

Week 1 – Introducing Mindfulness

This course aims to help us be more aware so that we can learn to respond to situations with choice rather than reacting automatically. We will do this by paying attention to all our experiences, including bodily sensations, thoughts, moods and emotions.

In our first session, we eat a raisin mindfully. This exercise helps us notice what happens when we fully experience something very ordinary. We also practice the body scan, which helps us learn to place our attention on different body parts, anchors our awareness in the present moment, and gives us more choice about where to put our attention.

Mindfulness helps us to wake up from being on 'automatic pilot'. We can sometimes drive for miles without really being aware of what we are doing. Similarly, we may not be 'present' for much of our lives. When we're in automatic pilot, we are more likely to be triggered by events around us and our thoughts, feelings, and sensations. This can activate old habits of feeling, thinking and behaviour that are often unhelpful and may lead to low mood or stress.

Mindfulness helps us be more aware of our bodily sensations, feelings and thoughts from moment to moment. This frees us from having to act out the old patterns that may have caused problems in the past. We are not about trying to get rid of particular thoughts or feelings. Instead, we are developing a greater awareness of how things are in each moment.

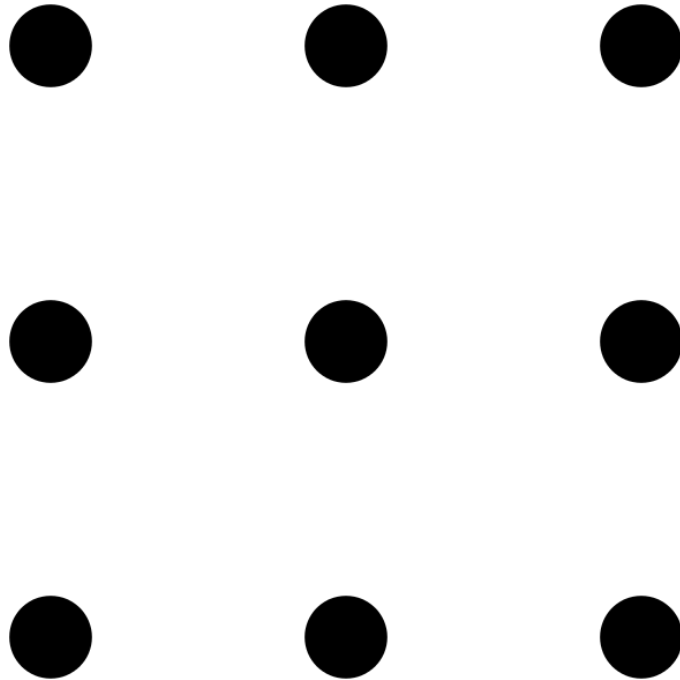


Home Practice for Week Following Session 1

1. Practise the body scan recording once a day for at least six days before we meet again.
2. You can also note anything that comes up in the home practice in the Home Practice Record Form (see on the next pages) so that we can talk about it at the next meeting. This form is for your record only.
3. Choose one routine activity in your daily life, and bring mindfulness to that activity each time you do it, just as we did in the raisin exercise. You might choose to focus on waking up in the morning, brushing your teeth, showering, drying your body, getting dressed, eating, driving, taking out the rubbish, shopping, starting the car.
4. Eat at least one meal mindfully. You don't need to quite as slowly as we did with the raisin. However, it is helpful to slow down a little. Focus on the sights, tastes, smells and impulses that arise as you give your attention to the food.
5. Do the Nine Dots puzzle on the following page. Notice your responses to the whole process of approaching the puzzle.

The Nine Dots Puzzle

- Connect the dots in four straight lines without lifting your pencil from the paper and without going twice over the line
- Notice your responses to the whole process of approaching the puzzle



Please, read this poem. What are your reflections about it?

If I Had My Life to Live Over

If I had my life to live over,
I'd dare to make more mistakes next time.
I'd relax, I would limber up.
I would be sillier than I have been this trip.
I would take fewer things seriously.
I would take more chances.

I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers.
I would eat more ice cream and less beans.
I would perhaps have more actual troubles, but I'd have fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I am one of those people who has lived sensibly and sanely,
hour after hour, day after day.
Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had to do it over again,
I'd have more of them.
In fact, I'd try to have nothing else.
Just moments,
one after another,
instead of living so many years ahead of each day.

I've been one of those people who never goes anywhere
without a thermometer, a hot water bottle,
a raincoat and a parachute.
If I had to do it again, I would travel lighter than I have.
If I had my life to live over,
I would start barefoot earlier in the spring
and stay that way later in the fall.
I would go to more dances.
I would ride more merry-go-rounds.
I would pick more daisies.

Nadine Stair,
85 years old, from the Stress Reduction Workbook, University of Massachusetts Medical
School

Home practice record form – week 1

Date	Practice	Experience, response