

HANDOUT: Taking a Breathing-space: Seeing what is most needed

Category	Subcategory	Group size	Duration	Language
Mindfulness	Mindfulness interventions	Individual or group	60 minutes	English

For the facilitator & participants

Short introduction

The present moment is the place from which our entire reality is created. Our relationships, communication, work/home life, and other experiences spring forth from our thoughts, feelings, and actions (Kabat Zinn, 2004).

But how many of us are truly aware of the thoughts, feelings and actions that influence our experience and our relationships with others? How many of us have learned to cultivate and grow one of the critical skills that help us to see what is actually happening right now and what is needed as a result? To see what is at the root of our experience and what is (not) to be done (Williams & Penman, 2011)?

Meditation: The 3-minute Breathing Space

(Step 1, approx. 1 minute) Let us stop and sit still, close our eyes, and bring the awareness inside.

How are you? What's here now?

What **bodily sensations** are there? Maybe there is the tension of pressure. Plenty of energy or little. Feelings of comfort or discomfort. The warmth or coldness.

Just observe, there is nothing to do, nothing to fix. Just be.

What **feelings or emotions** are there? Perhaps there are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings. Perhaps emotions such as gratefulness, unrest, sadness, happiness, anxiety, or anger. Whatever is there, let it be. Do not resist or cling to it. Just be.

What **thoughts or thought processes** are there? Many or few? Positive or negative? Focused on the future or past? Thoughts that encourage you to do something?

Just notice, don't judge or try to step, just let them be.

(Step 2, approx. 1 minute) And while letting be, now bring your awareness to the belly / the abdomen. And here experience the rise and fall during the inhalation and exhalation.

Anchoring yourself in the middle of all those thoughts and feelings. Anchoring yourself in the breath. Making it rise and disappear in the background. While giving your breath your full awareness.

Perhaps slowing the inhalation and the exhalation, breathing a little deeper, a little slower and let your body relax.

Just breathing. Being fully present at this moment.

(step 3, approx. 1 minute) And now expand the field of your awareness expanded further to your body as a whole. Being aware of the posture. Feeling the contours of your body too.

Your facial expression. And the muscles of your face.

If you notice that there is still tension in your body, breathe in it.

And you become aware of the space around your body. The larger space.

And from this embodied presence, this awareness, ask yourself the question:

What is most needed?

Theory: The 3-minute Breathing Space

Two important questions are incorporated in this meditation:

- What's here now?
- What is most needed?

These questions seem simple, but have a profound depth to them. The see what is really here and what is needed is a skill that can be developed. And that helps us not to react out of the habit of patterns.

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us (Williams & Penman, 2011).

To investigate what's here now when observing in the first minute/step:

- The body
- Feelings & emotions
- Thoughts

And the funny thing is, you can just let whatever is there 'be' as it is. Please do not judge, resist, or cling to whatever is there. It is all information, which can be helpful and lead to insights.

In the second minute/step we observe the breath:

This helps to collect the attention and to create a little more space between you and whatever you noticed in step 1. It also helps to calm the nervous system so that we become more intelligent.

Whenever the attention drifts, just smile and kindly return it to the breath.

In the third minute/step expand your awareness to the body as a whole. And from this embodied question we ask ourselves (based upon what is here), what is most needed? What would be most beneficial for me, the other person, this world?

Sometimes an answer will come. It might be grandiose such as world peace or something ordinary like a short break or a glass of water. Or perhaps nothing is needed at this moment. That's okay too!



Where, when, and how? You can practice this meditation anywhere you like, even in very busy settings... you can always practise it in the toilet. If you practice it at least once a day, it becomes a new skill. So start by practising when it doesn't count, preferably not the most challenging circumstances.

And keep it up! So that in time you will be able to use it in a "split-second" as well. Very beneficial in situations where aggression is encountered.

It will strongly reduce the tendency to respond from the fight, flight, or freeze pattern but from a more evolved part of your brain.



Tips for beginners

1. Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic. It's familiar to us because it's what we already do, how we already are. It takes many shapes and goes by many names.
2. Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do. We already have the capacity to be present, and it doesn't require us to change who we are. But we can cultivate these innate qualities with simple practises that are scientifically demonstrated to benefit ourselves, our loved ones, our friends and neighbours, the people we work with, and the institutions and organizations we take part in.
3. You don't need to change. Solutions that ask us to change who we are or become something we're not have failed us over and over again. Mindfulness recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.
4. Mindfulness has the potential to become a transformative social phenomenon. Here's why:
5. Anyone can do it. Mindfulness practise cultivates universal human qualities and does not require anyone to change their beliefs. Everyone can benefit and it's easy to learn.
6. It's a way of living. Mindfulness is more than just a practice. It brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress. Even a little makes our lives better.
7. It's evidence-based. We don't have to take mindfulness on faith. Both science and experience demonstrate their positive benefits for our health, happiness, work, and relationships.
8. It sparks innovation. As we deal with our world's increasing complexity and uncertainty, mindfulness can lead us to effective, resilient, low-cost responses to seemingly intransigent problems.

Reflection:

1. What did you experience?
2. How might this intervention be helpful to you?
3. As a result of this intervention:
 - a. What might you do less?
 - b. What might you do more?
4. How might this intervention help (after having practised it for at least some weeks) you when experiencing verbal aggression?

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