



## 8 Week Mindfulness and Mindful-Living Programme

### Introduction to 8 week programme

Dear Precious Being,

Thank you for signing up to accompany me on an 8 week programme of Mindfulness and Mindful Living. Our group will journey together and who knows what the benefits will be. I have been interested in and have been practicing Mindfulness for many years. My life has become busy and stressful at times and as can happen I have become more engrossed in doing than being. I would like to return to my appreciation of living in the moment and living from a more centred place within myself. I look forward to having you as my companion.

### Introduction

This 8 week Mindfulness Programme offers encouragement to move from the busy “doing” mode of mind to a more gentle way of “being” – being more present for what is here and holding whatever we find with kindness and compassion. It is nurturing and life transforming for those who undertake it. Through understanding various selected readings and practicing different mindfulness exercises throughout the weeks you will feel the benefits of slowing down and reconnecting with a deeper stillness that is always there when you slow down enough to listen.

To be effective, mindfulness requires an embodied engagement on the part of anyone hoping to derive some benefit from it. Mark Williams and Danny Penman in their book say mindfulness is a *practice*. So mindfulness is a way of being, rather than merely a good idea or a clever technique. It is thousands of years old and is often spoken of as “the heart of Buddhist meditation” although its essence, being about attention and awareness, is universal.

The programme provides you with a clear structure, within which you can observe your own mind and body, and your life unfolding. You learn to use a systematic approach for working with whatever arises. This framework is strongly evidence based, arising out of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and shaped into a common sense eight week programme for anyone interested in his/her health and sanity especially in this frantic world. Taking on this programme is a commitment to yourself and a radical act of trust and faith in yourself. You become your own best friend and live your life more fully, moment by moment.

You might like to write about your experiences and awakenings each week in your journal. (This can be a note book or diary). The 8 weeks of Mindful living is suitable for beginners and those of you that have already been involved in mindfulness practice. Week by week you will *rediscover* a sense of peace and contentment. It is the kind of happiness that gets into our bones and promotes a deep-seated authentic love of life that helps you cope more skilfully with your life experiences.

It’s a secret that was well understood in the ancient world and is kept alive in some cultures even today. This programme will take you along a path that many philosophers and practitioners have trodden in the past; a path that the latest scientific advances show does dissipate anxiety, stress and feelings of exhaustion. Mindfulness is recognised to help people who struggle with bouts of depression. It is now one of the preferred treatments recommended by the UK’s National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.

In the following weeks I offer a series of simple practices that you can incorporate into your daily life. They are based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, Jack



Kornfield, Tony Bates and Thich Nhat Hanh and others who are master practitioners and experts in the field of Mindfulness in the western world.

Mindfulness meditation is so beautifully simple that it can be used by any of us to reveal our innate “joy of life”. This is worthwhile in itself but it can also prevent normal feelings of anxiety, stress and sadness from spiralling downwards into prolonged periods of unhappiness and exhaustion, or even serious clinical depression.

### **Mindfulness – finding peace in a busy world**

We live in a very overactive world, our days filled with doing and then more doing and never getting all the doing done so we come to the end of the day tired and stressed. Whether we are trying to earn money, rear children, get fit, or do a better job it is all based on striving to be somewhere other than where we are or to be someone other than who we are right now. We always seem to be on the way somewhere! We all have times of feeling overwhelmed by life, wondering how we can cope with all the responsibilities. Much of our stress comes from looking ahead to the future - causing anxiety, or dwelling in the past remembering how things used to be.

Mindfulness is about observation without criticism; being compassionate with yourself.

### **Mindfulness and Self – Compassion**

Mindfulness and self-compassion go hand in hand. As we become more aware of what is happening moment by moment it becomes easier to notice the tendency that we have towards judgements, self-criticism, anxiety, stress and negativity. We notice how hard we tend to be on ourselves often focusing on our failings and imperfections, setting high standards for ourselves and comparing ourselves to others. Through mindfulness practice we see the possibility of noticing these moments of self-blame, imperfection, anger, sadness, negativity and to be with them with kindness, tenderness and compassion rather than judgement. Seeing what is present is one thing and then holding this with care is another piece in the path that leads from discomfort to more ease, from suffering to greater freedom.

Self-compassion facilitates kindness, understanding and care when we are confronted with our difficulties. It allows us to see our humanness and how part of this is being imperfect, making mistakes, experiencing frustrations and falling short of the mark. Self-compassion allows us to see that we all have an innate ability to be kind, caring and compassionate towards others and ourselves.

Before we proceed I would like to dispel some myths about mindfulness and meditation in particular: in the words of Mark Williams and Danny Penman -

- o “Meditation is not a religion. It is a method of mental training. Many people who practice are religious, many atheists and agnostics are meditators too.
- o You don’t have to sit cross-legged on the floor, you can if you wish. Some people sit on chairs to meditate; you can also practice bringing mindful-awareness to whatever you are doing. You can meditate more or less anywhere.
- o Meditation is not complicated. It is not about “success” or “failure”.
- o Mindfulness practice does not take a lot of time, although patience and persistence is required.
- o Meditation is not about accepting the unacceptable. It is about seeing the world with clarity so that you can take wiser decisions and considered action to change what needs to be changed”.

Mindfulness meditation harness an alternative way in which our minds can relate to the world.



Most of us know only the analytical side of the mind; the process of thinking, judging, planning and trawling through past memories while searching for solutions to our problems. The mind is also *aware*.

We do not just *think* about things, we are also aware that we are thinking. We don't need language to stand as an intermediary between us and the world; we can also experience it directly through our senses. We are capable of directly sensing things like the sound of birds, the scent of beautiful flowers and the smile on our loved one's face. We know with the heart as well as the head. Thinking is not all there is to conscious experience. The mind is more encompassing than the mind alone.

Meditation creates greater mental clarity, seeing things with pure open hearted awareness. It's a place – a vantage point from which we can witness our own thoughts, feelings, and struggles as they arise. Mindfulness meditation invites us to become more patient and kind with ourselves and to cultivate open-mindedness and gentle persistence. Mindfulness does not negate the brain's natural desire to solve problems. It gives us the time and space to choose the *best* ways of solving them. Some problems are best dealt with emotionally – we select the solution that “feels” best. Others need to be worked through logically. Many are best dealt with intuitively, creatively. Some are best left alone for now.

Mindfulness operates on two levels. The core of this programme and mindfulness meditation is a series of simple daily practices that can be done anywhere, although a quiet space at home is helpful. Mindfulness also encourages you to break some unconscious habits of thinking and behaving that prevent you living life to the full. Habit breaking is straight forward.

Each week you will be asked to do something different. These are simple acts which will break your daily routine and help you become happier in yourself. You are invited to take this programme over the 8 week period as taking the time to *practice* will reveal its potential.

### ***Mindfulness Practice Can Be Simple***

#### **PAUSE**



**Pausing** helps to interrupt movement – mental (thoughts), physical (the body) and emotional. It helps us to step out of our automatic rushing forward.

**Pausing** helps to stop the urge to be “doing” and allows us to drop into the place of “being”.

It allows us to really meet experience, not through how we think things are, but through experiencing what is actually happening. Pausing is the space that can be created in the midst of turmoil. It takes a huge effort and a lot of energy to stop the momentum of a large object rolling down a hill, so too, it takes a lot of effort to stop the habitual forward push of mind habits. It takes energy to steer ourselves out of deeply worn ruts – mental, physical and emotional.

**Pausing** is not about time, it is about Mindfulness. When taking the time to pause, many things may be revealed to us – joy, happiness, sorrow, anger, peace, gratitude, compassion and more.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR PAUSING AND RELAXING**

**PAUSE** - stop what you are doing right now.

Come up close to your experience, and check in to see what it feels like to let go of the forward momentum.



What does your body feel like at this moment?

How does your jaw feel? What are the sensations like in your shoulders? How is your chest? Is your belly soft or hard?

Can you soften and relax any tension in the body?

Is your mind still buzzing?

What is the emotional tone at this moment?

Simply observe without criticism.

Can you experience any sense of lightness having let go of the forward push and the physical tension?

Now that the rush of habit has been interrupted, something fresh can arise.

**You have just completed the first mindfulness exercise of this programme.**

Each week I will give you a Mindfulness meditation practice.. A meditation consists of focusing your full attention on your breath as it flows in and out of your body. To introduce you to the practice, we begin with a short one (see One minute Meditation box, below).

#### **A one-minute meditation**

1. Sit erect in a straight-backed chair. If possible, bring your back a little away from the rear of the chair so that your spine is self-supporting. Your feet can be flat on the floor. Close your eyes or lower your gaze.
2. Focus your attention on your breath as it flows in and out of your body. Stay in touch with the different sensations of each in-breath and each out-breath. Observe the breath without looking for anything special to happen. There is no need to alter your breathing in any way.
3. After a while your mind may wonder. When you notice this, gently bring your attention back to your breath, without giving yourself a hard time – the act of realising that your mind has wandered and bringing your attention back without criticising yourself is central to the practice of mindfulness meditation.
4. Your mind may eventually become calm like a still pond - or it may not. Even if you get a sense of absolute stillness, it may only be fleeting. If you feel angry or exasperated, notice that this may be fleeting too. Whatever happens, just allow it to be as it is.
5. After a minute, let your eyes open and take in the room again

Focusing on each breath in this way allows you to observe your thought as they arise in your mind, and little by little, to let go of struggling with them. You come to realise that thoughts come and go of their own accord; that *you* are not your thoughts.

You can watch as they appear in your mind, and watch again as they disappear like a cloud passing



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in the sky or a soap bubble bursting. You come to understand that thoughts and feelings are transient. They come and go, and you get to choose whether to act on them or not.

When stress or unhappiness hover overhead you learn to treat them as clouds overhead, to observe them with friendly curiosity as they drift pass. You learn to catch thought patterns before they tip you into a downward spiral, and this helps put you in control of your life.

“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.”  
—Thich Nhat Hanh, *Stepping into Freedom: Rules of Monastic Practice for Novices*

Tomorrow, you will receive information and guidance for week 1 of your 8 week Mindfulness and Mindful-Living Programme. Thank you again for your interest and support.

Be well,  
Christine

### References

Hanh Nhat, T. (1997). *Stepping into Freedom: Rules of Monastic Practice for Novices*. Berkley, CA: Parallax Press.

Williams, M. Penman, D. (2011). *Mindfulness: a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world*. London: Piatkus