

Resource Packet on “Mindfulness” Practices

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Self-Assessment

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003)

Description: The MAAS is a 15-item scale designed to assess a core characteristic of dispositional mindfulness, namely, open or receptive awareness of and attention to what is taking place in the present. The scale shows strong psychometric properties and has been validated with college, community, and cancer patient samples. Correlational, quasi-experimental, and laboratory studies have shown that the MAAS taps a unique quality of consciousness that is related to, and predictive of, a variety of self-regulation and well-being constructs. The measure takes 10 minutes or less to complete.

Day-to-Day Experiences

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Almost Always	Very Frequently	Somewhat Frequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Very Infrequently	Almost Never
I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6

I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I drive places on "automatic pilot" and then wonder why I went there.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I snack without being aware that I'm eating.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Scoring information:

To score the scale, simply compute a mean of the 15 items. Higher scores reflect higher levels of dispositional mindfulness.

Reference:

Brown, K.W. & Ryan, R.M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 822-848.

Informal Practice: Mindfulness in Daily Life

FOUNDATIONAL MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES

Be Simply Aware

This technique is used for grounding in the present moment, to increase a sense of internal calm. Bring your Awareness to what you see, feel and hear. Keep it very simple – just note and breathe.

What you see

I see....The blue water, The red shirt, A Flower, A red leaf

What you feel

I feel....My arm on the chair, The coolness on my face. My heart beat, An itch

What you hear

I hear...The hum of the computer, Someone talking, Laughter, Music, Crickets

Repeat as needed. Do alone or with others.

Naming or Noting Process

This is a technique that helps you to focus your awareness. Keep it light and easy. Let go of it when you are just being in the present moment, in the experience. It is a simple tool, used to anchor your awareness.

Simply note or name your experience as you are having it. When you notice you are telling a story, having judgment, analyzing, adding to the simple experience – gently return to naming or noting: your breath as it comes in your body or moves out of your body; your sensations; your emotions. Do not complicate what is simply arising to awareness.

Body/ cold/ hot/ tight/soft/ hard/ relaxed /tense

Pain/ throbbing/ burning/ searing

Hearing/ sound/music/

Smell/ taste / visual/ dark/ light/color

Thoughts/ thinking/ worry/ planning/ rehearsing/ Remembering/ past/ memory/ past/ future

Emotion/ anger/ hurt/ sad/ happy/ joy/ regret/ guilt/

Like/ dislike/ judgment/ critical/

Desire/ wanting/ aversion

It is not what you observe, but how you observe, that is important.

Observe and note with compassion and tenderness.

Mindfulness in Activities of Daily Life

Use a noting or naming technique to focus your awareness on the activity you have chosen; you will lose your focus and thoughts, emotions, sensations will ariseit is their nature. Gently return your awareness to your chosen task; it is your anchor to the present.

- 1) **Stop and take 3 breaths** – noting in and out as your breath moves in and out of your body.
- 2) **Stop and count your breaths:** count 1 for in breath and 2 for out breath; or count 1 on the in and 2 on the out breath; see if you can get to 10 and then start again. Each time your mind wanders - simply start again. This technique calms the mind and increases focus.
- 3) **Mindfully do everyday tasks:** wash the dishes, brush your teeth, shower, or eat something. Use the naming technique to guide your awareness. When you lose your focus gently return your focus to what you had chosen. Set a timer and a time – keep it short – 5 or 10 minutes.
- 4) **Simply note what you see, hear and feel.** Do it for 3 rounds. Do it with a friend.
- 5) **Locate your body in space** and note it's position. You can add a simple body scan and simply note what you are aware of as you move through your body.
- 6) Take 5 minutes and **repeat a prayer, a positive thought or meditation over and over.** When your awareness wanders, bring it back to your task, your anchor.
- 7) **Slow down** – walk slower, shower slower, talk slower and notice, with your awareness, the effect.

Formal Practices: Sitting Meditation Practice Resources

Creating a Dedicated Meditation Space

What is a Dedicated Meditation Space?

- Space for daily meditation, that is created with “intention” - not used for ordinary activities (i.e., it becomes “dedicated” for meditation only)
- Clean, clutter free, and private area that has minimal sounds and distractions
- Often designed to inspire a sense of peace, serenity and purpose

The Value of a Dedicated Meditation Space

Having a dedicated space for meditation provides a powerful reminder and support for daily practice that helps you to connect with something deeper within yourself. A private environment that is a clean, serene, and created with intention, helps one to focus, relax and carry out a daily commitment with greater ease. Daily focused practice in the same room on the same seat, energetically facilitates, supports, and empowers the space for meditation. Over time, advanced meditators that have trained their minds are able to practice in any setting with ease. For beginners, having a dedicated space that supports concentration eases the process.

Selecting the Space

- Select a location removed from the hustle and bustle of everyday life (e.g., a small room, closet, or corner of a room).

Supplies to Support/Enhance a Meditation Space:

- Meditation seat
 - Cushions/pillows or blankets, bench or chair
- Blanket or meditation shawl (optional)
- Timer (optional)
- Meditation table, shelf or altar to hold (optional):
 - Meditation supplies (e.g., bell, mala/prayer beads for mantra meditation)
 - Items that will inspire and uplift (see examples below)

The Meditation Table, Shelf or Altar

- Many ancient traditions have used meditation tables or altars as a sacred focal point.
- Traditional elements include a covering cloth, and strategically placed items that make use of the senses and inspire or uplift, (e.g., candles or lights, flowers, inspirational images or statues, incense, natural objects, water, meaningful words or books)

Maintaining the Space

- Keep it clean, tidy, clutter and dust free.
- Rotate altar offerings so they are fresh and alive

Please note: There are no rules or right or wrong for creating a meditation space. Your own resources, circumstances, creativity will allow you to personalize this for your own meditation needs.

Practical Tips to Begin and Enhance a Meditation Practice

Developing a Routine:

- Make a determination/commitment to meditate at the same time each day.
 - Just after awakening and just prior to sleep are optimal.
 - Decide if you can commit to once a day or twice a day.
- Consistency will dramatically increase the benefit.
- Set realistic daily goals and make good effort to keep them.
 - Start small: 5-15 minutes per sitting for week one
 - When goal is met, increase sitting time.

Preparing the Environment:

- See “Creating a Dedicated Meditation Space” handout.
- Minimize potential distractions (e.g., turn off the phones, close windows/doors)
- Let your family know how long you will be meditating - ask them to hold questions/interruptions till you are done.

Ensuring Comfort:

- Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes.
- Use a blanket or meditation shawl for warmth - body heat may drop during meditation

Setting your Intention:

- Set your motivation to practice
 - Say a prayer or intention out loud or inwardly (e.g., “So that I may be more mindful in my daily activities and be of benefit to others, may I use this time well and be alert and aware in my meditation.”)
 - Be clear this is not time to space out; mind is alert, aware, open/receptive.
- Decide how long you are going meditate before you start –
 - Start in smaller time increments and build up
 - Use a quiet timer, so you are not inclined to check the clock.
 - Follow through no matter how restless or bored you become.

Preparing and Holding the Body:

- Avoid exercise/activity that will excite the nervous system prior to meditation.
- Meditate on an empty stomach – eating brings on sleepiness.
- Consider yoga or gentle stretching to calm the body, open hips and lengthen spine
- See “How to Sit for Meditation”
- Do a simple body scan, letting go of any tension you discover as best you can.
- Take a few deep breaths and consciously relax your body on the out breath.
- Do your best to stay still and sit like a Mountain: majestic, steadfast, and just being with all that comes its way.

How to Sit for Meditation?

Why Posture is Important:

- When the spine is aligned and the body is held and supported in a careful posture, the mind will naturally become calmer and more stable.
- Finding and holding an aligned and straight posture promotes intention, wakefulness, and concentration which will allow you to sit for extended periods of time more comfortably/

Seating Options:

- Chair sitting
 - To provide support, it is essential to that the buttocks are somewhat higher than the knees and that the hips are rocked slightly forward to support the spine.
 - Feet should rest comfortably on the floor
- Kneeling
 - May use a meditation bench or pillow to elevate pelvis above the knees;
 - Kneeling may take pressure off of back but put more pressure on knees, so be sure to use a cushion to support them.
- Floor sitting
 - Any variety of cross legged positions may be used; key is to find what works for your level of flexibility and comfort.
 - Sitting cross-legged naturally creates a triangle platform for you, which can enhance stability
 - It is important to elevate the buttocks above the knees with pillows or cushions. Feel free to use pillows to support your knees.

What to do with the rest of your body:

- To increase relaxation drop your shoulders; relax your jaw and your tongue letting it rest just behind your two front teeth; tilt your head and chin slightly down.
- Creating comfort and relaxation in your body is very beneficial as meditation is a dynamic activity where you are both relaxed and alert.
- Eyes may be closed or slightly open and gazing softly 2-3 feet ahead.

Essential Elements

- It is important to experiment with different sitting postures and supports to find what will work for you; try a variety of different positions, pillows, sitting options and postures to find your “Sweet spot”.
- Many find it helpful to alternate between a cushion, kneeling bench and chair.
- The position of the pelvis must be in a neutral position to allow the maintenance of the normal curves of the spine to support sitting meditation.