



## SESSION 7: HOW CAN I BEST TAKE CARE OF MYSELF?

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### SUMMARY OF SESSION 7

What we actually do with our time, from moment to moment, from hour to hour, from one year to the next, can very powerfully influence our general well-being and our ability to deal skilfully with depression. You might like to try asking yourself these questions:

1. Of the things that I do, what nourishes me? What lifts my mood, energises me, makes me feel calm and centred? What increases my sense of actually being alive and present, rather than merely existing? ('N' activities)
2. Of the things that I do, what depletes me? What pulls me down, drains my energy, makes me feel tense and fragmented? What decreases my sense of actually being alive and present, what makes me feel I am merely existing, or worse? ('D' activities)
3. Accepting that there are some aspects of my life that I simply cannot change, how can I increase the time and effort I give to 'N' activities and decrease the time and effort I give to 'D' activities?
4. And could I learn to approach 'D' activities in a different way? To practise being fully present with them, even if I find them boring or unpleasant – to bring 'raisin mind' to them instead of judging them or wishing that they were not there?

By being present in more of our moments, and making mindful decisions about what we really need at each of those moments, we can use activity to become more aware and alert, and to regulate mood.

This is true both for the regular pattern of our daily lives, and for dealing with periods of low mood that may lead on to depression - we can use our day-by-day experience to discover and cultivate activities that will help us to care for ourselves in periods of worsening mood. Having these already available means that we will be more likely to persist with them in the face of negative thoughts such as "Why bother with anything?" that are simply part of the territory of feeling depressed.

For example, one of the simplest ways to take care of your physical and mental well-being is to take daily physical exercise. As a minimum, aim for at least one brisk 10 minute walk a day - and also, if at all possible, other types of exercise such as mindful stretching, yoga, swimming, jogging, etc. Once exercise is part of your daily routine, it is readily available as a way of responding to depressed moods as they arise.

## USING THE BREATHING SPACE: THE ACTION STEP

The Breathing Space provides a way to remind us to use activity to deal with unpleasant feelings as they arise. After reconnecting with an expanded awareness in the breathing space, it may feel appropriate to take some considered action. In dealing with depressed feelings, the following activities may be particularly helpful:

1. Do something pleasurable.
2. Do something that will give you a sense of satisfaction or mastery.
3. Act mindfully.

**Ask yourself: What do I need for myself right now? How can I best take care of myself right now?**

### 1. Doing Something Pleasurable

- **Be Kind to Your Body:** Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to your favourite food; have your favourite hot drink.
- **Engage in Enjoyable Activities:** Go for a walk (maybe with the dog or a friend); visit a friend; do your favourite hobby; do some gardening; take some exercise; phone a friend; spend time with someone you like; cook a meal; go shopping; watch something funny or uplifting on TV; read something that gives you pleasure; listen to music that makes you feel good

Be aware of barriers to pleasure: Be aware of 'killjoy thoughts' that tell you won't enjoy a pleasure you have planned, that you don't deserve it, that you should be enjoying it more, thoughts that distract you from fully experiencing what you are doing.

### 2. Doing Something That Gives You a Sense of Mastery or Satisfaction

- Clean the house; clear out a cupboard or drawer; catch up with letter writing; do some work; pay a bill; do something that you have been putting off doing.

Be aware of high standards and "it should be different" thinking. They may make it hard for you to feel you have achieved anything worthwhile. Notice thoughts like "I should be doing this better/faster/more easily", recognize them for what they are, and let them be.

Things that are normally easy can be very difficult when mood is low. So, give yourself the credit you would give another person struggling with a difficult task. It may well be helpful to break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time. Make sure you treat yourself kindly and with respect, and congratulate yourself whenever you complete a task or a part of a task.

### 3. Acting Mindfully

When mood is low, our minds tend to be preoccupied with worries and ruminations. We may be going over and over things that have happened in the past, trying to make sense of why we feel the way we do, or anxiously wondering about the future. The end result is that our attention is not really on what we are doing – we are lost in our heads, rather than focussed on what is happening right here and now. This means that activities that might nourish us become depleting.

**Notice if your mind has been hijacked by negative thoughts that tend to take you away from being present.** Instead, have an intention to focus your entire attention on what you are doing right now. Keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in the present (e.g. "Now I am walking down the stairs...now I can feel the banister beneath my hand...now I'm walking into the kitchen...now I'm turning on the light..."). Be aware of your breathing as you do other things; be aware of the contact of your foot with the floor as you walk. The more powerful your thoughts, the more difficult this may be. But, with practice, you will find that your capacity to be more fully present in each moment will grow.

## REMEMBER

**Be open-minded:** Whatever you choose to do, perform your action as an experiment. Don't pre-judge how you will feel after it is completed. Keep an open mind about whether doing this will be helpful in any way.

**Aim for a broad range:** Consider a range of activities and don't limit yourself to a favourite few. Sometimes trying new behaviours can be interesting in itself. 'Exploring' and 'enquiring' often works against 'withdrawal' and 'retreat'.

**Don't expect miracles:** Carry out what you have planned to do as best you can. Putting extra pressure on yourself by expecting a single activity to alter things dramatically may be unrealistic. Even a 1% change in your pattern of activities, increasing those that nourish you and decreasing those that deplete you, is helpful in building your overall sense of control in the face of shifts in your mood.

## WHEN DEPRESSION IS OVERWHELMING

Sometimes you may find that depression comes out of the blue. For example, you may wake up feeling very tired and listless, with hopeless thoughts going through your mind. When this happens, it may be useful for you to tell yourself, "Just because I am depressed now does not mean that I have to stay depressed."

When things come out of the blue like this, they set off negative ways of thinking in everyone. If you have been depressed in the past, it will tend to trigger old habits of thought that may be particularly damaging: full of overgeneralizations, predictions that this will go on forever, and "back to square one" thinking. These ways of making sense of what is happening to you tend to undermine your taking any action.

Having these symptoms does not mean that the depression needs to go on for a long time or that you are already in a full-blown episode of depression. Ask yourself, "What can I do to look after myself to get me through this low period?"

Take a breathing space to help gather yourself. This may help you see your situation from a wider perspective. This wider perspective allows you to become aware of both the pull of the old habits of thinking and what skillful action you might take.

## HOME PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK FOLLOWING SESSION 7

- **Lay the foundations for a Sustainable Mindfulness Practice:**

From the various forms of formal mindfulness practice you have explored (body scan, sitting meditations of varying lengths and types, mindful stretching, mindful movement, mindful walking), see if it's possible to settle on a pattern of practice that you can realistically sustain once the 8 weeks of the program are over.

It's fine to have different daily practices for weekdays and the weekend. The vital thing is that you acknowledge the real constraints on your time while honoring mindfulness practice as a really important source of daily nourishment for you.

As best you can, find a pattern of practice you feel comfortable with—there's no need to force yourself to heroic efforts that are not sustainable. It's better to plan too little (you can always add more later!) than plan too much (which may lead you to give up altogether)

- **Complete the Action Plan** to prepare for times when mood threatens to overwhelm you. Feel free to include others—family or friends—in this planning.
- **Three-Minute Breathing Space:** Practice the regular Three-Minute Breathing Space 3 times a day.
- **Responding - plus action:** In addition, practice whenever you notice unpleasant thoughts or feelings. Record each time you do the coping breathing space, and any action you decided to take afterwards.

Complete the 'Practice Record Form' each time you do any of the practices. Make a note of anything that you notice.

## HOME PRACTICE RECORD FORM

You can record each time you practice on this form or use your own diary/journal. Make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments: Discoveries, Delights, Difficulties?
1	Chosen Practice(s):  BS   BS   BS  Responsive BS:	
2	Chosen Practice(s):  BS   BS   BS  Responsive BS:	
3	Chosen Practice(s):  BS   BS   BS  Responsive BS:	
4	Chosen Practice(s):  BS   BS   BS  Responsive BS:	
5	Chosen Practice(s):  BS   BS   BS  Responsive BS:	
6	Chosen Practice(s):  BS   BS   BS  Responsive BS::	
7	Chosen Practice(s):  BS   BS   BS  Responsive BS:	