

## **Session 7 – Taking Care of myself**

*For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin – real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time to be served, a debt to be paid.*

*Then life would begin.*

*At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life.*

Alfred D'Souza

### **Taking Care of Myself**

The way we think and feel in each moment has an enormous influence on our actions. Awareness of our thoughts and emotions can give us a choice as to what we do in the next moment.

Sometimes our thoughts can take us away from considering what we really need and acting wisely. For example, we might think that other people should always come first, or that making time for oneself is merely an indulgence, or we may be swept into a spiral of thoughts and feelings, triggered by physical or mental tiredness, about how we can't do what we did in the past.

*In these moments we have the possibility of looking after ourselves and having a positive influence on our energy levels and overall sense of wellbeing.*

#### **You might like to try asking yourself these questions:**

1. Of the things that I do, what nourishes me, what increases my sense of being alive and present rather than merely existing?
2. Of the things that I do what drains me and decreases my sense of being alive and present?
3. Accepting that there are aspects of my life that I cannot change am I consciously choosing to include enough activities in my daily life that nourish me?



## **Changing activity**

*Of the positive activities: how might I change things so that I take more time to do these things or become more aware of them?*

*Of the draining activities: how might these best be done less often, or how might I relate to them differently?*

## **Making mindful decisions**

These ideas may be worth revisiting.

- **A daily plan** which includes a range of activities can help you decide what you need to do, especially in the face of feelings of low mood, tiredness and discouraging thoughts like "why bother with anything" or "I'm not getting anywhere".
- **Rest and exercise** are important on the road to recovery. As best you can, engage in them mindfully. For example, when taking exercise try to be aware of any tendency that may arise to either push yourself too much or hold back too much. See if you can open and soften to any intense sensations. Remember the mindful stretching you have been doing. When you are not being active see if you can choose a way of resting that is nourishing in the way described above.
- **Give yourself credit** for what you do! It is very easy to discount our efforts and make comparisons with what we used to do, or what other people do. As best you can watch out for this tendency and notice how it makes you feel.
- **Break tasks or activities down into manageable chunks** and congratulate yourself when you have achieved each small step.
- **Fully be with the experience of what you are doing:** keep yourself in the very moment you are in as best you can, (now I am walking in to the kitchen, now I am washing this plate), be aware of the contact of your feet on the floor as you walk etc. By acting mindfully you are simply being in the present rather than engaging in unhelpful judgments about yourself

## Continuing Your Practice

Over the past weeks you have experienced a number of Mindfulness meditation practices. It is important to remember that Mindfulness goes beyond formal sitting or lying meditation and is something that can, and should, be very much a part of day to day living. Here are some ideas for staying mindful throughout your day:

- **Wake mindfully:** Before you get up in the morning, take a few moments to focus on your breath. Take five mindful breaths, noticing how your body feels and any thoughts or feelings that may be present
- **“Chop wood, carry water”:** As we have practised on the course, bring as much moment by moment awareness as you can to the tasks of your day (doing housework, shopping, working at your computer, driving, putting out the rubbish...). Be aware of how your body feels as you move in these activities. Use your senses to stay in the moment. If your mind wanders, notice where it has gone and gently guide it back.
- **Eat mindfully:** Remember the raisin exercise! See if you can bring some of this attention to how and what you are eating, perhaps consciously slowing down for a while as you do so.
- **Use sound as a reminder** to be mindful. E.g. text alert
- **Practise mindful walking:** Take your awareness into each step, noticing how your body feels as you move, and being aware of your body in relation to the environment around you, with its sights, sounds and smells. Feel the ground under your feet as you walk
- **Use delays as an opportunity for mindfulness:** If you're stuck in traffic or in a supermarket queue, instead of getting annoyed, use the time to be mindful, noticing your posture and breathing, and being aware of any thoughts and feelings that may be present, simply holding them in awareness
- **Return to the breath** at intervals throughout the day. Keep on using the Breathing Space for this purpose, or simply stop and take a few mindful breaths
- **Return to the body:** From time to time, note how your body feels. Are you aware of any tension building up? If so, choose to consciously let it go, perhaps using the out-breath to soften and release the tension
- **Use visual reminders** to help you stay mindful: a meaningful image or a few words placed where you will see them

- **End your day mindfully:** Before you go to bed at night, use the Breathing Space before you settle for the night. You can also be mindful in carrying out your bedtime routine.

(Based on Williams, Teasdale & Segal)

## **Pausing to take action**

### ***When you are feeling low, discouraged, tired, or 'driven'.***

After grounding yourself in the present acknowledging whatever has arisen in your mind and body, then connecting with a more spacious and flexible awareness, you may choose to take some considered action.

### ***Try asking yourself:***

What do I need right now? How can I best look after myself right now?

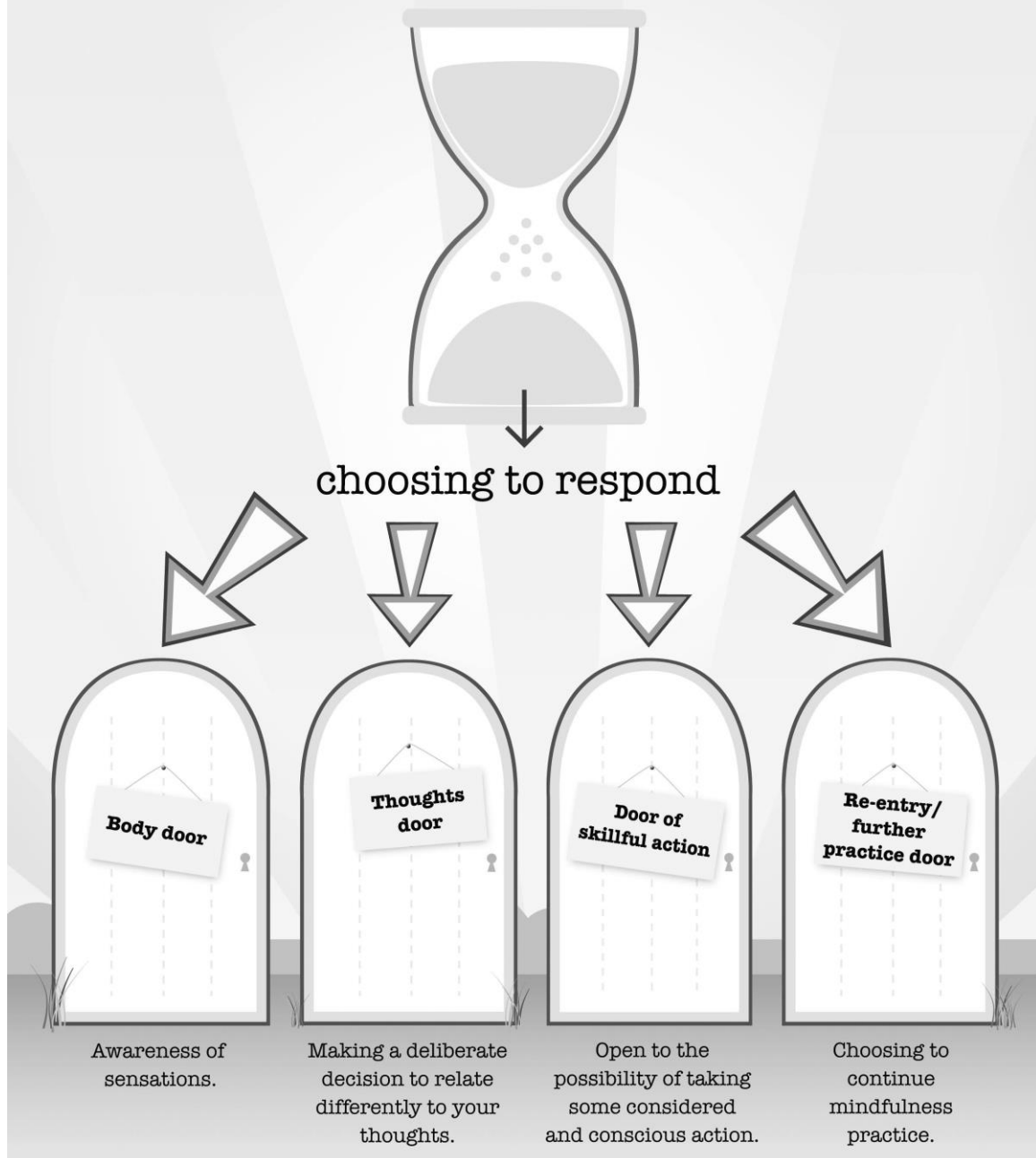
- Do I take some exercise? If so, try to do it mindfully.
- Do I take on some housework, or some other task which gives me a sense of satisfaction or control? If so, remember not to aim for perfection:
- Do I need to stop and allow someone else to help me or have a break?
- Do I need to say how I am feeling to someone?
- Do I need to do something just for myself like pampering my body by having a hot bath, or doing my favourite hobby or listening to music or seeing a friend?

Whatever you choose to do, see if you can bring some awareness to this, act mindfully.

Remember to keep an open mind as to how you will feel when you have completed an action. Try not to prejudge how helpful it will be.

*An attitude of curiosity will help you learn more about what your body and mind requires for greater health.*

# Stepping out of automatic pilot



A3 poster developed by Alison Evans and Claire Brejcha for the PREVENT trial (Kuyken et al., 2010) and now used in the Exeter Mindfulness Network MBCT courses

## When symptoms worsen or return

At times you will experience a worsening or return of fatigue, pain and other symptoms. Sometimes you may have an idea why this has occurred (e.g. stress, over exertion, poor sleep). At other times they may seem to come out of the blue. A degree of discomfort is also likely to arise as you gradually increase your activity and fitness levels, so is often part of the recovery process.

When symptoms worsen or return, they can set off negative ways of thinking or concerns.

If you have been extremely ill in the past, an increase in symptoms will tend to trigger old habits of thought that may be particularly unhelpful: for example predictions that this will go on forever, catastrophic thoughts about how bad things will get again, and 'back to square one' thinking. All of these ways of making sense of what is happening to you will tend to undermine your taking helpful action. For example, they may lead you to pull back and avoid activities. Such thought patterns can also result in stress which in turn can lead to more physical and mental symptoms.

When this happens, it may be helpful to remind yourself, "Just because I am exhausted [or in pain etc] right now does not mean that will stay exhausted [or in pain]."

Ask yourself What emotional system am I in? Threat and drive are likely to be very activated in a setback.

Perhaps ask yourself, "What can I do to look after myself to get me through this?"

Pausing to help gather yourself. This may help you see your situation from a wider perspective. This wider perspective allows you to become aware of both the pull of the old habits of thinking and what skilful action you might take.

Finding the mind going back to earlier, difficult times is part of how we are as human beings.

*A man bitten by a snake once, forever more fears a coiled rope.*

The Dalai Lama

## **Action Plan**

What actions and practices can I choose to take that will lift my mood, give me energy, give me a sense of satisfaction and nourish me, even if I don't feel like doing them- and in response to different levels of "the pit"?

***When things are ok/ ticking along***

***When things are a bit challenging***

***Tough times***



## **Follow up**

As part of this course you will have the opportunity to meet individually with one of the facilitators to discuss your use of mindfulness and health management. Before the meeting it can be helpful to ask yourself the following:

What do I want to achieve in the appointment?

How am I using mindfulness?-

- the practices- long; short
- daily activity
- Dealing with difficulty

Any questions about mindfulness or more generally about managing health?

### ***Follow up group sessions***

These are offered throughout the year and you will be emailed the dates. They are optional and you don't have to let us know if you are coming or not

#### ***Individual review***

Date

Time

Place

Therapist

#### ***Group review (please check emails before setting out in case there is a problem on the day)***

Date

Time

Place

## **What if there is no need to change?**

*What if there is no need to change?*

*No need to transform yourself*

*Into someone who is more compassionate, more present, more loving, or wise?*

*How would this affect all the places in your life where you are endlessly trying to be better?*

*What if the task is simply to unfold,*

*To become who you are already are in your essential nature -*

*Gentle, compassionate, and capable of living fully and passionately present?*

*What if the question is not*

*"Why am I so infrequently the person I really want to be?"*

*But "Why do I so infrequently want to be the person I really am?"*

*How would this change what you think you have to learn?*

*What if becoming who and what we truly are happens not through striving and trying*

*But by recognising and receiving the people and places and practices*

*That are for us the warmth of encouragement we need to unfold?*

*How would this shape the choices you make about how to spend today?*

*What if you knew that the impulse to move in a way that creates beauty in the world*

*Will arise from deep within*

*And guide you every time you simply pay attention*

*And wait?*

*How would this shape your stillness, your movement,*

*Your willingness to follow this impulse*

*To just let go*

*And dance?*

Prelude to "The Dance" by Oriah Mountain Dreamer