EIGHT WEEK MINDFULNESS TRAINING
INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................5

WEEK 1 - WHAT IS MINDFULNESS? ................................................................. 11

WEEK 2 - ATTENTION TRAINING & BASIC NEUROSCIENCE ..................... 20

WEEK 3 - MINDFULNESS OF THOUGHTS ..................................................... 31

WEEK 4 - MINDFULNESS OF EMOTIONS ...................................................... 35

WEEK 5 - RECOGNISING PATTERNS OF OUR MINDS ................................. 39

WEEK 6 - MINDFULNESS OF LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION & SELF ...... 45

WEEK 7 - CONNECTION TO THE EARTH, OTHERS AND SELF .................. 51

WEEK 8 - ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT IS .......................................................... 55
INTRODUCTION
What you will Learn
Welcome to this eight week, self-paced mindfulness training. This course will provide you with an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms that underpin mindfulness widespread success and application as well as the practices and additional information that will help you establish a regular practice.

Each week you will benefit from;
1. Learning about an aspect of mindfulness.
2. Explanations of how mindfulness ‘works’.
3. Formal and informal practices to assist bringing mindfulness into daily life, not just in formal sitting sessions.
4. References to research supporting the many benefits from regular practice.
5. Explanations of why we do the practices.

This course covers basic neuroscience and draws on scientific findings of what happens physiologically when we purposefully train our attention by practicing mindfulness regularly.

Mindfulness is not something that you do for 30 minutes a day and forget about it. Mindfulness is a way of being, bringing increased awareness to all aspects of our lives; more presence, increased curiosity and acceptance of life circumstances. Humans have the unique ability to train attention by shifting attention either involuntarily (when we hear a loud bang) or voluntarily (when we meditate or focus on one thing). This mechanism is the key to understanding and applying mindfulness in our lives— to enrich our lives with the knowledge that we can choose where to put our attention rather than feel entrapped by thoughts and feelings that often feel like they are controlling us.

Everybody has the ability to focus and regulate attention. According to B Allan Wallace (The Attention Revolution), training the attention is our most important form of self-regulation and self-control. As humans, we have the ability to introduce mindful awareness into every aspect of our lives.

Mindfulness is an inner resource that we access through focused mindfulness practices. Purposefully cultivating the mindful state of being reconnects us to state of alert awareness and presence that in turn promotes balance and wellbeing as well as many other well-documented benefits.

In this course we learn to transform and establish a new vital relationship with ourselves (our thoughts and feelings), others and the world around us. Each week we focus on an aspect of mindfulness and over the 8 weeks build a solid understanding of the processes that underpin why it is so important to have some form of daily mind training to assist you with the many on-going distortions and challenges life provides for our learning and personal growth and to develop a raised awareness of what it is to be human.
WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

• Why these practices are successful.

• How to recognise unhelpful stress, anxiety and tension in the body and mind and learn strategies to work skillfully with these.

• How to train your attention, self-nourish, be kind to yourself and others as well as come to see we are all experiencing similar life challenges so that increased empathy and compassion for others naturally emerges.

Even after formal practice is over, you will learn that as we move through the day, there is an opportunity every minute to watch where our attention goes. We become more aware of how easily we become distracted, how quickly old patterns of thinking and reacting can fire up. It becomes clear by cultivating mindfulness as part of our daily self-regulation it actually becomes our default mode when the pressure is on and when we drift into unhelpful and aimless thinking. We naturally raise the level of awareness of ourselves and the world around us.

The more we practice, the more resilient our minds become. Not unlike a muscle, the brain ‘muscle’ when exercised daily gets stronger; our awareness becomes sharper and we are more present and watchful of not getting caught up in draining distractions, stories we tell ourselves, internally or externally, leaking vital life energy on habitual, robotic mental behaviours.

You will discover ways to integrate information about how and why mindfulness practices ‘work’ when practiced regularly.

Tips on difficulties of practicing.
1. Practice when not tired. Being tired will make it harder to stay focused.
2. Make sure you have eaten so not hungry.
3. Make sure all devices are switched off and others in house know not to disturb you.
4. Try to practice same time, same place however you can practice anywhere. The main thing is to do the practice regularly, daily.
5. Just keep starting again and again when you lose focus during practices. This is the key mechanism that strengthens attention and the ability to shift your attention at will.

REASONS WHY WE DO PRACTICES

• To lower stress and anxiety and develop body awareness

• To find new perspectives and new ways of coping with life’s many challenges.

• To uncover patterns of conditioned thinking, reacting and behaving that are not helpful that generate stress, anxiety and emotionality unnecessarily. To recognise we are not our thoughts.
• To restore balance, re-connection and equilibrium by purposefully engaging the ‘rest and 
digest’ response of the nervous system.

By developing competency in ‘reading’ our thoughts, emotions and sensations, we learn a lot about 
our conditioning, reactive patterns and where we need to replace old unhelpful habits of thinking 
and reacting with new healthy habits by cultivating moment to moment awareness and presence.

Research supports that the purposeful, regular training of our attention cultivates relaxation, 
opens our minds to deeper awareness and insights, improves physical and mental well-being 
and develops a more purposeful, satisfying life.

▶ The ability to pay attention is one of the greatest markers of success in life.

■ GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS TRAINING

To get the most from this course there are a few tips to help you on your way.

1. In this course you will be doing formal and informal mindfulness practices. Research 
shows that to experience the many well-documented benefits long term, you need to 
practice daily- not just eight weeks. The eight week time-frame is designed to allow 
you to organically develop the mindful state of being. After eight weeks the mind has 
effectively ‘re-wired’ itself (created new neural pathways over old) and the mindful 
state of being is established as the default mode especially when the pressure is on and 
unhelpful thinking threatens to take over. Most people who commit to this training find 
the benefits of lowered anxiety and stress are enough motivation to make mindfulness 
practice a part of their everyday self-care. To get good at anything, sports, music, mind 
training, we need to practice regularly. The informal practice is simply, purposefully 
bringing awareness and noticing to:
- Walking to work or school
- Having a tea or coffee
- While talking or listening
- Waiting at traffic lights
- Standing in a queue
- Talking with people

2. Anytime is a good time to be mindful. Over time this becomes our way of being so that we 
let go of notions such as …; ‘Am I being mindful now?’. Being mindful becomes who you 
are! We recognise that we can’t try to be mindful – we simply bring another level of aware-
ness to being present instead of measuring our experience to ‘see’ if we are doing it right.

There is no right or wrong in mindfulness. You bring to the practice your intention, 
attention and the attitude of giving it your best shot.

Your inner life of thoughts and feelings is the material you have to work with so there is 
no comparing or striving to get it right.
3. **Allowing everything to be as it is**

The more you cultivate the awareness of **allowing everything be as it is**, the quicker you come to a state of calm acceptance, free flow of your life experiences and begin to **observe thoughts and feelings** as a curious scientist rather than **judging good or bad**.

In turn, the more you **drop expectations** and allow yourself to come in contact with simply being, you will automatically begin to relax more mentally and physically.

**No striving**

When we **give up striving, grasping and trying** it is enormously freeing. More spaciousness opens up inside of us to be present to each and every moment in a new and vivid way. **Over time**, with regular practice we find we are **more aware of the sensations in our bodies and thoughts and feelings** as they naturally arise, shift and change all throughout the day. We become more anchored in the body and more present in the moment.

**Observing thoughts and feelings**

Mindfulness **isn’t about not thinking**, it’s **about observing our thoughts and feelings** and over time, becoming more aware of **underlying patterns** that are often fixed and robotic.

Mindfulness helps us develop a **new relationship to our thoughts, feelings and our inner lives**. It is seeing in this way we are able to **recognise unhelpful thoughts and feelings** and realise **we have a choice** of where to put our attention and purposefully shift our attention.

4. For the **formal practice**, set aside a time (recommended minimum of 15 minutes daily) in the morning or the evening or anytime that works for you. If you get distracted during practice, and you will, just start again and again. Be patient. Mindfulness develops organically over time. You will naturally increase your practice period as you begin to identify and experience the many benefits of regular, daily practice.

5. Each session will begin with a **theme** such as mindfulness of emotions, robotic thoughts patterns, acceptance of what is to name a few and this will develop over the eight weeks.

6. **Writing a daily reflection log** after practicing. This will help you to **articulate** what happened during the practices and begin to cultivate a deeper moment-by-moment awareness of your thoughts and feelings and reactions or responses to them.

Writing **observations** after practicing— there is no right or wrong—however this writing practice will **assist you to process and understand** the observations, insights and mental shifts you will experience when practicing mindfulness regularly.

7. **Give up knowing** anything about mindfulness or meditation and come to the practices with a beginners mind. This way you will be **receptive** to whatever experience arises in the moment without referencing the past or the future.

**Be open and curious and kind to yourself** to whatever arises during practice. Imagine you are a curious scientist observing your thoughts and sensations as if you have never
done this before. It is a refreshing approach to your life experience and brings you more vividly into the present moment. It cultivates a curiosity about life itself.

8. The more you practice, over time, you will experience many different mind states. **It is normal to want to prolong the ‘good’ experiences and let go of the ‘bad’ experiences as fast as possible.** This is only human. It is important that we stay in contact with whatever experience we are having, not trying to hold onto it or escape from it because it is the striving to **get something** that separates us from being fully present. Cultivating open awareness, allowing all experiences in, we become more skilled over time to just let whatever experience we are observing to simply be there without reacting and judging it good or bad. This helps us develop tolerance, patience and acceptance of all experiences.

9. In the beginning, many people become **bored and restless** which is perfectly normal. When you turn the spotlight of attention from the outer world of distraction to the inner world of thoughts and feelings it can seem strange especially if you have never spent time with yourself.

   It might seem like you have more thoughts than ever but really it’s probably simply that you have never noticed your thought activity in this way before.

   Try just acknowledging and naming the feeling, ‘I feel bored’. Accept that as a fact and let it be there. What does boredom really feel like? Be curious? Notice your breath—has it quickened, slowed? Do you feel restless in the body?

   **Step back and notice what boredom feels like** from a distance and simply observe it. Chances are the feeling of boredom will dissolve and your observing self will settle back into the instruction of keeping your attention on the breath for example.

   Remember to meditate when not tired or hungry and at a time of day that suits. If you get sleepy and start nodding off, just open your eyes or stand for a minute or two and start again. This will help to stay alert.

10. **It’s not uncommon to become sleepy** in the early days of practicing mindfulness. This urge is quite normal as you are introducing a new way of relating to your mind and you are breaking old habits.

11. Sometimes it can become uncomfortable controlling the breath for a period of time. You might become lightheaded. Remember you are observing your breath so don’t try and control your breathing or change it in any way. You are simply observing the body breathing itself.

12. Sometimes when people go into the meditative state the body can sway slightly. This can be challenging and a bit scary. To deal with this, just keep focused on your breathing and this usually stabilizes the body movement. If not, stand for a few minutes or walk around and start again.

*Let’s get started.*
WEEK ONE:
What is Mindfulness?
WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a state of being fully present, curious and non-judgmental to your life experience—whatever that is in the moment.

‘Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.’
Jon Kabat-Zinn

People often ask, 'Is meditation and mindfulness the same?'
There is an aspect of mindfulness in all meditation practice however they are not the same. Meditation is an activity done sitting still and turning attention to an object (breath, sounds, words) whereas mindfulness is a state of being, cultivated by the continuous awareness of where our attention is, no matter what we are doing. Mindfulness is purposefully cultivated by choosing to shift the attention, especially when we recognise we are having unhelpful thoughts and feelings. There are formal mindfulness practices (breathing, body scan, open awareness) and informal practice (bringing awareness to speaking, listening, walking eating etc.)

The ability to control attention is one of the key markers in a successful life. Practicing mindfulness regularly is associated with less negativity, greater sense of self-worth, over-all physical well-being and mental balance, increased resilience, positivity, less chronic anxiety, depression and mental conditions

What does non-judgment mean?
All our lives we have developed the habit of labelling experience good and bad. As soon as we judge a feeling, we introduce a division in the mind which leads to mental conflict—’I want good feelings, not bad feelings.’

We make constant comparisons between past and present experiences and automatically judge situations and people. Judging, as a mental habit is another obstacle to be truly present. By over-thinking and worrying we become entangled and the thoughts multiply, further separating ourselves from a state of wholeness and presence. This is mentally and physically draining and takes even more energy than accepting what has happened, surrendering to what is.

We automatically turn away from what we perceive and label as unpleasant. When we recognise how powerful a strategy non-judgment is, we can view all experiences as just that—passing life events that rise up, last awhile and pass away—unless we start thinking about them which then fuels the emotions and we are swamped in unmanageable reactivity that is mentally and physically exhausting.
What is the present moment?

When we put our attention on answering this question, it usually comes as a shock to realise how little we are in contact with the present moment.

Most of us would agree that when we are thinking, except for practical purposes, work etc, we are either going over something that happened in the past, was said, a misunderstanding or unresolved hurt or we are dreaming off into the future where everything will be good, right and happy or we are worrying about the unknown.

Repetitive thinking prevents us from enjoying what is happening now; for example, conversation, engaging with nature, eating (flavors) because our attention is on thoughts and not the direct experiences we are having in the present moment.

When we free ourselves from the often tyrannical mind and all the see-sawing between past and future we come to recognise that being present is problem free.

Being present releases us from the grip of anxious thinking, worrying, telling ourselves often scary stories about what might or could happen. Being present brings us in contact with a vibrant state of being engaged and connected to life itself and we recognise how much of our life we have missed with the endless habit of thinking. It is a deeply satisfying and balancing feeling to be fully present. People who are more mindful are usually less reactive, more peaceful, calmer and happier and experience less anxiety as well as feeling a deeper sense of connection to self, others and the world around them.

Mindful practices and exercises are designed to increase our ability to be present, moment to moment in the here and now and increase our awareness as well as provide strategies to deal with unhelpful thoughts and feelings.

Acceptance

Acceptance is a key mindfulness strategy and requires an often radical new relationship to our inner lives of thoughts and feelings.

By purposefully allowing thoughts and feelings to simply be, seeing reality as it is in the present moment, is the first step to acceptance. We surrender to the truth of situations rather than attempt to interfere and get a desired outcome, an outcome we want.

We often automatically respond by turning away from difficult thoughts, feelings and situations. Training ourselves to put the spotlight of attention on the present moment, we let go of struggling with the unwanted thoughts and feelings- we accept what is rather than resist it. We give up the old habit of denying what is there and turning away and purposefully adopt a new behavior of turning towards difficulties and allow them to be there, even if it feels uncomfortable and over time we recognise that these difficult emotions lose their hold over us. This practice saves a lot of precious life energy that is wasted in resisting what is.
Attention

Attention is like a muscle—it can be trained and strengthened. Everybody has the ability to focus and self-regulate thoughts and emotions.

We have 2 types of attention;
1. When our attention is drawn to an outside stimuli e.g. a smell, a sound, a conversation or putting our hand on a hot stove.

2. When we purposely put our attention on something. For example when we do breathing exercises and purposefully put the attention on the breathing.

Purposefully cultivating attention strengthens our ability to be attentive for prolonged periods of time—essential in education for example.
The ability to regulate attention is one of the key markers for success, socially, academically, in careers, social life as well as wellbeing.
The regulation of attention can be trained. (Tang et al, 2007)
This is the key focus of mindfulness. Mindfulness trains us to focus on whatever is happening, in the moment rather than ruminate over past events that are over future events that haven't happened, often filled with fear and anxiety.

Our minds think—that's what mind is—thoughts—however in mindfulness we train ourselves to recognise when we are going into unhelpful thinking and here we need to train and regulate our attention. Mindfulness is essentially attention training and one of the many benefits is improved self-regulation.

Benefits

There are many well-documented benefits from regular mindfulness practice. By purposefully being aware of our thoughts and feelings we establish a new relationship with them and we are able to self-manage and self-regulate ourselves better as well.

With regular practice, we begin to ‘see through’ our reactivity and repeated patterns of unhelpful behaviors and by doing that we learn to stop the robotic reactivity, making the same mistakes over and over. Recognising we have a choice, we feel freer, calmer and more balanced.

- less anxiety and stress
- less reactivity more responsiveness
- more mental clarity
- increased ability to remain attentive and focused
- increased social–emotional intelligence
- able to get to sleep easier
- overall well-being and inner balance
Balance

So much attention is focused on being present it’s easy to think we are never meant to think about the past or future. We think about the past and the future; we set goals, we recall past events as a necessary part of something happening now.

We need to think to remember where we left the keys, bills paid, people to contact appointments to keep.

It is the unhelpful, repetitive thinking patterns and behaviors that we interrupt by introducing regular mindfulness practices. Over time, this helps us to recognise and let go of these unhelpful ways of thinking and reacting.

Mindfulness offers us a new relationship and perception of reality and a new way of responding instead of reacting to life events.

MINDFULNESS DEVELOPS ORGANICALLY

Mindfulness is a state of being. Too often it seems to be presented as something to ‘get’ like a prize. It’s an organically developing gift of heightened self-awareness and being-ness, being present in your own life and showing up for all life offers no matter how it looks. It’s often said the most difficult circumstances eventually, after all the gnawing anxiety and rebelling against the unfairness of it all, turn out to be our greatest teachers.

Remember, mindfulness is not magic. It takes repeated practice for the benefits to become apparent so be patient. Plant the seed (intention) water it regularly (attention) and bring an open-hearted curiosity without judgment (attitude) to the practice and the mindfulness state will slowly reveal itself, over time in less reactivity, a deeper sense of calm and connection to self, other and the world around you.

How do I establish a regular practice?

By recognizing the only way we get skilled at anything is to do it again and again to continuously start...again and again. As you begin to experience the benefits, it gets easier to practice and overcome the obstacles; sleepiness, distractions, boredom, irritation. One of the key things to remember is to stop all trying and striving.

It is being alert yet relaxed and training our attention that yields the benefits of mindfulness practice.

How do I become aware?

When we turn our attention away from the often distracting outer world to our inner world of thoughts and feelings we begin to watch our thoughts and feelings (observe) in a new and alert way. We also raise our awareness of the external world by mindfully listening; hearing the birds singing, noticing sounds around us, fully engaging with others when speaking.
We purposefully develop awareness of sensations in our bodies such as pain, pressure, tingling, joyful feelings of wellbeing. We become more aware of the air on our cheeks, the temperature, colours, textures and smells. We develop ongoing body awareness throughout the day- dropping down into say the sensations of the stomach, the shoulders as a way of staying anchored in the body and also prevent unnecessary build-up of unobserved tensions.

Sometimes it might be uncomfortable to be aware of the not so pleasant feelings and thoughts and this is OK too. We don't always get to choose our life circumstances. Bringing awareness to the not so pleasant experiences can help us let go of them quicker.

Keeping our attention on whatever happens, rather than turning away from difficulties can, paradoxically be a quicker way to free ourselves from their effects. It might be we want the difficulty to stop—simply notice that.

No judging

Notice if you judge it good or bad. Practicing mindfulness doesn't mean life won't keep throwing the challenges at us— it will. Mindfulness practices help us recognise and deal skillfully with life's constant challenges in ways that free ourselves from the ongoing mental and emotional entanglement with these challenges that only prolong the stress, worried thinking and physical effects in our minds and bodies.

No right or wrong

Remember; there is no right or wrong in mindfulness— we are simply training ourselves to be more present and less judgmental of what life circumstances give us and to develop skills to remain calm and present even when difficulties arise.

If you start judging yourself during practice… I'm not getting this at all…. My mind is super busy…. just notice that. In a sense mindfulness is simply allowing ourselves to experience what is happening in any given moment, recognizing how we often want something else to happen that isn't and eventually, hopefully surrendering to whatever is presenting itself and being fully present. Thoughts and emotions arise and pass away all day long like clouds in the sky.

We are training ourselves to observe this without getting entangled, caught up unnecessarily especially in unhelpful thoughts and feelings that will get stuck inside our minds like a broken record causing ongoing, repeated suffering— until we let go.
**PRACTICE; BREATHING PART ONE AND TWO**

*Formal mindfulness instructions; practices: breathing part one and two*

**PART ONE**

1. Find a time and a place at home where you will not be disturbed.
2. Turn off all devices except an alarm that you can set for 15 minutes to begin with.
3. Find a comfortable sitting position either on a chair or cushion with your back straight, shoulders back but not stiff, feet firmly on the floor if sitting and hands gently in your lap or on thighs.
4. Shutting the eyes gently or if you prefer find a point a little in front of you and gaze to this point with eyes downwards.
5. Bringing your full attention to your body, feel the weight of your body being supported by the chair or the floor. Notice where you make contact with the chair or floor or the your spine against the back of the chair. Notice how you feel at this moment and also any shifts or changes you experience.
6. When you are ready, shifting your attention to your breathing and begin to notice how it feels as the air enters and leaves your body. Imagine you are a curious scientist that has never noticed how it feels to breathe. Just notice where your attention goes; to the temperature of the air as it enters your nostrils, to the belly rising and falling or wherever you sense it most vividly.

**PART TWO**

1. We are now going to narrow the attention down to the small area beneath the nostrils and get a sense of how the **air feel against the skin at the opening to the nostril**– slight gust of air on the exhale is the sensation we are focusing on in this second part of the breathing practice. Continue breathing normally, at your own rhythm, no effort needs to be made as we are simply observing the **flow of breath in and out of the body**, in particular around the nostrils and recognizing the sensation of the air on the exhale at
the base of the nostrils.

Breathing in this way sharpens and focuses our mind muscle. It’s like a gym work-out for the brain!

Often there is an increased awareness that in fact, we are not consciously breathing but we are watching the body breathing and we are simply observing that life mechanism.

Click the blue link below to listen to the guided audio for BREATHING PART 1 AND 2 online: Week 1 Audio

- Remember to write in your journal (see next page).

Do the exercises minimum 15 min. per day preferably more.
You can focus on one or do a combination of Breathing Meditation, the Body Scan, Listening and Open Awareness.

The main thing is to do regularly daily. Writing in the journal shouldn’t be a chore. It is a way of acknowledging what happens during the practice and allows you to process observations, insights, interesting sensations, anything that surprised you. It is a way of putting further attention on the changes you will inevitably experience as you begin to ‘wake-up’ more and more to the present moment and quieten the constant inner chatter that can be so distracting.
# Week 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Day</th>
<th>Breathing, Body Scan, Listening, Open Awareness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>What Did You Notice? What was difficult?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>What Did You Notice? What was difficult?</td>
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WEEK TWO:
Attention training and basic neuroscience
ATTENTION TRAINING & BASIC NEUROSCIENCE

One of the reasons mindfulness has reached the mainstream after centuries of practice in one form or another in all contemplative practices, is the enormous amount of evidence-based research that has been done. Consistently the results point to on-going improvements in attention, mental clarity, overall sense of well-being, improved immunity, improved emotional-social intelligence, better sleep, more kindness and empathy.

We live in an age of science and we expect to be able to prove why and how something ‘works’ or is effective. There are countless research papers available online for all to access and this has led to many people who previously might associate mindfulness meditation with buddhist monks, and lofty ideas, to consider this mind training to be a real strategy to self-manage and self regulate and most importantly address the often endless inner draining chatter, going over the past- that is finished- or dreaming of into a future- that hasn’t arrived, judging labeling, circular thinking.

Research shows that when the brain is exposed to new external and internal stimuli, new neural pathways are created - in other words both the structure and chemistry of the brain changes over time, when exposed to new influences.

By introducing new behaviors - such as attention training-mindfulness practices- we intentionally change our relationship to our thoughts so that we can free ourselves from reactivity and being trapped in unhelpful patterns of thinking.

(R. Davidson, S. Begley, 2013)

We learn to identify unhelpful habits of thinking and reacting and we find we can replace them, superimpose new healthy, helpful ways of thinking and responding. We do this by accepting and allowing whatever is present to be there without trying to ignore it (bury it), turn away, reacting which usually just further entangles us and eventually it resurfaces, often stronger than before.

With this new, alert way of being present we are quicker to recognise unhelpful thoughts and feelings that just arrive in our conscious awareness and better still, we have a strategy, for example focus on breath, to put our attention on rather than be swamped and overtaken by the inner critical voice or old hurts and unresolved misunderstandings that play out over and over in our minds.

With regular mindfulness practice we are learning new skills to cope with our often unhelpful thoughts, feelings and robotic reactions, beliefs and behaviors.

A basic understanding of how our brains function shows us that by intentionally connecting with our natural calming system, the para-sympathetic nervous system we can prevent rising stress and anxiety by doing the breathing practices. Over time, with regular practice, this becomes our default mode and we begin to experience a new state of presence especially when the pressure is on and unhelpful thinking and behaving threaten to cause...
mental, physical or emotional imbalance.

Over time we realise we have more calmness, openness, receptivity and inner spaciousness as we recognise old habits of thinking and reacting have diminished or disappeared making room for the new to come in, moment to moment. We become aware of inhabiting our lives more fully and vibrantly the more present we are.

We establish a fresh, new way of being in our own lives that is richly rewarding; deepening relationships with greater presence and connectivity, engaging more closely with people and our environment therefore deepening our connection to the natural world around us and we come to see and feel the interconnectivity of all life.

## UNDERSTANDING THE STRESS RESPONSE

**Chronic activation of the stress mechanism impairs mental and physical health.** Stress is unpleasant, even when it is transient. A stressful situation — whether something environmental such as a dental appointment or psychological, such as persistent worry about a relationship ending or money problems — can trigger stress hormones that produce distinct physiological changes.

A stressful incident can make the heart pound and breathing quicken, muscles tense and sweating. This is known as the “fight-or-flight” response because it evolved as a survival mechanism in life-threatening situations. These hormonal changes prepare the body to help fight off danger or flee to safety.

Unfortunately, the body can also overreact to stressors that are not life-threatening, such as money worries, work pressure, and family difficulties. Over the years, researchers gained insight into the long-term effects stress has on physical and psychological health. Over time, repeated activation of the stress response wear the body down and health begins to suffer; both mentally and physically.

Research suggests that prolonged stress contributes to high blood pressure, promotes the formation of artery-clogging deposits, and causes brain changes that may contribute to anxiety, depression, and addiction.

**The stress response begins in the brain**

When someone confronts danger, the eyes or ears (or both) send the information to the amygdala, an area of the brain that contributes to emotional processing. The amygdala interprets the images and sounds. When it perceives danger, it instantly sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus — the command centre.

When someone experiences a stressful event, the amygdala, (part of the limbic system) sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus. This area of the brain functions like a command centre, communicating with the rest of the body through the nervous system so that the person has the energy to fight or flee.

This area of the brain communicates with the rest of the body through the autonomic nervous system, which controls such involuntary body functions as breathing, blood pressure,
heartbeat, and the dilation or constriction of key blood vessels and small airways in the lungs called bronchioles.

The autonomic nervous system has two components, the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system functions to trigger the fight-or-flight response, providing the body with a burst of energy so that it can respond to perceived dangers. The para-sympathetic nervous system promotes the “rest and digest” response that calms the body down after the danger has passed. After the amygdala sends a distress signal, the hypothalamus activates the sympathetic nervous system by sending signals through the autonomic nerves to the adrenal glands.

These glands respond by pumping the hormone adrenaline into the bloodstream. As adrenaline circulates through the body, it brings on a number of physiological changes. The heart beats faster than normal, pushing blood to the muscles, heart, and other vital organs. Pulse rate and blood pressure go up.

The person undergoing these changes also starts to breathe more rapidly. Small airways in the lungs open wide. This way, the lungs can take in as much oxygen as possible with each breath. Extra oxygen is sent to the brain, increasing alertness. Sight, hearing, and other senses become sharper. Meanwhile, adrenaline triggers the release of blood sugar (glucose) and fats from temporary storage sites in the body. These nutrients flood into the bloodstream, supplying energy to all parts of the body.

All of these changes happen so quickly that people aren’t aware of them. In fact, the wiring is so efficient that the amygdala and hypothalamus start this process even before the brain’s visual centers have had a chance to fully process what is happening. That’s why people are able to jump out of the path of an oncoming car even before they think about what they are doing. As the initial surge of adrenaline subsides, the body return to normal function. However, in our times, many people are in a partial state of stress and anxiety 24/7. The body has continual leaking of stress hormones in the blood further exacerbating feelings of stress.

Eventually the whole response will calm down. The parasympathetic nervous system—the calming part of the nervous system—rest and digest—then decreases the stress response.

Techniques to counter stress. The first step is recognising stress.

Many people do not have strategies to deal with excessive stress and are unable to find a way to manage and eliminate stress.

Chronic low-level stress keeps the sympathetic nervous system on high alert.

After a while, this has an effect on the body that contributes to the health problems associated with chronic stress. Constant adrenaline surges can damage blood vessels and arteries, increasing blood pressure and raising risk of heart attacks or strokes. Elevated cortisol levels create physiological changes that help to replenish the body’s energy stores that are depleted during the stress response. But they inadvertently contribute to the increase of fat
tissue and to weight gain. For example, cortisol increases appetite, so that people will want to eat more to obtain extra energy. It also increases storage of unused nutrients as fat. Fortunately, people can learn techniques to counter the stress response.

Relaxation response.

Using a combination of approaches that activate the relaxation response including deep abdominal breathing, body scanning, focusing on a soothing words such as stillness and calmness, visualization of tranquil scenes, repetitive prayer, yoga, and tai chi, sports, walking, nature, knitting, gardening, all assist relaxation. Done on a regular basis, we are better equipped to cope with life’s sudden challenges that can trigger the stress response. We build resilience to life stressors.

Physical activity.

People can use exercise to dissipate building stress in several ways. Exercise, such as taking a brisk walk shortly after feeling stressed, not only deepens breathing but also helps relieve muscle tension.

Walking in nature and connecting with the natural world is known to soothe stress and anxious people. The healing power of the natural world is timeless and immersing ourselves regularly in nature is balancing to the human body and mind.

Movement practices such as gardening, yoga, tai chi, and qi gong combine fluid movements with deep breathing and mental focus, inner balancing, all of which can induce calm. Social support, confidants, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, relatives, spouses, and companions all provide a life-enhancing social net — and may increase longevity. It’s not clear why, but the buffering theory holds that people who enjoy close relationships with family and friends receive emotional support that indirectly helps to sustain them at times of stress and crisis.

THE BODY IS ALWAYS IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

In Mindfulness practice, apart from the breath used as an object of our focus we use the sensations of the body to increase our present moment awareness. The body is always present here and now, it is only the mind that wanders into the past or off into an imagined future. Mindfulness practices anchor us in being present in the body and alert and aware to thoughts and feelings in our minds and bodies.

Sensations

We are cerebral people. What does that mean? Most people are so locked into endless rumination, thinking, we have lost touch with the sensations in our bodies and often ‘all in our heads’.

Mindfulness training brings us into direct contact with the body sensations and trains our attention and as a way of recognizing what is happening to us in the moment. In addition, focus on sensations shifts our attention from the incessant inner chatter that can become emotional, is often untrue, send us off into stories that go over and over in our minds to the
point we begin to believe these thoughts and identify with them.

**Learning to recognise when we are going into unhelpful thinking patterns, we learn to purposefully shift the attention to the sensations of the body. We become curious about exactly how the body feels; pressure, tightness, heat, tingling.**

The purpose of this is to develop a grounding in the physical body cultivating more moment by moment presence and awareness so that don't get caught up unnecessarily in the mind.

There is a deep inner intelligence (inner wisdom) in all of us that many of us have lost touch with. Mindfulness provides the strategies and tools to reconnect us with this valuable inner resource of balance and presence and mental clarity.

We know this through sayings such as: I had a 'gut feelings, my heart was broken, I felt it in my bones'. There are endless examples that embedded in language is a knowledge of the body's deeper intelligence with life.

Mindfulness **purposefully cultivates re-connection with our deeper inner resource of life wisdom** and this is done through **shifting the attention from the thinking mind to the sensations of the body and breath and all senses**.

By **purposefully cultivating contact with the senses** in the **here and now** we are establishing the direct link to presence and away from the distractions of going over the past and dreaming off into the future.

The pressure, tingling, warmth or cold, moving knees, hands and feet are **all happening right now. Bringing our attention back, again and again to the sensations of the body** either in formal training or just anytime throughout the day, helps us to develop a deeper relationship with our bodies, a more insightful relationship to our inner lives and life itself.

That is, we are purposefully shifting our attention from the incessant, thinking mind to purposefully examine the different sensations the body produces at any one time warmth, cold, pressure, tightness, tingling, neutral.

**Being fully present and aware of physical sensations** in the body and actually being fully present moment by moment in the body has a calming, centering effect on mind and body.

### DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF BODY SENSATIONS

All throughout the day, bringing your **awareness to physical sensations** can be a great practice to prevent say, build up of tension in the face, the shoulders, the stomach. Simply **'checking in' with yourself throughout the day and noticing tightness, pressure, you can drop the tension down so it doesn't increase and in fact dissipates. This cultivates a relaxed state of being in the body.**

The great **ability of the human mind to shift attention at will** allows us to be vigilant of
pressure building in the mind or body and rather than it go on unchecked we can train ourselves to recognise when we need to take action. Simply putting our full attention on the tightness in our neck and shoulders won’t be quite as good as a massage but will ease the tension. We train ourselves to ‘drop down’ or let go of the guarding, armoring, tensing of the muscles and purposefully breathe more ease into these parts of the body.

It’s refreshing to STOP periodically throughout the day and check in ‘with ourselves’ to avoid tensions building up in the body.

All these self-nourishing strategies raise our awareness, presence and well-being. Over time, research says approx. 8 weeks regular daily practice, the mind goes into the mindful state by default when the pressure is really on (hence the reference to “rewiring the brain”). We naturally know when to step back, take a pause instead of building increasing tensions in mind and body and purposefully release and breathe tension away.

**Practice: The body scan**

The body scan is universally used due to its powerful healing and calming effects. People with sleep issues regularly report relief by doing the body scan. In yoga it is more commonly known as progressive muscle relaxation and involves sweeping through the body mentally and shifting our attention to each part of the body, becoming aware of any sensation we might feel there. In a sense we are learning to ‘read’ the sensations of the body.

Because we spend so much time thinking (in our heads) it’s easy to lose touch with the signals our bodies send through sensations which is an important means of keeping building stress in check. (Shapiro 2005).

The body scan (and all mindfulness practices) help us develop a heightened awareness of our physical bodies, helps us develop the ability to recognise and feel sensations by being fully present so that we train ourselves to recognise for example, if too much stress is building up in our shoulders, stomach, anywhere.

Remember, unless we purposefully train our attention, most of our waking time is spent focusing on the world outside our bodies; other people, work, distractions. Developing body awareness is an important part of self-management and self-nourishment. Recognising when we are going into a stress state and over-anxious thinking that can quickly spiral out of control, we can interrupt this by shifting our attention to the sensations of the body. Reconnecting with the bodies deep intelligence reconnects us to a life intelligence that is present in the here and now at all times. Done regularly and repeatedly this becomes our default mode.

In this heightened state of awareness, cultivated by repeated practice, we can shift our attention and purposefully ‘drop down’ the tension from our bodies and bring a deeper state of presence and ease.
In this week we recognise the body (an object) as seemingly different to the observer (subject) yet ‘reading’ the body in this way actually unites the object and subject so that these distinctions dissolve into present moment awareness.

In the beginning you may be distracted often and it may seem an impossible task to stay focused and follow the instruction but be patient.

Over time, you will be able to easily do this without guidance and the body scan universally loved as a great ‘tool’ especially for getting to sleep at night.

Remember there is no right or wrong in mindfulness– we are simply training our attention to shift our attention from one part of the body to another. When the mind wanders, and it will because that’s what minds do, gently and kindly turn your attention back to the practice.

When we put the full focus of our awareness on the body sensations during the body scan, they may be experienced more intensely. Holding our awareness on the sensations without judging, just curiously observing, can dissolve the discomfit if especially strong.

You might notice the following sensations; pulsing, aching, tingling, vibrating, lightness, heaviness, numbness, itchiness, stiffness, pressure, burning, dampness, heat and others.

You might feel; impatient, irritable, happiness, sadness, fear, frustration, pride, shame, anger, annoyance, boredom or joy.

You can do the body scan literally anywhere; walking along, lying down (most popular) waiting in a queue. You can do a quick one (check-in with you) and an extended (toes to head).

**Body Scan** *(Play Audio)*

The body scan trains us to be attentive to specific parts of the body as well as exercise the skills of shifting our attention at will.

As with all mindfulness practices, when we notice our mind has wandered we skillfully re-direct our attention back to the task.

This ability is one of the key components of self-control and over time we become more resilient with the increased ability to notice underlying pattern of our thoughts.

This can be very useful for resolving long-standing issues, buried deep in our sub-conscious and the more the spotlight of awareness is on our inner life, the more we are able to ‘face’ and resolve old issues that are still having an impact on us by letting go of old ways of thinking and reacting and cultivating presence in the here and now.

Lying on a mat on the floor in comfortable clothing, legs together arms by your sides, eyes gently closed.
Surrender your whole body weight to the floor and become aware of gravity pulling on your muscles.
Feel where your head comes in contact with the floor.
As best as possible let go of any tension in the muscles, any hold on. We are going to move through the body part by part with full awareness of how the body feels (tightness, pain, pressure tingling- anything at all or nothing at all)

Beginning at the tips of the toes, getting a sense of anything at all; slight tingling, tightness or nothing at all. There is no desired outcome and this isn't a competition- we are simply observing what the tips of the toes feel like at this moment.

When you are ready, sweeping your awareness over the top of the foot and the soles of the feet. Becoming aware of any sensations you find and simply noticing that. Letting go of any tightness or pressure you come across.

Traveling now to the ankle and up the lower leg, noticing how the calf muscles feel and then the whole lower leg. Again, purposefully relaxing the lower leg.

If your mind wanders away and starts making lists or remembering things you have to do, gently acknowledge that and return to the practice.

Putting your attention on the small area behind the knee. Can you feel warmth or moisture? Can you feel anything or nothing at all. It is all OK as we are simply acknowledging how it feels in this moment.

Moving up to the thighs. The thighs have a heavy energy, they are quite large and hold us up all day long. Investigate the muscles of the thighs and purposefully relaxing these muscles. Feel the cloth of your clothing against your thighs.

Feel the whole leg(s) sinking further into relaxation and awareness as you drop down any holding on.
Putting your attention on the buttocks. Can you feel tightness, pressure or nothing at all? Relax the buttocks.

In your own time, shifting your attention to the pelvic area and relax.

Starting at the base of the spine traveling up the spine, vertebra by vertebrae to the top of the spine, noticing any sensations, pressure, pain, tingling- anything whatsoever- or nothing at all. Again if your mind wanders this is perfectly normal, it's what minds do, gently redirect your attention back to the task of scanning the body. If you become distracted be kind to yourself simply accept your mind has wandered and bring your attention back. This is the key activity in attention training (mindfulness)- bringing the attention back to the object of focus again and again.

Now getting a sense of how the lower back, middle of the back and the top of the back feel at this moment. Stopping if you sense tightness or pressure and purposefully relaxing those muscles. Paying particular attention the large muscles across the shoulders where tension
traditionally lodges. Letting go of tensions, imagining they are melting like chocolate and draining down through the body, the legs and out through the feet into the floor. Over time, with increased presence and body awareness we can detect pressure building and quietly say, ‘I am not having pressure in my body,’ breath deeply releasing and letting it go.

The whole large area of the back is now relaxed.

Bringing your attention to the front of the body; the stomach, an area of great tension holding-on. Scan across the whole stomach noticing any tightness, pain, clenching and breathing into the this area, relax and release tensions.

Moving up to the chest, scan across the chest area doing the same, relaxing and releasing, letting go.

Traveling to the neck and throat, notice, relax and release.

Putting your full attention on the jawbone that often holds a lot of tension especially when we are anxious, angry or emotional. Let go of tension in the jawbone.

Bringing your attention to the chin, lips, cheeks and nose.

Traveling to the eyes and the small muscle around the eyes. Relax the eyeballs.

Shifting your attention to the forehead, becoming aware of any tightness, furrowing etc. Relax, release and let go.

Bringing your attention to the sides of the head, the back of the head and finally the crown of the head all the time keeping your awareness on any sensations you experience and relaxing and releasing any tensions or pressure you find.

The whole body is lying on the floor alert, relaxed and aware of itself. Take a few quiet moments to stay in touch with this feeling of the energy moving through your whole body and the sense of relaxed, aware state you are in. Even when you return to normal activities in a few minutes you can hold this sense of awareness and connectedness throughout the day, even as you go about your busy life by making a habit of ‘checking-in’ with yourself to notice if any tension is building. Adopting a daily practice of noticing each hour or two how your body (and mind) feels is a good practice to prevent the build up of tension in the body.

Listen to the BODY SCAN guided audio:

Week 2 Audio

» Remember to write in your journal
### WEEK 2

**15 MIN. MINIMUM PRACTICE DAILY**

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MINDFULNESS OF THOUGHTS

Mindfulness has reached the mainstream because there is an urgent need to find a workable solution to the anxiety and stress levels that continue to escalate in all areas of society, from toddlers to older people.

Mental health problems are rising and expected to continue to do so and we now have very young children presenting with anxiety and stress behaviors and physical symptoms directly related to stress.

How did stress become so embedded in our society causing so much disconnection and anxiety to so many?

Conditioning, expectations, financial stress, competitiveness, loss of contact with family and self, nature, low self esteem, the list goes on.

When we become a captive of the mind, a mind filled with endless thoughts, memories, unresolved hurts, demands, criticisms, future dreams, something we heard on the news, on the bus we are actively contributing to our own suffering. When we believe our thoughts, we mistakenly begin to think we are our thoughts and identify with them.

WE ARE NOT OUR THOUGHTS

Thoughts are passing mental events that arrive in our minds, last a short while and pass away like clouds in the sky or waves in the ocean- if we don't attach to them and start to tell a story and believe them. If we continue to go over thoughts, again and again, this leads to emotion arising often taking us over so they we feel we can't control our thoughts, especially hurts, disappointments, unresolved misunderstandings and emotions.

When we begin to recognise that we need to put a stop to the endless playing over and over of often disturbing and unhelpful thoughts, we begin to purposefully retrain our minds by becoming attentive to thoughts and feelings as they arise. This is the beginning of an inner spaciousness and freedom from (often) self-generated anxiety.

Our unhelpful thoughts can be tracked to be the beginning of the bodies response ;anxious thinking or rising emotion.

This robotic mind is at the core of being trapped in patterns of reactivity. When we begin to observe our thoughts and feelings more closely we are able to purposefully put an interrupter in place by simply shifting our awareness to physical sensations.

We know that an emotional charge can feel like we are being overwhelmed and we become powerless. With time, practice and awareness we can purposefully disrupt this emotional charge.
There are times when we naturally go into a stress state—acute stress situations. Having an established mindfulness practice provides us with strategies to deal with acute stress as well as chronic stress, which is one of the main cause of long-term illness.

We all know the different mental behaviors that cause ongoing stress; **Worry**—about something that might happen, fears for our physical safety or another’s, money, home, food. The list is endless. Recognizing that worry leaks vital life energy from us and achieves nothing but separation from the present, disturbance in the physical body as well as the mind and separation from all the good in our lives right now. Letting go of the past that is over and not dreaming off into the future—ever—helps us stay fully present and stay in touch with life now as it is being lived.

**Judging**: self-criticism is damaging and can cause a lot of stress— if you listen to your inner critic. The constant inner voice, instructing, self-denigrating, judging ourselves and others (often harshly)—all thinking behaviors that serve no purpose but to clutter the mind even more and remove you from the present.

The mind can be quite convincing so you have to recognize this a trap and learn to step back and observe and not engage in this type of energy draining mental activity. Give up all judging—of yourself and others. This is enormously freeing. It might take a while but every time you catch your self—judging yourself or another, let it go. Over time your mind will be quicker than the thought.

**Recognising we are not our thoughts** is the first step to freeing ourselves from the grip of the often demanding, judgmental mind.

We learn to **work with our minds** to minimize stress and anxiety and often self-inflicted pain. This requires us to be alert and present and aware of the thoughts passing across the screen of our minds.

Another **intervention** is when we notice our thoughts are unhelpful, we can **purposefully shift our attention** to the sensations in the body. We can feel our fingertips, trace around our feet on the ground, become aware of the **flow of air** moving in and out of our nostrils— all of these strategies will shift attention away from worrying thoughts and give your mind a moment to relax and let go. Simply by **interrupting the flow of unhelpful thoughts** often wakes us up to what is happening and we remain alert to present moment awareness instead of drifting off into unhelpful thinking that triggers emotionality.

Listen to the OPEN AWARENESS guided audio:
Week 3 Audio

- Remember to write in your journal
# WEEK 3

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15 MIN. MINIMUM PRACTICE DAILY
WEEK FOUR: Mindfulness of Emotions
MINDFULNESS OF EMOTIONS

How many of us, when we were young, were given a language or encouraged to talk about our emotions? Not many. So we were left with the fluctuating rising and falling of often big, overwhelming emotions and just had to cope as best we could.

Teenage years when the hormones go wild? Did anyone tell us that most teenagers are thinking and reacting from their emotional centre and often disconnected from the pre-frontal cortex? Did anyone mention the human brain is not fully developed until we are 24-25 years old so the disconnection and emotionality of teenage years are part of the process of the brain’s development.

Few people had direction, information, guidance to cope with these often overwhelming states. More than ever, we now recognise the lack of education regarding the workings of the brain, the emotions and thoughts isn’t so great as more and more people grapple with often buried, unresolved emotions and behaviors that inevitably surface at some time, often inappropriately. Not being encouraged to talk about and face emotions in the moment meant they were buried and unresolved.

Mindfulness offers a new approach to dealing with emotions, especially the difficult ones.

Until we become familiar with our emotional life, we know little about ourselves and why and how we react/ respond to certain situations, people and life experiences.

We too often have gotten into the habit/pattern of avoiding or blocking emotion when it surfaces demanding our attention. We run to the fridge for food as a distraction, pick up the phone or a magazine or worse a glass of alcohol or drugs- anything to numb ourselves from facing the squirming discomfort in our guts and throughout the body of difficult emotion.

ALLOWING THE EMOTION.

Mindfulness is radical in dealing with difficult emotions in the sense that the practices of facing emotions require us to allow emotions to be, whatever we are experiencing in the moment. We train ourselves to turn towards, not away from difficult emotions and put our attention fully onto the emotion— the discomfort, the feelings that arise in the body, the thoughts, changed respiration, memories, whatever presents.

By stepping back and observing and allowing the complex interplay of the effect emotions have on us— something significant happens.

The often deeply embedded emotion, when faced in this way, dissolves and over time, are greatly diminished and eventually the often raging emotion loses their hold over us and begin to dissolve or diminish.

This leads to deeper self-understanding and the recognition that we do not have to be captive to past, often difficult emotions and unresolved hurts and misunderstandings and that resisting facing emotion in this way never works out for the best. We also begin to
recognise that we have a choice where to put our attention. We can choose to suffer or free ourselves from suffering.

**PRACTICE; FACING DIFFICULT EMOTIONS** *(PLAY AUDIO)*

In this practice we stabilize the mind and bring our scattered thoughts to a point of focus with breathing part one and two. After some minutes of attention on the breath and the body we **narrow the attention again to the small area beneath the nostril noticing the flow of air in and out of the nostrils**, the temperature, the sensation of the air as it travels on the interior of the nose towards the lungs. In particular we notice the soft flow of air on the exhalation – at the opening of the nostrils.

After some minutes doing the breathing practices, we bring to mind, visualize a difficult situation or person we are currently dealing with. We observe closely our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations as we purposefully put our full attention on this person or situation. After a couple of minutes observing we imagine a band of white light around the person or situation. The difficulty is still there but we have stepped back from it and are observing any changes in our thoughts, feelings sensations as we continue to observe without trying or looking for a particular outcome. We are simply allowing this challenge to be there. How does that feel in your body? How does that feel in your mind?

Listen to the FACING DIFFICULT EMOTIONS guided audio:
*Week 4 Audio*

▸ *Remember to write in your journal*
## Week 4

15 Min. Minimum Practice Daily

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WEEK FIVE:
Recognising Patterns of Our Minds
RECOGNISING PATTERNS OF OUR MINDS

Taking time this session to reflect on any changes, subtle or distinctive, that may have taken place over the past four weeks as you continue to establish a mindfulness practice and work your way through this training.

Looking at areas where you might be struggling, blocking or denying or missing key clues where part of your life, physical or mental might need a closer use of feeling the sensations, feeling but not drowning in them.

Noticing patterns of resistance and turning away is the beginning of a breakthrough in facing this difficulty that is surprising hard to ‘dissolve’. At times, it might become evident you need more professional help to find ways to release the past’s effect on the present. The same applies to your students. Occasionally you might meet a situation that you feel you do not have the life experience to deal with.

In these moments, we draw on our mindfulness practices, particularly breathing to re-connect with the parasympathetic nervous system and restore the body and mind back to balance.

When we begin to observe our thoughts and feelings closely, we come in contact with our thoughts and feelings in a new way. In day to day life, in our interactions with others, we have more presence and have a raised awareness of their body language, subtle messages, our reaction to them (registered in the body sensations either pleasant or unpleasant).

We may sense an old pattern arising of reactivity to a raised voice or an unpleasant response. In these moments we can bring a mindful observation of not going down the same track of learned reactivity (from the past) instead we can take a pause, step back, observe and CHOOSE a different more measured response.

Reflective responses are important part of who we are. Sometimes they save our lives for example instead of stepping off the road we look, reflexively as a life protector, right and left or we might reflexively pull our hand away from a hot oven. It is the emotional reflexes that often find us saying and doing things we later regret that cause the most problems. The more mindfulness becomes a part of your life, the more mindfulness becomes your default mode, especially when the pressure is on.

Training ourselves to recognise when our thinking and reactions are unhelpful, we know instinctively to take a pause and re-assess the situation.

The wide-spread use of STOP and RAIN in mindfulness training assists in recognising those moments when we are trying to avoid facing difficult emotion and offers a successful strategy.

S- STOP and observe thoughts and feelings in the moment. Name quietly to yourself what you are experiencing and fully feel the emotion. By naming what is happening this puts a distance between you and the emotion, loosens the power the emotion has over you, so that there is less likelihood you will identify with it and less need to turn away from it.
T- Take a few purposeful breaths, deep breaths.

O- Observe what is happening inside yourself; thoughts, feelings. Notice if you want to avoid, fix or turn away from the difficulty. Simply observing further separates you from the emotion so it doesn't take over. You recognise you are not the emotion and it is a passing event that can be observed without becoming entangled.

P- proceed mindfully with a new awareness and relationship to this difficulty and let it go so it no longer has a hold over you.

Similarly:

R- Recognise what you are experiencing and name it quietly to yourself. Bring a sense of curiosity as you name the feeling. Again, this separates from the feeling clinging to you and taking over and you can bring some distance between you and the feeling present.

A- Allow the feeling to be there- not resisting or turning away. Notice your inner voice and the story it is telling you about the emotion and try and not judge yourself. Let it be whatever it is- even the physical sensations that arises. Not trying to ignore or change what is happening. This allows acceptance of what is.

This way of observing can liberate you from the hold the feeling has over you and again brings some distance between you and the feeling further dissipating its hold over you.

There is less need to escape and run away from the feeling which would only further bury it to percolate away and rise with a fresh emotional force at another time.

I- Investigate- notice how your body feels as you put your full gaze and awareness on this feeling. Has your breathing changed, heart rate increased? Tightness in the tummy or chest? Do the sensations change or shift the more you observe? Do they subside as you put your full attention on them?

N- Non-Identification. When you observe whatever is arising in your body in this way, allowing it to be fully present, we develop a relationship over time to our thoughts and feelings that allows them to come and go like clouds in the sky. We can later marvel about how entrapped you once were by every thought and feeling and now they are impersonal, inner events that rise up, last a while and then disappear- unless we project a story or feelings and thoughts onto them- prolonging and adding to instead of dissipating the emotional force.

Over time, after practicing mindfulness becomes part of your daily self-nourishing, self-management plan, we become increasingly familiar with deeper patterns of our thoughts and feelings. Often these patterns develop as a self-protection mechanism. Being abused, undermined, feeling shame, hurt and guilt are all feelings we all know and usually try to turn away from.

One of the radical principles of mindfulness is we learn to allow these feelings- even the difficult ones in- allow them to be present without turning away.
By putting the spotlight of our attention on these difficult feelings, fully experiencing the sensations of these feelings in the body, we find they begin to dissolve— they begin to lose their power over us.

Over time, with continued turning towards, not away from, these difficult feelings disappear for good. The past is over and no longer has a power to disturb us because we have faced it fully and consciously let it go!

That is why naming strong fears, hurts and reactions also help to disentangle ourselves from the grip of the emotional charge of these feelings and reactions.

Over time, mindfulness develops organically, we begin to experience this deepening by recognizing when we are in the surface mind of day to day ‘doing’ and when we come in contact with the deeper part of our being— the unconscious— where these psychological patterns are embedded and playing out and influencing us, even though we do not register them in the conscious mind. Learning to know ourselves deeply is the great reward for all the daily mindfulness practice.

Learning to recognise, understand and interrupt these protective patterns so they no longer fuel our reactions or feed our fears, is freeing.

This freedom opens up an inner spaciousness and presence that is deeply grounding, balancing and ultimately uncovers a natural state of inner balance, ease and happiness.

Uncluttered by protective psychological patterns that are not helpful, we find we have less reactivity and more measured responsiveness— we uncover a state of balance and inner calm.

By uncovering our natural wisdom, that is stripping away the layers of the conditioned, often reactive mind, we become more present, open and curious about whatever shows up in our lives.

We learn radical acceptance of all life experiences and the less we label (good and bad) and have preferences (like that, don’t like that) the easier it becomes to just be with what is. Life will always have challenges.

Cultivating a new relationship with our thoughts and feelings and having strategies to deal with life difficulties allows us to step back rather than become entangled and to be response-ible rather than emotionally react that often causing more pain and suffering.
PRACTICE - MOUNTAIN MEDITATION  (PLAY AUDIO)

Visualise a tall, strong mountain - one you are familiar with or one you just imagine. Look carefully at the top of the mountain. Is there an ice cap? Is there a river running down the mountain? Can you see rocks, trees. Really look closely now at the strength of the mountain, how tall and strong the mountain stands. Look at the base of the mountain - unmovable, silent, strong. Now imagine yourself inside the mountain - your head at the top of the mountain, your shoulders in the cradle and your thighs and legs as the base of the mountain. You have a feeling of steadiness, strength, immovability, silent. The weather rages around your mountain; wind, rain, snow, sleet but you remain calm and steady as a mountain as the moving tide of emotions rises and falls inside of you. You are the mountain. Continue breathing slowly and steadily throughout this practice.

Listen to the THE MOUNTAIN MEDITATION guided audio:
Week 5 Audio

› Remember to write in your journal
# Week 5

**15 min. minimum practice daily**

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WEEK SIX: Mindfulness of Listening and Communication
MINDFULNESS OF LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION AND THE SELF

When we look closely, we see that stress comes from a number of sources: our own minds, external physical stresses and most often through communication with people.

Awareness of ways of communicating effectively to avoid misunderstandings, allowing others to be heard, requires deep listening.

Developing awareness of people’s perceptions, feelings, difficulties and needs, mindfully opens a doorway to ‘being present’ in relationship creating a deeper bond of understanding, openness and being heard.

One of the greatest things you can offer another is to listen deeply. Cultivating deep listening means stepping back from robotic behaviors; interrupting, giving advise, not truly listening. When we are truly listened to we feel validated and connected. When no-one hears us, we feel disconnected and separate.

When we turn our attention fully to listening we find, if we are fully honest, when we are talking to others we are often not fully present.

We might be thinking of something else altogether, we might be wondering what to say next, asserting ourselves, we might have an agenda in the conversation and try and lead it towards a preferred outcome, we feel nervous or afraid we might not measure up, say the right thing… the inner-commenter has an endless stream of comments that all separate us from being fully present in the moment and truly listening.

WHAT IS DEEP LISTENING?

Put simply, to be able to deeply listen to another requires the listener to drop the self; no interrupting, trying to fix, shifting the conversation to something we want to talk about, stop watching the clock.

Instead we are purposefully and open-heartedly fully present, attentive, available, be receptive, curious to what is being shared.

Listening deeply is profound. It requires you to not judge or interpret or control- in fact those behaviors will assure you are not fully listening.

The art of deep listening asks us to be present as our authentic self, to drop all notions and trying and to be fully present.

Cultivating a culture of caring between people requires deep listening and authentic presence.
When we become aware of silencing the inner critic while we are listening we also recognise the following points to encourage deeper communication:

**Timing** – knowing when to speak and when to not speak

**Allowing** the space without interrupting. Not offering advice.

**Listening** deeply – dropping any agenda, hearing the shifting tones of voices and sounds.

**Being fully present**, curious and receptive. Developing an awareness of what we listen. This ongoing reflection assists us to **recognise** the **unhelpful patterns of interrupting, asserting and not being present** in the conversation which leads to more authentic presence.

When we begin to become familiar with our thoughts, observations, feelings we quickly begin to notice the robotic judging self. Almost always we have a comment – we like it, don’t like it, disapprove, judge.

Once we become aware of this automatic response to almost everything in our lives we can look more closely and begin to recognise how much time and space judging takes. And this takes from us being fully present and engaged with life as it happens.

It’s inevitable that some people and their behaviors don’t fit our world view or moral code yet equally our way of living and being can seem unacceptable for others for whatever reason.

Everyone is experiencing their own lives in their own unique way, growing in awareness in the laboratory of life with the many challenges we are each given to help us grow in intelligence, self-awareness, presence and compassion for others. If we ask ourselves … What is the purpose of life? We may answer to become more intelligent, to grow in awareness, to be the best we can. We can’t decide that for another person. We can never know their circumstances or understand their challenges. As much as possible we develop tolerance for everyone’s life journey. Stopping judging is a great beginning.

‘To listen is to lean in softly with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.’ Mark Neevo

**WHAT IS SELF?**

The **self** is the part of you that is made up of conditioning, ideas and beliefs you have often inherited and not examined.

It’s the divided, subjective you that wants, likes and dislikes, judges, tries by interfering (tries to get an outcome by not accepting situations as they are). When we practice mindfulness and come to know more deeply who we are by observing our thoughts and reactions more closely we often are surprised to learn how much our ‘selves’ get in our own way by not allowing the flow of life to unfold. Trying, a behaviour of the self, is often known as the troublemaker – simply because no amount of trying changes the flow of life events as they are meant to happen. Trying requires a force, quite a strong emotional charge.
Forcing anything to be other than what it is—counterproductive and tiring and we leak a lot of life energy in this non-productive, often automatic, robotic, (unconscious) behavior of the self.

We get into the habit of listening to the inner critic and worse begin to believe it; ‘you are a loser,’ ‘you will never be loved,’ ‘you always make the same mistakes’ etc. This endless stream of negative self-talk keeps us trapped (and unhappy). When we practice mindfulness we purposefully recognise these thoughts as unhelpful and train ourselves to shift attention to the breath or physical sensations rather than become entrapped in the broken record of these repetitive thoughts. In this way these thoughts and feelings lose their hold over us and in time we completely give up the robotic activity of negative thinking. We re-wire our brains to recognise when the stress is building up in our thoughts or feelings and we purposefully redirect our attention. Overtime, this become our default mode and a protective mechanism. We stop giving our thoughts power over us and realise we are not controlled by our thoughts but we can control our thoughts with attention, observation and awareness.

### Communication with Self

‘Human suffering is created by entanglement with cognitive networks made possible by language.’ (Steve Hayes, Acceptance Commitment Therapy.)

We are constantly listening to our inner voice (inner critic) and communicating with ourselves. We have yes/no conversations, storytelling and endless streams of inner communication—much of it inflaming our emotional states with often untrue thoughts, beliefs, reactions.

**Language has a powerful impact on us.**

For example, we might feel fear and say to ourselves, ‘I am afraid.’ Language specialists and mindfulness researchers (Santorini 2011) have found that by replacing our standard language responses we can shift perspective.

For example saying, ‘I am experiencing fear,’ immediately put distance between ourselves and the emotion we are experiencing. It doesn’t disappear but it loosens its grip over us so that we are not overwhelmed. We still feel fear however we are more observing the response in our bodies rather than being paralysed by the emotion. When we give attention to negative thoughts they multiply.

The more we develop mindfulness as a state of being present, alert and aware we become more able to identify unhelpful thoughts and feelings as they arise and make the choice to not go off on a tangent, creating thoughts and reactions around something that possibly has no reality.

Equally, we can train ourselves to recognise the negative inner commentary and purposefully replace it with positive statements always speak in the present tense—not the future. I can deal with this now—I will be able to deal with this.

Tell yourself ‘I am...’ statements repeatedly. Repeating negative statements makes you believe it. This is important. Inner chatter often runs our lives. Language has a big impact on our minds so cultivate awareness around inner chatter. Don’t allow the negative in.
Pillars of achievement in self-talk:
Rewire, replace negative self-talk with positive statements.
Use self-talk to influence subconscious
Leave past comments and stories in the past—refuse to engage with them!

Listen to the LISTENING MEDITATION guided audio:
Week 6 Audio

» Remember to write your journal
## WEEK 6

**15 MIN. MINIMUM PRACTICE DAILY**

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WEEK SEVEN:
Connection to the Earth, Others and Self
CONNECTION TO THE EARTH, OTHERS AND SELF

Too often we are trapped in the prisons of our own minds. If we listen to the inner critic, have constant connection to devices and distractions we can lose touch with nature and the environment, people (by not being fully, vibrantly present) and with ourselves (disconnection, lack of self-acceptance, self compassion).

Developing a connection to nature has been shown to help with depression and reduce the symptoms of stress and anxiety. The constant demands of this fast-moving world, work and the pace of life in general can be counter-balanced by self nourishing with regular mindfulness practice including cultivating an awareness and relationship to nature.

Walking in a forest, seaside, river or looking up at the sky (day or night). Listening to the soothing sounds of birdsong or the wind—intentionally—reminds us we are all part of this diverse world of living things and we all breathe the same air and are all deeply connected. We are all cells in the body of humanity trying to do the best we can.

Purposefully connecting with the energy of nature is calming and often releases us from the grip of the constant inner chatter. Watching a golden sunset is calming and deeply present to the majestic beauty of our earth. In these moments, the turbulent mind falls away and we stand in awe of the magnificence of our natural world that is our home.

Looking at and connecting to trees or a forest we can train ourselves to recognise the trees are an essential part of life. Trees breathe in carbon dioxide (the by-product of human exhalation) and breathe out the pure oxygen we need to live! That is quite a close relationship we have with all plant life but how often do we consider this or give thanks for this wonder.

Walking on the beach, the grass barefoot further connects us to the energy of the earth in a nourishing way. Too often we are locked away indoors so to purposefully recognise a need to make time each day to connect with nature, outdoors, fresh air—away from the distraction of devices—is an important part of maintaining physical balance and mental equilibrium.

THE STORY-TELLING SELF AND THE OBSERVING SELF

Learning and unlearning practice (play audio)

Over time, with regular mindfulness meditation practice, we grow in self-awareness. We begin to see the self as the story-teller, the one that gets caught up in the stream of thoughts and feelings about a person, a relationship, a challenge or perceived problem often judging, being self-critical etc.

We tell our-selves often complex stories about a person or a situation that often, may not be true or real yet we experience a range of emotions and reactions around these thoughts that have no real basis. This is wasting life energy and destabilizes the mind!

When we have established a regular mindfulness practice we begin to notice we naturally
shift our focus from the storytelling self to the observing self. From this new perspective we are better able to see the facts without speculating and recognise when we are going into unhelpful story-telling mode.

In this way we can interrupt this unhelpful story-telling self and free ourselves from the effects of needless emotional reactivity to situations and events that may not have even happened!

Cultivating self-acceptance and recognizing we are whole and complete as we are, flaws and all, is liberating.

Self-acceptance is a powerful way of being fully present in our own lives. You may have robotic behaviors (automatic), ways of thinking, reacting that over time, with continued regular practice, begin to diminish and disappear as you bring more attention, awareness and presence into our lives.

You become calmer, clearer, more present moment to moment with increased awareness and receptiveness to others.

Equally, self-care is an important part of self-acceptance. Developing a healthy self-respect involves recognizing when too much is being asked of you. We have to learn to say ‘no’ sometimes when it means it will push us over a mental or physical edge- even if it means offending someone.

Too often we are told it is selfish to think of ourselves before others yet when we are burnt-out from the constant demands of meeting everyone’s expectations, we often find we have little time for our own needs.

Compassion fatigue is real and a by-product of always being the ‘giving’ person; giving of time, resources, assistance. Of course we need to help each other. We are social creatures and thrive on connectivity to others, giving to others but we also thrive when we purposefully nourish and take care of our own needs.

A natural compassion for all life begins to surface as, released from the prisons of our own minds, we recognise the sameness of everyone; everyone suffers, everyone has life challenges, everyone does the best they can even if we don’t see that.

Listen to the LEARNING & UNLEARNING guided audio:

Week 7 Audio

› Remember to write in your journal
### WEEK 7
**15 MIN. MINIMUM PRACTICE DAILY**

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WEEK EIGHT:
Acceptance of What Is
**ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT IS**

*Focus on the good*

It is well known, adopting a **daily practice of being grateful** for all the **good** in our lives is calming and healing. Our world has a tendency to focus on the 'not good', negative news, negative excitement through others misfortunes. We seemed programmed to expect the worst.

**With a simple shift to all that is good**, we begin establishing a **changed mindset**, that over time, increases our awareness, presence, energy and positivity. Take one moment now and **notice the position of your lips**. Are they slightly downturned? Now ever so softly, purposefully pull the corners of the lips up - without feeling like a clown.

What did you notice? A feeling of lightness? This small gesture with the **face muscles** can be a constant reminder that life is **not all stress and challenge**. We can look at all the good - we have a home, people who care about us, people we care for, food to eat, a bed to sleep, in clothes, maybe a job and a car. We live on this beautiful planet filled with trees, flowers, birds and animals.

This doesn't eliminate all the ‘not good’- poverty, crime, disease, war, unfairness but it does provide a way of being that helps us navigate our way through life with an awareness that **what we hold in our minds and hearts is often reflected in the world around us**.

**GETTING YOUR LIFE RIGHT**

*Patience*

It’s taken a long time to become the person you are with all the usual flaws and conditioned behaviors and reactions. Be easy with yourself. Paradoxically, opposed to everything the world tries to tell us, we don't need to add anything to ourselves. We are whole and complete as we are. For too long, we have been conditioned to believe we are less than whole and need to add something to be better. How about just accepting yourself, flaws and all, in all your humanity! Recognising this deepens our appreciation of our lives, life itself in all its myriad forms.

When you have had enough unhappiness and begin to recognise it’s our thoughts and often an inability to accept life, as it is, that causes so much unnecessary suffering, we begin to come in contact more fully, more richly with life itself- your precious life. Remember, your thoughts are the root cause of suffering. Putting the spotlight of awareness on thoughts and patterns of reactivity and recognising we have a choice of where we put our attention as well as knowing we can shift attention, especially when trapped in negative self-talk, unhelpful thinking patterns, is the doorway to inner freedom. You can't just add water and suddenly you are now mindful.

It’s an organic process of re-wiring your brain, thinking patterns, facing the past and the stranglehold it often has over you over time. It’s accessing a deeper life intelligence and
it available to all who are willing to face themselves in 100% honesty and do let go of the thoughts, behaviors and patterns that keep you trapped. Be patient. Slowly you begin to notice less anxiousness, less reactivity, greater acceptance a deeper feeling of connection to others, a deeper compassion for all life as we come in contact increasingly with the mystery life is and our place in it.

If we **focus on the negative**, *life appears negative* but if we **focus on the positive and the good**, *this is what is reflected back to us*. We all create our own states of being by the choices we make and the thoughts we have.

So much of our lives are spent being **on the treadmill**, trying to keep up, **trying to get life right**. We are always trying to **find the missing thing that will make everything OK**.

**Trying**

When we recognise that when we ‘try’ to fix something, we are often getting in the way of a naturally occurring solution arriving. In fact, our trying interferes and complicates situations. Equally trying to get a **particular outcome, not accepting situations**, people as they are is equally disturbing, ingrained behavior that is **unconscious conditioning**. When we begin to recognise these **robotic thought patterns** we become aware the **resistance to acceptance reality as it is**.

We begin to see that if we **let go of the anxious grasping and holding on and trying**, a new **spaciousness opens up**, our whole **bodies and minds soften** into a state of ease from holding tension and we recognise that **trying** uses a lot of **emotional energy**. When we drop it, become freer and easier, lighter in our beings.

**Accepting reality moment to moment**

When we recognise the patterns of behavior and thinking that keep us trapped in anxious holding on and constant trying to get things right we begin to cultivate true presence, acceptance, fully being in each moment with alert awareness.

**This new way of being** can be challenging as **shifting our attention and cultivating present moment awareness** doesn’t mean life won’t continue to **throw challenges at us**. It will. Is this not how we learn and grow in life intelligence and be the best we can?

If you think back over your life, isn’t it the **most difficult, painful experiences** that have eventually become our **greatest teachers - waking us up to aspects of ourselves** that we have been blind to, beliefs and behaviors that are not helpful?

Seeing life, ourselves and others in this new way opens the door to a **deep acceptance**. We see that we have the ability to be present, **moment to moment with whatever is happening** - perceived good or perceived bad.

**Labelling**

Over time when we recognise life is a continuous series of ongoing events - some good, some
not so good- we give up labeling and invite all experiences in. Labelling is a practice that further separates us from being fully present here and now.

We find **we are able to fully meet all experiences as they are** instead of **hoping or wishing** things were different. **We turn toward** difficulty and **be** with it, rather **than turn away** and try to distract ourselves. **Meeting all life experiences in this way** we find we are **more resilient** than we thought and we develop **an inner strength** and deeper intelligence by **facing and accepting life… as it is!**

**ACCEPTANCE** is the great gift of mindfulness training. It is recognizing our thoughts and feelings as they arise with kindness and curiosity. We can ‘let it all in’ without grasping, wanting a different outcome, turning away. This is the radical insight into mindfulness- deeply accepting life circumstances with grace and ease and loosening the stranglehold of aversion.

We slowly begin to see that the key skill we are developing in mindfulness training is **recognizing** what is happening in the moment- what is passing across the screens of our minds, the inner landscape of our being- moods, feelings, emotions, sensations. We recognise the “okayness’ (Jeff Foster) of all life, even when it seems not OK.

**Forgiveness and Gratitude**

Holding onto past hurts and resentments keeps us stuck in the past. Cultivating a mindful way of life means letting go of the past and opens up a space to be more fully present. Forgive where you can. If you were hurt by others remember they probably didn't know better or were hurt people themselves. That doesn't make it right but it doesn't help to dwell in the past in any way. Forgiveness frees us but it has to be heart felt and with real intention. Equally adopting a daily practice of gratitude for all the good life offers Mindfulness provides the tools and strategies to lead a purposeful, meaningful life connected to all that life offers. Sending loving kind thoughts to loved ones and even people we find challenging is equally freeing. All these behaviors when adopted raise the level of our awareness our vibration of happiness and cultivate interconnectivity.

Over time, when you become established in mindfulness practice and it becomes part of your every-day self regulation and self-management, you come to realise that you are letting go of old ways of being, often unhelpful and coming in contact with the deeper wisdom of being human.
You come to understand that you are your own best ‘teacher’ and the material you have to work with is your life experience. By putting the spotlight of attention on all aspects of your mental and emotional being, you discard old behaviors that are unhelpful and replace them with new ways of being. You cultivate and experience a deeper contact with reality, acceptance of what is, yourself and others, develop gratitude for life itself.

**Going forward from here**

Training our attention is possibly the greatest best thing you can do to truly come in contact with who you really are and recognising that you are not your thoughts. Coming in contact with the stillness and silence within, we come to recognise that the thinking, distracted mind is the source of so much anxiety and loss of inner balance. Mindfulness restores us to a state of balance, wholeness and well being and is maintained by regular, daily practice.

Listen to the ACCEPTING WHAT IS guided audio:

**Week 8 Audio**

- *Remember to write in your journal*
### WEEK 8

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