

## HANDOUT: GETTING INTO THE PRESENT MOMENT

**Instructions:** There are many words to use when thinking about getting into the present moment. This handout contains many different words and phrases to describe how to think about leaving stress, anxiety, and negative thoughts behind.

Look over this list and find what words or phrases connect with you. Or, you might come up with your own words that help you connect with being calm and present. Use this list as a starting point. **Circle the words or phrases that you like the best.**

- chill-axin'
- getting into the game
- hitting the pause button
- in the eye of the hurricane
- clarity
- impartial witness/spectator
- coming back to your senses
- be here now
- the present moment
- making friends with your mind
- watching and observing
- curiosity; being curious
- picturing the ocean or a river
- changing your relationship to thoughts and feelings
- putting on the right gear for stormy weather
- getting in the zone
- getting in touch
- patience
- peace, calm, and stillness
- taking a breath
- changing the channel
- focused attention
- surfing the moment
- in the flow
- non-judging awareness
- non-blaming; openness
- acceptance of this moment
- creating space (from negativity)

**Reflections:** If you have other words or phrases not listed above, write these here:

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What is an example of a good time and place that you could put your favorite word or words to use?

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What do you see as the biggest challenge you will face when trying to use your word or phrase for getting in the present moment? \_\_\_\_\_

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## HANDOUT: A STORY: PRACTICING MINDFULNESS WITH KINDFULNESS

There was once a mindfulness institute that placed an advertisement in a daily newspaper and in various social media sites. The short ad read as follows:

*One-day Enlightenment. Guaranteed. Call: 555-Mindful*

A woman saw this ad and got very excited. She had been dealing with daily stressors, a new job, and even health issues. She called to get the address and the very next morning she went to the institute and found one of the instructors.

“I saw your ad. What do you mean by enlightenment?” she asked.

“Clarity of mind,” said the instructor. “Also, a sense of peace and inner calm, even in the midst of life’s difficulties. All you have to do,” he explained, “is to follow your breath completely, noticing the in-breath, the pause, and the out-breath—without any distractions for the next seven hours to realize your goal.”

The woman glanced at her wristwatch, smiled and said, “Fabulous, I’ll have my enlightenment by dinnertime! Sign me up.” She was given a cushion to sit on, and so she began. The first in-breath was fantastic, and she was present with it the entire time. Right then, however, a siren blared outside. The woman’s sense of hearing grabbed onto the siren and brought it inside her mind, where it started to spin a story: *That’s loud. Don’t they know we’re trying to get our enlightenment in here?*

Just then she realized she had forgotten about her breath. And so she started again, noticing the complete in-breath and then being present with the pause. She was just starting her out-breath when a fly buzzed by. She opened her eyes and her sense of sight went and grabbed the fly and brought it inside her mind. Again, the mind spun an elaborate story: *I wonder if we’re going to have lunch, because having flies isn’t a good idea. Maybe someone left the window open. Who should I talk to?* Finally, she remembered about her breath, and so she started again . . . and again. As the story goes, she was still there ten years later trying to get her seven consecutive hours of breath awareness!

That’s why mindfulness is more accurately called *re-mindfulness*. It’s totally okay to remind yourself to come back to being aware of the mind and body and environment time and time again. Remember, there’s no being perfect with mindfulness. You don’t have to stop your thoughts, either. Just noticing them is good enough. *In fact, when it comes to learning mindfulness good enough is always good enough.* Because mindfulness is *re-mindfulness*, there’s never any failure with it. And it’s why mindfulness is a way of inviting and practicing kindness toward yourself.

**Reflections:** If you have critical or distracted thoughts during your mindfulness practice, just notice them, smile inwardly, knowing that by noticing thoughts you are actually doing the practice! Then, just think of the words “good enough” to release the thoughts and return to your practice. Write down your experiences in the space below.

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## HANDOUT: CREATING A PERSONAL INTENTION STATEMENT

**Instructions:** Use this 3-step handout to write down a short statement related to an area in your life that you would like to improve or enhance. Have you ever done this before? If not, welcome to the club. Very few people consciously think about what values matter most to them and how this could change their lives. The nice thing about setting an intention (or personal mission statement) is that it is uniquely yours.

Below are several different life areas (with examples) of statements. A mission statement need only be a single paragraph (about 3-4 sentences long). As you begin, here are some guidelines:

- 1) Your mission statement does not have to be perfect! In fact, part of this assignment is that you go back over and over to rewrite and rework it. Personal statements take time to craft, so be patient with yourself and know that you will, more than likely, change it in the future.
- 2) Your mission statement *will not include specific goals*. This is a broader statement that relates to the values you want to bring to any area of your life. The goals come later.
- 3) Think about sharing your statement with those who you trust. Find out if others have statements like these. Or, you can examine the intentionality of someone you admire—this could be a historical figure, a friend, or a family member.

**Step 1.** Choose from one of the following LIFE AREAS for your Personal Intention Statement:

- Physical Health
- Emotional Health

**Example:** *My intention is to find balance each day so as to nurture my mental health. I will make time to notice and value the little things that are already at my side. Also, I will open myself to positive resources and others as a way of finding hope and resilience.*

- Parenting
- Marriage/Relationship

**Example:** *My intention is to create loving relationships that manifest the values of respect, cooperation, kindness, generosity, harmony, and ease. I commit myself to bringing patience, honesty, and transparency into the relationship.*

- Friendship
- Financial
- Daily Joy
- Career

**Example:** *My intention is to bring an attitude of deep appreciation and gratitude to my work. I will strive to have my work serve others in a helpful and supportive way.*

**Step 2.** Use the *values list* below to identify the values that matter to you. **Circle** those *value* words that matter to you and which feel right to include in your statement:

- trust
- patience
- respect
- forbearance
- generosity
- hospitality
- transparency
- attentive
- supportive
- acceptance
- self-acceptance
- curiosity
- empathy
- relational
- humility
- compromising
- friendliness
- loyalty
- appreciation
- gratitude
- patience
- peace
- kindness
- harmony
- hopefulness
- service
- nurturing
- altruism
- sensitivity
- prayerfulness
- faithfulness
- expressive
- grateful
- sharing
- willingness
- persistence
- openness
- caring
- compassion
- honesty
- humor
- cooperation
- joyfulness
- calmness
- understanding
- benevolence
- spirituality
- encouraging
- thoughtfulness
- gracious
- judicious/fair
- love
- tenderness
- reliability

If you have additional words or phrases not noted above, write these here:

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**Step 3.** Using the value words you chose, write a first draft below:

My Personal Intention Statement for (Family, Career, etc). \_\_\_\_\_ is as follows:

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**Reflections:**

1) How does it feel to have a personal intention statement? What is one way your commitment to this statement could create a positive difference for you or others?

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2) What specific goals or actions can you think of that would support your intention? Write these down below. Make sure these are small and simple goals to begin with! You can track your goals to make sure that you are supporting your intention to the best of your ability.

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3) Consider carrying your statement with you by writing it on an index card and looking at it several times daily. How can you develop a plan to accomplish this?

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## HANDOUT: LEARNING TO BELLY BREATHE

**Instructions:** Have you ever seen a baby breathe? With each breath its little belly moves, not the chest. That's our natural breathing method, and with this handout you will learn to use belly breathing, or diaphragmatic breathing, to naturally relax the body.

If you're a chest breather, you're taking shorter, faster breaths. By getting the air in the deeper part of the lungs, you'll actually get 10x more air with each breath. This will be a slower, longer breath—but a *normal* sized breath. **Follow along with the questions below to retrain the breath and get the benefits of belly breathing.**

**Question 1:** Am I a Chest Breather or a Belly Breather?

To check whether you are breathing shallowly or more deeply, do the following:

1. Sit in a chair, with an erect but comfortable posture.
2. Place one palm on your chest and the other palm on your stomach (below the rib cage and above the navel).
3. Take some normal breaths. Which hand or hands move? If you're not sure, look in the mirror.
4. If the top or both hands are moving, then you're a chest breather. If the bottom hand moves, you're getting a fuller breath. In either case, follow along to get the most out of your belly breathing.

**Question 2:** How Can I Retrain Myself to Belly Breathe?

You are going to learn a movement that gently stretches muscles that run between the ribs—naturally hinging the ribs open so you can get a more full breath.

1. Reach behind your chair with your arms and bring your hands together.
2. Relax the abdominal muscles so your stomach can move outward as your lungs press on the stomach cavity.
3. Notice if there's more movement in the belly. It's that easy.
4. If you didn't notice any belly breathing, try this posture: raise your arms above your head and clasp your hands behind your neck. This opens the chest area and makes taking a deeper breath easier.

**Question 3:** How Should I Practice or Use Belly Breathing?

1. Try practicing for 1-minute at a time, three times a day to start.
2. You can notice when you feel tense or stressed, and do a minute right then.
3. Pay attention to your posture, especially if you're sitting at a computer.
4. Practice while standing up or lying down.

**Reflections:** What time(s) of the day can you practice breathing? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Are there any challenges you see to using belly breathing? \_\_\_\_\_

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How would this breathing benefit you? \_\_\_\_\_

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## HANDOUT: PALM THE PRESENT MOMENT

**Instructions:** Use this portable grounding meditation script whenever you find yourself getting anxious, worried, feeling overwhelmed, lost in negative thoughts, or feeling uncertain about the future while transitioning from one place to another. Spend as much time as necessary to do this the first time.

Once you are familiar with how to *Palm the Present Moment*, you can shorten the process and do this in just one-minute, if desired.

**Sit in a comfortable chair and take a couple of nice, long, calming breaths.** Now, just raise your hands up to the height of the heart center, with the palms facing one another—about a foot or so apart. Notice how much tension there is in just holding the arms and hands up in the air.

**Next, ever so slowly, bring the hands closer until you feel even the slightest or subtle sensation of energy, pressure, heat, or warmth.** Stop when you feel this, and just notice this for a few moments. Observe closely this sensation. Is the heat, warmth, energy, or pressure constant? Or, does it vary slightly moment to moment?

**Now, gently move the palms closer until just the fingertips come together with the most feathery, lightest touch.** Imagine that the molecules from the fingertips of your right hand are dancing with the molecules of the fingertips of your left hand. You might even think about what dance they are doing . . . the foxtrot, the samba, the tango, the waltz, or the jitterbug.

**Now, you continue to bring your palms together until they lightly touch.** As you do this, notice how the fingers straighten out and how more heat builds up between the palms. With your palms together, this is a good time to pause for a few moments and have appreciation for the body, which is a precious gift that we possess.

We can also reflect on the words of former priest and author John O'Donohue who wisely wrote in *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*, “Your body is the only home in the universe.”

*(Rest in silent appreciation for 5-10 seconds)*

**Now, let's spend a few moments to see what it's like to tense, and then relax the body.** Keeping your palms touching, raise your elbows up to the side. Press with only ten percent of the total pressure you could exert. Now, press your hands together even harder—up to twenty percent of total pressure.

**Stop pressing if you feel any pain.** Press only as hard as you can without experiencing pain or discomfort.

**Again, observe how far up your arm the tension goes.** Does it extend to the wrists, the elbows, the shoulders, the shoulder blades, the back, the chest? Maybe you feel more heat building in the palms of your hands? Which muscles are tense? After about five seconds of this, let your shoulders and elbows relax and fall. Release all this tension. Notice how nice it is to let go of tightness and tension in the body.

**Finally, very slowly open your palms, like flower blossoms opening to the morning sun.** Sense the coolness in your palms as the heat dissipates. Finally, let the weight of gravity tug on your hands and arms, letting these gently fall like leaves from a tree, until they come to rest on your lap or legs. Take a nice, long inhale, and as you exhale, imagine all the remaining stress draining out with the exhale down your legs and out of the bottom of your feet—where it will flow into the Earth for recycling.

If you want, just sit for a few more moments in appreciation for the body that follows your commands and carries your consciousness so you can achieve your life goals. How marvelous!

## **HANDOUT: GROUND-SURFING (MINDFUL WALKING)**

**Instructions:** Use this portable method of getting present when you are in transition and feeling anxious as you walk from one place to another. Consider using this practice when walking from the car to your office, walking from the car to entering your home, or even when walking into that staff meeting.

To begin with, 1) find a place that is quiet, where you can take up to fifteen steps in any direction, and 2) practice next to a wall just in case you lose your balance since you will be moving more slowly than normal.

You can do this practice in two ways. Try each of the methods below for three minutes and see which one works best for you:

### **Ground-Surfing with Intention:**

*As you prepare to walk, set an intention for each step and movement you take. This can be a mental intention, said silently. For example, you can set the intention to “take a step with my right foot,” after which you will follow up by taking that step. As you take the step you will observe and notice very closely how it feels as your foot lifts up, moves forward, touches down, and even how it feels as you shift the weight from one side of the body to the other. In other words, this is really a simple three-step process of 1) setting an intention, 2) following up with an action, and 3) noticing and observing the movement in detail. It’s that easy!*

*Usually, you can set an intention for each step, and also set an intention for every time that you turn the body in a new direction. That mental intention can be stated just as “turning, turning.”*

*Spend three minutes walking down a hallway or corridor in your home or office, then turning and walking back. Setting an intention will naturally slow you down. It will also tend to keep your mind from thinking other thoughts. If, however, your mind has thoughts or gets distracted, simply return to stating your intention for each step and return to the walking. Try this in the morning as a way to walk to the bathroom, or during other times of the day.*

*Note that you can use intention while walking at normal speed as well! In this case, simply state the word “walking, walking” as you move, placing full awareness on the legs, the feet, the arms, and the entire body as it moves.*

### **Ground-Surfing with Full Presence:**

*For this practice, you don’t need to think of anything or set any mental intention. Instead, you will imagine placing your full awareness in the body itself. It is as if your consciousness moves into your legs and feet, and you can notice each little movement and be fully engaged with it—just as if you were a surfer riding a wave in Hawaii! Only this time you’re surfing the ground, noticing every little change in how your feet contact the carpet, wood, or grass that you walk on. See how each surface affects how you surf it.*

*Let your body and movement become fluid and enjoy the ride as you immerse yourself in this dance of movement. Have you ever seen someone practice tai chi, yoga, or dance? Let walking slowly (or even at normal speed) embody the same graceful movement as these practices. By moving in this way you take the body off auto-pilot and flow with each movement and moment. Enjoy the ride!*

**Reflections:** Which of the two ground-surfing methods above helped you to stay fully present with each movement? Which slowed down the busy, anxious mind?

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When would be a good time for you to practice ground-surfing? How could you adapt this practice to help manage anxiety during periods of uncertainty and transition?

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How could you create a daily mindful movement practice? What would that look like? What challenges or obstacles would you face in implementing this?

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## **HANDOUT: TWO WAYS OF DOING ANYTHING (OR, HOW TO SAVOR THE JOURNEY)**

**Introduction:** Have you ever thought that there could be two ways of doing anything? For example, you can wash the dishes to get them done with because they're a chore you don't like . . . or, you can do the dishes in order to do the dishes.

Likewise, you can drive your car to get from point A to point B . . . or, you can drive your car in order to drive your car.

Here's another example. You can do your homework or office work in order to get the best grade, highest accolades, or get a promotion . . . or, you can do your work with a sense of curiosity, openness, and total engagement.

In any of the cases above, you still get to your intended goal—of washing the dishes, driving where you want to go, and getting a positive response to your work. What's more, you savor the journey. That means you are less likely to feel pressured, anxious, or unhappy about the activity before you, or to have an unfortunate accident along the way because you were wishing you were somewhere else!

Even Henry David Thoreau experienced the problem of being present when he was living and walking around Walden Pond in the mid 1880s—and he didn't have an iPhone or iPad to distract him! Here's what he wrote in his Essay on Walking:

*It sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head, and I am not where my body is; I am out of my senses . . . What business have I in the woods if I am thinking of something out of the woods?*

**Instructions:** Choose from among one of the following activities. It might be useful to choose an activity that you typically resist or don't like doing.

Driving	Homework	Preparing meals
Washing the dishes	Laundry work	Shopping
Vacuuming	Studying for a test	General cleaning

*The point of this practice is not to say you will suddenly love washing the dishes and will run over to your neighbor's house and volunteer to wash the dishes stacked in their sink! The idea is to change your relationship to an activity. To experience it in a whole new way that lets go of your previous assumptions and dislikes.*

*Do the activity for five or 10 minutes without distraction or multi-tasking—so turn off the TV or other devices and see what it is like **to focus, slow down and notice every little detail** that you can. Allow yourself to experience this chore or activity as if it were the very first time you have ever done it. Using the example of washing dishes:*

- *Before starting, spend a few moments just to reflect on the dishes and utensils and how they have helped you enjoy your meal. Take a moment to admire the work and craftsmanship that went into designing and making these items.*
- *Feel the fine movements of your arms, hands, and body as you lift and manipulate the dishes.*
  - *Notice the coolness or warmth of the water as it splashes on your hands.*
  - *Sense the weight, texture, and shape of utensils and plates*
- *Notice the smells and scents of the dishwashing liquid.*

- *Observe all the unique colors and shapes on the dishes as if you had never seen them before.*
- *Listen to the sound of the water and the clinking of plates and cups, and other sounds in the environment.*
- *If you get distracted, return to the sensing of each moment.*

**Reflections:** What did you notice most by slowing down and immersing yourself in washing the dishes (or other activity)?

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What daily activities do you typically avoid or rush through? How would a more curious attitude change your experience of that activity?

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How could the idea of “two ways of doing anything” become a daily practice? In what way would it be helpful to you? How would it be helpful to those around you?

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## HANDOUT: SKY GAZING WITH NATURE

**Instructions:** *Sky Gazing is a method of connecting your gaze with Nature. It begins by extending the gaze toward the sky or horizon, and then slowly bringing it downward to focus on a nearby tree or a plant.*

*This short, easy-to-use practice can be done indoors or outdoors in a matter of minutes. Use it any time you are feeling mentally fatigued or anxious about an upcoming event. Whether you are a businessperson, student, teacher, or anyone overwhelmed by stress, this practice will help you get centered, refreshed, and quiet the busy mind. After you are done, you will likely feel more refreshed, and ready to focus and concentrate.*

*While you can use this practice indoors by using any size plant, the ideal method of practice would be out of doors with a large tree and a view to the sky or horizon. Follow along with the 5-steps below for approximately five minutes:*

- 1) First, go outside and find a location that allows you to tilt your head up slightly so you can view the sky. Secondly, find a large tree that is situated near your view of the sky—so that you can easily transition your gaze from the sky to the tree while standing in place. In addition, you will want to be standing within arm's length of this tree. If that is not possible, stand close enough to see the details of the bark and leaves of the particular tree. When choosing a tree, make sure you pick one that is pleasing to you and draws you in. Perhaps it's the color of the leaves, the shape of the branches or the trunk.
- 2) To begin, slowly raise your head and cast your gaze out as far as you can into the sky. Visualize releasing and letting go of whatever troubles and worries you have into the expansiveness above you. Let go of the uncertainty, the not-knowing, the fear, the sadness, the doubt, and even the wishing-it-were different. Release all of that into the sky, which is infinitely spacious and big enough to hold all the worries of the world. Stand as long as you need to, continuing to let go and let be.
- 3) Place your hands on the tree as you shift your gaze from the sky down to where you connect with the tree. Imagine that your feet are rooted solidly into the earth like that tree. Did you know that trees are the largest organisms on earth? Feel your connection with the great cathedral of trees that protects our ecosystem and makes our lives possible. As you feel the bark on your hands and fingers, let yourself get absorbed into the big picture of how we are surrounded and sustained by the natural world.
- 4) Now, starting at the bottom of the tree, slowly turn your gaze upward. Pay attention to the smallest details, from the texture of the bark and changes in coloration to where new growth occurs. Continue to broaden your focus until your gaze reaches the highest branches at the top of the tree.
- 5) Rest the weary mind as you sense your unity with Nature and the wisdom it holds. Appreciate that the natural world has lessons to offer on how there is a season for planting, growing, and harvesting, and pausing. Allow yourself to open to these teachings in the moments or days ahead.

**Reflections:** What was it like to spend five minutes with Nature in this way? When might you find this practice most helpful?

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What was it like to release and cast your worries into the expansiveness of the sky? Did this help you gain a different perspective?

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## HANDOUT: BE-THIS SENSE-GROUNDING PRACTICE

**Instructions:**

**WHAT:** "BE-THIS" is an acronym that stands for six powerful grounding skills (Breath, Emotion, Touch, Hearing, Intentional Stretching, Sight/Smell) that put you in touch with all your senses. This lets you redirect your attention away from anxious or negative thoughts and focus on your surroundings in a more positive way.

**WHEN:** Use "BE-THIS" when you notice emotional overload, such as when you might rate your negative or anxious state as being in the "5-7" range, or high range, when rated on a scale of 1-7, where 1 is the lowest negativity and 7 is the highest.

**HOW:** The four steps to practicing the "long form" BE-THIS are as follows:

**Step 1.** Notice when you have gone into emotional overload, which you can do by rating your level of negativity. You don't have to wait until you reach the "high" range to do grounding. In fact, it is a good idea to start practicing early on, when you notice that your level of negativity is in the medium 4-5 range.

In the space below, write down the clues that let you know when you are in the 5-7 range of emotional overload. In other words, what does your emotional overload look or feel like? (For example, this could be a feeling you have in your body, wanting to cry, a sense of anger or helplessness, etc.) The trick is to notice this before you overreact emotionally, or during your emotional overload.

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**Step 2.** Look around and describe your surrounding environment in a single sentence, followed by your intention to practice BE-THIS awareness skills. This could be stated as, "I am standing in the living room at home, and I am practicing my awareness and grounding skills." The purpose of this is to center you in the moment. Practice this right now by writing a sample intentional statement below:

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**Step 3.** Find a place where you can spend approximately five to seven minutes to practice in peace. This can still be done with others present, but it is best when distractions are limited.

**Step 4.** You will cycle yourself through the BE-THIS sense awareness and grounding skills. You can spend approximately one to one-and-a-half minutes with each of the BE-THIS grounding skills. Right now, practice each of the six grounding skills as described below:

***B—Breathe.*** For the first minute, use the diaphragmatic breathing practice to stay grounded in breathing. As you move on to the other senses, continue to keep about 25% of your awareness on your breathing.

How did it feel to do this first part of the exercise?

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***E—Emotion.*** For the next one to one-and-a-half minutes, let yourself experience your emotions and feelings with a sense of acceptance, without either pushing them away or attaching to them. Just name or label your emotions as if from a safe distance—without adding any judgment of good or bad, by simply saying "feeling of anger" or "feeling of sadness". You might even say where you feel this in your body, such as "tightness in my stomach" or "clenching in the jaw." As you continue to do this, notice if the feelings are less intense or change.

Practice by naming your present emotions/body feelings in the space below. If you're not exactly sure what name to give the emotion, take your best guess and write it down anyway. In this way you are getting to know your feelings a little more closely.

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If someone else is involved in your emotional overload, spend another 30 seconds or one minute to notice if it is possible for you to experience empathy with regards to this person. Empathy means imagining how another person feels. It doesn't mean they are right and you are wrong, or vice versa. It just means that you could understand how they might be feeling. If you don't feel empathy, just notice that you don't feel this. When the minute is up, move on.

What thoughts came up for you while doing this portion of the exercise?

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***T—Touch.*** For one minute you will practice relaxing touch. Raise your hands to heart level, with your palms facing one another and a few inches apart. Sense any heat and pay attention to your pulse until you can feel it in your hands. Then, take three breaths, each one filling the space between your palms with positive energy. Then, slowly bring your palms together, compressing the energy. Briskly rub your palms together for a few seconds.

Next, place your hands over your eyes for a few moments, then one hand over each temple, then over the back of your head. Let the energy in your hands relax and soothe you. Next, you can place your palms over the top of your chest and slowly sweep them downward over your heart, stomach, thighs, and knees. Lastly, let your arms hang at your side and shake your hands for a few seconds to release any remaining tension.

What thoughts came up for you while doing this portion of the exercise?

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**H—Hear.** For one minute, tune into the sounds of your environment. Let yourself expand your hearing and awareness to let in as many sounds as are possible—even those you make by breathing, moving in your chair, etc. Try listening to each without putting a name or label on it. Just notice each sound, occurring moment-to-moment, second-to-second.

Again, write down whatever thoughts came up for you while doing this portion of the exercise.

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**I—Intentional Stretching.** For the next minute, set a simple intention and follow up mindfully. You might set the intention to stretch your neck by rolling your head around from right to left in a relaxing circular movement. Or, you might set the intention to raise your arms high over your head as you inhale, then lowering them as you exhale. It's a good idea to think of an intention that helps you release some tension and tightness from the body.

In the space below, write down some gentle body movements (such as those mentioned above or others) that you could use as an intention and which would help you to relax.

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**S—Sight/Smell.** For the final minute or longer, use your olfactory, taste and visual senses with curiosity. Do this without thinking about the function of an object, or whether you like or want or dislike it. Simply look around and notice *in detail* as many different shapes, sizes, and colors of objects as you can—noticing these with an attitude of openness, child-like wonder, and interest. Also, what different scents are in the environment?

Look around the room or environment you are in at this moment. After you have spent time exploring, take a moment to note in the space below some of your observations about the sights and scents around you:

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**Wrap-Up:** Congratulations on completing the *BE-THIS Sense-Grounding* practice!

Now that you have completed the practice, go ahead and re-rate your level of emotional negativity on a 1-7 scale. How has the number changed?

If grounding has been helpful, write down examples of times when this practice could have been helpful in the past, as well as how you could use it in the future. Remember that *BE-THIS Sense-Grounding* is like any skill. The more you practice and use it the better you get at it!

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**OPTIONAL PRACTICE:** *Speed Scan BE-THIS-Grounding*

Sometimes you don't have five or six minutes to reverse overload! Fortunately, you can scan through all of the BE-THIS Sense Grounding skills in just a minute or less.

As before, you can rate and then re-rate your level of emotional negativity on that 1-7 scale both before and after you do the *Speed Scan BE-THIS Grounding*.

Set the intention to do *Speed Scan BE-THIS*. Then, simply state each letter and the word that it represents. Then, you will follow it with a brief experience as follows:

*B-Breath:* take one or two deep and satisfying diaphragmatic breaths.

*E-Emotion:* Quickly scan your body from head to toe, sensing for an emotion or feeling in the body. Name that feeling.

*T-Touch:* Slowly touch one thing nearby or press your feet into the ground.

*H-Hear:* Notice a single sound that is happening at this very second—even if it is the sound of your breath.

*I-Intentional Stretching:* State a simple intention to do a single stretch, and follow it up right now.

*S-Sight and Smell:* Notice one object in front of you, and take one long inhale to see what scent you can detect in the environment.

## HANDOUT: SENSING AND RATING ANXIETY IN THE BODY

### Instructions:

For this exercise you will learn how to pay attention to sensations of anxiety that occur in the body in a whole new way. This is a portable practice that can go with you anytime you feel anxious. It is also a useful way to “drop into the body” anytime throughout the day—just to say “hello” and get more familiar with this precious gift that we all possess!

There is no better early warning system than the body for signaling us we may be out of balance with some situation—either past or present—in our life. Whether the body’s signal is related to old trauma, a difficult life situation, or stress, the ability to notice these warning signals can help you respond more quickly and effectively.

Remember, no one is immune from anxiety! By *Sensing and Rating Anxiety in the Body* you can be present with it and cope with it in a healthy way. The practice of noticing sensations takes time, so be kind to yourself as you learn how to do this. If possible, do this practice in a quiet location so you can observe the sensations in detail.

Follow along with the six steps below:

- 1) Begin this practice when you first notice any sensation of anxiety. If you wait until a full-blown anxiety attack is underway, then it could be difficult to even practice this technique! The more you do this practice, the more easily you will begin to notice the early onset of anxiety—whether it’s just a tightness in the chest or a shallower than normal breath.
- 2) Bring your palms together and press your heels into the floor as a way to get grounded in the body. Press them together for about 5 seconds, then exhaling to let go of stress.
- 3) Bring attention to where you are feeling anxiety in the body and answer the questions that follow.

If you are alone, you can either state the answers out loud or write them down in the space provided. (If you are with others while experiencing anxiety, simply state the answers mentally).

- a. *Where in the body is the sensation of anxiety present? Name as many different places as you can, from where there’s the strongest feeling to the smallest feeling.*

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- b. *How would you rate the anxiety level on a 1-7 scale, with 1 the lowest level of anxiety and 7 the highest level? Write that number below.*

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- c. *If the anxiety sensation had a name, what name would you give it?*

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- d. *If the anxiety sensation had a color, what color would it be?*

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- e. *If the anxiety sensation had a shape, what shape would it be?*

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- f. *If the anxiety sensation had a size, how large or small would it be?*

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g. *If the anxiety sensation had a weight, how heavy would it be?*

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4) For one minute, take several slow, calming and soothing breaths. As you do this, you can visualize or imagine that this breath travels into the place where you are experiencing the sensation of anxiety. Let the breath fill up that area. With each exhale, you can visualize the sensation draining out of the body.

Optionally, instead of focusing on breathing, you can simply observe the sensation with as much curiosity as you can! Like a surfer riding a wave, see if you can surf the anxious sensation, noticing in great detail every little change as it rises and falls—just like an ocean wave.

5) At the end of one minute, go back to Step 3 and re-rate the level of the sensation on a 1-7 scale, as well as answering the questions about name, size, shape, color, weight, etc.

6) Continue to observe the sensation for up to five minutes, noticing how it changes moment by moment, even subtly.

**Reflections:** What did you learn from noticing and rating your sensation of anxiety?

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When can you routinely schedule the *Sensing and Rating the Body Practice* as a way of noticing the early warning signs of anxiety?

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## **HANDOUT: VISUALIZING THE CALM**

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### **Visualizing the Calm (Situational)**

**Instructions:**

For this exercise you will learn how to use the power of visualization, or mental rehearsal, to find a greater sense of calm when faced with a situation that is distressing or anxiety producing. Mental visualization, for example, has been shown to be effective with athletes because it helps them actually practice, as well as prepare for dealing with the high stress level of competition.

This practice works because the brain responds as if it is actually experiencing the visualization. What is important, however, is that you engage all your senses in your mental imagery. Picture your calming scenario in as much detail as possible. That means noticing all the sights, sounds, smells, textures, and any other sensations that surround you. Like in the film *Avatar*, where the main character was linked to an *avatar* that was controlled through his mind, you can think of this visualization as your own 3-D avatar!

**Pre-Visualization:**

1) Identify the activity during which you feel anxiety. Write that in the space here:

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2) Next, identify when you first start to experience any sensation of anxiety. What is that sensation? Write that here:

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3) Now, identify the following: What are you typically doing prior to the start of your anxious feeling? What are you thinking? What are you feeling?

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**Visualization:**

For your visualization, picture yourself at the point *before* you notice any sensation of anxiety. See yourself as totally relaxed, calm, and at ease—even knowing that you are going to be encountering a situation that has *in the past* produced feelings of anxiety.

Now, picture yourself, or your *avatar*, entering that situation while continuing to be totally at ease and relaxed. Notice all the people, the objects in the room, the sounds and sights all around you. You may even notice the particular scents that are in the space. It is important that you mentally see yourself as being successful at being calm and at ease in your visualization.

If at any time you feel tense or anxious, remind yourself that this is *your* visualization! You can always freeze-frame the action, put the visualization into reverse and back up to the point where you again feel secure and calm. Then, start rehearsing, or playing, your visualization again. Stay connected to your soothing breath as you play through the rehearsal.

After you complete your rehearsal, practice again . . . and again! You can always imagine yourself as more and more confident and relaxed, which lets you be more flexible and helps you prepare for any unpredictable events that might happen while you are in “real” time.

**Reflections:** Congratulations on completing this mental rehearsal! How did it feel to successfully complete it?

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Think of one small way that mental rehearsal can make a difference for yourself or others. How could you practice this each day for up to five minutes? Where and when could you practice?

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### 3-Minute Visualizing the Calm Right Now

Here is a second visualization practice, and it is for those times you need to calm down and counter general feelings of anxiety and chaos in the moment, before it overwhelms you. For this visualization, you will draw upon your personal history.

Is there something or someone from your past that has helped you to find peace or calm? This could be any object, sound, color, or even a caring family member or friend. Even if this resource is not available at the time of your anxiety, you can draw upon your memory to rehearse a detailed visualization that brings relief.

For the next three minutes, visualize of one or more of the following favorite, reassuring, and uplifting items in as much detail as you can.

Favorite color(s)	Favorite wise person	Favorite healthy food
Favorite song or sound	Favorite peaceful place	Favorite animal
Favorite natural setting	Favorite quote	Favorite soothing activity

## HANDOUT: STORY AND MEDITATION: HOW TO GET FREE FROM A MONKEY TRAP

Did you know that hunters have a unique way of capturing monkeys? They hollow out a gourd or container and place some food inside. The gourd is fixed to the ground, and there is a hole barely large enough for the monkey's hand to fit through and grab the tempting morsel.

However, there's a catch . . . and that is that the once the monkey grasps the food with a clenched fist, its hand is too big to pull out. Yes, the monkey *could* get unstuck by releasing the food and yanking out its hand. However, the iron grip of attachment, greed, and desire for this food keeps the hand clenched. The monkey is trapped by nothing more than his own unwillingness to let go.

This is a powerful metaphor for our own “stuckness,” or anytime we are trapped by a strongly held belief, rigid idea, or desire that keeps us frozen in place. In addition to feeling stuck, we may likely experience feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Fortunately, you can learn what a monkey caught in a trap does *not* know: *The secret to getting free from almost any anxiety producing trap or unbending belief system is simply learning to let go of it.*

### Get Free from the Monkey Trap Meditation

#### **Instructions:**

Before reading through the meditation, begin by answering the following questions to help you discover those “monkey traps” in your own life.

**Pre-Meditation Questions:** Everyone deals with some kind of monkey trap in their life. The trick is to first become aware of the trap (which the monkey couldn't do) in order to get free. What are the traps that cause your anxiety or tension?

Keep in mind that any idea or strong belief—such as the need to get all “A's” in school, to always be first in any endeavor, or to fear messing up and not being liked—can create anxiety. And yet, you find it difficult to stop believing that you must achieve or act in a certain way—even if it causes immense pain. Write down your “traps” below, even if you still think they are necessary for you.

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Ask yourself, “How strongly does this idea or belief hold onto me, onto my mind, and my emotions? You can even rate this on a 1-7 scale, with 1 being no hold on you, and 7 representing a “super glue” hold on you. Also, rate this in the space below.

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**Monkey Trap Meditation:** Now, you are ready for the Monkey Trap Meditation. Find a place that is quiet calm. Sit in a chair, taking an erect but relaxed posture.

*Visualize your 'monkey trap' or the cause of that anxiety or dis-ease and dis-comfort as being located in that gourd that traps monkeys. Now, imagine extending your arm and squeezing your hand through the gourd's narrow hole and grabbing on to whatever it is that you feel is absolutely necessary to have. Notice how this is actually a form of grabbing onto, attachment, and craving.*

As you hold on, focus on how tightly your hand is clenching on to your craving. Feel how tight and painful it is to hold on like this. Keep holding and feeling the sensation that comes from this kind of grabbing and holding on so tightly to something.

Now, ever so slightly, give yourself permission to let go of the craving, to let go of that idea or belief that you believed that you *must absolutely possess*. What would be so horribly bad about letting go of it? Would you be a pariah? Would you have no other options in life? Notice how the craving can be so narrow, limiting, and overpowering that it can make us forget about other possibilities! As you let go of the craving, or monkey trap that holds you, simultaneously release the tension in your hand.

Spend at least two minutes slowly letting yourself release and let go of this craving. You might say to yourself, "In this moment, I can relax my mind, relax my hand, and relax my need to grab onto the craving." Slowly release your clenched fist. Feel how the blood returns into your hand. Notice how your hand has freedom of movement. Observe the pleasant sensation that comes from letting go. Now, slowly extract your hand from the "monkey trap" and leave your craving behind for the moment. Shake your hand and fingers for a few seconds, savoring the freedom of full movement that they now enjoy.

Use this simple meditation each day, or whenever you need help you deal with feelings or beliefs that constrict you and keep you clenched up and tight with anxiety.

**Reflections:** How did it feel to let go in this way? To what extent did this mediation change the perception of your craving or lessen how strongly you are holding onto your "monkey trap"?

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## HANDOUT: THE 70% RULE, OR WHY 7 IS THE NEW 10

### **Instructions:**

This handout is a worksheet for learning about *The 70% Rule, or Why 7 Is the New 10*. Basically, this rule suggests that it's practically impossible to consistently reach 100%, or get a perfect "10" in any endeavor. You can try, but you will put in a lot of extra effort and sweat for very little return.

Think of it this way: Putting an additional 20-30% energy into what is already *very good* or *good enough* may not be a practical use of your time. To find out if this is really so, answer the questions in Part 1 of this worksheet to understand and consider the role of perfectionism in your life and whether it is counterproductive. The questions in Part 2 will examine whether the substitute goals of *very good* or *good enough* have merit.

### **PART 1:**

**Reflections:** Do you delay starting a project because you know it must be perfect?

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Similarly, do you delay completing projects because you worry they won't be good enough?

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How worried are you about how others will judge your work? Are you your own worst critic—thinking you could have done better? Do you feel that any effort of less than 100% is a failure?

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Have others said you are highly critical of them? How has this attitude affected your relationships?

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Look over the reflections above to see if perfectionism is creating difficulty or havoc in your life or relationships. Now, continue with Part 2 of this worksheet.

**PART 2:**

**Redefining Failure:** In the space below, write down your own definition of failure. Does your definition include the importance of failure for what it teaches you about resilience, self-acceptance, and other kinds of learning? Consider including how failure or loss prepares you for later success.

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How would letting go of the craving for a perfect outcome remove self-imposed pressure? How does it lessen anxiety or worry?

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How could putting in 70% of your energy toward the goal of *very good* or *good enough* be helpful to you—especially since that other 20-30% can never make anything perfect anyway?!

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Right now, think back on an experience where you were overly critical or dissatisfied with your work or performance. Now, using the new definition above, reappraise and re-rate how well you did using a 1-10 scale, where a rating of 7 (*very good* or *good enough*) is really a 10.

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## HANDOUT: SHARING GRATITUDE

### **Instructions:**

Have you experienced gratitude today? Gratitude comes from the ancient word *gratitudo*, which means to find what is pleasing or to give thanks, as well as being related to the blessing at mealtime. The benefit of gratitude is that it cultivates a sense of openness, appreciation, altruism, and kindness. In a very real sense, gratitude is the tow truck big enough to pull you out of those deep life ruts.

Gratitude is surprisingly easy to do. It depends on where you place your attention. This is your choice: You can focus on what is missing in your life, or you can focus on what is present. As a wise sage once said, “Pray for what you already have in your life and you’ll never be disappointed.”

Follow along with the *Sharing Gratitude* worksheet and you can track how well this practice works for you.

### **Step 1.** Familiarize Yourself with Gratitude

To help you get started, look over the two categories of gratitude that you can reflect upon. As you look over this list, you might imagine what life would be like without tapping into gratitude.

#### **BASIC DAILY GRATITUDE**

Roof over your head	Transportation for getting around	Bed to sleep in
Sunlight	Health	Ability to smile
Running water	Furniture where you live	Chairs to sit in
Food to eat	Coffee/Tea to drink	Trees
Smiling	The five senses	Electricity
Light bulbs	Supportive people in your life	Clothing

#### **PARADOXICAL GRATITUDE**

Paradoxical gratitude consists of finding gratitude for the circumstance you prefer *not* to have in your life. Think of whatever you are not happy with. For example, one could be dissatisfied or unhappy with any of the following: One’s car, relationship, living conditions, job, career choice, family, friends, earnings, retirement, vacation plans, a recent loss, etc.

Whichever of these you may be unhappy about, consider why there is still something for which to be grateful. Suppose that your car broke down, but you can still afford to pay for a mechanic to fix it. Perhaps you lost a friendship or other important relationship, but you still could be grateful for others who support you during the loss. Or, you might be grateful for new doors that may open after a loss—those silver linings that none of us are ever prescient enough to predict!

By doing this you have discovered the secret of paradoxical gratitude!

### **Step 2.** Journal Your Gratitude

Use a journal, your mobile device, or an index card to keep track of your gratitude. Each day for the next week, write down from 1-3 things you are grateful for that day. This can be a basic gratitude or a paradoxical gratitude, or both. By the way, having gratitude for just one thing is good enough—even if it turns out to be one item you are grateful for during the entire week.

**Step 3.** Share Your Gratitude

Keeping a gratitude journal is nice because it builds up the storehouse of memories about gratitude. But why not take gratitude a step further by sharing it with others. Sharing gratitude helps you connect with others around something that is positive and life-affirming.

Sharing your gratitude with others can be done in a number of ways. Here are a few suggestions:

- Begin by sharing your gratitude, then ask others (at the office, at home, at school, etc) what *they* have gratitude for. Let yourself open to the deeper ideas that grow out of this mutual discussion for finding meaning in life.
- Write a gratitude letter to someone who has done something helpful, kind, caring, impactful, or compassionate for you. Then, after writing your letter of thanks, share this letter with that individual. You can either present the letter to them, or you can share your gratitude in person.
- Share the story behind one of the things you are grateful for with another person.

**Reflections:** At the end of the week, look back over your gratitude journal or list. Do you notice a common theme? How does it feel to look this over? Does anything you wrote down surprise you? Finally, write down how you can continue to use gratitude and what your commitment is to this practice.

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## HANDOUT: THE G.L.A.D. TECHNIQUE

### **Instructions:**

G.L.A.D. is an acronym for ways of finding joy and balance. It works by paying attention to certain positive aspects of life that are around you all the time, but which frequently go unnoticed. Sound easy? It is!

To begin, look over each of the letters to get familiar with what each stands for. Then, use the guidelines below for starting your own G.L.A.D. practice.

**G**—One **Gratitude** that you're thankful for today

- This can represent the most *basic gratitude*, such as having food and water, sunlight, a body that works well enough, a roof over your head, etc.
- Your gratitude might also be about appreciating those truly significant things in your life—such as a devoted relationship, meaningful work, a caring community of friends, and robust health that allows you to experience life to the fullest, etc.

**L**—One new thing you **Learned** today

- This can be something you learned about yourself today, such as noticing an insight or wisdom that you possess.
- It could mean having an open attitude so that you can discover something new and interesting about another person (even someone you have known for a long, long time).
- This might just have to do with learning a new fact or gaining a new perspective on something—and that might make you happy because it is fun to be curious and to learn.

**A**—One small **Accomplishment** you did today

- Often, we mistakenly believe that an accomplishment has to be something super-sized. In truth, an accomplishment can be that ordinary act of self-care that you did for yourself or another. Examples might be:
  - Getting enough sleep.
  - Not skipping meals and getting enough nourishment.
  - Getting dressed in the morning (highly underrated!).
  - Doing anything that moves you (even slightly) toward reaching a long-term goal.

**D**—One thing of **Delight** that touched you today

- Consider anything that makes you laugh, smile, or brings you joy.
- This can be a thing of beauty that you notice during the day.
  - Examples could be hearing a bird chirp, seeing a colorful flower, laughing at a funny joke, tasting food, returning a smile, noticing the pleasant sensation of water on your hands while washing the dishes, etc.

### **G.L.A.D. Practice Guidelines:**

Use a journal, mobile device, or an index card to keep track of those G.L.A.D. items that you notice. To really get in the practice, try to do this each day for the next week. If possible, try to notice an entirely new and unique gratitude, learning, accomplishment, and delight for each day.

While you can do this daily, you can also do a G.L.A.D. practice on a weekly basis. The important thing is that you write these down and keep them to look at in the future. One idea is to keep your G.L.A.D. items on an index card or some other portable device so that you can write these down the moment you notice them.

At the end of the week, look over your G.L.A.D. writings and answer the following questions:

**Reflections:** Congratulations on following through on your G.L.A.D. practice! What was it like to focus your attention in this way? How did it make you feel to start noticing these aspects of daily life?

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Name one small way in which this practice benefitted you or someone in your life?

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How could you share your G.L.A.D. ideas with others? What is the most effective method (daily, weekly) for you to continue using the G.L.A.D. Technique?

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## HANDOUT: HERE AND NOW PLEASANTNESS

### Instructions:

This is an easy to use practice that can help you go off auto-pilot and really notice your environment in greater detail. In particular, you are going to use it to notice positive and pleasant things that are all around you. To practice this, it is best to be seated in a place where you are not going to be distracted or interrupted.

When you're settled and ready, follow along with this short script:

***Right now, look around the room or space that you are in.*** This could be the therapy room, a room where you live, or any location—even outside.

***With a sense of childlike curiosity, look around and find one item that is pleasant, or pleasing, to you.*** It could be a color, a shape, an object, a sound, a smell, or a texture of something that you can touch. Be sure to examine the entire space around you. If you're in a room, tilt your head up to look at the ceiling, then down the walls, and all the way down to the floor. Don't let anything go unnoticed! Once you find something pleasant, spend some time thinking about what you like about it. By the way, if you happen to notice multiple pleasant items, that's okay too.

***Looking at the object you find pleasant, ask yourself:*** What is it exactly that I like about it? Is it the shape, the size, or the color of it? Does it remind me of a pleasant or happy memory?

***It is very common for the practice of Here and Now Pleasantness to elicit positive and enjoyable memories.*** For example, you might find a curved shape that reminds you of a wave of water curling in the ocean. Or, you may find that a color or object reminds you of a favorite season of the year or some other positive memory. Whatever your memory may be, allow yourself to savor it for as long as you want.

***After you have experienced a pleasant object, sound, or sight, etc., go and find another in the room or space around you.*** Again, pay attention to why you like it. Sometimes, you may notice a favorite color or sound that just makes you feel good.

***Good job on locating pleasantness right here, right now! Answer the reflections that follow to think about how you can use this on a daily basis.***

**Reflections:** How did putting on the filter of “here-and-now pleasantness” make you feel? Did you notice that it helped to shift the mind away from busy or “unpleasant” thoughts?

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The *Here and Now Pleasantness* practice doesn't take up any space in your purse or wallet, so you can use it anywhere you happen to be. How could this practice help you be more aware and present in your surroundings?

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**Guidelines for Using *Here and Now Pleasantness*:** Each time you move from one place to another, or each time you walk through a doorway and enter a new room or space, make it a point of activating *Here and Now Pleasantness* to find one new pleasant thing.

Now that you've successfully completed this practice, you can again look for pleasantness the moment you step outside. Look around and see if there's some kind of pleasantness that you missed earlier in the day. Even if you drive the same route to work each day, work in the same space day after day, or live in the same room, you can look for something new—as well as re-experience something as pleasant over and over again in this moment.

Do this often enough, and you will rewire your brain by repeatedly entering the *Here and Now Pleasantness* before you. Enjoy the view.

## **HANDOUT: CHANGE YOUR (HISTORY) CHANNEL**

### ***Instructions:***

Our personal stories play a significant role in our lives, but if an old (and perhaps painful) story has been playing in your head for a long time, then it might be time to find a different story to focus on—or at the very least, take a break from the old story so you can get a breather! While the old story is there for a reason (and you can always choose to return to it at anytime), it's essential to know that you also have the *choice* to revise the old story, or find other valid stories that help you recognize your strengths and feel more in charge of your life.

The purpose of this handout is to help you become aware of your stories and think about using them in a new way. The following questions will guide you through the process of exploring and considering new ways of dealing with an old, repeating story. Remember, too, that this is just one approach for dealing with the old story. There are many methods for reappraising and releasing the pain of trauma or abuse.

What follows are six different practices for investigating your stories in new ways. As you use each practice, think of it as putting the TV remote in your hand. Each method gives you a way to click the remote and switch from the old story (or history channel) to a new one whenever you want to. Happy story-creating and story-telling!

### **Practice 1: Count the Old Story and Refocus Away from It**

Have you ever thought of counting the number of times that the old, unhappy story comes up during the course of a day?

**a) For the next seven days, keep track of your old stories (on a sheet of paper, mobile device, etc). Each time the story appears to you, mark this down.**

Also, just because a thought or story pops up in your head doesn't mean that you need to respond to it. Like a broken record, you can lift the needle off the record player and put on a new tune!

**b) After you count the story, change the channel to a different, more supportive story by using one or more of the following practices.**

Don't worry how many times the old story comes up. Just work on changing the channel when it does.

### **Practice 2: Find Supportive Stories of Safety and Calm**

Spend some time to think about a story from your past where you felt safe, secure, and calm. Maybe you were with someone who made you feel safe—even if it was a grade school teacher, grandparent, or friend. Write the story down below. Remember it in as much detail as possible. Even if it represents a small event, allow yourself to savor, enjoy, and re-experience it. Be sure to include the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of that safe and calm memory.

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**Practice 3: Recall Stories of Strength, Resilience, and Hope**

For this practice, you are going to think back on those times where you experienced or displayed strength, resilience, and hope. Remember, too, that even a difficult story can display your strengths. Strengths can take many forms, and do not need to follow along with a traditional idea of strength. Patience, quiet, hospitality, compassion, caring, listening, sharing, and acceptance are all examples of personal strengths.

For a resilience story, think of a time that you bounced back from a difficult life situation. The fact that you are working this exercise is itself a sign of resilience!

A hope story can be anytime that you move toward a goal, sought out resources and advice from others, or shared hope with others who needed it.

Write down ideas relating to these stories in the space below. If you need more space, complete this practice on a separate sheet of paper.

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**Practice 4: Find Books, Films, and Stories that You Love**

Do you have a favorite story that you have read over and over? Is there a movie that makes you feel hopeful or connects with you in some deep way? Is there a children’s story that makes you brighten and smile? Write down your favorites below.

In addition, include the strengths of the characters in those stories. Many children’s books, for example, are about strengths that a character in the story is trying to find. What draws you to these characters? What do you admire most about them? How do you reflect those very strengths in your own life story?

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**Practice 5: Find a Neutral Story**

Sometimes we can broaden our attention, or turn away from the old history channel story simply by finding a nice, old-fashioned boring story! This like the story where you go to the store to pick up groceries and nothing very exciting happens. But nothing bad or dramatic happens either—which is a good thing.

This is another strategy for using your remote to change the channel. Simply click and go to a story where you felt no strong emotion, one way or the other. See what it's like to change to this channel. Write down one or more of those boring stories below.

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**Practice 6: Journal What It Was Like to Change Your History Channel**

At the end of the week, reflect back on your experiences with changing the history channel. Over the period of a week, did it become easier to change the channel? Was there a change in the frequency of the old story as the days went by? Which practice(s) for changing the channel worked best for you? How could you continue to use these?

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Which of the six practices for changing the channel worked best for you? How could you continue to use these?

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## HANDOUT: MY FAVORITE THINGS

### Instructions:

Let's try an experiment. Right now, think of a favorite color. Focus on that favorite color for a few moments longer. Perhaps you are even wearing a blouse, shirt or other piece of clothing that contains that color. Close your eyes and picture this color in your mind's eye for a few more seconds before continuing on.

How did this favorite color focus your attention? How did you feel when paying attention to your favorite color?

The practice of *My Favorite Things* is like a giant magnet that attracts your attention by focusing you on things that you enjoy, that bring you a sense of comfort, and that help you feel secure. Best of all, you can tailor your favorites to match what you already enjoy.

### PART 1: Create a Favorite Things List

Look at the list of words below. *You will use these to put together a list of categories to focus on.* Note that there are two categories: 1) a category for your single most favorite thing, and 2) a category for multiple items—so you can think about more than one favorite color, person, or place, etc. Circle the ones that instantly appeal to you. Don't think too hard about these.

Use this when you are feeling down, scattered, or experiencing negative thoughts.

Category 1—**Circle the categories where you can think of a single most favorite thing that makes you feel good.**

Feel-good song	Person	Visual artist or art work
Season	Healthy food	Color
Meal	Time of day	Snack food
Mobile app	Morning activity	Feel-good book
Magazine	Teacher	Family member
School subject	Hobby	Extreme sport
Sport	Sports team	Safe, relaxing place
Vacation spot	Room where I live	Historical figure
Comfort food	Comedian/joke	Contemplative practice
Tree	Flower	Scenic place
Park	Car/transportation	Album
Accomplishment	Gratitude	Smell/scent
Article of clothing	Fashion designer	Purse/wallet
TV show	Radio show	Celebrity

If you have other favorite things that are not mentioned in the list above, add your others here:

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Now, compile the items you circled by writing them down in one place. Use an index card, sheet of paper, or computer, or phone to-do list. At the top of the list write: *My Single Most Favorite Things*.

Category 2—**Circle the words where you easily have at least two or more favorite things in that category that make you feel good.**

Feel-good songs	People	Musical artists
Seasons	Healthy foods	Colors
Meals	Times of day	Snack foods
Mobile apps	Morning activities	Feel-good books
Magazines	Teachers	Family members
School subjects	Hobbies	Extreme sports
Sports	Sports teams	Safe, relaxing places
Vacation spots	Rooms where I live	Historical figures
Comfort foods	Comedians/jokes	Contemplative practices
Trees	Flowers	Scenic places
Parks	Cars/transportation	Albums
Accomplishments	Gratitudes	Smells/scents
Articles of clothing	Fashion designers	Purses/wallets
TV shows	Radio shows	Celebrities

Now, compile this list of categories on an index card, sheet of paper, computer, or phone to-do list. At the top of this list write: *My Many Favorite Things*.

## **PART 2: Access Your Favorite Things List**

Use either or both of these favorite lists anytime you need to counterbalance rumination, or when you feel overwhelmed by chaos and stress. Use these guidelines to help you successfully use the *My Favorite Things* practice:

### **GUIDELINES:**

- Practice going over your favorites list for 10 minutes or longer. Get familiar with how long it takes for you to feel calm or uplifted.
- You can use this practice anytime, but it may be most effective if you start focusing on your favorites before you reach a high level of negativity or feel extremely stressed or depressed.
- Consider using *My Favorite Things* as a preventive technique, such as prior to entering a situation or circumstance that has acted as an emotional trigger in the past.
- If possible, find a quiet place where you can go to focus on *My Favorite Things*. You may only need a few minutes to get centered.
- Go through your list, starting from the top. Focus on as many details of each favorite thing as you can. For example, if it's a song, sing the song in your head. If it's a favorite book, imagine your favorite characters and favorite parts of the book. If it's a favorite scenic place, try to recall everything you can about that place by using all of your senses.
- Continue going through one or both lists for as long as needed, or until you feel grounded, safe, and calm.

## **HANDOUT: SAVORING SUCCESS—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

Savoring is a practice for really steeping yourself—for several minutes at a time—in a pleasurable or positive memory or experience. It can help you reminisce about a past success in your life, allow you to more deeply enjoy what is right around you this moment, and let you positively anticipate an upcoming event. In other words, savoring is a tool for getting you feeling better by recognizing the positives in your life—whether past, present, or future.

Ideally, you can blend all three types of savoring. And as you start your savoring practice you will gain more awareness and experience for fully enjoying all parts of your life. In this way you can honor your history, appreciate the now, and bring an attitude of eagerness for what is to come.

This exercise includes three different ways to savor. After you familiarize yourself with these, follow the instructions for each. Try all of these methods of shifting mental gears. Now, let's get ready to savor.

### **1. Savoring Past Successes**

Reminiscing about one of your past successes can produce a feeling of well-being. For this kind of savoring you will reflect on the following kinds of past experiences:

- Any experience that made you feel proud, such as—
  - A past accomplishment (finishing a class, completing a project at home or work, cooking or preparing a new recipe, etc).
  - Any action of kindness, caring, or compassion that helped someone to feel grateful, or which benefitted another person. This can also include the action of volunteering for a beneficial cause.
  - Any action that moved you toward a long-term goal, no matter how small.

#### ***Instructions:***

- 1) Think of a past memory that fits one of the categories above. The idea here is to savor your past experience for an extended period of time.
- 2) Find a quiet place where you can mentally savor all the details of your past success.
- 3) Spend at least 5 minutes mentally recalling a favorite memory of a success, how it made you feel proud, as well as how you felt joyful. If others shared in your joy and success, imagine them as well. Steep yourself in the experience, as if you are experiencing it for the very first time. Remember, you can savor the same experience over and over, or you can find other memories and categories and practice savoring them as well.
- 4) Optionally, you can journal your savoring experience for five minutes. Use the space below, or use a separate sheet.

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## 2. Savoring Present Experiences

Focusing on your present moment experience goes beyond simply trying to find pleasure. The practice of being engaged, focused, and present is in itself a steadying and soothing sensation. With this kind of awareness, you can practice being present during any of the following conditions:

- Any distraction that takes you away from the activity you are engaged in.
- Any external annoyance or irritation that captures your attention.
- Any internal negative or anxious thought that you are dwelling on.
- Any obsessive thought or craving sensation in the body.

### **Instructions:**

- 1) Throughout the day, get in the habit of asking yourself this question: *Where is my mind right now?* Wherever your mind might be, you can simply notice where it has wandered.
- 2) When you find your mind has taken a little trip away from the activity you are engaged in, just label that as “mind-wandering,” “thinking,” or “mental sensation.” If your mind has been drawn to a mental image, you can simply label that as “seeing.” Likewise, if a sound has taken you out of this moment, you can label that as “hearing,” then return to the present activity.
- 3) After labeling your mind’s wandering, you can let go of the thought (visual image or other sensation that has grabbed you) and redirect your mind to pay attention to this present moment and to return to the body. You will also return to the activity you were engaged in during your moment of mind-wandering.
- 4) When you come back to the present, notice as much as you can about what you are doing. Spend up to five minutes being present in the following ways, allowing yourself to be focused and engaged with whatever you are doing. See how this present moment state of awareness brings a pleasant or centered feeling.
  - If you are moving your body, appreciate how the body follows your command. Marvel in the dexterity of your body, your hands, and other movement. Notice the colors and shapes around you, taking care to notice any favorite colors or objects. For example, if you are sitting at the computer, you can notice how your hands rest on the keyboard, the colors on the screen, and how your body feels in the chair.
  - Turn your attention toward something for which you can be grateful which is in your environment or the activity in which you are engaged. That could be anything from having a roof over your head to the warm cup of coffee or tea on your desk, to appreciating the clothes that you wear or the comfortable chair that you sit in.







**PART 2:** *Identify and circle your strengths* using the list below. Remember that recognizing your strengths is not a form of bragging, but a way of realistically noticing where you are skillful and effective. This is not a time for humility, so don't be shy about circling the strengths that are part of your story!

**NOTE:** If you are telling this story to another person, the listener does not interrupt, but listens with openness and empathy. After the story is completed, the listener's job is as follows: *To identify the strengths that are revealed in the story that is being told.* If it is helpful, the listener can also draw upon the list of 50 strengths noted below.

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|----------------------|--|---------------|
| adventurous          | authentic                                      | concentration |
| eagerness            | self-knowing insight                           | courageous    |
| humility             | charisma                                       | collaborative |
| responsible          | encouraging                                    | persistent    |
| service-oriented     | compassionate                                  | kind          |
| caring               | accessible                                     | accepting     |
| understanding        | empathetic                                     | loyal         |
| hospitable to others | faithful                                       | spontaneous   |
| passionate           | listening                                      | contemplative |
| questioning          | spiritual                                      | religious     |
| wise                 | playful  | practical     |
| curious              | open   | thoughtful    |
| sensitive            | dignified                                      | dedicated     |
| flexible             | adaptive                                       | balanced      |
| perspective          | prepared                                       | purposeful    |
| detailed             | honest   | trustworthy   |
| patient              | generous (with materials,<br>time, & emotions) |               |

**Reflections:** How did it feel to identify—or have someone else identify—your strengths? Was it affirming, validating, or even empowering?

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How could you start to identify strengths as you go through the day?

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Consider starting a strengths journal as a way to acknowledge and honor your strengths on a daily basis. How would you go about undertaking this process? What strengths could you use to help you achieve this goal?

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## HANDOUT: PUTTING ON WEATHER GEAR

Everyone has to deal with the weather. As we know, there are all kinds of bad weather to contend with, and the same is true in life. Fortunately, like the weather, the challenging life conditions we face are often temporary. Eventually, the sun shines again.

In this handout you will think about the kind of weather gear you can put on that will help you to deal with those unpredictable, stormy conditions you may face—regardless of how severe. There are two parts to this practice. Follow along with the instructions below.

**PART 1:** Give your detailed ‘Weather Report.’

***Instructions:***

In the space below, write a few sentences to describe the weather in your life right now. Like your favorite seasoned weather forecaster, describe a weather system that is happening right now, or predict a future weather pattern that is headed your way.

As you do this, you can answer the following questions:

- What is the severity of the weather? What kind of storm is this? (thunderstorm, snow, ice, drizzling rain, tornado, hurricane, heat wave, drought, freezing temperatures, blizzard, sandstorm, etc).
- You can also rate this on a 1-10 scale, with 1 the most mild and 10 the most severe.
- Is this weather system slow moving or fast?
- For how long a period of time do you expect this weather will last?
- Is the weather a prediction of what is to come? What kind of weather do you forecast and why?

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**PART 2:** Describe the ‘Weather Gear’ necessary to protect you from the weather.

***Instructions:***

In the space below, explore the weather gear that can help you successfully get through either a mild weather system or avoid the damaging consequences of a severe storm.

Gear can be anything from an umbrella and raincoat to a down jacket and the refuge of a storm shelter. After choosing your weather gear, describe how this weather gear translates into real life skills or resources. For example, an umbrella to keep you dry from a dreary or persistent drizzle might be listening to uplifting music or having a meal with a good friend. Likewise, the refuge of a storm shelter might be finding those people or resources that can help you deal with your severe storm.

In as much detail you can, describe the weather gear you will need, what this will look like, and how effective you think it will be.

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**Reflections:** How does giving a weather report help clarify what you need to do to deal with this particular weather pattern or system?

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How helpful is it to know that the weather is temporary? How accurate are you at predicting future weather? How can you use your time to better prepare for upcoming storms?

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## HANDOUT: TUNE UP WITH MUSIC

Music is like a powerful drug. Did you know, for example, that the right musician actually boost your immune system, raise your mood, and even promote healing after a surgery?

Sounds amazing, but the music that plays through your headset, computer, or other device can counteract feelings of depression and tune you into a happier state of mind. This handout will let you discover how music plays *you* as much as you play *it*.

### **Instructions:**

You are going to create a *Music-Mood Inventory* in the space below. This is an opportunity for you to find out how music alters how you feel. To do this, you will rate your mood as you listen to different kinds of music. Experiment with different kinds of music and see how each shifts your mood.

MOOD BEFORE	TYPE OF SONG/MUSIC	MOOD AFTER
In this column, describe the activity you are engaged in <b>before</b> music. Rate mood on a 1-10 scale: 1=low mood; 10=high mood	Name of song and type of music	Rate your mood again <b>after</b> listening to music using the 1-10 scale.

**Reflections:** What did you discover about music as a way to manage moods? What type of music or songs were most effective in changing your moods?

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**Optional:** Make a playlist for various kinds of activities, such as 1) Chore Playlist, 2) Confidence and Feel Good Playlist, 3) Getting-Out-of-the-House Playlist, and 4) Starting (or Finishing) a Project Playlist. What other playlists of songs could motivate you? Write those in the space below:

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## HANDOUT: ACTIVATING WITH MENTAL REHEARSAL

Did you ever watch a basketball player at the free throw line? Before shooting the ball, they are visualizing and mentally picturing the movement of the body and the ball as it swishes through the hoop. Even the Navy Seals practice mental rehearsal, or visualization, as a tool to help them succeed at the highly challenging “pool competency” part of their training—when they must untangle their scuba breathing tubes underwater before surfacing! This is not an easy task, but mental rehearsal actually improves the pass rate because it prepares the Seal recruits in advance for what they need to do.

In the same way, you can use mental rehearsal to help you accomplish even the smallest but important goals that you may find difficult at this time. The mental rehearsal here is designed to give you energy. Later, you can start adapting this technique in ways described below.

Right now, let’s start with a very simple visualization for feeling more energetic.

### **Instructions:**

- 1) Find a quiet place where you can close your eyes for up to two minutes. (If you don’t like closing your eyes for any reason, you can keep your eyes open).
- 2) To begin, think of an activity that has energized you in the past. This could be taking a brisk walk, hiking, swimming, jumping on a trampoline, riding a horse, jogging along the beach, or doing a familiar workout routine. You can also think of a non-physical activity that energizes you, such as writing a poem, sketching, or playing chess. Picture yourself in great detail performing this activity. Notice the surroundings, including all the sights, sounds, objects, and colors of your environment where you are engaging in this activity.

If you haven’t done this activity for a long time, that doesn’t matter. You can still picture yourself doing something that you enjoyed and which gave you energy in the past. When you visualize the activity, make sure to *picture yourself as successfully completing it*. Don’t see yourself as stopping or feeling exhausted . . . after all it’s only for two minutes!

- 3) As you visualize the activity, notice if you feel any physical sensations, such as your breath deepening, your heart rate increasing, sensations in your muscles, and your body moving slightly. This often happens, and it shows you why mental rehearsal is effective.
- 4) Use a timer to keep track of time. Set it for two minutes, close your eyes and begin.

**Reflections:** How did it feel to do this mental rehearsal? Do you feel energized? What did you notice in your breathing, heart rate or body?

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If you have thought about exercising, how could you use this visualization practice as a two minute warm-up to get you motivated for the real thing?

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Other possible applications for this practice include visualizations for leaving the house, meeting friends, or starting a project. Use the space below to write down how you could use visualization to move you toward a goal—in even one small, simple and realistic way.

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## **HANDOUT: THE LIGHTNESS OF LAUGHTER**

Use this handout to examine and explore how you can bring the healing salve of laughter into your life. Laughter might not make your problem disappear, but it can help you to think differently about your problem by helping you think more clearly. Who knows?—it may even help you find a totally different perspective.

Studies on laughter show that having a more cheerful disposition can help us live longer, too, as well as helping improve sleep and lessen depression. Follow along with the four-part practice below for lightening your load.

### **Instructions:**

**PART 1:** In the space below, make a list of *Those Things that I Spend Too Much Time Worrying About*.

Examples of these include: things that push your buttons, critical comments (from yourself or others), what others think, bad drivers, personal demands, expectations from others, bad and insensitive bosses, and lack of control over certain situations or aspects of your life.

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**Reflections:** What was it like to notice those buttons? How long have these been with you? How would it feel like to respond differently to these—and not let them get to you?

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**PART 2:** Make an executive decision to laugh it off! Let it go! Can you really decide to do that? Yes, of course you can! *Who* says you can't? *Why* can't you? Use the next minute to make that executive decision.

**Reflections:** How does it feel to make this kind of executive decision? What would it be like to continue to make this kind of executive decision the next time one of your buttons gets pushed? What would be the challenges you might face in doing this?

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**PART 3:** Write down the “lighter view” for each of the “buttons” or “serious thoughts” that confront you often. Be sure to include evidence that reacting and worrying about these is counterproductive for you.

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**PART 4:** Now it's time to explore just who and what makes you laugh. In the space below, write down all the persons or activities that make you feel “lighter.” Who tickles that funny bone for you? This could be a family member or friend, comedian, neighbor, work associate, TV show, film, or book, etc. Make a point of spending time with these persons or activities. Use them as role models.

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**Reflections:** How do you think inviting more humor into your life will change your experiences? How can you bring a little bit of laughter into your life each day?

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## HANDOUT: SQUEEZE OUT STRESS

If you feel stress, you are not alone. Far from it. Did you know that stress is one of the major issues facing us these days? It's true. A recent *Stress in America* survey conducted by the American Psychological Association found that 67% of persons reported suffering from a psychological symptom of stress the previous year. And yet, only about a third of those surveyed said they were doing a good job of managing stress.

You are going to use one of the easiest practices for reducing stress. If you haven't already done this, there are a couple of guidelines. First, don't wait for stress symptoms to reach a high level before using this technique. Start early. Secondly, practice often as a way of helping your body learn to relax—even when you don't think you need it.

### **Instructions:**

- Find a quiet spot where you can sit or recline for up to five minutes. Sometimes it's helpful to find a place where there is low light or no light—especially if one of your stress symptoms is sensitivity to light.
- To begin, spend a few seconds pressing your heels into the floor or press your hands together if you are lying down. This is just to help you get grounded.
- Take three or four nice, satisfying, deep breaths. Exhale slowly. If you have learned how to do belly breathing, or diaphragmatic breathing, that is the kind of breathing that you will use here.
- Starting at the bottom of the body and moving upward, imagine squeezing all the tension into a ball with your feet as you inhale. Tense both feet (not to the point of pain) but just enough that you feel the tightness and tension. Hold this pose—also holding your in-breath—for a good five seconds, then release the ball of tension in your feet and exhale *sloooowwwlyyy* for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your feet relax. Notice how nice it feels to let go of tightness in the feet. Now, inhale, imagining your breath traveling all the way down the body and settling into your feet. As you exhale, feel this part of the body relax even further.
- If you want, take a couple more long inhalations into the feet. With each slow exhalation you can feel the feet relax more and more deeply as any remaining tension or tightness is drained and squeezed out of the body. At this time, you can even smile inwardly at your feet, a part of the body that works hard carrying you around throughout the day.
- Next, you will move your attention up to the ankles, shins, and calves of both legs. Repeat the same squeezing out of the tension as you inhale and hold the tension before exhaling and releasing even more tension until nothing remains. Then, try smiling inwardly at this part of the body in gratitude.
- Little by little you will move up the entire body—tensing and squeezing each part into a ball to push out the stress as you also use your breath to do this. Move from the feet up to the knees, the thighs and hips, the stomach and abdominal area, the back muscles, the hands, the arms (forearm, elbow, upper arms), the neck and shoulders, and finally, the face, skull and scalp. If you are already experiencing pain in a part of the body, such as a headache, then don't tighten up that area as it may increase the pain or discomfort. Just skip over it.
- When you are done, let yourself revel in the deep peace and calm that pervades the body. Spend as long as you want to rest in this way. You may want to send your inner smile to the entire body at this time. Don't forget to send gratitude to yourself for taking care of your body and managing your stress.



## HANDOUT: TURNING DOWN THE VOLUME WITH NATURE

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If you are sensitive to sound and find intrusive sounds annoying and irritating, you are reacting normally to the stress produced by an increasingly noisy world. The fact that you are aware of sounds is the first step toward finding a remedy.

While we can't just snap our fingers and make that beeping (or "bleeping") garbage truck with noisy hydraulics disappear, we can take time to balance out and reduce the disorganizing and disturbing effects of unwanted noise.

This handout will offer some suggestions for finding calm and peace from stress by connecting with the soothing sounds of Nature and silence.

Let's start by reflecting on the words of Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote, "In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness." In this busy world no one will give us silence, but we can plant the seeds of silence ourselves.

### **Instructions:**

1) JUST LISTENING PRACTICE: This is warm-up practice that you can use any time that sounds are annoying you. Here's how:

- Listen intently to the sounds around you right now. You are not trying to resist them or judge these sounds as good or bad. Whatever they are, just notice as many of them as you can. Sometimes, it is in resisting our experience that we get worn out and feel stress. Whenever you feel irritated or overwhelmed by sounds, try this non-judging, neutral method of noticing as many sounds as you can—without fighting them. (This is not to say you can't "turn down the volume" on these sounds, which you will learn to do next).

**Reflections:** How did it feel to focus your attention to sounds in this way, without judging them? What is it like to know you can choose to marvel at the sounds produced by modern technology? (Just as you can choose the *Just Listening Practice*, you can also choose the *Turning Down the Volume with Nature* practice!)

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2) TURNING DOWN THE VOLUME WITH NATURE PRACTICE: Since Nature can be soothing, we are going to bring Nature and silence together.

- Find a natural spot as far from the mechanical world as you can. This might be a park, the backyard, wherever you can find Nature. You don't need to get out in the woods or up on a mountaintop to turn down the volume!

- If possible, find a quiet place to sit. (You can sit, stand, or walk with this practice). Now, widen your gaze. Let all of this natural world seep in. Next, let your eyes gently be drawn to whatever natural feature attracts it. This might be a flower, a tree, a patch of grass, the chirping of a bird, a scurrying squirrel, the broad blue sky or clouds floating high above.
- Focus in on this aspect of Nature that you are drawn toward. Don't analyze, just experience it. Lose yourself in it. If you have worries, imagine casting them outward, letting Nature, which is so big and immense, hold your worries for you.
- Let yourself sit in the peace, wonder, and magnificent mystery of Nature. Focus in on its sounds. Experience deeply how different these are from the sounds of your normal day. Go deeper as you continue to peer into the Nature around you. Let yourself notice all the tiniest details, the uniqueness of each tree branch and cloud as you immerse yourself in the outdoors.
- Don't be afraid to go beyond. Beyond word and thought into the formless, the spacious. Rest in this sublime place for as long as you need.
- Sometimes Nature may speak to you, wordlessly, of course. It may help you tap into your own wisdom or help you find some clarity around a problem. Don't force this. But don't be surprised if Nature's silence comes to your aid in this way.
- Conclude your *Turning Down the Volume with Nature* practice with a centering statement, blessing, or gratitude.

**Reflections:** Can you think of one small way this practice was beneficial? How could you use this during the day? Is there a way to experience this even indoors?

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There are other ways to turn down the volume, or at least counteract sound pollution and noise clutter. These include noise cancelling earphones or CDs that feature the soothing sounds found in the natural world, such as mild drizzling rain, rumbling ocean waves, or the soft song of the forest. Which of these methods—or others that you can think of—would help you to turn down the volume when you can't easily step out into Nature?

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## HANDOUT: TAKE A STRESS PAUSE

Are things speeding up in your life? Do you feel like you just don't have a moment to take a breather? Are you feeling overwhelmed, over-stimulated, and pressured to make too many decisions too fast?

Fortunately, this easy exercise is an ideal way to create a buffer from speed and stress and to slow things down a bit. If you're stressed and reactive, and feel that you would benefit by stepping back, this could be just the way to open a new doorway. In addition, you can take a stress pause anytime you feel stuck in an old habit or routine.

### **Instructions:**

Use the acronym S-T-O-P to take a pause anytime, anywhere. Simply state each letter and then follow along with what it means. "STOP" doesn't mean to stop everything, but rather, to be more present, aware, at ease, and in flow with what is happening all around you. From this centered, flexible, and aware place, you don't have to react out of fear or impulse. You can be more available in order to make better choices and observe all the options and possibilities before you.

**S-Stand:** Slow the pace by standing in place and taking two or three nice, calming, deep belly breaths. By doing this you are making a conscious and purposeful decision to slow things down. You are deciding to be in control, rather than let external pressures trigger you to reaction and stress.

**T-Tune-In:** In this moment, tune-in to your body with full presence. Feel yourself grounded and connected to the earth, just like a favorite tree. Slowly scan the body starting from the tips of the toes and moving up to the top of the head. As you move upwards, be aware of where you may be holding onto tension or negative emotions. Breathe into the tension and let it go.

Optionally, you can visualize breathing a soothing white or golden light into that tension-filled area. Then as you exhale, imagine your breath carrying the tension down the body—finally releasing it through the bottom of the feet. Take as many breaths as needed to release tension and negativity.

**O-Observe:** Change the channel by closely observing your external environment. Focus on the surroundings, taking note of at least three unique or pleasant things—colors, shapes, objects, sounds, or textures that you like. If you are in a familiar environment, look for even the smallest detail you may not have noticed before—like the space between the wood grains on the table, or the different shades of color in the carpet. Just immerse and ground yourself in your surroundings like this for a minute or two as you find something that delights or surprises you.

**P-Possibility:** Pause to reflect on the openness, spaciousness, and possibilities that lie before you. You have just gone off auto-pilot and are now free to choose a new and beneficial direction. If you had been feeling reactive or angry, for example, you can look with fresh eyes at the variety of different choices and options before you. Who says that right now you couldn't sing, smile, call a supportive friend, take a nice walk, or get a scoop of your favorite ice cream? You might even just feel pleased that you have completed this exercise. Stretch your mind and see how far it can go!

**Reflections:** What was it like for you to S-T-O-P in this way? What did you notice most?

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What kinds of new possibilities could this practice help you to find? How could you get creative with using this practice?

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## HANDOUT: "BREATHING INTO" STRESS DETOX

The *Breathing Into Stress Detox* practice is about bringing your body back into balance, and as such its purpose is to help discharge and release tension and stress that builds up in the body. (This practice is not intended as a substitute for getting proper medical care for even a moderate, serious, or persistent condition).

That is not to minimize this practice, because coming into balance and harmony is critical for daily functioning and entering the moment with full presence. Even a mild headache could be a sign of being out of balance that disrupts your ability to focus and savor the moment.

For practice, you will use your imagination to visualize that you could breathe past the lungs and into any part of the body.

### **Instructions:**

This is a simple practice once you get the hang of it. Find a nice quiet place where you can sit or lie down. You can do this for up to five minutes or longer if you want.

- Close your eyes and bring awareness to the body. Notice where you feel tightness, tension, or even pain.
- Once you've located the place where you want to relieve tension, you will take in a long breath. As you inhale, imagine a healing or soothing white or golden light coming in through the crown of your head— you could just see this light coming in with your breath through the normal breathing pathways. Picture this light traveling to the location where you are experiencing tightness or tension.
- Let the soothing light fill up the affected area. Let it seep all the way down to the cells of that part of the body.
- Take a long, slow exhalation. As you do this, visualize your breath carrying any tightness, tension, and any impurities down the body. The breath carries these impurities down the legs and finally, out of the bottom of your feet—where they are deposited harmlessly back into the Earth for recycling (or composting).
- Repeat the above process as many times as necessary until the tightness or tension is reduced or all remaining impurities are drained away. Optionally, you can add the following healing or balancing intention: "May this part of my body attain full balance and harmony as it is intended to be."

**Reflections:** Write in the space below your experience of the *Breathing Into Stress Detox*. What changes, if any, in your body tension did you notice?

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The idea of visualizing a healing white or golden light are just suggestions. Are there other colors or imagery (such as flowing water), or sounds that you would find helpful when doing this practice?

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## HANDOUT: WARM HANDS VISUALIZATION

### ***The Power of Bio-Feedback***

Have you ever tried or heard of bio-feedback? It has a long history and has been found to be very effective for reducing stress, turning down the body's stress system, and for turning *on* the body's relaxation system. Relaxation techniques like this one have been successfully implemented and used in medical clinics around the country to lower blood pressure, lessen headaches, improve sleep, and other stress-related conditions.

**In this visualization, you will imagine warming up your hands and feet.** By doing this, you move blood toward the body's extremities. This has been shown to help blood vessels and muscles relax. Body temperature on the surface of the hands is around 75 degrees. Research has shown that many people can increase the temperature in their hands by as much as 10 degrees. In fact, to show you that this works, before starting, you can tape a thermometer or stress device to the tip of your middle or ring finger. Notice the reading on the thermometer. After your visualization, you can read the thermometer again and see how much the temperature has changed. By doing this practice, you are actually controlling your autonomic nervous system, regulating it and bringing your body into greater balance. Now, let's begin. Follow along with the steps below.

- 1) Practice this somewhere that is quiet and where you will not be disturbed for the next 10 minutes.** It may also be helpful to lie down when practicing this visualization, although it's okay to sit. You will close your eyes in order to visualize this in as much detail as possible. You can even state the mental intention for this exercise as follows: "My intention right now is to relax my body and reduce stress and invite a state of peace, balance, and calm."
- 2) Start by taking some nice long, slow breaths.** If you have learned belly breathing, you can do that. When you are comfortably settled in, you will picture yourself in front of an elevator that will carry you down several floors to the beach.
- 3) The elevator door opens, and you step in. Press the button on the car that will take you down five floors to the beach.** The elevator has a big window that lets you look out on the beach. It is a bright, sunny day without a cloud in the sky. The palm trees (or any trees you want to imagine) are blowing in a gentle breeze. As the elevator moves down past each floor, you can hear the calming voice from the elevator that counts down each floor. "Floor Four . . ." "Floor Three" intones the voice. As you move down past each floor you can feel yourself getting more and more relaxed. "Floor Two," you hear the voice say. Now you are feeling much calmer, as if all your tension is leaving the body in anticipation of your visit to the beach. You feel the elevator slow down as you approach the beach level. "Floor One . . . Welcome to the Beach," says the warm voice. The doors open and you step onto a sandy path leading to the beach. You can picture yourself removing your shoes and feeling the warmth of the sand envelop your feet as you follow the path toward the expansive beach.
- 4) You carry with you a large beach blanket. When you get closer to the clear, aqua colored water, find a place to spread your blanket.** You can picture yourself lying down with your clothes on, or you may be wearing a swimsuit or shorts and a top. Notice how it feels to let your body spread out on the blanket. Feel the support of the warm sand beneath you. As you lie down, you notice how the heat of the sun warms your hands. Notice your hands as they start to soak in all the warmth and heat. Let them soak it in, feeling them warm up under the hot sun. In fact, picture yourself moving your hands onto the sand. The heat of the sand is hot, but not uncomfortably so, and it warms your hands even more.
- 5) Notice all your senses at the beach.** Pause for a minute to notice the sounds of the water and the waves. The rhythmic sound is comforting to hear. You may hear the seagulls flapping their wings or chirping a melodic song. At the same time, notice the smell of the beach, the ocean, and maybe even the scent of sun tanning

lotion that wafts through the air. Feel the sand on your hands, as well as your back and legs touching the warm blanket. Now, focus on your feet. Notice how they, too, have been warming up. You may visualize putting them on the sand, too. The pulsing of the sun's rays are beating down on your feet and your hands, heating them up more each second. Notice how nice it feels to have that warm sensation in your hands and feet. Notice how the heat extends from the top of the hand down to the palm, and all the way out to the fingers and fingertips.

- 6) **Relish and immerse yourself in the warmth of the sun, the sand, and the beach.** Your hands are heating up even more now, as the sun's rays continue to heat them from above while the hot sand heats them from below. Feel the warmth building even more. Know that it is okay to sit like this. There is nothing more important to attend to right now. You are giving yourself this break at the beach, because you enjoy the feeling of warmth and peace that it gives you. Continue to let your hands and feet get warmer and warmer. When they have reached maximum warmth, you can set the intention to stand and return to the elevator.
- 7) **You might want to brush off the sand first! Now, picture yourself walking back up the sandy path to the elevator.** Stepping on, you feel all warm and relaxed. When the door closes, you can see yourself pressing the top button, which is Floor Five. As the soothing elevator voice announces each floor on the way up, you can feel yourself getting more alert and filled with a complete sense of well-being. "Floor Two . . . Floor Three" says the voice as you feel a sense of inner balance and peace. At "Floor Four" you are reminded that you can use this special elevator anytime you want to go down five floors to the beach and savor the welcoming warmth that waits for you.
- 8) **As the elevator slows to a stop, the calming voice announces, "Floor Five, thank you for coming to your special beach. Please come visit us again!"** The door opens wide and, as you get step off the elevator, you feel completely at ease, energized, refocused and ready to greet your day. Open your eyes at this point with a nice, long inhale and exhale.

**Reflections:** If you have taped a thermometer to your finger, look at its reading. Did it change? By how much?

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What does this practice say about your ability to use your mind to affect your body? Also, the idea of visualizing a beach is just one way of imagining your hands and feet heating up.

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How could you make this a practice that you use on a regular basis? What would that look like? How would that be helpful to you in regulating stress?

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## HANDOUT: SHARE AN UPLIFTING AND HOPEFUL STORY

The stories we tell can create stress, and they can relieve stress. Stories can also help us find hope and the resources that can provide motivating support, as well as vital information for overcoming obstacles that are in the way.

Let's start with some quotes about how our perceptions and stories affect us.

*I'm an old man and have known a great many troubles in my life—most of which never happened.*

—Mark Twain

*Hope is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.*

—Vaclav Havel

*Spring is hidden in all seasons.*

—Zen Master Daiensai

For this practice, you will see how an uplifting and hopeful story can reduce stress or even help to build relationships with others by hearing such a story. Follow along with these steps to find an uplifting story of hope from your own life. To qualify as an uplifting story, it needs the following attributes:

- The story needs to present a challenge that you faced. It needs to have “lows” and “highs” like any good, compelling story!
- It needs to end with a “high” or have been resolved positively or beneficially. (Even acceptance can be a positive outcome).
- Others must have helped you to some degree in reaching resolution, such as:
  - Offering advice that got you thinking of new ways to reach your goal
  - Giving you useful information
  - Inspiring or motivating you to move forward

1) In the space below you will write about your story in detail. (Optionally, at another time you can share this story with another). Make sure that you include the following items in order to describe the entire story:

- Who/What/Why/Where/When/How: Like a news reporter just stating the facts, describe when this story occurred in your life. How did this situation come about? Who else was involved in this story/situation? (You can always change names to keep this confidential).

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- Describe the negative feelings you were dealing with of being stuck. In other words, what was like for you emotionally to face the challenge of this story? Tell all the feelings—whether sadness, hopelessness, frustration, anger, etc.— that you experienced. (These are the lows).

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- Once again, like a journalist, describe the facts about how you found a supportive resource, got help or assistance, or sought out useful advice that helped move you forward to find resolution and a positive outcome. This part of the story tells of your own resourcefulness and ability to connect with others in a trusting and positive way. (A resource could be a historical person that you admire for how they overcame obstacles, or even wise, strong, unwavering characters from your favorite story or film).

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- Finally, write down the positive emotions you felt upon moving forward and getting unstuck. Tell all the feelings—whether lightness, hope, happiness, tears of joy, relief, etc.— that you experienced. (These are the highs).

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**Reflections:** Sometimes it's easy to forget all the details of our own uplifting stories. What was it like to journal an uplifting story of hope from your life in this way?

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How did it make you feel to re-experience the highs? What did you learn most about yourself and your strengths by writing down this story?

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What would it be like for you to share an uplifting story with others—as well as to hear another’s uplifting story?

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Seek out uplifting stories this week wherever you can, noting them in the space below. You might even consider keeping a journal of hopeful stories. See what they have in common, notice how connecting with others often turns challenging stories into positive and uplifting ones.

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## **HANDOUT: BE THE PEBBLE**

### ***A Practice to Quiet and Calm the Mind***

Sometimes, stress can get our minds so active and ‘wound up’ that they are like a choppy ocean. If you’ve ever gone out to sea on waters like that, you know that getting seasick is no fun. For many, having a mind that is as choppy and turbulent as that water can have very much the same effect.

But what if you were a pebble that could drop below the surface of that tumultuous water and get down to where the water was still, calm, and peaceful? The pebble wouldn’t be experiencing the chaos up above. It would just be at rest, peaceful and snug on the bottom of the ocean floor. That’s just what this practice can help you do when you’re stressed and spinning with thoughts.

For this practice, you are going to use a word or a phrase that will serve as your “pebble” that can focus your mind and help you drop below the surface of those noisy, riotous waves. This is a gentle practice that guides you to that place of greater peace and inner hospitality. Follow along with the three steps below.

### ***Instructions:***

#### **1) Choose a Word or Phrase**

To begin, you’ll want to choose a word or short phrase that you can focus on and repeat in your mind, over and over. The words or phrases you can use for this practice are infinite. You could, for example, mentally repeat words such as “one,” “quiet mind,” “peace,” “shalom,” or “now.” I have found that many people like to use the word “pebble” because it is neutral and has no associations for them. You might even decide to use a prayer, such as the ancient Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me.” Feel free to get creative and use words that feel good. For example, I know an avid golfer who finds the phrase “bogey-free” to be calming and helpful for him. If the word you are using doesn’t feel right, you can always try another one next time.

It’s also a good idea to avoid words that associate you with a particular memory. If you find that a word stimulates memory or intrudes by creating more thoughts, you can choose a more neutral word. Even using a neutral word like “one” has been shown to lower stress.

The purpose of this practice is to release stress and gently quiet your mind by turning it away from the turbulence. You can think of this practice as dropping a pebble into rushing water. The word you focus on will gently take you beneath the choppy surface to where there are no waves; your mind and thoughts will settle down and grow quiet in the stillness beneath the waves. You can also imagine this practice as a way of calming the surface so you can float on top of the still water.

Once you begin to focus on the word, allow yourself at least 10 minutes of quiet time to reflect on your word or phrase. It helps to find a quiet place to sit, either indoors or outside. While you can do this practice lying down, it’s better to sit up, because it will be easier to stay awake. This is true even if you are sitting up in bed. Avoid practicing for at least one hour after a meal, because you may get too drowsy to stay focused.

#### **2) Sit Quietly With Eyes Closed**

Now, sitting quietly, close your eyes. While repeating your word, you will be placing about 10-15% of your awareness on the breath. Make sure you breathe evenly, and into the belly. As you think of your word, do not concentrate hard; this is not about forcing or creating too much effort. This is a gentle and effortless way of resting in the stillness beneath the water. Imagine that you are just *preferring or favoring* your chosen word over other thoughts. If your mind wanders off into thinking about the past or the future for a while, that’s okay. Even if you get drowsy, that’s okay, too. Just gently return to your word again.

Sometimes, it may feel like your word has gone inward, as if it’s still there even though you’re not repeating it. If this happens, simply allow yourself to experience it this way. Your other senses may also intrude as you

repeat your word. You may hear a noise or you may feel a sensation in your body. Don't push these away; rather, just notice them and return to the breath and the word.

### 3) Allow Negative Feelings To Pass

Sometimes, strong feelings or emotions may occur while you are repeating your word. If you experience a strong negative feeling, see what it is like to sit with it until it passes. Your mind will naturally be drawn to it, and you don't need to explain or understand it, but let yourself notice if it increases or lessens in intensity. If for any reason it doesn't dissolve away and you get uncomfortable, you can always stop the practice by opening your eyes, distracting yourself, or just resting. Know that you can always return to this practice later. At other times, you may experience an uplifting feeling while doing this practice. Whatever your experience may be today, the next practice session may bring totally different feelings. Give yourself permission to be open to whatever arises.

I like to think of this as a gentle practice, so if you feel the need to shift your position on the ground or chair or bed, go ahead and do so—but do so with full awareness. You may want to use a watch or clock the first few times you try this. After a while, you will sense when your 10 minutes are up. Before you open your eyes, allow yourself to just sit in the presence of your body with compassion. Then, slowly open your eyes. You may also want to end your 10 minutes of attentiveness with a short message or blessing of thanks.

**Reflections:** How did this practice settle your mind? Were you able to stay with your pebble word(s) in an easy way, as a preference, and not have to force it?

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Try keeping track of how long you practice, such as from five to 10 minutes, for example. Make note of your stress or anxiety level before and after you do practice *Be the Pebble*. Use a 1-10 scale, where 10 is the highest level and 1 is the lowest. This way, you may learn what amount of time is optimal for you.

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As with any other practice, this one works best when used regularly. How could you schedule this? What times of day do you think it would be most effective or helpful to reduce stress?

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## **HANDOUT: BE A SMART STRESS AVOIDER**

Right now, think about one thing that gets you stressed out. Is it the traffic in the morning going to work? The chores you face at home? The stack of messy mail and bills that you haven't yet gotten cleaned up and paid? It's normal that there seem to be things we just can't control that drive up our stress levels. Or, can we control them—even a little? While it's a great idea to use relaxation methods to de-stress, it also makes a lot of sense to manage and avoid stress when and where we can.

- 1) Take a look at what stress in your life is manageable or preventable. Here is a list of 60 potential stressors. To begin, circle the ones that are significant sources of stress
- 2) Write the stresses that you circled in the table below, in the left column, "Sources of Stress."

### **SOURCES OF STRESS**

driving	rush hour traffic	health
deadlines	unopened mail	chores
clutter	relationships	loud noises
bright lights	weather	other drivers
animals/wild animals	repairs/car repairs	bad smells
air pollution/congestion	fears	credit card bills
politics	religion	retirement (saving for)
unemployment	divorce/going to court	underemployment
crying children	children's safety	bosses
running late	running behind at work	co-workers
crime	personal safety	finances
health insurance	aging	medical/dental expenses
diet/weight	studying/homework	staying up w/technology
tech overload (email/texting)	planning/making meals	school exams
homework	entertaining/visitors	holidays
goals	procrastination	parenting
natural disasters	death/grief	moving/packing
starting a new job	planning a wedding	changing schools
missing work	work trainings	work reviews
grocery shopping	an addiction	public speaking

- 3) In the middle column, rate your significant stressors on a 1-10 scale, where 1 is low and 10 is the highest level of stress.
- 4) In the right column, write an "M" if the stress is manageable, and "A" if it is avoidable. An avoidable stress might be rush hour traffic, which could be avoided by taking a new route or scheduling appointments before or after the rush hour, if possible. Rush hour traffic might also be manageable by leaving for work a few minutes earlier.



## HANDOUT: SURF THE BODY (THE BODY SCAN)

Find a quiet place where you can sit or lie down for several minutes as you follow along with the steps outlined below. **Please Note**—If you suffer from trauma or experience severe discomfort that you feel you can't tolerate while surfing the body, you can always open your eyes and stop. You are always in control whenever you do this practice.

### **Instructions:**

**Here are some orienting thoughts before starting.** You will be placing your attention on your body. The purpose of this activity is not to relax, but to increase your awareness and notice any body sensations that may be present from moment to moment. If you feel discomfort at any time, you can remind yourself that this is simply a sensation. The sensation does not define who you are. You are simply observing signals, and you may notice that the awareness of sensation of pain is not the sensation or pain itself, but just awareness. This may lead to greater understanding about discomfort or pain.

**If at any time any sensation feels overwhelming, you can open your eyes and stop, or move to another body part where there is no pain or negative feeling.** Know, however, that by resting with the discomfort, you are allowing yourself to bear witness to the feeling and sensation that exists, and experiencing the fullness of what is occurring. If you have pain in a certain area of the body—such as your neck or shoulders—you may find that focusing on that area increases the sensation. Again, you can always move focus to another part of the body and return to the painful area later.

**Remember that this practice may or may not produce relaxation.** It will be different each time you practice it. You are encouraged to let go of expectations as part of this practice. This is a very proactive process by which you are actually scanning the motor and sensory cortex of your brain. It's kind of like massaging the brain and body from the inside out.

- 1) To begin, center your mind on your body's presence.** Take three deep breaths and feel your diaphragm move. Feel how marvelous it is that each breath fills your lungs, sends oxygen to your muscles and organs, and sustains you. You may want to wiggle your toes and feel how effortlessly they follow your command. Take a few moments to feel grateful for this body, this extraordinary gift that you possess.
- 2) You are going to use your imagination with the practice.** Let's imagine, for example, that your breath could carry your awareness into any part of the body. Let's try now, by taking that first breath. Picture the breath going down the left side of the body and bringing your awareness with it. Bring the breath down the left leg and into the left foot and all way out to your toes. Let your full awareness settle into the toes. Just notice whatever sensations are rising and falling. If there's no sensation, that's okay too. You don't need to create one. As you do this, you can spend a moment to acknowledge how your toes have been masterfully constructed to help you walk and carry your weight. Picture your toes from the inside, filled with muscles, tendons, and bones, all working in concert. Feel a sense of gratitude and thankfulness to them. As you breathe, you may even visualize them filling up with the breath, bringing even more awareness to this part of the body. Do this now for a few moments. When you are ready to move on to the next part of the foot, exhale to release your attention on the toes.

*Optionally, if you want, you may take a moment to send gratitude and appreciation to each part of the body as you go through this exercise.*

- 3) Take time to now breathe into the soles of your feet, to the balls of the feet and the heel.** Bring full awareness to this part of the feet. Feel any sensations in the soles. Sense the tendons and tissue that are below

the skin. Notice any feelings or signals from inside this part of the body. Again, you can optionally give thanks to the soles of your feet for supporting your body and for allowing you to feel sensations as you walk and move and stay active. Or, you can just continue to sense each part of the body. Again, exhale to release awareness on this part of the body.

- 4) **Now, with your next breath, you will carry awareness down to the ankles, taking time to fully experience any sensations that are present.** You can imagine the inside of this part of your body, how it is both flexible and strong enough to help you pivot and change directions. Allow yourself to let go of any sensation so as to contact the next sensation as it appears. In this way you can contact new sensations as they appear in this moment, and the next, and the next. If your mind wanders off at any time, that's okay. Just notice where your mind has gone—you can label it as “mind wandering” or “thinking,” and then bring your attention back to the moment-by-moment focus of the ankles. You can label wherever the mind goes—if it has a picture in the mind's eye, just label that as “seeing.” If a sound hijacks your mind, just label that as “hearing,” then return to the sensing of the body.
- 5) **Continue to move up the left side of the body.** Take a breath and picture that breath bringing awareness to each part as you sense the shin/calf, knee, hand, lower arm, upper arm, shoulders, back, spine, neck, and then the head (face, skull, and scalp). After reaching the top of the body, you can complete the body scan by moving down the right side of the body until you reach the toes of the right foot.
- 6) **The extremities can be surfed or, optionally, you can also scan internal body parts, including the heart, intestines, stomach, genitals, kidneys, liver, spine, and brain, as well as other sense organs that assist in your well-being.**  
Feel your connection to each of these parts that help to make a joyful and fulfilling life possible.
- 7) **When you have completed this practice by addressing all your body, let yourself rest for a few moments in the presence of it.** Give thanks and ask for your body to guide you in doing what is best for it. Let your body know that you will pay attention to the signals it sends you, and that you will follow up any warning signals by getting check-ups and taking care of it through learning about health and preventive measures. By now, you may really be smiling and ready to face the day (or night, as the case may be). This is a wonderful ancient practice that will help you find the strength to do what is right for your body—and the rest of you.

### **In Conclusion:**

During the day, be more aware of your body; it really will let you know when it is happy and when it is not. I know several people, for example, who have told me that they feel less energetic when they drink too much caffeine. It is easy to make corrections if you take the time to become good friends with your body.

**Reflections:** How can you make the body scan part of a daily practice? When do you think would be a good time to use this?

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What will be the biggest challenge you face in implementing the body scan?

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*Surfing the Body* practice is a powerful grounding method. But it needn't be used in the full form described above. How might you adapt this to create the instant, American-style one-minute body scan for greeting the body in the morning or anytime during the day?

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## HANDOUT: ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE

Have you ever fought against something in your life that you couldn't change? Maybe when you were 15 years old you wanted to drive a car, but the driving age was older than that. Or, maybe you didn't get accepted to the college you wanted. Or perhaps you lost out on the job you interviewed for. Yes, you could stay mad, upset, and frustrated, or you could accept it and move on. Acceptance is the ability to move forward, and it means that you can still find another job, go to another college, or wait to get older so you can finally drive.

Acceptance is what is in our control. It can even be the attitude with which we deal with unwanted situations that we cannot control or change. A loss of physical health and pain are two such unwanted conditions. By answering the questions below, you will see if an attitude of acceptance might have a place in helping you. Keep in mind that acceptance is a choice, and is very different from resignation. Don't confuse the two. Resignation means giving up and being unwilling or unable to see what you can and can't control.

The Serenity Prayer, a cornerstone of 12-Step programs, eloquently makes this point:

*God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

### **Instructions:**

How you choose to use language around your situation and pain can influence how you feel. Answer the following questions to explore the concept of acceptance, as well as to find new ways to work with language. Acceptance is not an answer, but a place from which change can begin.

When you think about your pain or physical limitations, how do you describe to others how it is affecting your life? What key words really tell the story?

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How does this description make you feel? What emotions result from your telling others of your pain?

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If you could give a name to your pain or health condition, what would that be? You could name it after a movie character, a color, an object, or even a feeling. Choose any name you want, and feel free to get creative.

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How does this chosen name make you feel? Victimized? Hopeless? Hopeful? Empowered? Sad? Demoralized? Intimidated? Powerful? In control? Out of control?

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If the previous name you came up with for your pain or health condition produced negative feelings, come up with a new name. Think of a word or name that might make you laugh or feel less negative. Again, draw upon TV, film and other ideas, as well as objects. See if it's possible to find a name that makes you smile.

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What would it be like not to fight or go to war with your pain or condition?

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What part or parts of your pain or condition could you start to accept? For example, could you listen your pain like you listen to a dear family member? Could you care for your pain like you might care for an injured friend? Could you look upon your pain like you gaze at the photo of a heroic person you admire?

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How might an attitude of acceptance change how you feel? How would it change the story you would use to describe your pain or condition? Write that new story below—even if you're not entirely committed to it or believe it. Just see what it would look and sound like.

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What advice would your wise, nurturing self give you about learning to accept?

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## HANDOUT: BEAR MEDITATION

In the film *The Big Lebowski*, there is a scene where the Stranger says to the Jeff Bridges' character the Dude, the following words: "Sometimes you eat the bear, and sometimes, well, he eats you."

The bear can be any difficult, unresolved situation in your life—like the pain you must endure. The interesting thing about bears is this: Your attitude toward the bear can make all the difference in the world! If you provoke the bear and try to get it to leave, it may attack you and try to make a meal of you. You might try to have patience for the bear, try to outlast it and maybe it will move on. You could even try to befriend the bear, so you and the bear can co-exist. Another approach might be to just be present with compassion for both you and the bear—to "bear witness" so to speak.

So, which approach would you choose?

### **Instructions:**

Follow the steps below to help you get help for dealing with the bear. Use this *Bear Meditation* not so much to find a solution, but more to acknowledge your willingness to be open to hearing a new perspective in dealing with it.

- 1) Find a quiet place where you can sit in silence as long as you need. Before starting, set the following intention: "May my higher power listen with love and compassion. May my higher power not judge me. May it point me toward a wise path filled with deeper awareness, meaning, and self-compassion."
- 2) Have a heart-to-heart with the higher power in your life about your pain. Spend a few moments to think about this higher power. A higher power can be anything from a belief in God to the wise, nurturing self within, or anything in between—even a wise and kind being like Mother Teresa, St. Francis, the Buddha, or any other admired individual. If you want, you can visualize your higher power seated opposite you.  
State how the *bear* is affecting your life. Let your higher power know about your fears, worries, emotions, and concerns. As you tell your story, know that your higher power is listening intently. In addition, know that your higher power instantly came to be by your side to you right now because he or she cares deeply about your well-being.
- 3) Let your higher power know that this difficulty is something that you can't easily handle on your own, and that you have come to ask for help. Visualize your higher power as fully understanding and appreciating the wisdom you have in seeking assistance. Take a few moments to feel how nice it is not to carry the heavy weight and burden of dealing with the *bear* all by yourself. Feel the lightness of this.
- 4) Ask the higher power for courage to just 'sit' with the *bear*. Do this without expectations just so you might understand the bear better. The higher power may help you here, to just give you another viewpoint, a wise way of being with this. Surrender to whatever happens. If there is sadness, give that to the higher power to hold. Whatever happens, know that the higher power is there with you, supporting you, and sending you love and compassion each moment. Sit for as long as you need.
- 5) You are not yet done. For now, you will do something you may have thought to be impossible. You will switch seats and positions with your higher power. This doesn't mean that you *are* this higher power, but that you can view yourself with care, and compassion, and love through the eyes of the higher power. From that vantage point, see what it's like to look at you. See your courage, appreciate your strength, witness your wisdom. You only need to do this for a few seconds. Now, return your presence to your body.

6) Lastly, say a blessing of gratitude and thanks for how your higher self made itself available to you—and how it will continue to do so anytime that you need assistance in the future or whenever you want to do another meditation.

**Reflections:** How did the *Bear Meditation* change your approach to the bear? What did you learn about it or yourself?

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What is it like to know that you can tap into your higher power when needed? How do you think this can be of use?

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## HANDOUT: FOCUSING AWAY

Did you ever hear the blare of a siren while driving in a car? Did you notice that your focus narrows on the sound. Where is the siren? Is it a fire truck, ambulance, or police car? Which direction is it coming from? And, in that moment, you were probably oblivious to many of the other sights and sounds around you. That's because of the power of focusing.

In the same way, magicians use your own ability to focus against you—by distracting you and getting you to focus on what they want. This is called misdirection, and it is done so you don't notice where they are *really* placing that object that they just made disappear. For this *Focusing Away* practice, you will get to be your own magician. In this magic trick you will see if you can make your pain disappear—or at least lessen—by focusing strongly on other items in your environment, as well as actions that draw your attention elsewhere.

### **Instructions:**

To help augment your *Focusing Away* abilities, you are going to create a *Comfort Box*. This box that will contain all the different ideas and ways that you can find comfort in order to create some distance from pain and help you pay attention to those things that can bring some kind of pleasure.

Anything can be in a Comfort Box. It can include actual items, such as a meditation or music CD that you find uplifting, a lavender scented candle, or even a chocolate nugget. It can also contain notes that tell you what to do, such as looking at a photo album that makes you smile. Look at the categories below, and circle those items that you feel will positively grab your attention. If something has worked in the past, include it in your comfort box.

What does a Comfort Box look like? Anything you want it to be! It can be a cardboard box that you have decorated or labeled. It can be a jewelry box or any container used for another purpose. You can decorate it, color it, and make it expressive.

### **COMFORT ACTIVITIES:**

(Circle the activities that you know will focus you away—even to a small extent. When done, write your selections on a sheet of paper to put in the Comfort Box. Tailor the activity to whatever is manageable for you. A walk in Nature, for example, might mean walking 20 feet out the front door and noticing the grass, hedges, plants, and flowers before walking back).

Take a walk in Nature	Meet a friend	Eat a meal
Sit in Nature	Prepare a nice meal	Eat an enjoyable food
Appropriate exercise	Call a friend	Email or text a friend
Read a favorite book	Watch a favorite film	Listen to an uplifting song
Draw or sketch	Look at a flower	Smell a rose
Do a crossword puzzle	Do a Sudoku puzzle	Read the funnies
Read a poem	Read scripture	Write (anything that is fun)
Stretch	Breathe deeply	Smile (just for no reason)
Watch a favorite TV show	Pet an animal	Play solitaire
Play cards with someone	Pray/meditate	Play a game (like Scrabble)
Blow bubbles	Learn one new thing	Write a positive memory

Practice your vocabulary  
 Put on favorite clothes  
 Enjoy your favorite room

Drink a cool drink  
 Think of favorite person  
 Sit in a comfy chair

Drink a warm drink  
 Find your favorite color/art  
 Laugh with favorite show

**Reflections:** In the space below, add other comfort activities that will help you focus away.

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**COMFORT ITEMS:** Circle the Comfort Items that appeal to you.

Scented candle

Favorite film DVD

Favorite upbeat music CD

Small favorite food treat

Favorite book

Favorite poem

Favorite inspiring quote

Aromatherapy

Photos (friends, family)

Bubble bath

Bubble-blower

Favorite hand cream

Favorite keepsake

Favorite jewelry

Precious letter

Journal of good memories

Puzzle book

Prayer beads

Spiritual object or icon

Favorite scripture

Favorite childhood toy

Playing cards

Favorite beverage (hot chocolate, lemonade)

**Reflections:** In the space below, add other comfort items that will help you focus away.

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To see how good a magician you are and how well this works for you, you will rate your level of pain before and after using a comfort activity or item. This way, you can find out what works best. Use a 1-10 scale where 1 is the lowest pain and 10 is the highest. You may find that certain activities/items work best when pain is initially lower, while others work best when pain is initially higher. Use the table here as a guide, or make your own. Remember to use the activity or item for a long enough time to make it effective.

Pain Before (1-10)	Comfort Activity/Item	Pain After (1-10)

## HANDOUT: DECENTRALIZING PAIN

This handout is designed to get you thinking about pain and the experience of pain in a different way. But first, to illustrate a point, answer the following question as a full sentence. The question is this: *What food did you eat this morning and how did you like it?*

That was easy, wasn't it? Now, did you use the words "I," "me," "my," or "mine" in answering that question? Of course you did! That's normal, because we typically take a very personal, or "I-centric" view of things. This is how we talk about and share our world and experiences.

But what happens when we talk about *my pain*? What happens when we buy into the pain as being our own? Now, this is not to imply that you are *not* the one experiencing it. Of course you are. However, what this practice suggests is that it is possible to view and experience pain—or anything for that matter—from a more neutral and less judgmental perspective. In other words, it would be like an impartial witness who was noticing what was occurring and just describing it without any personal stake in what is happening. Have you ever wondered how taking an "impartial witness" perspective that might change your feelings about the pain?

### **Instructions:**

This practice will let you experience the story of your pain from that impartial witness viewpoint. There are four parts to this exercise, which begins with a *Warm-up Story*.

- 1) *Warm-up Story—Personal Point of View*: For the next three minutes you will describe a recent memorable meal that you had. It's best if this meal was shared with others and had some kind of an emotional component—either very positive or negative. Now, describe that story in detail—what you ate, how the food tasted and whether you liked or didn't like it, who you were with, whether you enjoyed or didn't enjoy the conversation, what you talked about, and the place where you had the meal. Did you eat more than you wanted? How did that feel for you? (Alternatively, write down the story here if there is no one to tell it to).

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- 2) *Warm-up Story—Decentralized Point of View*: Excellent. You just shared a story very much from the personal "I" point of view. Now, you will share the *identical* story in a very different way. This time, you will tell the story, but *without* using the words by "I," "me," "my," or "mine" in the telling. That's right—you're going to try to decentralize your story! This is not an easy thing to do, so here are a few suggestions. When telling the story in this way, don't use a pronoun such as "he" or "she" or "this person" to represent you. That would be like using "I". Instead, talk about the experiences, such as "There was the experience of *the body* walking and

sitting down at the table,” or “*the mouth* tasted the hamburger and noticed how juicy it was,” or “*the eyes* saw the white tablecloth,” or “*the stomach* felt uncomfortably tight after eating,” or “there was a conversation that was very interesting,” etc.

Do you see how it is possible to tell the same story from a third person perspective?

It’s important when you first practice this to tell your story to an engaged listener. The listener has a very important and specific job. The listener will not interrupt while listening with interest. Most importantly, the listener will be paying attention for the words “I,” “me,” “my,” or “mine” that you may use without even knowing it. Upon hearing any of these words, the listener will simply raise their hand to let you know that you used the word. Then you can rephrase your story.

Again, this is not easy, and you *don’t have to be perfect in not using those words*. The point of telling your story this way is to help you learn that your experience of having a meal (or of pain) can be viewed in this decentralized way. You are always able to go back to your very personal, “I-centric” viewpoint after this practice.

At this time you will share your same meal story without using the words “I,” “me,” “my,” or “mine” for the next three minutes, and the engaged listener will keep time for you. Are you ready? Start now. (Alternatively, if you can’t find someone to tell the decentralized story with, write that version of the story below).

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**Reflections:** How challenging was it for you to tell your story without using the personal “I,” “me,” “my,” or “mine” words?

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What did it feel like to experience your story from this more neutral point of view? Was it more descriptive? Did it have less negative emotional feeling for you?

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What is one helpful or positive thing you noticed by shifting into the impartial spectator point of view?

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3) *Story of Pain—Personal Point of View*: For three minutes you will tell the very *personal* story of an experience where you felt pain. This could be the story of your morning, such as waking up. Or, it could be the story of how pain limited your ability to do something you wanted to do (see a friend, take part in some activity, etc). Use as many “I,” “me,” “my,” or “mine” words as you like! (If you don’t have someone to share this story with, write down your experience below).

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4) *Story of Pain—Decentralized Point of View*: You’ve already had practice telling a story without the words “I,” “me,” “my,” or “mine.” For the next three minutes you will share the identical pain story that you just described, but from the very neutral, non-judging and impartial perspective of an interested witness. Again, the engaged listener will keep time and raise their hand to let you know if you’ve used the words “I,” “me,” “my,” or “mine” during your story. If so, just rephrase and start again, describing the experiences in parts of the body. Even the word “pain” is a judgment of sorts, so you might consider using the word “sensation,” then describing that sensation as well as you can—such as “tightness” “vise-like” “tension” “wave-like” or whatever words describe the sensation that you felt in that moment. Remember to describe your surroundings and other experiences in detail.

By the way, you can still mention negative thoughts that were part of the pain story. From the observer perspective you might describe that as, “The mind kept repeating the negative thought that . . .” or “there was the feeling of frustration and tightness in the gut,” or “the mind said the words “I wish things were different.” In this way, you can know what is in the mind, and what is in the body.

(If you don’t have an engaged listener, journal your decentralized story of pain in the space below).

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**Reflections:** After having had some practice, what was it like to again tell a story from the decentralized perspective?

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What did it feel like to experience your story of pain from this more neutral point of view? Were you able to notice how thoughts or commentary from the mind had a role in your pain story? It can be helpful to know that just because you “have” a thought doesn’t mean you have to “buy” it or decide to purchase it as your own.

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What is one helpful or positive thing you noticed by shifting into the impartial spectator point of view for your story of pain?

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How do you think this shift could be useful? When could you practice telling the story in this decentralized way—even if as a reminder that you have a choice about how to experience your story of pain?

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## HANDOUT: REACHING BEYOND THE COCOON OF PAIN

Any kind of sustained experience pain—physical or emotional—can cause us to isolate and withdraw over time. Pain can be like a cocoon that separates us from others. Stuck in the cocoon, we marshal all our energy to deal with and manage the pain. Meanwhile, we may have little or few resources available for others. Through no fault of our own we isolate, and sometimes the cocoon is thick enough to keep others out.

The handout here is intended as an exploration of how your cocoon of pain has affected your relationships and offers some suggestions for what you can do to start *Reaching Beyond the Cocoon of Pain* to restore and re-establish connections with others.

**Instructions:** Reflect on the questions/reflections that follow. Remember that there are no wrong answers here. If you have been hidden in the cocoon for any length of time, it can be scary to reach out.

Completing this handout is an act of courage on your part. It requires openness, faith, and trust to peek out of that cocoon, to tear open the walls that have held you in a difficult time. But no cocoon is meant to be permanent. Every butterfly must break out of its temporary home in order to fly free.

**Reflections:** How long have you been in your cocoon of pain? What purpose did the cocoon serve for you? Did it serve a useful purpose of any kind?

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How did the cocoon transform or change over time? Did it grow thicker? Was it darker inside? Was it more resistant to things outside it?

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How did being in the cocoon affect your relationships over time—home, work, friends, etc.?

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What is your single greatest worry, fear, or concern about leaving the cocoon?

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What relationships would you like to re-establish after your time in the cocoon?

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What roles, if any, have shifted as a result of your being in the cocoon? (For example, a spouse might have had to take on more daily responsibilities as a result of her/his partner being in the cocoon).

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What is one, small, simple way you could reach out from the cocoon to a person you care about? Any idea is useful, and the more you can come up with, the better. (This could include anything like, a call, a kind touch on the shoulder, a smile, any act of caring, making a meal for that person, etc).

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How can you use the small, caring actions and strategies mentioned above in a consistent way? It takes time to rebuild when you reach out of the cocoon! Have patience and persistence. How can you journal or keep track of your efforts at reaching out of the cocoon? Notice the results, too, and how it makes you feel to fly more freely.

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## HANDOUT: LESSONS FROM NATURE

### **The Benefits of Paying Attention to Nature**

Have you ever found yourself immersed in the wonder and splendor of Nature? There are trees, for example, that are known to be several thousands of years old. Trees are not only the largest living organisms on Earth, but we depend on them for our very survival. More importantly, they have a lot to teach us—if only we paid more attention to them.

**Instructions:** Read the story below and then take an inventory of how Nature might help you find lessons about dealing with the pain in your life.

What follows is true story of one man—let’s call him Jerry—who got a surprising lesson just because he decided to go outside and watch the trees one day.

*Jerry worked at an office that had become a depressing and sad place to go to each day. There had been many lay-offs, and Jerry had seen several of his friends and associates let go. Soon, Jerry figured, his time was coming.*

*Meanwhile, Jerry worried and fretted endlessly about this, until the concern permeated into all areas of his life. Jerry stopped talking to people at work and closed the door to his office. He felt like a prisoner waiting for an execution, and he let it affect his life negatively, to the point where he became severely depressed.*

*One morning, to take a break from the oppressive feeling of the office, Jerry stepped outside to a small courtyard that was enclosed by the building. It wasn’t anything spectacular, just a few nondescript trees and some small bushes. Jerry sat on a wooden bench, and before long his attention was grabbed by Nature around him. He forgot about all his troubles at work. For a moment he wasn’t thinking about what the day he would be called into his boss’s office or how he would find another job after being let go. He wasn’t regretting how his retirement plans would be dashed. He wasn’t frowning about what a disappointment he would be to his family and his wife. Instead, he was one-hundred percent engaged in the drama and story of Nature that unfolded before him.*

*It came to him like a sudden bolt of lightning. There it was, right before him. The answer he was seeking.*

*Jerry’s eyes were peeled on the thick, brownish vines of ivy that were clinging to the tree trunks. He could see where the gardeners had cut these off. But the ivy started growing again up the side of the tree. It didn’t just give up and stop living because the gardener came along with a pair of shears. The ivy had no fear of failure, and no worry, because it was just doing what it was supposed to do, and it always found a way to keep moving forward.*

*Suddenly, Jerry had a powerful realization: Even if my job comes to an end tomorrow, I’ll find a way to keep growing and living, just like that vine.*

**Reflections:** Have you ever had an “aha” experience with Nature—just like Jerry did in the story above? What was it like to read a story where hopelessness was transformed into hope?

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From your experience of Nature, trees, and plants, is there any observation you have made that is applicable to your story of pain? Is there a lesson from Nature that can give you a sense of hope or find a different way to experience pain?

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How can you sit with Nature as a practice—whether daily, every other day, or once a week?

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Paradoxically, the secret to tapping into Nature’s wisdom may be in just letting it be and not expecting an answer. Still, it can be valuable to set an intention to be present and open to the lessons that Nature may invite. In the space below, write down your intention—it only has to be a sentence or two—that clearly states your wish to open to whatever lessons Nature is willing to offer. You can imagine this lesson as coming from whatever source you want—from a higher power, God, your own wise self, Mother Earth, and so on.

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## HANDOUT: LOVING-KINDNESS AFFIRMATION

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In his book *Works of Love*, Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard shared some wisdom on the essence of love. He wrote:

*To cheat oneself out of love is the most terrible deception;  
it is an eternal loss for which there is no reparation,  
either in time or in eternity.*

As someone grappling with pain—either physical or emotional (maybe both)—it may be hard to think about the idea of love. But the affirmation practiced in these pages is not like the love you may be thinking of. It is not the flavor of love that is romantic, sentimental, or nostalgic—dependent on one person or a specific memory. Rather, this is the deeply profound and compassionate wish for the well-being of all persons.

It is predicated on the basis that all beings deserve this non-discriminating love, that we all *need* it because all of us have struggled or suffered in some way. Even that person who seems happy and appears to have it all together will deal with loss and pain in life. And so, this practice is a form of compassion—which really means *to be with the suffering of another*.

We begin by developing compassion for ourselves. This is a process, since you may not feel you are deserving of this deep wish for your well-being. If this is the case, you can begin by picturing the young baby, toddler, or child you once were, and who was deserving of this loving meditation. State the words for that part of you.

Offering love and charity toward our neighbors is a central tenant to all wisdom traditions. Key examples of loving-kindness are found in stories of how Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed all fed the hungry and starving, without discrimination. Whatever your background may be, this is an inclusive practice that anyone can benefit from. In addition, you can see the words here in any way that fits with your religious or spiritual background—as a blessing, a prayer, an affirmation, and so on.

**Instructions:** Follow along with the words below, stating them to yourself over and over . . . *like you really mean it.*

### 1) BEGIN WITH FORGIVENESS.

We've all been hurt, which is why this practice begins with forgiveness. You may be that parent, for example, who knows you have unintentionally wronged your children and yet hope for the grace of forgiveness. Or, you may have inadvertently hurt someone because you didn't know any better. Whatever the case may be, reflect on the words below. Allow forgiveness to act as a salve for your wounded spirit so that you may let go and move on. By sending forgiveness, you also open the gateway to a more awakened and sensitive behavior—alert to even the subtle consequences of your actions and thoughts. Jesus spoke to this in the Bible (Luke 6:37) when he said, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

**Repeat the following words once before moving on.**

*May I forgive myself for hurting others.  
May others forgive me for hurting them.  
May I forgive myself for hurting myself.*

## 2) SAY LOVING-KINDNESS FOR YOURSELF.

**Repeat the following words over and over.** Say them until you can feel the words resonating within. This could be for five minutes, for 10, for 30 minutes.

*May I be safe.*

*May I be happy.*

*May I be healthy.*

*May I be peaceful.*

Optionally, add these words—

*May I be free from pain, hunger, and suffering.*

## 3) SAY LOVING-KINDNESS FOR OTHERS.

Next, you will repeat the loving-kindness meditation/affirmation for others. Picture these individuals looking radiant and healthy and happy as you send them this deep wish for their well-being.

Look at the list of six groups below. The top two are self-explanatory, but the “neutral persons” group refers to persons who you may see or interact with from time to time but who you don’t really know—such as that person at the checkout stand at the grocery store, that person who lives down the street who you wave to, etc.

The “unfriendly group” represents those persons who are difficult persons in your life. They may have even created pain and abuse. This is a group that presents the greatest challenge for sending out the loving-kindness words. If you find that you can’t send to this group, you can stop and start sending love to yourself. Then, where you feel resonance with the words, again start sending loving-kindness to others, starting from the top of the list.

Remember, that even that abuser or difficult person in your life has suffered in some way. Even this person would benefit from such a blessing. In addition, you can know that difficult person does not have to know you are sending these words out to them. In fact, they may not even be alive. Because loving-kindness breaks down the walls of separation between ourselves and others, saying it for others—even those who may have hurt or harmed us—is also beneficial to us! Here are the categories and the way you can repeat the loving-kindness wish of well-being for these groups of persons.

- 1) Teachers/mentors/guides
- 2) Family members
- 3) Friends
- 4) Neutral persons
- 5) Unfriendly persons
- 6) All Persons/living beings/living things without discrimination

**Repeat the following loving-kindness words for each of the above groups.**

*May (name here) be safe.*

*May (name here) be happy.*

*May (name here) be healthy.*

*May (name here) be peaceful.*

Optionally, add these words—

*May (name here) be free from pain, hunger, and suffering.*

4) CONCLUDE WITH A FINAL BLESSING OR WISH FOR OTHERS.

After you have extended loving-kindness to all the six groups, end with following words.

**Say the following words once.**

*May suffering ones by suffering-free,*

*May the fear-struck fearless be,*

*May grieving ones shed all grief,*

*May all beings find relief.*

**Reflections:** What was it like for you to say the loving-kindness meditation or affirmation? Was there any part of this that you found difficult?

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The loving-kindness practice takes time and patience. How do you think this could help you move toward forgiveness—either toward yourself or others?

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How could you develop an ongoing loving-kindness meditation or affirmation practice? Where would be an ideal place to practice this—where you might be in the solitude of Nature or at a place you design and dedicate to this gentle practice of cultivating peace, kindness, and compassion?

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## HANDOUT: HEALING WITH MUSIC

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When is the last time you sang a song—just for the fun of it?

A study conducted at Stockholm University in Sweden showed that when amateurs practiced singing, they reduced feelings of stress while experiencing feelings of joy and elation. Interestingly, professional singers didn't get the same benefit, because they were concerned about performance and achievement. Isn't it nice to know you can sing without that pressure? This is singing just for the fun of it.

If you are too shy or unable to sing for any reason whatsoever, don't worry. Simply listening to music has been proven to be beneficial for reducing stress because of its effect on the vascular system. Listening to joyful music actually expands and relaxes your blood vessels and lymphatic vessels.

Try the strategies below and report how they change your experience of pain, stress, or anxiety.

### **Instructions:**

Experiment with each of the musical ideas below to see which works best for you. Sing for at least five minutes at a time. Sing for longer if you feel like it.

Each time you try one of the musical methods below, rate the level of pain or discomfort you feel on a 1-10 scale, with 1 the lowest level and 10 the highest.

After you have finished, make sure to again rate the pain or level of discomfort on a 1-10 scale. This way, you can see which method is most effective at diminishing, managing, or distracting from pain. (Use the Chart below to track your ratings).

### 1) SING OR HUM A SONG YOU LIKE.

Even if you haven't typically sung songs before, see what it's like to sing one of your favorite songs. You can also hum the song—which gives you the same benefits. Thomas Jefferson was known for humming his favorite Scottish tunes when he was living at Monticello.

Consider singing a song from your past that you enjoyed. If you can't think of the lyrics, look on the Internet where it's pretty easy to locate lyrics of all kinds.

### 2) SING ALONG WITH MUSIC.

Like going to a karaoke bar, you can enjoy singing along with music. This might help if you don't have the lyrics available.

### 3) SIMPLY LISTEN TO MUSIC THAT YOU FIND JOYFUL.

Listen to music that makes you feel good. That could mean a feeling of being uplifted or even euphoric. Ideally, listen for 15-minutes or more. If you can move or sway to the sounds, go ahead and let your body move however it wants. Music from artists Randy Newman and Bobby McFerrin seem to bring smiles to faces. Maybe yours?

### 4) EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT KINDS OF MUSIC.

You may think you only enjoy a particular musical type. But have you listened to any others lately? For example, soothing, classical music has been shown to help persons to heal more quickly after surgery. This could present you

with the opportunity to explore and expand your musical tastes. Or, it may confirm your existing choices! Have fun discovering the different forms of music that are available.

PAIN BEFORE	MUSICAL METHOD	PAIN AFTER
In this column, rate the pain level <b>before</b> music. Rate mood on a 1-10 scale: 1=low pain; 10=high pain	Singing/Humming; Sing along with Music; Listen to Joyful Music; Types of Music	Rate your pain level again <b>after</b> listening to music using the 1-10 scale.

**Reflections:** What did you discover about music’s effectiveness as a way to manage pain? What did you learn about the ability of music to refocus your attention?

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Which method of connecting with music worked best to reduce or distract you from pain? Which would you find most portable and useable?

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How could you create an ongoing practice for using music to reduce stress and/or pain? What might be the challenges to making this work? What would be one benefit of this practice for you or others in your life?

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## HANDOUT: AT PEACE WITH PAIN

### ***A Comforting Visualization***

As much as it may feel that your pain is something others can't understand or fathom, this meditation can help you realize that you are not alone. Being at peace with pain doesn't mean that you are resigned to pain or that you wouldn't want things different with all your heart and mind. But it does mean that you can rest in the peace of mind and comfort that comes from the love and support of others.

The visualization here will let you be surrounded by the love of those who have cared for you and supported you throughout your life—as well as those who you know would offer their loving presence if they could be with you now.

### ***Instructions:***

- 1) Before starting, set the following intention:** *With this meditation, may I find peace of mind with my pain through the love, support, and comfort of others.*
- 2) Find a quiet, safe location where you will not be interrupted for at least 10 minutes.** Close your eyes.
- 3) Recall those persons who it feels good to be around.** These are people from your entire life who have held for you the simple wish that you be loved and well. These are folks who have the warmest thoughts and feelings for you, and when you are in their vicinity, you feel safe and good.

Picture those people, who could be called benefactors, because they care about your present condition, and they wish the best for you. Who are these persons? This could be a family member or a dear friend who made you feel safe and worthwhile. This person could also be one of your grade school teachers, a kindly neighbor, or a camp counselor who you think fondly of. There may have been strangers who have been kind and who possessed a loving presence that you still recall. In addition, add to this group those spiritual persons or mentors who have had your best interests at heart. These could be historical figures, from Jesus and Buddha to Mother Teresa or anyone who you know would have held the deepest wish for your well-being in their heart. These evolved and spiritual beings fully understand your difficult situation, and they would drop everything to be with you at this time—and to lend you support just by being at your side.

Bring all of these persons to mind. Visualize them smiling and radiant as they surround you—all the while sending you the warm glow of their deepest love and support. They hold the wish for your happiness, safety, joy, health, and peace. They accept and love you completely and unconditionally, just as you are.

You might experience their unconditional love and unlimited compassion for your difficult situation and wish for your well-being as a soft glow, a warm light that bathes you completely. Like a warm and sweet honeyed syrup, picture it flowing down from the top of the head and spilling to the tips of your toes. Let this unconditional love and concern for you seep down into every cell of your body. Absorb it with each breath you take.

Allow yourself to open up in order to let in this support, compassion, and love. Should you notice any skeptical or negative thoughts creeping into your mind, just release these—again returning to the deep wish for your well-being.

If your mind wanders, simply notice that and gently return it to your group of caring and loving supporters, or benefactors. Notice that their love and compassion is not passive at all. It is like a deep, flowing river of energy that moves you and deeply inspires you. How wonderful to be surrounded by so many loving persons . . .

- 4) Mentally say the following words for yourself,**

*May I rest in the very compassion, love,  
and support that these individuals hold for me.*

*May I rest with a sense of abiding peace with my situation,  
Knowing that I am always supported by my benefactors.*

**5) All things are inter-connected. And so, optionally, you can choose to mentally dissolve the separation between yourself your benefactors.** Right now, let yourself merge with them as you come into a sense of unity with these persons.

As you come into feeling of union with these persons, know that all beings can be benefactors for one another. We all want to feel this experience of compassionate understanding, love and well-being.

**To end this meditation, let yourself rest for a few moments in the peace of things as they are.** Just having the wisdom that comes from knowing that you can always be surrounded by the warm compassionate gaze and loving support of benefactors, from your past, your present, and even from those who you may encounter later today or tomorrow.

**Lastly, send these benefactors a blessing that reflects your gratitude and appreciation.**

**Reflections:** What was most surprising about this meditation for being *At Peace with Pain*? What benefactors showed up for you?

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How did it feel to have compassion for your situation? How did it feeling to be supported by wise and knowing benefactors who understood your pain?

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How could this meditation be incorporated into your life? How could it help you to find benefactors or reach out to potential benefactors? How would you go about reaching out or finding these benefactors?

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