 'in' and 'out'.)
6. Keep slowly walking and keep your attention on your breath.
7. Keep your movements small and subtle. This will keep your breath regular and calm.
8. The timer will sound after 10 minutes at which point you can stop walking and stop mentally verbalising 'in' and 'out' if you have been doing so.

## Reflection

Take a moment to sit down or standing where you are, verbalise 3 words that pop into your head, without any judgement of what these words are.



# SENSORY OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES



## DAILY JOURNALLING

Daily journalling helps us to become aware of our feelings and to see how our feelings can change throughout the day. The observation that our feelings are impermanent means that, in time, we are less likely to be reactive to them as we know that they will change. With this understanding, we attempt to not allow ourselves to get upset about something that will change, recognising that it will not last forever and the temptation to change the difficult feelings will cause us frustration and sadness.

### Outcomes:

- A continual awareness of the changing states of our emotions.
- Understanding that all feelings are impermanent. Sometimes feelings can cause us joy, but sometimes can cause us sadness, the important thing is to be aware of them but try not to react to them.
- Acceptance of feelings without trying/wanting to change them.
- Understanding that we will survive even if feelings are difficult.

### Length of Activity:

10 minutes every morning/ at the end of every day.

### Minimum Number of Students:

1 person

### Set-Up

Individual to sit on their own in a quiet space away from distractions

### Materials

A blank Journal or exercise book specifically for the use of mindfulness.

### Interaction Point

Individual work

**Please see next page for a step by step guide**

# SENSORY OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES

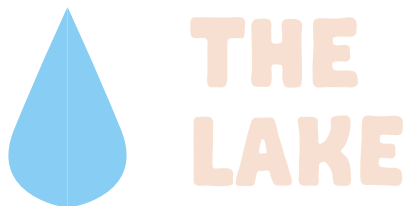
## Step by Step:

1. Open your journal to a double page and write the day of the week at the top.
2. Inhale and then exhale.
3. You can then start writing however you like, in whatever language you like, in whatever colour you like.
4. Write down:
  - Something that you are grateful for.
  - Something that is going well in your life right now.
  - Something that makes you smile/laugh/feel happy.
  - Something that is challenging.
  - Something you are have been struggling with and how you might attempt to tackle it in differently in the future.
  - Something you are proud of yourself for.
5. You can draw a picture on the opposite page, or you can doodle. You can even write more about how you feel if you would like. Be creative!

## Reflection

- Reflect on if there is anything you would like to write about tomorrow. If you are struggling, try focus on what you have done well and if there is anything you would like to do differently tomorrow and why.
- Use the time effectively, being aware of the changing states of emotions- keep creating!

# VISUALISATION TECHNIQUES



Visualisation techniques are extremely helpful when trying to calm down the central nervous system. Through the technique of visualisation, we are able to access our subconscious and creative dream state, allowing us fully relax and experience the journey that the visualisation takes us on. The power of imagination is an excellent tool for convincing the brain that we are experiencing what we are thinking of. That is why, thinking of joyful and peaceful things, brings us so much happiness.

## Outcomes:

- Experience the benefit of visualisation/imagination techniques.
- Understanding that visualisation and imagination can affect the way we feel.
- Experience how visualisation techniques can calm us down and allow us experience a feeling of peace.
- Understanding how our experience of positive aspects of visualisation can be used whenever we want.

## Length of Activity:

15-20 minutes

## Minimum Number of Students:

2+, please see maximum, as stated by the government guidelines

## Set-Up

Individual to sit on their own in a quiet space, away from distractions and where they cannot touch anyone else.

## Materials

None

## Interaction Point

- Individual work.
- 'Reader' of the visualisation reads to the participants, from a safe distance.

**Please see next page for a step by step guide**

# VISUALISATION TECHNIQUES

## Step by Step:

1. Out of the group of people who are there, a 'Reader' for the visualisation technique is agreed upon. This can be someone who, today, is feeling particularly neutral.
2. All other participants lie on the floor, keeping social distancing guidelines in to account.
3. The 'Reader', slowly reads the script on the following page to the participants.

## Reflection/ Closing Discussion

- The participants can go around and share their experiences of the visualisation. This can be lead by the 'Reader':

For example:

- Was anything difficult about the experience?
- What part did you enjoy the most?
- If you were going to give a word to describe how you feel now, after doing the practice, what word would you give to describe your current state?
- Has your state of mind changed since doing the practice?
- Remind the participants that they can return to their lake and this state of tranquillity at any time throughout the day, all the have to do is visualise their lake.



## 'THE LAKE' VISUALISATION SCRIPT

- Close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose, and then exhale through your mouth, letting out a sigh.
- Imagine that your body is sinking into the floor and with each breath, you sink further and further into the floor.
- Your arms become heavy and you relax your hands and your fingers.
- Your legs become heavy as you let your feet fall out to the side.
- Your torso becomes heavy and your back relaxes into the floor.
- Your head and neck become heavy.
- Relax your mouth and relax all your facial muscles.

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- Your whole body is completely relaxed.
- (Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)
- Imagine, that you are sitting next to a lake.
  - The lake is big, still and calm.
  - Feel the stillness of the lake and sense the deepness of its colour.

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- A leaf, blown across by a gentle breeze, falls down onto the surface of the lake.
- The touch of the leaf against the water sends soft ripples through the stillness of the lake.
- As the ripples get further away from the leaf, they increase in size.
- Watch as the ripples slowly spread and then disappear.

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- After some time, the lake returns to its normal, calm state.

- Notice how no amount of interference can affect the true and still nature of the lake.

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- Your mind is like this lake.

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- Although at times it may become unsettled, it will always return to its true nature of calm stillness.

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- At any time during the day, if something has interfered with your calm, you can always come back to this moment by closing your eyes and visualising yourself next to the lake.

(Pause here for about 10 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- Now you can bring your attention back to your breathing.

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- Bring your attention to your hands and feet as you wiggle your fingers your toes

(Pause here for about 5 seconds to allow the participants to engage with the exercise.)

- Stretch your hands out behind your head.

- Stretch the right side of your body.

- And stretch the left side of your body.

- Roll over onto your side and come back up to sitting on the floor.

# BREATHING EXERCISES



## 4:7:8

When we make a conscious effort to control our breath, we can affect our state of mind. Through learning techniques that control our breath, we are also learning techniques which help us to balance our mind, be less reactive, remain calm and feel less anxious.

### Outcomes:

- Awareness how our breathing pattern can effect our state of mind.
- Integrating breathing patterns into every-day activities.
- Increased focus and decreased levels of anxiety.

**Length of Activity:** 5-10 minutes

### Minimum Number of Students:

1 person

### Set-Up

Individual to sit on their own in a quiet space away from distractions

### Materials

A timer. (If using a phone timer, please make sure the phone is set to flight mode to avoid distractions)

### Interaction Point

Individual work

**Please see next page for a step by step guide**

# BREATHING EXERCISES

## Step by Step:

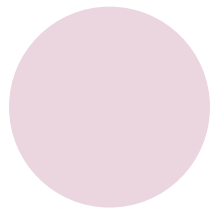
1. Set a timer for 10 minutes. (If using your phone, make sure it is on flight mode in order to limit distraction.)
2. Close your eyes.
3. Either sit cross legged on the floor or sit on a chair. Either way, make sure your back is nice and straight.
4. Breath in through your nose for 4 seconds (counting in your head.)
5. Hold the breath for 7 seconds (counting in your head and trying not to speed up whilst counting.)
6. Exhale the breath through your nose for 8 seconds (counting in your head and trying not to speed up whilst counting.)
7. Repeat this until the timer sounds for you to finish.
8. Allow your yourself a few seconds to reflect on how you're are feeling after the exercise.

## Reflection/ Closing Discussion

- Do not get up from this breathing exercise straight away.
- You may start to feel drowsy but studies show that this type of breathing helps to maintain a balanced mind and decrease anxiety.
- At first, this exercise can feel quite uncomfortable as we are not used to controlling the flow of our breath. However, with perseverance and practice, you will notice an increase in lung capacity, energy levels and decreased levels of anxiety.
- If today you could only manage a few minutes, perhaps challenge yourself to do more tomorrow or the week after.
- Don't give up.
- Trust and keep practicing.



# GROUP EXERCISES



## SHARING CIRCLE

The sharing circle helps us to develop empathy and openness with those we are with. Vulnerability that is bought up when we are speaking face to face with people can be confronting at times but it is important to remember that everyone has their own truth and speaking it can be a way of helping them to heal, if we are willing to listen.

### Outcomes:

- Promotes openness and active listening without judgement
- Create stronger bonds in group dynamics
- Allows space for trust authenticity
- Promotes a safe space
- Allows space for strength and security

### Length of Activity:

15-20 minutes (best practiced at the end of the day)

### Minimum Number of Students:

2+, please see maximum, as stated by the government guidelines

### Set-Up

Individuals sit in a circle, abiding by social distancing regulations

### Materials

None

### Interaction Point

- Individual work
- Sitting in a group whilst in a circle abiding by social distancing regulations and with no contact to be made between participants

**Please see next page for a step by step guide**

# GROUP EXERCISES

## Step by Step:

1. You can remind the person next to you that you they are safe be honest about how they are feeling.
2. Everyone should remember the agreements that they read and agreed to when they began practicing mindfulness.
3. As a group, close your eyes and take a deep breath in and then breath out, exhaling through your mouth.
4. Choose who would like to speak first.
5. In the circle and each person to express themselves using the following format of speech:  
A. When \_\_\_\_\_ happens, B. It makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_, C. What would be helpful for me is if \_\_\_\_\_ (try not to blame or shame here), D. What I need right now is \_\_\_\_\_ (focus on your needs and not what someones else can provide for you)

(At this point, if the individual feedback on the situation, they can ask for it here. If not, they can leave it at point D. and the next person has the opportunity to speak)

6. When each person has shared their feelings from the above framework, go around again and each individual can speak using the following framework: Today, one thing that made me smile was..., Today, one thing that I found challenging was..., One thing that I fear I may have done wrongly today is..., Tomorrow I want to try to..., Today I have learnt that...,I am glad that...

7. Thank each other for sharing after doing so.

## Reflection/ Closing Discussion

- Reflect on if it was difficult to share openly, face-to-face, as apposed to in a journal.
- Did it bring up any issues?
- What was challenging?
- What was the most enjoyable part?
- Do you feel heard?

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**For more support, resources or information please do not hesitate to get in touch.**