

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy
Facilitator Manual
SECOND EDITION

Charlton Hall



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My journey into the world of ecotherapy began in my teen years in the 1970s when I read works about Native American holy men and healers. From books like *Black Elk Speaks* and *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions* I learned to trust my own inner wisdom. From books like *Rolling Thunder* and *Seven Arrows* I learned to trust the healing power of nature. And from Joseph Campbell's collected works and Carlos Castaneda's *Don Juan* series I learned the power of personal myth.

In the 1990s I began to explore my Celtic and Norse heritage and read works by those who followed Celtic and Norse spiritual paths. One that was particularly formative in my thinking was *Anam Cara: A book of Celtic Wisdom* by John O'Donohue. The more I explored the teachings and the sagas of sages and ancients from all around the world, the more I learned that what the original peoples of the Earth all had in common was a reverence for nature and a deep respect for nature-centered spirituality.

What I learned from all my explorations is that the further back you go into history, the more human beings have in common. We all started out on a nature-centered path, and the rites and rituals our ancestors all shared had more commonalities than differences.

For all my sacred Ancestors who set my feet on the path, and for all my fellow pilgrims on the journey, thank you for what you have done for all of us. May we all have the wisdom to see.

ABOUT THIS FACILITATOR MANUAL

This is the second edition of *Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Facilitator Manual*. The original manual was published in 2015, and the sciences of mindfulness and ecotherapy have advanced a great deal since that time. This second edition was updated to reflect this new research. This edition, like its predecessor, was written to accompany the 12-week *Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy* workshop series. Some of the exercises in this new edition have changed based on participant feedback regarding what is more helpful in facilitating nature experiences.

This new version of the handbook introduces the 12 skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) and introduces one of these skills at each of the 12 sessions in the program. Although this book is designed to accompany the 12-week Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy workshop series, it may also be completed on your own at home. The experiential nature of the work allows anyone with access to outdoor spaces the opportunity to complete the series. If you are interested in participating in a workshop series near you, you can visit the Mindful Ecotherapy Center's website at www.mindfulecotherapy.org. The website contains a directory of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy programs worldwide at

<https://mindfulecotherapy.org/directory-2>

If you are completing this workbook on your own, you may visit the website or email me at chuck@mindfulecotherapy.com for resources, assistance, or clarification. I'd also love to hear your feedback regarding this edition of the workbook!

CHANGES IN THE SECOND EDITION

The original edition of this manual was published in 2017. The second edition made several changes. Some of these are as follows.

The first six sessions of the program deal with mindfulness. The order of these sessions was changed based on participant feedback. This was done to make the skills taught in these sessions follow a more logical order of progression.

The *My Animal Legend* exercise that was in Session 9 of the first edition was replaced by a Spirit Animal exercise because the My Animal Legend activity was a bit too long to complete in a one-hour session. This exercise will be developed into a full program later. The Spirit Animal exercise is more concise while still illustrating the skill of that session, Nature as Teacher.

There seems to be a misconception that the Spirit Animal exercise is “cultural appropriation” because Native American cultures engage in the practice. While it is true that the practice is widespread in the Native American community, it is a tool that has been used by most, if not all, cultures at one time or another. The Spirit Animal section was therefore expanded to include multiple citations from multiple sources demonstrating that the practice of taking a Spirit Animal is and was widespread, dating back to, and including, Neanderthals over 60,000 years ago.

The information about finding your birth tree using the Celtic ogham in the session on centering was deleted because it was too culturally specific. It was replaced by a Centering Tree exercise that is more generic and culturally inclusive.

New studies that were released after the date of the publication of the first edition have been included in the session material. These citations are referenced at the end of the sections in which they appear, and whenever appropriate the citations are included within the chapter materials.

Finally, some of the text has been edited and/or modified for clarity.

I'd like to thank everyone who offered feedback. Without your input these improvements would not have been possible!

If you are completing the workbook on your own, you may visit the website or email me at chuck@mindfulecotherapy.com for resources, assistance, or clarification. I'd also love to hear your feedback regarding this edition of the manual, and your suggestions for improvement of future editions!

INTRODUCTION TO THE FACILITATOR MANUAL

This is the Facilitator Manual for the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program. The Facilitator Manual contains the complete text from the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook, plus tips, suggestions, and instructions for facilitating the 12-Week Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program. All instructions for Facilitators will either appear in grey boxes like this one, or in grey sidebars. Online training is also available for facilitators of this course at www.mindfulecotherapy.org

FORMAT OF THE MINDFULNESS-BASED ECOTHERAPY PROGRAM

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program is a 12-week program that meets once per week for one hour, with an optional 30-minute discussion period at the end of the class. The question-and-answer discussion period at the end of each class is optional for two reasons: 1. Making it optional empowers attendees to decide for themselves whether or not to stay for the discussion; 2. Making it optional allows Facilitators to determine who is engaged and who is not engaged, so that they may focus more attention on those who choose not to stay for discussions. Note that not staying for the discussion isn't necessarily a bad thing. Doing some of the deep inner work in Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy will require a lot of inner processing, and some people may not feel like talking much after completing the exercises.

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook is the manual for students. It is available at most major media outlets. If you are planning to implement the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program at your clinic, institute, or organization, volume discounts are available for the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook through the Mindful Ecotherapy Organization. For information on training and volume discounts on the workbook, contact the author at chuck@mindfulecotherapy.org or visit www.mindfulecotherapy.org.

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook is divided into 13 chapters. The first chapter offers an overview of the program, and the remaining chapters each cover one of the 12 sessions in the program. The workbook contains more material than could possibly be covered in each one-hour session, so Facilitators may wish to assign the reading materials as homework for each session.

There is a homework assignment for each session. These homework assignments should be reviewed at the beginning of the session so that Facilitators may check to see if students are integrating the materials properly.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

The materials for each session also include at least one optional activity. This optional activity may be completed by students on their own, or it may be done at the facilitator's discretion if time permits. Some of the optional activities require an outdoor setting and should of course only be used in such a setting if the locale used for workshops is available. For example, "The River" activity from Session 5 requires that there is a river or another body of water nearby during the session. If you don't have access to a river, you would not be able to do that activity, and would need to plan accordingly.

Note also that each session contains more material than could be practically completed in a one-hour session with a group of more than five people or so. If you have a larger group, you may wish to extend the time frame as needed to accommodate the activities, or you may use your discretion to eliminate some activities so that you will have enough time to complete all the exercises in your chosen time frame.

ABSENCES

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program was designed to be a twelve-week intensive program. Because of this, a great deal of information is presented in a short period of time. The material continually builds on concepts introduced in previous sessions. Because of this, you may want to keep the allowable number of absences to less than one or two, especially if those absences are sequential. In other words, if a person misses two or more consecutive sessions, it will be extremely difficult for them to catch up. Having a copy of the workbook will help to keep them current, but only if they do the exercises at home. Even then they may have difficulty keeping up. This is because most of the exercises in the program are highly experiential in nature. The program is about the individual's inner journey and missing the experiential exercises when they occur in a group format deprives participants of the group energy that is generated when people all do the exercises together in a wilderness or park setting.

As I've done versions of this program over the years, I've come to learn that due to the unique talents and insights of each particular group of participants, each group and each individual session has its own dynamic and energy. Missing a session means missing an experience that can never happen again in the same way.

It's a good idea to explain this policy on absences at the first session. You may even wish to create a group participation contract stating this policy. For a sample Group Participation Contract, see the Facilitator Tips for Session 1.

For more detailed information on the 12-week Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program, please see the next section, Overview of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy.

ABOUT THE LOCATIONS USED FOR THE PROGRAM

Since this program is about utilizing the healing power of nature to make personal change, it is best conducted in an outdoor setting. While some of the sessions can be conducted indoors (especially the earlier sessions dealing with the skills of mindfulness), I prefer to do them all outdoors if possible. Outdoor environments have been demonstrated to produce changes in consciousness not readily available in indoor settings (Van den Berg & Ter Heijne, 2005), so to my way of thinking holding them indoors defeats the purpose. Of course, there will be times when the weather doesn't cooperate, and during those times it's a good idea to have a backup plan or to schedule a rain date if you have to cancel. I've found that many parks have some sort of shelter that may be used for such purposes. There's something soothing and meditative about holding a session outdoors under the cover of a shelter as the rain gently patters on the roof.

Because of the outdoor nature of this program, a little finesse is required in planning and scheduling. Since it is a twelve-week program if you hold sessions once a week you will have covered an approximate three-month span of time. This means that you will have to be aware of local weather patterns when planning your program. The home of the Mindful Ecotherapy Organization is in the southern Appalachians of upstate South Carolina. While starting a program in October might be great for taking advantage of the cooler temperatures and the colorful falling leaves, starting such a three-month program at that time would mean that we would be finishing in late December or early January when the weather is freezing outside. Alternately, starting a program at mid-day in the spring might be great, but if we continue to meet at noon for three months, we'll be experiencing the midsummer heat of the Deep South.

If you're new to your local area and aren't sure about the weather patterns, you may wish to consult with the locals in order to determine the best times for your program.

In the past I've also done this as a week-long intensive program, doing one session in the morning and one in the afternoon. This allows the entire program to be completed as a one-week retreat; however, I wouldn't recommend trying to do more than two sessions per day in an intensive format. This is because some of the sessions, if done properly, can be quite intense. People need time to process what they've experienced and doing more than two sessions per day doesn't allow for such time.

A final word of caution on choosing a location: Safety first! Be aware of any dangerous wild animals that might inhabit the area you've chosen. Also note any dangers from the terrain, such as high waterfalls, slippery trails, etc. and have proper liability insurance should accidents happen. You may wish to consult with an attorney to have a waiver drawn up limiting your liability in case of accidents.

Also be on the lookout for dangerous plants like poison ivy, poison oak, stinging nettles and poison sumac. If you don't know what these plants look like, consult with someone who does and have them check out the area ahead of time.

If you plan to have any children at your events, caution them about eating the plants. You might also have to warn some adults in this regard. Sometimes participants expect you to be an expert on the local flora and fauna. If you are such an expert, that's fine. But if you aren't, it'd be advisable not to allow your participants to eat anything they might find on the trail.

Be aware of potential allergies that your participants might have. Keep a first aid kit with an epi pen and allergy medicines but be aware of local liability laws regarding distribution of medicines. It may be helpful to ask your participants to be aware of allergens and to plan accordingly.

Finally, I would highly recommend taking a basic first aid course before facilitating any of these programs, or have

someone with first aid training available and have a plan for emergencies when they arise.

Above all else, a good facilitator is one who has experienced the program. If you can attend one of our annual trainings, it is recommended that you do so. If you don't have the ability to travel to our locations, the facilitator training is also available online at www.mindfulecotherapy.org.

If nothing else, at least work through the program yourself using the workbook or the facilitator manual so that you have a good understanding of what your participants will experience as they attend.

Above all, have fun and allow the wonder of nature to speak to you!

Running a Successful Group

GROUP DYNAMICS

Each group you conduct will have a different dynamic, due to the fact that different groups are made up of different individuals in different times and different places. The Facilitator's challenge in assessing group dynamics is to determine the level of functioning and engagement for each individual in the group. The discussions and interaction should be simple enough to integrate those who are less engaged while simultaneously being challenging enough to keep the attention of those who are higher functioning. For inexperienced group facilitators, this can be a difficult balance to strike. It's often a challenging task even for facilitators with years of experience!! One simple way to achieve this balance is to ask the group honestly and openly for feedback and suggestions.

Another challenge for facilitators is to continually monitor for engagement and interaction. A good facilitator will notice those who seem to have withdrawn from the discussion and will work to actively draw them back in by asking questions or otherwise interacting with them. At the other end of the spectrum, there will be those who attempt to dominate the discussion. Facilitators will also have to watch for these sometimes-forceful attempts to take control of the group. This sort of dynamic can be forestalled by gently reminding the instigators that others should also be allowed to speak.

A simple and effective way to ensure engagement and participation of all group members is to go around the room and ask each person to respond in turn to a question or exercise. A good way to do this is to plan an 'icebreaker' exercise at the beginning of each session. Such an exercise allows the group to transition from the everyday world to the purpose of the gathering by putting aside any other agenda prior to beginning a session. A good icebreaker that allows this transition to happen naturally is to open with a brief grounding and centering meditation. This can be as simple as asking everyone to take three deep breaths before the session begins.

If you have a location that requires a hike from the parking area to the gathering area, you may also use this time by having participants engage in a walking meditation from the parking lot to the site. During this time ask them to ground and center themselves on the way to the gathering.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program is run as a 'co-ed' program; meaning that groups are not usually segregated by gender or sex. This is done so that facilitators may observe interactional dynamics among group members in order to challenge difficulties related to rigid gender roles. There may be cases in which groups will have to be segregated (such as a sex offenders' group, or a domestic violence offenders' group, or a group that meets in a male-only or female-only institution), but unless safety is an issue, it is recommended that groups be co-educational so that students may integrate the lessons more successfully in a group with real-world dynamics. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is about setting aside preconceptions and being open to new possibilities, and one of these possibilities is re-thinking gender roles in society and what they mean to the individual.

The ideal group size is from 8 to 12 members. Research has shown that groups larger than 12 members tend to split off into sub-groups, forming coalitions that may challenge the facilitator's authority. For groups larger than 12 members, a co-facilitator is recommended. Such a co-facilitator can assist in keeping people engaged so that sub-group coalitions do not form as easily. The ideal ratio to maintain, if possible, is one facilitator per 12 group members.

GROUP RULES

In order to run a successful group, the rules should be clear and concise. Facilitators should decide on the group rules before the first session and review them with the group members. Group rules are up to the facilitator, the institution, and the group participants. It is a good idea to empower students at the first session by including them in the rule-making process. The facilitator should review the rules, and then ask the group if there are any modifications they'd like to make, or any further rules they'd like to suggest.

These rules are then written down, typed up, and distributed at the next session or by email prior to the next session. Facilitators may ask one of the students to keep track of the rules and modifications as the group comes up with them.

SAMPLE GROUP RULES

Here are some rules that you may find useful in planning your groups. These are just suggestions. You should create your own group rules with participants during the first session of the group. Soliciting their input makes the group more inclusive and participatory.

1. *Confidentiality* – Group members should agree to abide by the rule, “What happens in group, stays in group.” Group members agree not to discuss each other’s personal information outside of a group context, and to respect each other’s privacy.
2. *Safety* – Group members should agree not to attack each other verbally or physically while in group, or outside of group.
3. *Participation* – Group members should agree to actively participate in the group, do all the homework assignments, and show up on time.
4. *Punctuality* – Facilitators should honor those who show up on time by starting the group promptly at the advertised time. The ‘Fifteen Minute Rule’ is a good rule of thumb: If a group member is more than fifteen minutes late, it counts as an absence. Remind participants that tardiness causes disruptions to the flow of the group and is disrespectful to other members of the group. I like to honor those who showed up on time by starting on time. Waiting for stragglers is disrespectful to those who arrived on time.
5. *Absences* – Due to the intensive nature of the program, it is recommended that you establish a firm policy regarding absences. Since each session builds on previous sessions, it is not recommended that participants be allowed more than two consecutive absences.
6. *Courtesy* – Group members should respect each other and the facilitator(s). This includes not interrupting others who are speaking. Facilitators may wish to use a “talking stick” if constant interruption becomes an issue. A talking stick is just a stick or other object that is passed among group members. The rule for using a talking stick is that only the person holding the stick may speak.

These are just some sample rules that will help your program to run more smoothly. Remember that you may revise the rules at any time during the course of the program, and you should solicit suggestions and input from group members prior to making any changes in the rules.

STAGES OF CHANGE

The Trans-Theoretical Model (TTM) of Stages of Change identifies five stages in the change process. As a facilitator you are instilling change in the students in your group. Each student will fall along a spectrum in the Stages of Change. You will need to identify where each group member is on the spectrum. Each stage has different dynamics and different tools for engagement. The ultimate task of the facilitator regarding Stages of Change is to motivate group students towards change. Successful completion of the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy program requires motivation to change. The TTM Stages of Change, along with a brief discussion of each, follows below. As a facilitator, you will need to know how to move your students through each stage towards the ultimate stage of Maintenance.

1. Pre-Contemplational – “I don’t have a problem.” This stage is sometimes referred to as ‘denial.’ A person at this stage is blaming others or their circumstances for the difficulties in their life rather than accepting personal responsibility. This often manifests as ‘blame-shifting’ or ‘blamestorming,’ in which the individual avoids personal responsibility for making any needed changes. As a facilitator you would move such a person towards the Contemplational stage by developing discrepancies. This is done by gently challenging the statements that lead to denial. An example of developing discrepancies might be, “I don’t understand. You say you don’t have a problem with the way your life is going, yet you enrolled in this Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy program. Could you please explain what you hope to learn here?” Of course, many people may enroll in the program just because they are interested in self-improvement through nature. For such individuals, developing discrepancies might include statements like, “How have you been living your life to this point, and what has it gotten you? How would you like your life to be different after completing this program?”
2. Contemplational – “Okay, maybe I do have a problem.” At this stage, the person is willing to consider that there may be a problem. As Facilitator, you may challenge the denial of the Pre-Contemplational stage by developing discrepancies, and the individual is now willing to consider that there may be a problem. At this stage, you would move individuals towards Preparation by asking two questions:
 - a. If you did have a problem, what would be some signs that would tell you that there was a problem? What would it look like?
 - b. If you did not have a problem, what would that look like?

You may then use the answers to these two questions to help the student determine which category applies to their current situation.

3. Preparation – “I definitely have a problem, and this is what I need to do about it.” At this stage, the student has admitted that there is a problem, and that something needs to be done. Your job as a facilitator at this stage is to help the student to assess strengths and weaknesses, and to formulate a change plan that addresses each student’s particular needs. Once this has been done, you will help the student to execute the change plan by moving to the Action phase.
4. Action – “I’m now doing something to address the problem.” At the Action stage, the facilitator and the student work together to create change, guided by the student’s change plan. The exercises in the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program are designed to facilitate motivation for change. This motivation for change is analogous to the Performing stage of group dynamics (see section below on Group Stages).
5. Maintenance – “I’ve implemented my change plan, fine-tuned it by troubleshooting, and now I’m going to stay with the program.” At this stage the plan for change has been formulated, and the facilitator has helped the students to troubleshoot the plan by asking what might go wrong with the plan as written. Now the student goes out into the world and implements it. If the plan is sound, then the Maintenance stage has been achieved. Maintenance means that the student has created a change plan that works in the real world. A paradigm shift has occurred that allows the student to successfully make changes at all times and in all situations. If an unforeseen circumstance occurs that causes the student to relapse (i.e., to return to previous problem behaviors and modes of thinking), then he/she returns to the change plan, incorporates the new situation, and comes up with a

potential solution to the unforeseen crisis.

This new solution is then implemented. The process is repeated until the new situation has been successfully resolved. A word of caution here: As a facilitator, your goal is not to solve problems for your students. Your goal is to help them figure out how to solve their own problems. If you solve their problems for them, you will have created a situation of dependency. Such a situation is especially hazardous with people who have difficulties with emotional regulation since they are usually accustomed to making their problems someone else's responsibility. A good rule of thumb here is "Don't work harder than your students."

GROUP STAGES

As a general rule, there are five stages of group dynamics. These stages play out over the duration of the group, and each stage has its own characteristics. These stages are:

1. *Forming* – In the Forming stage, the group is getting to know each other. They are also learning the rules. This applies to the unspoken rules as well as the stated group rules. The group dynamics are arranging, and trust is being developed between group members and the facilitator(s). At this stage, the facilitator's goal is to develop an atmosphere of trust and safety for all group members. During this stage be aware that many participants may be leery of sharing their thoughts and feelings with a group of strangers. Be patient and gentle with them as you prepare them for the next stage.
2. *Storming* – In the Storming stage, group members have settled into the culture of the group and jockeying for position has begun. Each group will try to establish a pecking order. At this stage, the facilitator's task is to work to actively engage the withdrawn members of the group while preventing the stronger personalities from dominating each session. One way to do this is to allow each person a turn to speak. In more extreme cases, a talking stick may be needed in order to keep any one person from dominating the discussion.
3. *Norming* – In the Norming stage, trust bonds have been established, the pecking order has been decided, and group members have settled into their roles. Each member knows what the group's norms are, what's expected of them, what's expected of the facilitator, and how the group's culture works. At this stage, the facilitator's goal is to work towards continuing to enforce the group's established norms in a solution-focused way so that all activities of the group are leading towards problem-solving rather than blaming, shaming, or guilt-tripping. At this stage be aware of the dangers of "groupthink." Groupthink occurs when a person or persons with good ideas keep those ideas to themselves because they perceive that such a recommendation might go against the group culture. Try to maintain an open and accepting culture so that all opinions are heard and evaluated, without letting one or two individuals dominate the conversation.
4. *Performing* – Now that all of the group dynamics have been successfully navigated and the group is functioning as a cohesive whole, the real work can begin. At the Performing stage, group members are actively engaged in discussion. They support each other, turn in their homework, and demonstrate that they are motivated for change (the Action phase of the Stages of Change above).
5. At this stage, the facilitator's goal is to keep all group members performing by continuing to work towards a solution-focused approach to problem-solving. During the Performing stage, the facilitator should avoid the temptation to solve problems for group members. Instead, the facilitator helps group members to learn to solve their own problems so that a state of dependence upon the facilitator is not created. This is done by soliciting suggestions for possible solutions from the group.
6. *Adjourning* – At the Adjourning stage, the group is preparing to dissolve. It is a time for celebrating successes and learning to use the skills on their own without having to rely on the group for support. At this stage it is the facilitator's goal to work towards successful transition planning. This includes linking group members to needed community supports, discussing how to continue to successfully implement their change plans, and rewarding group members for their progress.

FACILITATOR SKILLS

As a Group Facilitator, you will need several skills:

1. Active Listening – A facilitator needs to be able to pay attention not only to the words being spoken, but also to the tone and the body language. A good facilitator knows that it is possible to validate a person's feelings without necessarily having to agree with or condone those feelings or the behaviors they generate.
2. Connecting – A facilitator needs to be able to help members overcome obstacles to connecting with each other so that the group can become a functioning, cohesive unit.
3. Blocking – This is one of the more difficult facilitating skills to learn. Blocking involves keeping more aggressive members from taking over the group. A good facilitator will redirect less focused group members or otherwise move to prevent them from dominating the discussion or disrupting the group. Skill in blocking requires being firm without becoming confrontational or aggressive.
4. Summarizing – A good facilitator can review what has happened in a session and summarize it succinctly for all members of the group so that they are better able to integrate the events of a particular session.
5. Positive Regard – Possibly the most important facilitating skill, positive regard means keeping a person-focused attitude by allowing group members to set their own goals and outcomes. Positive regard also means validating the thoughts and feelings of all group members without necessarily having to agree with or condone those thoughts or feelings.
6. Confronting – On occasion a good facilitator will be required to confront patterns of thought and behavior that lead to detrimental outcomes or disrupt the group. This is best accomplished by developing discrepancies between the group member's stated goals and their behavior. For example, if a group member's goal is to become responsible for his/her own personal journey, yet that individual continues to act in ways that demand that others be responsible for that individual's journey, then there is a discrepancy. A good facilitator can gently point out this discrepancy in a patient and kind manner so that change and growth may occur.
7. Inspiring – A good facilitator is an inspiration to group members. Such a facilitator is able to see the good in everyone, and to help them see the good in themselves as well so that they may recognize their own strengths and live by them.

The next page contains a sample Group Participation Contract. It is recommended that you create your own with information specific to your own group, using the sample on the next page as a template. Have all group members sign it at the beginning of the first session and retain a copy for your records.

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FEEDBACK

I'm always looking for tips and suggestions to help improve future versions of the workbook and the program. I'd love to hear your feedback at chuck@mindfulecotherapy.com

MINDFULNESS-BASED ECOTHERAPY PROGRAM

Sample Group Participation Contract

Name: _____ Date: _____

By signing below, I signify that I understand and agree to abide by the following:

Confidentiality

Participants must be able to speak freely and openly. I would not like others in the group to share my personal information; therefore, I agree not to share anything that happens or that is discussed in this group with people who are not participating in this group.

By signing below, I understand that violation of this confidentiality agreement is deemed sufficient grounds to be removed from the group.

Attendance and Participation

I understand that if my attendance in the group is mandatory (for example, court-ordered) that the facilitator(s) may be required to report information about my attendance. I further understand that in order to successfully complete the program, I must attend all twelve sessions. I will be allowed no more than two consecutive absences. I understand that if I am absent more than twice, I may be dropped from the program and will have to begin again at the next scheduled group. I also understand that if I am more than fifteen minutes late, I may be counted as 'absent.' By signing below, I agree not to disrupt the group by arriving late or leaving early except in cases of extreme emergency.

I further agree not to engage in activities that may disrupt the group. I will not take phone calls during group or leave the group during sessions except in case of emergency.

The group meets once per week on (Day of week) _____ at: (time of group) _____

Group Informed Consent

By signing below, I agree to participate in the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program.

My identity and the identity of any other member of the group or others involved directly or indirectly will remain confidential. The facilitators will not use my name or personal identifying information in anything that is written about this group. If data is collected for purposes of research, no identifying information will be collected or retained. Although participation is encouraged, I understand that my participation is voluntary; I do not have to answer questions or speak unless I choose to. I agree to respect the privacy of the people who participate in this group. I will not share any identifying information or details about the discussion outside of this group.

If I have any questions about the group, I can call:

Facilitator Name: _____

Facilitator Contact Information: _____

I have read and understood the information above, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing below, I voluntarily agree to participate in this group.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Facilitator: _____ Date: _____

PROGRAM OVERVIEW FACILITATOR NOTES

The section that follows is an overview of the entire program for those who wish to know more. Since the material in this section is not part of a session, it won't actually be reviewed during any session of the program.

If you are requiring your participants to purchase the workbook that goes with the program, you may ask them to read over this section prior to attending the first session of your program; however, since this is an overview most of what is discussed in this chapter will be reviewed in greater detail in later portions of the workbook.

It is highly recommended that as a facilitator you read over this material prior to conducting your first session, as it contains information that will be valuable in leading sessions. It also contains critical foundational theoretical information about the concepts used throughout the program.

PROMOTIONAL BROCHURE FOR THE PROGRAM

If you would like to download a trifold brochure that covers the information in this overview, there is one available in pdf format at the Mindful Ecotherapy Center's website at www.mindfulecotherapy.org.

Visit the site and enter "Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program Brochure" in the search box or look under the "Resources" tab.

The brochure contains a brief explanation of all 12 sessions of the program. It also contains a blank space that you can use to list your own organization's contact information and location.

Overview of the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook and Program

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) is a blending of Mindfulness and Ecopsychology. MBE uses nature to facilitate mindful awareness. MBE is used as a framework for helping individuals and families to find deeper connections in their own lives, and to give more meaning and enjoyment to the activities of daily living.



First annual Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Retreat, Highlands, NC, 2009

0.0 Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Most people enjoy spending time outdoors. The existence of state and national parks, public beaches, mountain resorts, and other outdoor recreational facilities can attest to this fact. We seek nature because it is not only enjoyable, but healthy as well. A large and growing body of research demonstrates that nature is good for the mind as well as the body.

Not only is spending time in nature relaxing and healthy. It can also facilitate mindful states of being. What is mindfulness, and why is it important? Mindfulness is simply a way of paying attention to the moment in which you find yourself by focusing on your immediate experience rather than on ruminations and negative thought patterns (Carlson, et al 2004). These negative thinking cycles may be producing stress depression, or anxiety. By entering mindful states, we break these cycles. Scientific study continues to demonstrate that mindfulness increases attention and concentration, facilitates calmer states, and helps with stress reduction. Mindfulness works so well in this capacity that it has been referred to as the *"penicillin of mental health."*

The Mindful Ecotherapy Center was founded in 2007 to create programs that use natural environments to facilitate mindful states. In 2010 the tools and techniques of ecotherapy and mindfulness were blended in a program known as *Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE)*. MBE uses nature to facilitate *mindful awareness*, the first skill of MBE, covered in the materials for Session 1 of the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy 12-week program.

For those of you interested in learning more about mindfulness and ecotherapy, and how they work well together, there is an extensive list of citations and references at the end of this book.

Since 2008 the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy program has helped individuals and families to find deeper connections in their own lives, and to give more meaning and enjoyment to their activities of daily living. It has proven particularly effective in helping victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other types of traumas. Our facilitators around the world have also had much success using the program for substance abuse recovery.

By re-integrating ourselves with nature through Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, we can tap into nature's healing power and to heal the earth as we heal ourselves.

Carlson, L.E., Speca, M., Patel, K.D., & Goodey, E. (2004). Mindfulness-based stress reduction in relation to quality of life, mood, symptoms of stress and levels of cortisol, dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate (DHEAS) and melatonin in breast and prostate cancer outpatients. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. 2004 May; 29(4):448-74.

0.1 What is Mindfulness?

Think about the last time you were stressed out or depressed about something. Hold that thought in your mind and ask yourself, *“Was the stress due to something that happened in the past? Was it about something that may or may not happen in the future? How much of what I was anxious about has to do with right now, at this very moment, as I read this sentence?”*

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to what is happening right now, in this moment, with intention.

By focusing on our experiences in the now, from moment to moment, we come to realize that we are free to choose which thoughts and feelings to pay attention to, and which thoughts and feelings not to focus on. This doesn't mean that we're trying to stop thinking or feeling. It means that we're just making a conscious choice on how much attention to focus on those thoughts or feelings. It doesn't mean that we're trying to avoid those thoughts or feelings either. It just means we recognize that they can't have any influence on us unless we choose to let them.

Think about it this way: The past only exists in our memories. The future is only a projection of the past. That is to say, the future is only our educated guesses about what we think might happen based on our past experiences. Anxiety about future events is the result of playing the odds based on past experiences and expecting similar occurrences to happen in the future. Mindfulness is a way of using the present moment to choose what to believe about the past and the future. We can choose which memories to pay attention to, and which projections about the future to focus our attention on. Mindfulness isn't about trying to make anxious or depressing thoughts and feelings go away. It is about choosing whether or not to dwell on such thoughts and feelings.

Imagine that everything that has ever stressed you out or depressed you is written on this page. Now hold this book about six inches from your nose, or as close to your face as you can while still being able to read the words on this page. With the book this close to your face, how much of your surroundings can you see? If you're like most people, you probably can't see much of anything in the immediate environment except this book. You might catch a glimpse here and there of something in your peripheral vision, but overall, all you're going to be able to see is the pages of this book.

If your stressful thoughts and feelings were written on this page, they'd be in the way of you being able to see the overall picture clearly. The words on this page would be blocking your view and making it difficult to see the big picture.

When we let our stressful thoughts and feelings occupy all our attention, then like this book, they tend to block our view of anything else that might be going on in our lives.

Instead of having all your stressful and depressing thoughts written on this page, imagine that they're written on a boomerang. If you tried to throw that boomerang away, it would eventually come back to you. If you weren't careful, it might actually smack you in the head on its return trip! The harder you try to throw this boomerang away, the faster it comes back to you. When we try to “throw away” stressful and depressing thoughts and feelings, they tend to come right back at us as well. That's because, like it or not, stressful and depressing thoughts and feelings are just as much a part of us as happy thoughts and feelings. Trying to throw them away is trying to throw away a part of ourselves. When we try to throw away the experience of those types of thoughts and feelings, we're engaging in something called *experiential avoidance*.

What if, instead of trying to throw that boomerang away, you simply set it in your lap? If you did this, those negative thoughts and feelings written on the boomerang would still be with you, but they wouldn't be blocking your view. You could still see and interact with the world, but you also wouldn't be trying to throw away a part of yourself.

Mindfulness in this context is a way of setting that boomerang of stressful and depressing thoughts in your lap so you can see the world around you (Maher, 2021). It's not a way of trying to throw those thoughts and feelings away. Remember, if you try to do that, the boomerang may come back with a vengeance! Instead, mindfulness is about learning to accept that such thoughts and feelings are a natural part of existence and accepting that we don't have to let them keep us from interacting with the world unless we consciously choose to do so.

Bharate and Ray (2021) describe this as meta-awareness; or the state of being aware that you are aware. In this state of meta-cognition, we are aware of ourselves as thinking and feeling individuals. We also become aware that our thoughts and feelings are not our destiny. They are simply processes of the mind.

In a 2021 study, Maher demonstrated that teaching mindfulness skills to university students helped to ameliorate symptoms of stress and performance anxiety and was an inexpensive and effective way to enhance student well-being and to improve student performance.

Bharate, G., & Ray, S. (2021, May 11). *The wandering mind, the focused mind and the meta-aware mind*. <https://doi.org/10.31231/osf.io/8zjeb>

Maher, Christina. (2021). The Benefits of Mindfulness for University Students. *Building Healthy Academic Communities Journal*. 5. 42-57. 10.18061/bhac.v5i1.7735.

0.2 Upstairs Brain vs. Downstairs Brain

In their book, *The Whole-Brain Child*, Dan Siegel and Tina Payne-Bryson introduce the concept of upstairs brain and downstairs brain as a convenient metaphor for how thinking and feeling are processed in the brain.

Feelings of depression, anxiety, sadness, and other emotions are generated in a part of the brain called the *limbic system*. This "downstairs" portion of the brain is only interested in three things: *Fighting, fleeing, or freezing*. In *fight* mode, the *downstairs brain* wants to protect you from harm by fighting against the threat. When it is triggered, your heart may race, your palms may get sweaty, and you may have a sharp increase in irritability and anger. In *flee* mode, you may experience a similar adrenaline rush, but in this instance your brain is preparing your body to run away from the danger. In *freeze* mode, we tend to retreat inside ourselves. This is the deer-in-the-headlights feeling of "*If I'm very quiet and still, the bad thing won't see me.*"

When you're in fight, flee, or freeze mode, your downstairs brain is preparing you to deal with a real or perceived threat in the only way it knows how. When your downstairs brain is engaged, the upstairs part of your brain tends to get overwhelmed.

The *upstairs brain*, in contrast, consists of the *neocortex* of the brain, is the part responsible for thinking things through, figuring things out, and solving problems. When the downstairs brain takes over, the upstairs brain is out to lunch. That's why when you're emotionally overwhelmed it is nearly impossible to figure out a way to deal with it. Upstairs brain is all about finding solutions to problems, but downstairs brain is all about fighting, fleeing, or freezing. When your upstairs brain is overwhelmed, thinking things over isn't going to work. That's because at that point your downstairs brain is in charge. For those times when your downstairs brain is running the show, mindfulness is a way of disengaging from the thinking cycle for a while so that you can re-center yourself and reconnect with yourself and the world around you.

If you find yourself in downstairs brain mode, where emotions are running the show, mindful states are a way to take a break for a while to allow your anxious thoughts and feelings to calm so that the upstairs brain can take charge again. Note again that mindfulness is not about "telling yourself not to think about it" or trying to avoid unpleasant feelings. Instead, it is about sitting quietly with those unpleasant feelings until you can re-engage.

In his book, *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence*, Dr. Siegel demonstrates that learning emotional regulation of the downstairs brain through mindful awareness leads to improved immune system functioning, decreased inflammation, improved cholesterol, improved cardiovascular functioning, and increased neural integration.

This increased neural integration includes improved problem-solving, self-regulation skills, and improved adaptive behaviors, making it possible to adapt to new or stressful situations more easily and with less difficulty.

Siegel, Daniel J. and Payne-Bryson, Tina (2011). *The Whole Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*, Random House, New York, NY.

Siegel, Daniel (2020). *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence*. New York, NY, Random House.

0.3 Doing Mode vs. Being Mode

Another aspect of mindfulness is stepping outside of *doing mode* and entering *being mode*.

When we're caught up in thought and feeling cycles that lead to depression and anxiety, we usually feel that we should be *doing* something to fix it. The problem with this is that sometimes there is nothing you *can* do to fix a problem. Mindfulness is a way to escape this cycle of trying to fix things by simply focusing on our moment-to-moment experience. When we are doing this, we are in *being mode*. In being mode we are not trying to fix anything. We are not trying to go anywhere. We are not trying to do anything. We are not trying, period. Trying is *doing*, and being mode isn't about *doing*.

In being mode we are free to enjoy our experiences from moment to moment by focusing on what our senses are telling us rather than focusing on trying to find a way out of a problem. When downstairs brain is engaged, and upstairs brain is temporarily disconnected, moving into being mode allows us a little breathing room.

0.4 Thinking Mode vs. Sensing Mode

The way to move from *doing mode* to *being mode* is to shift our mental energy from *thinking mode* to *sensing mode*. Our brains only have a finite amount of energy to spend on any given task at any given time. If we have a stressful or depressing thought cycle going on, we can shift energy from what our thoughts are telling us by engaging our internal observer to start focusing on what our senses are telling us. As you read this paragraph, can you feel your breath going in and out of your lungs? Were you even aware you were breathing before you read the previous sentence? When caught up in thinking cycles, we're focusing on the boomerang of unpleasant emotions and expecting it to return with a vengeance. But by shifting our attention to our direct experiences and focusing on what our senses are telling us, we're able to move into sensing mode.

When in sensing mode we are no longer giving energy to ruminating cycles that are leading us to states that we do not want to experience. We can move to sensing mode by focusing first on our breathing, then on our direct sensory experiences of the current situation. We do this by using all of our senses, in the moment, to explore the environment around us. What do we hear? What do we see? What do we smell? What do we taste? What do we feel? By asking ourselves these questions, we can move into sensing mode.

Fuller, Jessica. (2021). *Skills and Lessons Learned during the 2020 Pandemic: A Behavior Analytic View of Honing Mindfulness, Awareness, and Kindness*, New York, NY. Routledge.

0.5 A Tale of Two Wolves

A grandfather and his grandson were once walking through the woods. The grandfather noticed that the grandson was quieter than usual, so asked what was bothering him.

"I had an argument today with my best friend," the grandson said, "and now I'm so angry with him I don't know what to do!"

The grandfather thought about this for a moment, and answered the grandson, "I've had times like that myself, where I've been so mad I could hardly think straight. But then I remember that there are two wolves inside of me who are constantly at battle."

"One wolf is the good wolf. He is calm, friendly and wise. He always looks after the pack, and always takes care of everyone, especially the ones who can't take care of themselves.

Grandfather continued, "The other wolf is mean, angry, and evil. He makes fun of the other wolves, and constantly starts fights. He is always angry, and he is never satisfied. These two wolves are always at war within me."

The grandson looked at his grandfather and asked, "Which wolf will win?"

"The one I feed," the grandfather replied.

Mindful states help us to move from thinking mode to sensing mode. The more energy we spend on sensing, the less energy we must spend on thinking. Based on the tale of two wolves above, we could see the two wolves as “thinking wolf” and “sensing wolf.” The more energy you give to sensing wolf, the less energy you give to thinking wolf. The less energy thinking wolf receives, the weaker thinking wolf becomes. Conversely, the more energy sensing wolf receives, the stronger sensing wolf becomes. By shifting from thinking to sensing, you’re not trying to ‘kill’ the thinking wolf. You’re not engaging in doing mode by trying to make the thinking wolf go away. You’re simply depriving it of energy so that it may eventually go away on its own. Even if it doesn’t go away on its own, you’re not focusing your attention on it. Since your attention isn’t on it, thinking wolf can’t grab you by the throat, refusing to let go.

Of course, focusing on what your senses are telling you is a type of thinking as well; however, the difference is that focusing on what your senses are telling you is a type of thinking devoid of emotional content. If you’re in a thinking cycle that is causing you anxiety or depression, then anxiety and depression are emotions. But unless you hate trees for some reason, simply sitting quietly in a forest and observing a tree as if you are an artist about to draw that tree is an exercise devoid of emotional content. By focusing on the emotionally neutral stimuli found in nature, we give ourselves the opportunity to feed the sensing wolf.

The exercises in this workbook all involve a type of doing, but it is a type of doing that is emotionally neutral. The exercises here, unless otherwise specified, are a type of doing that trains your brain to focus on your experiences in the here and now, devoid of troublesome emotional content.

Miller, Brian. (2021). *Breathing Lessons: Skills for Activating Parasympathetic Recovery*.
10.4324/9781003049043-8-11.

0.6 Basics of Mindfulness

Think about something that has made you anxious recently and ask yourself this: Was the anxiety a product of the circumstances in which you found yourself, or was it a result of what you believed about those circumstances? If the anxiety was a result of the circumstances themselves, then nothing can be done to change the situation, because we can’t control what goes on outside of ourselves. But if it’s the result of what we *believe* about those circumstances, we can consciously choose different beliefs that don’t lead to anxiety and depression. The essence of mindfulness is accepting that while we cannot change what goes on outside of ourselves, we can change our beliefs about it so that we become proactive rather than reactive.

Mindfulness accomplishes this goal through several basic skills as described by Marsha Linehan, the founder of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy. The skills of mindfulness used in Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy include *Observing, Describing, Fully Participating, Focusing on One Thing at a Time, Being Non-Judgmental*, and the *Power of Intention*.

Linehan, Marsha (1993). *The Cognitive Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.

Mehlum, Lars. (2020). Mechanisms of Change in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy for People with Borderline Personality Disorder. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 37.
10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.08.017.

0.7 What is Ecotherapy?

For most of our existence *homo sapiens* has lived in harmony with nature as hunter/gatherers. Such a lifestyle requires a vast knowledge of the seasons, and of the patterns and habits of wildlife, and of plants and herbs and their healing powers. Industrialization and urbanization are fairly recent phenomena on an evolutionary scale. We still carry the genetic memory of our ancestors who lived in untamed nature. Our brains are wired for the outdoors and nature. A growing body of research demonstrates that not only do we feel better when we make time for nature, it is also a requirement for good physical and mental health!

The field of *ecopsychology* studies how humans interact with nature. Ecopsychology is a philosophy combining elements of psychology and ecology. It is the study of the fact that mental health is contingent upon the health of the environment. Humankind and the environment are part of an interrelated system. We are not separate from nature. We are a part of nature.

At its core, ecopsychology suggests that there is a synergistic relation between planetary and personal well-being; that the needs of the one are relevant to the needs of the other. In short, what we do to the environment, we do to ourselves. *Ecotherapy* is the practical application of this knowledge. In ecotherapy nature is the “therapist.” In practicing the techniques of ecotherapy, we allow the healing power of nature to work its magic on us.

Hölzel et al (2011) demonstrated that meditative states of mindfulness stimulate neural growth in the cerebral cortex in the areas of the brain responsible for emotional regulation, good judgment, insight, and impulse control. Nature experiences have been demonstrated in several studies to produce meditative states (fascination, relaxation, and mindfulness).

Hölzel, Britta, Carmody, James, Vangel, Mark, Congleton, Christina, Yerramsetti, Sita M., Gard, Tim, & Lazar, Sara W. (2011). Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 191 (2011) 36-43.

0.8 Benefits of Ecotherapy

Experiences in and with nature, or *natural experiences*, are ways in which we consciously choose to allow nature to work its healing magic on us. Some types of natural experiences include:

Facilitated Wilderness Experiences

In these types of experiences, a trained facilitator takes you into the woods for an adventure. These events can be anything from a wilderness experience in ecotherapy led by a therapist or counselor, to a hunting trip led by a wilderness guide. Mutz and Müller in 2016 demonstrated that facilitated wilderness journeys in the Alps increased self-efficacy, mindfulness, and subjective well-being.

Naor, et al (2020) in a metastudy on wilderness experiences found that the silence such adventures naturally provide emotional release, and promote resting of the mind, a sense of peace and tranquility, the opportunity for introspection and reflection, a sense of being fully present in the moment, and a feeling of emotional restoration. In short, wilderness experiences, whether facilitated or unfacilitated, promote mindful states of being.

Such programs may also reduce feelings of time pressure and mental stress amongst participants, creating a greater sense of calm and self-efficacy.

Mutz, Michael & Müller, Johannes. (2016). Mental health benefits of outdoor adventures: Results from two pilot studies. *Journal of Adolescence*. 49. 105-114. 10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.03.009.

Naor, Lia & Maysel, Ofra. (2020). The Wilderness Solo Experience: A Unique Practice of Silence and Solitude for Personal Growth. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 11. 547067. 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.547067.

Animal Assisted Therapy

Animal therapy in the form of contact with pets and/or wild or domesticated animals enhances self-actualization and can lessen symptoms of depression.

In 2016 Min et al reviewed multiple Animal-Assisted Therapy interventions and found that such activities are highly beneficial to mental, physical, and social health and well-being of the children. Animal-Assisted Therapy was particularly helpful in treating pain, illness, trauma and cancer, and mental and developmental disorders. The study also found that Animal-Assisted Therapy was effective for social and educational purposes such as developing social skills and helping children learn more effectively.

According to Pai-Dhungat and Verma (2020), connection between humans and animals is imprinted in our collective subconscious and to some extent molds our emotional world. The study demonstrated that the presence of pets/animals helps victims of sexual assault feel more comfortable in therapy settings. Animal-assisted interventions also reduce anxiety, depression, and other post-traumatic stress symptoms. According to the study, the positive feelings that pet therapy induces during therapy sessions with sexual assault victims goes far beyond just the therapy sessions themselves. The effects are long-lasting and continue long after the therapy interventions are over.

Other studies have shown that owning pets, or even just watching fish in an aquarium (Clements, et al, 2019), can greatly reduce stress. There are many other ways that animals can help us lead happier lives, as any pet owner can tell you!

Clements, H., Valentin, S., Jenkins, N., Rankin, J., Baker, J. S., Gee, N., Snellgrove, D., & Sloman, K. (2019). The effects of interacting with fish in aquariums on human health and well-being: A systematic review. *PloS one*, 14(7), e0220524. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0220524>

Min, Myat & Mohd, Omar & Cho, Cho & Raheema, Zaw. (2016). A Review on Animal-Assisted Therapy and Activities for Healthcare and Teaching of Children. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences (JESOC)*. 5. 40-46.

Pai-Dhungat, Jayant & Verma, Aparna. (2020). Animal Assisted Therapy. *The Journal of the Association of Physicians of India*. 68. 81.

Therapeutic Gardens

Sempik & Spurgeon (2006) demonstrated that therapeutic gardening reduces stress and lessens symptoms of depression. Blair (2009) discovered that gardening can be used as a means of helping school children to enhance self-sufficiency, social identity, meaning, and self-integration.

Thaneshwari, et al in a 2018 literature review reported that therapeutic gardening assists in stress reduction of staff and patients, facilitates more rapid healing in hospital settings, increases work efficiency and reduces cost of treatment for health care facilities. The study also found that therapeutic gardening eases suffering from mental illnesses like autism, dementia, and Alzheimer's.

There's just something very healing about planting something and nurturing it as you watch it grow that makes it a healing experience.

Blair, D. (2009). The Child in the Garden: An Evaluative Review of the Benefits of School Gardening. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, WINTER 2009, VOL. 40, NO. 2

Sempik, J. and Spurgeon, T. (2006). *Lessons learnt – Evidence from practice: The use of plants and horticulture in promoting health and well-being* in: Proceedings of the 6th International Congress on Education in Botanic Gardens, Richmond: Botanic Gardens Conservation International in association with Oxford: University of Oxford Botanic Garden (ISBN 1-905164-13-0).

Thaneshwari, Thaneshwari & Kumari, Poonam & Sharma, Rishu & Sahare, H.A.. (2018). Therapeutic gardens in healthcare: A review. *Annals of Biology*. 34. 162-166.

Vacations

Sponselee, et al (2004) discovered that outdoor activities reduce stress and restore energy. If you've ever enjoyed a vacation spent camping, hiking, walking on the beach, or participating in other pleasurable outdoor activities, then you're already aware of the regenerative power of taking time off to appreciate nature. Roggenbuck & Driver (2000) found that you don't even need a facilitator or guide to enjoy health and well-being benefits from the use of wilderness areas.

Jain and Goel (2019) found that vacations act as buffers against the stress of daily living. They found that vacationers feel just as happy and rejuvenated after some time has elapsed as they did while on vacation, and that vacationers differ from non-vacationers in terms of their happiness, resilience, peace of mind and mindfulness levels. Their study also explored different subtypes of vacations and found that the effects were greater when more vacation time was spent outdoors.

Bhalla, et al (2020) found that vacations have benefits in multiple dimensions, including physical, cognitive, stress reduction, sense of wellbeing, and overall self-esteem.

Bhalla, Rohan & Nathani, Navita & Agarwal, Sumedha. (2020). *ECOTHERAPY: NATURE VACATION FOR MULTIDIMENSIONAL WELL-BEING*. Vol. 7, 174-180.

Jain, Sanya & Goel, Yashi (2019). Assessing the Therapeutic Effects of Vacationing, *The National Life Skills, Value Education & School Wellness Program IJSHW ISSN:2349-5464, Jan-April 2019, Vol. 5, No.1*

Purcell, A.H. Corbin, J.D. Hans, K.E. (2007). Urban Riparian Restoration: An Outdoor Classroom for College and High School Students Collaborating in Conservation, *Madrono*, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 258–267, 2007.

Roggenbuck, J.W. & Driver, B.L. (2000). Benefits of Nonfacilitated Uses of Wilderness. *USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P-15-VOL-3*.

Sponselee, A.M., de Kort, Y. & Meijnders, A. (2004). Healing Media: The moderating role of presence in restoring from stress in a mediated environment. *Presence* 2004.

Architecture Incorporating Natural Spaces

Nature can be incorporated into the home environment through the use of plants, an aquarium, or even recorded nature sounds. Alvarsson et al (2010) studied the positive mental health effects of listening to nature sounds and found that just listening to recording of the sounds of nature could reduce stress and hasten recovery after stressful incidents.

Han and Li-Wen (2019) in their international study found that having plants in your house can increase mental and physical health, aid in emotional regulation, and improve attention and concentration.

In a metastudy in 2019 Clements, et al found that having an aquarium in homes or offices had positive effects on mood, stress reduction, physical and chronic pain, improved nutritional intake and decreased body weight.

Alvarsson J, Wiens S., & Nilsson M. (2010). Stress and recovery during exposure to nature sounds and environmental noise. *Int. J Environ Res Public Health*, 2010 (7) 1036-106.

Clements, H., Valentin, S., Jenkins, N., Rankin, J., Baker, J. S., Gee, N., Snellgrove, D., & Sloman, K. (2019). The effects of interacting with fish in aquariums on human health and well-being: A systematic review. *PloS one*, 14(7), e0220524. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0220524>

Han, Ke-Tsung & Ruan, Li-Wen (2019). Effects of Indoor Plants on Self-Reported Perceptions: A Systemic Review, *Sustainability* 2019, 11, 4506; doi:10.3390/su111164506

Outdoor Classrooms

Purcell, et all in 2007 revealed that outdoor classrooms enhanced many critical factors of the educational experience, including: Enhanced retention, better focus, more attention to detail, less hyperactivity, more relaxation, increased confidence and self-esteem, and better cognitive functioning.

A 2019 study by Guardino, et al reported that both teachers and students demonstrated an increased perception of wellbeing, pleasure, and interest when teaching and learning in the outdoor classroom. The study also found that children with disabilities were less distracted and more on-task when working in an outdoor classroom.

Guardino, Caroline & Hall, Katrina & Largo-Wight, Erin & Hubbuch, Charles. (2019). Teacher and student perceptions of an outdoor classroom. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*. 22. 10.1007/s42322-019-00033-7.

Min, Myat & Mohd, Omar & Cho, Cho & Raheema, Zaw. (2016). A Review on Animal-Assisted Therapy and Activities for Healthcare and Teaching of Children. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences (JESOC)*. 5. 40-46.

Mutz, Michael & Müller, Johannes. (2016). Mental health benefits of outdoor adventures: Results from two pilot studies. *Journal of Adolescence*. 49. 105-114. 10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.03.009.

Purcell, A.H. Corbin, J.D. Hans, K.E. (2007). Urban Riparian Restoration: An Outdoor Classroom for College and High School Students Collaborating in Conservation, *Madrono*, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 258–267, 2007.

0.9 Characteristics of Natural (Nature) Experiences

In a 2005 study on the effects of nature, van den Berg and ter Heijne introduced the concepts of *focused attention* and *fascination*. Focused attention is a concentrated cognitive effort to avoid distractions in the environment, while fascination is a natural interest in the environment, requiring little or no effort of concentration. The study found that wilderness or nature experiences produce fascination while man-made environments tend to require more focus. Environments that promote fascination have been demonstrated to reduce stress, improve concentration, and promote overall wellbeing.

A natural environment (including flora, fauna, natural scents, music or natural sounds, etc.) promotes fascination and requires less reliance on focused attention. With less demands being made on focused attention, more cognitive resources are available for the heightened awareness necessary to achieve a peak experience or a mindful, meditative state.

A metastudy on the benefits of ecotherapy by Franco et al (2017) concluded that experiences in natural spaces lead to increased self-esteem, an increased internal locus of control (meaning that people feel in control of their circumstances instead of being controlled by their circumstances), deep reflective experiences, vision-questing (determining a life path), enhanced abstinence effects for people with addictions, feelings of connectedness to nature; feelings of oneness, lowered heart rate and blood pressure, enhanced stress management capabilities, better immune system functioning, lessened recovery time from illness or surgery, and better quality-of-life ratings from people who live in suburbs designed to incorporate green spaces.

Franco, L. S., Shanahan, D. F., & Fuller, R. A. (2017). A Review of the Benefits of Nature Experiences: More Than Meets the Eye. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 14(8), 864. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14080864>

Mutz, Michael & Müller, Johannes. (2016). Mental health benefits of outdoor adventures: Results from two pilot studies. *Journal of Adolescence*. 49. 105-114. 10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.03.009.

Van den Berg, A. E., & Ter Heijne, M. (2005). Fear versus fascination: Emotional responses to natural threats. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 25 (3), 261-272.

0.10 Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: An Integration of Mindfulness and Ecotherapy

"Nature has her proper interest; and he will know what it is, who believes and feels, that every Thing has a Life of its own, and that we are all one Life."

– Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"Magic, indeed, is all around us, in stones, flowers, stars, the dawn wind and the sunset cloud; all we need is the ability to see and understand."

Doreen Valiente, *Natural Magic*

"The Gods and Goddesses of myth, legend and fairy tale represent archetypes, real potencies and potentialities deep within the psyche, which, when allowed to flower permit us to be more fully human."

– Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*

For millennia prior to the Industrial Revolution, people lived together in small tribes, whether in nomadic bands or geographically fixed in location in villages or towns. We spent our time and earned our living as hunter-gatherers, and our minds and bodies evolved in this type of environment. Evolution wired our brains for nature.

With the advent of agriculture, we settled down more and more, and began to build cities. With cities came modernization. First, we built machines, then, with the discovery of electricity, we began to build electric machines. Thomas Edison's invention of electric light forever robbed the night of its power to evoke mystery, awe, and terror by creating a perpetual electric twilight in our towns and cities. This artificial light made more hours available to labor in the factories. The more domesticated we became, the more the wilderness retreated beyond the city limits. We ceased to mark time by the cycles of the seasons and began to keep time by the factory whistle.

While our minds may have retreated from nature, our bodies did not. Evolution programmed us to need nature, and our bodies and minds still respond to it.

Our modern, mechanized lifestyle has brought about many changes for the better. We live longer and more productive lives, and we are healthier in many ways than we have ever been in the history of humankind. But our hearts still long for the cry of the wilderness.

Ecopsychology studies the relationship between mental health and the environment. This field of research views the mental health of humankind as a part of the geo-ecosystem that is the living planet we call Earth. If all life on Earth is interrelated, then what happens to the rest of the planet affects us all. Ecopsychology recognizes that not only does the environment impact our physical health, but it also has a direct influence on our mental health. While artificial, stressful, polluted environments have the power to harm, nature has the power to heal, both physically and mentally.

From the perspective of ecotherapy, everything is connected to everything else. According to this holistic paradigm, people don't exist in a vacuum. They are part of the larger system of their neighborhood, and of the even larger system of their particular societies, and ultimately the system of all life on Earth, circles-within-circles. Each of these systems communicates to us in different ways, and we interact with each of these systems. The individual is not only a part of a system of interacting human beings, but also as a

part of an ecosystem. We interact with the environment, and the environment interacts with us. For those who know how to listen, the wind in the trees can sing to us. The view of a mountain range or a moonlit ocean can tell a story. The smell of the first flowers of spring can speak just as clearly as a loved one's voice can. The touch of a ray of sun can be as powerful as a lover's caress.

On the other hand, a crowded, polluted city street can communicate as well. The messages we get from our environment have an impact on us, whether we are consciously aware of that impact or not. This environmental impact changes our sense of self, and our sense of wellbeing.

If we could make a paradigm shift to a lifestyle that makes room for nature, what would that do to our sense of wellbeing?

In a 2019 study Albrecht et al demonstrated that nature-based mindfulness helped participants develop the ecological self, including pro-environmental behaviors such as mindful consumption, helps individuals cope with climate change, depression, and stress, enhances wellbeing, enables a more creative, considered, and holistic way of thinking, and motivates social activism. In short, practicing mindfulness in nature creates a paradigm shift in those who participate in it.

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) Program is one of the paths to help to make this paradigm shift. MBE is a 12-week nature program. Each session meets outdoors for about 90 minutes and is guided by a trained MBE facilitator. This handbook was designed to accompany the 12-week program, but if the program isn't offered in your region, you may also use this book to complete the exercises on your own.

There is also a worldwide directory of trained Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Certified Facilitators on the Mindful Ecotherapy Center's website. The Mindful Ecotherapy Center offers an online facilitator training program as well. For details, visit the website at www.mindfulecotherapy.org.

If you are a mental health professional interested in becoming a certified Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy facilitator, we offer courses online at the website as well.

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is a set of 12 skills and a 12-week program. Each session of the program focuses on one of the skills of MBE. The outline in the next section below is an introduction to MBE and an overview of the content and topics of each of the 12 sessions.

The rest of this manual is divided into chapters. Each chapter focuses on one of the skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy. If you are completing this workbook as part of a workshop, your homework is to read the material for each session prior to participating. The activities in each session will be done during the workshop, so don't try to complete them ahead of time. Just read over the materials so you'll have a good idea of what to expect in each session.

If you are completing the workbook on your own, feel free to do the activities at any time, at your own pace. Many of the activities require or suggest outdoor locales. You may use your own best judgment as to whether the weather is appropriate in your location for any suggested activities. If you've had to postpone an activity due to bad weather, try it again when the weather is better. In doing so you'll get the full benefit of each exercise.

Adler, Margot (1986). *Drawing Down the Moon*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

- Albrecht, Nicole & Morgan, Briony & NJ, Albrecht. (2019). The Importance of Nature Based Mindfulness. *Online Journal of Complementary & Alternative Medicine*. 2. 10.33552/OJCAM.2019.02.000544.
- Borchers, J.G., and Bradshaw, G.A. (December, 2008). How green is my valley—and mind. Ecotherapy and the greening of psychology. *Counseling Today*, pp. 38-41.
- Brown, D., Forte, M., & Dysart, M. (1984). Visual sensitivity and mindfulness meditation. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 58(3)775-784, June, 1984.

0.11 Outline/Overview of the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) Program

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy consists of 12 skill sets. The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy program is a 12-week program, with one session per week. At each session, one of the 12 skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is discussed and practiced. The skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) include:

Session 1: Mindful Awareness

Mindful Awareness is a way of tuning in to what is happening right now, at this moment. It is a shift from *doing mode* into *being mode*. Mindful Awareness involves the skills of Observing, Describing, Fully Participating, Being Non-Judgmental, Focusing on One Thing at a Time, and Being Effective through the Power of Intention. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) teaches you these skills.

- Altner, N. (2002). Mindfulness Practice and Smoking Cessation: The Essen Hospital Smoking Cessation Study. *Journal for Meditation and Meditation Research*, 2, 9-18.
- Behan, Caragh. (2020). The benefits of meditation and mindfulness practices during times of crisis such as COVID-19. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*. 37. 1-8. 10.1017/ipm.2020.38.

Session 2: Living in the Now

Living in the Now means leaving *Doing Mode* and entering *Being Mode*. In *Being Mode* we learn that there is no past, there is no future. There is only this present moment. *Living in the Now* means allowing yourself to be in this moment...here and now. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) teaches you the skills of *Living in the Now*.

- Demarree, Kenneth & Naragon-Gainey, Kristin. (2021). Individual Differences in the Contents and Form of Present-Moment Awareness: The Multidimensional Awareness Scale. *Assessment*. 107319112098660. 10.1177/1073191120986605.

Session 3: Letting Go

The art of Mindful Acceptance can best be described as the *Art of Letting Go*. Once you have done everything in your power to solve a problem, you have done all that is possible to do, so at that point worry and stress are counterproductive (Davis 2021). Note that letting go of the stress and anxiety doesn't necessarily mean letting go of the problem itself.

For example, suppose you have a car payment coming up, and you don't have the money to pay it. This would naturally cause you anxiety. If, after brainstorming for solutions, you find that you still don't have the money to pay the car payment, then at that point you've done all you can do. At that point, you let go of the anxiety associated with the problem.

That doesn't mean that you let go of car payments altogether. You'll make the payment when you can. In this instance, "letting go" just means that you won't worry about not being able to make the payment. The energy you might have used worrying about the situation could be put to better use in trying to come up with solutions. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) teaches us how to let go through the power of radical acceptance.

Davis, Sophia. (2021). On letting go. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*. 5. 10.1016/S2352-4642(21)00054-7.

Session 4: Radical Acceptance

Mindful Awareness teaches us the art of acceptance. Emotional reactions to our circumstances are natural, but that doesn't mean that we must react to these emotions. The mindfulness skill of acceptance teaches us that we can experience these emotions without engaging in cycles of behavior that lead us to negative consequences.

Acceptance teaches us that we are not our thoughts, and that we are not our emotions. At any time we can choose which thoughts and emotions we wish to respond to. If, at any time, we should engage in thoughts and behaviors that lead to negative consequences, this does not mean that we have become "bad" persons. This simply means that we are human beings, and as humans we are entitled to make mistakes. Each mistake is an opportunity for growth and learning. Forgiveness is a skill and an art. The place to start with learning the art of forgiveness is in learning first to forgive ourselves when we make mistakes. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) teaches you the art of Radical Acceptance.

Childs, D. (2007). Mindfulness and the psychology of presence. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 80, 367–376.

Josefsson, Torbjörn & Ivarsson, Andreas & Gustafsson, Henrik & Stenling, Andreas & Lindwall, Magnus & Tornberg, Rasmus & Böröy, Jan. (2019). Effects of Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) on Sport-Specific Dispositional Mindfulness, Emotion Regulation, and Self-Rated Athletic Performance in a Multiple-Sport Population: an RCT Study. *Mindfulness*. 10. 10.1007/s12671-019-01098-7.

Session 5: Wise Mind and Wise Body

When you are being logical, rational, and devoid of emotion, you are said to be in *Rational Mind*. When you are allowing your thoughts to be driven by your emotions, you are said to be in *Emotional Mind*. The goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is to achieve *Wise Mind*. The mindful concept of Wise Mind is the joining of Rational Mind and Emotional Mind in perfect balance and harmony. It is a moving beyond opposites to a mindful state of acceptance.

Likewise, when we come to realize that there is no line between mind and body, and that they are one and the same, we can move beyond the duality that implies that mind and body are separate entities. From there we see that the body can change the mind, and the mind can change the body (Zhang & Chennubhotla, 2021). Wise Mind is the first step to living in True Self. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) gives you some of the tools you will need to help you develop your own Wise Mind and your own Wise Body.

Zhang, Niushen & Chennubhotla, Sushma. (2021). Mind-Body Therapies. In book: *Integrative Headache Medicine* (pp.133-151), Springer.

Session 6: Centering

Centering yourself is allowing yourself to get in touch with and being open to your True Self. It is allowing yourself to realize that you are perfect just as you are, even with your imperfections, because those feelings and desires are also a part of who you really are. If you accept your imperfections and integrate them into your way of thinking and feeling about yourself, you will obtain peace of mind, and you will be centered. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) teaches you how to Center.

Dorais, Stephanie & Gutierrez, Daniel. (2021). The Influence of Spiritual Transcendence on a Centering Meditation: A Growth Curve Analysis of Resilience. *Religions*. 12. 573. 10.3390/rel12080573.

Session 7: Connecting

Suppose you could take all the spiritual paths practiced worldwide, put them into a cauldron, and boil them down to their essence. What would remain? I believe that the common thread to all spiritual practices is a feeling of connection. In this sense, spirituality means connection to others, or connection to the divine, or simply connection to nature and to ourselves.

In short: spirituality in its essence is *connectedness*. If you think back on the spiritual experiences you've had in your lifetime, do recall feeling connected on some level? Many describe spiritual experiences as a sense of oneness. *Oneness* implies connection to something outside ourselves. In this sense, even an agnostic or an atheist could achieve spirituality through connection. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) can be one of the paths you use to re-connect to spirit.

McCoy, Derek. (2020). *Learning by Connecting with Others*. 10.4324/9780429321290-10.

Session 8: Nature as Metaphor

Each of us lives in our own personal fairy tale called "my life." We all have good things that happen to us, and we all have bad things that happen to us. We create our own personal myths by choosing which things to focus on in our own lives. The good news about the myth of our lives is that we are the authors. If we don't like the way the story is going, we have the power to do a rewrite at any time. We can't always choose the circumstances of our lives, but we can always choose the story we create about those circumstances. If you go out into the woods and start observing things, you will notice something begin to happen. You will begin to create stories about the events you observe there in the

forest. These stories that spring to mind in the woods can tell you a great deal about what is going on in your own unconscious mind if you know how to pay attention to them. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) teaches you how to pay attention to those stories.

Heyden, Yoav. (2021). *An exploratory study of the use of metaphor in the practice of ecotherapy*. Master's Thesis, Stellenbosch University.

Session 9: Nature as Teacher

Our ancestors knew hundreds of medicinal uses of local plants and herbs. They knew the seasons, when to plant, when to harvest, how to forecast the weather by the behavior of plants and animals, and a host of other things based on their observations of nature.

The lessons our ancestors learned haven't gone away. They're still there, waiting in the forest like an open book. All we must do is to learn how to read it. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) teaches us the language of nature so that we may read its "book."

Ayotte-Beaudet, Jean-Philippe & Beaudry, Marie-Claude & Bisailon, Véronique & Cordeau, Patrice. (2020). *Outdoor classes in higher education during the context of COVID-19 in Canada: Guide to support management during the first phases of implementation*.

Session 10: Nature as Nurture

A large and growing body of research has demonstrated that nature has incredible healing and nurturing powers. People who go into the woods become calmer, more relaxed, less stressful, and healthier. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) can be used to tap into the nurturing power of nature.

Nadel, Meryl. (2019). *Natural Environment as Refuge, Nurturer, Catalyst*.
10.1093/oso/9780190496548.003.0001.

Session 11: Nature as Healer

Research continues to demonstrate the healing power of nature. People who swim with dolphins recover from depression more quickly than people who take antidepressants (Antonioli and Reveley, 2005). Children with ADHD who play outdoors regularly display fewer symptoms than those who do not (Blair, 2009). Bhalla et al (2020) demonstrated that ecotherapy vacations increase well-being across multiple dimensions, including both physical and mental well-being. These are just a few examples of the many beneficial effects of the healing power of nature. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) helps you to connect to this healing power.

Alvarsson J, Wiens S., & Nilsson M. (2010). Stress and recovery during exposure to nature sounds and environmental noise. *Int. J Environ Res Public Health*, 2010 (7) 1036-106.

Antonioli, C. & Reveley, M. A. (2005). Randomised controlled trial of animal facilitated therapy with dolphins in the treatment of depression. *British Medical Journal*, 2005, vol. 331, no. 7527, pp. 1231–1234.

Bhalla, Rohan & Nathani, Navita & Agarwal, Sumedha. (2020). *ECOTHERAPY: NATURE VACATION FOR MULTIDIMENSIONAL WELL-BEING*. Vol. 7, 174-180.

Blair, D. (2009). The Child in the Garden: An Evaluative Review of the Benefits of School Gardening. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, WINTER 2009, VOL. 40, NO. 2

Session 12: Living in True Self

Do you remember a time when you knew exactly who you were, what you wanted to be, and where your life was going (Shipman, 2019)? When you do something that isn't healthy for you, or make a mistake, which part of you is it that recognizes the mistake? What part of you is it that holds the highest dreams and aspirations for your life (Facco, et al, 2019)?

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) recognizes that part of you as your *True Self* (Durbano. Et al. 2021). The ultimate goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) is to realize your True Self, and to live in it (Beliavsky, 2020). Doing so allows you the opportunity to re-connect in positive ways with nature, with others, and with yourself.

Beliavsky, Vlad. (2020). *Free Will in Rogerian Theory*. 10.1007/978-3-030-41571-6_3.

Durbano, Federico & Irtelli, Floriana & Marchesi, Barbara. (2021). *The Real Self and the Ideal Self*. 10.5772/intechopen.98194.

Facco, Enrico & Alkhafaji, Benedikt & Tressoldi, Patrizio. (2019). In Search of the True Self. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. 39. 10.1037/teo0000112.

Shipman, Alan. (2019). *The True Self*. 10.1007/978-3-030-12289-8_17.

Session 1: Mindful Awareness

Mindful Awareness is a way of tuning in to what is happening right now, at this moment. It is a shift from *Doing Mode* into *Being Mode*. Mindful Awareness involves the skills of Observing, Describing, Fully Participating, Being Non-Judgmental, and Focusing on One Thing at a Time.



Facilitator Notes for Session 1

Mindful Awareness Suggested Format

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 1* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group. Listen to at least one meditation recording prior to the session (you may download several at www.mindfulecotherapy.org in the *Resources* section).

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and should be covered in the session): Mindfulness; upstairs brain vs. downstairs brain; tale of two wolves (from Overview Section 0.2); Doing Mode vs. Being Mode; Skills of Mindfulness; observing, describing, fully participating, focusing on one thing at a time, being non-judgmental, and the power of intention

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Snowballing; the Cloudy Day analogy; present moment awareness; emotional content vs. sensory content; assumptions, perceptions, and reality; the two questions of intention (1. What is my intention? 2. Are my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors going to support my intention?)

INTRODUCTIONS

As an icebreaker exercise, facilitators first introduce themselves, then ask each group participant to do the same. The facilitator may also ask participants to answer a question or to tell the class a little about themselves by way of introduction. A favorite I like to use is to ask students what they hope to learn in the classes.

DISCUSS GROUP RULES

Once introductions are made, create the group rules, and discuss the rationale for each rule. Solicit suggestions and modifications for additional group rules from class participants. There is a sample group rules list in the facilitator notes for the previous section. Select a student from the class to be the secretary who writes down all the suggested rules and modifications. Have the rules and modifications typed up for the class for the next session and distribute accordingly.

A NOTE ABOUT EXERCISES AND ACTIVITIES

For most groups, each session contains more exercises than can be comfortably accommodated in a one-hour format. Because of this, exercises and activities throughout the book are ranked by priority. If you choose to use a longer format, you may have time to engage in all of the activities in each session; however, be aware that sessions longer than 90 minutes tend to diminish in effectiveness because at that point people begin to lose attention and focus.

A guide to priority rankings is as follows:

PRIORITY = 1 Do this exercise if at all possible, during the allotted time

PRIORITY = 2 Do this exercise if time permits

PRIORITY = 3 Only do this exercise if you can comfortably fit it into your time frame; otherwise have students complete it on their own before the next session.

SESSION OUTLINE

1.0 What is Mindfulness?

Begin the session by discussing the concept of mindfulness.

Definition of mindfulness: Mindfulness simply means paying attention to the present moment, with intention, without ruminating on thoughts about the past or the future.

You may wish to illustrate the concept of mindfulness in this manner: Begin to speak a sentence and tell the group that by the time you finish the sentence you are now speaking the beginning of the sentence will be in the past. That's how quickly the present becomes the past. The past, like the future, only exists in the memory. If it's in the memory, it's a product of the mind, and the tools and techniques of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) can teach us, in the present moment, to choose which thoughts and feelings about the past and the future to pay attention to.

Next, review the concept of upstairs brain (the neocortex) vs. downstairs brain (the limbic system)

You may illustrate upstairs brain vs. downstairs brain by placing your hands together, palm to palm with thumbs side-by-side. Now fold your fingers over the thumbs so that the thumbs are tucked inside. The thumbs represent the limbic system (downstairs brain), and the fingers represent the neocortex (upstairs brain). Illustrate "fight or flight" mode by extending your fingers away from your thumbs and stating, "When the downstairs brain is activated, the upstairs brain disconnects, making it difficult, if not impossible, to think your way through a problem. When this happens, finding a solution isn't going to be an easy task."

1.1 Doing Mode vs. Being Mode

Explain the difference between Doing Mode and Being Mode.

Exercise: Ways I Engage in Doing Mode - PRIORITY = 1

Have the students list ways they engage in Doing Mode. If doing this activity outdoors where writing might be problematic, you can have them verbally list a few Doing Mode activities. Alternately you may have them complete the list as homework prior to Session 1. You may wish to have the group sit or stand in a circle and take turns going around the circle having each student list at least one way they engage in Doing Mode. Doing Mode involves solving problems, figuring things out, and participating in day-to-day activities. Doing Mode often manifests when anxiety or depression appears by feeling that you have to "do" something to make the anxiety or depression go away. This can be a problem if there is nothing you can do to resolve the anxiety or depression.

1.2 Engaging in Being Mode

Being Mode is focusing only on the present moment, without thoughts about the future or the past.

Illustrate Being Mode by having students focus all of their attention on the sensations of their breathing while taking three or four deep breaths.

Discuss Being Mode by relating it to thinking cycles vs. sensing cycles.

Illustrate the concept using the analogy of the Cloudy Day.

Exercise: Ways to Engage in Being Mode - PRIORITY = 2

Have the students list possible ways to engage in Doing Mode per instructions on the worksheet. If doing this activity outdoors where writing might be problematic, you can have them verbally list a few Being Mode activities. You may wish to have the group sit or stand in a circle and take turns going around the circle having each student list at least one way they could engage in Being Mode. Being Mode involves being aware of our sensory experiences in the present moment.

1.3 Skills of Mindfulness

List the six skills of mindfulness for students.

Explain how these skills are used to facilitate a shift from Doing Mode to Being Mode by focusing attention to sensations rather than thoughts (sensing cycles rather than thinking cycles).

1.4 Observing

Illustrate observing by having students focus on a tree or other natural object in the landscape, and by having them describe how their consciousness changes before and after such observations.

Emphasize that observing is generally an activity that does not have emotional content and can therefore be used to shift focus away from disturbing emotions if needed.

1.5 Describing

To illustrate describing, have students close their eyes and describe the landscape as observed by the rest of their senses.

Ask students if they think they could distinguish one landscape from another with their eyes closed, based on the description of the landscape the rest of their senses are giving them.

Exercise: Observing and Describing Nature - PRIORITY = 1

This exercise calls for a period of observation of 20 minutes or more, but since that would take up a third of the allotted time for this session, you may do it in the manner described below, and then ask the students to try it for the full 20 minutes on their own time in the coming week:

1. Have them rate their current stress level on a scale of 1 to 10
2. Have them engage in a period of observing and describing as discussed on the Observing and Describing Nature worksheet while you time them
3. Time the students for a period of 3 to 5 minutes
4. Have them rate their stress level again on a scale of 1 to 10
5. Discuss the results
6. Some students may have increased stress after the exercise, and that's okay too. If this is the case, process their thoughts and feelings during the exercise – the point being that if they were having stressful thoughts and feelings, they were not engaged in observing and describing; they were engaged in thinking and feeling!

1.6 Reflections on Observing and Describing

Link the results of the observing and describing exercise to the *Two Wolves* analogy by asking students which wolf they were feeding.

1.7 Fully Participating

Link Fully Participating to “getting out of your own head” and paying more attention to what is going on around you and less attention to thoughts and feelings.

Discuss and describe the Last Kiss exercise; if time permits, facilitate this optional activity based on the guidelines given.

Optional Activity: The Last Kiss - PRIORITY = 3

If you don't have enough time to actually engage in this exercise, explain it to the group and ask them to try it at home. If you don't have enough time to do it, and the students do it at home on their own, process their experiences at the next session.

If you have enough time to do it, ask students to describe how this might be different from how they would ordinarily eat a piece of chocolate.

1.8 Focusing on One Thing at a Time

It's been said that the way to eat an elephant is “one bite at a time.” If we focus on the entire elephant, we might become so overwhelmed that we never take the first bite, but if we focus only on the next bite, and then the next, and then the next, then eventually we will have eaten the whole elephant.

Ask students to brainstorm other examples of focusing on one thing at a time from their own personal experiences. You may wish to do this by going around the circle and having each person volunteer to contribute something.

1.9 Being Non-Judgmental

Illustrate the concept of being non-judgmental by asking students to list and discuss times when their own negative judgments and assumptions may have led to negative consequences.

Ask students to speculate on how their lives might be different if they could live in completely non-judgmental ways. Someone may point out that sometimes judgment keeps us from making bad decisions or from getting into dangerous situations. You may agree with them and point out the three questions for determining if a judgment is sound or not:

1. Is it true?
2. Is it just?
3. Is it fair?

If the answer to all three of these questions is “yes,” and the person isn’t engaging in self-deception, then it’s probably a situation where the judgment won’t lead to negative consequences.

1.10 The Power of Intention

Emphasize the Power of Intention as a solution-focused approach rather than a problem-focused approach. Remember the two questions of intention:

1. What is my intention in this situation?
2. Are my thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviors supporting my intention?

Exercise: The Power of Intention - PRIORITY = 1

Have students participate in this exercise by going around the circle and giving at least one answer to each of the questions on the worksheet.

1.11 Achieving Mindful Awareness

Discuss the definition of “insanity:” “Insanity is doing the same thing in the same ways and expecting different results.” Next, discuss mindful awareness as a way to do things differently.

Point out that doing things differently might feel weird at first. If it didn’t, you’d probably already be doing it that way.

Ask students to be open to experiencing things in a different way, and to trying new things. Doing things in a different way may or may not work, but we already know that doing them in the *same* ways *doesn’t* work.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 2 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from *Session 1* that weren’t covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

1.0 What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness simply means paying attention to the present moment. Think about the last time you were stressed out. Did the stress have anything to do with something that happened in the past? Did it have anything to do with something that may or may not happen in the future? How much of the stress had to do with what is going on right now, in this present moment, as you are reading this sentence?

The modern world has conditioned us to live in our heads. We so often get caught up in our thinking cycles that we forget how to pay attention to what's going on right now in the world around us. This thinking process kicks into overdrive when we're caught in depressing or anxious thought cycles. One negative thought leads to another, and another, until soon we're caught in a speeding snowball of negativity.

We're so conditioned to these thought cycles that sometimes we aren't even aware that they're happening until we suddenly find ourselves stressing out. It's as if our thoughts are a film running at double speed.

What if we could somehow slow that film projector so that we could look at each thought frame by frame? By engaging our ability to *observe* and *describe* our own thoughts to ourselves, we are able to do just that. Mindfulness is a way to engage the internal observer that lives inside of each of us so that we can pay attention to life moment by moment.

According to Dr. Daniel Siegel (2011), each of us has an *upstairs brain* and a *downstairs brain*. The upstairs part of the brain is the part that does the thinking, and the downstairs part of the brain is the part that does the feeling. When stressful or depressing thoughts and feelings become too much to bear, our downstairs brains engage. This downstairs brain is only concerned with three things: fighting, fleeing, or freezing. When downstairs brain is in charge, our natural tendency is to want to do something to fix the situation. The problem there is that the upstairs brain is the part that comes up with solutions to problems. When the downstairs brain is engaged, the only solutions we can see are those involving fighting, fleeing, or freezing. In short, when we're stressed or depressed, the part of the brain that does the *doing* is temporarily out of order.

Siegel, Daniel J. and Payne-Bryson, Tina (2011). *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*, Random House, New York, NY.

1.1 Benefits of Mindfulness

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of studies on the benefits of mindfulness. An in-depth references section at the end of this book lists a few of the many studies on the subject, but for now let's focus on a few of the more important recent ones.

According to Bharate (2021), practicing mindfulness leads to meta-awareness. In simple terms, meta-awareness is being aware that you are aware. It is the ability to be consciously able to examine your

thought stream, with intention. When you can achieve this state, Bharate notes that experienced mindful practitioners can, through the power of meta-awareness, replace distressing thoughts like aggression, jealousy, lust, despondency, and other negative emotions by cultivating their opposites in the form of virtuous thoughts.

Behan (2020) studied the benefits of mindful practices during the pandemic of 2020 and found that the practice of mindful meditation eased the stress and anxiety that the crisis caused.

Brown (1984) demonstrated that those who regularly practice mindful meditation improve their visual sensitivity, increasing their ability to observe and perceive things in the environment.

Carlson, et al (2004) found that practicing Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) improved quality of life, mood, and stress levels and decreased cortisol levels in breast and prostate cancer outpatients. Cortisol is a hormone that is produced during stress. A decrease in the cortisol level means the body is under less stress.

Fuller (2021) studied children and their responses to the 2020 pandemic. She found that introducing mindfulness skills to children improved their ability to cope with stress and depression and ameliorated some of the stress and depression related to the pandemic.

Maher (2021) found that teaching university students mindful skills decreased their stress. The more mindful skills the students practiced, the less stress they encountered, leading to increased school performance, better attention and concentration, and ability to stay on-task. Her conclusion was that teaching mindful skills to university students was an effective, low-cost way to promote and establish mental health in the university system.

These are just a few of the many benefits of mindfulness. Throughout the rest of the program, we will be referring to more of these studies. For more information see the references section at the end of this book.

Behan, Caragh. (2020). The benefits of meditation and mindfulness practices during times of crisis such as COVID-19. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*. 37. 1-8. 10.1017/ipm.2020.38.

Bharate, Ganesh & Ray, Sumantran. (2021). *The wandering mind, the focused mind and the meta-aware mind*. 10.31231/osf.io/8zjeb.

Brown, D., Forte, M., & Dysart, M. (1984). Differences in visual sensitivity among mindfulness meditators and non-meditators, *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 58(3), 727-733, June, 1984.

Carlson, L.E., Speca, M., Patel, K.D., & Goodey, E. (2004). Mindfulness-based stress reduction in relation to quality of life, mood, symptoms of stress and levels of cortisol, dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate (DHEAS) and melatonin in breast and prostate cancer outpatients. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. 2004 May; 29(4):448-74.

Fuller, Jessica. (2021). *Skills and Lessons Learned during the 2020 Pandemic: A Behavior Analytic View of Honing Mindfulness, Awareness, and Kindness*, New York, NY. Routledge.

Maher, Christina. (2021). The Benefits of Mindfulness for University Students. *Building Healthy Academic Communities Journal*. 5. 42-57. 10..

1.2 Doing Mode vs. Being Mode

One way mindfulness can help in this situation is by moving from *doing mode* to *being mode*. In doing mode we're trying to come up with solutions, or trying to stop the anxiety or depression, or trying to escape from the repercussions of the problem. In being mode, we're just allowing ourselves some space to be in the moment, without trying to push the problem away or solve it (remember, *trying* is *doing*).

The first step to leaving doing mode is to become aware of the ways in which we engage in it. To explore this idea, go to the exercise on the next page.

Lyddy, Christopher & Good, Darren. (2017). Being While Doing: An Inductive Model of Mindfulness at Work. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 7. 2060. 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.02060.

1.2 Ways I Engage in Doing Mode

Name: _____ Date: _____

Think about the ways in which you engage in Doing Mode throughout your day. Doing Mode involves solving problems, figuring things out, and participating in day-to-day activities. List a few of the ways you engage in Doing Mode below:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
- 9. _____
- 10. _____
- 11. _____
- 12. _____
- 13. _____
- 14. _____
- 15. _____
- 16. _____
- 17. _____
- 18. _____
- 19. _____
- 20. _____

1.3 Engaging in Being Mode

When we move our attention from the thinking cycle to the sensing cycle, we often find that it is not necessary to do anything right now. When we leave *doing*, we enter *being*.

Think of it this way: Imagine that I held a belief that I should never have a cloudy day. This belief says that every time I go outside the sun should be shining. If I held such a belief, I'd be setting myself up for disappointment, because cloudy days are a natural part of the weather. If I expected that the sun would always be shining, I would have an unrealistic expectation of the way the weather works.

We sometimes create unrealistic expectations for ourselves by assuming that stressful or depressing thoughts and feelings are somehow not "natural." In fact, just the opposite is true. It is perfectly natural to have stressful or depressing thoughts and feelings from time to time.

Try this sometime: Ask everyone you know if they've never in their entire lives had a depressing or stressful thought. I'm willing to bet that you won't be able to find anyone who would say that they've never been depressed or anxious. That's because, like cloudy days, stressful and depressing feelings are a natural part of being alive.

If we can accept that we don't have to do anything to fix cloudy days, we can accept that we don't have to do anything to fix negative thoughts and feelings as well. In fact, sometimes our attempts to fix such thought cycles could be the very thing that makes them worse. Here's an example of how this process works:

Suppose I am prone to panic attacks. One day I find myself feeling anxious. I can tell by the way my thoughts are racing and by the way my body feels that my anxiety is rising. I know from previous experience that rising anxiety has led to panic attacks in the past. As I realize this, my anxiety increases even more because I'm afraid that I'm about to have yet another panic attack. So I try to do something to stop it by trying to force myself to calm down. But "*trying to calm down*" is doing mode. The harder I try to calm down, the more I stress out about the fact that I can't calm down. The more I stress out about the fact that I can't seem to calm down, the more my anxiety rises, because I'm trying to do something to fix it, and what I'm doing isn't working. The more I fail at fixing it, the more I stress out and try even harder to fix it. This cycle builds and builds until I have another full-blown panic attack.

What if, when I felt my anxiety rising, I was able to say, "*Oh, that's another panic attack about to happen. I've had them before. Yes, they're unpleasant, but I've managed to survive them. No need to try to stop it.*"

In this case, I'm not trying to do anything. I'm not trying to stop the attack. I've consciously chosen to sit with it and be in the moment with the experience, paying attention to and describing the sensations to myself. Because I'm not engaging in doing mode by trying to fix something, I'm not adding to the anxiety. I'm just allowing things to happen in their own time, while I observe with my senses. From this perspective, even if I do have another panic attack, I'm being still with it and observing it rather than interacting with it. I know from previous experience that it won't kill me, however unpleasant the experience might be. I'm engaging my internal observer to be with the experience.

This ability to pay attention to the present moment is the essence of being mode.

To gain some insight into how to explore Being Mode, go on to the next page and complete the exercise on *Ways to Engage in Being Mode*.

1.3 Ways to Engage in Being Mode

Name: _____ Date: _____

One of the most basic ways to engage in *Being Mode* is to simply start paying attention to the sensations you experience in the world around you. One thing you can always focus on is your breath. This is because your breath is always with you. Try this now by taking a few deep breaths and noticing the sensations. What did you feel in your body? Did you notice any smells in the air? Were you able to taste anything on the air as you exhaled? What does your breathing sound like? Leaving Doing Mode and entering Being Mode can be as simple as paying attention to what your senses are telling you. Think about some ways you can engage all of your senses and write them in the appropriate sections below. For example, for “*smell*,” you might write, “*Light a scented candle.*”

SMELL

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

TASTE

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

TOUCH

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

HEARING

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

SIGHT

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

1.4 Skills of Mindfulness

For purposes of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, the primary goal of mindfulness is to leave *doing mode* and enter *being mode*. This may be accomplished through the following six skills (Linehan, 1993):

1. Observing
2. Describing
3. Fully participating
4. Focusing on one thing at a time
5. Being non-judgmental
6. Being effective through the power of intention

The next sections will describe each of these skills in turn. As you read the sections below, think about how each of the skills of mindfulness would help you to focus on your moment-to-moment experience of the world, and to leave doing mode and enter into being mode.

1.5 Observing

The next time you're out in the woods, find a tree and look at it closely. It may be a tree that you've walked past several times before, or it may be a tree you've never seen. This time, look at it in a different way. Imagine you're an artist who is about to draw or paint this tree. Do you see it differently when you think about it in these terms? Do you notice how many different shades of color there are in its bark and leaves? Do you see how the light and shadow fall on it? How many leaves are there? How many branches? In which directions are the branches going?

Is your experience of the tree completely new when you look at it in this way? The mindful skill of *observing* allows us to be present with the tree, or with our environment, or with others, by focusing on our moment-to-moment experience. It is a way of leaving *thinking mode* and entering *sensing mode*. When we leave thinking mode, we become open to what our senses are telling us in the here and now.

This technique may also be used to observe our own inner cycles of thinking and feeling. If we are experiencing strong emotional states like anxiety, sadness, or depression, we may use the skill of observing, along with the skill of describing, to simply note the experience in the moment without having to react to it (Brown, 2003).

This observation of our own inner states is an eventual goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, but for now we're just going to practice observing and describing things with neutral emotional content, like trees, plants, and other objects readily found in nature.

Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of beings present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 822–848.

Linehan, Marsha (1993). *The Cognitive Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.

1.6 Describing

Describing works together with observing (Brown, 2007). It is a way of noting what our senses are telling us in the present moment. In the example of the tree from the previous section, *describing* would be used to note the characteristics of each detail of the tree. Perhaps the leaves are various shades of brown. In the fall, they may be a rainbow of autumn colors. In the spring, blossoms might present a different palette. The texture of the bark might be rough or smooth, with fine variegations or with large reticulations. There will also be a specific aroma associated with each individual tree.

There may also be sounds that a particular tree makes as the wind blows through the leaves. If you were a sightless person, would you be able to distinguish one tree from another simply by the sound the wind makes in the leaves? Would you be able to identify a tree by its aroma?

These are the *describing skills* of mindfulness. By describing our moment-to-moment experiences to ourselves in context, we can live richer and more meaningful lives. We are also able to consciously choose to shift attention away from troubling thought and feeling patterns and onto the world of our immediate experience. Observing and describing help us to move from doing mode to being mode. They help us to shift from thinking mode to sensing mode. While observing and describing may also be a type of thinking, and a type of doing, the difference is that these skills train us to think about our immediate experiences through our senses in the present moment.

When we've gained practice with observing and describing things in nature that have no heavy emotional content, then we can move on to our own inner dialogs. When it comes to regulating our emotional states, we may use our describing skills to experience strong emotions in the present. By describing these states to ourselves, we can step outside of the maelstrom of feelings that they generate. We can focus on the bigger picture without becoming overwhelmed.

This is an eventual goal of the tool of describing, but for now we're just going to gain practice with the technique by examining things with neutral emotional content.

Go to the next page and complete the *Observing and Describing Nature* exercise.

Brown, K. W., Ryan, R. M., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychological Inquiry, 18*(4), 211–237.

1.6 Observing and Describing Nature

Name: _____ Date: _____

Weather permitting, find an outdoor space where you may practice this exercise relatively undisturbed. It can be a park, a woodland area, or your own back yard. If the weather is unpleasant outside, you may practice this activity indoors with a houseplant.

Before you begin, rate your current stress level using the scale below. Make a slash mark in the appropriate place on the line below:

CURRENT STRESS LEVEL

NOT STRESSED AT ALL --1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--EXTREMELY STRESSED OUT

ACTIVITY

1. If you can do this activity outdoors, select a tree, bush, or other flora in the environment to observe and describe. This should be in a place where you may sit comfortably next to it while you perform the exercise. If you are doing this indoors with a houseplant, place the plant in front of you while you sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor. If you are wearing any tight clothing, you may wish to loosen it.
2. Once you are comfortably seated near the plant, begin by taking a few deep breaths. Bring your thoughts to the activity at hand, letting other thoughts gently float away, like a fallen leaf drifting downstream.
3. When you are feeling grounded and centered, begin the activity by observing and describing the plant you have chosen. Imagine yourself as an artist about to paint a picture of this plant. How many leaves do you see? How many branches? In how many directions do the branches twist and turn? How many different colors do you see? How do the light and the shadow fall on your plant?
4. Observe and describe the plant to yourself in this manner for at least 20 minutes. If you have a watch or a cell phone with a timer you may wish to set it to let you know when your time is done. If you prefer, you can just do the exercise until you think 20 minutes have passed. The observing and describing are more important than the amount of time you spend doing it. The answer to the question, *“How long should I do this?”* is, *“As long as necessary.”*
5. When you have finished the exercise, rate yourself again on anxiety and stress using the scale below.

CURRENT STRESS LEVEL

NOT STRESSED AT ALL --1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--EXTREMELY STRESSED OUT

1.7 Reflections on Observing and Describing

Did you note any differences in your stress level before and after the exercise? If so, what happened is that you moved your mental energy from the thinking part of your brain to the sensing part of your brain. Your brain only has a finite amount of energy it can devote to a given task. By re-directing your brain's energy to the activity of observing and describing your chosen plant, you took energy out of any stressful thought cycles. If you observed any decrease in stress after the exercise, you starved the *anxiety wolf* and fed the *sensory wolf*. This means that you moved energy out of the anxiety cycle and put energy into the sensory cycle, adding to your experience of the present moment.

1.8 Fully Participating

Most of us live inside our own heads from time to time. We get caught up in thinking about the day-to-day tasks of living and forget to take the time to just "be." We all have to-do lists that we constantly go over during the day. Sometimes these lists become so long that we begin to feel overwhelmed. When this happens, the art of *fully participating* allows us to slow down and enjoy the experience of each moment. Fully participating is another way to shift from Doing Mode into Being Mode.

Optional Activity: The Last Kiss

(For each session there will be optional exercises that you may do on your own, or under the guidance of a facilitator if you are taking this course as part of a workshop. They will be included in these insert boxes in the materials for each session)

I love chocolate. There have been times when I've been absent-mindedly eating chocolate kisses while working on the computer. On occasion I've reached into the bag only to find it empty. At those times I've thought to myself, "I wish I'd realized that the last one I ate was the last kiss in the bag! If I had known, I would have paid more attention to it!"

There was nothing different about the last kiss in the bag. It was just like all the other kisses in the bag. What was different was the fact that I should have been focusing my attention on it.

What if we were able to focus our attention on every kiss? What if we could make every kiss as important as the last one? Try this exercise with a piece of chocolate. If you cannot eat chocolate, you may wish to use a raisin or other small food item.

1. Hold the chocolate in your hand. Observe it and describe it to yourself. Picture yourself as an artist about to draw this piece of chocolate. How many colors do you see? What is its shape? How do the light and the shadow fall on it?
2. Now unwrap the chocolate and hold the wrapper up to your ear. Close your eyes and rub the wrapper between your fingers. What does it sound like? If you were a blind person, would you be able to identify the wrapper simply by the sound it makes?
3. Now place the chocolate on your tongue, but don't bite it. Allow it to slowly dissolve. Where on your tongue can you first taste it? The four basic taste buds are sweet, sour, salt and bitter. Can you taste each of these sensations?
4. Pay close attention to your sense of smell. Can you notice any aroma as you eat the chocolate?
5. Now savor the chocolate as if it is the last piece of chocolate on earth. There is nothing to do right now but to enjoy this piece of chocolate.

Did the exercise above change your experience of chocolate in any way? If so, you've learned the art of *fully participating*.

Think about the last time you talked to a loved one. Were you fully participating in the conversation, or were you busily texting someone on your cell phone while conversing? Were you one-on-one with the other person, or were you watching television while chatting? Were you really there for them, or were you also plugging away on your laptop computer while attempting to hold a conversation?

How about the last time you went for a drive in the country? Were you focusing on absorbing the scenery, or was your mind on something else? Did you take the time to enjoy the experience, or were you so busy thinking things over that you forgot to be present in the moment?

Fully participating means putting all your attention into what's going on right now, at this moment. By participating in life moment to moment we can live life more fully. To experiment with *Fully Participating*, try the optional *Last Kiss* exercise on the previous page.

1.9 Focusing on One Thing at a Time

The mindful skill of *focusing on one thing at a time*, or what Linehan calls “*one-mindfulness*,” (Dimeff & Linehan, 2001) works together with fully participating. Focusing on one thing at a time means not getting caught up in endless to-do lists until we overwhelm ourselves. The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. If we focus on the thousand miles, we'll be too overwhelmed to take the first step; but if we focus only on the first step, then the next, then the next, eventually the journey will be over, and we will have reached our destination.

One-mindfulness is coming to the realization that the way to complete a thousand-mile journey is to avoid the temptation to focus on the thousand miles. If we focus on the thousand miles to come rather than on the first step, we may become so overwhelmed that we never want to take that first step. By focusing only on one step, or on one thing, at a time, mindfulness allows us to let go of the anxiety that comes with having a full agenda.

A way to practice focusing on one thing at a time in our daily lives is to ask ourselves, “*What is the smallest step I can take today that will make a difference?*” while remembering that sometimes the answer to that question might be, “*No steps at all.*” Mindful awareness allows us the wisdom to know that sometimes it's okay if the only things we do today are to breathe and to enjoy life in the moment.

One way to accomplish this goal is to ask ourselves, “*What is the worst thing that could happen in this situation?*”

This doesn't mean that we're being dismissive of the situation. Instead, it means that we are consciously evaluating things to see what might happen if we lose sight of our goals. If we can identify what the worst thing is in each situation, and we can prepare ourselves for it, then anything else that may happen is already accounted for.

For example, if I'm stressed out about a huge project at work, I am probably worried that I might not get the project completed by the deadline. If I don't make the deadline, the worst thing that can happen in that situation is that I may get fired if I don't complete the project on time. I could prepare myself for the worst thing by asking myself, “*Is it really likely that they'd fire me for not completing this project on time? Can my company really afford to lose an employee who stresses out this much about missing a deadline?*”

If I judge the answer to this question to be “yes,” then I might want to ask myself if I really want to work for a company that places so little value on employees who try their best. And of course, if the answer is “no,” then I may be needlessly stressing myself out over an outcome even I don’t think is likely to occur. In such a case, the ability to focus on one thing at a time might be the thing that allows me to set aside my anxiety and concentrate on the job at hand so that I can complete it one step at a time, and to make the deadline (Linehan, 1993).

Dimeff, L., & Linehan, M.M. (2001). Dialectical Behavior Therapy in a Nutshell. *The California Psychologist*, 34, 10-13.

Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Cognitive behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. Guilford Press., New York, NY.

1.10 Being Non-Judgmental

Think about how many times in the past stressful and depressing thoughts may have arisen because you misjudged a person, place or situation. Such misjudging usually happens by making assumptions about the person’s intentions or about the situation. The mindful skill of *being non-judgmental* is the skill of letting go of our preconceptions and assumptions about others. It means letting go of judgments about the way the world works, especially if those judgments lead to negative consequences. It also means letting go of our own negative self-judgments.

Consider this example of how judgments can alter our reality:

Suppose I have a bad experience that leads me to make the judgment that “*everyone is out to get me.*” That judgment is going to set my perception filter to look for evidence that confirms this assumption, while rejecting evidence that denies this assumption. This means that I’m going to see only the things that I want to see. In this case, the things I’ve set my perception filter to see are the things that affirm my judgment that “*everybody is out to get me.*”

Notice that once I’ve set my perception filter in this way, *everyone* starts looking like they’re out to get me. Suppose I meet someone who is being nice to me. This person is treating me well, because this person is friendly and interested in a relationship and is not “out to get me.” But since my perception filter is set based on the assumption, “*everyone is out to get me,*” I’m going to perceive this person’s niceness as an attempt to butter me up so that they may take advantage of me later. My perception filter sees a person who is being nice because they want something from me.

Now further suppose that I go around treating everyone I meet as if they’re out to get me, based on this judgment and this assumption. What’s going to happen? Isn’t it likely that all the nice people in my life will eventually get tired of being treated like they’re up to something? When they finally get tired of being treated in this way, they’re going to stop trying to interact with me. That means that the people who really aren’t out to get me will eventually go away, and soon the only people who will interact with me are the people who really *are* out to get me. By making a judgment, I’ve created a reality in which everyone I meet *is* out to get me.

Being non-judgmental teaches us not to have false expectations about ourselves and others. Being non-judgmental means not making assumptions that can cause our perception filters to create realities we may not want to experience. When we have learned the art of being non-judgmental, we have learned to be with others and with ourselves in the moment, free of judgments, assumptions and false perceptions about ourselves, others, nature, and the world around us.

1.11 Being Effective: The Power of Intention

We can talk about problems all day, but until we start talking about solutions, nothing will ever get solved. The way to solve a problem is to take positive, intentional steps towards finding a solution.

All the skills of mindfulness come together in the power of intention (Mehlum, 2020). The key to being effective in life is to do things intentionally. A mindful life is a life lived deliberately. Such a consciously lived life is not driven about on the winds of whim and fortune. It is a purposeful life. The power of intention helps us to solve problems in an effective manner. It is possible to live a life of purpose through tapping into this power. The way to use the power of intention is to begin by asking two questions:

1. What is my intention in this situation (what am I trying to accomplish here)?
2. Are my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors going to help me to achieve this intention?

To practice the power of intention, go on to the next page and try the *Power of Intention* activity.

Mehlum, Lars. (2020). Mechanisms of Change in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy for People with Borderline Personality Disorder. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 37. 10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.08.017.

1.11 Being Effective: The Power of Intention

Name: _____ Date: _____

To live a purposeful, effective life, or a life of intention, we must live out our values. This means living in True Self. The way to live in True Self is to know who and what we are, and to use that knowledge to set our intentions and purpose. The first step lies in creating a roadmap. Looking back on your answers to the question on the previous page, think about which values and traits you have that might help you to accomplish your goals. Write these traits in the spaces provided below.

I demonstrate my reverence for all of life by manifesting unconditional love and respect for myself and all other beings in the following ways:

I demonstrate my natural sincerity by manifesting honesty, simplicity and faithfulness in the following ways:

I demonstrate my gentleness by manifesting kindness, consideration for others and sensitivity to spiritual truth in the following ways:

I demonstrate supportiveness by manifesting service to others without expectation of reward in the following ways:

1.12 Achieving Mindful Awareness

By using the six mindfulness skills outlined earlier, we can move towards achieving mindful awareness. The skills of observing, describing, fully participating, focusing on one thing at a time (one-mindfulness), being non-judgmental, and being effective through the power of intention allow us to experience life more fully in the present moment by consciously choosing to focus on our immediate experiences.

It has been said that there are three ways to deal with a problem. The first is to solve it. If it is a problem that cannot be solved, then the second way to deal with it is to change the way we think about it so that it is no longer a problem. If we can't change the way we think about it, then we may just have to accept that this is the way things are.

The more experience we gain in achieving mindful awareness, the more we can move towards a state of *radical acceptance*. Radical acceptance means coming to the realization that while we cannot always change the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we *can* always change what we choose to *believe* about those circumstances. Such radical acceptance allows us to deal with life as it really is, rather than the way we wish it could be, in the present moment.

The first skill of mindfulness involves simply paying attention to the present moment. One way to do this is to focus only on your breathing, without thinking about anything. While focusing on your breathing, if a thought comes to mind, simply note it and let it go, without judging yourself or the thought. It's perfectly natural that thoughts will try to surface, because we are taught to be thinking creatures. However, as you practice with mindful awareness, it will get easier to let those thoughts go, so don't get frustrated if it is difficult at first.

Remember that it's not a question of trying not to have any thoughts.

A better way to picture it is as ripples on a pond. The water in the pond is your thoughts. The ripples are the troublesome or negative thoughts. If you try to smooth out the pond you'll only succeed in making more waves. But if you sit quietly and wait for the pond to settle down on its own, soon your pond will be as smooth as glass.

The features of mindfulness are tools that we may use to help to smooth out the surface of our own inner ponds. When we can achieve such a state at will, we have achieved mindful awareness.

Mindfulness is a skill like any other. It can be difficult to learn at first, because it is so diametrically opposed to the way we're accustomed to thinking, acting, and doing. But if you persevere, with intention, you will soon learn how to be effective in your mindful practice.

Some of the techniques of mindfulness may feel strange at first, simply because they are different.

"Different" doesn't mean "better" or "worse," it simply means "different."

It's been said that "*Insanity is doing the same thing in the same ways and expecting different results.*" To put it another way, if what you're doing isn't working, then doing more of the same isn't going to work either. If we've been doing things that lead to negative consequences, we're probably doing those things because they feel familiar to us. But the way to get different results is to do things in different ways. This leads to different consequences for our actions.

It's only natural that doing things differently will feel strange or weird at first. If it didn't, chances are you already be doing things that way, simply because it feels more normal and natural.

Learning to get different results means that while we recognize that at first the practice or mindfulness might seem strange or uncomfortable, we are learning to be more effective by being willing to do things differently.

Mindfulness is a way to do things differently.

Chadwick, P., Hember, M., Symes, J., Peters, E., Kuipers, E., & Dagnan, D. (2008). Responding mindfully to unpleasant thoughts and images: Reliability and validity of the Southampton Mindfulness Questionnaire. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 47*, 451–455.

Linehan, Marsha (1993). *The Cognitive Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.

1.13 Mindful Meditation

Although meditation is a part of mindfulness, mindful awareness is much more than a meditative technique. Mindfulness is a way of life. The techniques of mindfulness can be applied to any of our day-to-day experiences. They are not restricted to the realm of meditation.

People who are new to meditation seem to think that it means sitting cross-legged on the floor in uncomfortable yoga poses while telling yourself not to think. Almost any activity can be done while meditating (Astin, 1997). We will explore some of these possibilities in future sessions with the Coyote Walk meditation and other activities.

If you are uncomfortable with the idea of meditation, I suggest you consider exercising the mindful skill of being non-judgmental and setting aside any preconceptions you might have about the practice (Buchheld, et al, 2001). Try some of the meditations suggested in future exercises a few times to see if they work for you. If they don't, then you can set them aside. Just remember that Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is a way to do things differently, and doing things differently is the only way to get different results.

Like anything else that must be learned, mindfulness is a skill that requires practice. Leonardo da Vinci didn't paint the Mona Lisa the first time he picked up a paintbrush. Likewise, you probably won't be able to jump right into mindful awareness mode of being without a lot of practice. That's okay. Give yourself permission to practice occasionally.

The more you do so, the more mindful you'll become!

Astin, J.A. (1997). Stress Reduction through Mindfulness Meditation: Effects on Psychological, Symptomatology, Sense of Control, and Spiritual Experiences. *Psychotherapy Psychosomatics, 66*, 97-106.

Buchheld, N., Grossman, P., & Walach, H. (2001). Measuring mindfulness in Insight Meditation (Vipassana) and meditation-based psychotherapy: The development of the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI). *Journal for Meditation and Meditation Research*, 1, 11–34.

Session 2: Living in the Now

Living in the Now means leaving *Doing Mode* and entering *Being Mode*. In *Being Mode* we learn that there is no past, there is no future. There is only this present moment. Living in the Now means allowing yourself to be in the moment in which you find yourself...here and now.



Facilitator Notes for Session 2: Living in the Now

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 2* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Doing Mode; Being Mode; Thinking Mode; Sensing Mode; you are not your mind/thoughts; True Self; Crystal Ball Thinking; Sacred Space, and Experiential Avoidance

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Upstream and downstream thoughts; the river analogy; “musturbating;” Coyote Walk, and befriending the bad wolf

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with Living in the Now, after defining the concept for the class. If they have had any experiences where they have had difficulty dwelling in the past or ruminating over the future, they are living in their heads, and not in the “now” of existence. Ask fellow students to offer suggestions on how to live in the present moment. Keep the focus on Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy and try to link the discussion to various “living in the now” skills from the Session 2 materials if possible.

If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn’t time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

DISTRIBUTE GROUP RULES

Distribute the group rules that were decided upon at Session 1. If you prefer not to distribute them in paper format, you may also email them to participants prior to Session 2.

SESSION OUTLINE

2.0 You are not Your Mind

A common error made by beginning students in mindfulness is that it requires you to “stop thinking.” Mindful meditation and mindfulness are not about stopping the thinking process. As this section points out, if you’re telling yourself to “stop thinking,” then you’re thinking about not thinking. Telling yourself to stop thinking is a thought. The goal of a mindful meditation isn’t to stop thinking. Instead, the goal is to observe and describe thoughts and feelings while recognizing that we don’t have to believe them to be true or to identify with them. Thoughts and feelings are not facts. They are simply processes of the brain.

2.1 Thought Streams: The River

If you have access to a river or other body of water in your workshop space, having students actually stand in the river while describing this concept can be a very powerful experience. If you choose to do this, and have access to such a river, remember “safety first.” Don’t use a rapidly flowing river. Make sure to have someone trained in first aid in case of emergencies, and don’t let anyone who can’t swim into the river. Don’t allow anyone to stand more than knee-deep in the river. Also, if you’re planning to do this, make sure to prepare your participants ahead of time by reminding them to bring towels, swimsuits, and other accessories if needed.

2.2 Upstream and Downstream Thoughts

If you are using an actual river, you can transition from the “river” analogy in the previous section directly into the concept of *upstream* and *downstream* thoughts in this section. If you don’t have access to an actual river, you can just have your students visualize a river instead. The key concept in this activity is the idea that the present moment is the only thing that’s real. Once the present moment is over, it only exists in memory. And if it exists in memory only, we can choose how to interact with those memories. The thoughts and memories that lie downstream don’t exist in the present. They only have access to the present if we choose to pay attention to them. We are always in charge of which thoughts to focus our attention on. Remember that thoughts are not facts. They’re just things our brains do.

2.3 Time is an Illusion

Crystal ball thinking involves “catastrophizing” or “masturbating” about the future. It means placing judgments on future events based on our past experiences. But if we judge the future by the past, we cut off any possibility of change in the future. Here’s why. Suppose I say to myself, “It’s always been this way.” Let’s further assume that this statement is accurate, and it really has “always been this way.” Such a statement must be made in the present moment, looking back on past events. That’s fine. But if I then say, “And it always will be this way in the future,” I’ve just cut off any possibility of change, because I’m using crystal ball thinking to refuse to accept the possibility of change in the future.

One of the concepts of living in the now is letting go of the past so that change can begin in the present and carry forth into the future. Note that this is not meant to minimize the anxiety or depression a person may feel about the past. If a person is telling themselves not to experience these feelings, they are engaging in Experiential Avoidance (see section 2.8). Instead, living in the now means taking control of the present moment to choose how to experience thoughts and feelings about the past and the future.

2.4 Reality and the Now

By living in the now we can choose, in this moment, what to believe about the future, or the past. The idea that you can re-create your past is a novel one, but not an impossible goal. Most memory is constructive, so we can change our perceptions about the past by choosing to look at it in a different way than we have before. If the way we choose to remember the past is causing us stress, we can change what parts of the past we focus on, in the present moment, so that it does not have as great an impact on us in the future. You might illustrate this with your students by asking them to discuss instances in which they’ve changed their minds about past events so that they no longer have such an emotional impact.

2.5 Creating Sacred Space

Sacred, or “set apart” spaces, are spaces and places that exist outside of time. This is because sacred spaces are designed to help us leave doing mode and enter into being mode. In being mode, time is irrelevant, because we’re not “doing” anything. Sacred spaces should be designed to stimulate the senses. You might emphasize this to your students by lighting incense or a smudge stick, or by pointing out a scenic view in your workshop space, or by offering a pleasant snack or libation, or by playing soothing music, or by engaging in any other activity that might create sacred space by engaging the senses.

2.6 Being in the Now: Coyote Walk

The idea behind the Coyote Walk activity is that with practice we may engage in any activity in a mindful way. The Coyote Walk allows your students to practice walking mindfully, as a precursor to being able to do other activities mindfully. Sometimes when I suggest meditation to my patients, they picture it as having to take time out of their busy days to sit cross-legged on the floor. But the idea behind the Coyote Walk is that you can engage in mindful meditation while doing other things.

EXERCISE: Coyote Walk PRIORITY 1

If you don’t have time for any other activity in this week’s session, make sure you do the Coyote Walk. It is an activity that can be done either indoors or outdoors. The importance of this activity is that you can engage in mindful meditation in many aspects of your life, and not just in sitting quietly in your sacred space.

The accompanying worksheet also allows students to be self-reflective by asking them if there are any ways in which they may have been deceiving themselves, or deceiving others. This exercise can sometimes be used to help people get past the denial phase of the Stages of Change (the pre-contemplational stage) if there are problems that they are refusing to acknowledge.

2.7 Wherever You Go, There You Are

Part of the acknowledgement of the True Self is the acknowledgement of what Carl Jung called the *Shadow*. The Shadow is where our darker impulses live. If we try to pretend our darker desires and needs don’t exist, then that denial gives them power over us. But if we acknowledge their existence, that opens the gateway to expressing them in positive, rather than harmful, ways. It’s perfectly okay, for example, to be angry. It is not, however, okay to abuse others in our anger. The feeling isn’t the problem; it’s the behavior that’s the problem.

By acknowledging our anger, we are able to act on it in positive ways, perhaps by working out a compromise with the person we’re angry with. Ultimately, we cannot run from ourselves, so by “befriending the bad wolf” we take away its power to harm us. When we do so, we gain control over it and release its hold on us.

You might illustrate this concept to students by having them list some appropriate ways to express darker and more negative emotions.

2.8 Experiential Avoidance

“Trying” not to have thoughts is having thoughts. Experiential avoidance means trying to avoid unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or emotions by telling yourself to “get over it” or “stop thinking about it.” I sometimes illustrate this using a beach ball if I’m conducting a group near a body of water. I have students try to push the beach ball underwater. The harder they push, the harder the beach ball “pushes” back.

Trying to avoid negative experiences is exactly like pushing a beach ball underwater. The harder we try to avoid them, the more energy we give them, making them stronger. If, for example, I’m depressed and I tell myself to stop feeling depressed, then not being able to stop being depressed is depressing, so I wind up even more depressed than I was in the first place.

There’s a reason this beach ball of experience pushes back so hard. That’s because the reason we get depressed or anxious about things is because we care about things. If we didn’t care about anything, we wouldn’t have anything to be stressed or depressed about. If we try to push that beach ball of anxiety or depression underwater, we’re also trying to drown everything we care about.

If you have access to a body of water and a beach ball, you might illustrate the concept of experiential avoidance as illustrated above by having students try to push the beach ball underwater.

EXERCISE: Experiential Avoidance PRIORITY 1

This activity is designed for students to do in their own sacred space, but you can have them answer the questions in the first part of the worksheet before doing the second part in their own sacred space. If you have them answer the questions during the workshop, also have them select one thing from the list they'd like to get rid of. Now tell them to go and meditate on that one thing in their own sacred space between now and the next session, per the instructions at the bottom of the worksheet.

At the beginning of the session next week facilitate a discussion about what it was like to simply sit in being mode with the thing they said they'd like to get rid of. Re-introduce the idea of experiential avoidance and link it to just being with the thought or feeling in a non-judgmental way without trying to get rid of it, in being mode.

2.9 Befriending the Bad Wolf

During the "befriending the Bad Wolf" section of this session, I often have students list one or two things that the "bad wolf" is trying to warn them about. I then have them thank the bad wolf for doing its job, and then give it permission to leave now before dismissing it. After the person speaking dismissed their own "bad wolf," have the group say in unison, "Go now in peace."

When done in a group setting this can be a powerful rite.

One word of caution: Due to the extremely intimate nature of this exercise, if you choose to use it, only do so on a volunteer basis. Don't force anyone to participate if they're not willing to do so.

2.10 True Self and the Now

The "mind trap" occurs when our thought and feeling cycles trap us inside our own heads, causing us to dwell on depressing thoughts and feelings about the past or anxiety about the future. From the perspective of the True Self, however, we may see this mind trap for what it is. It is just a process of the mind, and not fact or reality unless we choose to make it so.

At this point in the session check to see if students have integrated the materials by asking them to reflect on their own True Selves, and how living in the now might help them to connect to their own True Selves more fully.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 3 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from *Session 2* that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

2.0 You are not Your Mind

"I think, therefore I am." – Rene Descartes

The philosopher Descartes summed up Western philosophical thought in a nutshell with his famous statement. Western modes of thought have convinced us that *we are what we think*. Most of our mental suffering in life comes from the concept that *we are* our thoughts and feelings. In fact, I would go so far as to say that all our mental suffering is in the mind, by definition.

But what if we are *not* our thoughts?

Beginning students of mindfulness often assume that one of the goals of mindful meditation is to stop thinking. This is an oversimplification of the practice of mindful meditation, but let's suppose for a moment that it is true.

Imagine yourself sitting down to have a mindful meditation. You empty your mind and start focusing on your breathing. After a few moments pass, you have a thought. Perhaps it's a thought like, *"Why am I wasting time doing this? I have other things to do!"*

As soon as you have the thought, you become aware of it, and say to yourself, *"Oh no, I had a thought."*

So which part of you is it that recognized that you had a thought? It can't be your thoughts that recognized that you had a thought, because your thoughts were, *"Why am I wasting time doing this? I have other things to do!"*

The part of you that recognized that you had a thought could not have been your thoughts themselves, because that's the thing that you were recognizing: Your thoughts.

If the thing that recognizes my thoughts isn't my thoughts, what is it?

In mindfulness, we call this thought-recognizer the *internal observer*. In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, we call the internal observer the *True Self*.

This internal observation by the True Self teaches us that if we are having anxious thoughts and feelings, or depressing thoughts and feelings, or stressful thoughts and feelings, those thoughts and feelings are just that: Thoughts and feelings. They are not good or bad, or true or false, unless we choose to believe that they are. We don't have to identify with them unless we choose to do so.

The True Self is the internal mechanism that allows us to recognize that thoughts and feelings are only thoughts and feelings. They are not who we are unless we decide to let them be who we are. So, if I'm having anxious thoughts, I am not an anxious person. I am simply a person who is, for a time, having anxious thoughts. If I'm having depressing thoughts, I am not a depressed person. I'm just a person who is, right now, having depressing thoughts. If I am having cravings, I am not an addict. I'm just a person who is, for the moment, having addictive cravings.

If we so desire, we can engage that internal observer called the True Self for a time to observe and describe thoughts and feelings to ourselves without having to become those thoughts and feelings. This is because we are not our minds. We are something more.

2.1 Thought Streams: The River

Imagine that your thoughts and feelings are like a river. The river is always flowing, ever changing. In this river of the mind, sometimes positive thoughts float to the top, and sometimes negative thoughts float to the top. If we find ourselves in a spot on the river where those negative thoughts are floating to the top, our goal isn't to stop the river by trying to dam it up. If we try to dam up the river, the water will only continue to back up behind the dam until either the dam bursts or the water overflows.

This is what happens when people have panic attacks or "nervous breakdowns," or even explosive bouts of anger. The water behind the dam has no place to go, and it eventually builds up until a catastrophe happens.

Trying to stop negative thoughts and feelings by damming up the river isn't the answer, since it could lead to catastrophe. So how do we deal with such thoughts?

What if there was an alternative to trying to stop the river by building a dam across it?

If we find ourselves at a place on the river where those negative thoughts are flowing to the top, we can consciously decide not to drown in the river by choosing instead to get out of the river, sit on the riverbank, and watch those thoughts and feelings flow by.

When we make this choice, the river is still flowing. We haven't tried to dam it up. We're just not swimming in it. From our viewpoint on the banks of the river, we can watch those thoughts and feelings flow by without being carried downstream. Using our powers of observing and describing, we can acknowledge the river's presence without being at the river's mercy.

2.2 Upstream and Downstream Thoughts

In our analogy of the river, the thing that makes it flow from Point A to Point B is the presence of time. The sage has said, "*You can't step twice on the same piece of water.*" This is because the water is always changing from moment to moment.

Imagine yourself standing in a gently flowing river. This is a river of the mind. Upstream, the past spreads out behind you. Downstream, the river flows into the future. To return to the past would involve wading upstream against the current. To visit the future would require swimming downstream with the tide.

Suppose you tried to wade upstream or swim downstream. Once you got to your new location, the past would still lie behind you upstream relative to where you are now. Likewise, the future would still lie downstream ahead of you.

No matter which direction you move, you will always find yourself right here, right now, in the river.

Imagine yourself turning now to face upstream, towards the past. You already know what lies behind you. There may be rocky shoals and rapids behind you. There may even be high waterfalls and boulders. But the fact that you are standing right now at this place and this time in the river means that you survived the journey.

Regardless of what lies behind you on the river, you have made it this far. This means that you are a survivor! You have met the challenges on the river and have gotten to where you are today.

Now turn to face downstream. This part of the river is unknown to you. You haven't ventured there yet. There is no way of knowing whether more rapids lie ahead, or whether there is smooth sailing for the rest of the journey. You might try to make educated guesses as to what the downstream journey might be, based on the parts of the river you have already traveled, but there is no way to know with any certainty whether those guesses are correct.

Rivers can suddenly change, and if you spend all your time worrying about what lies downstream, you miss the moment in which you find yourself. Worrying too much about what might lie downstream takes energy away from enjoying the pleasant experience of the river here and now.

Even if the worst happens, and we encounter catastrophes downstream, the choice to remain in the river is still ours. We can, at any time, make the conscious choice to step outside of the river for a while to watch it flow by.

We can't know what lies downstream, but we can prepare ourselves for it. We can't change the river, but we can change ourselves in order to increase the likelihood of a safe journey.

Life is this river of the mind. When we learn to go with the flow, we decrease our chances of running aground or drowning.

Optional Activity: The River

If you have the opportunity, find a gently flowing river near you. This should be a river where the water isn't flowing too rapidly, and where the water isn't too deep. Remember, safety first! This should be a river you know well, and it's best not to do this activity alone.

Once you have found your river, go out into it. Don't go any deeper than your knees. It's preferable to find a spot on the river where nature surrounds you.

Now stand in the river and do a little mindful breathing. Inhale and exhale deeply for at least three breaths. Ground and center yourself.

Now cultivate an open and accepting attitude towards everything you are experiencing. What do you see? What do you hear? Can you feel the river's currents with your body? Are there pleasant aromas on the breeze? Enjoy the experience of being in the river right here, and right now.

When you feel at peace with your surroundings, take a mental snapshot of all you have experienced here in the river. Mentally record the river in as much detail as possible. When you have done so, you may recall and retrieve this experience the next time you are feeling stressed out.

When you are ready, leave the river and sit on the riverbank while thinking over these questions:

1. Once you were grounded and centered, did you find yourself thinking about what lies upstream or what lies downstream, or neither?
2. Once you were grounded and centered, did you find your mind wandering to your mental "to do" list of daily activities?
3. What was it about the river that made this experience different than your day-to-day life?
4. Is there a way to carry this experience with you into your day-to-day life?

2.3 Time is an Illusion

By the time you finish reading this sentence, the experience of reading it will lie in the past. At which point does the present become the past? Now? How about now?

How about *never*?

Where exactly does the past lie, anyway? Once you have finished reading *this* sentence, the only place it will exist is in your memory. This means that all your past experiences, all those journeys you have already taken, only exist in what you remember about them. The past is a product of the mind.

Let's turn to the future now.

Without turning the page, do you know what lies ahead in this book? You may have read the table of contents, so you might have a general idea of what is to come, but can you, without turning the page, tell me what the fifth word of the second paragraph on the next page is?

Of course not, because you haven't experienced it yet.

One aspect of crystal ball thinking (see Section 4.3) is that such thinking tries to predict the future. We are quite good at crystal ball thinking. This is because crystal ball thinking helps us to plan for the future. Without a little planning and prediction, we never make any progress. If I don't plan to make the house payment, I may not have a house in the future. If I don't plan to eat today, and the next day, and the next, I might eventually starve to death.

But there is a difference between planning and catastrophizing. Catastrophizing involves focusing our attention only on the bad things that might happen in the future. Albert Ellis (1975) referred to it as *musturbating*, because it often takes the form of phrases like, "*I must do this,*" or "*I must not do this.*"

The difference between planning and catastrophizing is that planning involves setting concrete, measurable goals for the future while catastrophizing often ends in a storm of musturbation. Planning is a way of relieving anxiety, not of causing it. If you're feeling anxious while planning, you're probably musturbating.

If you find yourself anxious when planning about the future, check to see if you are catastrophizing. Planning for the future is a way of anticipating negative outcomes and preparing for them so they don't catch you unprepared further down the river. It is a way of relieving anxiety by minimizing future catastrophes.

When planning for the future watch for statements that focus on negative outcomes rather than positive ones. This doesn't mean that you cannot anticipate and plan for negative outcomes. If it did, nobody would ever buy health insurance! What it means is that you're planning for negative outcomes in order to prevent or guard against them. When discussing possible negative outcomes during planning, it is as a means of having positive outcomes later.

What if we do find ourselves catastrophizing? How do we escape it?

It's called "crystal ball thinking" for a reason. Unless you have a crystal ball, you cannot know the future with any certainty. This can be a scary proposition for people who have experienced catastrophes in the past, but if I find myself anticipating further disasters in the future, that possible future only exists in my

mind. It is just as likely that something good might happen in the future. But if I've set my perception filter to only anticipate and look for bad outcomes, will I see a positive opportunity even if it presents itself?

Our perception filters only exist in our minds. The good news is that we are in charge of how those filters are set. We can choose which events in our lives to pay attention to (Siegel, 2020).

The past only exists in memory, and the future is just an educated guess about what may or may not happen further downstream. Both past and future are nothing but products of the mind. We can consciously choose in the now which thoughts and feelings about past or future to give our energy to. When we do so, we are *living in the now*.

When we have anxiety, stress or depression, it is almost inevitably because we are dwelling on the past or on the future. As you read this sentence, are you having any stressful thoughts or feelings? If so, how many of those stressful thoughts or feelings are about what is going on *right now*, as you read this? How many of them are the result of things that happened in the past, or how many may or may not happen in the future?

To dwell on memories of the past, or projections of memory onto the future, is to be trapped by the mind. In the now, we can escape the *mind trap* and make conscious decisions on how much attention to give to those thoughts and memories. When we escape the mind trap, we step outside of time to the now. Here in the now, the past and the future cannot touch us unless we choose to let them.

In the now, we recognize that time is just the mind's way of keeping everything from happening at once. Once we grasp the concept that time is just an illusion, we are free to connect with our True Self.

Ellis, A. & Harper, R. E. (1975) *A New Guide to Rational Living*. New York: Wilshire.

Siegel, Daniel (2020). *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence*. New York, NY, Random House.

2.4 Reality and the Now

"Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away."

–Phillip K. Dick

As we discussed in the previous section, the past only exists in memory, and the future is just a projection of our memories. This means that both the past and the future exist only in our memories. The present moment is always becoming the past as we continue to move forward in time, and the future is always becoming the now as we continue to move forward in time.

Is time real? If the past and the future are products of memory and projections of the mind, do they have any real existence outside of this present moment? If so, how? Can a thing exist only in memory? If the past and the future are just imagined experiences created by the mind, then we are free in the now to create different experiences.

If there is any such thing as real time, then it can only exist right here, right now. If there is any such thing as free will, then it too can only exist right here and right now. This is because the past is gone, and the future is not here yet. We cannot travel back in time and exercise our free will about conscious choices in the past, because it no longer exists. Likewise, we cannot travel forward in time to choices that have not presented themselves yet because the future isn't here yet.

But here in the now, we can make choices. Here we may exercise our free will to believe anything we want about the future...or the past. That is because this present moment is all that is real.

Dick, P. K. (1987). *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon*, New York, NY: Doubleday

2.5 Creating Sacred Space

The original meaning of the word “sacred” was “set apart.” A sacred thing is a thing that is set apart from ordinary everyday living. It is a place for quiet contemplation and meditation. Many indigenous people around the world believed (and still believe) that time and space are not separate. This was and is especially true of sacred spaces. Many of the stone circles in Europe were aligned to mark the passage of time. For the early Europeans time was measured in sacred places. The perception of time is therefore linked to space.

In the observation of many tribal rituals throughout the world, people believed that to enter sacred space was to step outside of time. This is the essence of living in the now. It is the ability to leave the time stream for a moment. Once inside sacred space, we may embrace the timelessness of being.

From a psychological perspective, setting aside a sacred space allows you to enter that space, step outside of time, and do your own work of contemplating the essence of being. If you have a special place set aside for this activity, and only for this activity, then entering it more readily puts you in a special state of mind. Psychologists call this *situation-specific learning*. If your sacred space becomes associated in your mind with relaxation, meditation and contemplation, then after a while simply entering your sacred space will put you into a meditative state (Nadel, 2019).

If you are fortunate enough to have access to a natural place that calls to you, you may make it your own by placing symbols and signs there that mean something to you. My own sacred space is marked by statuary and wind chimes. The gentle music of the chimes lends itself well to contemplation. When I am at home with the windows open, sometimes the wind blows through the trees, stirring the chimes. When this happens, I am instantly reminded of my sacred space and the peace I find there. Even if I am busy working at the computer, the music of the chimes reminds me for a moment of the happy times I have spent in my sacred space in meditation.

If you don't have access to an outdoor place to create your own sacred space, you can create one indoors. Set up a small table somewhere in a corner of your home. Cover it with things that help you to achieve a meditative state. You may use candles, incense, house plants, or pictures of nature scenes or loved ones. You can use anything that might help you to connect with your True Self.

If you're out walking in the woods, you may come upon a place that calls to you. Stop there and meditate for a while. If this place is particularly meaningful for you, you may mark it for others by making a small

pile of stones. This has been a tradition of mine for decades now, and when we do Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy workshops, students often do this. Coming upon a small pile of stones left by another can be a powerful way to connect yourself to others who have walked the path. It also allows you the opportunity to be in a sacred space that others have enjoyed before you.

Whether your sacred space is indoors or outdoors, it can be a useful place for finding your center and connecting with your True Self.

Nadel, Meryl. (2019). *Natural Environment as Refuge, Nurturer, Catalyst*.
10.1093/oso/9780190496548.003.0001.

2.6 Being in the Now: Coyote Walk

Mindful meditation is usually pictured as sitting quietly, legs crossed, while focusing on the breath. While this is one way of meditating, it is not the only way. One of the lessons of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is that we may meditate anywhere, at any time. As long as we are living in the now by paying attention to what our senses are telling us in the moment, we are engaged in mindful meditation (Bernhard, et al, 1988).

This means that we may engage in *any* activity in a mindful way.

A common exercise to perform in a mindful manner is an activity called mindful walking. The basic process of mindful walking is to walk while focusing on the physical sensations of the process of walking by shifting energy from the thinking cycle to the cycle of sensations. What do my leg muscles feel like as I walk? Can I feel my diaphragm as I breathe? What sights do I see as I walk? What do I hear? What aromas are in the air?

Gotink et al (2016) found that there is a synergistic effect when engaging in mindful walking. Walking facilitates a mindful state, and mindful states facilitate the desire to keep engaging in more mindful walking. The act of mindful walking also causes the benefits of the activity to increase exponentially. The more you practice it, the more benefits you gain from it.

The Coyote Walk is a way to practice mindful walking. To practice this technique, first picture how a coyote walks. She places her paws one in front of the other so that she makes as little noise as possible. She experiences her world largely through her sense of smell, pausing here and there to read her environment before moving on. If she spots something of interest, she stops for a while to investigate. She is open to what her senses tell her, but at the same time she approaches life with a playful attitude.

In coyote lore from native peoples around the world, the coyote represents the Trickster. She is seen as cunning and wise, and willing to use deception as a teaching tool.

The archetype of Coyote teaches us how wisdom is the twin of foolishness. In the antics of others, we see our own foolishness and we learn from their mistakes. She teaches through humor and the ability to laugh at life's absurdities and ironies. Coyote strips away the masks we all wear so that we may get to the truth underneath all the fronts that we put on for others and for ourselves.

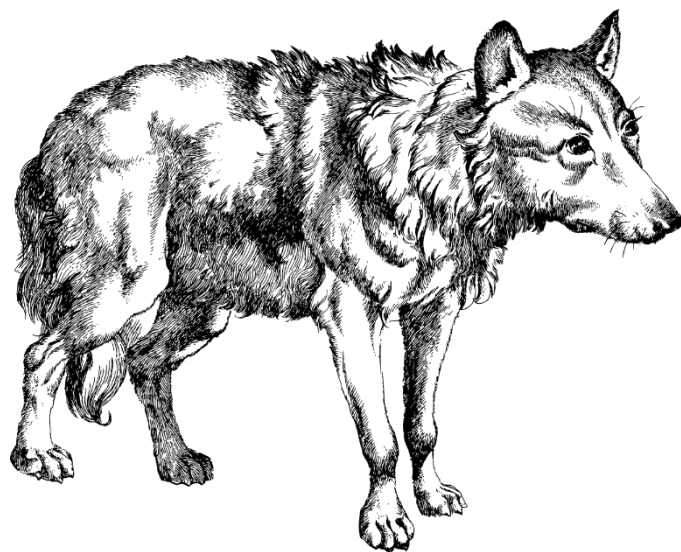
Her energy is reflected in the phrase, *“Simplicity is perfection.”* She teaches us to learn to distinguish what we need from what we want. Coyote won’t give us everything we want, but she will lead us to everything we need.

The howl of the coyote stirs something primitive and passionate in our souls and reminds us to return to the place of the beginning...that childlike sense of wonder and fascination with the beauty of the world.

Coyote is a survivor and can adapt to new situations by learning to bend and flow. The Way of the Coyote is to understand that all things are sacred, yet nothing is sacred. If you have any sacred cows in our life, coyote will be sure to devour them.

Coyote is also a strong protector of family. Coyotes often mate for life and will fiercely defend mate and cubs. They will often adopt cubs who have become parentless. They realize that family is not always a matter of blood, but of spirit.

Coyote teaches by becoming a mirror. Her tricks and jokes reflect our own folly back at us until we realize what is happening and learn from it, if we are fortunate enough to realize what is going on. Coyote will



continue to hold a mirror up to us until we learn to see our true ourselves or until we become so angry and frustrated that we lose our way.

Coyote’s humor also teaches us that what we do to others, we ultimately do to ourselves. She teaches us that we reap what we sow. Coyote teaches us to look for things we may have been avoiding or refusing to acknowledge in our own lives. This sometimes manifests in strange ways. Look at what you criticize the most in others and see if you have those same characteristics.

Coyotes tend to spend all their energy caring for others. They would do well to remember to take some time and energy for themselves also. Those

who don’t understand coyote’s ways are often angered or alienated by the mirror because they don’t wish to acknowledge what it shows them about themselves. So sometimes the way of the Coyote can be a lonely way.

When you are in touch with your own coyote archetype, look closely at ways you may have been giving energy to foolishness. This is especially true in relationships, since we often fool ourselves in relationships, and refuse to see what is plain to everyone else.

Remember that Coyote’s goal is not to anger or frustrate, but to teach. For Coyote to teach, we must be willing to learn. Think about the archetype of Coyote as teacher as you complete this exercise.

To perform the Coyote Walk, first go to an outdoor place, weather permitting, and find a spot where you may walk undisturbed for at least thirty minutes. When you have found your place, stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart. Now ground and center yourself while contemplating the energy in the archetype of the coyote described above. Feel yourself becoming the coyote. Take the coyote energy into yourself and begin to walk, placing one foot in front of the other as quietly as possible. To do this, it

may help to visualize a straight line drawn on the ground. Imagine your feet touching that line with every step.

Continue to walk, remaining open to the sensations of your feet as they rise and fall, to the sensations of your breathing, and to all the information your senses are giving you about the immediate environment. Don't stare at your feet, but instead look around you so that you may experience the environment to the fullest (Lu Shi, et al, 2019).

When you have completed this exercise, go on to answer the questions on the *Coyote Walk* worksheet on the next page.

Bernhard, J. D., Kristeller, J., Kabat-Zinn, Jon (1988), Effectiveness of relaxation and visualization techniques as an adjunct to phototherapy and photochemotherapy of psoriasis. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 19(3), 572-573.

Gotink, Rinske & Hermans, Karlijn & Geschwind, Nicole & Nooij, Reinier & de Groot, Wouter & Speckens, Anne. (2016). Mindfulness and mood stimulate each other in an upward spiral: a mindful walking intervention using experience sampling. *Mindfulness*. 7. 10.1007/s12671-016-0550-8.

Lu Shi, L., Welsh, R.S., Lopes, S., Rennert, L., Chen, L., Jones, K., Zhang, L., Crenshaw, B., Wilson, M., and Zinzow, H. (2019). A pilot study of mindful walking training on physical activity and health outcomes among adults with inadequate activity, *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, Volume 44, June 2019, Pages 116-122

2.6 Coyote Walk

Name: _____ Date: _____

Complete the Coyote Walk exercise from Section 2.6 of the *Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook* before answering the questions below:

When you took the coyote energy into yourself by getting in touch with your coyote archetype, what did you notice about yourself? Did you feel any differently? If so, how?

During your walk, did coyote hold up a mirror to you? If so, what did you see in it?

Did you like what you saw in the mirror? If so, describe it. If not, how might you change it?

Did coyote show you any ways you might be tricking or fooling yourself? If so, what were they?

2.6 Coyote Walk

Name: _____ Date: _____

Did coyote show you any ways you might be tricking or fooling others? If so, what were they?

Did coyote show you anything you might like to change about yourself? If so, what was it, and how might you change it?

Did the Coyote Walk change your perception of time? If so, how?

Would the Coyote Walk be a useful tool to help you live in the now? If so, how? If not, why not?

2.7 Wherever You Go, There You Are

One of the lessons of coyote is that we cannot escape ourselves. We all have a dark side. We cannot escape this dark side because it is a part of us. Coyote teaches us that if we ignore our darker natures, we will be consumed by our darker natures. But if we can acknowledge our darker and more chaotic tendencies, we have taken the first step towards controlling them. When coyote places us before the mirror, it's up to us what to do with what she shows us.

Coyote's lesson is that there is no such thing as a "bad" feeling. What may or may not be "bad" is the behavior that comes after the feeling. By acknowledging our more chaotic feelings we learn that just because we are having feelings, we don't have to act on them. By living in the now, we learn that feelings are just feelings (Bishop, 2002).

Who are you really? Who is this internal observer known as the True Self?

Let's do a thought experiment to discover the nature of this entity. Think about what makes you, you. Right now, you are looking at this page through your own eyes. Right now, your senses are experiencing the sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations of your immediate environment. You are observing the world through your own perspective. The sum of everything you have experienced up until this moment is contained within your head.

Now let's suppose it were possible to make an exact clone of you. This clone is your age and has all your memories and experiences. For all practical purposes this clone is identical to you in every way. Once this clone is created, would you continue to see the world through your own eyes, or would you begin to see the world through the clone's eyes? Where is our point of view? With you or the clone?

Obviously, you would continue to see the world from your own perspective, even though the clone was an exact, identical copy of you.

So, what is it that makes you unique? The clone is an exact copy of you in every way except one: The way in which your clone views the world. The clone has his or her own point of view, their own perspective, on the world, just as you have your own.

What does this mean? It means you have your own unique perspective on the world, and that perspective is not a product of blood, bone, sinew, or neurons. Since your clone would be an exact replica of all your biological and neurological functions, yet you would still see the world from your own head and not your clone's head, this True Self cannot be solely a product of biology and material existence. It is something different. It is something eternal. It is something that is not dependent on time or matter.

It is your own internal observer. It is your own True Self.

2.8 Experiential Avoidance

We're very good at trying to avoid experiences we don't like. If we're depressed or stressed, we often engage in a host of activities designed to help us avoid experiencing those feelings. The problem is that our experiential avoidance tends to make things worse instead of better. We often try to tell ourselves, "*Just don't think about it, and it will go away.*" This amounts to telling ourselves, "*Try to stop having thoughts.*" The problem is that "trying" is thinking, so trying not to have thoughts is having thoughts.

When this dynamic occurs, we are playing a game without end (Harris, 2019). If I tell myself to try to stop thinking, and then I'm not able to stop thinking, this adds even more stress to the situation because my strategy was unsuccessful. So, I try even harder to stop thinking, and I'm even more unsuccessful at it.

When we tell ourselves to stop thinking or stop feeling, we are attempting to push those thoughts and feelings away, and quite often this attempt to push those thoughts and feelings away is the very thing that makes them stay.

This tendency to try to stop thinking about thoughts and feelings is what Acceptance and Commitment Therapy calls *experiential avoidance* because we're trying to avoid the experience of stressful thoughts and feelings like depression or anxiety.

In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, we come to realize that our thoughts and feelings are a part of us, and we therefore don't have to avoid them. But we also don't have to give more energy to them than they are due. When we give them energy by trying not to think or trying not to feel, we are feeding the bad wolf (see section 0.5).

Instead of feeding the bad wolf, we can instead choose to thank it for protecting us and send it on its way. Eventually it will go away on its own. Even if it does not, we have befriended it so that it is no longer a danger.

To explore experiential avoidance, complete the exercise on the next page.

Bishop, S. R. (2002). What do we really know about mindfulness-based stress reduction? *Psychosomatic Medicine, 64*, 71–84.

Harris, R. (2019). *ACT Made Simple: An Easy-to-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Second Edition*, Oakland, California: New Harbinger

2.8 Experiential Avoidance

Name: _____ Date: _____

Think about some of the thoughts and feelings you've tried to get rid of in the past, then answer the following questions:

The thoughts I'd most like to get rid of are:

The feelings I'd most like to get rid of are:

The behaviors I'd most like to get rid of are:

The memories I'd most like to get rid of are:

2.8 Experiential Avoidance

Name: _____ Date: _____

Now that you've created your list, look at the list of strategies below for avoiding experiences. Place a check mark by each strategy you've ever used in an effort to get rid of the thoughts, feelings, behaviors and memories that you listed on the previous page.

- Worrying about it
- Trying not to think about it
- Trying to distract myself
- Staying busy
- Finding other things to do
- Dwelling on the past
- Catastrophizing about the future
- Fantasizing about escaping the situation (e.g., quitting your job, leaving your spouse, etc.)
- Imagining revenge
- Imagining suicide
- Thinking "Life's not fair"
- Thinking "I must" or "I must not"
- Thinking "I should have" or "I would have" or "I could have"
- Second-guessing past decisions
- Anticipating future problems
- Blaming myself
- Shaming myself
- Guilt-tripping myself
- Blaming others
- Shaming others
- Guilt-tripping others
- Blaming the world
- Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, etc.)
- Overeating, or not eating, as a method of stress relief
- Addictive behaviors (gambling, worrying, being depressed, "woe is me" pity parties)
- Other: _____

Now ask yourself:

1. Did any of these strategies work in the long run?
2. Did any of these strategies actually make the things worse instead of better?
3. If you were able to live in the "now" of existence, instead of in the mind trap, how many of the things you were trying to get rid of would still be a problem?

Think of one thing from the list that you would like to get rid of. Go outside to your own sacred space, ground and center, and just allow yourself to experience the thing you were trying to get rid of. Open yourself completely to the experience in the present moment, without assumptions about the past or expectations about the future. Just be in the now with the thing you were trying to get rid of.

Did this change your experience? By accepting it instead of trying to avoid it, do you look at it in a different way? What did being in your sacred space add to the experience, if anything?

2.9 Befriending the Bad Wolf

Let's revisit the idea of the good wolf vs. the bad wolf. If you need to refresh your memory about the story, you may wish to return to Section 0.5 and read it again before continuing.

There are things that you are consciously aware of, and there are things that you are not consciously aware of. The functions that you are not consciously aware of are regulated by a part of your body called the *autonomic nervous system*.

The autonomic nervous system is further divided into two major parts: The *sympathetic nervous system* and the *parasympathetic nervous system*. The sympathetic nervous system is in charge of your fight, flight or freeze responses. It is the part that is activated when you are stressed. When it is triggered your heart rate increases, your blood pressure rises, and your adrenaline starts flowing. It is the "bad wolf" that gets fed when we give in to thought and feeling cycles that produce anxiety or stress.

The parasympathetic nervous system, on the other hand, is responsible for calming you down after the danger has passed. When it is activated, your body stops pumping adrenaline. Your heart and respiration slow down, and tranquility returns. This is the "good wolf" we feed when we dwell on positive thoughts and feelings.

Both parts of the autonomic nervous system are necessary. While it's nice to feel calm and relaxed, there are times when we need to have the adrenaline pumping. If you're being chased by a bear, it's usually



not a good time to lie down and take a nap! The sympathetic nervous system protects us by preparing us to either fight or escape from the danger.

The “bad wolf” of the sympathetic nervous system also serves a useful purpose.

The problem is that the bad wolf, or the sympathetic nervous system, evolved long before civilization. Back then the dangers one might face on a day-to-day basis were more of a very real and physical nature. This bad wolf part of us evolved to keep us safe when predators attacked. But now we live in the modern world where the dangers are not so obvious. If the boss yells at me at work, it’s highly doubtful that his intention is to tear me to shreds (unless it’s in a metaphorical sense, of course), yet the bad wolf of the sympathetic nervous system still gets triggered.

This is because it only has three ways it can respond: Fight, flee or freeze. It doesn’t know the difference between a metaphorical threat and an actual physical danger. It doesn’t know the difference between the boss yelling and a bear growling and charging.

So whether the boss is yelling or a predator is stalking, the sympathetic nervous system has the same response. It’s going to gear up to fight, flee or freeze.

The reason for this is that the sympathetic nervous system’s job is to protect us. But since it doesn’t know the difference between the boss and a predator, its response to both situations is exactly the same. To further complicate matters, if I try to demand that the bad wolf stop what it’s doing, it’s going to see me as a threat as well. The more I tell the bad wolf to calm down, stop thinking about it, or to stop feeling, the more threatening I am to the bad wolf. He’s just trying to do his job, and I’m trying to stop him.

Experiential avoidance is one way we often try to keep the bad wolf from doing his job (Coelho, et al, 2007). The problem is that if we choose to avoid the messages we’re getting from the bad wolf, the bad wolf sees it as a threat, and responds with even more adrenaline in preparation for fighting or fleeing. When this happens, we are feeding the bad wolf.

What if, instead of trying to prevent the bad wolf from doing its job, we turn to it and thank it?

Remember, the bad wolf is just trying to protect us. It doesn’t mean us any harm. It’s just nature’s way of keeping us safe. When the bad wolf of the sympathetic nervous system gets triggered, we can thank him (or her) for doing the job it was designed to do (Miller, 2021). Next time your bad wolf is triggered, try saying this to yourself, while picturing yourself addressing the bad wolf:

“I hear you. I understand that you are trying to protect me, and I thank you for it, but I am no longer in danger. I release you from your duty. You are free to go now.”

You may need to repeat this several times, like a mantra, until the bad wolf returns to a calmer state.

When you thank the bad wolf in this manner, you engage the parasympathetic nervous system’s calming power. The bad wolf sees that there is no more danger and doesn’t see you or the situation as a threat any longer. When this happens, the bad wolf feels it has done its job and is free to go.

What does the bad wolf have to do with living in the now?

The only moment that is real, the only moment that you can own, is this present one. You can’t own the past, and you can’t own the future. The bad wolf is trying to protect you from something that it sees as a

danger *in the future*. But here right now, in this present moment, the danger has not yet arrived. Here right now, in this present moment, the past is also over and done.

This means that if we are having stressful or depressing thoughts or feelings, those experiences are only happening in the mind (Coelho, et al, 2007). They are only the bad wolf barking and warning us of what it perceives to be danger. Since those experiences are just thoughts and feelings, and not real dangers, we can choose to sit quietly with them in the present moment, without having to do anything to fix them. In being mode, in the now, we can befriend the bad wolf, heeding its warning without having to give it more attention and energy than it deserves.

Coelho, H. F., Canter, P. H., & Ernst, E. (2007). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy: Evaluating current evidence and informing future research. *Journal of Consulting Clinical Psychology, 75(6)*, 1000–1005.

Miller, Brian. (2021). *Breathing Lessons: Skills for Activating Parasympathetic Recovery*. 10.4324/9781003049043-8-11.

2.10 True Self and the Now

When we learn to live in the now of existence, we can recognize that we are not our minds. We are something different. Our upstream thoughts about the past and downstream thoughts about the future are illusions, just as time is an illusion. The only reality we have, the only reality we can experience, is right here in the now, in this present moment.

When we come to this knowledge there is no need to avoid unpleasant thoughts and unpleasant feelings, because we can recognize them as illusory products of the mind trap. When we befriend the bad wolf of our sympathetic nervous system, it frees us from the need to avoid unpleasant thoughts and unpleasant feelings because we can see them for what they are. They are not malicious or evil processes. They are just the bad wolf trying to protect us from danger.

When we understand, in the present moment, that thoughts and feelings are just processes of the mind, and not who we are, we are able to live in True Self in the now of existence.

Session 3: Letting Go

Letting go creates space between you and problems that cause you stress. Once you have done everything in your power to solve a problem, you have done all you can, so at that point worry and stress are counterproductive. *Letting go* of the stress and anxiety doesn't necessarily mean letting go of the problem itself. Remember that telling yourself not to think about it is thinking about it! Instead, letting go means not feeling you have to react to the anxiety associated with the problem. The energy you might have used worrying about the situation could be put to better use in coming up with solutions. Learning to let go in this manner is the first step in learning the art of radical acceptance.



Facilitator Notes for Session 3: Letting Go

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 3* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy and must be covered in the session): Letting Go; Needs vs. Wants; The questions of Intention: 1. What is my intention in this situation? 2. Are my thoughts, feelings, and behavior supporting this intention? hiding in material possessions, riding the wave

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): The Seesaw; valuing people instead of possessions; the Cloudy Day analogy

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with Letting Go, after defining the concept for the class. If they have had any experiences where they have had difficulty letting go of something that has been bothering them, ask fellow students to offer suggestions on how to help them let go of the anxiety. Keep the focus on Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy and try to link the discussion to various “letting go” skills from the Session 3 materials if possible.

If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn’t time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

SESSION OUTLINE

3.0 The Bare Necessities

For this discussion on the bare necessities, have students list a few things that stress them out. Now ask them how many of those things had to do with something other than an immediate need of food, clothing, shelter, or love. The idea of the bare necessities exercise is that a great deal of our stress and anxiety comes from trying to keep up with and accumulate more and more possessions and material goods. If we learn to let go of the need for more “stuff” we can eliminate a lot of anxiety from our lives.

EXERCISE: Wants vs. Needs PRIORITY 1

Do this exercise in class if at all possible. If not possible due to time constraints, make sure to assign it as homework. The basic necessities for any human being are food, clothing, shelter, and love. Explain this, then have students list their needs and their wants. A “need” for purposes of this exercise is something the person could not survive without. A “want” is something it would be nice to have, but that is not absolutely essential for survival. Inevitably when I do this exercise, there are students who list “wants” as “needs.” For example, I’ve had people say that they “need” their cell phone in order to survive because it helps them stay in touch with family, etc. I generally let them go ahead and list it as a need, then during the conversation after the exercise, ask them to explain how their lives and/or their survival might be threatened if they didn’t have the cell phone. Gently guide them, but don’t force the issue. If they truly believe they would die without their cell phones, then let them continue to believe that. The idea of letting go of what they can is more important than the idea that they can’t let go of their cell phones. Once they’ve determined just how much they can survive without, link it to the idea of letting go as described in this section.

3.1 Alone in the Woods

A key concept from this section is the idea that happiness isn’t about our relationship to possessions. It’s about our relationship to ourselves and to others. Point out that “others” in this sense also included all wildlife, flora, and fauna, on the planet.

This section states, “The key (to letting go) is to ask ourselves openly and honestly how much of what we do in our lives is based on fulfilling our basic needs, and how much of what occupies our time has to do with chasing our wants and desires.”

At this point I usually ask the class how much of their time during the week is spent on meeting the tasks of fulfilling their basic needs, and how much of their time during the week is spent on chasing their wants and desires. I do so by asking them to put a percentage on each.

3.2 Letting Go: The Seesaw

If you happen to be fortunate enough to be able to conduct your workshops in a setting that has a playground with a seesaw, you can take this opportunity to give an actual demonstration or the principle of letting go by getting off the seesaw. Otherwise, you may just discuss it with your students.

The idea behind the seesaw is that relationships are reciprocal; what one person does influences and affects what the other person does. But if one person “gets off the seesaw” as described in the section, they’ve let go of a problem interaction by refusing to participate in it. Instead, they may choose to redirect the energy of the situation by asking the Questions of Intention: 1. What is my intention in this situation? 2. Does what I’m about to do or say reflect that intention?

In other words, if your intention is to have a productive and loving relationship with another person, are your words and actions supporting that intention, or doing just the opposite? What would it take to get off the seesaw by letting go of unproductive interactions?

3.3 Simplify

If someone can’t get enough alcohol or drugs, we consider that person to be an addict. If someone can’t get enough food and eats until they’re morbidly obese, we think that person has an eating disorder. If someone hoards household items or pets, we say that person has a hoarding disorder. However, if a person hoards more money than

they could ever need; we just consider that person to be a wise investor or a wealthy businessperson. But could it be that people who need to accumulate excessive amounts of material possessions are suffering from some sort of disorder themselves?

Hiding in material possessions allows us to avoid dealing with our own personal issues. Such a reliance on material possessions in an effort to avoid dealing with one's own emotions could technically be classified as an addiction, because such a person is using possessions as a way of numbing emotional pains and difficulties.

The three criteria for any addiction are withdrawal, tolerance, and loss of control. When applied to material possessions, these criteria might look like this:

Withdrawal: The person gets irritable or even angry when prevented from indulging in his "drug of choice." In this case, the drug of choice is material possessions. Such a person might react badly or even with anger when asked to stop buying so many things or obsessing over material wealth.

Tolerance: A person with an alcohol problem needs more and more alcohol to get the same "buzz" over time because they've built up a tolerance. A person with an addiction to material possessions might find that no matter how much money or "stuff" they accumulate, it's never enough.

Loss of Control: In substance abuse, loss of control often manifests when a person goes to the bar to have "one drink," then winds up sitting at the bar until closing time because they couldn't control their addictive behavior. With material possessions, such a loss of control might manifest with the person constantly buying more and more items or accumulating more and more wealth, and not being able to stop themselves, even if it's detrimental to their family relationships ("He never spends enough time with me!") or their social or occupational functioning ("Joe doesn't play golf anymore, he's always working"). This is sometimes referred to as "binge shopping."

If time permits, you might ask the class to discuss whether or not they think that material possessions could become an addiction. If so, how would such an addiction manifest, and how would Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy help to treat or cure it?

3.4 Change is Inevitable: A Tale of Two Friends

After sharing the *Tale of Two Friends* story from this section, I generally also share the Cloudy Day analogy. Suppose every day when I left my house, I expected it to be sunny and warm outside. This is not a realistic expectation because clouds and rain are a natural part of the weather. Likewise, if I expect never to be depressed or stressed out, that's not a realistic expectation, because being stressed or depressed is a natural occurrence among human beings. I usually ask the class if any of them knows anyone who has never been stressed out or depressed a day in their lives. This is usually good for a laugh, because there is nobody who has never been depressed or stressed out. The point is that stress and depression are just as natural as cloudy days. Expecting them to go away is like expecting the weather to always be sunny.

3.5 Everything Changes - Ride the Wave

Experiential avoidance means trying to avoid unpleasant experiences by telling ourselves not to think about them. The problem with telling ourselves not to think about unpleasant experiences is that telling ourselves not to think about them, is thinking about them!

The more we tell ourselves to stop having stressful thoughts, the more stressed out we become when we find we can't stop having stressful thoughts. Riding the wave is one way to sit quietly with the stressful and/or depressing thoughts until they subside on their own. When we sit quietly in being mode with our stressful thoughts, we are not trying to avoid them.

3.6 Mindful Openness: Mindfully Letting Go

Mindful openness is about gaining a sense of perspective on any problems that may be stressing us out in the present moment. As you read this, think about what you were worrying about on this exact day six months ago. Do you have difficulty remembering? Most people do. Likewise, six months to the day from this exact date, do you think you're going to remember what you're stressed out about today?

When reviewing this with your students, it's important not to minimize what they may be feeling in the present moment. If you have students who are stressed out or depressed don't try to engage in telling them to "snap out of it" or "stop worrying about it." If they do so, they are back to the experiential avoidance we discussed in the previous section.

Instead, validate their feelings while gently reminding them that “this too shall pass.” They can sit with the feeling until it passes if they desire. In doing so, they are not avoiding the experience of the feeling. And if they’re able to see the bigger picture and focus on what they might be feeling six months from now, they can take comfort in the fact that their current emotional state, however painful it might be, is a temporary one.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 4 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from Session 3 that weren’t covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

3.0 The Bare Necessities

“Do everything with a mind that lets go. Do not expect any praise or reward. If you let go a little, you will have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace. If you let go completely, you will know complete peace and freedom. Your struggles with the world will have come to an end.”

– Achaan Cha, *A Still Forest Pool*

As Achaan Cha reminds us, the more we can let go of things, especially things that trouble us, the more peace and freedom we are able to create. The only true needs any human being has are food, clothing, shelter and love. In some environments, we might not even need the clothing and shelter!

Think about all the things that have stressed you out or caused you depression in the past. How many of those depressing or anxious thoughts involved the pursuit of things other than food, clothing, shelter and love? If we could learn to be happy with the bare necessities of life, how much of what causes us stress and depression would disappear?

What do we really need in life? How do we distinguish our needs from our wants?

For the next few moments, think about all the things in your life that have caused you stressful thoughts and feelings. Next, think about all the things in your life that have brought you pleasurable experiences. Do you notice any recurring themes in the stressful experiences? How about the pleasurable ones? If so, make a mental note of common themes in both stressing and pleasurable experiences. Hold those themes in mind as you go on to the next worksheet, *Wants vs. Needs*.

3.0 Wants vs. Needs

Name: _____ Date: _____

Look back over the lists you created on the previous page. Place a check mark beside everything on the list that has brought you pleasure and place an 'X' beside everything that has brought you stress, depression or anxiety. Some of the things on your lists might have both an X and a check mark. For example, under the *wants* section, you might have listed, "A new car." You may have the desire for a new car, and the thought of getting a new one might have brought you pleasure, but now you find that the thought of payments, plus maintenance and upkeep are causing you stress. In that case, it's okay to put both an X and a check mark by the item.

When you have finished marking each list, count how many X marks you have, and how many check marks you have. Which list has more X marks, your *needs* list, or your *wants* list? What does this information tell you about the things in your life that cause you stress? Are you getting more stress from your *needs*, or from your *wants*?

What does this information tell you about the things in your life that cause you pleasure? Are you getting more pleasure and enjoyment from your *needs*, or from your *wants*? Once you've added up all the check marks and the X marks, go on to answer the questions below.

I had more check marks in my (circle one)

Wants List | Needs List

I had more X marks in my (circle one)

Wants List | Needs List

If you had more X marks in your NEEDS list, what specifically would you have to let go of in order to decrease the stressful thoughts associated with these items? For example, if you are stressed out about your diet, how could you change your thinking about the food you eat so that you could be more accepting of your dietary needs?

If you had more X marks in your WANTS list, is this a 'want' that you could do without? If you did without it, would your life be less stressful? How? Would having the item reduce your stress, or add to it? How?

3.1 Alone in the Woods

“Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts.”

— Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

The purpose of the *Needs vs. Wants* exercise is to demonstrate to us just how little we actually need in life to live a contented existence. We all need a few material possessions, but at some point we cease to own things, and things start to own us. If our happiness comes from the things that we own, what happens if we lose those things? Could we ever be happy again?

On the other hand, if happiness is something we learn to create from inside of ourselves, then nothing and no one can take that happiness from us. Happiness isn't about our relationship to possessions. It's about our relationship to ourselves and to others. Part of the art of letting go is recognizing our relationship to things that may be causing us stress in our lives. This can mean literal things like material possessions, or conceptual things like ideas and beliefs that are leading us into anxiety-producing thought patterns.

Imagine if we could let go completely, as the quote from Achaan Cha at the beginning of this chapter suggests. What if we could care about things and people without developing unhealthy attachments to them? What would our lives look like then?

In the mid-1990s I had the opportunity to conduct a personal experiment in *letting go*. During that time, I went off into the woods to live in a small cabin without utilities or running water. I remained there for nearly a year, cooking my meals on a coal-fired hibachi and bathing in a stream (The story of this Walden-like experience is recounted in my book, *Green Circles: A Sustainable*

The Happy Fisherman

Once upon a time, in a sleepy little seaside village there lived a fisherman. He spent his days in a tiny little rowboat catching just enough fish every day to sell at the market and satisfy his family's needs.

One day an American businessman watched this fisherman from the shore. He noticed that the fisherman fished until noon, then brought his catch to the market to sell. Once he'd sold the last fish, he went home.

After several days of watching the fisherman's activities, the businessman met him at the market for a chat.

“I've been watching you work, and I noticed that you only fish until noon,” said the businessman, *“Why don't you stay out longer? What could you be doing in the afternoon that's so important that you couldn't fish all day?”*

The fisherman replied, *“Why would I want to stay out longer? By noon every day, I catch enough fish to sell at the market. It gives me enough money to pay my bills and meet my daily needs. The rest of the time I spend playing with my grandchildren, taking siestas with my wife, and playing the guitar in the plaza.”*

“But if you stayed out all day, you could catch more fish and make more money,” said the businessman, *“and with more money, you could buy a bigger boat. Then with a bigger boat, you could catch even more fish, and buy more boats. Eventually you could have a whole fleet of fishing boats and open your own fishing company!”*

“Then what?” asked the fisherman.

“That's the best part!” said the businessman, *“Once you own a whole fleet of fishing vessels, you can create an international fishing conglomerate and sell it to the highest bidder for millions of dollars!”*

“Millions of dollars, eh?” said the fisherman, *“And what would I do with millions of dollars?”*

“Well,” said the businessman, *“You could retire to a little fishing village, where you could play with your grandchildren, fish, take siestas with your wife, and play the guitar in the plaza.”*

MORAL: *Sometimes less is more.*

Journey from the Cradle to the Grave). After living there in the woods alone for a month or so I found that my consciousness changed for the better.

The experience taught me how little I actually needed to survive and thrive. At the end of the year there in the woods, I found myself at complete peace with myself and the world around me. Even though I was living in a tiny cabin in the woods without running water or electricity, it was one of the happier and more peaceful times of my life. A large part of the reason for this is that I didn't have any attachments to material things weighing me down. I was able to let go of all of that, and to simply enjoy the pleasure of being.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that everyone should run off into the woods for a year. We can learn to let go of a lot of things in our lives without having to become hermits. The key is to ask ourselves openly and honestly how much of what we do in our lives is based on fulfilling our basic needs, and how much of what occupies our time has to do with chasing our wants and desires. When we can answer that, we have learned the art of letting go.

3.2 Letting Go: The Seesaw

Do you remember playing on a seesaw as a child? It always took two people. If one person got off the seesaw, the other couldn't play.

Relationships are like that. If you find yourself in a disagreement, and there is no resolution in sight, it's as if you and your partner are children playing on a seesaw. If you find yourselves going up and down, back and forth, with no end in sight, then maybe it's time to get off the seesaw.

If you are both on the "problem seesaw," and that problem doesn't seem to have a resolution, you can choose to remove yourself from the situation by letting go. Your partner can't play on the seesaw if you consciously choose to get off the seesaw yourself. Letting go is a way to get off the relationship seesaw.

In the martial art of Aikido, a smaller, weaker opponent can easily defeat a larger, stronger opponent. The reason for this is that Aikido doesn't meet an attack head-on. Aikido redirects the energy of the attack by avoiding it altogether. This idea from Aikido translates into relationships as well. By refusing to meet an attack head-on, you redirect the energy. When your partner pushes, you don't push back with equal force, you simply move out of the way. In other words, if your partner becomes highly agitated and emotional, you respond by becoming calmer, quieter and more rational. This is a skill that takes some practice, but if you can achieve it, you may be surprised at the results.

For example, suppose your partner says something like, "*You never do anything I like to do!*" Instead of arguing the point, you might agree to some extent. Notice that the statement "*You never do anything I like to do!*" is a global statement, using the word "never." Global statements are statements in which all-or-nothing thinking is being used. Such statements use words like "always" and "never" to try to paint black-and-white portraits of behaviors, ignoring the grey areas where most of life happens. If your partner used such a global statement, you could redirect the energy of your partner's attack by changing it to a specific, rather than global, statement, and by agreeing to a specific instance, by saying something like, "*That's true, last night I didn't do what you wanted to do. I watched television instead.*"

If your partner's intent is to start an argument by stating that you never do what they want to do, you've gotten off the seesaw by calmly agreeing to a specific instance where that statement was true, but you've

also changed it from a global to a specific instance. In this case, you've taken the negative energy out of the situation, because if you're agreeing with your partner, then there's nothing to fight about.

The key to getting off the seesaw is to meet your partner's high energy attacks with a low energy response, in a calm, quiet, and mindful manner. To do this, it helps to focus on what your intention is in the situation. The questions of intention we discussed in Session 1 are:

1. What is my intention in this situation (what am I trying to accomplish here)?
2. Are my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors going to help me to achieve this intention?

For example, if it is my intention to have a happy relationship, but I'm always arguing and fighting with my partner, does my behavior match my intention?

A simpler and more succinct way of putting it is: *"Is it more important to me to be right, or is it more important to be happy in this relationship?"*

By looking at our intentions openly and honestly, we can let go of behaviors that aren't working and to focus on those behaviors that are helping us to achieve our objectives. We can talk about problems all day, but until we start talking about solutions, nothing ever gets solved (Barnes, et al, 2007). By learning to let go of the problem, we can more easily manifest the solution. When we have done so, we will have learned to let go by getting off the problem seesaw.

Barnes, Sean & Brown, Kirk & Krusemark, Elizabeth & Campbell, W. Keith & Rogge, Ronald. (2007). The role of mindfulness in romantic relationship satisfaction and responses to relationship stress. *Journal of marital and family therapy*. 33. 482-500. 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00033.x.

3.3 Simplify

We live in a materialistic society. We're constantly bombarded with messages that if we eat the right foods or wear the right clothes or drive the right car, we'll achieve instant happiness. But if that's really true, why are there so many millionaires whose personal lives are in tatters?

Given the choice between being the richest person in the world, yet living totally alone, or having just enough to get by, but living with a family and friends who love and care about you, which would you choose? The people who truly love us don't care about what sort of car we drive or what sort of clothes we wear. They love us for who we are, not what we own or

Optional Activity: Survival Camping

If you enjoy camping, here's an exercise you might try in order to learn how to simplify.

I once had a friend who bragged about being able to camp by only taking a knife and a ball of string. He had learned how to minimize his camping experience, so he didn't have to lug a ton of camping equipment into the woods. He was an expert in backpack camping.

You can learn from my friend's skills. Next time you plan to camp, look at your usual list of camping supplies. How much of it could you truly do without? Make a list for a weekend camping trip, taking only the bare necessities. Don't leave anything behind (like food or water) that might be a safety issue but try to leave the luxuries at home. Instead of taking a cooler, try taking MREs or foraging (only forage if you know what you're doing!). Instead of taking a cot and a tent, try taking a portable hammock with a rain fly, etc.

After camping this way for a weekend, do you notice anything different about your camping experience? Was it less or more enjoyable than your usual camping style?

what we can buy for them. Likewise, the people who truly love us and care about us are more interested in our presence than in our presents.

The more possessions you own, the more time you spend paying for and maintaining your possessions. The more time you spend on your possessions, the less time you have to spend with family and friends, or even with yourself. The more stuff you own, the more time you have to spend working in to get the money to pay for and care for all that stuff, and the less time you have to spend doing the things you truly enjoy.

I once had a friend who wanted a big fancy boat. He worked hard until he could afford the down-payment on the boat, and then he was finally able to realize his dream. The problem came in when he started making payments on the boat. He soon found that he was working so much overtime paying for the boat that he never had the opportunity to actually *enjoy* the boat. He had not yet learned the art of simplifying by letting go.

Of course, there must be a balance. A certain amount of money is required simply to stay alive and to meet our basic needs. But one thing the current economic crisis has done, is to force us all to get by on less. In some ways this can be a good thing. It re-focuses our attention on what's important in life. Our basic needs are food, clothing, shelter and love. Anything beyond that is candy. And we all know what happens when you eat too much candy!

Going back over the *Needs vs. Wants* list you just created in the exercise from Section 4.0, how many of the material possessions on your list are things you could do without? How many of them are basic necessities of life?

Sometimes possessions can be places to hide. Engaging in activities centered on possessions can be great escapes from dealing with our problems. We probably all know some husband who goes out in the garage and tinkers with the car in order to avoid intimacy with his wife. We also probably all know some wife who avoids intimacy with her husband by logging onto social media, or children who avoid interacting with their parents by playing video games all day.

What if we valued people more than possessions? How would that change our world?

If you find yourself using your possessions as a place to hide, a place to avoid connecting with others, with nature, or even with yourself, then make a promise to yourself right now that you will simplify your life. Maybe you could do with a few less new outfits. Maybe you could drive your car for another year or two instead of working overtime to pay for a new one. Maybe you could have a nice healthy home-cooked meal instead of gobbling down more greasy, fried fast food.

Mindfulness teaches us to slow down and focus on one thing at a time. The mindfulness of ecotherapy teaches us that we can slow down in our lifestyles as well. If we savor every moment, then we don't have to fill those moments up with an endless stream of meaningless possessions. The more we can simplify our lives by eliminating the unnecessary clutter, the more we can practice the art of letting go.

3.4 Change is Inevitable: A Tale of Two Friends

I have two friends who talk about the weather a lot. One always complains about the weather. When the sun shines, he complains about the heat. When the sun doesn't shine, he complains about the cold. When it's cloudy out, he complains about the rain. Nothing the weather ever does seems to satisfy him.

My other friend talks a lot about the weather too, but her approach is different. When it's rainy out, she says, "*I'm so thankful for the rain! My plants could sure use it!*" When it's sunny out, she says, "*I'm so glad for the sunshine!*" When it's cold out, she says, "*Good, I needed a good excuse to curl up in front of the fire with a book and a cup of tea.*"

Both these people live in the same area. They both experience the same weather on the same days. What's different about these individuals is how each of them chooses to view change. One has learned to let go by practicing the art of mindful acceptance. She has learned that rainy days are at least as important as sunny ones. With this knowledge, she has learned to cherish and be thankful for all types of weather.

We tend to grumble and complain when bad things happen to us. We don't like to be in pain or misery. We don't even like to be inconvenienced. We'd probably all love to have our way all the time. But think about that for a moment. If we never had any bad times, how could we appreciate the good times? If you could eat pizza every day, even if pizza was your favorite food, wouldn't you eventually get sick of it?

One aspect of mindful awareness is being mindful that change is inevitable. As the sage has said, "*This too shall pass.*" When change happens, we can accept it and go with the flow, or we can fight it and put ourselves in misery, like my friend who always complains about the weather (by the way, his complaining is pervasive. He complains about everything else in his life too!).

This concept of change applies to everything, even the bad times. So when things look bad, it may be helpful to remember that *this too shall pass*. This knowledge makes it easier to let go of the misery associated with bad times.

3.5 Everything Changes - Ride the Wave

I work a lot with people who have addictive behaviors. These addictions aren't necessarily to alcohol and other drugs. People can be addicted to food, to bad relationships, to anger, or to a host of other different things. All these things produce chemical changes in our brains.

Our bodies are complex systems of cycles. These cycles peak and trough throughout the day, and throughout our lifetimes. They come and go in waves. When certain waves peak together, that's when those addictive cravings hit. We may crave alcohol, or chocolate, or even an argument, to try to get our systems in balance again. When we're on top of that wave, it can feel like that urge is never going to go away.

Since these changes occur in cycles if you can "ride the wave," those urges will subside (Marlatt 1994). If we don't give in to them and wait patiently for them to go through their paces, we can take comfort in the fact that they will eventually go away. Mindful awareness helps us to know our bodies and their complex cycles. It also helps us to know that *this too shall pass*. If we learn to be with the feeling, it will eventually disappear on its own.

If we are troubled by addictions, whether to substances, material possessions, or emotional states of being, the way to ride the wave is to sit quietly in the moment with the craving. We know from personal experience that the craving will eventually subside, even though it may feel, in the moment, as if it is going to last forever.

But if we are able, just for a moment, to let go of the urge to indulge, then another moment, then another, eventually the craving may subside. Even if it doesn't, mindful awareness gives us the knowledge that we are not our cravings. We are in control if we choose to be. And we can mindfully choose to observe and describe the cravings to ourselves without having to act upon them. The more practice we have at this, the more we will be able to let go of those craving cycles when they occur.



Commentary. Mindfulness and metaphor in relapse prevention: An interview with G. Alan Marlatt.
Journal of the American Dietetic Association, 94(8), 846-848, 1994.

3.6 Mindful Openness: Mindfully Letting Go

Do you remember what you were stressed out about ten years ago? Five years ago? A month ago? A week ago? Yesterday?

Think about the things that are stressing you out *today*. In five or ten years, will these things still matter to you? *Mindful openness* is the quality of learning to zoom out and see things in the bigger picture.

Imagine you were required to write a biography about your life from birth up to this present moment. Further imagine that you only had a paragraph or two (say 300 words or less) to write that biography. It

may help to think of this couple of paragraphs as an entry in a sort of “Who’s Who” of your life and accomplishments.

What would you say about yourself in such a small space that would describe the essence of who you are?

How much space would you have in that biography to talk about the things that are stressing you out *at this moment*?

Mindful openness is a way of gaining a sense of perspective on life’s problems. It’s a way of focusing on the forest rather than on each individual tree. By seeing the problem in the context of our whole lives, we are more easily able to let go of any stress and anxiety it generates.

It’s important to note that letting go doesn’t mean that we pretend that the problem doesn’t exist. The idea isn’t to ignore the problem, or even to try to make it go away. The idea is to consciously observe and describe the problem while choosing not to ‘buy into’ the anxiety it generates. We’re not letting go of the problem. We’re letting go of the anxiety it creates.

When we learn to do this, we have mastered the art of letting go (Cordon, et al, 2009).

Cordon, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Gibson, P. R. (2009). The role of mindfulness-based stress reduction in perceived stress: Preliminary evidence for the moderating role of attachment style. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, 23(3), 258–269.

Session 4: Radical Acceptance

Mindful Awareness teaches us the art of *acceptance*. Emotional reactions to our circumstances are natural, but that doesn't mean that we must respond to these emotions. The mindful skill of *radical acceptance* teaches us that we can experience these emotions without engaging in cycles of behavior that lead us to negative consequences. Acceptance teaches us that we are not our thoughts, and that we are not our emotions. At any time, we can choose which thoughts and emotions we wish to respond to. When we have learned the art of letting go in this manner, we have learned radical acceptance.



Facilitator Notes for Session 4: Radical Acceptance

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 4* Course Materials, try the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group. If you haven't already done so, participate in at least one guided mindful meditation, then practice facilitating at least one mindful meditation with a friend or co-facilitator prior to doing it with your group (you may download several recordings of mindful meditations at www.mindfulecotherapy.org in the *Resources* section). For your own guided meditation, you may create your own script or use the one included in the materials for the session. If creating your own script, try not to deviate too far from the central idea of being in the present moment.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Acceptance; True Self; Radical Acceptance; Crystal Ball Thinking; Basic Mindful Meditation; acceptance vs. change; radical acceptance of True Self

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): “If we are victims of our circumstances, we will always be victims. But if we are victims of our beliefs about our circumstances, then we are always free to change our beliefs;” observing and describing thought cycles; mindful acceptance; Naming Ceremony

INTRODUCTIONS

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with the first session. If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn't time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

SESSION OUTLINE

4.0 Acceptance

Discuss the concept of acceptance.

Definition of acceptance: The mindful skill of acceptance teaches us that we can experience thoughts and emotions without engaging in cycles of behavior that lead us to negative consequences. Acceptance teaches us that we are not our thoughts, and that we are not our emotions. At any time, we can choose which thoughts and emotions we wish to respond to.

4.1 Things That Cause Me Stress

Discuss the concept of stress. At this point in the session, I usually ask the group for a show of hands: “How many people here today have never had a stressful day in their entire lives?” This is usually a good time to revisit the Cloudy Day analogy from Session 1. This analogy is that stress is like a cloudy day. Both are natural occurrences.

Definition of stress: When things we care about don’t go the way we expected.

If we didn’t care about anything, we’d never have stress about anything. The positive side of stress is that it lets us know there are things we care about.

This discussion on stress is a prelude to completing the next exercise: *Things That Cause Me Stress*.

Exercise: Things That Cause Me Stress – PRIORITY = 1

If using the workbook with your group, encourage students not to read ahead prior to completing this exercise (unless, of course, you assigned the chapter for homework prior to the session). Students are asked to list some everyday things that cause them stress. After they have done this portion of the exercise, have them go back and write a “P” beside anything that has to do with events that happened in the past, and an “F” beside anything that has to do with events that may or may not happen in the future.

If your students are like most people, there won’t be many items on the list that don’t have an F or a P beside them. The point to this exercise is that very few things that cause us stress are happening in the present moment. This means that we can use the present moment to choose what to believe about the past or the future.

Sometimes you will get students who say that they’re being bothered in the present moment by thoughts and feelings about past or future events. That’s perfectly okay, as it wonderfully illustrates the point of this exercise. If they’re bothered in the present moment by stressful thoughts and feelings, they haven’t yet learned how to select what to believe about those thoughts and feelings, which are just thoughts and feelings, and not any real danger. The next section will begin to teach them how to deal with stressful thoughts and feelings in the present moment.

4.2 Escaping Stress in the Present

One way to achieve radical acceptance of the things that stress us out is to realize that if we are victims of our circumstances, then we cannot control our lives. This is because we cannot control what goes on outside of ourselves. We cannot control what other people do, and we can rarely control what life throws at us. So, if we are victims of our circumstances, we will always be victims. But if we are victims of our *beliefs* about our circumstances, then we are always free to change our beliefs. Doing so frees us from the tyranny of the past and the anxiety of the future.

Note also that the goal here is not to try to stop or suppress stressful thoughts. If I am having stressful thoughts, and my goal is to stop having stressful thoughts, then telling myself, “Stop having stressful thoughts!” is itself a stressful thought! *Experiential avoidance* is the tendency we all have at times to try to avoid stressful or depressing thoughts by telling ourselves not to think about it. It’s the psychological equivalent of trying to hold a beach ball underwater. The harder we try to push those thoughts beneath the surface, the more they push back and try to re-surface.

The goal here is not to try to stop stressful thoughts and feelings. The goal here is to allow ourselves to experience those stressful thoughts and feelings without having to believe they are true.

For example, suppose I have a thought, “I’m going to fail.”

If I choose to believe that this thought is true, that I'm going to fail, then it is highly likely that this thought will become a self-fulfilling prophecy and I will act in ways that will lead me to fail. But what if I had the thought, "I'm going to fail," and I just recognized it as a product of my mind? Since I am not my thoughts, I can choose to identify with that thought, or I can choose not to believe that thought. Sure, I might fail, but it's also possible that I might not fail. Even if I do fail, at least it means that I made the effort instead of doing nothing.

If I allow myself to experience such thoughts and feelings without choosing to make them a part of my identity, I am escaping stress in the present by acknowledging those thoughts and feelings without identifying with them.

4.3 Crystal Ball Thinking

Props often come in handy when illustrating concepts from this program. If you can purchase a small crystal ball it may help to have one handy when discussing this concept. You may even use humor to illustrate the concept by handing your crystal ball to a group participant and asking them to gaze in it and tell you what another person in the group is thinking.

There are two types of crystal ball thinking: One is trying to predict the future and the other is trying to predict what others are thinking or feeling. Be sure to cover both types when illustrating the concept.

4.4 Mindful Acceptance

Mindful acceptance is the ability to set aside our expectations and assumptions about self and about others so that we may be more accepting of our own true selves and of the other people in our lives.

The concept may be illustrated by explaining the difference between "validating" and "condoning." I can validate another person's right to feel the way they feel without having to agree with their feelings or condone their behavior. For example, if someone is being verbally aggressive with me I can validate their right to feel upset without condoning abusive behaviors.

Mindful Acceptance is a key concept for most of the lessons to follow, so make sure all students have a good grasp of the concept before moving on.

4.5 A Basic Mindful Meditation

At this point conduct a basic mindful meditation with the group. You may create your own script for such a meditation if you are comfortable doing so, or you may just have participants close their eyes and focus on their breathing while you read the bullet points in this section of the book.

As you do the meditation, be mindful of the time. Try not to do the meditation for more than ten minutes so you will have time to cover the rest of the points in this session, but at the same time don't try to rush through the exercise. It may help to practice facilitating such a meditation several times with friends or family members before trying it in a group for the first time.

4.6 Radical Acceptance

Radical acceptance is the idea of mindful acceptance taken to the next level. Ask your students to think about the last time they were stressed or depressed, and to ask themselves, "Was my stress or depression the result of the circumstances in which I found myself, or was it the result of what I believed about those circumstances?"

Radical acceptance means realizing that if our distressing thoughts and feelings are the result of our circumstances, then we will always be victims of our circumstances. But if our distressing thoughts and feelings are the result of what we believe about those circumstances, then we have the power to change our world.

Use the graphic in this section of the book to illustrate that wisdom comes from knowing what we can change and what we have to accept. You might also wish to stress that "acceptance" doesn't mean we should accept situations that are abusive or unhealthy. In this case acceptance means that we may have to accept that it is time to end unhealthy or abusive relationships.

4.7 Radical Acceptance of True Self

I illustrate the concept of "True Self" by stating to students, "Everybody has a picture of how they would like to be, and a picture of how they actually see themselves. The closer these two pictures are, the less problems people have. The farther apart those two images are, the more problems a person is likely to have, because they're constantly asking themselves, 'Why can't I be like this?'"

The image you have in your head of how you would like to be is the image you have of your True Self. People learn to accept their True Selves in one of two ways:

1. By moving their perception of themselves closer to their image of their True Self; or,
2. By moving their image of their True Self closer to their perception of themselves.

Exercise: Radical Acceptance of True Self – PRIORITY = 1

Have students complete the *Radical Acceptance of True Self* exercise and facilitate a discussion by going over each item on the list and have students volunteer responses. Since this material is deeply personal, don't force students to participate if they don't want to, but have everyone list some generic examples of how they might learn to accept their True Selves.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 5 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from *Session 4* that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

4.0 Acceptance

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.” –from the Serenity Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr

Now that you have a basic understanding of some of the techniques of mindfulness, we’re about to go on a journey of self-discovery. Think back for a moment to a time in your life when you knew exactly who you were, and what you wanted to be. It may have been a time in your childhood, or a time later in your life. Or it may be that you’ve never thought about exactly who you were and who you wanted to be. That’s okay too. Perhaps you’ve never just learned how to acknowledge your own motivations in this way.

If this is the case, close your eyes and think for a moment about who you would be if there were no barriers keeping you from living up to your own potential (Rogers, 1980). Suppose you had the power to transform yourself into anyone. Who would you become?

The vision you have right now is called your *True Self*.

Hold that vision firmly in your mind as you read and complete this session’s materials.

Your True Self is that part of you that recognizes when you’ve done something in character for you. It is the part of you that is the internal observer; the part that holds your highest aspirations and your highest dreams for yourself. It is the part of you that holds your core values. The Humanist psychotherapist Carl Rogers called it your *Ideal Self*. According to Rogers, the Ideal Self is the person you would be if you could “*get out of your own way*” and dare to be who you were meant to be.

The ultimate goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) is to find the road to your own True Self, and to live more fully in it. If you’re not living in your True Self, what is it that is keeping you from doing so? MBE may help you to answer this question. This session’s materials will help you to begin to integrate your True Self into your being by learning to accept all parts of who you are as parts of yourself.

Rogers, Carl (1980). *A Way of Being*, Houghton Mifflin, New York, NY.

4.1 Things that Cause Me Stress

Stress is a natural part of life. Even the most laid-back person has experienced stress at some point. Radical acceptance teaches us that a certain amount of stress is normal, and that what’s important in life is not avoiding stress but learning how to deal with it when it comes.

To explore ways of dealing with the inevitable stressors of life, complete the exercise *Things that Cause Me Stress* on the next page.

4.1 Things That Cause Me Stress

Name: _____ Date: _____

Think about some of the things in your life that have caused you stress. List a few of these things in the space below. You don't have to fill up all the spaces on the list but try to think of at least 3 or 4 things.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____

4.2 Escaping Stress in the Present

One way of achieving radical acceptance is to practice letting go by paying attention to your immediate experiences. This is accomplished by focusing on the present moment. To illustrate how this works, go back to the list you've just created of *Things That Cause Me Stress*. For every item on the list that involves things that happened in the past, write a 'P' beside that item. For every item on the list that involves things that may or may not happen in the future, write an 'F' by that item.

Some of your responses might have both a 'P' and an 'F' beside them. You might be worried about something that happened in the past, and worried that it might happen again in the future. Maybe you've had past arguments with a family member, and you're expecting a visit from them. Based on past performance, you're expecting a future argument. For those items, it's okay to place both a 'P' and an 'F' beside them.

Looking back over the list again, how many items don't have either a 'P' or an 'F' beside them? If you're like most people who do this exercise, you probably don't have many, if any at all.

The point to this exercise is that most of the things that cause us stressful or depressing thoughts are things that involve past or future events. This means that we can consciously choose, right now in the present moment, which thoughts to give our energies to, and which thoughts and feelings to let go of.

It has been said that if you are worried about the past you are depressed, and if you are worried about the future, you are anxious. We have all been hurt in the past, and we tend to make educated guesses about what the future holds for us based on past performance. In this way, the future is just the past projected.

A way to achieve radical acceptance of the things that stress us out is to realize that if we are victims of our circumstances, then we cannot control our lives. This is because we cannot control what goes on outside of ourselves. We cannot control what other people do, and we can rarely control what life throws at us. If we are victims of our circumstances, we will always be victims.

But if we are victims of our *beliefs* about our circumstances, then we are always free to change our beliefs. Doing so frees us from the tyranny of the past and the anxiety of the future.

4.3 Crystal Ball Thinking

We are particularly good at anticipating the thoughts, actions, and feelings of others and ourselves by placing judgments on their perceived motives and intentions. Theoretically, this has survival value. If you're around a dangerous person, it's probably a good idea to anticipate what they might do that could threaten your wellbeing. So, we're good at it. The problem comes when we guess what another person is feeling or thinking, and we get it wrong. How often have you assumed what another person might be thinking or feeling? How often have you guessed incorrectly, and how did that person react?

When I was actively practicing marital therapy, the past got brought up quite often between partners who were arguing. The reason for this is that when a partner has done something wrong in the past the other partner automatically assumes that this behavior will continue in the future, based on past performance.

The problem, from the point of view of the partner being accused of wrongdoing, is that until someone invents a time machine he or she cannot go back in time and correct past mistakes. They can only

promise to do better in the future. If the other partner continues to bring up the past, this individual will be constantly battling the ghosts of previous behaviors.

By constantly bringing up the past, we forestall any opportunity for change in the future, because we judgmentally set up our perception filters only to look for evidence that confirms our assumptions. In this case, the assumption (or judgment) is that the past behavior will continue in the future. If we assume that this is true, then we're going to have a hard time seeing any evidence that confirms the opposite assumption: That this behavior will *not* continue in the future.

Likewise, a lot of arguments among family members come about because one family member guesses at what another family member is feeling at a given moment. Consider this conversation:

Jane: *"What are you mad about?"*

Joe: *"I'm not mad about anything."*

Jane: *"Yes you are, I can tell. So what is it?"*

Joe: *"I told you, I'm not mad about anything."*

Jane: *"Come on, I know you. I can tell when you're mad!"*

Joe: *"I'M NOT MAD!"*

In the above scenario, Jane's interpretation of Joe's emotional state became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although Joe wasn't angry at the start of the conversation, by the end of it he most definitely was!

In this context, radical acceptance means not making assumptions about what the other person is feeling or thinking. The easiest way to tell what a person is thinking or feeling at any given time is to simply ask them, and not to try to guess what their motivations or emotions might be. If you feel tempted to anticipate what a person is thinking or feeling, you are engaging in what I call *crystal ball thinking*.

Unless you have a crystal ball, you cannot possibly know what another person's thoughts or feelings may be. We often generate stress for ourselves by assuming what a person is thinking or feeling, and then acting based on our own assumptions of what we think other people may be experiencing. The truth is that unless you have a crystal ball, you can never know for certain what another person is thinking or feeling. The only way to know is to just ask them.

What I hear a lot from my patients and clients is, "But how can I know they're telling me the truth about what they're thinking or feeling?"

If you ask them, there's always the possibility that they can be deceptive in their answers, but if they are, then that's their responsibility, not yours. You're only obligated to act on the information they give you. You've given them the opportunity to be truthful. If they choose not to be, then you can't control their need to be emotionally distant or deceptive. If you continue to second-guess and mistrust their answers, then it might be time to ask yourself why you wish to continue a relationship with a person you obviously don't trust.

Another type of crystal ball thinking occurs when we try to make predictions about our own behaviors based on past experience. We can tell when this happens because there's a tendency to use statements like the following:

"I always screw things up."

"I'll never find love."

“I’m just not good enough for this.”

“I’ll never understand.”

Based on the examples above, you can probably come up with your own statements that reflect your own crystal ball thinking.

Note that identifying such statements doesn’t mean that we’re going to try to make them go away. Remember, *trying* is *doing*, and one of the objects of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is to leave doing mode and enter being mode. We’re not trying to change this inner dialog. Using the skill of mindful acceptance, we are just going to observe and describe these thought cycles to ourselves, without choosing to interact with them or to believe them to be true. Mindful acceptance means, in part, that we accept that on occasion our minds are going to engage in these crystal ball thinking cycles, but that doesn’t mean we have to believe what our minds are saying. Mindful acceptance is the knowledge that we are not our thoughts, and we are not our feelings. We are something else.

That something else is the *True Self*. The True Self accepts that minds occasionally generate thoughts that can be negative. But the True Self also recognizes that these thoughts are just thoughts, and they are neither true nor false unless we choose to believe that they are. True Self recognizes that our brains are going to do what they’re good at, and that’s generating thoughts and feelings. But when we’re living in True Self, we can recognize that even though our brains are going to generate thoughts and feelings, we don’t have to let those thoughts and feelings bully us or push us around.

The True Self also knows through experience that if we can enter being mode and sit quietly with these thoughts and feelings that they may eventually subside. And even if they don’t, True Self knows that those crystal ball thoughts cannot touch us unless we choose to let them. They are only “true” if we decide to make them true.

The way to escape crystal ball thinking is to remember your mindful awareness skills. Crystal ball thinking is just another type of thinking, and thinking is doing. The goal is to move from troublesome thoughts about the past or anxious thoughts about the future by shifting from doing mode to being mode. In the being mode, there is no past, and there is no future. There is only this present moment. If we are truly connected to the present moment, then we avoid the temptation to blame others or ourselves for our past mistakes, or to try to anticipate what our future mistakes might be.

In being mode, mindful acceptance becomes possible because we are not using our crystal balls to make educated guesses about our own motivations or the motivations of other people. Educated guesses are still guesses, and mindful acceptance is a way of setting such guesses aside while being present in the moment with self and others.

When we learn the art of acceptance, we also learn to accept that whatever other people may be feeling or thinking in the present moment is their responsibility, and not ours. The only responsibility we have to ourselves is to change ourselves to accommodate our own sense of wellbeing. When we can ground and center ourselves using mindful acceptance, we are able to share our own sense of wellbeing with others.

If this involves changing how we respond to difficult people, the choice is still ours. We get to decide whether such a change is worth it or not (Coyle, 2009). Radical acceptance doesn’t mean accepting any sort of abusive treatment from others. It means being able to set firm and consistent boundaries with abusive people. In some cases, mindful acceptance can mean accepting the fact that an abusive person isn’t going to change, and in that case, we will have to accept the loss of the relationship.

That's okay too. Living in True Self means accepting that you as a worthy child of the universe do not have to accept being abused, whether that abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal.

Coyle, James P. (2009). *An Exploratory Study of the Nature of Family Resilience*, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.

4.4 Mindful Acceptance

"Never underestimate your power to change yourself; never overestimate your power to change others." -- H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

One of the more difficult lessons of life is that we cannot change the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others. We can only change our own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The best we can do where others are concerned is to ask them to change. Then if they are willing to change, they will; however, if they are not willing to change, then at that point we've done all we can do. Further attempts to get them to conform to our expectations of them are doomed to failure because we are not in charge of how other people choose to live their lives.

In Session 1 we discussed some of the skills of mindfulness. One of those skills is *being non-judgmental*. If we are trying to change others in an attempt to get them to conform to our expectations of them, we are judging them to be less than perfect (by our standards, at least) as they are now. But what if we set aside attempts to change others? What if, using the power of being non-judgmental, we were able to recognize that people are doing the best they can in the only ways they know how? Would such a change in viewpoint allow us to accept them for who they are?

4.5 A Basic Mindful Meditation

Mindful meditation is letting go of doing mode and embracing being mode while focusing on the moment. This act of letting go allows us to enter being mode because we are accepting ourselves and our situations in the present moment, free of expectations, judgments, or assumptions. It is an exercise in mindful acceptance of self.

One of the simplest ways to do a mindful meditation is to focus on something and to allow ourselves to experience it through our senses, without expectations or assumptions. For centuries, Buddhists who practice mindful meditation have focused on the breath. The reason for this is that our breath is always with us. By focusing on our breath, we may engage in mindful meditation almost anywhere, at any time by directing our attention to the sensations of our breathing.

The following basic mindful meditation contains instructions on how to practice *Mindful Breathing*. You may wish to record yourself speaking it so that you may play it back and follow along. Alternately, you may watch a video recording of it for free at <https://mindfulecotherapy.org/videos>. You may also look for *Basic Mindful Meditation* in the 'Search' box on the website.

Read over the bullet points below at least once to gain an understanding of the process of basic mindful meditation before trying it:

- To begin this Basic Mindful Meditation, find a comfortable position, free of distractions, either sitting or lying down. Align your spine so that you are free of any stress points. If you are wearing any tight clothing, you may wish to loosen it. It is best to practice this meditation at least an hour after eating, as digestion tends to interfere with relaxation.
- When you find your comfortable position, close your eyes.
- Remember that at any time during this meditation, should you encounter thoughts or feelings that become overwhelming to you, it is best to cease the exercise until you can return to it in a calmer state.
- To begin, first center yourself. To center yourself, let go of the cares of the day by turning your attention inward. Focus on nothing but the sensations of your breathing.
- To allow yourself to just “be,” gradually become aware of thoughts and feelings you may be experiencing.
- In being mode we realize that just because we are having thoughts and feelings, we do not have to act upon them.
- Notice the sensations of your abdomen as it rises and falls with each breath. Turn your attention inward as you focus only on your breathing. You are not trying to go any place; you are not trying to do anything. You are simply present in this moment, observing your body as you breathe.
- As you continue to focus only on your breathing, you may notice that from time to time your mind begins to wander. This is only natural. It’s what minds do. Be aware that if your mind wanders, you don’t have to follow it. Simply wait for your mind to return to you by continuing to focus on your breathing.
- If you do notice your mind wandering, don’t consider this to be a failure. If you start judging yourself for allowing your mind to wander, such thoughts are simply more thoughts, and one of the objects of Mindful Meditation is to empty your mind of thoughts so that you can just “be.” If you find yourself having such thoughts, just return to your breathing and allow your mind to come back to you by returning your attention only to your breathing.
- As you continue to breathe, remember that there is no past, there is no future. There is only this present moment. Allow yourself to be in this moment...here and now. Any time your consciousness wanders, return to the ‘now’ of the present moment.
- To end the meditation, gradually expand your awareness. If you are sitting, allow yourself to become aware of how your body contacts the chair. If you are lying down, allow yourself to feel how your body contacts the bed or the floor.
- Continue to expand your consciousness outward until you become aware of your immediate surroundings.
- When you feel you are ready, slowly open your eyes and return to yourself.

Conclude this mindful meditation by taking with you any insights, thoughts, or feelings you may have gained in your practice. As you end this meditation, open your eyes while remaining calm, yet alert and relaxed.

4.6 Radical Acceptance

"To be a human being means to possess a feeling of inferiority which constantly presses towards its own conquest. The greater the feeling of inferiority that has been experienced, the more powerful is the urge for conquest and the more violent the emotional agitation."

-- Alfred Adler

Mindful acceptance means learning what we can change and what we cannot. *Radical acceptance* is a type of mindful acceptance that is the ability to set aside our expectations and assumptions about self and about others so that we may be more accepting of our own true selves and of the other people in our lives.

Radical acceptance is the knowledge that if our problems come from our circumstances, there's little we can do to change the situation, but if our problems come from what we *believe* about our circumstances, we can always change our beliefs.

Radical acceptance is the idea of *mindful acceptance* taken to the next level. Think about the last time you were stressed or depressed, and ask yourself, *"Was my stress or depression the result of the circumstances in which I found myself, or was it the result of what I believed about those circumstances?"*

If our distressing thoughts and feelings are the result of our circumstances, then we will always be victims of our circumstances. But if our distressing thoughts and feelings are the result of *what we believe* about those circumstances, then we have the power to change our world. We often cannot control what life throws at us, but we are always in control of what we think and feel about what happens to us. We can choose what to believe, and therefore what meaning to create, from the experience.

Optional Activity: Naming Ceremony

Most indigenous peoples from around the world named their children after things found in nature. We are familiar with this practice through the names of Native Americans like Sitting Bull or Crazy Horse, but many people aren't aware that the practice was worldwide.

Native American names have obvious sources in nature, but did you know that many other names have their origins in the natural world? My middle name, "Bruce," means "brushwood thicket." The name "Glen" originally meant "from the fertile valley," the name "Mary" means "wished for child," the name "Ann" means "merciful one," etc.

As you begin your journey to living in True Self, you may wish to select a new name for yourself that reflects this new identity.

To do this, first go outside to a natural place. The wilder, the better. If you have the time and the opportunity you may wish to do this activity in a national or state park.

Prepare yourself by taking several deep breaths, and by grounding and centering yourself. Once you feel prepared, go into the forest. Keep your attention open and accepting. Set your intention on the activity.

Continue to walk in the forest until you find something that appeals to you. This could be any natural object, animal or plant that you find yourself attracted to. This thing that caught your attention shall be your new name.

For example, if you are walking on the trail and see a hawk fly overhead, you might choose the name, "Flying Hawk."

Once you have found your new name, you may wish to have a ceremony where you announce it to your family and friends. This ceremony may be as formal or as informal as you like. This is your own rite of passage, so you may craft it to meet your needs and expectations.

Now that you have your new name, use it when exploring the skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy.

At our workshops, selecting this name is one of the first things we do. Workshop attendees are addressed by their "nature name" for the duration of the course. This helps to reinforce the idea that attendees are becoming new people, as are you as you progress through this workbook.

The Lakota have a saying, *“It is a good day to die.”*

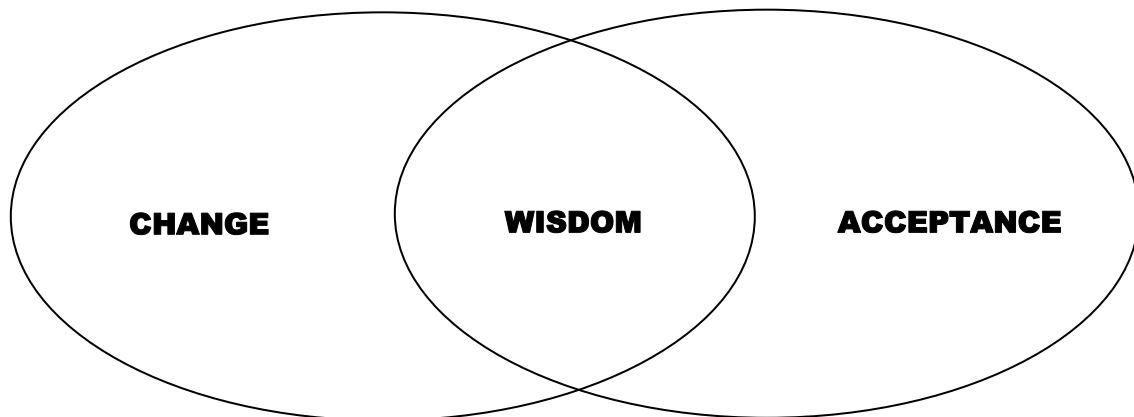
This saying doesn't mean that the Lakota went into battle hoping to die. It meant that they were wise enough to know that if they were prepared for their own deaths and had accepted the fact that one day they would die, then nothing else could conquer them.

What if you knew that today was your last day on earth? What would you do differently? Who would you wish to speak with? What would you like to tell them? How would you treat the people you meet today?

“It is a good day to die,” is not a wish to cease to exist. It is an acknowledgement that a life lived fully is a life that is at peace with whatever may come. It is a life that focuses on the joy of living in the moment. This radical form of mindful acceptance asks the question, *“Once we have conquered our fear of death, what else can touch us?”*

The lesson of this saying is that there are things within our control, and things not within our control. True wisdom is the ability to know what we can control and to distinguish that from what we must accept. It is a way of saying, *“I am one with all that is, all that was and all that ever will be.”*

Suppose you could graph this concept. It might look something like the drawing below:



In this graphic, there are things we have the power to change, and things that we must accept. In other words, true wisdom lies where change and acceptance meet. This is not always as easy as it sounds. A rule of thumb for making this determination of what we can change and what we must accept is to ask ourselves, *“Am I trying to impose my own will on what the universe is showing me?”*

Wisdom lies in remembering that in this life, we don't attract what we *want*, we attract what we *are*. The good news is that we have the ability to determine who we are, and nobody else can take that from us. When we are secure in this knowledge, we will gain the wisdom to know that which can be changed and that which should be accepted. This is the essence of radical acceptance.

4.7 Radical Acceptance of True Self

“All behavior is purposeful if you understand the context.”

– Alfred Adler

People do all sorts of crazy things. Some people smoke, some people do illicit drugs, some people engage in risky hobbies like skydiving or rock climbing, some engage in criminal activities, and many participate in behaviors that, to an outside observer, might look downright harmful. Have you ever had a friend or family member who insisted on doing things that were potentially dangerous to themselves or to others?

Adler’s quote above explains such self-harming behaviors.

To someone without a substance abuse problem, it is difficult to understand how someone could abuse dangerous drugs like opioids or methamphetamine. To someone not in the depths of despair and depression, it might be impossible to understand how suicide might look like a viable option to a person locked in their own personal hell. Suicide might even be considered a selfish act to a person who doesn’t understand the harsh effects of depression on the human mind and brain.

But to someone with an addiction problem, or to someone with suicidal tendencies, their behavior makes perfect sense. Perhaps to a person with an addiction, getting high beats the alternative of having to live with overwhelming emotions. Perhaps to a suicidal person, death looks like a more viable option than having to live with overpowering emotional pain. In either case, to the person engaging in the behavior, the behavior makes perfect sense.

Every human being has experienced occasional feelings of shame, guilt, blame, or inferiority. Such feelings are a natural part of the human condition. Unfortunately, they can also be the source of many of the problems we experience with our relationships, careers, spiritual endeavors, and day-to-day living.

As human beings we’re conditioned to disown certain parts of ourselves. We don’t like to admit our feelings of anger, shame or guilt, because doing so might mean that we are less than perfect. But what does “perfect” really mean?

Try this sometime: Ask three of your closest friends or family members what their idea of the “perfect day” is. I’m willing to bet you’ll get at least three different answers. So if you do get three different answers to the question, *“Describe your perfect day,”* what does “perfect” really mean?

The obvious answer to this is that the term “perfect” is defined by the individual. This means that your idea of perfect might be completely different from my idea of perfect. Each of us is in charge of what “perfect” means to us.

The good news about this is that if “perfect” is self-defined, and if my own personal idea of what “perfect” means is causing me stress, then I am free to change it at any time. The way to do this is to realize that all of us have feelings of depression, stress, or anxiety from time to time. All of us fail to live up to our own expectations for ourselves from time to time. We may choose to beat ourselves up for failing to be “perfect,” or we may choose to realize that as human beings, failing to be “perfect” is a natural part of existence.

By learning to love ourselves “warts and all,” we learn the art of radical acceptance of the True Self.

The next page contains an exercise for determining who you are and what you would like to become. It is designed to help you identify your True Self, and to accept that this is who you are. You may wish to make several copies of the exercise, doing one each week until you complete the course. Notice how your answers change over time!

The last session in this course and in this workbook is *Living in True Self*. You may re-visit the *Radical Acceptance of True Self* exercise after completing Session 12 as a means of charting your progress over the duration of the course, so you may wish to keep your answers as you do this exercise for the first time.

4.7 Radical Acceptance of True Self

Name: _____ Date: _____

Of the things about yourself above that generate feelings of blame, guilt, or shame, do any of them reveal hidden strengths? How? Example: If you get angry easily, could it be because you are passionate about the things you care about? Could this passion be turned into a strength?

What are some ways that you could accept these feelings of blame, guilt or shame as parts of yourself without having to buy into them? Are there any ways that you could think about these feelings and thoughts so that they are no longer a problem? Be as specific as possible in your answers.

How would these different ways of believing and behaving about your thoughts and feelings create a more compassionate and positive reality in your life? To complete this section, you may wish to draw upon your responses to the *Being Effective: The Power of Intention* exercise from Session 1.

4.7 Radical Acceptance of True Self

Name: _____ Date: _____

What would have to change about the way you view yourself in order for you to be able to live more fully in your True Self?

What strengths do you possess that will allow you to make those changes?

What are some potential things that could go wrong when you plan to make those changes?

What are some potential solutions if those things go wrong?

The more experience we gain in achieving radical acceptance, the more we can live in True Self. Such acceptance allows us to deal with ourselves as we really are. There are two ways to achieve this: We may either change the way we see ourselves to bring it more in line with our True Selves, or we may change our concept of True Self to bring it more in line with the way we see ourselves. When we have done either of these (or both of these), we will be living in *Wise Mind*.

Session 5: Wise Mind and Wise Body

When you are being logical, rational, and devoid of emotion, you are in *Rational Mind*. When you are allowing your thoughts to be driven by your emotions, you are in *Emotional Mind*. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy seeks *Wise Mind*. Wise Mind is the joining of Rational Mind and Emotional Mind in perfect balance and harmony. It is a moving beyond opposites to a mindful state of acceptance. Likewise, when we come to realize that there is no line between mind and body, and that they are one and the same, we can move beyond the duality that implies that mind and body are separate entities. From there we see that the body can change the mind, and the mind can change the body. Wise Mind and Wise Body is the first step to living in True Self.



Facilitator Notes for Session 5: Wise Mind and Wise Body

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 5* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group. Practice facilitating at least one sensory integration meditation with a friend or co-facilitator prior to doing it with your group (you may download several recordings of mindful meditations at www.mindfulecotherapy.org in the *Resources* section). If you would like to view a video specifically for the Sensory Integration Meditation, visit <https://mindfulecotherapy.org/videos> and scroll down to the video *entitled Sensory Integration Meditation*.

For your own guided meditation during Session 5, you may create your own script or use the one in the book. If creating your own script, try not to deviate too far from the central idea of being in the present moment while focusing on the senses.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Wise Mind, Emotional Mind, Rational Mind, Sensory Integration, Wise Body, mindful acceptance of discomfort; True Self, Wise Mind and Wise Body as one

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation; Hebb’s Postulate (“What fires together, wires together”); mindful eating; going inside the discomfort, and The Mindful Body of the True Self

INTRODUCTIONS

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with Wise Mind, after defining the concept for the class. If they have had any experiences where being too emotional or too rational has caused them problems, facilitate a discussion about how Wise Mind could have helped them out of that situation. If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn’t time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

SESSION OUTLINE

5.0 What is Wise Mind?

When we are being logical, rational, and devoid of emotion, we are in Rational Mind. When we are allowing our thoughts to be driven by our feelings, we are in Emotional Mind. A goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) is to achieve Wise Mind. Wise Mind is the joining of Rational Mind and Emotional Mind in perfect balance and harmony. It is a moving beyond opposites to a mindful state of acceptance.

You may wish to begin the session by reading this definition of Wise Mind, then asking each member of the group what Wise Mind means to them, and how it might help them to overcome a recent problem in which they were too emotional or too rational.

5.1 Wise Mind and Wise Body

This section affords a great opportunity to facilitate a discussion about the duality of mind/body thinking. In reality, our minds are a part of our bodies. By looking at things in this way, and considering Hebb's Postulate, we can actually re-wire our brains through the conscious and deliberate effort of meditation! Since the act of meditation causes the neurons in our brains to "fire together" in a new way, the neurons will "wire together" into circuits that promote greater relaxation, better concentration, better judgment, and better emotional regulation and distress tolerance.

5.2 Sensory Integration Meditation

For this section of the session, you will conduct a Sensory Integration meditation. You may do so by writing your own script or by reading the one out of the book. You can also view one at <https://mindfulecotherapy.org/videos>. In any case, practice the sensory integration meditation at least once on your own before conducting it in session. Ideally you should practice it several times before attempting to facilitate it with your class so that you will be intimately familiar with the sensations and reflections of the meditation. You may also wish to complete the exercise, *Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation* yourself before facilitating the class so that you will have a good understanding of the goals of the exercise.

5.3 Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation

EXERCISE: Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation PRIORITY 1

Have students complete the Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation exercise and facilitate a discussion by going over each item on the list and having your students volunteer responses. Since this material is deeply personal, don't force students to participate if they don't want to, but have everyone list some generic examples of what people might learn about themselves and their bodies by engaging in this meditation.

5.4 The Mindful Body and the Wise Mind

This section of the workbook discusses the connection between the mind and the body, and how powerful it can be. I often use a simple guided visualization to help illustrate the power the mind has over the body: I have the group close their eyes and visualize a lemon in great detail, asking them to imagine with all of their senses. What does the lemon look like? If they had to draw it, could they? What does its skin feel like in their hands? What is its scent as they hold it up to their noses, etc.? I then ask them to imagine slicing that lemon and taking a bite out of it. After the visualization is over, I ask them to raise their hands if their mouths began to water during the exercise. Usually at least half the class raises their hands at this point. My question for the class: "There was no actual lemon here, so why did your mouth water?"

The answer, of course, is obvious. Their minds tricked their bodies into experiencing the sensation of eating a lemon. This anecdotal exercise provides a great segue' to the next section on mindful eating.

5.5 Mindful Eating

If your groups are scheduled around a mealtime, you might be able to share a meal together while discussing the process of mindful eating. If not, you might bring a bag of chocolate kisses or some sort of fruit with which to engage in the Last Kiss exercise in order to illustrate the principle of mindful eating. If neither of these options are available,

you can just discuss the process of mindful eating with the group and ask them to experiment with it the next time they eat a meal.

5.6 Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort

DISCLAIMER: The Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort exercise is not to be used as a substitute for treatment for chronic pain by a licensed medical health care provider. If you have any students with chronic pain issues, advise them to consult with their doctors and other health care providers before attempting this exercise.

Since this is an exercise only for people with pain issues, and not everyone in your group may have a pain issue, the actual exercise is an optional one. Review the information in your session, if possible, but it is not necessary to engage in the actual exercise itself. If you choose to actually do the activity, have another activity on stand-by for those who don't have chronic pain issues.

EXERCISE: Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort - Priority 3

If you choose to do this activity during session, do so, have students complete the worksheets. If you choose not to do this activity during the session, you may assign it as homework for those who have issues with chronic pain. If you do this, remember to discuss the results at the icebreaker portion of the session next week.

5.7 Wise Mind, Wise Body, and True Self

The Serenity Prayer states,

*"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."*

This prayer may be graphed out as in Section 5.7. Where acceptance and change overlap, there is wisdom. In general, we can only change ourselves. We cannot change others. What we can do, is ask others to change, but if we ask and they are unwilling to change, then all we can do is to accept that this is the way things are. Note that this doesn't mean we should have to accept abuse from others. In such a case the "acceptance" might be that we just have to accept the fact that since this person is unwilling to change, we have to end the relationship.

The next concept in this section is the idea of True Self vs. Perceived Self. I often illustrate this by holding up two hands. One hand represents the way I would like to be (the Ideal Self or the True Self) and the other hand represents how I see myself (the Perceived Self). The closer together these two hands are, the less problems people are likely to have, but the farther apart these two hands are, the more problems are likely to occur because the Perceived Self hand is always asking itself, "Why can't I be more like that other hand?" In this case the "other hand" represents the True Self or Ideal Self.

There are two ways to resolve the gap between the hands. We can move the True Self hand closer to the Perceived Self hand or we can move the Perceived Self hand closer to the True Self hand. What usually happens over the course of the Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy program is that both hands meet in the middle somewhere.

EXERCISE: The Mindful Body of the True Self PRIORITY 2

Time permitting, do this exercise in class. If you don't have time, you may assign it as homework. If you do the exercise in class, you may facilitate a discussion about the exercise by asking people to share some of their responses, but don't force people to respond unless they volunteer first. The personal nature of the questions might lead some students to be hesitant about answering them in front of a group of people

5.8 Mind and Body as One

I like to facilitate a discussion at this point by asking two or three members of the class to define their "perfect day" or perhaps their "perfect meal." Inevitably the answers are different. When two or more people give different answers to any question about "perfection," my next question is, "You both gave different responses to your definition of the perfect day (or perfect meal, etc.). Which one of you is correct and which one of you is wrong?"

The answer, of course, is that each of them is correct in their own way, because they are defining what's "perfect" to them. What this means is that the idea of "perfection" is subjective; we get to define what "perfect" means. Since we're the ones defining what "perfect" means, if the world is consistently falling short of our expectations for "perfection," we can always change our own personal definitions to match more closely what we get from the world around us.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 6 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from *Session 5* that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

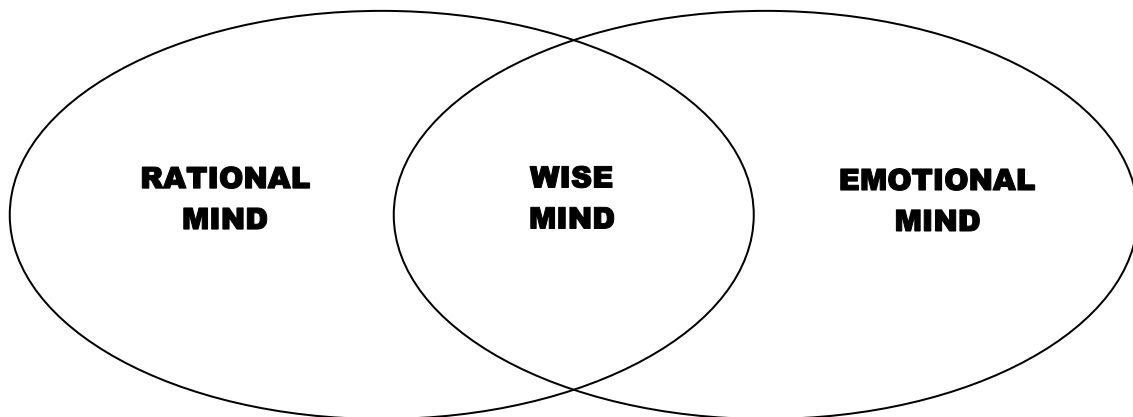
At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

5.0 What is Wise Mind?

When we are being logical, rational, and devoid of emotion, we are in *Rational Mind*. When we are allowing our thoughts to be driven by our feelings, we are in *Emotional Mind*. A goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) is to achieve *Wise Mind*. Wise Mind is the joining of Rational Mind and Emotional Mind in perfect balance and harmony. It is a moving beyond opposites to a mindful state of acceptance.

We sometimes tend to think of things in black-and-white terms. When in this mode of thought, we tend to see experiences as “*all good*” or “*all bad*.” But if we use our skills of mindful awareness to see what is really there, we may come to recognize that rarely are things all good or all bad. There is usually a little bit of bad in the best good things, but likewise there is usually a little bit of good even in the worst bad things. One of the skills of Wise Mind is seeing the gray areas of life for what they are instead of interpreting them as black or white.

If we were to graph out the idea that Wise Mind is a blend and balance of Emotional Mind and Rational Mind, the graph would look like the illustration below.



To look at an example of how this Wise Mind might appear in the real world, let’s imagine that a woman has stolen a loaf of bread to feed her children, who are starving. A person who is totally cold, calculating and logical, devoid of emotion, and operating solely from Rational Mind, might say something like, “*Yes, it’s unfortunate that her children were starving, but the law is the law. She should be punished.*”

But a person who is operating from Wise Mind can use a rational mind tempered by emotion. In this case, such a person might say something like, “*The law is the law, but we should also have compassion. Who among us wouldn’t steal a loaf of bread if our children were starving?*”

Let’s look at another example, this time from Emotional Mind.

Suppose I'm in line at the grocery store. I only have a few items, so I'm in the "ten items or less" lane. The person in front of me has a cart completely full of groceries. It's obvious that she has far more than ten items.

If I'm operating from Emotional Mind, I might let my emotions get the better of me and make an angry comment to this person, causing a scene in the grocery store. But a person operating from Wise Mind in this situation might temper the emotional reaction with Rational Mind. Such a person might take the opportunity to say to himself, *"This person is obviously going to be a while. I don't need to let the fact that she's breaking the rules ruin my day. Instead, I can take this opportunity to do a mini-meditation while I wait."*

When operating from Wise Mind, we can gain the wisdom to know what we have the power to change, and what we must accept. Once we have achieved this state of acceptance, we are able to integrate Wise Mind into Wise Body. This is because mind and body are part of the same whole. Integrating mind and body is the first step towards integrating person into nature.

5.1 Wise Mind and Wise Body

"Don't let your mind bully your body into believing it must carry the burden of its worries."

--Astrid Alauda

"Realize that this very body, with its aches and its pleasures, is exactly what we need to be fully human, fully awake, fully alive."

-- Pema Chodron

We're conditioned to believe that mind and body are separate entities; however, this is not true. The mind and the body are one. When the mind cries out, the body suffers. When the body is in pain or ill, the mind is impacted. A healthy mind is a part of a healthy body.

How well do you know your own body? Do you know its moods and its ways of communicating with you? If you are a person who, like most of us, struggles with overeating, do you recognize the messages your body sends you when you're full?

Maybe you have a chronic pain issue. Do you know the signs and signals your body gives you when you're about to have an episode?

Maybe you have a problem with anger. Do you recognize the physical signs your body gives you prior to losing your temper?

Are you affected by the weather? Do you feel gloomier and more depressed when the weather changes? Do you feel happier when the sun is shining, and it is warm outside?

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) is about how we connect to family, friends, the natural world, and ourselves. One way of connecting with ourselves is to get in touch with our own bodies. In the following sections we'll examine how to do so (Creswell & Lindsay, 2014).

5.2 Sensory Integration Meditation

To begin getting in touch with your body, we will use the techniques of mindful awareness to explore and integrate more fully with the information we get from our senses. When we explore the world with our senses it is easier to move from Doing Mode into Being Mode and to live in the now. The reason for this is simple. It's impossible to see, hear, touch, taste, or smell anything in the past or in the future. We can only experience the world through our senses in the present moment.

One way of achieving this present-moment awareness is with a *Sensory Integration Meditation*. Instructions and a script for this meditation are included below. You may wish to record yourself reading the instructions below for future playback. Alternately you may wish to view the Sensory Integration Meditation from www.mindfulecotherapy.org. Visit the website and search for *Sensory Integration Meditation* or visit <https://mindfulecotherapy.org/videos>.

The Sensory Integration Meditation allows us to bring our minds more in tune with our bodies by focusing only on the information we get from our senses. Our senses are our only connection with the world outside of our own heads, so the more proficient we can become with exploring the world with our senses, the more we are able to integrate mind, body and nature into one perfect coherent whole.

The instructions for the Sensory Integration Meditation are as follows:

- To begin this Sensory Integration Meditation, start by closing your eyes and taking a few deep cleansing breaths.
- As you feel the air entering your lungs, you are breathing in calmness and relaxation.
- As you exhale, allow worries, tension and stress to evaporate from your body, mind and spirit.
- Allow yourself to return to a state of mindful awareness for a time, focusing only on your breathing.
- Remember that if at any time during this Sensory Integration Meditation you should encounter thoughts or feelings that are overwhelming to you, you should stop the meditation and return to it when you are calmer.
- When you are ready, allow your attention to focus around the sensation of the air flowing into your nostrils as you inhale. Feel the air entering your nasal passages.
- As you direct your attention to your nose, do you notice any aromas? Are they pleasant odors or pungent odors? Do the scents you find around you evoke any memories?
- If a memory is triggered, remember that you don't have to follow it if it is unpleasant to you. Simply note it for future reference.
- If, on the other hand, you encounter a fragrance that triggers a happy memory, allow that happiness to embrace and envelope you.
- Linger here for a while with the aromas you find around you.
- When you are ready to move on, direct your attention to your mouth and tongue. As your breath leaves your body with each exhalation, do you detect any taste on your breath?

- It may be a subtle sensation, or not noticeable at all. If it is not a noticeable sensation, that's okay too. If it is noticeable, describe what sort of taste it is. Is it sweet or bitter? Sour or salty? How does it compare to the fragrances you smell right now?
- Move your attention now to your ears. What do you hear? Are there any background noises?
- Can you hear the sound of your breathing?
- Can you hear the sound of your own heart beating?
- Focus for a moment on the information your ears bring to you.
- Move your attention now to your body. If you are lying down, notice how your body contacts the bed or floor. If you are sitting, notice how your body contacts the chair.
- Are there any pressure points of contact?
- Do you feel pressure from any tight clothing?
- Overall, are you comfortable, or is there some tension somewhere in your body?
- Can you melt the tension away by focusing your attention on it?
- Now move your attention to your eyes. If they are still closed, open them slowly, giving them time to adjust to the light.
- As you observe your surroundings, see them without assumptions, in a new way.
- Imagine yourself an artist. If you were to paint the scene you see before you, how would you capture the detail you see?
- Observe the variations in color, shading and light that you see around you. Focus on the spaces between objects rather than on the objects themselves.
- If you were asked to draw only the spaces you see before you, what would that look like?
- Examine every detail of everything you see before you.
- Now close your eyes again and come back to yourself.
- Did this meditation evoke any memories, thoughts or feelings? If so, note them for consideration after this meditation is over.
- As you bring your awareness back to yourself, note how you are feeling right now. Remember this feeling when the meditation is done.
- Return your attention only to your breathing. Feel the air enter and leave your body.

When you feel you are ready, open your eyes again and end the meditation feeling calm yet invigorated.

Once you have completed the Sensory Integration Meditation at least once outdoors and at least once indoors, go on to the next page and complete the exercise, *Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation* to gain more insight into the utility of this meditation.

Baer, R. A. (2003). Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 125–143. Introduction to Special Issue 183

5.3 Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation

After completing the Sensory Integration Meditation, answer the questions on the following worksheet. If it is possible to do the meditation in both an indoor and an outdoor setting, do so, noting the differences between the indoor and outdoor experiences in the space provided.

Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., & Allen, K. B. (2004). Assessment of mindfulness by self-report: *The Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills*. *Assessment*, 11, 191–206.

Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., Hopkins, J., Krietemeyer, J., & Toney, L. (2006). Using self-report assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment*, 13, 27–45.

5.3 Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation

Name: _____ Date: _____

What did you learn about your own body from the meditation?

Indoor

Outdoor

Did you experience any new bodily sensations during this meditation? If so, how did these sensations manifest in your body?

Indoor

Outdoor

5.3 Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Did you find any areas of deep relaxation or wellbeing in your body after doing the meditation?
If so, where? Describe the experience.

Indoor

Outdoor

Did you experience any emotional sensations while doing the meditation? If so, did these emotions seem to be linked to a certain experience or sensation? For example, did the emotion seem to be triggered by an aroma? By a sound? By a sight? By any other sensation? Describe these sensations and emotions in the spaces provided below.

Indoor

Outdoor

5.3 Reflections on the Sensory Integration Meditation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Did the meditation and the accompanying sensations trigger any streams of thought? If so, were these thoughts associated with any particular sensations (for example, if you were doing the meditation outdoors and heard children on a playground, and it triggered streams of thought about happy days in your youth engaging in similar activities)?

Indoor

Outdoor

Did the meditation trigger any memories? If so, were these memories associated with any particular sensations?

Indoor

Outdoor

5.4 The Mindful Body and the Wise Mind

Refer to the idea of Wise Mind in Section 5.0. Remember that Wise Mind consists of Emotional Mind and Rational Mind in balance and harmony. The way that Wise Mind manifests itself in the body is by dissolving the barrier between mind and body. We tend to think of mind and body as separate things, but this distinction does not exist in reality. Just as the body can influence what the mind thinks and does, so can the mind influence what the body does. This concept is often talked about as *“mind over matter.”*

Picture a little dirt road in the country. It’s a small, one-lane road without much traffic. As more people move to the country, the road gets used more often. Eventually, it has to be widened into a two-lane road to accommodate all the extra traffic. As the area gets more and more traffic, the road gets wider and wider. Eventually the road may become a six-lane or eight-lane highway. The more traffic the road has, the bigger the road gets.

Your brain works in a similar fashion. Hebb’s Postulate states, *“What fires together, wires together.”*

When you have a new thought for the first time, the neurons in your brain reconnect in new pathways. The more those new pathways get used, the more neurons on those pathways connect to each other. If you practice thinking in new and different ways, then eventually the little dirt road in the country of your brain can become a superhighway. A study by Hölzel et al (2011) using fMRI and CAT scans of the brain demonstrated that using the techniques of mindfulness for as little as twenty minutes a day for eight weeks causes increases in cortical thickness in the areas of the brain responsible for good judgment, emotional regulation, and impulse control.

This means that you can re-wire your brain by using just the power of your mind! When you do so, you have used your power of mind to create physical changes in your body (brain).

Human beings are usually particularly good at getting caught in automatic negative thought processes. This probably had some survival benefits for our ancestors. You are more likely to survive if you imagine a wolf behind every bush and tree than you are if you assume that there are no wolves in the forest. In the former case you are always prepared for a wolf attack, but in the latter case you are likely to be surprised by a wolf. If we assume there are wolves out there, even if there are not any, we remain on high alert and minimize the risk of wolf attacks. It’s a very short step from this to *“The wolves are out to get me!”*

This natural tendency to assume the worst leads us to a natural tendency to fall into automatic negative thinking patterns. To illustrate this, try a simple experiment. Buy a bag of marbles and carry it with you all day. Every time you have a negative thought, take a marble out of the bag. Every time you have a positive thought, put a marble back into the bag. At the end of the day, is your bag full or empty?

If your bag is empty at the end of the day, then you’ve “lost all your marbles.” To put the marbles back in the bag, you have to say one positive thing for each marble you put back into the bag. This little game will help you to focus on observing and describing your thought stream.

Negative thoughts are a chain reaction. One negative thought leads to another, and another, until we find ourselves caught in a downward spiral of negativity that can lead to depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem.

Mindfulness is a way of setting aside negative thought patterns and paying attention only to the moment. It’s not about avoiding, resisting or “fixing” unpleasant thoughts and emotions. Instead, it is a way of

stepping outside of the thought stream for a moment to realize that you are not your thoughts or feelings. It is a way of accepting that you don't have to buy into these negative thoughts about yourself and others. Note that it's not about trying to avoid negative thoughts and feelings. All your thoughts and feelings are a part of you and trying to avoid them is trying to avoid your True Self. Mindfulness is more about realizing that you don't have to react to those thoughts and feelings.

Another way to picture this concept is that the more positive thoughts you have, the easier it becomes to have positive thoughts in the future. Of course, the opposite is also true. The more negative thoughts you have, the easier it becomes to have negative thoughts in the future. The choice is up to you whether you wish to have positive or negative thoughts. What sorts of pathways are you building in your brain?

To illustrate that you are not your thoughts, imagine that you are trying not to have any thoughts. Now imagine that while you are trying not to have any thoughts, a thought comes to your mind despite your best efforts. Your initial reaction might be, "*Oh no, I've just had a thought.*"

If that is the case, what part of you was it that recognized that you just had a thought? It couldn't have been your thoughts that did the recognizing because the thought was what you recognized in the first place. This means that there is an internal observer, separate from your thoughts, that is the real you. The Wise Mind of the Mindful Body recognizes that mind and body are one and the same. You cannot be your thoughts because your thoughts are what your mind (and therefore your body) recognized in the first place when you tried to tell yourself to stop thinking.

The part of you that recognized the thought was what is known as the *True Self*. It is the internal observer that watches the thoughts and feelings. A goal of mindfulness is the recognition of the True Self as who you really are, apart from troublesome thoughts and feelings. This wisdom leads us to be able to live more fully in True Self.

Hölzel, Britta, Carmody, James, Vangela, Mark, Congletona, Christina, Yerramsettia, Sita M., Garda, Tim, & Lazar, Sara W. (2011). Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 191 (2011) 36-43.

Stent, Gunther S. (1973). A Physiological Mechanism for Hebb's Postulate of Learning, *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci.*, Vol. 70, No. 4, pp 997-1001, April 1973.

5.5 Mindful Eating

We have an obesity epidemic in this country. Fad diets come and go, but the missing component in many of these diets is how we *think* about eating. Remember the Last Kiss exercise from Session 1? One of the ideas of the Last Kiss exercise is that if we focus on one thing at a time while paying attention to our eating, and only to our eating, then at mealtime every chocolate kiss can be as enjoyable as the last one in the bag. You may even find that if you can approach eating with a mindful attitude, by focusing only on the enjoyment of your meals while eating, you may not have to diet at all, because mindful eating means you can get more enjoyment out of less food. Less food means fewer calories, and fewer calories means more weight loss.

Does a whole bag of chocolates taste better than a single piece of chocolate? If you can truly enjoy that one piece, is there any need to polish off the whole bag? Mindful eating is about quality over quantity.

The first step in mindful eating is to fully prepare yourself for the experience of eating. Eating is not something you want to do while multitasking! If you have a habit of eating at the computer, or while watching television, or while doing any of a hundred other activities, make a conscious decision right now that from now on, when you eat, the only thing you will be doing during meals is focusing on the pleasure of eating.

If you're a person who likes to wolf down meals, the first thing you will want to do is to learn to slow down and enjoy each bite. It takes quite a bit of time for your brain to get the signal that you are full. If you eat quickly, it is quite possible that you will continue to eat before your brain gets the signal to stop eating. Slowing down will allow your body's natural systems the time they need to signal your brain that your stomach is full.

To practice mindful eating, first eliminate all mealtime distractions. You may find it helpful to do a brief centering and grounding exercise prior to beginning the meal. To do this, simply take a few deep breaths at the table, allowing your thoughts, feelings, and other mental distractions to quiet down before beginning to eat. For further information on grounding and centering, see *Session 6: Centering*.

When you are centered, begin to eat by focusing only on one bite at a time. Pay attention to the flavors and textures of the food. Savor each bite for as long as possible before swallowing. Give no thought to the next bite until you've finished enjoying the food that is already in your mouth. As you eat, feel the sensations that your body is giving you. Can you pinpoint exactly when you are full? If you were describing this meal to a person who had never tasted anything like it before, what words would you use? Practice your observing and describing skills as you taste and savor each bite.

Another part of mindful eating is learning to distinguish between *hunger* and *appetite*. You may have a craving for your favorite sweet, but is that really hunger talking, or is it just your appetite? Hunger is more of an actual physical sensation of an empty stomach, or a rumbling sensation in the belly area, while appetite is more of a psychological craving. A psychological craving is the product of a thought and/or feeling process. If you can learn to change this thought and feeling process, you will learn to control your appetite.

As you continue to grow in your practice of Mindful Eating, pay attention to how your body experiences food. Do certain foods give you more or less energy? Do certain foods seem to change your moods? Are there foods that heighten your overall sense of wellbeing? Allow your body to teach you how it handles the food you eat, and how it responds to your diet.

The most basic necessity of life is food. How you define your relationship with food will help to define who you are as a person. It will also help you to further develop that Wise Mind/Wise Body connection.

Dunn C, Olabode-Dada O, Whetstone L, Thomas C, Aggarwal S, et al. (2018) Mindful Eating and Weight Loss, Results from a Randomized Trial. *J Family Med Community Health* 5(3): 1152.

Lofgren, Ingrid. (2015). Mindful Eating. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. 9. 10.1177/1559827615569684.

Nelson, Joseph. (2017). Mindful Eating: The Art of Presence While You Eat. *Diabetes Spectrum*. 30. 171-174. 10.2337/ds17-0015.

5.6 Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort

America is a heavily medicated society. We've been taught that we should pop a pill at the first sign of pain or discomfort. This heavy reliance on medication has led to a multi-billion-dollar pharmaceutical industry. Unfortunately, one of the side effects of this "throw a pill at it" mentality is the creation of a multi-billion-dollar addiction treatment industry as well. About a thousand people die annually by overdosing on prescription medications.

The good news is that studies have shown that one of the most effective non-pharmaceutical ways to manage pain and discomfort is mindfulness (Khoo et al, 2019; Wright Voss et al, 2019; Carson, 2005; Snyder & Wieland, 2003; Gray, 2004; Garner-Nix et al, 2008). If you have difficulties with chronic pain or discomfort, remember that your attitudes and beliefs about pain will have a lot of influence on the sensations you will experience. *Woman to Mother* by Vanjie Bergum reminds us that in our culture here in the United States, "pain means something is wrong, pain means punishment, pain should be avoided or taken away."

Our fear sense is awakened when we feel pain. We're unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) afraid that we have suffered an injury of some sort. If we suffer from chronic discomfort and can learn to focus on the meaning behind the pain instead of the pain itself, we can feel some power and control over it. Once we have accepted that the pain is not harmful, we become more able to participate in the activities of day-to-day living without fear or stress.

Meditation can help achieve and sustain this level of control. Of course, before beginning any pain management program you should consult with your doctor to make sure that there isn't something critical going on that would require medical attention. Once you're sure that the source of the pain is something that cannot be treated medically, you can proceed with the techniques of the *Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort* exercise that follows.

To begin the Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort exercise, first complete a Body Scan meditation. This is done by getting into a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down, and loosening any restrictive clothing. Next, start at your fingers or toes and move up and down your body inch by inch, focusing only on a few square inches of your body at a time. It may help to imagine a laser scanner pointed at each particular part of your body as you go. That laser scanner represents your focus.

As you turn your attention each body section, pay close attention to the sensations you find in that body part. Is it hot or cold? Comfortable or uncomfortable? Tense, or loose and relaxed? Is there any pain here? Is it a sharp pain or a dull pain? A hot pain or a cold pain? Are there any pleasurable sensations to be found here? Can you describe them?

Proceed to scan every part of your body a little at a time, answering the questions above for each section of your body, until you have completed the body scan meditation. If you wish, you may view a Body Scan meditation at www.mindfulecotherapy.org. Go to the website and type "Body Scan" into the search box or visit <https://mindfulecotherapy.org/videos>.

While doing the meditation, focus on where you are experiencing the discomfort. Observe it and describe it to yourself using the questions above. Be as specific as possible about the nature and character of the discomfort. When you have completed the Body Scan meditation, follow the instructions on the worksheet that follows to complete the *Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort* activity.

You will be using the mindful skills of observing and describing while answering the questions on the worksheet, and you will be using the mindful skill of acceptance while doing the meditation on your own. While doing the meditation, dwell on the idea of *Going Inside the Discomfort* found in the insert to the right.

If you are not experiencing any discomfort when participating in this exercise, don't try to "force" it. In other words, don't try to tell yourself that you are feeling discomfort when you are not. Just allow yourself to experience the Body Scan Meditation for what it is.

Just go ahead and do the Body Scan Meditation anyway to familiarize yourself with the exercise. Pay particular attention to the sensations you experience in your body, and how they might relate to your state of mind. You may then use the Body Scan should you experience any discomfort in the future.

Optional Activity: Going Inside the Discomfort

Our automatic reaction to discomfort is to tense up and to try to fight it. When "*going inside the discomfort*" we let go of any resistance to the discomfort and welcome it in order to make peace with it. Instead of trying to fight it, we cultivate an attitude of curiosity and acceptance. What is the discomfort trying to teach me? What can I learn from it? If I accept it, will it cease to be discomfort? How can I change myself to be more accepting of the presence of the discomfort?

The next time you find yourself with discomfort, first make sure that you are not at risk of harm. If you are safe, try going inside the discomfort by greeting it with an open and accepting attitude, welcoming it and thanking it for trying to warn you of a danger.

When you do this, does it change your experience of the discomfort? How?

Bergum, Vanjie (1989). *Woman to Mother: A Transformation*. Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Westport, Connecticut.

Khoo EL, Small R, Cheng W, Hatchard T, Glynn B, Rice DB, Skidmore B, Kenny S, Hutton B, Poulin PA. (2019). Comparative evaluation of group-based mindfulness-based stress reduction and cognitive behavioural therapy for the treatment and management of chronic pain: A systematic review and network meta-analysis. *Evid Based Ment Health*. 2019 Feb 1;22(1):26-35.

Wright Voss, Maren, Atisme, Kandice, Yaughner, Ashley, and Sulzer, Sandra (2019). Mindfulness for Chronic Pain Management, FC/Health/2019-01pr, June 2019

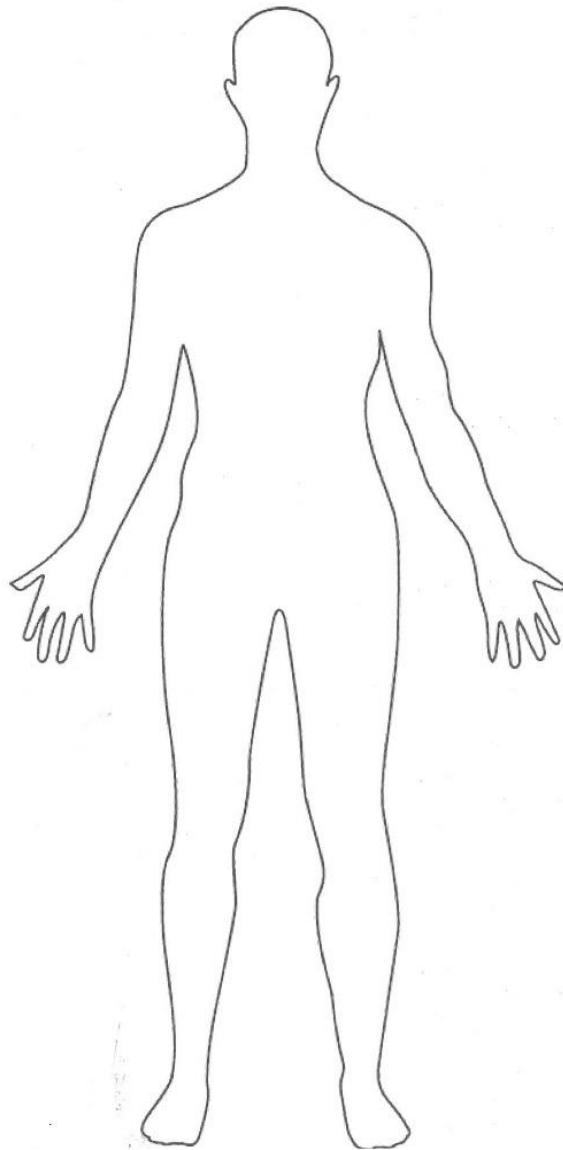
5.6 Mindful Acceptance of Discomfort

Name: _____ Date: _____

Do a Body Scan meditation, focusing on identifying any areas of discomfort in your body. Complete the Body Scan, paying special attention to where you may be experiencing any pain or discomfort in your own body. After completing the meditation, answer the questions below. Be as specific as possible in your answers.

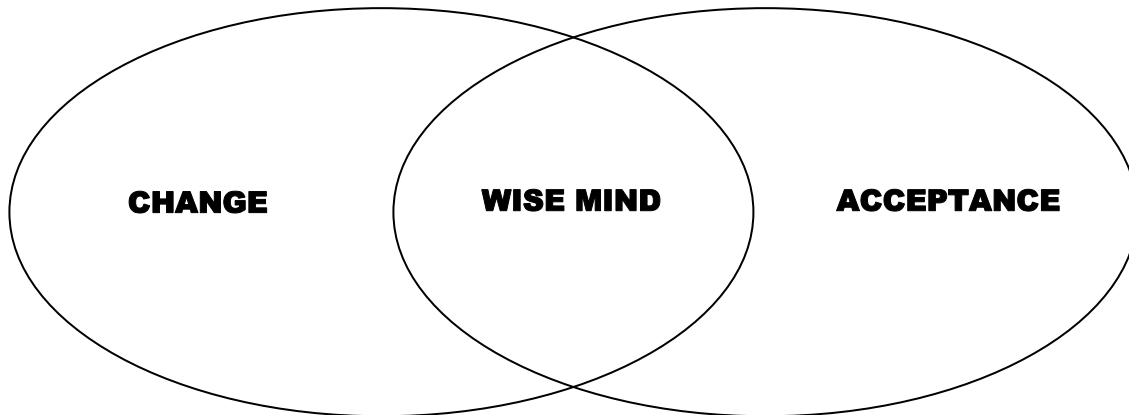
Where did you feel the discomfort? Circle any areas of discomfort on the illustration below and write the descriptions on the lines provided on the next page. Be as specific as possible. For example, don't say, "In my back."

Instead say, "In my lower back, about an inch from the tip of my spine."



5.7 Wise Mind, Wise Body, and True Self

As you may remember from the beginning of this chapter, Wise Mind is a perfect balance of Rational Mind and Emotional Mind. But it is much more than that. In Session 1 we learned that wisdom is the ability to know what we can change, and what we must accept. This wisdom is a product of the Wise Mind. This concept of Wise Mind might be expressed with the graphic below.



When you look back on the Wise Body exercises that have done in this session, have the exercises helped you to be more accepting of your body and mind? Did they help you to learn how to change the things you can?

In Session 1 we learned that the ultimate objective of MBE is to be able to live more fully and truly in True Self. True Self is who we would like to be if we could stop putting limitations on ourselves. There is also another type of self, called Perceived Self. The Perceived Self is how we see ourselves now. When our Perceived Self is very close to our desired True Self, we are at peace with ourselves and with the world. But when the way we see ourselves is miles away from where we would like to be, we are stressed out, depressed, and anxious.

The more we can live in True Self, the more we can eliminate these stressful and depressing feelings. The more we can do this, the more we liberate ourselves.

There are two ways to do this. The first is to bring the True Self closer to the Perceived Self. The second is to bring the Perceived Self closer to the True Self. Using the tools of acceptance and change while engaging in mindful body activities like the ones in this chapter, we may find that there is not as much we would like to change about ourselves as we may have thought. By using radical acceptance, we can embrace ourselves the way we are. This acceptance extends to our bodies as well as to our minds.

The mindful body of the True Self allows us to accept the vessel that carries us through this life. Mindful acceptance teaches us that thoughts such as, *“I’m too fat,”* or *“I’m too thin,”* or *“I’m not attractive enough,”* or *“I’m out of shape,”* are just thoughts. They do not have to become true unless we choose to believe that they are true.

The mindful body of the True Self also allows us to realize that pain and discomfort are a normal part of existence. This truth extends to mental pains like depression and anxiety as well as physical pains like fibromyalgia and chronic rheumatism. While we don't have to let our pain define us, we can still accept it as a part of ourselves. When we can welcome pain and discomfort as a natural part of our lives, we are able to gain our freedom and to enjoy life more fully.

Think again about your True Self. How could your mind and body help you to live fully and freely as the person you were born to be? How could your True Self manifest through the power of your mindful body? Go on to the next page and explore this idea by completing the worksheet, *The Mindful Body of the True Self*.

Carson, J.W.; Keefe, F.J.; Lynch, T.R.; Carson, K.M.; Goli, V.; Fras, A.M. & et al. (2005). Loving-kindness meditation for chronic low back pain: results from a pilot trial. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 23(3): 287-304; Sep 2005.

5.7 The Mindful Body of the True Self

Name: _____ Date: _____

Our bodies are the vehicles that carry us through this journey we call life. The more you can learn about your body, the more you will know about yourself.

Picture your True Self in your mind's eye. Hold this image of your True Self in your mind for a moment as you answer the questions below.

How does your True Self manifest itself in your body?

Are there any aspects of your True Self that are not currently manifesting in your body?

Example: Does your body posture indicate confidence? If it does not, what would it take to change that?

How could you change your body posture to move more into alignment with your True Self?

Are there aspects of your True Self that are already manifesting in your body? In the way you carry yourself? In your posture? In the way energy flows through your body? How can you have more of these manifestations of True Self in your body?

5.8 Mind and Body as One

“Argue for your limitations, and sure enough, they’re yours.”

– Richard Bach, *Illusions: Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*

In this session we have learned how to temper emotion with reason, and how to enrich reason with emotion. By achieving this state of Wise Mind, we are able then move forward and recognize that mind and body are not separate entities; mind is an emergent property of body. Or to look at it from a more metaphysical viewpoint, perhaps it is more accurate to say that body is an emergent property of mind.

In either case, when we come to realize that there is no line between mind and body, and that they are one and the same, we have achieved Wise Body as well. From Wise Body we can move toward living fully in True Self. The True Self encompasses both mind and body and is the sum of who we are as individuals.

In the True Self of the Mindful Body, we can recognize that we are perfect, even with all our imperfections. This is because we are the ones who get to define what “perfect” means, and if we choose, we may always define it in a way that accepts the totality of our being.

Astin J.A., Berman B.M., Bausell B., Lee W.L., Hochberg M, & Forsys K.L. (2003). The efficacy of mindfulness meditation plus Qigong movement therapy in the treatment of fibromyalgia: a randomized controlled trial, *Journal of Heumatology*, 2003 Oct; 30(10):2257-62.

Session 6: Centering

Centering yourself is allowing yourself to get in touch with and be open to your True Self. It is allowing yourself to realize that you are perfect just as you are, even with your imperfections, because those feelings and desires are also a part of who you really are. If you accept your imperfections and integrate them into your way of thinking and feeling about yourself, you will obtain peace of mind, and you will be centered.



Facilitator Notes for Session 6: Centering

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 6* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Centering; Ideal Self; Perceived Self; Acceptance vs. Change; finding your center; your birth tree; Tree of Life Meditation

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Centering with Sandtray Expressive Arts; core values; personal truths; the centering tree, masturbate

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with the *Experiential Avoidance* exercise from last week's homework. In this activity, students were asked to select from a list of things they would like to be rid of. They were then asked to pick one thing in particular they'd like to be rid of, and to take it to their own personal sacred space and meditate on it by simply being with it, without trying to get rid of it.

You may ask them the following questions:

1. Did simply sitting with the thing in the moment make your experience of it worse, better, or about the same?
2. If sitting with it made your experience of it worse, were you ruminating on it (i.e., catastrophizing or masturbate)?
3. If sitting with it in the moment in being mode made your experience of it better, what did you notice about yourself and your ability to engage in being mode in this way?
4. Did being in your own sacred space add anything to your experience in the moment?

Use student answers to these questions as an opportunity to segue into the concept of "centering," which is the process of allowing yourself to get in touch with and be open to your True Self. Link the concept of Experiential Avoidance to centering by noting that if you are trying to avoid experiences, you are trying to avoid parts of your True Self, and no matter where you go, you cannot run away from yourself. By learning to center, you are able to allow yourself to experience the fullness of being that is your True Self.

If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn't time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

SESSION OUTLINE

6.0 Finding Your Center

Centering is the process of getting in touch with your True Self in the present moment by letting go of thoughts about the past and the future and focusing on living in the now. Introduce this week's material by defining "centering."

6.1 Who are You?

Discuss the idea of the Ideal Self vs. the Perceived Self. You might ask students to describe how far apart the two are for them. You could then follow up by asking what would move each person's Ideal Self and Perceived Self closer together. Ask for volunteers and have each volunteer list one thing that would bring their Perceived Self and their True Self closer together.

Next, discuss the idea of acceptance vs. change. Link it to the idea that we can only change ourselves. We cannot change others. We can ask others to change, but if they refuse to do so, then we have to accept that it is beyond our capacity to change others. Either that, or we must accept that this is not a relationship we need to be in. Sometimes when I discuss this idea, there are students who insist on trying to get other people to change. In such a case, it is usually because the student is using the idea of forcing others to change as a defense mechanism to avoid the responsibility of changing themselves. Either that, or they are clinging to a relationship that they probably shouldn't be in. In extreme cases, such as abusive relationships, "acceptance" doesn't mean accepting the abuse. It means accepting that this is a relationship that must end in order to avoid being hurt any further.

The ultimate in acceptance is to be able to accept one's Perceived Self as easily and as readily as one can accept their Ideal Self. When the two are one and the same, the ultimate acceptance has been achieved. It is then that they are able to live fully in their True Self.

6.2 Centering with Sandtray Expressive Arts

For the Sandtray Expressive Arts exercise, decide if you are going to use materials from the site itself or whether or not you will have to purchase materials, including sandtrays. You should scout out the site prior to this session to make sure it can accommodate the exercise. Are there enough natural materials nearby to do expressive eco-art pieces with all of your students? Does the site allow you to use natural materials in this way? Will you have to bring any materials to the site? If so, what?

Also create at least one eco-art piece yourself before facilitating this session. You might want to take a photo of your completed work. You can use this picture to illustrate the process for your students.

EXERCISE: Centering with Sandtray Expressive Arts PRIORITY 1

Begin the activity by explaining how Sandtray Expressive Arts may be used to center. In this particular exercise you will be teaching your students to center by creating a piece that represents them. The piece will represent each student's own True Self. If they need to scout the grounds to find materials for their piece, make sure you allot enough time in the session for them to do so. Once they've gathered their materials, have them create their pieces. If time permits you may also have each student explain or describe their piece to the rest of the group.

6.3 Centering Tree

In the Centering Tree exercise, each participant selects a tree to use for a centering meditation. If possible, try to have a tree for each student. If you don't have the availability for each student to have a tree, you can alternately have them try this assignment at home with a tree of their own. If you live in an area where trees are scarce, you can have your students pick another type of plant and use it as a focal point during the meditation. If you are doing this activity in session, selecting a Centering Tree is a prelude for the Tree of Life Meditation that follows in *Section 6.4*.

6.4 Tree of Life Meditation

Conduct the Tree of Life meditation by either reading the script out of the book or by writing your own script. If writing your own script, concentrate on the ideas of grounding, centering, and drawing energy from the earth.

Practice the meditation on your own before conducting it in a class, being mindful of the amount of time available to conduct it. Try to keep it under ten minutes if possible.

EXERCISE: Reflections on the Tree of Life Meditation PRIORITY 2

In the interest of time, you may assign this exercise as homework prior to the next session. If time permits you may also choose to do it in session. What I usually do is to go through the questions after the meditation and get one or two responses from volunteers so that students have an idea of how to answer the questions. I then assign the worksheet as homework if there's not enough time remaining in the session to complete it.

6.5 Getting to Know Your Tree

The exercises in this section help with centering by spending time with a tree or other plant in nature. You can have your students each select a tree or other plant with which to spend a few minutes. This plant doesn't have to be their birth tree. The idea here is to let them experience centering by exploring the plant with all of their senses in the present moment. By focusing on their senses, they leave thinking mode and enter into sensing mode. This allows them to leave more easily doing mode and enter into being mode. Centering is ultimately being in the moment with our own True Selves.

After letting your class spend some time exploring a tree or other plant with all of their senses, ask them what the experience was like. Do they feel calmer and more centered? Why?

I like to have a student read the material in this section out loud. Alternately you may read it aloud yourself. After doing so, ask your students to reflect on their own sense of oneness with all of life. Did the material help them to feel more at peace with all of existence? If so, why? If not, what would it take to help them to center and connect with all life?

6.7 Lessons from the Tree of Life

In this final section for Session 6, trees are used as a metaphor for being centered. Trees are rooted in the ground while reaching for the stars. Ask your students how they could learn from trees how to center themselves in their daily lives.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 7 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from Session 6 that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

6.0 Finding Your Center

Creswell and Lindsay (2014) found that mindful centering helps people make less stressful assumptions and appraisals about life situations and helps to reduce stress reactivity responses. Dorais and Gutierrez (2021) found that a regular practice of centering meditation effectively reduces stress in college students. Centering meditations are an effective way to reduce stress and increase concentration, decision-making skills, and overall wellbeing.

Centering refers to the process of emptying your mind of any concerns about past problems or future worries. In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy centering is a way of preparing yourself for doing deeper meditative work. In simpler terms, centering is getting in touch with your True Self. In this session we will learn a few centering techniques. These centering skills lay the groundwork for *connecting*, which will be covered in Session 7.

Creswell, J. & Lindsay, Emily. (2014). How Does Mindfulness Training Affect Health? A Mindfulness Stress Buffering Account. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 23. 401-407. 10.1177/0963721414547415.

Dorais Stephanie, & Gutierrez, Daniel (2021). The Effectiveness of a Centering Meditation Intervention on College Stress and Mindfulness: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 12, 2021.

6.1 Who are You?

Why are you, you? What are the things that make you the person that you are today? Why do inner work in the first place?

Many of us carry a vision of who we would like to be. We also carry a vision of who we perceive ourselves to be at this moment in time. The Humanist Psychologist Carl Rogers called these two visions the *Ideal Self* and the *Perceived Self*. At the times when we do not feel at peace with ourselves because of some anxiety, stress or depression, it is most often due to a conflict between our vision of who we would want to be, and who we perceive ourselves to be. In other words, we experience a conflict between the Ideal Self and the Perceived Self.

The act of centering involves striking a balance between the powers of chaos and order in our lives. From this perspective, the Ideal Self represents the power of order, and the Perceived Self represents the power of chaos. The way to strike a balance between these two powers is to introduce a little chaos into the order or introduce a little order to the chaos.

If conflict and inner turmoil are arising within you because of the gap between your Ideal Self and your Perceived Self, then the way to achieve balance would be to narrow that gap or to close it completely.

Suppose for example that your Ideal Self is a person who is organized, punctual and capable of completing multiple tasks at once during the day. On the other hand, your Perceived Self (the person you see yourself as) is not highly organized, always late, and incapable of meeting all the goals you set for yourself in a day.

The conflict within you has arisen in this case because you have set impossible standards for yourself, yet you feel you should be able to meet those standards anyway. One way to find balance in this situation would be to realize that your Ideal Self doesn't have to be perfectly organized and punctual all the time, thereby allowing a little chaos to enter into the "perfect" order established in your vision of your Ideal Self.

Another way to introduce balance is to impose a little more order upon the chaos of your Perceived Self by taking the time to plan better so that you are more able to meet the schedule set by your Ideal Self.

The goal of the inner journey that is Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is to strike a balance between the Ideal Self (or the life of perfect order) and the Perceived Self (or the life of perfect chaos). The more we learn about our own inner wants, needs and desires, and the reasons for them, the more we will draw closer to achieving balance. In short, if we can change our thoughts and feelings, we can change our world. But to change our thoughts and feelings, we must first know what those thoughts and feelings are.

There are many things we may wish to change about ourselves and about the world. We may even be able to change many of them. But there are also things that are beyond our power to change. Those things we cannot change, we must learn to accept. If we do not, then we will be endlessly frustrated by attempting the impossible.

According to a study by Dorais and Gutierrez (2021), Centering is a way to learn about your thoughts and feelings so that you may change them if you desire. This is most readily achieved through cultivating a spiritual sense of transcendence. We'll be talking about how Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy views spirituality in next week's session, but for now let's just say that the process involves getting in touch with and connecting to your own higher self. When that happens, you are centered.

Of course, it can be exceedingly difficult to tell which things we can change, and which things we cannot. This is where wisdom enters the picture. One purpose of centering is to gain enough inner wisdom to be able to know the difference between the things we can change, and the things we must accept.

Think for a moment about the last time you were anxious or stressed out. Do you remember what caused your anxiety? Did that cause of your worry have something to do with an event that happened in the past, or an event that might happen in the future? Until someone invents a time machine, there is no way to go back and change the past. Worrying about something that happened in the past is counterproductive. Likewise, if you are worrying about something that may or may not happen in the future, you are wasting energy that could be put to better use in the here and now. Unless you have a crystal ball, there's no way of knowing for certain what may happen in the future. By worrying about it, you are expending energy that could be used to prevent the possible future disaster from happening in the first place.

When conflict arises within us due to conflicts between our Ideal Self and our Perceived Self, we can restore balance and eliminate or reduce that conflict by seeking wisdom through acceptance and change. If the conflict between our Ideal Self and our Perceived Self has to do with something that happened in the past or something that might happen in the future, then that is something we will have to learn to accept, since it is impossible to change the past, and it is impossible to predict the future with any degree of certainty. The only changes we may make involve things that are happening right now, in the present moment.

Remember, as you set out on the path of making changes in your life, that you cannot change anyone but yourself. If problems arise in your life because of the actions of another person, you cannot force that

person to do anything. All you can do is to accept that they are who they are. Knowing this, you may then be able to change yourself so that you can accept others more easily. This acceptance can occur more readily if you learn to let go of the past and the future and focus only on the present moment.

Centering also means acknowledging that we can't change anybody but ourselves. If we're experiencing anxiety because of something in our relationships with another person or with other people, then we can't change them. We can only change the way we interact with them. Centering allows us the wisdom to change ourselves in productive ways so that we can have more productive relationships.

Dorais, Stephanie & Gutierrez, Daniel. (2021). The Influence of Spiritual Transcendence on a Centering Meditation: A Growth Curve Analysis of Resilience. *Religions*. 12. 573. 10.3390/rel12080573.

Rogers, Carl (1980). *A Way of Being*, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

6.2 Centering with Sandtray Expressive Arts

Centering at its most basic level is about bringing your awareness into the present moment by leaving doing mode and entering being mode. Centering from the perspective of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is about connecting to that inner child, the internal observer known as your True Self.

The True Self exists in your mind's conscious awareness of itself, but also in your mind's unconscious self-expression. This means that in Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, centering means becoming aware of these unconscious manifestations of your True Self so that they may be brought into your conscious awareness.

So how do you become consciously aware of the unconscious? One way to do this is through Sandtray Expressive Arts (Degges-White, 2018, Garrett 2014).



Looking at this piece of expressive art made with natural objects, what could you tell about the person who created it?

Ecotherapy is rooted in ecopsychology and espouses that humans are intrinsically connected to nature and are nurtured by a positive relationship with the Earth (Snyder, 2018). Eco-art therapy is a type of therapy that uses nature to create art. In sand tray therapy, the therapist or other facilitator has a sand tray in which the participant creates a scene based on a chosen topic. The facilitator usually has a vast collection of figurines, toys, statues, and other symbols in physical form that may be used to create the scene (Garrett 2015). The participant selects from these items to create a scene in the sandtray based on a pre-selected theme. In one type of sandtray therapy, called responsive sand tray, the person creating the scene is then asked to reflect upon and respond to the meaning created by the sandtray. Doing so can be a powerful means of centering.

If you are completing this workbook as a part of a Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy program, your facilitator may have sandtrays with which to conduct this exercise. If you are completing this book on your own, you may choose to purchase your own sandtray. This can just be a plastic container big enough for the purpose, filled with play sand that may be purchased at any building supply store.

Alternately you can just do what I do when I conduct sandtray groups and just skip the sandtray altogether. In my programs we just create scenes directly on the ground.

The purpose of this sandtray exercise is to center by getting in touch with both the conscious and unconscious aspects of your True Self (Rogers et al 2020). In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, “centering” means allowing your True Self to come forth and take control of your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

To practice centering with Sandtray Expressive Arts, first go to an outdoor place such as a park, a beach, a forest, or other natural area. If your own Sacred Space is suitable for the activity, it would be preferable to use it; but if you cannot, then use any natural area you have available.

Next, complete the exercise on the following pages.

- Degges-White, Susan (2018). *Integrating the Expressive Arts into Counseling Practice, Second Edition*, New York, NY: Springer
- Garrett, M. (2014). Beyond play therapy: using the sandtray as an expressive arts intervention in counselling adult clients. *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 2014 Vol. 5, No. 1, 99–105, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21507686.2013.864319>
- Garrett, M. (2015). 100+ Ideas for Directed Sandtrays in Counseling. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, March 2015, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 45-50
- Johnson, Adrienne A. (2021). *Pathworking: A Mixed Methods Study of Eco-Art Therapy and Mindfulness in Women with Eating Disorders*. A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Master of Arts in Art Therapy Degree Department of Art Therapy in the Graduate Program Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana.
- Luke, Melissa & Peters, Harvey. (2019). LGBTQ* Responsive Sand Tray: Creative Arts and Counseling. *Journal of Counseling Sexology & Sexual Wellness: Research, Practice, and Education*. 10.34296/01011002.
- Rogers, Jennifer & Luke, Melissa & Darkis, Jessie. (2020). Meet Me in the Sand: Stories and Self-Expression in Sand Tray Work with Older Adults. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*. 16. 1-13. 10.1080/15401383.2020.1734513.
- Snyder, M. (2018). Expressive arts and ecotherapy: Shifting paradigms. In S. Atkins & M. Snyder (Eds.) *Nature-based expressive arts therapy: Integrating the expressive arts and ecotherapy* (pp. 45-61). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

6.2 Centering with Sandtray Expressive Arts

Name: _____ Date: _____

This centering exercise using Sandtray Expressive Arts Therapy allows you to center by getting in touch with both the conscious and unconscious aspects of your True Self. The unconscious manifestation of your True Self will occur through the process of *natural attraction*. The conscious manifestation of your True Self will manifest through *expressive arts*.

To participate in this exercise, follow the steps outlined below to create a centering scene, then go on to answer the questions about the activity.

1. Think about your own True Self. Who are you? Why are you, you? What do you want in life? What do you want to do in life? If you could sum up your existence in a sentence or two, what would that be?
2. Now go out into nature and collect some objects with which to create a scene in the sandtray, or on the ground at a place designated by the facilitator of your group. These should be natural objects, i.e., things found in nature like rocks, flowers, twigs, and feathers. If you are completing this workbook on your own, choose an outdoor space suitable for the activity. You may wish to carry a bag, a basket, or a bucket in which to collect your materials. To select your materials, rely on the principle of *natural attraction*. Don't put much conscious thought into making your object selections. Just allow the objects themselves to attract you. Choose objects you are naturally attracted to, without trying to fit them into some plan for your finished project. Just let them call to you on their own. Gather your materials until you feel you are done.
3. When you've gathered all your materials, select a spot in which to create your piece of expressive art. If you are doing this exercise as part of a Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy group, your instructor may assign you a space, but if you're doing the exercise on your own, then you can pick the place.
4. Hold your answers from step #1 in mind as you complete your expressive arts piece. The goal of the piece is to portray your innermost self using the natural materials you have gathered.
5. When you have completed your piece, meditate on it for a moment or two, then go on to answer the questions below.

If you are doing this exercise as part of a group, your facilitator will have the other students in the class interpret your piece, and you will be interpreting the work of others. When doing so, answer the following questions for each piece being interpreted. If you are completing this workbook on your own, you may answer these questions about your own piece, or have a family member or friend interpret it for you.

1. What is your overall impression of the piece?
2. What can you learn about the person who created it by studying it?
3. What do the materials used in the piece tell you about the person who created it?
4. What is the emotional quality of the piece? How do you feel when looking at it?
5. Think about the elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Now examine the materials used to make the piece and assign them to elements. For example, feathers could be assigned to "air," or rocks could be assigned to "earth," or twigs could be assigned to "fire," or shells could be assigned to "water." Does any one element dominate? If so, which?
6. If one element seems to dominate, what does that tell you about the person who created the piece?
7. When you interpret the works of others, do you feel more, or less, centered?
8. When you interpret your own work, do you feel more, or less, centered?
9. Could this art you created be used as a focal point for meditation? If so, why? If not, why not?
10. Look at the materials you used to make your own piece. Why do you think you were attracted to those materials in particular, and what could they tell you about yourself?

6.3 Centering Tree

Do you have a favorite tree? It could be a particular variety of tree, or just one tree near where you live. What about that tree attracts you? What can your affinity for that particular tree tell you about yourself? What characteristics do you share with your tree? How is your tree like you, and how is it different?

In other words, what sort of tree would you be if you were a tree?

Would you be an oak that firmly stands its ground when the winds of misfortune blow, or would you be a willow that remains rooted by bending and flowing with the storm? Would you be an apple tree that gives freely of its fruit of knowledge, or would you be a thorny mayhaw that makes the seeker fight for the harvest? Would you shed your leaves in winter and hibernate, or would you be green year-round, bringing life and energy to your leaf-shedding friends in their own cold winters?

In short, which tree are you?

For this centering tree exercise, we will be identifying the characteristics of trees and comparing them to the characteristics of humans. We will be comparing the characteristics of your favorite tree to characteristics you possess in yourself. In this way we will be using trees as a metaphor to center ourselves. This act of centering occurs by comparing our own personal characteristics to the characteristics of a particular tree. Using nature as a metaphor for our own traits, we can learn more about ourselves, and therefore center ourselves.

The first step in this centering tree exercise is to identify a tree to work with. Do you have a tree that seems to call to you? Is there a type of tree that you identify with? If you've never thought about this before, spend some time thinking about it. It may help to walk through your neighborhood or your sacred space and see if any trees seem to call to you. Use the principle of natural attraction that you used to select your materials for the sandtray exercise.

Now that you've selected a tree, can you identify it if you saw one in the woods? If not, search online or use a field guide to learn to identify your tree. If you have a park or forest nearby, try to find your tree somewhere outdoors. It should be a location where you may meditate undisturbed for at least ten minutes. If you don't have access to your own tree, you may do the meditation outdoors under any tree available. If you don't have access to any trees, or if the weather isn't conducive to outdoor meditation, you may also do the meditation indoors. Picture yourself sitting under your tree as you do the meditation.



Remember, we're reaching into the power of the unconscious mind, and activating our own personal tree archetypes during this meditation. The goal is to center by connecting with your own True Self. We will use the characteristics of your chosen tree as a metaphor for your own True Self, so when you connect with your tree, you will be connecting with a metaphor of yourself.

When you have found your tree and you're ready, go on to the next section and perform the Tree of Life Meditation. If possible, do the meditation under your chosen tree. If it's not possible to sit under your tree while performing the meditation, then visualize your tree while meditating.

6.4 Tree of Life Meditation

Begin this meditation by finding a comfortable place, preferably outdoors. If you have identified your centering tree, and such a tree is nearby, sit comfortably underneath it (weather permitting, of course), with your back resting against the tree. If you must do this meditation indoors, sit comfortably in a quiet area where you may be undisturbed for the duration of the meditation.

You may read the directions below step-by-step as you perform the meditation. Alternately you may wish to record yourself reading the steps out loud, then play back the recording as you perform the meditation. If you have a trusted friend with a calming voice, you might also ask them to guide you through the meditation by reading the points below.

- Before beginning this meditation, center yourself by emptying your mind of all distractions.
- Start with a few cleansing breaths.
- Begin the Tree of Life meditation by thinking of a color that gives you peace and serenity. This should be a color that brings you happiness, joy, and relaxation.
- Now visualize a small sphere of light in this color, radiating from your solar plexus, just above your navel.
- Picture this light flowing downward, out of the tip of your spine, into the earth below you. See it branching off like the roots of a tree, drawing strength and energy from the earth. With each breath, you are drawing more energy out of the earth.
- Your spine is becoming the trunk of a tree: The Tree of Life. Feel the energy rising from the ground to become part of your being. This is called 'grounding,' and is the beginning of any meditation.
- Feel the energy rise through the trunk of your spine into the crown of your head. See the energy as colored light, bursting forth from the top of your head.
- The light energy emerging from your head is branching off in all directions, reaching out to touch the heavens above with each exhaled breath.
- Watch the energy rise far above you, like the branches and leaves of the Tree of Life.
- How far does your energy reach? Can you reach the stars? See the light energy flowing within you, uniting the realms of earth and sky. Feel yourself becoming a part of all that is. You are merging with the life force of all existence.
- When you feel you have reached Unity with the Tree of Life, meditate on these questions:
 - How am I like all that exists?
 - How am I different?
 - How can I be more at peace with all that is?
 - What teachings do my senses give to me?

- What teachings do my dreams give to me?
- How closely do my dreams match my reality?
- Can I bring my reality into closer harmony with my dreams? How?
- To close this meditation, note any insights you have gained.
- Now see the roots and branches of energy slowly returning to the center of your being. The energy of the life force is not leaving you; it is simply concentrating itself into the center of your being.
- When you have returned to this world, open your eyes, and take with you the lessons you have learned today from the Tree of Life.

After completing the Tree of Life meditation, go on to the exercise on the next page, *Reflections on the Tree of Life Meditation*.

6.4 Reflections on the Tree of Life Meditation

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Name: _____ Date: _____

During the Tree of Life Meditation, you were asked to reflect on how you are like all that exists. Which of the answers to that question are also personal truths from your own True Self? Answer below:

The meditation also asked you to describe how you are different from all that exists. Are any of these differences barriers to living in your True Self? How?

The meditation asked you to think about how you can I be more at peace with all that exists. Did your answers to this question reflect any of your own personal core values?

The meditation asked you to reflect on the teachings your senses give to you. Did one sense seem to predominate over all the others? Which one? What teachings did you learn from that sense?

6.4 Reflections on the Tree of Life Meditation

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Name: _____ Date: _____

The meditation asked you to reflect on which teachings your dreams give to you. What do these teaching have in common with your own personal truths? What teachings from your dreams are different from your own personal truths?

The meditation asked you to reflect on how closely your dreams match your reality. Would you like your dreams to become more real? If so, why? If not, why not?

Did you learn anything from your centering tree while doing this meditation? If so, describe what you learned below:

6.5 Getting to Know Your Tree

To begin exploring the wealth of knowledge to be gained from trees and other plants, start by selecting a tree to spend some time with. This tree can be your centering tree or any tree that you feel drawn to. It should also be a tree that it would be convenient for you to visit at least once a week. This should be a tree with which you have a strong relationship. If you have not yet developed a relationship with a tree, go out into the woods, preferably in the spring of the year, and select one that seems to call to you.

Spend some time cultivating a relationship with that tree. Sit under its branches in the shade while meditating. Study its leaves, its branches, its roots, and its bark. Research folklore associated with your tree. Are there any medicinal uses for your tree? Does your tree have any practical uses? What might you make out of its wood? What might you use its leaves, bark, roots and fruit for? How is your tree like you? How is it different? What strengths does your tree have, that you might find lacking in yourself? What strengths do you possess that your tree does not? What can you learn about yourself from studying your tree?

As you learn about your tree, don't forget to bring it gifts from time to time. Talk to your tree and listen for a reply. Don't expect answers in words; listen with your heart and spirit. Spend the time learning from your tree and befriending it. Watch how it changes from season to season. Know its moods and its habits. Know its needs and its gifts. Become an expert on your tree.

At first it may seem odd to think of trees as having moods, but as you come to know your tree, it may not seem so odd at all. As you spend time with your tree, learning its moods will become almost second nature to you.

To begin understanding how to learn a tree's feelings, think about how you observe the feelings of your friends and family. A subtle change of posture, or a slight change of facial expression, and you can tell when your romantic partner is feeling a bit down. Likewise, the more you know your tree, the more you will become sensitive to its moods.

Explore your tree with your senses. Taste its fruit. Smell its blossoms. Touch its bark. Does its scent change with the seasons? Does its bark feel different in the morning than it does in the evening? Can you tell by taste when the fruit is ripe for the picking? The more time you spend with your tree, the more you will become attuned to how these changes manifest.

Optional Activity: A Year with Your Tree

Because this activity takes an entire year, it is usually outside of the scope of the 12-week Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy seminars, so you may wish to do this on your own.

Once you have found your centering tree, you may wish to develop a deeper relationship with it. The best way to do this is to befriend your tree for at least a year. By doing so you will have observed your tree in all seasons. You will have experienced all its manifestations throughout the year.

If you choose to do this, you may wish to keep a Centering Tree Journal. You may write any of your observations about your centering tree in this journal. You may also use it to record any lore, songs, or poetry about your tree. If your tree bears leaves, you might press them and place them in your journal, one for each season.

You may also take photographs of your tree from time to time and watch as it grows.

Notice that from time to time, trees shed their leaves. Branches fall off. New growths of leaves or flowers or fruit begin. Trees are ever-changing. They are a reminder that we are always changing and growing too. Just because on occasion our own leaves fall off and our own branches may need an occasional pruning, that doesn't mean that new growth won't come in the spring.

As you and your tree change together, it can help you to find your own roots, your own branches, and your own center.

When you truly come to know your tree, you will see that it can predict the weather by the way its leaves orient themselves. You will be able to know when your tree is about to bear fruit, when its leaves will begin to shed, and when the seasons are about to change. When you begin to understand the ways of your tree, you can take energy from your tree when you need it, and you can give energy to your tree when it needs you.

6.6 The Tree at the Center

How old are you? How long have you lived? What does age mean, really? In the beginning, the Universe was nothing but hydrogen. Then came the first stars, which exploded and made the elements. These elements congealed into planets, and eventually into animals, then humans. The body you inhabit now is made of star dust. The atoms in your body witnessed the explosion of the Big Bang. The elements of which you are made are billions of years old. You are as old as the stars. You have been here since the beginning of the Universe.

Your body is about 70% water. Some of your body's water was once dew on the first grasses that grew on the Earth. A dinosaur once drank the water that is now contained within you. Some of the water that makes up your body once flowed past the Sphinx in the Nile River. It once quenched a lion's thirst in the deserts of Africa. Your water has been mammal, fish, and fowl. It has known what it is like to be an insect, and a king. It has been a tiny raindrop and a mighty ocean.

The atoms that make up your body once slept at the heart of a star. Some of your atoms have been reptiles and amphibians. Others have been great eagles or majestic beasts. Still other atoms have dwelt within the trees of the forest before becoming you. The collection of atoms called 'you' is as old as the Universe.

Visualize your life as a timeline. Each choice you make on that line redefines who you are. With each choice, you create two paths: One path in which you made the choice and one path in which you didn't make the choice. All our choices along the line of our lives branch out behind us like the twigs of a tree. Each node where a choice was made is a node where fruit can grow, or where fruit can wither and die.

Picture the line of your life as the trunk of a tree. This is the tree at the center of your life. As you look at the tree that is your life, note that its roots disappear into the ground, out of sight. These roots have branches too. These branches are the choices you made in the past that brought you to this life, here and now. In your mind's eye, follow those roots. See how they intertwine with the roots of other trees in the forest. Can you tell where your tree ends and where another begins?

Now follow the branches of the tree that is you. Note how they mingle with the other branches of the forest. Can you tell where your branches end and other trees begin? How many trees are there, really? Could it be that they are all one? Is one tree really separate from another, or are we all part of the same Tree at the Center?

If we are all connected to everything and everyone around us, how can we ever be separate? From this perspective, learning is just the process of rediscovering what we already know. We already have the knowledge within us; we simply have to remember how to access it. Let nature be your guide, and then you will remember how to learn what you already know, deep within yourself.

6.7 Lessons from the Tree of Life

As you spend more time with your tree, you may come to find that as you learn about it, you learn about yourself. Trees are centered and grounded. The more time you spend with your tree, the more you will find yourself grounded and centered as well.

In the Tree of Life meditation, you pictured your energy descending, root-like, deeply into the earth. As you progress through the lessons of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy you may likewise find your attention and consciousness becoming more and more rooted in the soil of your True Self. This centering in your true identity is the ultimate lesson from the Tree of Life. When you have learned it, you will always be able to find your center.

Session 7: Connecting

Suppose you could take all the spiritual paths practiced worldwide, put them into a cauldron, and boil them down to their essence. What would remain? I believe that the common thread to all spiritual practices is a feeling of connection. In this sense, spirituality means connection to others, or connection to the divine, or simply connection to nature and to ourselves. In short: spirituality is connectedness. If you think back on the spiritual experiences you've had in your lifetime, do recall feeling connected on some level? Many describe spiritual experiences as a sense of oneness. Oneness implies connection to something outside ourselves. In this sense, even an agnostic or an atheist could achieve spirituality through connection.



Facilitator Notes for Session 7: Connecting

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 7* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible. Note that there are a lot of exercises in this particular session, so you will have to be particularly aware of the time factor when facilitating the various exercises.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Connecting; reconnecting; Faces and Masks; mindful connecting; memes, and root memes

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Spirituality as connectedness; barriers to connection; the persona; the numinous; the Bell Branch

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with connectivity. You may begin by asking them what sorts of things help them to feel connected, or what connection means to them. Many equate connection with a feeling of love; however, we use “connection” instead of “love” because the term has less emotional baggage. Just be aware that many will say that connection equals love.

If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn’t time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

NOTE: The mask making exercise from Section 7.2 Faces and Masks will require most of the session. You may want to skip straight ahead to that activity after briefly discussing the concepts of spirituality and connectivity. Students may continue to work on their masks as you go over the other activities in the chapter. Make sure to do the Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected exercise before you begin the mask-making activity, so that the topic will be fresh on your students’ minds as they begin to make their masks.

SESSION OUTLINE

7.0 Spirituality

Emphasize that for the purposes of this course and program, spirituality is defined as a sense of connection. This means that anybody, regardless of their spiritual or religious inclination or lack thereof, could benefit from connectivity. You might wish to go around the room and ask each participant how they define spirituality, and how they define connection. Ask them to link the two if possible. This prepares everyone for the exercise to follow.

EXERCISE: What Connection Means to Me PRIORITY 1

With their answers to the questions in Section 7.0 above fresh on their minds, have everyone complete this exercise. When everyone is done, you may wish to facilitate a discussion on how spiritual connection manifests in thoughts, feelings, mind, and body. Can your students define what connection means using their thoughts, feelings, mind and body? Is there an element of connectivity in a spiritual sense that is beyond thoughts and feelings?

7.1 Reconnecting

Unless a person experienced some sort of deep childhood trauma, most children feel more spiritually connected to life and to nature than most adults. To them, every day brings a new experience full of wonder. During this section's discussion I often ask my students to close their eyes and visualize a time from their childhood when they felt deeply connected on a spiritual level. I then ask them if they were indoors or outdoors when this happened. If they were indoors, that's okay too. Different people connect in different ways. We're all different, and some people just naturally connect better indoors. What's more important is whether or not they had a deep sense of spiritual connection in childhood, and if it is possible to recapture that feeling in adulthood.

Note also that we're not trying to force a particular type of spirituality or even a belief in any sort of divine. Spiritual connection in this sense is just a feeling of awe and wonder at the bounty of life and nature. You don't have to believe in any sort of god or divinity to have such an experience.

A final word of caution: Some people, especially those who had traumatic childhoods, might not be able to think of any time in their lives when they felt connected at a spiritual level. That's okay too. If they can't come up with anything, ask them what would need to change in their lives in order for them to feel connected. If you get someone who answers this question with "I don't know," then the first step would be for them to figure out what would help them to feel connected. The rest of the exercises in this chapter may help them to answer this question, so if you have someone who is having difficulty coming up with something, ask them again at the end of the session if they still don't know.

EXERCISE: Things that Keep Me from Feeling Connected PRIORITY 1

After your students have identified a moment or two from childhood in which they felt connected, ask them to consider if, as they matured, something might have arisen in their lives that blocked that sense of connection in some way. Usually, such things are life events that interfere with one's sense of awe and wonder. Ask them to list some of these barriers to connection in the exercise here.

7.2 Faces and Masks

Prepare for this activity by having materials that can be used to make masks. If you are doing the workshop in an outdoor setting, you might have participants forage for natural materials to use when making their masks. A word of caution: It helps to have someone familiar with the local flora and fauna so that participants don't select things like poison oak, stinging nettles, etc. that can cause allergic reactions. Also caution your students about any "critters" that might be present in the underbrush.

Note that the materials used for constructing masks don't have to be expensive. You can use paper plates, string, colored ribbons, and markers. Most of these materials can be obtained relatively inexpensively from dollar stores. You may also use dried gourds, wood, or other natural materials.

Once students have completed their masks, but prior to completing the Faces and Masks worksheet in the next exercise, have them put on their masks and interact with each other while wearing them.

Ask them to note if the way they interact with each other has changed since they put on their masks. One activity I usually have people do while wearing their masks is to introduce themselves to the group as their True Selves. This can be done by having them say a few things about what their true identities are. It doesn't matter if they're actually doing the things that they'd like to be doing as their True Selves. For example, if a student wants to be an artist or a musician, but they've not yet had the confidence to act on this desire, have them introduce themselves as an artist or a musician. The purpose of this exercise is to determine how they might connect to others differently if they were confident enough to live fully as who they were meant to be. Be mindful of the time when doing this exercise and try not to spend more than ten or fifteen minutes on it if possible; however, this is the most important exercise of this session, so if you go a little long on this, it's safe to skip some of the later exercises.

EXERCISE: Faces and Masks PRIORITY 1

Once students have interacted for a time while wearing their masks, have them complete this worksheet. Ask for volunteers to share some of their answers and experiences with this activity. If there is not enough time to complete this activity during the session, have them complete it at home and discuss it at the introduction of the next session. Try to keep the focus on how the answers in the exercise will help participants to connect with others, with nature, and with themselves.

7.3 Connecting

After reviewing the material in this section, ask participants to discuss the ways in which they feel connected, and ways in which they have not felt connected. Focus on the assumptions people make about how they can and should connect to others, to nature, and to self. Crystal ball thinking involves making assumptions about the outcome by trying to predict the future, or by assuming what others might be thinking or feeling. Discuss ways in which participants can set aside their assumptions about the order of things so that they may be freer and more open to the possibility of connection.

EXERCISE: Ways I'd Like to Feel Connected PRIORITY 2

For this exercise, keep the focus on assumptions as barriers to connection. In other words, what assumptions might students be making about the situation that might be acting as barriers to connection? What changes would they have to make within themselves in order to allow connectivity to occur more naturally and spontaneously?

Return to the dialectic of acceptance versus change when necessary. We cannot change others. We can only change ourselves. We can ask others to change, but if they refuse, then we must accept their decision and either change ourselves in order to connect or end the relationship. I often use the acronym "FAST" when discussing barriers to connection. The way to find connection using **FAST** is:

Flexible: Be flexible and willing to compromise, when possible, without sacrificing the core values of your True Self.

Adaptable: Be willing and able to adapt to different circumstances as they arise, always having a back-up plan when possible.

Stable: A stable person isn't a person who doesn't have strong emotions. A stable person is one who is able to respond and reflect to emotions in positive ways.

Truthful: Connection is about the ability to be truthful and reflective with others and with self.

7.4 Connecting with Nature: A Great Place to Start

We can begin practicing our skills of connecting with other people by starting with nature. Animal-Assisted Therapy or other forms of therapy using natural settings, such as therapeutic gardening or wilderness adventures, allows us to practice our connectivity skills with nature first, before going on to the more complex interactions inherent in human communication. You might have students discuss ways they connect with nature and have them list ways that these skills could translate into their connection with people.

Above all else, a good facilitator is one who has experienced the program. If you can attend one of our annual trainings, it is recommended that you do so. If you don't have the ability to travel to our locations, the facilitator training is also available online at www.mindfulecotherapy.org.

If nothing else, at least work through the program yourself using the workbook or the facilitator manual so that you have a good understanding of what your participants will experience as they attend.

Above all, have fun and allow the wonder of nature to speak to you!

7.5 How Important is Connectivity?

This material, while interesting, can be skipped if time is a factor. The "take home" from this section is that connectivity can actually cause structural changes in the brain, wiring it in positive ways that lead to wellbeing.

7.6 Mindful Connecting

While this section is about how couples connect with each other, it can also be about any two people connecting with each other. Being in the moment with anyone is a great opportunity for connection, simply because being in the moment with another individual allows them to feel heard and respected. This is even true if the other person is a child, or even an animal.

When reviewing this section, you might wish to ask your students how many of them are in relationships. You may then generalize the skills in this section so that they apply to any two people and not just two people involved in a romantic relationship.

7.7 Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy and Connecting

If time permits, do the exercises in this section in class. If not, have students complete this exercise at home on their own. Discuss it at the beginning of the next session when you go over the homework for this week. As students discuss the materials, listen to responses, and check to see if they are properly integrating the skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy when removing their barriers to connection.

7.8 Memes

Define "meme" for your students. The word "meme" comes from the Greek word "mimeo," meaning "imitated thing." A meme is a behavior or thought that gets copied. A meme is simply a habit of thought or action that gets passed on from one person to another.

A "root meme" is a special type of meme. Root memes are memes from which other memes grow and propagate. For example, I might have several memes like, "I'm going to fail," and "things will never work out for me," and "nothing I ever do is good enough." A root meme for such a cluster of memes might be something like, "I'm inadequate." If the root meme "I'm inadequate" is eliminated, or replaced with something like, "I'm competent," then memes like "I'm going to fail," and "things will never work out for me," and "nothing I ever do is good enough" automatically disappear, since they are all rooted in the meme, "I'm inadequate."

If time permits, have students look back to their list of Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected from Section 7.1. Have them identify any root memes they can find from the list and facilitate a discussion about them.

EXERCISE: Root Memes that Act as Barriers to Connection PRIORITY 1

Have students complete this exercise in class if at all possible. Once it is completed, facilitate a discussion by asking for volunteers to share their responses with the group. Once volunteers have shared their responses you might ask the group to suggest ways in which individuals might remove such barriers to connection.

7.9 Change Your Memes, Change Your World

Our lives are a series of memes. We are constantly taking in new ideas, rejecting others, and modifying our own memes to conform to new world views. Our individual worlds are made of memes. This means that if we want to change our worlds, all we have to do is change our memes.

Making change in our lives means changing our memes (beliefs) so that we may change our consequences. Stress to your students that this might seem "weird" or "unnatural" at first, and that's okay. If it felt normal, they'd already be doing it. Ask them to stick with it for at least a month before dismissing the skills as ineffective. I tell my students

students that you don't get buff by going to the gym one time. You have to keep at it. Likewise, changing your memes means being willing to keep working at it.

I have my own Bell Branch that I bring to this session. Its branch shape is a great way to illustrate the branching nature of memes, and how they all connect to a central meme. The bells on my Bell Branch are also great representations of individual thoughts and ideas that arise from our memes.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 8 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from Session 7 that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

7.0 Spirituality

Most people on Earth practice some sort of spirituality. Obviously, spirituality must be pretty important to people. This is probably because there are some obvious benefits to having a spiritual practice. Studies tend to back this up (Benson, 1996). What the Benson's study shows is that the type of spirituality that people practice doesn't really matter. That is, the benefits of following a spiritual path (as opposed to a religion) aren't specific to the spiritual path you follow. No matter the path, the rewards are the same. Some of these rewards include relief from depression and anxiety, higher self-esteem, stress reduction, and higher self-efficacy. According to Dyer (2007), spiritual connections can even improve your physical health.

Some people get hung up on the term "spiritual." They think it implies a supernatural component. I prefer to think of "spiritual" things in the original sense of the word. "Spiritual" comes from the Latin "spiritus," which originally meant, "to breathe." So originally a "spiritual" experience was a breathtaking, or inspiring, experience. Whether or not you believe in any sort of supernatural divinity, a spiritual experience is a breathtaking, inspiring event.

Several studies have demonstrated that the type of spirituality one practices seems to be independent of the benefits gained. In other words, most spiritual paths reap similar rewards. All spiritual paths lead to a better quality of life for those who practice them properly.

What is it about spirituality that allows it to work its magic?

I have my own theory about this. Suppose you could take all the spiritual paths practiced worldwide, put them into a cauldron, and boil them down to their essence. What would remain? I believe that the common thread to all spiritual practices is a feeling of connection. This is a feeling of connection to others, or connection to the divine, or simply connection to nature and to ourselves. In short, spirituality is simply the ability to connect.

If you think back on the spiritual experiences you've had in your lifetime, do recall feeling connected on some level? Many describe spiritual experiences as a sense of *oneness*. Oneness implies connection to something outside ourselves. This connection could be to other people, to nature, to the Universe, to our own personal concept of God, or even to our own True Selves. In this sense, even an agnostic or an atheist could experience spirituality through connection. You don't have to believe in anything supernatural to feel connected to something larger than yourself. Of course, if you do believe in the divine, that's okay too. What's important in either case is that sense of being connected.

Think for a moment about what being connected means to you, then go on to the next page and answer the questions in the *What Connection Means to Me* exercise.

Benson, H. (1996). *Timeless healing: The power and biology of belief*. New York: Fireside Books.

Dyer, Jade (2007). How Does Spirituality Affect Physical Health? A Conceptual Review, *Holistic Nursing Practice* 2007; 21(6):324–328

7.0 What Connection Means to Me

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer the following questions. Try to be as specific as possible in your answers:

When I feel connected in a spiritual sense, I am...

When I feel connected, my thoughts are...

When I feel connected, my feelings are...

When I feel connected, my body is...

When I feel connected, my spirit is...

7.1 Reconnecting

We all have had spiritual experiences, or moments that inspire us and fill us with awe. In fact, without these experiences of connection, it's impossible to learn and grow (McCoy, 2020). Sometimes these experiences are described as *reconnecting*. The idea of reconnecting implies that we are connecting again to something that we somehow became disconnected with in the first place.

How we became disconnected isn't as important as finding out how to reconnect ourselves. If there are barriers between ourselves and the things we wish to be connected to, we have the ability to remove those barriers. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy allows connectedness by working to eliminate the barriers that keep us separate from our concept of the divine, from inspirational experiences, from each other, and from our true selves.

So, the way to have truly meaningful spiritual experiences is to remove or eliminate those things that keep us from connecting.

Take some time right now to think about the things that keep you from feeling connected. Make a list on the next page. Complete the exercise on the next page before reading any further.

McCoy, Derek. (2020). *Learning by Connecting with Others*. 10.4324/9780429321290-10.

7.1 Things that Keep Me from Feeling Connected page 1 of 1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Write down things that keep you from feeling connected to others, to nature, to the divine, and to your own True Self. Try to think of at least three.

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Now that you've completed your list, look at it again. Of all the things you've listed, how many of those things on your list have to do with barriers within yourself? How many of them have to do with other people? How many of them have to do with your circumstances or the environment in which you live?

What would it take to remove those barriers? Remember, you can't change others, you can only change yourself. If it's not people that are acting as barriers to connection, remember also that you can very rarely change external circumstances. You can only change how you choose to respond to those circumstances. Instead, focus on things that would involve activities and actions that are within your power to change. For example, you may have a person in your life who has a wonderful talent for making you angry. This anger keeps you from feeling connected to this person. Since you can't change the other person, is there something you could change about yourself that would make dealing with this person easier and less stressful?

For another example, imagine that you are trying to assemble a new piece of furniture, but the instructions are inaccurate, incomplete, or incomprehensible. Instead of getting frustrated, you can instead choose to connect with your True Self to find your calm inner balance. From there you may choose to approach the task one step at a time or to set it aside for a while to allow yourself to calm down.

Brainstorm several solutions to removing the barriers you've listed above. If the answers are too difficult for now, don't be discouraged. Set this list aside and come back to it when you've completed this entire section of the workbook.

7.2 Faces and Masks

Now that we've thought a bit about the barriers to connectedness we find in our own lives, how do we go about changing those barriers so that we can achieve connection?

Think for a moment about the different faces we wear each day. If you're interacting with people at work, do they see the same person that your family sees, or do you wear a different face in work situations? When you're at school, do you interact with people in the same way that you would interact with someone on a date? If you are at church, mosque, or temple, do you act in the same way you would act if you were out for a night on the town?

If you're like most people, you probably have different masks that you wear for different social situations.

Now think back on your list above. Are there any people on your list who prevent you from feeling connected?

Think about those people for a moment. Be totally honest with yourself. Do you think that those people act the same way in all social situations, or do they wear masks as well? Pick out one individual with whom you have difficulty feeling connected. Think of the mask they wear that seems to act as a barrier to your ability to connect with them. How much of that mask is their natural inclination, and how much of it is their response to the mask that you wear when you are with them? Remember to watch for crystal ball thinking. Don't assume a reason for their masks if you don't actually know what they're feeling or thinking! Might their masks with you be different if you changed your own mask?

This is not to say that you are responsible for the rude or reprehensible behavior of others. Each individual is responsible for his or her own behavior. The idea here is to evaluate your own responses to such

behavior. Is there anything you can change that might make it easier to connect with them? If so, try it and see if their behavior improves.

If, after changing the way you respond, you still find the person difficult to connect with, or even to be around, then you've done all you can do to correct the situation. At that point, your part in the problem is over and done with, and you will have to practice mindful acceptance. If you've done everything you can to try to get along with a difficult person, and they're still being difficult, then this is usually a good indication that the problem lies with the other person and not with yourself.

With this idea in mind, you can also try to see beyond the mask that the other person is wearing. Masks are often worn to hide a person's true identity. Is the other person trying to hide something? Could it be that they wear the mask out of fear of letting someone see who they really are? What could you do to help them change their mask? Even if you can't get them to put on a different face with you or with others, you may come to understand that their mask hides a deep hurt or fear, and their mask is their way of protecting themselves from further hurt.

What sort of mask do you wear with the world? What sort of mask would you like to wear? If your True Self were a mask, what would it look like? Go on to the *Faces and Masks* exercise on the next page to find out.

7.2 Faces and Masks Exercise

Name: _____ Date: _____

We all have different faces (masks) that we present to others. These masks sometimes change depending on the person and/or the situation. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung called these masks the *Persona*. *Persona* is Latin for “mask.” In ancient Rome actors often wore masks that portrayed the characters they were playing.

We all have characters, or masks, that we like to put on from time to time. For this exercise, we’re going to create a mask for the character of your own True Self.

To begin this exercise, meditate for a while on the nature and character of your own True Self. The True Self, for the purposes of this exercise, is the person you are if you are living up to your own highest aspirations for yourself.

When you have a good image of your own True Self in mind, answer the following questions before going on to the next page:

What is the nature of your True Self? Are you a lover, a warrior, a sage, a teacher, a trickster, a peacemaker, or something else? What word best describes who you are?

What are the elements of nature that might reflect the nature of your own True Self? Are you patient like a mountain? Strong like an oak? Wise like an owl? Playful like a coyote? What elements of nature best describe who you are?

How might these elements of nature assist you in finding your True Self? When you create your mask, how might you incorporate these elements into its design?

7.2 Faces and Masks Exercise

Name: _____ Date: _____

CREATING YOUR MASK

Now that you have a good idea of which elements to incorporate into your mask, gather the materials to make it. Try to focus on natural materials as much as possible, using wood, feathers, twigs, leaves, leather, etc. You may also use dried gourds for this purpose.

When you create your mask, hold the idea in mind that it is a representation of your True Self; the person you are in the process of becoming. As such, when finished the mask should tell your own story in such a way that anyone looking at it would have a good idea of who you are.

When you have finished constructing your mask, go on to the next section of this worksheet and answer the questions below. Do not attempt to answer these questions until you have completed your mask. It may help, when answering the questions below, to meditate or take a walk in the woods first.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 'TRUE SELF' MASK

Now that you have completed your mask, what did the exercise teach you about your own body and how you relate to it? Be as specific as possible when answering.

Now that you have completed your mask, what did the exercise teach you about how you connect to others? To nature? To yourself? Be as specific as possible when answering.

Now that you have completed your mask, what did the exercise teach you about the way you think about your True Self? Be as specific as possible when answering.

7.2 Faces and Masks Exercise

Name: _____ Date: _____

Now that you have completed your mask, what did the exercise teach you about your passions? About what you really care about, and what gives your life meaning? Be as specific as possible when answering.

Now that you have completed your mask, what did the exercise teach you about your own spiritual development? Be as specific as possible when answering.

Imagine an archaeologist digs up your mask a thousand years in the future. What might this archaeologist conclude about the person who wore it? Would the mask be a good representation of who you are right now? Of whom you hope to be in the future? Be as specific as possible when answering.

7.3 Connecting

Go back to your list of barriers to connectedness. Keeping crystal ball thinking in mind, how many of those barriers having to do with other people could you transform or even eliminate if you throw away your crystal ball? If you can dissolve those barriers by eliminating your own crystal ball thinking, would that help you to connect?

Maybe there are people on your list who will still present barriers, even if you throw away your crystal ball. If this is the case, and you've done everything you can imagine to eliminate your own barriers, then the time has come to make a choice. Consider why it is important to you to connect to this person, and whether the effort is worth it if they're not willing to reciprocate. Consider all the positives and negatives before deciding. Once you are certain you have considered all the options, set boundaries with the other person then make your decision, and make your decision final.

Perhaps it's not a person that is helping to create a barrier to your connectedness. Perhaps it's a place, or a situation, or even yourself. The way to eliminate the barriers in this instance is to try to decide why a connection is important in the first place. Remember that connection in this sense is a spiritual (inspirational) sort of connection; what C.G. Jung called the *numinous*. Such a connection is a transcendent experience; one that changes the way you see things and changes the way you view your place in the world. It is a deep, spiritual sense of belonging.

Think about the ways you'd like to feel connected in this context. Are there already ways in your life where you feel this connection? What is different about these connections? Evaluate the ways that you feel disconnected and consider what would be different if you were not so disconnected.

One of the values of ecotherapy is that nature gives us something to be connected to. It's a safe place to practice our connection skills. For example, do you have a pet? Do you feel connected to your pet? Have you ever had an argument with your pet that led you to feel disconnected? Think about these questions as you read the following:

- Has your pet ever started an argument with you?
- Does your pet ever talk back?
- Does your pet ever disagree with you in a conversation?
- Has your pet ever asked you for your car keys?
- Has your pet ever dumped you for another human?
- Has your pet ever asked you for a loan?
- Has any pet borrowed your tools and then not returned them?
- Did your pet ever ask you if you wanted him to guard your property?
- Has a pet ever done any of the thousand things that humans have done to disappoint you?

It may be argued that pets are incapable of rational thought, but humans have also, on occasion, displayed a talent for irrational thinking. What pets are capable of is unconditional acceptance. Because of this ability, animals are the ideal subjects with which to practice connecting.

Likewise, the forest, the wilderness, even a garden, has no agenda and nothing to gain by withholding connections. A garden will not throw up any barriers to connection. This means that nature is the ideal environment for practicing connectivity skills. Think for a moment about those experiences of connection that would help you to gain a spiritual quality to your day-to-day living, then go on to complete the exercise on the next page.

7.3 Ways I'd Like to Feel Connected

Name: _____ Date: _____

Go back to your list of *Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected*. For all of those things on your list that act as barriers to connection, there are also things that you would like to be connected to, but are not. List the things you'd like to be connected to below. Keep the focus on things that would foster a spiritual connection of unconditional acceptance, love, and security. Where does your passion lie? The things on this list can be things from the previous list, or entirely new things, or people. Try to think of at least three:

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Now look at the list on the previous page. How many of the things you listed are people? How many are places? How many are things? For each item on the list, ask yourself if there was ever a time when you felt connected, but somehow the connection was lost. If this is the case, what happened? What changed? Did the person, place or thing change, or did you?

For example, suppose you once felt connected to a person. That person was inspiring to you and helped you to feel connected to something larger than yourself. Further suppose that over time, that person began to violate your boundaries. These violations became more frequent and more severe over time until you no longer felt connected when you were around this person. In this case, the person changed, creating a barrier to connection.

Let's look at another example. Suppose you have a good friend you've always felt connected to. Over time, you develop new hobbies and interests, learn new things, and explore new life choices, while your friend stays pretty much the same. Due to your growth as a person, you no longer feel connected to your friend. In this case, you changed, creating a barrier to connection.

When seeking to connect with others, or with nature, or with yourself, or with your own concept of something larger than yourself, the first step is to ask if it was you that changed, or something else that changed. The second step is to remember that the only thing in your power to change is yourself.

If there are things on your list with which you've never felt a connection, but would like to, ask yourself if there's a similar circumstance in which you did feel a connection to something or someone else. Could that connectedness translate over to the item on your list? How?

For example, suppose you have a friend who loves classical music. She talks about it with a sense of awe and wonder, but when you listen to the same music you don't get the same inspiration. You'd like to be able to get the same sense of connection she feels, but classical music just doesn't do it for you. Is there a similar musical experience that gave you a similar sense of connection? Is there some music that inspires you to feel spiritual connection to something greater than yourself?

Finally, ask yourself why a sense of connection with the items on the list is important for you to achieve a spiritual experience. Dig really deep and be specific. In the example above where you changed so much you no longer felt connected to your friend, how important is it to still be friends with this person? Could you achieve a spiritual connection in some other way with something or someone else besides what you listed?

7.4 Connecting with Nature: A Great Place to Start

Look again at your list from the previous exercise. For the time being, eliminate any connections that have to do with people. Human relationships are complex and sometimes demanding, so we're going to start with something a bit easier. That something is nature. Since nature is usually non-threatening, it's a great place to start forming spiritual connections.

What ways could you feel more connected to nature? Think back on times in your past when you felt that connection. Perhaps it was a fishing trip, or a nature hike, or a camping trip. Maybe you felt connected while skiing or skydiving or canoeing. If there was ever a time when you felt at peace with yourself and

your surroundings, look back on it and ask yourself how you could recapture that experience. What was different about it? Where were you? What were you doing?

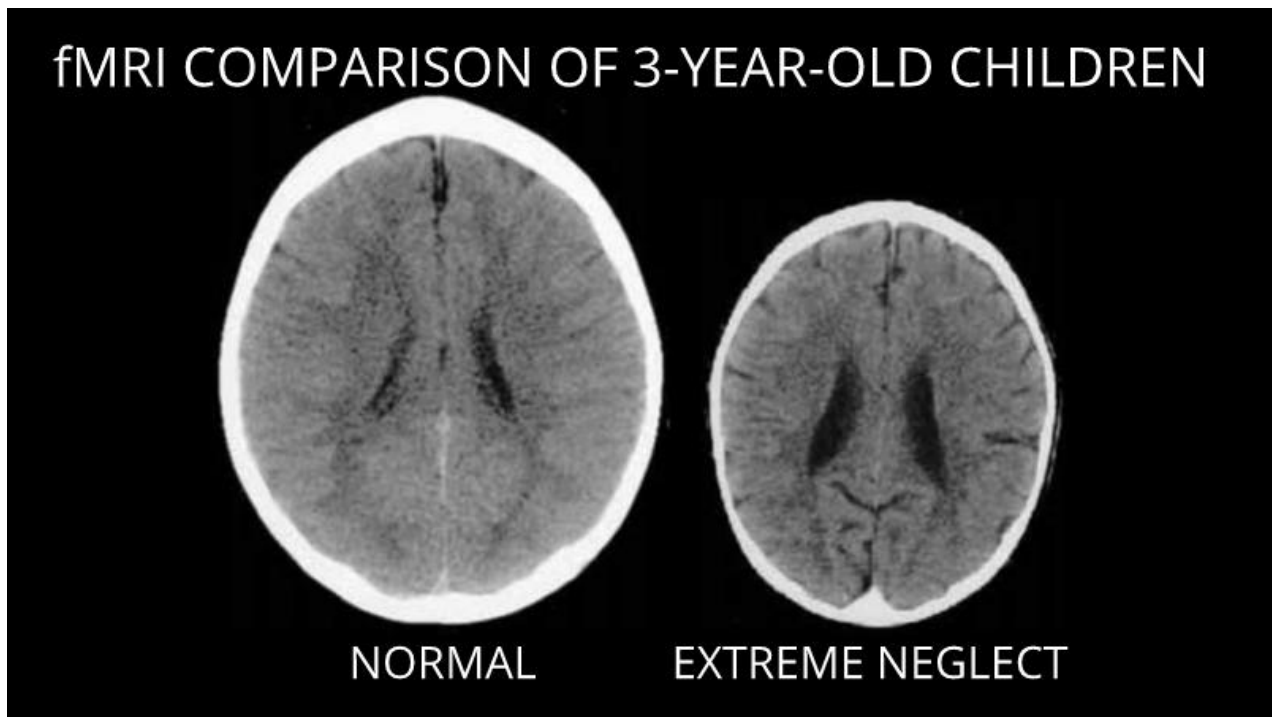
You may not live in an area where you can go out into the woods every day, but Han and Ruan (2019) demonstrated that even having a few houseplants or listening to recordings of nature sounds (Alvarsson and Nilsson, 2010) can have a calming and soothing effect. So even if you can't go on a three-mile nature hike every day, you can always find some ways to bring more nature into your immediate surroundings.

Alvarsson J, Wiens S., & Nilsson M. (2010). Stress and recovery during exposure to nature sounds and environmental noise. *Int. J Environ Res Public Health*, 2010 (7) 1036-106.

Han, Ke-Tsung & Ruan, Li-Wen (2019). Effects of Indoor Plants on Self-Reported Perceptions: A Systemic Review, *Sustainability* 2019, 11, 4506; doi:10.3390/su11164506

7.5 How Important is Connectivity?

We all need to feel connected to someone or something outside ourselves. Not only is such a connection a means of developing emotional security, but it is also necessary for physical health and even for proper brain development. Ongoing studies with feral children (children who are raised with extreme neglect, i.e., with little or no opportunity to connect with other human beings) continue to demonstrate the extremely detrimental effects such a lack of connection can produce.



Perry, Bruce (2002). Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential: What Childhood Neglect Tells Us about Nature and Nurture. *Brain and Mind* 3: 79-100, 2002.

MRI scans of feral children, when compared to children who were raised in loving families, show marked differences. Children raised in situations in which they have been deprived of human contact show

remarkable deficits in development of many critical areas of the brain (Vyshedskiy, et al, 2017), including the areas responsible for emotional regulation, good judgment, self-control, and concentration (Lapointe, 2005). Such studies with feral children demonstrate that humans need connections with other humans in order to develop properly. Obviously, connectivity is especially important!

Lapointe, Leonard. (2005). Feral children. *Journal of medical speech-language pathology*. 13. VII-IX.

Perry, Bruce (2002). Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential: What Childhood Neglect Tells Us about Nature and Nurture. *Brain and Mind* 3: 79-100, 2002.

Vyshedskiy, A., Mahapatra, S. & Dunn, R. (2017). *Linguistically deprived children: meta-analysis of published research underlines the importance of early syntactic language use for normal brain development*. Boston University, Boston, USA

7.6 Mindful Connecting

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is all about connecting; to ourselves, to each other, and to nature. Likewise, relationships are all about connecting to others. One way to connect with others is to eliminate any barriers to connection that may have grown up over time as the relationship progresses. We all have our own little escapes from connection, and these can creep slowly into relationships unnoticed.

When I counsel couples, I advise them to spend time alone together, working on their relationship. Sometimes I get couples who plan dates together, and when they return, I asked them what they did. Some common responses to this question include: “*We went to a movie,*” or, “*We watched television together,*” or “*We went out to dinner with another couple.*” When I question further, I discover that although technically they spent time together, that time was not used in connecting with each other. Instead, they spent the time engaging in various behaviors to avoid that connection.

In the example with the couple going out to dinner with another couple, the guys talked about golf, and the ladies talked about the latest books they’d read. The couple in question spent a total of about five minutes the entire evening actually talking to each other, and most of that conversation revolved around their choices for dinner. Likewise, in the movie and television examples, the couples did spend time together, but their attention was focused on the television and the movie, and not on each other.

If your intention is to connect to your partner for the purpose of building a stronger, more meaningful relationship, then focusing on the television or your golf score or your neighbors can be an escape from building that connection. On the other hand, we can enter into being mode with our partners and explore the simple joy of being together (Barnes, et al, 2007).

One of the ways we build connection is through communication; sharing our thoughts, feelings, and needs with each other. This doesn’t necessarily mean that all communication has to consist of talking about things. About 70% of communication is non-verbal. A gentle caress or a kiss on the cheek can communicate volumes. Simply being together can make or break a relationship (Gesell, et al, 2020).

Mindfulness is shifting out of doing mode and into being mode. This means that to connect with your partner, you don’t have to do anything but to be together. Explore the idea of simply being together, without having to do anything. No movies, no dinners, and perhaps not even any conversation. Just enjoy

each other's company. The ultimate non-verbal message in connecting to each other is: *"I'm here for you. I understand you. I care about you."* You don't need words to communicate this message to each other. Try it sometime and see how it improves your opportunities to connect.

Barnes, Sean & Brown, Kirk & Krusemark, Elizabeth & Campbell, W. Keith & Rogge, Ronald. (2007). The role of mindfulness in romantic relationship satisfaction and responses to relationship stress. *Journal of marital and family therapy*. 33. 482-500. 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00033.x.

Gesell, N., Niklas, F., Schmiedeler, S., & Segerer, R. (2020). Mindfulness and Romantic Relationship Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Conflict Resolution Styles and Closeness, *Mindfulness* (2020) 11:2314–2324.



7.7 Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy and Connecting

How does Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy fit into the idea of connection?

Pause for a moment and picture you and your partner in a romantic outdoor setting, far away from any distractions. You may picture yourselves hiking through the woods or picnicking on the beach. Now think about the ways you might escape connecting with each other and ask yourselves how many of those ways would still be there if you were both outdoors in the setting you've just pictured (Naor & Maysel, 2019).

For example, your partner may have listed *"watching television"* as one of their escapes. If you're picturing you and your partner sitting on the beach, would watching television even be an issue?

On the other hand, your partner may have listed, *"ignoring you"* as one of their escapes. If you were picnicking on the beach, it might still be possible for your partner to ignore you. If that's the case, you'll have to dig a little more deeply. You can talk about it together and decide together if it would still be an issue in a romantic outdoor setting.

Go over the ways you and your partner escape connecting with each other. How many of them have to do with things that occur in indoor settings? How many of them have to do with things that occur in outdoor settings? If you're like most people, most of your escapes potentially take place in indoor environments where there are things like television, social media, and housework. If so, you can see that one way of connecting, without potential distractions or escapes, is to go outdoors and spend time together.

Now go back to your *Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected* list. Have they changed? Find the top thing from your list that is currently keeping you from feeling connected to your True Self. Hold that

barrier to connection in your mind for a moment. We're going to take a closer look at it by going inside ourselves.

Before going any further, think about your number one barrier to connecting with your True Self, and answer the following questions:

- What is the exact nature of this barrier? Physical or mental?
- Is this barrier to connection a permanent barrier, or a temporary one?
- Is this barrier to connection a pervasive one, or a situation-specific one?
- Is this barrier to connection a personal one, or something external to you?
- Is it something you can change, or is it something you have to accept?
- Is it something you have control over?
- Is it something you can rephrase in order to turn it into a personal truth?

Now visualize yourself drawing a circle around this barrier to connection in your own mind.

Allow yourself to move from doing mode into being mode. Simply observe what's going on inside of this imaginary circle you've drawn around your barrier to connection. Are you able to pinpoint anything about your number one barrier to connecting with your True Self? Did you discover anything that might help you to remove it or to change it so that it is no longer a barrier? If you cannot change it, can you accept it so that it no longer prevents you from living in your True Self?

Did this exercise help you to find a way to make it easier to connect to your True Self?

Naor, Lia & Maysel, Ofra. (2019). The Therapeutic value of experiencing Spirituality in Nature. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. 7. 10.1037/scp0000204.

7.8 Memes

Were you able to pinpoint anything about your number one barrier to connecting with your True Self? Did you discover anything that might help you to remove it or to change it so that it is no longer a barrier? If you cannot change it, can you accept it so that it no longer prevents you from living in your True Self? If you cannot change it, and find it difficult to accept as it is, is there any way you could change the way you think about it so that it is no longer a problem? What would you need to let go of in order to accomplish this?

What behaviors might you be engaging in that might make this transition to connecting with your True Self difficult?

Behaviors are nothing more than habits of thought and action. The best thing about habits is that they can be broken. There's a special type of beliefs called *memes*. No, we're not talking about those cute pictures with witty sayings that get passed around on the Internet! A meme is a habit of thought or action that we inherit from someone else. A meme in this sense is an idea that gets passed on from one person to another, usually our parents or our family of origin. For example, if your parents taught you to always

be honest and work hard, then you might have a meme that causes you to believe that you should never tell a lie, and another meme that causes you to believe that you should always do your best.

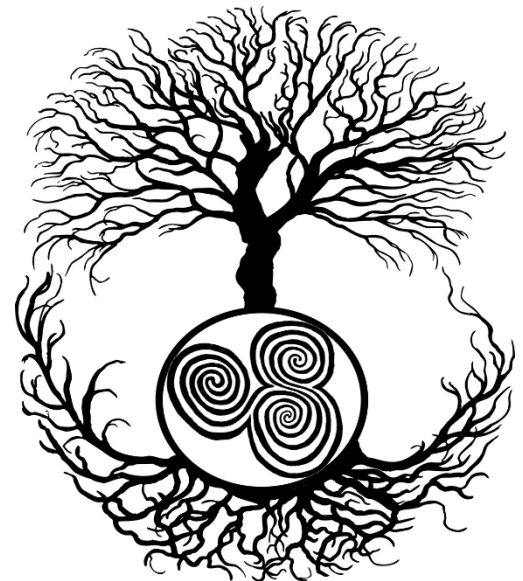
The word *meme* comes from the Greek word *mimeo*, meaning “*imitated thing*.” Memes are behaviors or beliefs we imitate from others.

Memes are to personality as genes are to an organism. If we change the DNA structure of an organism, we change the entire organism. Likewise, if we can change our memes, we change our beliefs. And if we can change our beliefs, we can change our world! This means that the key to removing barriers to connection to others, to self, to nature, and to our own sense of the spiritual is to change any memes that might be blocking the way.

Consider memes as little bits and pieces of your personality. They are core ideas that branch off and form more ideas, creating constellations of thought patterns and behaviors. There are memes that are core ideas, and memes that are branch ideas. Now picture these meme constellations as trees. The memes that make up the trunk of the tree are the core beliefs from which the branching memes spring.

If there are memes that are causing you difficulty in life, the best way to change them is to find the trunk of this tree. If you prune the branches without pulling the tree up by its roots, the problem branches will continue to grow back. These “*tree trunk*” memes are called “*root memes*.”

If you can identify a root meme and change it, then all the other branch memes that feed off of that root meme will change as well. Looking back to your list of *Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected*, find your number one barrier to connection with your True Self. Now look at the other things on your list. Can you see any patterns of relationship among these memes? If so, then they are all probably tied to a root meme. Find the patterns among your barriers to connection. Which one seems to be most important? That is, which one seems to be the one that all the others are connected to? That one is probably the root meme that is acting as a barrier to connection.



You may also see no relationship whatsoever among your top barriers to connection. If that is the case, they may all be root memes, or none of them may be. Or perhaps there are two or more groups of patterns of root memes. In this case, you have more than one root meme at play. Go over your list again and try to isolate all of the root memes that are acting as barriers to connection with your True Self.

List them in the exercise on the next page.

7.8 Root Memes that Act as Barriers to Connection Page 1 of 2

Name: _____ Date: _____

What personal memes might be keeping you from feeling more connected to nature, to others, and to your own True Self? List them below:

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7.8 Root Memes that Act as Barriers to Connection Page 2 of 2

Name: _____ Date: _____

Now that you have identified some of those root memes, pick the one that seems the most prominent or the most significant, and answer the following questions:

What is the nature of the problem meme/habit? (What do I hope to achieve in thinking/behaving this way? What is my intention?)

How is the problem maintained? It's been said that insanity is doing the same things over and over again in the same ways and expecting things to turn out differently. What solutions might you have been attempting that are instead maintaining the problem? (Which behaviors do I want to change? Is there a way to change how I think about it so that it is no longer a problem?)

Why do I engage in this meme/habit in the first place? (Why is this behavior important to me? What would I lose if I let it go? What would I gain? What is my motivation for continuing this belief/meme?)

Practice this exercise whenever you feel disconnected from others, from nature, and from yourself. The more often you practice it, the easier it will become to re-connect.

7.9 Change Your Memes, Change Your World

In the previous exercise, did you learn anything new about how to remove your barriers to connection with your True Self? Did it change your perception of your barriers to connection? Did it change your assumptions about how you interact with the world and with your True Self?

Every day we create our own reality by our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Our thoughts become our behaviors, and our behaviors become our thoughts. It makes perfect sense that if we have a set of beliefs (or memes), that our behaviors will stem from those thoughts. In other words, we act based on our beliefs.

It may seem counterintuitive that if we change our behaviors, we can change our thoughts as well. If this is a difficult concept for you, then the next time you're in a bad mood, force yourself to smile, even if you don't feel like it. It may help to smile at yourself in a mirror. Try smiling for five minutes in a row, even if you must force it, and watch what happens to your thoughts!

When I counsel people with self-esteem issues, I have them meditate each day for at least ten minutes, repeating positive affirmations about themselves while doing so (Edwards, 1991). I tell them to keep doing it, even though at first it may feel silly or awkward. I tell them to keep doing it even if they don't feel it to be true about themselves or even if they don't feel it.

After a few weeks of engaging in the practice, most of my patients tell me that they have observed their own thoughts about themselves change. They began to believe what they'd been telling themselves during these meditations! When this happens, Hebb's Postulate is in play. "What fires together wires together," so by changing their own thoughts about themselves, they've changed the physical structures of their own brains, creating, and then strengthening, new neural pathways. Thinking in new, mindful ways is like pushups for your brain!

If you've been doing things a certain way all your life, then doing things differently is bound to feel a little unnatural and strange at first, if for no other reason

Optional Activity: The Bell Branch



A Bell Branch is a branch selected from a tree that is meaningful to you. Once you have selected it, you may adorn it with colorful ribbons, feathers, or other decorations. This branch is also adorned with bells. Each bell tied to your Bell Branch represents a significant event in your life. The birth of a child might deserve a bell. A wedding might also call for one, as might a graduation, the passing of a loved one, a new job, or a new home.

The Bell Branch is a living record of the significant events in your life. You may use it in your sacred space for consecration and purification, or simply as a reminder of where you've been.

You may wish to select a branch from your centering tree, or any tree of your choosing, for your Bell Branch.

Once it has been selected, you may wish to write or carve your name on it and decorate it with symbols that are meaningful to you.

Each time you have a significant event in your life, add a bell to your Bell Branch.

When you shake your branch, all the bells will remind you of all those events. The music that they make will be the rites of passage of your life singing back to you.

than the fact that they are new and unfamiliar to you. But if you give yourself some time, these new ways of being will become familiar, and soon you'll be well on your way to living in True Self.

Edwards, D.L. (1991). A meta-analysis of the effects of meditation and hypnosis on measures of anxiety. *Dissertation abstracts international*, 52, (2-B), 1039-1040.

Session 8: Nature as Metaphor

Each of us has their own personal story called “*my life.*” We all have events that happen to us, and we sometimes choose to label those things as “good” or “bad.” We create our own personal myths by choosing which events to focus on in our own lives, or which things to include in our own personal narratives. The good news about the myths of our lives is that we are the authors. If we don’t like the way the story is going, we have the power to rewrite it at any time. We can’t always choose the circumstances of our lives, but we can always choose the story we create about those circumstances. If you go out into the woods and start observing things, you will notice something begin to happen. You will begin to create stories about the events you observe there in the forest. These stories that spring to mind in the woods can tell you a great deal about what is going on in your own unconscious mind if you know how to pay attention to them.



Facilitator Notes for Session 8: Nature as Metaphor

PREPARATION

Read the Session 8 Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Ecotherapy; Second-Order Change; Beginner’s Mind; the Power of Intention; Nature as Archetype; the Golden Road, and Nature as Metaphor

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): True Self; A Closer Look Activity; the power of the unconscious mind; the Green Man; the World Tree; tree as metaphor, and animal as metaphor

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with nature as a metaphor. Start this activity by asking for volunteers to tell a story in which they saw themselves in nature, or they saw nature in themselves. Link this discussion to the idea that nature can be used as a teaching tool. This discussion lays the groundwork for the activities in this session.

If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn’t time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

NOTE: The Closer Look exercise and subsequent reflections will require most of the session. This activity is the central portion of this session because in the Closer Look exercise you are looking for ways in which students saw stories happening in nature as they observed it. These stories are projections of their own consciousness onto the nature scenes they observed. Don’t try to put too much interpretation on their stories; instead, let them interpret them for themselves. Try to dedicate at least ten minutes of today’s session time for the Closer Look exercise.

SESSION OUTLINE

8.0 What is Ecotherapy?

Define ecotherapy by first defining ecopsychology, which is the study of the effects of nature on the psychology of humans and other animals. Ecotherapy is defined as “the use of the tools and techniques of ecopsychology in a therapeutic way and/or in a therapeutic setting.”

Introduce the idea of the pilgrimage as the optional activity from this section. You may encourage students to engage in their own pilgrimage, or you may suggest to them that in a way participating in this series of workshops could also be seen as a type of pilgrimage. If you wish, you may use the questions in the pilgrimage activity to facilitate a discussion about people’s experiences with this workshop series thus far.

The questions from the pilgrimage activity are:

1. Who am I?
2. Who do I want to be?
3. What is my mission or purpose in life?
4. How am I living that purpose?
5. How am I not living that purpose?
6. What would I have to change about myself in order to accomplish my life’s mission?

When I lead groups, I read over each question and ask students to discuss how their answers to these questions may have changed over the time they have been attending the workshops. Link their answers to these questions back to ecotherapy and nature as metaphor by asking how their experiences in nature over the course of this workshop series might have changed their answers.

8.1 Second-Order Change

First Order Change involves playing the same game over and over again by the same rules and expecting different results, while Second Order Change means thinking outside of the box and re-interpreting the rules so the game can be won.

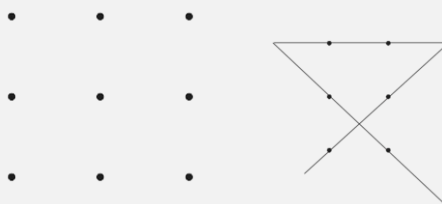
I often illustrate this concept through the use of the Nine Dot Puzzle.

The Nine Dot Puzzle introduces the concept of the paradigm shift (Second Order Change). Give students the first page of the puzzle, and explain the rules to them, but don’t show them the solution until they’ve attempted to solve the puzzle. After they’ve attempted to solve the puzzle, share the solution with them.

The natural assumption for most people attempting to solve the puzzle is that there is an invisible boundary around the perimeter of the nine dots: A “box.” But if you assume there is an unspoken rule that you cannot go outside of the box, it is impossible to solve the puzzle. People who make this assumption cannot solve the puzzle. Their natural assumptions prevent them from seeing the solution. Relate this to the idea of Second Order Change. A paradigm shift has to occur in order for the puzzle to be solved, just as a paradigm shift has to occur in our minds in order to achieve beginner’s mind and to look at things in a fresh, new way. By seeing things in a new way, we are able to escape assumptions that are keeping us from seeing solutions.

Here are the rules for working this puzzle:

1. Connect all nine dots below, using only four straight lines
2. Once you begin to draw, you cannot lift your pencil; the lines must be connected to each other in one continuous movement (think connect-the-dots)
3. It is possible to solve the puzzle!



As you can see, the only way to solve the puzzle is to literally “think outside the box.”

The natural assumption for most people is that there is an invisible boundary around the perimeter of the nine dots: A “box.” But the rules for solving the puzzle didn’t say that you could not go outside the box! If you assume there is an unspoken rule that you cannot go outside of the box, it is impossible to solve the puzzle. People who make this assumption cannot solve the puzzle. Their natural assumptions prevent them from seeing the solution.

Think about how you’d like to live. How many of your natural assumptions prevent you from consistently finding solutions to the problems you encounter in your day-to-day life? How many of your natural assumptions are preventing you from becoming the person you would like to be? How many of your assumptions are keeping you from living in True Self? What “rules” would have to change in order for you to make that leap? How can nature help you to challenge those assumptions? Discuss with your students.

8.2 Beginner’s Mind

Define beginner’s mind here for your students. It is a key concept for the exercises to follow. Beginner’s mind is the ability to greet each day with a new mind, without assumptions, preconceptions, or judgments. It is about cultivating a childlike sense of wonder about the world around us, and about ourselves. By doing so we are more easily able to achieve Second Order Change in our lives. Second Order Change is lasting because it is a change in the way we view the world.

8.3 True Self and the Power of Intention

When we live in deliberate and intentional ways, we are utilizing the power of intention. Intention is conceptualized with the following two questions:

1. What am I trying to accomplish with my life?
2. Is what I’m doing, saying, and thinking going to help me to accomplish my goals?

If we are using the power of intention, we are taking a solution-focused approach to problem solving. We can talk about problems all day, but until we start talking about solutions nothing gets solved. The power of intention is about solutions.

The way to live in True Self is intentionally. If you have time, you may facilitate a discussion about how students can use their power of intention to live more fully in True Self, and how nature might help them to do so.

8.4 Nature as Metaphor

Review how fairy tales like the Aesop’s Fables are nature metaphors used to teach valuable life lessons. Link this to the idea that we can create our own “fairy tales” by observing nature and using it as a metaphor for the challenges in our own lives. If time permits you may discuss how intention and nature may work together to create metaphors that allow students to live more fully in True Self.

EXERCISE: A Closer Look PRIORITY 1

This exercise has to be done outside, so if you’re experiencing inclement weather you will have to postpone it until weather permits. When I do this exercise, I use Hula Hoops™ and have students place them on the ground in front of them for their period of observation. The hoop marks the boundary of observation. Allow at least ten minutes for this exercise. I usually have at least one student who gets bored, gets up and wanders away during this exercise. That’s okay too. I generally ask them, during the discussion portion of the session, what caught their attention outside of the hoop. I then ask them to create a metaphor based on their observations of nature outside the parameters of the exercise. What did they see that wasn’t in the hoop?

8.5 Reflections on a Closer Look

The exercise that follows is designed to take the story created in the Closer Look exercise and to turn it inward; that is, to use the story as a metaphor for the individual’s own inner journey. Keep this in mind as you have your students complete the Reflections on A Closer Look exercise.

EXERCISE: Reflections on A Closer Look PRIORITY 1

Have your students answer the questions in this exercise after completing A Closer Look. If time permits, you may facilitate a discussion by asking volunteers to share their responses to the questions. In the interest of time, I usually read through the questions one by one and ask students to volunteer answers. I don't take more than one or two answers before going on to the next question. You may then assign this exercise as homework once the students have a clear understanding of how to answer the questions.

8.6 A Closer Look Inside

The Closer Look Inside exercise uses the Closer Look to remove barriers to connection. This is done by using the story students created in the Closer Look exercise as a metaphor for their own internal states.

EXERCISE: A Closer Look Inside PRIORITY 1

Have students complete this exercise during the session. If students notice that they created stories that contain things that may be used to eliminate barriers to connection, this exercise should help them to figure out what those things are, and how to use those metaphors in intentional ways to connect with nature and with themselves. If time permits you may facilitate a discussion of student responses to this exercise when it is completed.

8.7 Nature as Archetype

Discuss the concept of archetypes and have students name some nature archetypes like the Sacred Tree or the Mandala. Link the idea of archetypes to the power of the unconscious mind by noting that archetypes reside in the unconscious mind and are inborn. Metaphors in nature that make use of archetypal energy are very powerful metaphors that can lead to Second Order Change when used properly.

8.8 The Power of the Unconscious Mind

During this part of the session, ask students to volunteer experiences they may have had with their unconscious minds. Such experiences might manifest as a hunch or intuition, or a dream that tells them something about themselves, or just a feeling that they should do something at a particular time in a particular way.

8.9 The Golden Road

Freud considered dreams the "Golden Road" to the unconscious mind. In the Nature as Metaphor session, we explore some ways in which we may use nature as a metaphor for our own unconscious thought processes. Introduce this idea with the Green Man exercise that follows.

8.10 The Green Man

The Green Man exercise that follows in Section 8.12 involves using trees as a sort of Thematic Apperception Test. In other words, what we see in the tree is a projection of our own unconscious minds. For now, just discuss the idea of the Green Man as a face in the trees. Different people may see different faces, or even animals or other objects. This is because such images are merely projections.

8.11 Wise Mind and the World Tree

Discuss the archetypal image of the World Tree as a metaphor for mind. This metaphorical tree of mind has branches that reach into the life-giving sunlight of order and rational thought, while its roots stretch deep into the dark, moist and chaotic soil of the unconscious mind, where the darker emotions dwell.

8.12 Connecting through the Green Man

Prepare for the Green Man exercise by explaining the rationale for it. You will be asking students to find a face or other image in a tree of their choosing. They will then sketch it and interpret it based on what they think their own subconscious minds might be trying to tell them.

Prior to the exercise, facilitate a brief Tree of Life meditation as a means of grounding and centering your students.

EXERCISE: The Green Man PRIORITY 2

Have your students engage in the Green Man exercise by selecting a tree of their own. When they feel that an image has formed in the tree, have them sketch it, then go on to answer the questions in the next exercise.

EXERCISE: Reflections on the Green Man PRIORITY 2

When this exercise is complete, facilitate a discussion by asking volunteers to share their responses with the rest of the group. Focus on using the Green Man as a metaphor for unconscious mental states.

8.13 Tree as Metaphor

Facilitate a discussion on trees as metaphors for our own internal states. Do trees have personalities? What can you learn from yourself by observing the trees?

8.14 Animal as Metaphor

Animals are used quite often as metaphors for human interaction, as this section points out. When using animals as metaphors for our own personal lives, we can draw upon the strength of these archetypes to achieve our own mindful states of being. Session 8: Nature as Metaphor prepares us for the idea of using totem animals as metaphors for our own internal states. This concept will be introduced in the next session's materials.

8.15 Nature as Metaphor for True Self

I illustrate the concepts in this section by asking students, "What is the nature of your True Self apart from material possessions?"

The next question I ask is, "What is the nature of your True Self apart from the natural world?"

The idea behind these two questions is that while we could exist without material possessions, we could not exist without nature. The more in tune we are with nature, the more likely we are to be living in True Self. Compare and contrast answers to these two questions with your students, using nature as a metaphor for True Self.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 9 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from Session 8 that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

8.0 What is Ecotherapy?

"Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations."

-Alfred Adler

People live in systems. We all grew up in families that interconnected, interacted, and interrelated with each other in a systemic fashion. There were rules that our families lived by. Some of these rules were spoken, and some of them were unspoken. Our parents or other authority figures usually made these rules.

Some of us were raised by both our birth parents, while some of us were raised in blended families with stepparents. Others were raised in single-parent homes, or by grandparents, or by foster parents. In each of these families, there are systemic rules that indicate what the expectations are for surviving and thriving within the family.

These family systems exist in the larger circle of the neighborhood. In cities these neighborhoods may be close-knit communities, while in rural areas these neighborhood communities may be more geographically spread out. Each neighborhood has rules that either form a coherent unit or create chaos among the members of the system.

These neighborhoods belong to larger systems of community, and to town or city, and to nation, and ultimately to the entire planet we call home. Each of these systems has rules about interacting with other systems.

Nature is a system as well. How the system of nature chooses to interact with us is at least as important as how we choose to interact with nature. It is a reciprocal relationship; a "seesaw" of give and take. The more we interact in positive ways with nature, the more nature chooses to interact in positive ways with us. And of course, the more we choose to interact in negative ways with nature, the more we reap the consequences when nature responds in kind.

These complex interactions impact our psyches and influence our mental and physical wellbeing. If you've ever felt relaxed and invigorated after a walk in the park, or if you've ever felt sad after driving down a highway lined with litter, or if you've ever experienced anxiety because of fires, floods, tornadoes or hurricanes that continue to increase in intensity due to global warming, you know this to be true.

Our experiences with and in nature can influence our state of mind. The relatively new science of *ecopsychology* studies this process. As these interactions between humans and nature become more researched and documented, this knowledge can be used to create experiences in nature that promote wellbeing.

The therapeutic use of the knowledge gained through ecopsychology is known as *ecotherapy*. Ecotherapy is applied ecopsychology.

Optional Activity: Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages are probably as old as the human race. It is a worldwide practice found in all cultures, and as such it is probably an archetypal tradition.

A pilgrimage is just a journey undertaken for a sacred or spiritual purpose.

If you are participating in a Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy workshop series, or just completing this workbook on your own, you are on a pilgrimage of a sort. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy can be a spiritual journey to your True Self.

This optional pilgrimage activity is a way to create Second Order Change in your own life. To participate you must have access to some sort of hiking trail or other wilderness area. This should be a trail that you can walk comfortably in a single day or less unless you feel ambitious enough to make it a weekend backpacking and camping trip.

The purpose of this pilgrimage is to spend at least a day journeying in a natural setting while contemplating your own spiritual path. Be sure to take enough food and water for the journey!

If possible, set out at dawn and return at dusk. As you walk the trail, engage in mindful breathing and mindful walking as much as possible while remaining open to everything the trail has to show you and tell you. As you walk, contemplate these questions:

1. Who am I?
2. Who do I want to be?
3. What is my mission or purpose in life?
4. How am I living that purpose?
5. How am I not living that purpose?
6. What would I have to change about myself in order to accomplish my life's mission?

You may wish to take a journal with you. If any insights come to you as you walk, stop to write them down.

If you find any place that calls to you, stop there and meditate for a while, after asking permission and giving thanks.

Try asking the questions above before you set out on your pilgrimage, and after you return.

Did your answers change? How?

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy combines the tools of mindfulness and ecotherapy to create a nature-based program of mental health designed to prevent problems before they start by focusing on mindful experiences in natural environments.

One of the skills of mindfulness is the ability to focus on one thing at a time. In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, we use this skill to focus more on the natural world around us, and on how we change it and how it changes us. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy at its most basic level is simply engaging in being mode while in a natural environment.

The first step in connecting with nature in this way is to see nature as a metaphor for ourselves and our own inner journeys. By seeing ourselves reflected in nature and nature reflected in ourselves, we can open the doors to a wider world of experience. It is an adventure of healing both of ourselves and of nature.

In this session on Nature as Metaphor, we will examine ways to see ourselves reflected in nature so we can slow down, look around us, and live deliberately and with conscious intent, using nature as our guide and mentor by harnessing the power of *nature as metaphor*.

8.1 Second-Order Change

"We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are."

– Anais Nin

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is about learning a new way of being in the world. It is a paradigm shift to a new way of thinking and feeling about our day-to-day lives.

In mindfulness, there is a concept called *beginner's mind*. The idea of beginner's mind is to greet each day with a new mind, without

assumptions or judgments. It is about cultivating a childlike sense of wonder about the world around us, and about ourselves.

Beginner's mind is about being childlike, but it is not about being childish. The difference between childlike and childish is that in beginner's mind we are cultivating our mindful awareness skills to cast off our preconceived notions about the world around us to re-capture that childlike sense of wonder about life. Being childish, on the other hand, is having emotional reactions to situations that are out of our control instead of responding mindfully.

We all make certain assumptions in our lives, and many of those assumptions serve a useful purpose. For example, we assume that when we wake up in the morning and get out of bed, there will be a floor underneath the bed to support us. This is a useful assumption, because if we don't make that assumption, we might not get out of bed! This assumption is based on years of previous experience with getting out of bed and putting our feet on the floor.

There is, however, another category of assumptions that may not be so useful. Consider a person who has been raised in an abusive family. This person has received negative messages from her primary caretaker all her life. Some of these messages might be, "*You're not good enough*" or "*You're a bad person.*"

If such a person gets enough of those messages from her primary caretakers (her parents or other guardians), then that person's assumptions might be that "*I'm not good enough*" or "*I'm a bad person.*" This person has made assumptions about herself based on messages she has received in the past. Even though those messages may not have been true, they have become a part of the way she sees herself. In other words, she has assumed them to be true.

Family therapy is based in part on cybernetic systems theory. "Cybernetic" simply means "self-guided" and "self-correcting." A cybernetic system is a system that is always working to restore balance. This means that if you make any changes in that system, it tries to correct itself by restoring the system to its original configuration.

In cybernetic systems theory, we have the concepts of First Order Change and Second Order Change. *First Order Change* involves playing the same game over and over again by the same rules and expecting different results. This is what usually happens in a cybernetic system like a family. One person makes a change, and the rest of the family acts to try to minimize that change or make it disappear altogether.

An example of this might be a family where a member has issues with addiction. Suppose that person goes away and gets treatment for their substance abuse problems. Meanwhile the family stays at home and gets no treatment. When that person returns home, the same old problems are going to be there, and the family members are going to act in ways that will try to get that person to return to their old habits, like reminding them of their substance abuse problems or doubting their ability to change.

Second Order Change, on the other hand, means thinking outside of the box and re-interpreting the rules so the game can be won. Suppose we have the same situation as the above scenario, but this time the family gets therapy at the same time the person with the addiction problems is receiving therapy. This family therapy helps all members of the system to understand how addiction impacts the family dynamics. They all gain understanding and insight into their family's ways of interacting and connecting with each other. In other words, they have created Second Order Change in the family system by changing the

rules of the game. They change the rules of the game by changing the ways they connect with and interact with each other.

Let's look at another example.

Centuries ago, people assumed that the world was flat. This is because this assumption matched their observations about the world that they saw around them. Think for a moment about living with this paradigm. What assumptions would you make about the world if you thought it was flat? If you thought the world was flat, and you were sailing into uncharted waters, how would you feel about the likelihood of returning home safely? How would you feel about the risks of taking such a journey?

As time went on and scientific knowledge grew, we learned that the world is a sphere. With that new information, our worldview changed. It was a paradigm shift from a flat Earth to a round Earth. Imagine you were a sailor armed with this new knowledge. How would such information change your thoughts and feelings about sailing around the world? The ability to make a paradigm shift from the view of the earth as flat, to the view of the earth as a sphere, would be another example of a Second Order change.

The ability to achieve Second Order Change is the ability to achieve beginner's mind and to look at things in a fresh, new way. By seeing things in a new way, we are able to escape assumptions that are keeping us from seeing solutions (Schuman-Olivier, et al, 2020).

Nin, Anais (1979). *Little Birds*, New York, NY: Penguin Books

Schuman-Olivier, Zev MD; Trombka, Marcelo MD; Lovas, David A. MD; Brewer, Judson A. MD, PhD; Vago, David R. PhD; Gawande, Richa PhD; Dunne, Julie P. PhD, RN, PMHNP-BC; Lazar, Sara W. PhD; Loucks, Eric B. PhD; Fulwiler, Carl MD, PhD Mindfulness and Behavior Change, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry: 11/12 2020 - Volume 28 - Issue 6 - p 371-394*

8.2 Beginner's Mind

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is a way of achieving beginner's mind. It allows us to examine the assumptions we have made about our world and how we exist in it. Some of those assumptions may be useful assumptions, but some of those assumptions may not be. By beginning each day with a blank slate, we erase those assumptions that may lead to results we don't want.

How do you tell which assumptions are useful and which ones are not? The answer is that we use the mindful skill of focusing on one thing at a time to really pay attention to our thoughts and feelings, and to the thoughts and feelings of those around us. When using mindful awareness to examine our own inner motivations, we can discover which assumptions are useful in our daily lives, and which assumptions might need to be modified, or even cast away.

When we can set aside these negative assumptions and perceptions and greet each day with a sense of childlike wonder, we have achieved beginner's mind.

8.3 True Self and the Power of Intention

The goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is to free yourself from the assumptions and barriers to connection that keep you from living fully in your True Self. Refer to your list of *Things that Keep Me from Feeling Connected* from Session 7. How many of those barriers to connection have to do with your own assumptions about the way things work in your life? How many of those barriers to connection involve things that you have assumed to be permanent, personal, and pervasive? That is, how many of those barriers to connection have you assumed to be unchanging, inevitable, and centered on your own experience of the world? Let's look at what that means.

Permanent statements are global statements. They begin with words like "I always..." or "I never..." An example would be, "I always say the wrong thing in social situations." Or "I never succeed." We create our own worlds by the thoughts and feelings we have. Our thoughts then tend to become our reality. If you tend to use permanent statements, you may be setting yourself up for failure. The good news about permanent statements is that it only takes one example to prove them wrong. If one of your assumptions about life is, "I always screw things up," then all you need is a single instance of where you didn't "screw things up" to prove this statement wrong.

Instead of using permanent statements, focus on using statements like, "I sometimes..." or "I rarely..." Adopt this mode of thinking and see how many of your negative assumptions evaporate!

Personal statements are statements in which you blame yourself for the situation in which you find yourself. Suppose your friend Ralph is usually polite and friendly, but today you see him at the office, and he's in a grumpy mood. A personal statement about this situation might be, "I must have done something to make Ralph angry." In this instance, you've assumed that the reason Ralph was irritated was something you did. But what if Ralph had a fight with his wife before work this morning? Or what if Ralph has a headache? Or what if Ralph is just being a jerk today? Personal statements are assumptions that we are the cause of things that we may have no actual control over.

Instead of using permanent statements, focus on using statements like, "Ralph frowned at me. I wonder if he is having a bad day?"

Pervasive statements are statements in which we apply thoughts, beliefs, patterns, and behaviors from one area of life to all areas of life. Examples of such statements would be, “I can’t do anything right,” or “Everything I do ends in disaster.” The difference between pervasive statements and permanent statements is that a permanent statement sees a particular behavior as unchangeable, whereas a pervasive statement sees a particular behavior as covering all aspects of a person’s life. As with permanent statements, all you need to prove a pervasive statement incorrect is a single exception. If one of your pervasive statements is, “Everything I do ends in disaster,” then all you need to prove this assumption incorrect is a single instance in which you did something that didn’t end in disaster.

Instead of using pervasive statements, focus on using statements like, “Yes, I made a mistake that time, but that doesn’t mean that everything I do ends in disaster.”

Experiment with removing your barriers to connection by examining some of those barriers from your list. Do any of them involve permanent, personal, or pervasive statements? If so, could you re-write those statements? If you did, would the re-writes help you to achieve Second Order Change in those situations?

Our ultimate intention with Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is to be able to live fully in True Self. What paradigm shifts would have to take place for that to happen? What moves from a flat earth to a round earth would you have to make in your own way of seeing the world that would allow you to become the person you were born to be? How many assumptions about your life and the way the world works have you made that may not be helpful to living fully in your True Self? What Second Order Changes do you need in your life?

8.4 Nature as Metaphor

Fairy tales were used in the past, and are sometimes still used today, as teaching tools (for a great example of a fairy tale being used as a teaching tool in the modern world, see Robert Bly’s book, *Iron John*). These stories often contained moral lessons. Another thing most fairy tales contain are archetypal images and elements of nature. Think of your favorite fairy tale. What are the elements of nature in it? Does the fact that it is your favorite fairy tale have anything to do with those elements of nature? Are those elements good like the Goose that Laid the Golden Egg, or bad, like the Big Bad Wolf, or neutral like the beanstalk in Jack and the Beanstalk? What does your fondness for those particular elements of your fairy tale tell you about yourself?

Are there any archetypal elements to your story?

Each of us lives in our own personal fairy tale called “my life.” We all have good things that happen to us, and we all have bad things that happen to us. We create our own personal myths by choosing which of these elements to focus on in our own lives. The good news about the myth of our lives is that we are the authors. If we don’t like the way the story is going, we have the power to do a rewrite at any time. We can’t always choose the circumstances of our lives, but we can always choose the story we create about those circumstances.

If you go out into the woods and start observing things, you will notice something begin to happen. You will begin to create stories about the events you observe there in the forest.

I remember once when I watched a flock of crows defending their turf against a hawk. I had created personalities for each of the crows, and for the hawk. Before I knew it, I had created back stories for each

of the characters, and dialogue for the major players. I had watched this show for about ten minutes before I realized that the story I had created in my mind told me a lot more about what was going on inside my own head than what was happening with the birds.

Heyden (2021) reports that the use of nature as a metaphor in the practice of ecotherapy helps participants to grasp difficult concepts while gaining a greater sense of self-awareness and self-efficacy more readily. The next time you can observe nature for a time, pay attention to what sort of stories come to mind. What could it be that your unconscious mind is trying to tell you? Can you see nature as a metaphor for your own inner journey? To practice the art of observing nature as a metaphor for your own life, go on to the next page and complete the exercise, *A Closer Look*.

Bly, Robert (1990). *Iron John: A Book about Men*, Addison-Wesley, New York, NY.

Heyden, Yoav. (2021). *An exploratory study of the use of metaphor in the practice of ecotherapy*. Master's Thesis, Stellenbosch University.

8.5 Reflections on a Closer Look

As discussed earlier in this chapter, ecotherapy is the use of nature to facilitate mental wellbeing. One way that Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy does this is by using nature as a metaphor. The story you just created in the *Closer Look* exercise is a metaphor for your own inner journey.

The idea of Second-Order Change is that it is a lasting paradigm shift created when we can expand our vision and see the bigger picture. Such a change of perspective is a way of changing the “rules of the game” so that the game can be won. The *Closer Look* exercise can help to achieve this by using our observations and descriptions of nature as a window into our own souls.

The first step in achieving such a Second-Order Change is to achieve beginner’s mind (Garland, 2007). As we discussed previously, beginner’s mind is a way to look at the world anew with a sense of childlike wonder. It is a way of freeing ourselves from the assumptions we have made about the way the world works. If those assumptions are leading us to consequences in our lives that we don’t want to experience, the way to change those consequences is to challenge those assumptions.

What assumptions may you have been making that might be creating a barrier to your intention of living fully in your True Self? How might you re-examine those assumptions, using beginner’s mind, to see the world in a new way (Schuman-Olivier, et al, 2020)? How might your new vision of the world remove those barriers?

Read over the story you created in the *Closer Look* exercise. Now imagine that story as your observations and descriptions of what is going on inside your own mind. See the story you created as a metaphor for your own inner journey as you complete the *Reflections on a Closer Look* activity on the next pages.

Garland, Eric. (2007). The Meaning of Mindfulness: A Second-Order Cybernetics of Stress, Metacognition, and Coping. *Complementary Health Practice Review*. 12. 15-30.
10.1177/1533210107301740.

Schuman-Olivier, Zev MD; Trombka, Marcelo MD; Lovas, David A. MD; Brewer, Judson A. MD, PhD; Vago, David R. PhD; Gawande, Richa PhD; Dunne, Julie P. PhD, RN, PMHNP-BC; Lazar, Sara W. PhD; Loucks, Eric B. PhD; Fulwiler, Carl MD, PhD (2020). *Mindfulness and Behavior Change, Harvard Review of Psychiatry: 11/12 2020 - Volume 28 - Issue 6 - p 371-394*

8.5 Reflections on A Closer Look

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After completing the *Closer Look* exercise, did you notice any common themes in your observations? Read over the questions below and write your answers in the spaces provided.

Were your observations more about what you saw, or about your own internal state?

If it was more about what you saw, how do these observations relate to your thoughts and feelings?

If it was more about your own internal state, did you discover anything about your assumptions about the workings of your own thoughts and feelings?

Did you engage any of your other senses during the activity?

Did you write anything about what you heard?

Did you write anything about what you smelled?

8.5 Reflections on A Closer Look

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Did you find yourself inventing stories about what you saw on the ground? Yes | No

If so, what can these stories tell you about how you see your own True Self? If not, what did you write?

How did you feel before this exercise? After?

BEFORE

AFTER

Did you use one sense more than others to record your observations (e.g., seeing more than hearing)?

If your observations relied more on one sense than others, how might this experience change if you relied on another sense (e.g., hearing rather than seeing)?

8.5 Reflections on A Closer Look

Name: _____ Date: _____

If you focused primarily on observing the natural world during this experience, how might it change if you paid more attention to your own internal state (thoughts and feelings) instead?

If you focused primarily on your own inner state, how might this experience change if you focused more on the natural world?

What did you learn about your True Self and how it relates to the natural world?

Did you learn anything about your assumptions about how the world works? If so, describe the lesson:

8.6 A Closer Look Inside

If we can make the paradigm shift from viewing nature as something separate from ourselves, to viewing nature as a part of us, we are better able to re-integrate and to reconnect with the natural world. From this perspective, we can gain the knowledge that we are nature, and nature is us.

Sometimes those of us who work with ecology and environmentalism like to draw a line between humans and the rest of nature. In doing so we continue to foster the myth that humans and nature are two different things. We like to pretend that humans are not a part of nature.

In the *Reflections on a Closer Look* exercise on the previous pages, it is hopefully made clear that the line we often draw between nature and ourselves is an imaginary line. No such distinction between humans and nature actually exists. In this exercise we are using a small patch of nature to observe and describe our own inner states. The *Closer Look* exercise allows us to use nature as a metaphor for our own inner emotional and spiritual states.

But what if this is a two-way street? What if nature herself could use us as a metaphor? Does nature learn from us and communicate with us in the same way that we learn from her and communicate with her? What if a two-way communication with nature were possible? What if we could use the metaphors we have constructed as a way of connecting to nature?

In the *Closer Look Inside* exercise on the next pages, return to your *Things that Keep Me from Feeling Connected* list from Session 7 and select the top thing from that list that seems to be keeping you from connecting to your True Self.

As you complete the Closer Look Inside questions, reflect on the story you created during the *Closer Look* exercise, and to your responses to the questions in the *Reflections on a Closer Look* exercise. Viewing the story you created as a metaphor for your own personal journey to True Self, examine the details of your narrative for clues that might help you to remove your barriers to connecting to your True Self.

For example, suppose that in your Closer Look story you wrote the following: *“I saw an inchworm on a blade of grass, struggling to get to the next blade of grass.”*

Could that sentence be a metaphor for something you are struggling with inside of yourself? If so, how might you remove the barriers that you are struggling with so that you are more freely able to connect with nature, with others, and with your True Self?

Sometimes when I do the *Closer Look* exercises with groups, there are people who don't create a story. These people usually write things like, *“I saw a bunch of green grass with several ants, and a few ladybugs.”* Their responses to the exercise are heavy on observing and describing, but short on narrative content. If your responses to the exercise were of a similar nature, it could be that you have learned to see the world just as it is, without assumptions or perception filters.

Sometimes, however, such observational descriptions of the exercise, without any narrative elements, can be a way of avoiding the inner journey. In such a case, the person may be evading the story elements as a defense mechanism to keep from revealing too much to others or to self.

If you think that you may be doing this, just honestly ask yourself if you are doing so to avoid connecting with your True Self. You're your own best expert on your own inner state, so this is a question that only

you can answer. If you are satisfied that the answer to this question is, “no,” then go on to the next section, *A Closer Look Inside*.

If the answer to the question, “*Did I avoid telling a story because I wanted to avoid describing my own inner journey?*” is “yes,” then you may wish to go back and try the exercise again.

So, what if you truly are not avoiding a narrative in order to avoid connecting with your True Self, but you just wrote a description of your observations with no story elements?

In that case, you may continue to the *Closer Look Inside* exercise. If you did not include any story elements, and you are not trying to avoid connecting to your True Self, then simply writing a description of everything you saw in the *Closer Look* exercise means that you can see the world in a non-judgmental fashion, without assumptions. You may use these skills to help you to answer the questions in the *Closer Look Inside* exercise that follows.

8.6 A Closer Look Inside

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Go back to your list of *Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected* from Session 7. Has anything on the list changed as you've progressed through the *Closer Look* exercises? Find the top thing from your list that is currently keeping you from feeling connected to your True Self. Hold that barrier to connection in your mind for a moment. We're going to take a closer look at it by *going inside*.

Think about your number one barrier to connecting with your True Self, and answer the following questions:

What is the exact nature of this barrier? Physical or mental, or something else? Why?

Is this barrier to connection a permanent barrier, or a temporary one? Why?

Is this barrier to connection a pervasive one, touching all aspects of your life, or is it a situation-specific one, touching only one or a few areas of your life?

8.6 A Closer Look Inside

Name: _____ Date: _____

Is this barrier to connection a personal one, having something exclusively to do with you, or is it something external to you?

Is this barrier to connection something you can change, or is it something you have to accept?

Is this barrier to connection something you have control over?

Is this barrier to connection something you can re-frame in order to turn it into aid to connection?

Now visualize yourself drawing a circle around this barrier to connection in your own mind.

Allow yourself to move from Doing Mode into Being Mode. Simply observe what's going on inside of this imaginary circle you've drawn around your barrier to connection. Write down any observations about it in the exercise on the next page.

8.7 Nature as Archetype

The Psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung originated the concept of *archetypes*. Jung studied cultures from around the world and began noticing patterns that occurred with great frequency in most mythology and lore.

For example, most religions around the world have some sort of Sacred Tree archetype. There's the Tree of Knowledge in the Bible, the Lotus Tree under which Buddha was said to have achieved Enlightenment, and the Sacred Tree at the center of the world revered by many Native American, Norse, Germanic and Celtic people.

In each case, the Sacred Tree played a central role in each religion's story. Jung believed that it was no coincidence that these images kept cropping up from culture to culture. He believed that certain constellations of ideas such as the Sacred Tree, the Maiden, Mother, and Crone trilogy, the Golden Child, Warrior, and Sage trilogy, the Mandala, and many others were concepts that were inborn into all humans in much the same way that certain birds are born with the knowledge of how to navigate during migration. These archetypes are not something we have to be taught; they are something we are born with.

Jung hypothesized a repository of these archetypes within each human mind. The sum of these archetypes was something he called the *collective unconscious*. This means that every human being alive today, and every human being who has ever existed, has a repository of these archetypes somewhere in their unconscious minds.

8.8 The Power of the Unconscious Mind

The part of the brain that is responsible for consciousness is just the tip of the iceberg. Far more of our brainpower is used for unconscious activities. Until you read this sentence, were you consciously aware of your breathing? Or of your heart beating? Or of the thousands of biological processes currently going on in your body, being regulated by your brain and your autonomic nervous system? Like most people, you probably only became conscious of these processes after this paragraph called your attention to them.

Many of our emotional reactions and memories take place on an unconscious level as well. If you've ever had a strong emotional reaction to a place or situation, without knowing why, you've experienced the power of the unconscious mind. The unconscious part of the mind, where emotional memories are stored, has no sense of time. That's why often a strong grief reaction doesn't get better with time. Time alone cannot heal a childhood trauma. It only gets better when we learn how to deal with it.

Think back to a time in your childhood when a deep spiritual connection in your life may have been severed. Do you still have a strong emotional reaction to it? If so, you've again experienced the power of the unconscious mind.

Not everything about the unconscious mind is negative, though. It has been theorized that the unconscious mind is also the seat of creativity. It's the part of your mind that is activated when you dream. Most creative people report that their best ideas seem to come out of nowhere. This "nowhere" is actually the unconscious mind at work. This means that while problems can reside in the unconscious mind, so can solutions.

Think back to the last time you were inspired by an idea or a flash of insight or a hunch that turned out to be right. Was there a conscious process involved, or did the idea just seem to come to you, fully formed? If you've had such a moment of inspiration, you've once again experienced the power of the unconscious mind.

8.9 The Golden Road

The problem with trying to tap into the power of the unconscious, is that if we could be consciously aware of its workings, it wouldn't be unconscious! So how do we get there from here?

Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung's mentor, called dreams the "*Golden Road to the unconscious*" (2004). He believed that the apparently nonsensical content of our dreams was the unconscious mind's attempt to communicate to the conscious mind. Jung expanded on this concept, believing that the symbols we see in dreams could tap into the power of the collective unconscious through the archetypes. A dream about an archetypal image was especially powerful to Jung. Such a dream, to him, was a direct message from the collective unconscious.



Later psychotherapists began to expand on this idea, especially in the use of projections from the unconscious. You may have seen a Rorschach ink blot test, in which a subject is shown a blot of ink on a piece of paper and is asked to describe what he sees. Such images are attempts by therapists to tap into the subject's unconscious, in much the same way that Freud and Jung used dreams to achieve the same end. Joseph Campbell (1968) believed that these projections showed up in our myths and legends throughout cultures across time.

These techniques are used by therapists to try to gain insight into the unconscious minds of those who have mental health issues, but what if we could harness the power of the unconscious mind for creativity and connectedness as well?

Campbell, Joseph. (1968). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Freud, S. (2004) *The Interpretation of Dreams: Third Edition*. Glacier National Park, Montana: Kessinger Publishing.

8.10 The Green Man

Have you ever looked at the clouds and seen faces or other images in them? Most children, and many adults, have played this game from time to time, but have you ever stopped to think about why you saw a certain image and not another? There is no real image there in the clouds, so any image you see is a projection of your own mind onto the pattern in the sky. The next time you see an image in the clouds, ask yourself what that image means to you, and what might be going on in your life that would cause you to see that particular image.

Ancient Celts and some modern practitioners of nature-based spiritual paths have an archetype known as the Green Man. The Green Man is the physical embodiment of nature in human form. People who honor the Green Man archetype often see faces in the trees in much the same way that we see faces in the clouds.

One Celtic legend has it that when an ancestor dies, his or her soul inhabits a tree. According to this legend, each tree has its own properties and personality. If you see the face of an ancestor in a tree, note the type of tree and its qualities. Could it be that the ancestor whose face you saw in the tree is sending a message through the type of tree they chose to manifest in?

Of course, there was no real face in the tree. What was at work here was your own unconscious mind, meeting your need to hear from an ancestor from beyond the grave. This is what Freud called “projection.”

When you spend time in nature, notice which things attract your attention. Think about what those things mean to you and ask yourself why this particular thing should capture your attention at this particular time. When you can do this effectively, you’ve taken the first step on the Golden Road to the unconscious.

8.11 Wise Mind and the World Tree

Norse mythology held that a giant tree stood at the center of the earth. This tree was the axis around which the world turned. This World Tree, known as Yggdrasil, had roots that reached into the deepest depths of the Earth. Its branches reached up to the heavens, where the Gods and Goddesses lived. The humans lived between these two realms, in Middle Earth.

This World Tree can also be seen as a metaphor for Wise Mind. Consider the roots of the tree of your own Wise Mind as reaching deep into your unconscious mind, where your darkest and most hidden emotions dwell, while its branches reach for the higher consciousness of your waking mind, the center of rational thought. The tree of your Wise Mind unites the realm of the conscious and the unconscious, blending the emotional and the rational.

If you are troubled from time to time by strong emotions that you have difficulty coping with, the roots of these emotions probably lie in your unconscious mind. As noted previously, you cannot become directly aware of the workings of your unconscious mind. You can, however, tap into the power of your unconscious mind by using symbolism. One method of using this symbolism is by seeing nature as a metaphor and an archetype.

As we discussed in Section 8.10, the Green Man is one way to tap into those unconscious feelings and motivations.

8.12 Connecting through the Green Man

The Green Man archetype is not unique to Celtic folklore. Many cultures throughout the world have some form of Green Man. Because so many cultures recognize this symbol, the Green Man is archetypal. That is, his image is part of the collective unconscious shared by all humans. He is often depicted as a face surrounded by or made of leaves and other greenery. He symbolizes rebirth and the cycle of seasons as

the plants return to life in the spring. The icon of the Green Man is therefore a fitting way to begin your own rebirth to living in True Self.



In Section 8.8 we touched briefly on the Celtic practice of seeing faces and shapes in the leaves of trees. In this section, we will expand on that idea by going into the woods and looking for shapes and symbols in the trees. To do the next exercise you will need to have access to a leafy tree. If you are doing this exercise in the winter months, you will have to use an evergreen tree. If there are no trees in your immediate area, you may use a photograph of a tree, but the exercise works better if you can go outdoors and use a real, living tree.

To begin the Green Man exercise, first perform the Tree of Life meditation, preferably outdoors under a tree. When you have centered yourself by completing the meditation, find the tree you intend to use. It should be a leafy, full tree. Stand or sit near the tree and look at it with soft eyes, relaxing your focus.

Observe the tree until your mind forms a picture in its leaves. Do this in the same way you would look for pictures in the clouds in the sky. Don't stop looking at the tree until you can make out a picture hidden in the leaves. When you have the picture firmly in memory, go on to the next page and sketch what you saw. You don't have to be an artist about it. Just sketch enough to give a general impression of what you saw.

8.12a The Green Man Exercise

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Sketch a picture below of what you saw when you did the Green Man exercise. It doesn't have to be too detailed if you can tell what the picture represents.

8.12b Reflections on the Green Man

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What did you see in the tree? Use what you drew to answer these questions:

What does the picture you saw in the tree symbolize to you? What is the emotional quality of the picture?

What does the picture you saw tell you about your current emotional state?

How does the picture you saw relate to living in your True Self?

What is the overall message your image gives you?

8.13 Tree as Metaphor

Trees can be seen as a metaphor for life. They go through cycles and moods, just as we do. Some are strong, meeting the challenges of the seasons head-on and upright. Some bend and flow with the changing of the wind. Some are evergreen, showing their true colors no matter what the weather, while others ebb and flow with the seasons. Many ancient cultures believed that life could be understood through the trees.

Before the advent of the written word, our ancestors had no books from which to learn; no sacred texts from which to grow their spirituality, and no written history of their peoples. Nature was their sacred text. They studied the forest in the way that we study books today.

Think about applying the mindful skills of observing and describing to your studies of nature. Can you see the day-to-day changes in the trees as they grow through the seasons? What could you learn about the medicinal properties of the trees by paying close attention to them? What can you learn about the qualities of each tree by studying it? Do different trees have different personalities? Can trees be a metaphor for our own lives? If you were a tree, what sort of tree would you be?

What can you learn about your own personality by studying the trees?

8.14 Animal as Metaphor

Shamanistic cultures throughout the world use animals as metaphors for emotions, or as teaching tools. We even do this in our own culture. People can be “*as hungry as a bear*” or as “*quiet as a mouse*” or as “*gentle as a lamb*.” Animals and their traits are deeply rooted in our psychology.

We tend to separate ourselves from nature, and to forget that people are animals too. We are part of nature, and nature is a part of us. We cannot change that, no matter how much we might try to deny it. We even use animals in our research, from the white rats in the psychology labs to the animal testing labs and their often-horrible conditions. If humans don't have traits in common with our animal brothers and sisters, then why do we consider research on animals to be helpful at all to humans?

As human animals, our psyches are rooted in the natural world. Each of us contains within us archetypes of various animals. We instinctively know that snakes can be dangerous, just as we know we have nothing to fear from the timid rabbit. When using animals as metaphors for our own personal lives, we can draw upon the strength of these archetypes to achieve our own mindful states of being.

8.15 Nature as Metaphor for True Self

The more time we spend in nature, the more we come to realize that we are not separate from nature, and nature is not separate from us. This realization is a type of Second Order Change in itself. It is a paradigm shift of the mind. When we come to see ourselves as a part of everything that exists and realize that everything that exists is also a part of us, we can never go back to our old ways of thinking that lead us to believe that we are something separate from, and apart from, nature.

This revelation usually comes when we are able to achieve beginner's mind, setting aside our old assumptions about the way the world works, and about our places in it. The western industrialized world

has taught us that we are “civilized” beings separate from the wildness of nature, but in beginner’s mind we can return to that childlike sense of wonder of the natural world and enjoy the beauty of a sunset or the melody of a mountain stream.

From beginner’s mind we can ask ourselves what we truly value in this world, and in this life. How much of what I’m worried about today will matter in five years? In ten? How much of what I’m worried about today involves the accumulation of material possessions? How much of it involves my relationship with the natural world? When we can determine this for ourselves, we can use our power of intention to move closer to the people we want to be, using nature as our guide.

When we achieve this unity with nature, we are able to begin to see nature as a metaphor for our own stories. We are a part of nature, and nature is a part of us. We are on this journey together. When we accept nature into the narrative of our lives, we have moved one step closer to living in True Self.

Covert, A.M., Whiren, A.P., Keith, J. & Nelson, C. (1985). Pets, early adolescence and families. *Marriage and Family Review*, 8(3-4), 95-108.

Session 9: Nature as Teacher

Our ancestors knew hundreds of medicinal uses of local plants and herbs. They knew the seasons, when to plant, when to harvest, how to forecast the weather by the behavior of plants and animals, and a host of other things based on their observations of nature. The lessons our ancestors learned haven't gone away. They're still there, waiting in the forest like an open book. All we need to do is to learn how to read it.



Facilitator Notes for Session 9: Nature as Teacher

PREPARATION

Read the Session 9 Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

NOTE ABOUT PREPARATION FOR SESSION 9

The My Own Animal Legend exercise in Session 9 is quite lengthy. In interest of time, you may wish to assign it as homework prior to Session 9 so the bulk of the Session 9 class time may be used for the reflections and the discussion regarding the exercise. If you choose to do this, make sure your class understands ahead of time that they should bring the completed exercise with them to the beginning of Session 9.

Have them do the My Own Animal Legend portion for homework but save the Lessons from My Own Animal Legend portion for this week's session.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Animal totems; archetypes; animal as teacher, and nature as teacher

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): True Self; archetypal energy; expectations, and assumptions

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with nature as teacher. Start this activity by asking for volunteers to tell a story in which they learned something from nature, or they had the opportunity to use nature as a teaching tool. This discussion lays the groundwork for the activities in this session.

If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn't time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

SESSION OUTLINE

9.0 Forest as Teacher

Although he was not an ecotherapist, the psychotherapist Milton Erickson pioneered the use of metaphor in therapy. This groundbreaking work included using nature as a metaphor. When nature is used this way, it can be a teaching tool to illustrate many therapeutic concepts. The example used in this session is the spirit animal. When presenting this session, I always say a few words about how nature can be a teacher if we are willing to learn.

9.1 Animal as Teacher

This section introduces the idea that our culture already uses animals as teaching tools and symbols. From fairy tales involving animals to sports teams with animal mascots to our pet names for each other, animals as teaching tools are ingrained in our existence.

Sometimes when I teach this section, I have a well-meaning but misinformed person bring up the idea of cultural appropriation in the erroneous belief that spirit animals were only used by Native Americans. The information in this section demonstrates otherwise. It's not necessary to belabor the point, but the information is there for those who are interested. The important idea from this section is that animals can be used as teachers. We name our sports teams, our family members, and sometimes even our fairy tales after animals. We also have many metaphors involving animals. In this way nature can teach us.

9.2 Symbols and Spirit Animals

This section is based on Object Relations Theory. If you're not familiar with the term, you may wish to investigate and study at least the basic theory prior to facilitating this session. The basic idea of this section is that we represent people as "objects" in our own minds, and the pictures of other people we hold in our minds don't accurately reflect the reality of who they are. This objectification extends to animals who are significant in our lives as well. Cherished pets and animal companions can be "objects" upon which to project our wants and needs. In the Spirit Animal exercise that follows, we create an "object" in the form of a spirit animal. It doesn't necessarily need to be an actual animal. It is a container for archetypal energies. In the past when I've done this exercise people have chosen dragons, unicorns, and other mythical animals as their spirit animals, and that's okay too. The spirit animal is a symbol, nothing more, to be used as a teaching tool.

9.3 Your Spirit Animal

This section and the following activity ask your students to select a spirit animal to be used as a guide and a teacher. The exercise compares and contrasts the animal they have chosen to the True Self they are working towards expressing more fully. The animal is a metaphorical one, and not an actual animal, so it can possess whatever characteristics are necessary for the purposes of the exercise.

EXERCISE My Spirit Animal PRIORITY 1

I prefer to do this as a guided meditation, having students allow the picture of their spirit animal to form as they meditate. If they already have an idea of what their spirit animal is, they may hold a picture of it or a small figurine or stuffed animal as they meditate. I then have them to answer the questions on the worksheet. If there's time, they can fill out the worksheet during the session. If time is an issue, I go around the circle and have one or two volunteers answer the questions, and then assign the rest as homework.

9.4 Spirit Animal as Teacher

Ultimately a person's spirit animal is just another aspect of their own True Self. This section asks students to consider how their spirit animals might teach them. What's really going on here is that they're teaching themselves using the lens of the spirit animal. You may wish to facilitate a discussion about how spirit animals can be teachers. To do this, go around the circle and solicit opinions and suggestions on the topic.

9.5 Reflections on My Spirit Animal as Teacher

This section recaps the Spirit Animal exercise and asks students to reflect on whether or not the exercise was easy for them. For those who were having difficulty with the exercise, if any, you may solicit input from the group by asking for suggestions on how to make the exercise easier for those who were struggling.

9.6 Your Animal True Self

In *Session 8* we discussed the idea of Jungian archetypes. In this section we relate archetypes to spirit animals. You may wish to review the concept of archetypal energy with your students in this section. I usually go around the circle and ask each participant to talk about what the archetypal energy of their spirit animal means to them.

9.7 Nature as Teacher

In this wrapping up section for the session, we discuss how a person might continue to learn from nature. When we use Nature as Teacher, we learn to see what is really there without assumptions or expectations. As a facilitator, your goal is to emphasize this ability to see nature in a non-judgmental fashion while remaining open to learning what nature has to teach us. I usually end this session by asking people to tell me at least one thing nature taught them during this session.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 10 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from Session 9 that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

9.0 Forest as Teacher

Before the advent of the written word, our ancestors had no books from which to learn; no sacred texts from which to grow their spirituality, and no written history of their peoples. Nature was their sacred text. They studied the forest in the way that we study books today.

Think about applying the mindful skill of focusing on one thing at a time to your studies of nature. Can you see the day-to-day changes in the trees as they grow through the seasons? What could you learn about the medicinal properties of the trees by paying close attention to them? What can you learn about the qualities of each tree by studying it? Do different trees have different personalities? What can you learn about your own personality by studying the trees?

Optional Activity: Experiencing the Forest

If you have the opportunity to access a forest or wilderness area, try this exercise.

Go out into the forest. If possible, get far enough away from civilization that you can experience the forest without the sounds of mechanical devices like automobile engines, cell phones, etc.

Find a comfortable place to sit and close your eyes. Pay attention to what your other senses are telling you about the forest. What do you hear? What do you smell? Can you feel the breeze on your skin? Is there a taste to the air as you exhale?

Practice observing and describing in this manner for a time. Did this activity change your experience of the forest?

How?

9.1 Animal as Teacher

If you look at the myths, legends, and stories of indigenous peoples throughout the world, you won't have to look far to find that animals are used quite often as teaching tools. Remember Aesop's Fables? Most of those parables involved animals. Likewise, many of our fairy tales, from Goldilocks and the Three Bears to the Three Little Pigs, involve animals.

Although if you go back far enough in time shamanic cultures are universal across the world, you don't have to be a shaman to use animals as teaching tools. You already have volumes of knowledge on animals and their characteristics within you. A common practice among shamans worldwide is the taking of a spirit animal or animal guide. In the United States we tend to associate this practice with Native Americans, but ancient Celts, the people of Scandinavia, the Mongol people, the people of Asia, and even the early indigenous peoples of Europe all had some sort of practice of taking a spirit animal.

The association of spirit animals with Native American culture probably came from the idea of "totem animals." "Totem" comes from the Ojibwa language and may be roughly translated as "kinship." A totem animal is considered part of the family and guides a person throughout life. Not all Native American people took on totem animals, but many did. It's probably safe to say that most Native American nations engaged in the practice.

Also, although the word "totem" is exclusive to Native American culture, the practice itself was and is a worldwide phenomenon. Hiiemäe (2019) studied the northern European country of Estonia and found that the practice is still widespread to this day. In the study, *Belief Narratives of Spirit-Animals: A Case Study on Estonian Contemporary Folklore*, Hiiemäe found that belief in spirit animals help those who held

such beliefs to cope with life stress. The study also found that belief in spirit animals offered psychological support in many other areas of life.

In Norse lore the fylgjur (pronounced FILG-yur) in the plural and fylgja (pronounced FILG-ya) in the singular, are animal spirits like totem animals. This Norse word means "to follow," and the fylgja is said to follow the person throughout their life, offering guidance. The spirit animal that chooses to attach itself to a person is said to embody the characteristics of that person. A sly person might have a fox fylgja, a strong person might have a lion or a bear, a timid person might have a rabbit, and so on.

The Celtic púca (púcaí), (pronounced POO-ka) are shapeshifters who can take on many forms, including human form. They can be associated with good or evil. They were made famous by the Mary Coyle Chase play *Harvey*, about an alcoholic man who sees a púca in rabbit form. They are like the shapeshifting bakemono from Japan, who can also take the form of humans and work either good or evil. The Chinese jīngshén dòngwù and the Korean dongmul-ui yeonghon have similar characteristics. The further back into history we go, the more we find that indigenous cultures had some concept of spirit animals.

Pai-Dhungat and Verma (2020) demonstrated that the human-animal connection is embedded in our psyches and is therefore archetypal. To be archetypal is to be universally present in all cultures throughout all times. This means that all cultures always had some concept of animal helpers.

The mythologist Joseph Campbell, in *Transformations of Myth through Time*, discusses a Neanderthal burial site where they found a bear skull and other bones of bears arranged in ritualistic fashion. This burial site was at least 60,000 years old and was the inspiration for the *Clan of the Cave Bear* by Jean Auel. Given the arrangement of the bones in the burial site, plus the presence of the pollen of healing herbs and plants on the remains, Campbell concludes that this was the burial site of a shaman or other healer. If his conclusions are correct, it means that the practice of taking a spirit animal dates back at least to Neanderthal times and is not specific to one culture or one time period.

Spirit animals have been our teachers for at least the last 60,000 years. They teach us through metaphor and archetype. They teach us through fable and through their relationships with humans. They also teach us about ourselves when we take a spirit animal as our ally because they afford us an opportunity to re-examine our own unconscious minds by projecting our own thoughts, feelings, and desires onto them. In this session we will explore how animal wisdom can assist us on our journeys to our own true selves.

Auel, Jean M. (1980). *The Clan of the Cave Bear: Earth's Children, Book One*, Crown Publishers, New York, NY.

Campbell, Joseph (1990). *Transformations of Myth through Time: Thirteen brilliant final lectures from the renowned master of mythology*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.

Hiiemäe, Reet. (2019). Belief Narratives of Spirit-Animals: A Case Study on Estonian Contemporary Folklore. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*. 77. 115-138. 10.7592/FEJF2019.77.hiiemae.

Pai-Dhungat, Jayant & Verma, Aparna. (2020). Animal Assisted Therapy. *The Journal of the Association of Physicians of India*. 68. 81.

9.2 Symbols and Spirit Animals

Melanie Klein, a student of Sigmund Freud, is recognized as one of the creators of object relations theory. Rather than focusing on individuals, object relations theory emphasizes interactions between individuals. From the perspective of object relations theory, people themselves don't have problems. Problems arise when people interact with each other. When we interact in other than healthy ways, problems are the natural result.

Object relations theory sees people, places, and things as "objects" that may or may not be accurately represented in a person's perceptions (Carley 2015). My wife may have a picture of me in her mind, and I may have my own picture of myself in my own mind. We both have an idea, or an "object," of each other that may or may not accurately reflect what we are really like. Each of these pictures is an "object," and we both interact with each other based on these objects. These objects are made of other people's memories, assumptions, and past interactions with us, and the objects we have regarding other people are made of our own memories, assumptions, and past interactions with others.

Object relations theory places emphasis on relationships between objects, and not on the objects themselves. It also places a strong emphasis on how the past can shape the present. This is because the "objects" we perceive are based on our past interactions with the people represented by those objects.

According to object relations theory, there are three major components to an object:

1. The object as perceived by the self
2. The self in relation to the object
3. The relationship between self and object

To illustrate what this means, think about an infant's interactions with her mother. The infant might think:

1. "My mother is good because she feeds me when I am hungry" (representation of the object).
2. "Since my mother takes care of me, that must mean that I am good" (representation of the self in relation to the object).
3. "I love my mother" (representation of the relationship).

Animals are objects too. We all have our own internal representations of what various animals might represent to us. Using the outline above, think about a family pet:

1. "My cat is good because she comforts me when I am sad"
2. "Since my cat chooses to comfort me, that must mean that I am good."
3. "I love my cat"

Animals can stimulate our own creative thinking in non-threatening ways because they can be safe objects upon which to project our own unconscious wishes and fears. When we can do so, we are able to heal many relational and emotional problems (Mackenzie, 1999; Melson, 2001; Myers, 1998).

This means that spirit animals can be a powerful way to deal with the problems that may arise in our lives. This is because spirit animals are, or can be, symbol objects that we can use as allies in our journey towards living in True Self.

And finally, animal allies can help us to foster mindful skills within ourselves because animals can teach us to experience the world in the present, through our senses. When we learn to do so we can escape the mind trap and shift more easily from doing mode to being mode.

Carley, Steven G. (2015). *Melanie Klein: Object Relations Theory*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Columbia, MD, U.S.A., ISBN 10: 1511857005 ISBN 13: 9781511857000

Hiiemäe, Reet. (2019). Belief Narratives of Spirit-Animals: A Case Study on Estonian Contemporary Folklore. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*. 77. 115-138. 10.7592/FEJF2019.77.hiiemae.

Mackenzie, M. A. (1999). *The animal presence in depth psychology*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (9987398)

Melson, L. G. (2001). *Why the wild things are: Animals in the lives of children*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Myers, G. (1998). *Children and animals: Social development and our connections to other species*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

9.3 Your Spirit Animal

If you're a sports fan, you're no stranger to the fact that many professional sports teams are named after animals. There's the Seattle Seahawks, the Carolina Panthers, the Atlanta Falcons, the Philadelphia Eagles, etc. We also use animal names as terms of endearment (for example, "Teddy Bear") or as nicknames (Richard the Lionhearted, or King Arthur, whose name means "The Bear"). This tendency is a vestige of a time when we lived closer to nature. We choose these nicknames because certain animals have certain characteristics. In using these names for ourselves, our loved ones, and our sports teams, we are either consciously or unconsciously invoking the characteristics of those animals. We are using the archetypal energy of animals to make changes in ourselves.

Do you have an affinity for a certain animal? My wife and I both love cats, and she collects cat figurines and pictures. Other friends I know collect cows, pigs, bears, or other animals. When I ask people about their reasons for collecting a particular animal, the usual response is, "*I don't know, I just like cats (or dogs, or whatever).*"

If you have a favorite animal, have you ever stopped to think about why? What is it about that particular animal that attracts you? As we discussed earlier, there is an almost universal tradition in indigenous spiritual paths of taking a spirit animal. The practice was common among the Native American nations of North and South America, the ancient Celtic spiritual traditions, Norse traditions, Sami spiritual practices, ancient (and sometimes modern) Asian spiritual practices, and in many other indigenous spiritual traditions throughout the world. Obviously, such connections with the animal world are important. But why? Have you ever stopped to think about what this could mean?

Think about your favorite animal for a moment. You may have more than one favorite animal. If that is the case, pick the one that first comes to mind. Picture that animal clearly in your mind's eye. It may help to do a mindful meditation while focusing only on your chosen animal. When you feel that you have

established a connection in your mind with your animal, go on to the *My Spirit Animal* exercise on the next page.

9.3 My Spirit Animal

Name: _____ Date: _____

Think about your favorite animal. Hold the picture of that animal clearly in your mind as you complete the questions below:

What is your favorite animal? Why?

What are the characteristics of your favorite animal (for example, if your favorite animal is a lion, you might include 'fierce' or 'independent')?

In what ways are you like your favorite animal (personal traits you share with your favorite animal)?

9.3 My Spirit Animal

Name: _____ Date: _____

In what ways are you different from your favorite animal (personal traits you do not share with your favorite animal)?

Of those ways that you are different from your favorite animal, are there any characteristics you would like to have, but don't? For example, if your animal is a lion, and the lion is independent, and you don't see that quality in yourself, but would like to possess it, list it below:

How might your favorite animal bring these qualities into your life? Suppose your favorite animal is your "spirit" animal. How could you draw upon the archetypal energy of your spirit animal to help you to live more fully in your True Self?

9.4 Spirit Animal as Teacher

Once you have determined your spirit animal from the previous exercise, then your spirit animal can become your teacher. You may find that as you completed the exercise, you have more than one spirit animal. That's okay too. The only rule about spirit animals is that they should be useful to you. You may take as many spirit animals as necessary to help you on your journey to your True Self.

How do you open yourself up to being taught by your spirit animals?

If you own any pets, do you ever talk to them? If you don't own any pets, have you ever talked to anyone else's pets? How about animals in a zoo, or animals in the wild? Do they seem to understand you at times? Can your pets or other animals make their wants and needs known to you? Can they let you know if they're hungry, or if they want to go outside, or if they need a hug? Pets can't speak English. So how do you know what they want? How do they make their needs known to you?

The answer, of course, is that pets communicate to us using their body language. A dog wagging his tail means that the dog is happy. On the other hand, a cat wagging her tail means that someone is probably about to get scratched! We've learned what these signs mean by living with our pets and by paying attention to what their bodies are telling us. The more we pay attention to these non-verbal cues, the more we come to understand our pets.

As much as 70% of communication between human beings is non-verbal in nature. With pets, 100% of how they communicate with us is non-verbal. If you can learn how to read what your pets are telling you, you have learned the art of nonverbal communication.

Now take this to the next level. How might your spirit animal communicate with you? In Section 9.3 we talked about the idea of using the archetypal energy of animals to make change within ourselves. One way to do this is to picture your spirit animal in your own mind. Now think of a question you might have, and picture yourself asking your spirit animal. Given the nature of your spirit animal, what might the answer be? How would your spirit animal answer from his or her own strengths, abilities, and wisdom?

As you may have guessed by now, your spirit animal is just another aspect of your own True Self. The concept of spirit animals allows you to call upon the archetypal aspects of your own unconscious mind, and on the archetypal energy of the collective unconscious that dwells within each of us. When we conceptualize these archetypal energies as spirit animals, we create another space for them within our own psyches that allows the unconscious to express itself in new ways.

Keep these things in mind as you go on to the next page and complete the exercise, *My Spirit Animal as Teacher*.

9.4 My Spirit Animal as Teacher

Name: _____ Date: _____

To complete the *My Spirit Animal as Teacher* exercise, first find a quiet place, preferably outdoors, where you will be undisturbed for the duration of the activity. Now take a few deep centering breaths, ground yourself, and picture your spirit animal in your mind's eye. Think of a question or a situation in which you need help from your spirit animal. Given the nature of your animal, with its strengths, its weaknesses, its abilities, and its preferences, what advice do you think it might give you about your situation? Write the answer in the space provided below.

After completing the activity described above, how do you perceive your spirit animal? Write your answer below.

How do you see yourself in relation to your spirit animal? What is your relationship with each other, and how do you feel about it? Write your answer below.

How do you think your spirit animal feels about you? Write your answer below. Use more paper if necessary.

9.5 Reflections on My Spirit Animal as Teacher

Were you able to easily get in touch with the archetypal energy of your spirit animal? Was this exercise easy or difficult for you? Remember that the more you practice it, the easier it will become.

It may be that you have a beloved pet who may also act as your spirit animal. In some indigenous spiritual traditions, such animals were referred to as “familiar,” but for our purposes, you may simply choose to call it your “animal helper.” If you are fortunate enough to have such an animal companion who may also act as your spiritual helper and teacher, congratulations! You may call upon her or his wisdom at any time mutually agreeable to you both by using the activities described in this chapter.

9.6 Your Animal True Self

In her book, *Drawing Down the Moon*, Margot Adler tells of an experience she had with catching fish bare-handed. A friend’s pond was being drained and she was helping him to move the fish to another location. She was having very little success, until a shamanistic friend asked her to think of animals who are natural fishermen. Adler immediately thought of a bear. Her friend then advised her to “*become the bear*.” She then pictured in her mind how bears caught fish. When she adopted the pose and the technique that bears use to catch fish, she began catching them bare-handed at a rapid rate.

From mythology and legend, we all familiar with people who transform themselves into animals. There’s the werewolf, and Dracula’s ability to transform himself into a bat. There are legends about witches like the Slavic Baba Yaga, the Norse Berserkers, and the Skinwalkers of the Navajo who had the power to shapeshift.

Unfortunately, we may have taken those legends too literally. What if they weren’t about an actual physical transformation, but a transformation of the mind? If you could mentally transform yourself into an animal of your choosing, what would that look like? What would be different about the way you carried yourself? About the way you thought about life in general? About the way you felt about the world and yourself? What could you do in such a frame of mind that you couldn’t do as your usual self?

Of course, I’m not talking about barking like a dog at your next business meeting! But what if you could embody the courage of a lion the next time you ask for a raise? What if you could take on the gentleness of a lamb at your next romantic encounter? What if you could be as wise as an owl the next time you needed a solution to a problem?

Think about your spirit animal from the *My Spirit Animal* exercise. What characteristics of your spirit animal could help you to affirm and live in your True Self if you pictured yourself *becoming* that animal? Could you draw on the power and energy from your spirit animal to help you to succeed in transforming yourself into the person you were meant to be? How?

9.7 Nature as Teacher

The *My Spirit Animal* exercise is an opportunity to allow nature to teach us. It is also an opportunity for us to draw the archetypal energy of various animals into our lives as aids to connection. When I have done this session in workshops in the past, we have occasionally asked people to write down a brief experience they’ve had with their spirit animal, and then the class has acted out the stories people have written. The performance has been especially enjoyable when people were able to wear the masks they created in the *Faces and Masks* exercise from Session 7.

The techniques applied in the *Animal as Teacher* exercise may also be used in other aspects of our lives as we learn from nature. Imagine coming upon a stream while walking in the woods. A practitioner of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy sees the stream and studies its every aspect. How am I like the stream? How am I different? How may its energy be tapped? Why does it reflect the light of the moon? What is its substance? What is the nature of its life force? Is there an Art of Water? How do people feel about the different faces this stream presents? These are just some of the questions one might ask when observing and connecting with a stream.

The basic lesson of Nature as Teacher is to keep an open mind about anything you are studying so that you do not allow your preconceptions to cloud what is really there. This is not as easy as it sounds, but it can be accomplished. As with all things, the skill will grow with practice and patience. The key to this is to try to see all sides of a problem before looking for an answer.

With nature as your teacher, always strive to find the truth about your universe, and not merely what you wish to see or what your senses tell you. Remember that anything you will ever learn has been filtered through the sieve of your senses. What your body can perceive is but a small fraction of what is really there. The real nature of the Universe is deeper and more mysterious than we can ever know, at least in this present form. But that does not mean that we should stop trying. Your own inner universe is forever limited to the boundaries of your senses, but because of this, you also have the ability to create your own universe. That is the true nature of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: The ability to see the world as it really is, free of expectations or assumptions, and to create your own world by changing your beliefs and assumptions. When you have learned to do this, you can change your reality and your destiny.

Session 10: Nature as Nurture

A large and growing body of research has demonstrated that nature has incredible healing powers. People who go into the woods become calmer, more relaxed, less stressful, and healthier. Embracing the nurturing power of nature, we are healed.



Facilitator Notes for Session 10: Nature as Nurture

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 10* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Doing Mode; Being Mode; non-verbal communication; animal totems; animal as nurture; your animal True Self; an attitude of gratitude; the cycle of nurture, nature as nurture

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Connecting with animals; the archetypal energy of animals; “the map is not the territory;” permission from nature; the Four Mantras, and the mind trap

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with nature as nurture. Start this activity by asking for volunteers to tell a story in which they received nurturing from nature, or they had the opportunity to nurture nature themselves. This discussion lays the groundwork for the activities in this session.

If homework was assigned (e.g., exercises from the workbook that there wasn't time for at the previous session), ask if there were any questions about the materials and have students share their experiences in completing the activities. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

NOTE: Since one of the activities in this session involves establishing the cycle of nurture by practicing an attitude of gratitude, it might be a good idea to start this session with some sort of thanksgiving offering, and by seeking permission from nature to engage in today's activities. For more information on how to do this, see Sections 10.3 and 10.4.

SESSION OUTLINE

10.0 Nature and Nurturing Relationships

During this part of the session, I often do a little experiment in creative visualization. I have students take their resting heartbeat, then I guide them through a visualization in which they are stuck in traffic in a hot car with a leaking radiator. In this visualization they have only a few minutes to get to an important appointment like a job interview or a doctor visit. After a few minutes of this visualization, I have them take their pulse again, and write down the total next to their resting heartbeat total. I then do a creative visualization in which they are in a peaceful nature scene with no place to be and nothing to do but to enjoy the experience. I then have them take their pulses again.

Most of the time when I do this exercise, most of the class has a lower heart rate after the second visualization. The point is, of course, that nature relaxes and nurtures.

10.1 Nurturing and Non-Verbal Communication

This section explores non-verbal communication. Somewhere between 70% and 90% of communication between humans is non-verbal, relying instead on intonation, facial expressions, body posture, and other factors. This means that very little of the information we get from humans is actually in the form of words. When we can communicate non-verbally with human beings, we can also explore the idea of communicating non-verbally with nature.

When I do this section, I ask participants to list some ways that nature might communicate non-verbally with them. This is a precursor to the Attitude of Gratitude exercise in 10.3, which will require students to decide whether or not nature has granted permission to use the space for the exercise.

10.2 Animal as Nurture

This section introduces the nurturing qualities of animals as a precursor to the concept of Animal-Assisted Therapy. When facilitating this section, I ask my students to discuss times that they have been nurtured by animals, and also to list some examples of how they have nurtured animals in the past. These nurturing qualities can then be linked to the Spirit Animal they chose in the previous section to help them be more willing to give and also to receive nurturing.

10.3 An Attitude of Gratitude

Reality is constructive. This means that what we perceive about the world creates our reality for us. We make assumptions about how the world works, and those assumptions create our perceptions. Our perceptions are the filter we use to view the world. For example, if we have an assumption that “people are out to get me,” we automatically set our perception filters to look for evidence that supports that assumption. Once our perception filters are set in this manner, even people who aren’t out to get us look like they are out to get us. That’s because if they’re being nice to us, we automatically assume that since “people are out to get me,” they’re just being nice because they want something from us.

This eventually creates a reality around us based on our initial assumption. Here’s how that works: If the initial assumption is that “people are out to get me,” and then I treat everyone I meet as if they are out to get me, then eventually the people who aren’t out to get me are going to get tired of being treated as if they are out to get me, and they’re going to give up and go away. Eventually the only people left in my life will be the people who are out to get me. My assumptions and perceptions have created, or constructed, a reality based on my initial assumption. The purpose of the “attitude of gratitude” section and the exercise that follows is to reboot our perception filters. By willing our assumptions to conform to this attitude of gratitude, we re-set our perception filters to look for evidence of things to be grateful for. When we find things to be grateful for, nature, or the universe, responds by creating a reality in which there are even more things to be grateful for. In short, practicing an attitude of gratitude opens the doors for nature to be able to nurture us.

Review the concept of the “attitude of gratitude” with your students.

EXERCISE: An Attitude of Gratitude PRIORITY 1

For the purposes of this exercise the “sacred space” will have to be somewhere on the site you are using to conduct your workshops unless you elect to have your students do this at home. If you’re going to have them do this at home, it’s better to do it prior to today’s session, as the materials that follow build on this exercise and if they haven’t done it they’ll be missing out on some components of the exercises that follow. This is especially true of the Cycle of Nurture exercise that follows.

The basic premise of this exercise is that students make an “offering” of some sort to nature and wait to see if nature has granted them permission to use this sacred space. You may wish to have materials that can be used for this “offering.” I often supply birdseed or bits of bread for the local birds. On occasion I have also had a bottle of wine or ale that may be poured out on the ground as a libation. Smokers (or even non-smokers) may wish to offer a pinch of tobacco, or gardeners may wish to offer herbs from their gardens. It’s up to you what materials to use for your offerings. It is better to offer something that has meaning for the individual making the offering.

Have students spread out on your site, make their offering, and wait for some sign of permission being granted, then return and answer the questions on the worksheet.

Usually, I have at least one or two students who didn’t experience anything that would look or feel like nature giving permission for the day’s activities. If that’s the case, I explore their answers on the worksheet in a little more depth, as changes within themselves could also be considered to be nature granting permission. The reason for this is simple: They are a part of nature as well.

Link the offering and the granting of permission to the idea of nurturing. Have students discuss whether or not they felt nurtured, or if they felt they were nurturing, during this exercise. Ask them to relate gratitude to nurturing before going on to the Cycle of Nurture exercise.

10.4 Establishing the Cycle of Nurture

This section is preparation for the Cycle of Nurture exercise that follows. When conducting this workshop, I have students pair off with each other, taking turns to say both of these sentences to each other:

1. “I understand that you are suffering. I am here for you. I hear you. I care. Please tell me how I may help.”
2. “I am suffering. I see that you are here for me. I hear you. I care. Please help me.”

Now ask your students to pair off and have one speak the first sentence to the other. Ask the other how it felt to hear that. Then have the other student speak the sentence to the first partner and do the same. Repeat this procedure for the second sentence.

Use this to segue into the Cycle of Nurture exercise that follows.

EXERCISE: The Cycle of Nurture PRIORITY 1

For this exercise, have your students return to the place where they made their offering. Have the students complete the Cycle of Nurture exercise on their own, then have participants return to the meeting place. Ask for volunteers to share their responses to the questions on this exercise. Focus the discussion on the idea of nature as nurture, and whether students felt nurtured and/or nurturing during this exercise. If any students received an answer to the question, “How may I help?” have them share the answers they received if they are willing to do so. Again, keep the focus and the responses on how to receive nurturing from nature by offering nurturing in return.

10.5 Reflections on Nature as Nurture

The quote at the beginning of this section is from the movie *Never Cry Wolf*, about a man who goes off to learn about wolves in Alaska but winds up learning more about himself. I use this quote in my groups to process the idea of the mind trap.

To be caught in the mind trap is to be trapped by the mind into dwelling on memories of the past, or projections of memory onto the future. When we focus on thinking we are trapped inside our own heads. Such a state is eternally self-focused, even if we are ruminating over past or future events involving others, because it is we who are doing the ruminating. If we are nurturing others or nurturing nature, we are moving out of the mind trap because we are focusing on the needs of others instead of our own. The more we nurture, the more we are nurtured in return because we have established a two-way nurturing cycle.

Use this part of today’s session to discuss ways in which people have learned to nurture nature, and to be nurtured by nature. Ask open-ended questions then just let the group discuss it for themselves. This usually extends to the

question-and-answer period as well, as this session tends to get quite emotional at times. We all need nurture and healing, and so does the planet. This session tends to bring those needs to the surface, so be compassionate and supportive as your students discuss these topics.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 11 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from Session 10 that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

10.0 Nature and Nurturing Relationships

I met my wife of twenty years online through an Internet Personals site. On my Personals page, one of the questions asked on the Profile was, “*What is your idea of the perfect date?*” For my response, I wrote, “*Going camping in the woods...that moonlit beach is getting too crowded!*”

Of course, the reason I’d written this is that most responses to the question consisted of, “*A romantic walk on a moonlit beach.*”

The fact that so many people want to take romantic moonlit strolls along the beach with a romantic partner tells me something: That nature has the power to induce romantic feelings.

Real physiological changes occur when we go outdoors. Our heart rates slow down. Our blood pressure drops. We become more focused and aware. Many similar changes occur when we fall in love. Love is a nurturing relationship. When we have similar physiological changes in nature and in love, does it mean that we love nature? Does nature love us back? Could this mean that nature has the power to nurture?

The moral of the story is that if your intention is to build stronger relationships, to connect with your partner, or with nature, you’ll want to do more things that afford you the opportunity to build those connections. Nature is a powerful tool for helping both you and your partner to calm down, slow down, move out of Doing Mode into Being Mode, and to simply enjoy each other’s company. If you’re single, nature can still be a way to receive strong nurturing feelings like those of being in love. And when you feel nurtured, you’re more likely to be a nurturer in return.

Do you have pets? Do you find nurture from animals? Do you nurture and love your pets in return? Animals are a part of nature as well. We nurture them and they nurture us (Fine 200).

In Session 10 we will explore how animals and natural environments can nurture us, and how we can nurture them. The exercises in this chapter will help us to connect with the nurturing aspects of our True Selves.

Fine, A. (2000). Animals and therapists: incorporating animals in outpatient psychotherapy. In A. Fine (ed.) *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice* (179-211). San Diego, California, Academic Press.

Optional Activity: Plant a Tree

To experience nurturing relationships with nature, try planting a tree. If you don’t have the space or the opportunity for a tree, try planting a seed in a flowerpot or a cup.

As the plant you have chosen grows, nurture it by watering it and occasionally giving it plant food and fertilizer. If necessary, trim it and make sure it gets enough sunlight.

Spend at least six months nurturing your plant. Are you able to keep it alive? Are you able to help it to thrive?

After some time nurturing your plant or tree, you may come to discover that nurturing relationships are a two-way path. As you nurture your plant, you may find that it has nurtured you as well.

The more you give, the more you get back!

10.1 Nurturing and Non-Verbal Communication

In Session 7 we discussed the concept that spirituality is all about connection. People often find it easier to connect with their pets than with other people, because pets are non-judgmental and accepting. They

have few expectations of their human friends outside of food, shelter, and love. For this reason, when you are practicing your connection skills, it is often easier to practice with animals first before going on to practice with humans (Chitic, et al, 2020).

Nurturing is an aspect of connection. Connecting with nature, animals, others, and with ourselves is a very nurturing act. Some equate connection with love, and love is the most nurturing emotion. The first step in tapping into this two-way stream of nurturing and connecting is through communication.

Most of the therapy and counseling done in the world today is what is called “talk therapy.” In this type of therapy, therapists and their patients work on problems and find solutions by talking about them. There is, however, a vast body of experiential awareness that is non-verbal in nature. Because of this, some therapists believe that the ultimate therapy would be one in which you would not have to talk at all. Have you ever been emotionally moved by a beautiful piece of instrumental music, or by a sunset, or by a walk in the woods, or by an affectionate nuzzle from a favorite pet? If so, you’ve experienced non-verbal therapy.

When exploring the world of animal-assisted mindfulness, especially when connecting with animals, don’t focus so much on using words to describe what you are experiencing. Approach it from Being Mode rather than Doing Mode. Just enjoy the experience. As you do the exercises in this session, explore what it might be like to live in a non-verbal world. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is more about experiences than about talking. It’s more of a way of directly being in the world than about verbal communication. Communication with nature is easy once you get past the idea of words.

Chitic, Victor & Rusu, Alina & Szamoskozi, Stefan. (2020). *The Effects of Animal Assisted Therapy on Communication and Social Skills: A Meta-Analysis*.

10.2 Animal as Nurture

Therapists have a saying: “*The map is not the territory.*” One meaning of this phrase is that the greatest psychotherapist in the world can never know all the subtle nuances of her patient’s thoughts and feelings. The “map” is just a metaphor for a therapist’s understanding of the patient’s psyche. No matter how great a therapist’s skills, they can never see their patients as they really are. This means that you are your own best expert on what you are feeling or thinking at any given moment. By closely examining your own True Self, and learning to trust what you find, you are able to journey towards the person you were meant to be.

Another meaning of the saying, “*The map is not the territory,*” is that the way we perceive others is not the true way others actually are. According to object relations theory, each of us carries within ourselves our own representations of the people we meet. This is also true of the animals in our lives. We see them through our own personal lenses, assigning to them attributes and feelings that come from deep inside us. Which animals are nurturing you on your journey? What qualities do they possess? The qualities you see are projections of your own feelings and thoughts about these animals. In a way, they are the nurturing qualities you possess within yourself.

If you have pets, you’re probably aware that they help you get in touch with your own inner nurturing qualities. Many animals instinctively respond to your own nurturing by nurturing in return. My cats know

when I've had a bad day, and they come to me to offer comfort and affection in the same way that I offer my comfort and affection to them. I've learned a lot about myself from the way my animals respond to me, and the way I respond to them.

Even if you don't have pets, you can still take advantage of the nurturing qualities of animals by getting in touch with your own feelings about what nurturing animals represent to you. Symbolically, these thoughts and feelings represent our own primal urges.

Think about the spirit animal you selected in Session 9. What qualities does this animal possess that are nurturing? What qualities does it possess that aren't nurturing? How can you use these qualities in your journey to your own True Self?

10.3 An Attitude of Gratitude

Have you ever been thanked for doing something nice for someone? How did you feel afterwards? Did it make you more likely to want to help again in the future? Did it help the person who thanked you by making them more aware and more grateful to you in return for the gesture?

Imagine that you approached life with a sense of entitlement. Suppose you expected life to hand you everything on a silver platter. How long do you imagine it would be, with such an attitude, before you began to take things for granted? How long do you imagine it would be before you started demanding things?

Now imagine you approached life with a sense of gratitude. Suppose you were grateful for the air that you breathe, the food that you eat, the clothes that you wear, and the people in your life. Would it be possible to take things for granted with such an attitude of gratitude? Would it be possible to demand or expect things with such an attitude? Morgan & Kristjánsson (2017) demonstrated that grateful people are more happy than ungrateful people. It makes sense that people who are grateful should be happier than people who have a sense of entitlement.

In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy we teach students to approach life with an *attitude of gratitude*. Being thankful to others, to nature, or to your own concept of the divine changes the way you think and feel. Even if you have no concept of a higher power or of the divine, being grateful to the Universe for providing for you changes the way you approach things. It changes your thinking.

Nature nurtures us by providing for us. Everything you eat, the air you breathe, the water you drink, the clothes you wear, everything you see, hear, touch, taste or smell is a product of nature. How often do you thank nature (or your higher power, or your own concept of the divine) for this bounty?

One way to express gratitude is to commit a nurturing act in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Most, if not all, aboriginal peoples around the world provided offerings of one form or another to nature or the spirits of nature. These offerings could consist of bits of food, or libations (liquid refreshments poured out on the ground), or of colored ribbons, or of any form they chose with which to honor the spirit of nature.

Many Native American tribes offered pinches of sacred tobacco as a sacrifice when gathering healing herbs or plants. The Celtic and Norse peoples of Europe often tossed valuable silver vessels or exquisitely crafted tools and weapons into sacred rivers and other bodies of water. This is where we get our tradition of tossing coins into wishing wells. All over the world, ancient people and even people of

today express their gratitude in such ways. These were called “sacrifices” because it was the custom to only give their best to honor the spirits of nature. Giving away your most valuable and prized possessions in such a way was a sacrifice in the spirit of gratitude.

One way to establish a two-way nurturing relationship with nature is to make such offerings. In order to receive nurture from nature, we must be willing to offer our own nurturing in return. This is only natural. Would you stay in a relationship that was not nurturing you? Likewise, we have no reason to expect nurture from nature if we are not willing to give it ourselves.

A first step in establishing this nurturing relationship is to always remember to ask nature for permission before engaging in any outdoor activity, and to thank nature when the activity is over (Fisher 2002). Even if you don’t believe in any sort of spiritual consciousness of nature, or in any sort of higher power or divinity, expressing your gratitude to nature makes changes within your own consciousness. Even if it might feel strange at first, always seek permission from nature before beginning any activity, and wait for a reply.

I like to use the analogy of naming inanimate objects to illustrate this activity more clearly. I name all of my guitars. It’s a habit I picked up from blues guitarist B. B. King, who named his guitars “Lucille.” When I name my guitars, it doesn’t mean that I believe they are alive and are conscious sentient beings. It’s just a way of adding another dimension to how I relate to my musical instruments. In other words, it’s more about how I relate to my guitars than it is about their identity.

When you ask nature’s permission before engaging in any activity, it’s more about making conscious changes in yourself than it is about whether or not nature is a conscious, living entity. Being willing to ask permission from nature before doing an outdoor activity fosters a sense of nurturing in you, whether or not you believe nature is an entity.

How do you know that nature has granted permission? The answer to this question is like trying to explain what it is like to be in love, to a person who has never been in love. The best answer you can give is, *“You’ll know it when it happens.”*

One way to know that nature has granted permission is to notice, after asking, what you may feel attracted to. Does something in the environment call for your attention? After asking permission, do you feel at peace, or uneasy? Open your heart and your senses and be willing to accept the answers you receive.

If you don’t feel that nature has given you permission, then find another place, or postpone your activity until another day.

If you do feel that nature has consented, then thank her by offering something. A libation of ale, or wine, or other refreshment may be poured on the ground, or you may leave a bit of bread or cheese or other food item. When I do workshops, we sometimes cover pinecones in peanut butter, then roll them in birdseed.

Whatever offering you choose, present it in a thankful manner. You may wish to express your thanks out loud, or you may simply remain silent and respectful while placing your offering. In whatever manner you choose to express your thankfulness, the act will change your perceptions about the natural world and your place in it. This act eases the spirit and gives you a sense of peace and gratitude for all that nature has provided.

When you have committed this nurturing act, you have opened the way for a reciprocal exchange of nurturing from nature to you, and back again.

To take the first step in establishing the cycle of nurture, complete the *Attitude of Gratitude* exercise on the next page.

Fisher, A. (2002). *Radical ecopsychology. Psychology in the service of life*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Morgan, B., Gulliford, L., & Kristjánsson, K. (2017). A new approach to measuring moral virtues: The Multi-Component Gratitude Measure. *Personality and Individual Differences, 107*, 179–189.

10.3 An Attitude of Gratitude

Name: _____ Date: _____

For this exercise, enter your sacred space. If you have not yet established a sacred space for yourself, find any natural spot outdoors that seems to call to you. This spot will be your sacred space for the purposes of this exercise. Ask the spot's permission before continuing. If you feel that you have been granted permission, then express your gratitude by making an offering of some sort. This offering can be food, or a libation, or a colored ribbon, or an act of nurturing like watering or pruning a plant or removing debris from the area. While engaging in this activity, remain open to nature's voice by performing a mindful breathing exercise or some other form of meditation. After you have made your offering, sit quietly in your sacred spot and observe for a few minutes. Write down your observations by answering the questions below.

Did nature grant you permission for this activity? If so, how did this permission manifest itself?

When you made your offering, how did you feel? Did your perceptions of the location change? How?

When you made your offering, did you notice any changes in your thinking? If so, what changes?

10.3 An Attitude of Gratitude

Name: _____ Date: _____

If this is the first time you have ever established a nurturing relationship with nature by making an offering, did this act of gratitude change how you feel about yourself? In what ways?

If this is the not first time you have ever established a nurturing relationship with nature by making an offering, when did you first start the practice? How has the practice helped you to grow in your relationship with nature?

After you made your offering and began observing this sacred space, what did you notice?

How might the things you noticed or observed change how you feel about yourself?

Was anything you noticed nurturing to you? If so, how might it help you to live more fully in your True Self?

10.4 Establishing the Cycle of Nurture

The *Attitude of Gratitude* exercise is a first step in establishing a reciprocal nurturing relationship with nature. The next step is to create a cycle of nurturing. In order to receive nurturing, we must be willing to give nurturing in return. By opening yourself to the idea of being thankful to nature for her bounty, we are able to connect more fully to nature and to ourselves by removing obstacles to connection like ungratefulness, unwillingness, and indifference.

Human beings are a part of nature as well, and as human beings we respond to nurturing relationships. All relationships have difficulties. From time to time we argue with our loved ones and disagree. The next time you find yourself in such a disagreement, practice the exercise below. It works with romantic relationships, with parents and children, with family members, and with friends. It works with pretty much any relationship where people interact with each other.

The next time another person has a problem with you, try saying this to them:

“I understand that you are suffering. I am here for you. I hear you. I care. Please tell me how I may help.”

The next time you have a problem with another person, try saying this to them:

“I am suffering. I see that you are here for me. I hear you. I care. Please help me.”

These simple phrases, adapted from the *Four Mantras* by Thich Nhat Hanh, let the other person know that you value the relationship enough not to let the problem interfere. They also let the other person know that they are valued, and that you care for them. They also open the door to helping both partners feel heard and understood.

Practice these phrases with a loved one a few times before going on to the *Cycle of Nurture* exercise on the next page. If you are completing this exercise as a part of a Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy group, your instructor may have you practice it with other members of your group.

Nhat Hanh, Thich (1997). *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart*, Shambhala Publications, Boston, Massachusetts.

10.4 The Cycle of Nurture

Name: _____ Date: _____

If we expect to receive nurturing from nature, we must first expect to be willing to offer such nurture in return. Nurture is a two-way street. In order to establish the cycle of nurture with your own sacred space, first go to your sacred space and find a comfortable place to sit or stand. Next ground and center yourself by engaging in a brief meditation. Now ask permission for what you are about to do and wait for a reply. If permission is granted, continue with the exercise below. If permission is not granted, find another place, or wait until another day. When you have received permission from nature, make an offering to express your gratitude, then sit or stand comfortably and recite the following three times to all the life present in your sacred space:

“I understand that you are suffering. I am here for you. I hear you. I care. Please tell me how I may help.”

Once you have recited the above three times, open your heart and your mind and wait for an answer. This answer may come in the form of a visit from an animal, or the way the wind moves through the trees, or a sound, or just a feeling within yourself. If you don't receive an answer, end the exercise and try again on another day, following the same formula described above.

When you have gotten an answer, write your responses to the questions below.

What answer did you receive?

How do you plan to respond? In what ways may you nurture nature?

10.4 The Cycle of Nurture

Name: _____ Date: _____

How might the actions described above (your plan to help nature) help you to receive nurturing from nature in return?

How might nature manifest its gratitude to you for your help?

How might you prepare yourself to receive this expression of gratitude?

How might establishing this cycle of nurture with nature help you to become the person you were born to be? To live more fully in your own True Self?

10.5 Reflections on Nature as Nurture

"I think over again my small adventures. My fears, those small ones that seemed so big. For all the vital things I had to get and to reach. And yet there is only one great thing. The only thing. To live to see the great day that dawns, and the light that fills the world."

- Old Inuit Song

When we get stuck in thinking cycles, especially thinking cycles that lead to stress and anxiety, we tend to forget to focus on our present moment awareness. When this happens, we forget to take joy in the immediate pleasure of existence.

Being caught inside our own heads in this manner is called the "mind trap."

Think about all the things that have stressed you out in your life. How many of them were a product of the mind trap? That is, how many of them had to do with anxiety over things that had happened in the past, or that might happen in the future?

How many of them had to do with words and language? Could you worry about things if you had no words or language with which to fret over them?

As we learned in Session 9, nature doesn't communicate with words. Plants and animals can't communicate verbally. They make their wants and needs known in other ways. It's up to us to learn what these ways are.

To give and receive nurturing from nature, we must be open to learning non-verbal ways of communicating. Actions are more important than words when it comes to nurturing, so in order to establish a nurturing relationship with nature, we must be willing to act instead of merely talking. Although Ayotte-Beaudet, et al (2020) were studying the benefits of outdoor classrooms instead of the nurturing aspects of nature, the study found that outdoor classrooms offered superior benefits to indoor classrooms in terms of cognitive, physical, mental, and academic benefits. I believe that this is because of the nurturing aspect of natural environments.

While mindfulness involves leaving doing mode and entering being mode, nurturing involves leaving talking mode and entering doing mode. The doing mode of the nurturing cycle is about a different kind of doing than the type of doing that occurs in the mind trap. Nurturing is about doing activities that have positive emotional content rather than negative emotional content. Studies have shown that it is virtually impossible to dwell on our own problems when we are helping others with their problems. The more we nurture others, the more we are nurtured in return.

This is true of nature as well. If we are doing things to help nature, it is difficult to remain focused on the doing of the mind trap. By leaving the world of words behind, we are free to enter a nurturing relationship with nature and to do things that help both nature and ourselves.

We are a part of nature. The more we embrace our own capacity for nurturing, the more nature will offer nurture in return.

Ayotte-Beaudet, Jean-Philippe & Beaudry, Marie-Claude & Bisailon, Véronique & Cordeau, Patrice. (2020). *Outdoor classes in higher education during the context of COVID-19 in Canada: Guide to support management during the first phases of implementation.*

Session 11: Nature as Healer

Research continues to demonstrate the healing power of nature. When we let nature teach us how to nurture, we open the door for nature to be nurturing to us as well. When we create such mindful connections with nature, we are able to tap into nature's powerful healing abilities, and we are more able to heal nature as well. Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) helps you to connect to this healing power.



Facilitator Notes for Session 11: Nature as Healer

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 11* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

Note that for the Animal-Assisted Healing exercise, an animal of some sort is needed. If you have the availability, bring an animal of some sort with you for this exercise in today's session. It might be a friendly dog or cat, a horse, or some other sort of docile and friendly animal who is not afraid of strangers. Be conscious of liability issues should the animal somehow injure one of your students. You might also ask if any students have allergies before introducing the animal to the group.

As an alternative to bringing your own animal you might have students bring their pets. Just be aware that animals who are strangers to each other might have difficulties getting along, so plan accordingly. The best results I've ever had in this session is with horses who were accustomed to participating in animal-assisted therapy. Use your own discretion as to what may or may not be possible given your own location and resources.

If it's simply not possible to have animals present for this session (for example if you have to meet indoors for some reason) then you may have your participants do this portion of the session at home. If this is your plan, make sure they have done this prior to today's session. Don't assign it as homework for this session, as later sections in this session build on the exercise.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Animal-Assisted Therapy; animal-assisted healing; nature as healer; chaos; order; Shadow; Persona, and individuation

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Seasonal mood changes; animal assistants, and biorhythms

INTRODUCTION

As an icebreaker exercise, ask participants to discuss their experiences with nature as healer. Start this activity by asking for volunteers to tell a story in which they received healing from nature. This discussion lays the groundwork for the activities in this session.

SESSION OUTLINE

11.0 Animal as Healer

This section doesn't require a lot of discussion other than introducing the concept that animals can help us in the healing process. You might ask students to list ways in which their pets have given them emotional and/or physical healing of some sort.

11.1 Animal Assisted Healing

Discuss some of the research demonstrating the healing power of animal assisted therapy if time permits. If running short on time, you can skip this section, as the material is contained elsewhere in the workbook.

EXERCISE: Animal Assisted Healing PRIORITY 1

If animals are present for this activity, you will probably have to let your students take turns doing the exercise with the animals available. The exception here would be if every student was able to bring a pet along.

Students should take their pulses just prior to interacting with the animal, and they should take their pulses again just after interacting with the animal.

After all participants finish the exercise, ask how many had an increased heart rate, and how many had a decreased heart rate. In most cases, heart rate decreases unless the student was wrestling with the animal, or playing fetch, or some other sort of vigorous physical activity.

11.2 Reflections on Animal Assisted Healing

Start discussion here by asking students to volunteer their experiences with the previous exercise. Next, facilitate a discussion on animal assisted healing by reviewing the bullet points of the studies in this section and asking students to reflect on times they may have experienced any of the things discovered by the studies mentioned.

11.3 Material Possessions and Healing

Facilitate a discussion by asking your students to think of some things that they could not live without. Ask them to imagine themselves stranded on a deserted island. What would be the minimum they would need to survive? The idea behind this exercise is to illustrate just how little we actually need in order to survive. Most material possessions are luxuries, and the more material possessions we bring into our lives, the more potential for stress and anxiety we bring into our lives. This is because we first have to earn the money to buy those possessions, then we have to take care of those possessions once we own them.

EXERCISE: Anxiety from Material Possessions PRIORITY 1

This exercise takes a while because it draws on responses from previous exercises. Have students do it in session today if at all possible so that they will be in the right frame of mind for the exercises that follow. Try not to spend more than fifteen or twenty minutes on this portion so there will be enough time to cover the rest of the materials.

EXERCISE: Material Possessions as Aids to Connection PRIORITY 1

When doing this exercise ask your students to be honest about their answers, and not to deny finding numinous connections from material possessions if they do have such connections in their lives. For example, my guitars and flutes are material possessions, but the music they allow me to create has healed me many times over. They are material possessions that I would prefer not to lose.

Ask your students to share some material possessions that they find spiritual connections with. After they've identified a few, ask them how much stress and anxiety they've experienced purchasing those items and paying for their upkeep and maintenance. If your students are like the majority of mine, then material possessions from which they get a sense of spiritual connection probably don't cause them much distress. This is probably because if the connection is spiritual, we don't mind the upkeep.

11.4 Connecting and Healing

In this section, briefly discuss the health benefits of developing spiritual connections. For the purposes of this workshop series, the definition of “spiritual” is “connected to something larger than self.” Even people who have no concept of a higher power or of the divine can reap the healing benefits of connecting. For example, many types of Buddhism don’t require belief in any sort of gods or higher power, yet most Buddhists feel a powerful sense of connection to the earth and all the life that surrounds them.

I personally like the idea of mysticism, and I often introduce the concept here. A mystic is someone who recognizes that if there is such a thing as a God or Gods, then such a thing is, by definition, beyond human understanding. Therefore, when we claim to know anything about God(s), we are no longer talking about God(s). At that point we are talking about our own ideas being projected onto the unknowable.

A mystic, on the other hand, would recognize that belief in God(s) is not a necessary or useful concept when developing a spiritual connection to life, the universe, and everything. We can experience the numinous without having to believe in any sort of deity. As author and humorist Douglas Adams said, “Isn’t it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies living at the bottom of it?”

The more we are able to experience such a sense of spiritual connection, the more we open ourselves to the healing power of nature.

When presenting this idea, try to avoid the temptation of letting the discussion turn into a theological debate on the nature of God(s). The concept of the divine is up to the individual. The bottom line is, “Does this idea help me to connect with nature in spiritual and healing ways?”

11.5 Chaos and Order

Facilitate a discussion on linking chaos with the Shadow side of our personalities and on linking order with the Persona. When you had your students do the Faces and Masks exercise, they created a representation of their True Selves in mask form. The word “persona” literally means “mask.” Individuation is the process by which we come to live more fully in our True Selves by balancing the forces of chaos and order in our own lives. The more we live in True Self, the more we become unique individuals, completing the process of individuation.

What does this have to do with nature?

There are always seasons in nature. All of the seasons are necessary. Without the decay and death of autumn and winter, the new growth of spring and summer could not take place. Likewise, human beings experience seasons of growth and seasons of decay. It is unrealistic to expect never to have a winter in our lives, because that is part of being a human being. Just as both chaos and order are necessary for nature to thrive and prosper, so are the Shadow and the Persona necessary to complete the process of individuation so that we may become our True Selves.

Ask students to discuss what this means to them, and how they might integrate their Shadow sides into their being without trying to suppress or deny the darker aspects of their nature.

11.6 Healing Rhythms

Read over the instructions for filling out the Biorhythm Journal Chart and make sure you understand the purpose of the chart and how to fill it out. Explain the process to your students. The critical concept of the Biorhythm Journal Chart is that for many people, moods and feelings are dependent on the time of day, the seasons, and the weather to some extent. This chart will help to pinpoint these sometimes-subtle changes.

EXERCISE: Biorhythm Journal Chart PRIORITY 2

To illustrate the use of the chart, have your students complete one entry for today just to make sure they understand how to use the chart. They can then complete the rest of the chart over the coming week. For best results they should plot out their biorhythms for at least a year so they may record their moods in all seasons.

11.7 True Self and Healing

Ask for volunteers to discuss answers to these questions:

1. “What would need to be healed within myself in order for me to live fully in True Self?”
2. “How can nature and the natural world help me to find this healing?”

Due to the deeply personal nature of these questions, don’t force students to answer if they don’t volunteer.

Be aware that this can sometimes be a very emotional segment of the session, and be gentle and patient with participants who answer, offering comfort and nurture where necessary.

HOMEWORK

Have students read the Session 12 materials prior to the next session; have them complete any exercises from Session 11 that weren't covered in the session itself; ask them to bring any questions about the materials or the exercises to the next session. Since the next session will be the last session of the program, you may wish to plan some sort of closing ritual or ceremony. This could include having a potluck dinner or an award ceremony, or just a meet-and-greet with light refreshments. If you're planning to do this and you need your students to participate in the planning, discuss this at the end of the session today.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Note who stays for the discussion, and who leaves. Work at the next session to engage more actively those who leave. Remember that leaving may not always be a sign of not being engaged. Sometimes it indicates a need to process, in being mode, what was experienced during the session.

11.0 Animal as Healer

Humans are mammals. Mammals nurture and care for their young. During this period of nurturing in infancy, we form bonds that affect how we approach others for the rest of our lives. There is a whole area of psychology, called Attachment Theory, which studies how these relationships are formed, and how they cause us to act in the ways we do. If you've had negative attachments in your childhood, it may be difficult for you to connect with other people in positive ways.

Most people throughout the world have had a pet at some point in time. Pets afford people who've experienced negative attachments the opportunity to form positive attachments in non-threatening ways.

Animals have been used in schools, in therapeutic settings, and in nursing homes to help individuals form positive attachments. The reason this works is that both people and animals have a natural instinct to nurture and to be nurtured. Through this nurturing, we are healed.

Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 226-244.

11.1 Animal Assisted Healing

As mentioned in Section 0.6, there is a branch of psychotherapy known as *Animal-Assisted Therapy*. In this broad category of ecopsychology, animals help to facilitate therapeutic interventions. When animals nurture us in this manner, healing takes place in a realm beyond the words of traditional "talk therapy."

Since animals cannot rely on words for communication, they are much more sensitive to other means of communication. They can read our body language, our pheromones, our facial expressions, and the tone of our voices. This ability makes them excellent assistants in more experiential forms of therapy.

Studies compiled by Palley, et al in 2010 have shown that spending time with pets has the following effects on humans:

- The breathing rate slows down
- The heart rate slows down
- The blood pressure decreases
- Stress hormones are reduced
- Endorphins (the body's natural painkillers) are increased
- The immune system is strengthened
- People become calmer and more relaxed
- Perhaps not surprisingly, the animals also become more relaxed!

In a 2020 meta-analysis by Chitic, et al, animal-assisted therapy:

- improves participants' social and communication skills
- alleviates the effects of autism spectrum disorders
- enhances social abilities related to peers/friends
- increases coping/survival skills
- facilitates answering to peer pressure

- aids in expressing anger in appropriate ways
- increases abilities related to problem-solving and decision-making
- develops negotiating skills

All of the characteristics listed above are obviously healing characteristics, so animals are great natural healers!

To experience some of the healing power that animals can offer, try the Animal-Assisted Healing exercise on the next page. If you do not have a pet of your own, you may borrow one from a friend or visit a petting zoo or dog park. This exercise may be performed with any friendly four-legged friend. If you have allergies, take that into consideration when selecting your animal “therapist.”

Chitic, Victor & Rusu, Alina & Szamoskozi, Stefan. (2020). *The Effects of Animal Assisted Therapy on Communication and Social Skills: A Meta-Analysis*.

Davidson, Richard J., Kabat-Zinn, Jon et al. (2003) Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65, 564-570.

Palley, Lori S.; O'Rourke, P. Pearl; & Niemi, Steven M. (2010). Mainstreaming Animal-Assisted Therapy. *ILAR Journal*, Volume 51, Number 3 2010.

11.1 Animal Assisted Healing

Name: _____ Date: _____

For this exercise you will need an animal assistant. You may use your own pet for the exercise. If you do not have a pet, you may wish to borrow one from a friend or neighbor or visit a petting zoo or dog park if there is one near you. Don't attempt this exercise with a wild animal. If you have allergies, select an animal you're not allergic to.

To engage in the *Animal Assisted Healing* exercise, complete the following steps, then go on to answer the questions on the next page.

1. Find a space, preferably outdoors, where you and your animal assistant may be undisturbed for the duration of the exercise.
2. Begin by taking your pulse. Write down your heart rate on the worksheet on the next page, or just make a mental note of it for now.
3. Ask your animal assistant for its permission and help in completing this exercise and wait for a reply. Read the animal assistant's body language for signs that permission has been granted. If it has not, or if the animal seems uneasy in any way, postpone the activity until another time.
4. Once permission has been granted, thank your animal assistant by giving it a treat of some sort.
5. Bond with your animal assistant by grooming or petting it.
6. When you feel a bond has been established, think of a situation in which you need healing help. If you do not have such a situation, just enjoy the experience of being with your animal assistant.
7. Play with your animal assistant in some way. If your animal assistant is a dog, you may toss a ball or a stick. If a cat, you may offer it a bit of string. If some other animal, find a way to engage in a playful activity with it.
8. When you have finished playing with the animal assistant, thank it once again and express your gratitude by offering it another treat.
9. Take your pulse again.
10. Dismiss your animal assistant in a kind and gentle way.

When you have completed all 10 steps above, go to the worksheet on the next page and answer the questions.

11.1 Animal Assisted Healing

Name: _____ Date: _____

RESTING HEART RATE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EXERCISE: _____ beats per minute

How did your animal assistant grant you permission to do the exercise?

How did you choose to bond with your animal assistant? How did he/she respond?

Before playing with your animal assistant, did you think of a situation in which you needed help? Did playing with your animal assistant change the way you thought about the situation? How?

11.2 Reflections on Animal Assisted Healing

If you are like most people who engage in the Animal Assisted Healing exercise, you probably experienced a decrease in your heart rate from the beginning of the exercise until the end of the exercise. Of course, if your play with your animal assistant involved running or jumping, the opposite may have been true, but overall, most people become calmer and more relaxed after engaging in animal assisted healing.

McConnell, et al (2011) revealed that people who owned pets enjoyed the following health benefits:

- Pet owners are less likely to die within 1 year of having a heart attack than those who do not own pets
- Medicare patients with pets (especially dogs) had fewer physician visits than similar patients without pets
- HIV-positive men reported less depression than similar men without pets
- People with severe ambulatory disabilities (e.g., spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injury) who were given a service dog showed well-being improvements

In addition to the research by McConnell, here are some more studies on the power of animal assisted healing:

- Covert, et al (1985) found that children trust their pets and confide in them when they have a problem. They also play with their pet when feeling stressed.
- Fine (2000) Demonstrated that having animals present in a therapy session helps to modify the emotional climate of the room. Pets seem to have a calming effect that moderates strong negative emotions.
- Salomon (1995) found that nine- to thirteen-year-olds with higher scholastic performance reported seeking more emotional support from animals when they suffered with internal discomfort or felt lonely, compared to those with lower scholastic performance.
- Levine and Bohn (1986) found that children who live in homes where a pet is a member of the family were more empathetic than children in homes where there was no such pet.
- Melson (1990) found a positive association between attachment to pets and self-esteem in kindergarteners.
- Hu et al (2018) found that animal-assisted therapy improved symptoms of those with cognitive impairments
- Zafra-Tanaka et al (2019) found that animal-assisted therapy alleviates symptoms of dementia in seniors

There's a reason that humans have had relationships with our four-legged brothers and sisters for millennia. They nurture us, and we nurture them. By their nurturing, we can be healed.

Covert, A.M., Whiren, A.P., Keith, J. & Nelson, C. (1985). Pets, early adolescence and families. *Marriage and Family Review*, 8(3-4), 95-108.

Fine, A. (2000). Animals and therapists: incorporating animals in outpatient psychotherapy. In A. Fine (ed.) *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice* (179-211). San Diego, California, Academic Press.

Hu, M.; Zhang, P.; Leng, M.; Li, C.; Chen, L. (2018). Animal-assisted intervention for individuals with cognitive impairment: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials and quasi-randomized controlled trials. *Psychiatry Res.* 2018, 260, 418–427

- Levine, M.M. & Bohn, S. (1986). *Development of social skills as a function of being reared with pets. Living together: people, animals and the environment.* Delta Society International Conference, Boston, MA.
- McConnell, Allen R. et al (2011) Friends with Benefits: On the Positive Consequences of Pet Ownership. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2011, Vol. 101, No. 6, 1239 –1252
- Melson, G.F. (1990). *Pet ownership and attachment in young children: relation to behavior problems and social competence.* Annual Meeting of the Delta Society, Houston, TX.
- Salomon, A. (1995). *Animals as a means of emotional support and companionship for children aged 9 to 13 years old.* Conference on Human Animal Interactions, Animal Health, and Quality of Life, Sept 6-9, Geneva, Switzerland.
- Zafra-Tanaka, J.H.; Pacheco-Barrios, K.; Tellez, W.A.; Taype-Rondan, A. (2019). Effects of dog-assisted therapy in adults with dementia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychiatry* 2019, 19, 1–10.

11.3 Material Possessions and Healing

As mentioned in Section 4.0, the only things we really need to survive are food, clothing, shelter, and love. Everything else is a luxury item. The society we live in conditions us to believe that material possessions are the key to happiness. We tend to reinforce this when we buy each other gifts in an attempt to purchase love and affection. But what we're really teaching each other when we do this is that the gifts are more important than the giver.

Roberts, et al (2005) demonstrated that the more people tend to equate happiness with the purchase and ownership of material possessions, the more family stress they tend to have. And of course, the converse is true as well. The less people equate happiness with material possessions, the less family stress they tend to experience.

This belief that owning things is the key to happiness is not very conducive to developing healing relationships with other people, or with nature. In fact, many of the things that cause us stress come from our desire to purchase more and more for ourselves and for each other in our never-ending pursuit of happiness.

To illustrate how material possessions can interfere with healthy relationships, go back to your *Things That Cause Me Stress* from Section 4.1. How many of those things have to do with material possessions? List them in the exercise on the next page.

- Roberts, James & Tanner, John & Manolis, Chris. (2005). Materialism and the Family Structure–Stress Relation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology - J CONSUM PSYCHOL.* 15. 183-190.

11.3a Anxiety from Material Possessions

Name: _____ Date: _____

Go back to your *Things That Cause Me Stress* from Session 4.1. How many of those things have to do with material possessions? That is, on your list of things that cause you stressful or depressing thoughts, how many of them have to do with the purchase, rental, maintenance, or ownership of material goods? For purposes of this exercise, “material goods” may also include intangible goods such as stocks, bonds, insurance policies, medical bills, rental and lease fees, etc.

Once you have identified these items from your *Things That Cause Me Stress* list, write them below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____

Now go back again to Session 7 and look at your list of *Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected*. How many of those things have to do with material possessions or the worries they cause? List those in the exercise on the next page.

11.3a Anxiety from Material Possessions

Name: _____ Date: _____

Look at your list of *Things That Keep Me from Feeling Connected* from Session 7.1. How many of those things have to do with material possessions or the worries they cause? List them below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

Now find your list of *Ways I'd Like to Feel Connected* from Session 7.3. How many of those have to do with material possessions? List those in the exercise on the next page.

11.3b Possessions as Aids to Connection page 1 of 1

Name: _____ Date: _____

In Session 7.3, find your list of *Ways I'd Like to Feel Connected*. How many of those have to do with material possessions? Look for items on the list in Session 7.3 that are material possessions that help you to feel a spiritual, divine, inspiring, or numinous connection to nature, to your loved ones, and to yourself. When you have identified those items, list them below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

What did you learn about yourself from doing these lists? What did you learn about your relationship to material goods?

11.4 Connecting and Healing

There is a relationship between feeling spiritually connected and healing. In a 2007 meta-analysis on this relationship, Dyer found that the odds of survival for people who scored highly on spiritual measures were 29% higher than those who scored lower in spiritual involvement.

Dyer also examined a number of studies that indicated that meditation is associated with positive changes in immune function, reductions in cardiopulmonary and gastrointestinal tract symptoms in cancer patients, beneficial changes in blood pressure and heart rate, and decreased mortality risk, all of which may be related to long-term health.

This meta-study also found that the type of spirituality wasn't as important as the fact that participants had some sort of spiritual practice. For purposes of this study, agnostic and atheist Buddhists were included, with similar results. Using our definition of "spiritual" as "connected to something larger than self," even people who have no concept of a higher power or of the divine can reap the healing benefits of connecting.

Looking back on your lists on the exercises *Anxiety from Material Possessions* and *Material Possessions as Aids to Connection*, did you learn anything about the relationships between material possessions and spirituality? Do material possessions act more often as aids to spiritual connection, or as deterrents to spiritual connection?

If spirituality leads to healing, and material possessions often act to hinder us from achieving high levels of spiritual connection, what does that say about the relationship between material possessions and healing? Perhaps there is a reason that so many advanced practitioners of spiritual paths around the world practice asceticism. This doesn't mean that we should all sell our possessions and run off to live in a cave in the woods, but it does mean that we should all examine our relationship with our material possessions.

Dyer, Jade (2007). How Does Spirituality Affect Physical Health? A Conceptual Review, *Holistic Nursing Practice* 2007; 21(6):324–328

11.5 Chaos and Order

Nature is all about balance. For new life to begin, old life must eventually pass away. The seeds that fall in autumn contain the beginnings of new life in the spring. The circle of life and death is neither good nor bad. Each half of the cycle depends on the other for its existence.

Consider the seasons. The winter solstice marks the longest night of the year. From that day forward, days get longer and longer until the summer solstice, which is the shortest night of the year. At midsummer the days begin to grow shorter, and the nights grow longer until the winter solstice returns again, marking off a lighter part of the year and a darker part of the year.

All life on earth exists in a perpetual balance of chaos and order. Chaos represents the forces of death, darkness and decay, and order represents the forces of life, light, and growth.

Humans and animals live balanced between these forces of chaos and order. The ideal life is one that strives for a balance between these forces. To live a life ruled by chaos is to live without direction and purpose. Such a life is one of death, darkness, and decay. On the other hand, to live a life ruled by order is to become obsessive about everything, always chasing after an orderly perfection that does not exist in the natural world. Finding balance between the forces of chaos and order allows one to live a life of purpose without engaging in compulsive, controlling behavior.

A story from the movie *The Last Samurai* will help to illustrate this distinction. The samurai in that film mentioned that he had spent his life seeking a perfect cherry blossom. Towards the end of the film, as he lies dying on the battlefield, the wind stirs and blows thousands of cherry blossoms off the trees. As the blossoms come sailing his way, his dying words are, "They're *all* perfect."

I believe that the way to strike a balance between the chaos and the order of life is to realize that everything is perfect just the way it is if we have the wisdom to see it. The same is true with ourselves in our quest to live in our True Selves.

Carl Jung believed that all human beings contain within them the potential for all behaviors, both "good" and "bad." According to Jung, the *Persona* is the mask we wear in our everyday lives. It is the face we present to others. The *Persona* represents who we think we are, and who we would like to be. The *Shadow*, on the other hand, represents all those traits we wish to suppress in ourselves. All our anger, fears, and negative emotions and behaviors are pushed down into the *Shadow* and denied expression in the *Persona*.

Jung believed that the key to mental health was a process called *individuation*. Individuation involves striking a balance between the *Shadow* and the *Persona*. The *Shadow* represents the forces of chaos and darkness within an individual, and the *Persona* represents the forces of order and light. While the *Shadow* contains all our darker and more negative emotions, it is also the seat of creativity. To deny the existence of one's *Shadow* is to deny one's own ability to be creative. However, allowing the *Shadow* to rule one's life creates a situation where the individual is ruled by the forces of chaos and darkness. Jung saw psychoanalysis as the process by which we balance light and darkness within ourselves, thus achieving individuation.

Some moral, religious, and ethical systems try to deny the existence of our darker impulses. These systems focus solely on the *Persona*: The face we present to others. The more such systems suppress the darker impulses in the *Shadow*, the more unbalanced the individual becomes. In such a case, the *Shadow* becomes a pressure cooker with no means to release the pressure. In extreme cases, the pressure cooker blows, leading to dysfunction and even psychosis in extreme cases.

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy recognizes the need to balance *Persona* and *Shadow*. By acknowledging our darker impulses, we open the door to creating this balance, leading to individuation. Many people think that acknowledging our darker impulses means having to act on these impulses. Nothing could be further from the truth. Suppose someone has done something that leads you to be angry with that person. Your first impulse might be the desire to retaliate in some way by returning anger for anger, or by hurting that individual in some way. Those who focus only on the *Persona* would attempt to suppress and deny this impulse, even though the desire to retaliate is a perfectly normal reaction to being angered. The angrier such a person becomes, the more he tries to suppress that anger, until he reaches boiling point and reacts explosively to the situation.

In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy we seek to restore balance by acknowledging this impulse. Instead of swallowing our anger, we would recognize it as a darker impulse. But instead of returning anger for anger, we strive to express that anger in positive ways; perhaps by confronting the source of the anger and saying to the person, “*You know, I really felt angry when you did _____ . I don’t want to be angry with you. What can we do to resolve this situation?*”

As much as we might sometimes like to think otherwise, we are not separate from nature. A huge body of research confirms that our environment and the seasons affect our moods and behavior. If you think about it for a moment, you will probably find this to be true for yourself as well. Do you find yourself becoming more contemplative and introspective during the winter months? Do you become happier and more outgoing in the summer months? Does a walk in the woods improve your mood? If so, you are not alone.

The tools of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy allow us a tangible symbolic representation of these inner states of being. Just as the seasons move back and forth between cycles of light and darkness, so our own moods and feelings cycle between lighter and darker times. Celebrating the changes of the seasons and the cycle of life allows us to acknowledge both our lighter and our darker impulses in a contemplative and meditative way. By acknowledging them, we restore balance to our lives and to our own spiritual journeys.

11.6 Healing Rhythms

Mindful awareness helps us to know our bodies and their complex cycles. Mindful awareness also reminds us that when troubles come, whether in mind or body, it is helpful to remember that “*this too shall pass.*” A step in becoming aware of how these cycles influence us is to actually chart them and look for any patterns we may find. The following page is a journal page you can use to monitor the comings and goings of your various cycles.

Here’s how to use the journal page: You may wish to make several copies of the page so that you can chart your progress for several weeks or months. The page is divided up for each day of the week. For any situation in which you feel the need to monitor what your body’s cycles are doing, note the day and time, then move to the next block and describe your mood. It’s a good idea to monitor both your positive and negative moods so that you’ll know when you are more likely to have each. Next, move to the *Situation* block and record what’s going on at the time. Try to avoid the obvious; for example, if you just had a fight with your boss, then it’s perfectly understandable that you might be in a bad mood. Try to note subtler shifts of mood; we’re plotting your body’s natural biorhythms here, and those natural biorhythms can be corrupted by outside influences like fights with your boss.

Next, in the columns marked *Outdoor* and *Indoor* write whether you were indoors or outdoors when you made the observation. See if being outdoors has any different overall effect than being indoors, and vice-versa. You may wish to write a specific location under the appropriate column, to see if there is a place that may be affecting your mood.

Keep doing the chart until you feel confident that you are mindful of your body’s various cycles and moods. You can use this information to your advantage by avoiding any major decisions or interactions when you’re cycling towards a less productive mood, or by saving the important activities for when you are more likely to be operating at peak efficiency. For example, if you know you tend to be more tired and

irritable in the evenings at the first of the week, you might want to postpone any important decisions until the mornings of the later days of the week.

When you have established a consistent pattern with your moods and their cycles, you may use this information to your advantage to heal yourself and your relationships.

11.6 Biorhythm Journal Chart

Name: _____ Date: _____

DAY	TIME	MOOD	SITUATION	OUTDOOR	INDOOR
MONDAY					
TUESDAY					
WEDNESDAY					
THURSDAY					
FRIDAY					
SATURDAY					
SUNDAY					

11.7 True Self and Healing

We are nearing the end of our journey together. The next session, *Living in True Self*, has been the ultimate destination, and we are almost there. Upon finishing Session 12 you should have a much better understanding of who you are, and how to live as the person you were meant to be.

So how does one live in True Self?

When a person has integrated Shadow and Persona and has balanced the forces of chaos and order, that person has the ability to live in True Self.

According to the humanist psychotherapist Carl Rogers, we all have a vision of how we see ourselves, called the *Perceived Self*. We all also have a vision of how we would like to be, what Rogers called the *Ideal Self*. In Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy we refer to the Ideal Self as the *True Self*. When the Perceived Self and the True Self are evenly matched, a person feels calm and at peace with herself and with the world, but the farther apart the Perceived Self and the True Self are, the more chaotic and stressful her journey will be. This is because the Perceived Self is always asking why it can't be more like the True Self. The self-image of such a person does not match up to that person's vision of True Self.

When the Perceived Self and the True Self are so far apart, there are two possible solutions to bringing them back into balance. The first is to move the Perceived Self more closely in alignment with the True Self. The second is to bring the True Self more closely into alignment with the Perceived Self. In reality, most people achieve individuation, and therefore the ability to live in True Self, by moving the Perceived Self and the True Self more closely towards each other so that they meet in the middle.

The Perceived Self is ruled by chaos, and the True Self is ruled by order. The way to move the Perceived Self more closely towards the True Self is to see that a truly balanced person needs a little chaos in their lives, because that's where the creativity comes from. The way to move the True Self more closely to the Perceived Self is to see that a person needs a little order in their lives as well, because that's where stability and confidence come from.

One way to determine which direction to go when aligning your Perceived Self and your True Self is to think about the seasons of the year, and the cycles of life and death they bring. These cycles are a dance between the forces of chaos and the forces of order. Both light and dark are necessary to find balance, as are life and death, growth and decay, Shadow and Persona. Do you have more chaos in your life, or more order? Do you have a balance between the two? Are you comfortable with finding that balance if you do not have it? Will finding the balance between chaos and order in your life help you to life more fully in your True Self?

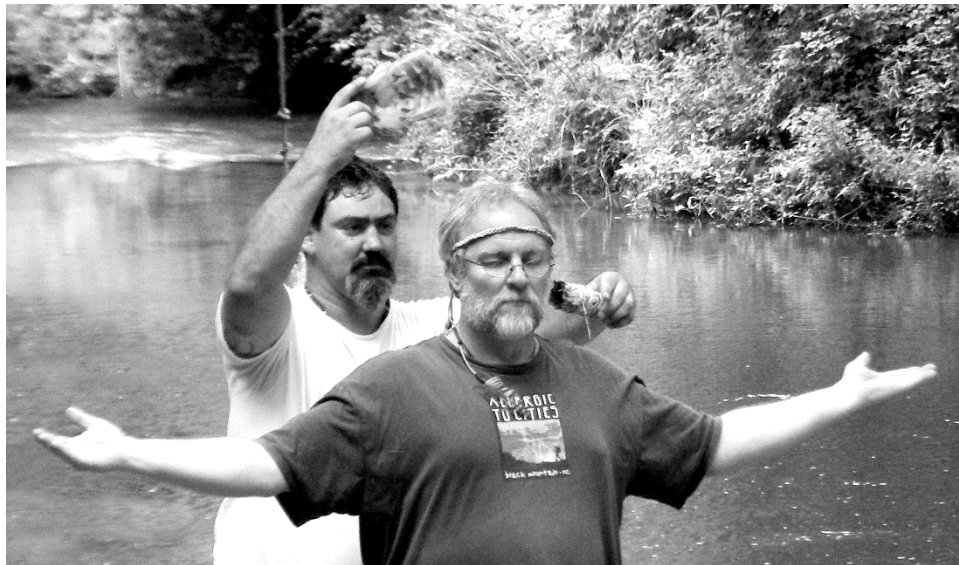
A person who is perfectly balanced between the Perceived Self and the True Self is a person who is spiritually connected. Such a spiritually connected person does not need material possessions to feel better about themselves. Their self-esteem and self-confidence are generated from within. Their sense of value comes from what they are, and not from what they own.

When we attain this level of balance and mastery, the power of nature has healed us.

Rogers, Carl (1980). *A Way of Being*, Houghton Mifflin, New York, NY.

Session 12: Living in True Self

Do you remember a time when you knew exactly who you were, what you wanted to be, and where your life was going? When you do something that isn't healthy for you, or make a mistake, which part of you is it that recognizes the mistake? What part of you is it that holds the highest dreams and aspirations for your life? Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) recognizes that part of you as your *True Self*. The ultimate goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) is to realize your True Self, and to live in it.



Facilitator Notes for Session 12: Living in True Self

PREPARATION

Read the *Session 12* Course Materials, review the exercises listed in the chapter and try them at least once yourself prior to facilitating the group.

Practice presenting the materials in this session alone before facilitating the session so you will have a good idea of how long it will take you, given your own speaking and presentation style, to go over critical materials. Adjust by adding or leaving out materials as needed, but do not cut key concepts or Priority 1 exercises and activities if at all possible.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Key concepts are those concepts that are foundational principles of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy, and must be covered in the session): Personal Truths; positive affirmations of personal truths; global thinking; external thinking; permanent thinking; radical acceptance; nature and the mindful body, and the power of intention

SECONDARY CONCEPTS

(Secondary concepts are those concepts that are not foundational, but that are important if the facilitator can work them into the session – otherwise students will read about them on their own in the reading assignments): Vision questing; the mirrored self, and Second Order Change

INTRODUCTION

This is the final session of the program. As an icebreaker exercise for this final session, ask participants to discuss what they've learned about their True Selves and how the course has helped them to live more fully in True Self. If you wish you may make this introductory discussion period longer than usual, as this is a sort of "wrapping things up" discussion in the Adjourning phase of group dynamics. Try not to spend more than ten minutes or so on this portion of the session.

SESSION OUTLINE

12.0 Through Adversity to the Stars

Start the discussion here by asking volunteers to talk about what their own idea of True Self means, and what barriers might be keeping them from living in True Self. Can those barriers be removed by looking “beyond the mask?” In other words, maybe it’s not possible to be an astronaut, but think about what was fascinating to you about being an astronaut in the first place. Now ask yourself, “Is it possible to find those things in some other career path?”

Ultimately True Self is all about finding meaning. Discuss this with your students as they discover the meaning behind their own concepts of True Self.

12.1 Mindful Awareness of the True Self

Ask for volunteers to discuss whether or not they love themselves. If any say they do not, ask them to discuss what it would take for them to be able to do so. Occasionally during this part of the session I’ll have someone who says that they were taught that self-love is narcissistic. I generally point out to these people that narcissism is a personality disorder, but self-love is a sign of a healthy soul. Self-love doesn’t mean self-involvement or selfishness. Self-love means knowing yourself well enough that you are willing to share with others in positive and healthy ways. This is the opposite of narcissism.

12.2 Personal Truths

Introduce this discussion as a prologue to the *My Personal Truths* exercise. Have volunteers discuss some of their own personal truths.

EXERCISE: My Personal Truths PRIORITY 1

Have students complete this exercise in the group if possible. The idea behind this exercise is for your students to figure out what values they have that would help them to live in their True Selves. Think of these questions as looking for “CORE” values:

Connected: What values do I have that help me to feel connected to others? To nature? To myself?

Open: What values do I have that help me to be open and trusting with others? With nature? With myself?

Reflective: What values do I have that help me to be truthful and responsive (rather than reactive) to others? To nature? To myself?

Empathetic: What values do I have that help me to care about others? Nature? Myself?

12.3 Turning Negatives into Positives

Before doing the exercise that follows, discuss the definition of global, external, and permanent statements:

Global statements are statements that are true in all situations at all times. An example of a global thinking statement would be, “I am an unlovable person.”

External statements are statements in which your personal truth is derived from circumstances which are beyond your control, i.e., things external to you. An example of an external statement would be, “People treat me with disrespect.”

Permanent statements are statements that assume that this is the way things have always been, and this is the way they will always be. An example of a permanent statement would be, “I can’t help it, that’s just the way I am.”

After defining these terms for your students, have them go back over their Personal Truths exercise, looking for examples of global, external, and personal statements. These will be re-framed in the following exercise.

EXERCISE: Positive Affirmations of My Personal Truths PRIORITY 1

In the first section of this exercise, students should re-frame any statements they had on the My Personal Truths exercise that were global, external, or permanent. If they didn’t have any, then they don’t have to do any re-frames. In that case, consider it a good thing that your students have come a long way during this course!

In the third section, “recurring themes” could be the number of global, external, or permanent statements present in the previous exercise, or any other thematic content. Finding these themes helps to live more fully in True Self by

identifying the meaning to each individual's life. The themes identified in the personal truths exercise indicate how a person feels about himself/herself.

The final section of the exercise is only necessary if students have listed any negative personal truths. In such a case, have them re-frame the statements to a more positive theme.

12.4 Radical Acceptance of the True Self

The topic that most often comes up in this section is described by the following sentence: "Healthy relationships do not require that we sacrifice who we really are for the sake of another."

Ask your students if they have ever had to sacrifice their True Selves because of trying to live up to the expectations of other people. Radical acceptance of True Self means moving beyond what we think others want us to do or be so that we may become what we think we should be. While this can be an empowering experience, it can also be scary because such thinking requires us to take responsibility for our own lives instead of relying on others for our sense of self.

EXERCISE: What I See when I Look in the Mirror PRIORITY 2

When doing this exercise outdoors, I usually carry a hand-held mirror. Another interesting variation on this exercise can be done if you have access to a still pool of water on the site you're using for your workshops. In such a case, you can have your students look at their reflections in the water instead of using a mirror.

When introducing this activity, don't say too much about what sort of responses students are expected to write. Just tell them to describe what they see. The rest will be covered in the next section.

12.5 The Mirrored Self

After students have completed the What I See when I Look in the Mirror exercise, have them go back over their lists and note how many statements had to do with physical appearance, and how many had to do with their own inner experiences of themselves. Have students re-frame any negative statements about themselves into positive statements.

Have students discuss how physical appearance and inner experience are similar, how they are different, and how they are related to each other. The goal here is to move beyond physical appearance to inner experience by shifting the focus from external to internal.

12.6 Nature and the Mindful Body

For this section I share a story from my childhood: When my grandfather learned to shave, he used a straight razor. When it got dull, he simply sharpened it. When my father learned to shave, he had a razor with disposable blades. When the blade got dull, he tossed the blade away and replaced it with a new one. By the time I learned to shave, the entire razor was disposable, and when the blade got dull, I tossed the whole thing.

The average American produces 5 pounds of trash per day. This is nearly double what the average American produced in the 1960s, and the amount keeps going up in spite of recycling. We have a throwaway mentality. The moment something stops being useful we toss it in the trash without trying to fix it. What if this extends to a psychological level? Does this throwaway mentality extend to our relationships with others? Do we "give up" and kick people to the curb the moment they cease being useful to us? How many ways could this throwaway mentality impact how we see others and ourselves?

Facilitate a discussion on this topic with your students.

12.7 Wise Mind and Communication

Introduce this topic by noting that the secret to successful communication involves asking two questions before having any conversation:

1. What am I trying to accomplish by having this conversation?
2. Is what I'm about to say going to accomplish that?

I do a lot of marriage counseling. When couples come to me for such counseling, their answer to the first question is usually something like, "We want to have a happy marriage."

But if they're quarreling all the time, is what they're saying helping them to accomplish their goal of having a happy

marriage? If such a couple admits that they're fighting all the time, I usually ask them, "Is it more important to be right, or is it more important to get along with each other?"

We can't change others. We can only change ourselves. We can ask others to change, but if they refuse, then the only thing we can do at that point is to accept their decision, or accept that this isn't a relationship that I need to be in.

When we live in True Self, we live in Wise Mind. In Wise Mind we are free and confident enough to allow others to be themselves.

If time permits, facilitate a discussion by having your students answer the two questions above. Use their answers to discuss the concepts covered in this section.

12.8 True Self and the Power of Intention

This section starts off by asking, "How many of your barriers to connection have to do with your own assumptions about the way things work in your life?"

If our happiness depends on the circumstances in which we find ourselves, then we can have our happiness taken away at any time, because we can't always change the circumstances that life throws at us. If, however, our happiness depends on what we believe about those circumstances, then we can always be happy because we are always in control of what we believe.

For this section, facilitate a discussion on the following questions:

1. "What is your intention?"
2. "How will your intention help you to live more fully as your True Self?"
3. "How will your intention help you to live more fully as your True Self?"
4. "What assumptions have you been making in life that might be stopping you from being able to establish an intention and to live more fully as your True Self?"

EXERCISE: What I Would Tell My Fairy Godmother PRIORITY 1

This exercise is a variation of the Miracle Question of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy. The purpose of this exercise is to establish intention. In Solution-Focused Brief Therapy the Miracle Question usually takes the form of, "If you woke up tomorrow and a miracle had happened, and suddenly everything in your life was perfect, what would be different?"

The answers your students give to the questions on this exercise help them to live more fully in True Self by establishing exactly what it is they're trying to accomplish, i.e., by creating a solution or an intention.

12.9 Becoming the Fairy Godmother

After your students have completed the What I Would Tell My Fairy Godmother exercise, facilitate a discussion on the following questions:

Are there any answers on this exercise that are beyond your own ability to change? Why or why not?

12.10 Killing the Goose

Facilitate a discussion with your students about their answers to the following questions:

1. How much of your own personal happiness comes from things?
2. How much of your own personal happiness comes from your relationship with people?
3. How much of your own personal happiness comes from your relationship with nature?
4. How much of your own personal happiness comes from your relationship with yourself?

12.11 What's Possible

Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is a novel about a sustainable, environmentally sound society. What would living in such a society do for our state of wellbeing on both a physical and a mental level?

This section is a sort of "wrapping things up" in which I usually ask students to discuss what their vision of Ecotopia would be, and what sort of paradigm shift would be necessary in their own thinking and in the thinking of society in general order to make their vision of Ecotopia happen. Did any of the skills they learned during this course help? Would any of these skills facilitate such a paradigm shift?

12.12 Walking the Path

This is a “final thoughts” discussion. I usually ask students to describe how they might implement the skills learned from this program in their daily lives.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

At the one-hour mark, invite group participants to stay for the discussion period. Point out that the thirty-minute post-session discussion period is optional. Since this is the last session of the program, you may wish to use this time for final thoughts. You may also distribute an evaluation at this point to help you improve future workshops and to get feedback from your students.

I usually use this discussion time for a final meet-and-greet and celebration party with refreshments.

12.0 Through Adversity to the Stars

I was born the year after the United States entered the space race. My childhood was spent watching rocket launches and lunar landings. Television and movies of the time were filled with astronauts exploring strange new worlds and seeking out new life and new civilization. More than anything else, I wanted to join them when I grew up.

Then I had my first eye exam.

It turns out that I had an astigmatism. Astronauts must have perfect vision, so at the ripe old age of nine years old, when men were walking on the moon for the first time, I was told that I had no chance of being an astronaut.

I was depressed about it for several years, until I decided that there was no use beating myself up over a minor twist of fate. So instead, I eventually asked myself what it was about being an astronaut that was attractive to me, and what other careers might offer the same or similar experiences.

The answer I came up with was that it was the adventure of seeing places and things that nobody had ever seen before that made being an astronaut so desirable. So, would it be possible to do that here on Earth?

The next step was to think about what sorts of careers might give me the chance to be such an explorer. I examined several possibilities before deciding to major in Experimental Psychology. The idea of discovering things about the mind that no one had ever experienced before excited me even more than the idea of walking on the moon! I had found my frontier.

The final skill of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is living in True Self (Beliavsky, 2020). My experience with having to change career aspirations incredibly early in life taught me to look behind the mask to find the meaning. I thought that being an astronaut was the only way to live in my own True Self, until that option was no longer available to me. But after a little soul searching, I found a career that was even more exciting.

In this session we will discuss what it truly means to live in True Self, and how to find all the characteristics and traits that make us who we are. We'll also talk about how to dig a little deeper to find the meaning behind the masks we wear with others and with ourselves.

Beliavsky, Vlad. (2020). *Free Will in Rogerian Theory*. 10.1007/978-3-030-41571-6_3.

12.1 Mindful Awareness of the True Self

Ponder this phrase for a moment: *"I truly love myself."*

What sort of feelings did that sentence generate? What sort of thoughts? Sometimes we get caught up in the idea that loving ourselves is somehow selfish or egotistical (Facco, et al, 2019). But let's think about that for a moment. If you don't love yourself, is it really fair of you to expect anybody else to love you?

Not only that, but if you don't love yourself, and you're in a relationship with someone who loves you, eventually you might find yourself thinking along these lines, either consciously or unconsciously:

"I don't really love myself, yet this person says they love me. If I don't love myself, yet this person says they love me, then there must be something wrong with them! How could a 'normal' person love someone like me when I can't even love me?"

Of course, the above paragraph is exaggerated just a bit, but there is some truth to it from time to time. If you don't really love yourself, then you can't really show others how to love you in the way you'd like to be loved.

Facco, Enrico & Alkhafaji, Benedikt & Tressoldi, Patrizio. (2019). In Search of the True Self. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. 39. 10.1037/teo0000112.

12.2 Personal Truths

Think back to the image of your True Self that you have been creating since you began this course. Take off all the masks you present to the rest of the world, and ask yourself, *"Who am I, really?"* Be as honest as possible when answering this question.

The purpose of the exercise in the next section is to discover your personal truths. Personal truths are the unwritten rules we have chosen to live our lives by (Durbano, et al, 2021). Some examples of personal truths would be:

"I am a creative person"

"I care about those around me"

"My relationships end in disaster"

Think about your own personal truths for a moment before going on to the next page. This should be an open and honest "warts and all" assessment that includes all of your thoughts about yourself and your own identity. List both your positive qualities and negative qualities.

It may help to center yourself first by taking a few deep breaths, and to ground yourself by stating a few personal affirmations. If necessary, try a little basic mindful meditation before looking deeply inside of yourself to discover your personal truths. When you feel you are ready, go on to the next page and complete the exercise there.

Durbano, Federico & Irtelli, Floriana & Marchesi, Barbara. (2021). *The Real Self and the Ideal Self*. 10.5772/intechopen.98194.

12.2 My Personal Truths

Name: _____ Date: _____

What are some of the personal truths by which you live your life? List as many as you feel necessary in the space below. Use extra paper if needed:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

In what positive ways have your personal truths helped you to live the life you want to live? List them below:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

In what ways have your own personal truths hindered you from living up to your own potential? From living the life you would like to?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

In what ways could you change your personal truths to help you to live up to your own full potential? List those changes below:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

12.3 Turning Negatives into Positives

What did you learn about yourself in the previous exercise? Were you surprised by anything you learned?

Now go back to your list of personal truths and put a check mark beside the ones that are helpful. Circle the ones that are less helpful. Take the less helpful ones you have circled and try to change them into more positive personal truths in the space on the worksheet that follows. For example, one of the personal truths you listed might say, *“All my relationships end in disaster.”*

A more positive way of stating this might be: *“In the past, I’ve had relationships that have disappointed me, but I choose to learn from my mistakes and move on so that I may grow as a person.”*

A few pointers to look for while rephrasing these statements:

Try to avoid rephrasing in ways that are global, external, and permanent.

A *global* statement is one that is always true in all situations.

An example of global thinking would be, *“I am an unlovable person.”* A better way to phrase it might be, *“I am a lovable person who sometimes does unlovable things.”*

An *external* statement would be one in which your personal truth is derived from circumstances which are beyond your control. They are things external to you. An example would be, *“People treat me with disrespect.”*

While this may be true on occasion, you really have no control over how other people treat you (Li, 2020). The behavior of others is an external event beyond your control. What you can control is how you react to the way you are treated. One way to rephrase the above statement would be, *“I can’t help the way others treat me, but I can change the way I respond to them.”*

A *permanent* statement is one that assumes that this is the way things have always been, and this is the way they will always be. An example would be, *“I can’t help it, that’s just the way I am.”* One possible way to rephrase that statement would be, *“I’ve usually reacted a certain way in the past, but I am in control of my life, and from this moment forward, I choose to react in a different manner this time and every time in the future so that I may get different results.”*

Think about your circled responses from the previous page, then go on to the next exercise, *Positive Affirmations of My Personal Truths*.

Rephrase all your circled responses on the next page so that they are positive affirmations rather than negative ones. Remember to keep away from global, external, and permanent thinking.

Li, Wai-yee. (2020). *Looking for the True Self*. 10.2307/j.ctvzpv77b.13.

12.3 Positive Affirmations of My Personal Truths page 1 of 1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Rephrase any circled responses from the previous exercise, *My Personal Truths*, so that they are more helpful to you in achieving the life you would like to live:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Was this exercise difficult for you? Why or why not?

Did you notice any recurring themes? Were these themes positive or negative?

How could you adapt more positive personal truths to help you live the life you would like to live?

12.4 Radical Acceptance of the True Self

You can never love another until you truly love yourself (Shipman, 2019). The first step in learning to love yourself is to truly accept who you are. The first step in learning to accept who you are is to accept yourself with all your good qualities, but also with all of your perceived flaws and imperfections. Give yourself permission to make mistakes occasionally, and to be who you are.

It's been said, "*When you lose, don't lose the lesson.*" Each mistake can be an opportunity for learning and growth. The *Positive Affirmations of My Personal Truths* exercise is a way to turn perceived negative qualities about yourself into positive personal truths.

Now go back to all the personal truths you placed a check mark by on the *My Personal Truths* page. Add those to the ones you rephrased from the *Positive Affirmations of My Personal Truths* page. The list you've created is a basic sketch of your True Self. One way to look at your True Self is to accept that your True Self is the person inside of you that feels loved by others and feels loved by you. When problems arise in our lives, it is usually because we have lost sight of our True Selves, so it is important to know who we really are and what we really want.

The way this often plays out in relationships, is that we sometimes become so involved with the other person that we give up our True Selves in the process. Think back on any negative relationships you may have had in the past. Did you give up a part of your True Self in an effort to sustain that relationship? If so, how did that turn out?

Healthy relationships do not require that we sacrifice who we really are for the sake of another. We can compromise with our partners or other loved ones, but that compromise should never come at the cost of a part of ourselves, especially if we are living in True Self. One way to prevent this from happening is to ask yourself, "*Am I doing this because this is what I want to do, or am I doing it because I'm afraid I'll lose this person if I don't?*"

It's one thing to do things for another person because you *want* to do it; it is quite another thing to do things for another person because you feel

Optional Activity: Vision Quest

The Vision Quest is a time-honored rite of passage common to indigenous peoples throughout the world. While it is most associated with Native American and Asian cultures, there is ample evidence to suggest that the indigenous peoples of Europe also practiced it in ancient times.

It is used to determine your life's purpose.

The Vision Quest may take on many forms, but for this optional activity we will be using the form of the all-night vigil.

If you choose to do this activity, first find a place that calls out to you. It may be your sacred space, or some other place that feels full of energy to you. Make sure it is a place that you will be undisturbed for the duration of the night. Dress in comfortable, loose-fitting clothing. You may wish to take a blanket with you to ward off the chill night air.

When you have arrived at your sacred space, first ask permission to use the space, then make an offering and express gratitude. Next, sit or stand comfortably and ground and center yourself.

You may wish to perform a mindful meditation like mindful breathing, the sensory integration meditation, or the Tree of Life meditation.

It may help to build a campfire or to light a candle to give you a center of focus.

Once you feel you are ready, ask the Universe to reveal your life purpose to you, and wait for a reply. Sometimes this reply may come as a vision, or a dream, or just as a feeling in your spirit. Stay awake all night if possible and greet the dawn with open acceptance.

Look for messages from the environment. Do the trees speak to you? Are you visited by any animals? A visit from your spirit animal would be especially powerful at this time.

When your life's mission is revealed, greet the dawn, and offer thanks.

If your mission is not revealed, try again at another time, after preparing yourself by a period of meditation, fasting, and thanksgiving.

obligated to do it. One way to tell the difference between doing it because you want to and doing it because you have to is to ask yourself, “Would I feel guilty if I didn’t do this?”

If the answer to this question is, “yes,” then it is likely that the other person has asked you to step outside of your True Self and do something out of character for you.

Before going on to the next section, find a mirror. It’s better to have a full-length mirror for this exercise, but if you don’t have one available, a hand-held mirror will work. This exercise will work even better if you have access to a calm reflecting pool of water somewhere outdoors.

Look into the mirror, and on the next page, describe what you see when you look at yourself. Pay attention to details, and list as many as you can.

Shipman, Alan. (2019). *The True Self*. 10.1007/978-3-030-12289-8_17.

12.5 The Mirrored Self

Now go back to what you wrote on the previous page. How much of what you wrote had to do with physical appearance, and how much of it had to do with your inner experience of yourself? Are the two related?

Western culture tends to focus a great deal on appearances. We've been conditioned in our society to believe that our external identity defines who we are. In other words, how we look tends to dictate how we feel. If we don't consider ourselves attractive, our self-esteem suffers, and we feel insecure about ourselves.

What we tend to forget is that the opposite viewpoint can be true as well. That is, how we feel about ourselves can dictate how attractive we appear to others. Have you ever met someone whose poise and self-confidence immediately made them more attractive to you? Such a person has learned to accept their body with all its flaws and imperfections, but also with all its assets and good points. Their attitude and how they feel about themselves has actually worked to make them more attractive to those around them.

Go back to your list again. If you wrote anything about your physical appearance that was negative, think of at least two positive things about your appearance. For example, if you wrote, *"I don't like my nose,"* you might write, *"I have a nice smile,"* and, *"I like my eyes."*

If you have any positive character traits listed, think about how those traits manifest themselves in your body. As you focus on the positive aspects of yourself, do you notice any changes within your own body? Do you stand up straighter when you meditate on your positive qualities? Do you feel muscle tension beginning to evaporate when you think about your positive character traits? Make it a part of your daily routine to look at yourself in the mirror for a minute or two, focusing only on the positive. And don't forget to smile at yourself while doing so!

Feel what this positive energy does to the way you carry yourself.

12.6 Nature and the Mindful Body

In early childhood, we are not aware of ourselves as separate beings. We see ourselves as a part of our parents. The moods and feelings of our primary caretakers become our moods and feelings, and vice-versa. If you've ever walked into a room after your parents have been fighting, you can feel that energy. It is palpable.

Those moods and feelings we get from our family members are like the language we speak. If you grew up in a Spanish-speaking household, you'd speak Spanish. If you grew up in an English-speaking household, you'd speak English. Likewise, we learn our emotional language from the people who shape our childhood.

As we mature, we gradually develop a sense of identity; a sense that we are individuals. We become separate from the people who raised us. There are positive aspects to this idea of separation. If we develop our own sense of identity, we learn to be responsible for our own physical and emotional wellbeing. We learn that we are responsible for our own happiness, and that others are responsible for their own emotions as well.

However, sometimes we can take this idea of separation too far. When this happens, we come to think that the environment around us has no impact on us, and that we have no impact on the environment.

In reality we are not separate from the environment in which we live. When we go out into nature, physiological changes occur. Our heart rates slow down, our blood pressure decreases. Our minds become more open and accepting. In short, nature gives us a sense of calmness and wellbeing. Even if you live in an urban environment, you can reap the benefits of these physiological changes by incorporating houseplants into your living space, or by listening to recordings of natural sounds like waterfalls, rainstorms, or crickets chirping.

Our actions change our environment. What we do to the web of life, we do to ourselves. If we pollute the water table, we eventually find ourselves drinking polluted water. If we poison the food chain, we eventually find ourselves eating tainted food. These toxins then become a part of us.

This idea can be extended to emotional pollution as well. If we act in emotionally toxic ways, we will eventually find that others respond to us in the same way. Could it be that our tendency to emotionally pollute the environment is somehow linked to our tendency to physically pollute the environment?

Nature teaches us that we are not separate from the natural world, and that the natural world is not separate from ourselves. We need nature to survive. We need nature to thrive. And nature needs us. We also tend to forget that we are a part of nature, and nature is a part of us. This means that we also need each other to survive. A healthy, happy life is one that makes room for caring for others. It is also a life that acknowledges that we all need help from time to time, and that there is no shame or weakness in asking for help when needed. Part of living in True Self is the simple acceptance of these facts.

As you bring your perceptions into closer alignment with your own image of your True Self, meditate on the role nature has to play in teaching you more about your body and the way it interacts with the natural world. You may try meditating both indoors and outdoors. If you do this, note any differences in the way your body experiences itself indoors and outdoors. In doing so, you will learn more about how your True Self manifests itself. You will also learn more about your own place in the world.

12.7 Wise Mind and Communication

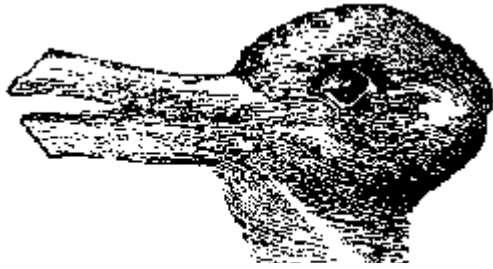
“Allow others to live as they choose and allow yourself to live as you choose.”

–Richard Bach

Without communication, there could be no relationships. The main, if not the only, cause that relationships develop difficulties is poor or misunderstood communication. Thinking back to the concept of Wise Mind as a harmony of Emotional Mind and Rational Mind, let's apply Wise Mind to communication.

What would a perfect balance of emotional and rational communication look like? Could it be that the Wise Mind of communication is the ability to make our emotional needs known in a calm and rational manner, without blaming, shaming or trying to 'guilt' our partners into submission?

A part of this Wise Mind of Communication is to take responsibility for our own emotional wellbeing, and to expect the same of others.



What do you see?

Look at the picture to the left and describe what you see. If you see the picture in more than one way, describe the first thing that you notice in the picture.

Some people see a rabbit in the picture to the left. Some people see a duck. Some people see both immediately. Can you see both the rabbit and the duck? Which did you see first?

Suppose you saw the rabbit but didn't see the duck. Further suppose that your partner saw the duck but didn't see the rabbit. Who would be right? Who would be wrong?

The answer, of course, is that there is no right or wrong answer. Both the rabbit and the duck are in the picture. If you saw the rabbit, and your partner saw the duck, you'd both be looking at the same picture and coming to different conclusions. Neither of these conclusions is right or wrong, and both are.

Think back to a past disagreement you may have had with your partner. Was it truly a case of *"I'm right and (s)he's wrong,"* or were you both looking at the same picture and coming to different conclusions about what was there, based on your own experiences of the situation?

When you communicate from Wise Mind, you come to realize that you are responsible for your own emotional wellbeing, and that is *all you are responsible for*. Likewise, when you communicate from Wise Mind, you are aware that your partners are responsible for their own emotional wellbeing, and that is *all they are responsible for*.

No matter how much you try, you cannot force someone to see things your way unless they are willing for it to happen, and vice-versa. Wise Mind realizes that you see the rabbit, and your partner sees the duck, and that's okay. You're each entitled to your own viewpoint of the situation. Wise Mind realizes that what you are not entitled to is the right to invalidate your partner's thoughts, feelings or opinions. Wise Mind knows how to agree to disagree.

A part of living in True Self is learning to free yourself from emotional dependence and codependence on your family and/or romantic relationships. Living in True Self involves taking responsibility for your own emotional wellbeing and allowing others to be responsible for their own emotional wellbeing.

Benzies, Karen & Mychasiuk, Richelle (2007). Fostering family resiliency: a review of the key protective factors. *Child and Family Social Work* 2009, 14, pp 103–114.

12.8 True Self and the Power of Intention

The ultimate goal of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is to free yourself from the assumptions and barriers to connection that keep you from living fully in your True Self. Refer to your list of *Top Ten Things that Keep Me from Feeling Connected* from Session 7. How many of those barriers to connection have to do with your own assumptions about the way things work in your life?

Return to your image of your True Self that we created in Session 4.7 *Radical Acceptance of True Self*. Our intention with Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy is to be able to live fully in True Self. What paradigm shifts would have to take place for that to happen? How many assumptions have you made about life that may not be helpful to living fully in your True Self? Is there a way you could change your own personal story that would lead you to be more accepting of yourself? If you did so, would it help you to become the person you were meant to be?

Imagine this scene:

You're walking alone in the forest one day. Suddenly your Fairy Godmother appears before you.

"Greetings," she says. *"You have found my secret hiding place, and now you will be granted a single wish."*

You protest, *"But I thought Fairy Godmothers granted three wishes?"*

"Ahhh," your Fairy Godmother says, *"But I am a special Fairy. I have but one power...the power to give you the life you have always wanted. I cannot grant you material possessions, or change other people, or make any changes in the environment around you. All I can do is to change you into the person you want to be."*

Your Fairy Godmother waits for your reply. What would you tell her? Go on to the next page and answer the questions on the *What I Would Tell My Fairy Godmother* exercise.

12.8 What I Would Tell My Fairy Godmother

Name: _____ Date: _____

You're walking in the woods when you meet your own special Fairy Godmother. She offers to grant you a single wish. This Fairy Godmother cannot change the world. She cannot change other people. This Fairy Godmother can only change things about the way you think and feel about yourself.

The Fairy Godmother asks you what you would like to change about yourself.

What would you tell your Fairy Godmother? Answer the questions below in the space provided:

What would you ask your Fairy Godmother to change about the way you think?

What would you ask your Fairy Godmother to change about the way you feel?

What would you ask your Fairy Godmother to change about the assumptions you have made concerning your life?

What would you ask your Fairy Godmother to change about the assumptions you have made about your ability to live fully in your True Self?

12.9 Becoming Your Own Fairy Godmother

What did you learn about yourself from the Fairy Godmother? Of course, the above is a fanciful scenario, but the good news is that the Fairy Godmother is real! The Fairy Godmother is your own True Self. Look again at your answers to the questions on the *What I Would Tell My Fairy Godmother* exercise. Are there any answers there that are beyond your own ability to change? Why? Why not?

12.10 Killing the Goose

“Love people, not things; use things, not people.”

— Spencer W. Kimball

There’s a fairy tale called *The Goose Who Laid the Golden Egg*. For you who are unfamiliar with the story, it’s about a farmer who had a magical goose. This magical goose laid one golden egg per day. The farmer sold these eggs and made quite a comfortable living for himself and his family. But one day the farmer began thinking that instead of just having the one egg every day, wouldn’t it be nice to have a whole bunch of golden eggs all at once?

The farmer began to have many sleepless nights thinking of all the things he could buy if he could get all the eggs at once.

Finally, one day his greed got the better of him, and he decided to kill the goose, cut it open, and take all the eggs at once for himself. So, this is what he did.

But when he killed the goose and cut it open, there were no eggs inside. In the past the goose had produced a fresh new golden egg every day, but it took a day for the goose to produce it. Now that the farmer had killed the goose, not only did he not have a big pile of golden eggs, but the one golden egg per day that he had gotten in the past was gone as well. So for the rest of his life, he had to work and scratch in the dirt just to get by.

We do not live in a sustainable society. Most of the resources that we take for granted are finite in quantity. Many cannot be replenished. When we run out of fossil fuels, it will take millions of years for nature to replace them. Precious metals like those used in the manufacture of cell phones and computers are in short supply as well, as are arable lands for farming and many other natural resources. Once they’re gone, they’re gone.

Little by little, we are killing off the goose that laid the golden egg. Even the most dyed-in-the-wool materialist must know this deep in the back of his or her mind. What sort of impact does this lack of living sustainably have on our individual psyches? On our collective conscious? A quick glance at the popularity of movies with apocalyptic themes will tell you that this meme is deeply imbedded within us.

What sort of impact does this knowledge have on the way we live our day-to-day lives?

The quote from Spencer W. Kimball at the beginning of this section reminds us to think about what’s truly important in life. How much of your own personal happiness comes from things? How much of it comes from your relationship with people? With nature? With yourself? Yes, a certain amount of material possessions is necessary to survive in life, but as the Beatles reminded us, “Money can’t buy me love.”

12.11 What's Possible

What if you could create the world of human beings all over again?

Think about the Fairy Godmother exercise from the previous section. Suppose you had another Fairy Godmother who would restore the world to its primal state, with all the people and all the animals, and all the forests, but without all the factories, traffic, and industries that pollute the Earth, our Mother. Suppose you could start over with all the knowledge and technical know-how that we have right now. But imagine the technology we could build would be applied in appropriate, sustainable ways that focused on people and nature instead of rabid materialism.

What sort of world would you create if you could start over?

There are a lot of top-down environmental efforts being made through legislation to improve our ecological and environmental situations. There is a place for such actions, but I don't think that a top-down approach will yield results quickly enough to avert an environmental catastrophe. I believe that we also need a bottom-up approach.

Section 8.1 illustrates the concept of second-order change. A first-order change is winning or losing according to the rules of the game. A second-order change involves changing the rules of the game so it is possible to win. The game we're playing right now with the environment is a no-win game. We need to change the rules of the game if humankind, and the planet, are going to survive and thrive.

The way we change the rules of the game is to change the culture itself by changing our values. Material possessions are a necessity, but they are not a solution to all of life's problems, nor are they the key to happiness. If we change our values to respect the things that are truly important in our lives, then I believe that a sustainable culture will automatically emerge from the bottom-up.

Can you imagine a whole culture of people living mindfully and caring about themselves by caring about the environment? If that culture swept over the planet, what would that do for the mental and physical wellbeing of every person on this earth? Imagine a whole world full of people in touch with their own True Selves, living out the lives they were born to have! I personally cannot imagine a greater adventure.

This workbook contains the basic tools you need to bring about such a paradigm shift for you and your family. Take the lessons you've learned here. Apply them to your own life and help your family and friends to apply them to their lives as well. If the whole world learned to live mindfully, in balance with and a part of nature, then the global environmental crisis would take care of itself.

12.12 Walking the Path

We're now coming to the end of our journey together. Whether you are completing this workbook as part of a class, or on your own, congratulations for all your hard work! You've learned a great deal about yourself, your relationship with others, and your relationship with nature. You've developed and created some tools that will help you along your journey. Now go out and do something nice for yourself...you deserve it!

If you completed this workbook on your own and are interested in taking a live series with a trained facilitator, visit www.mindfulecotherapy.org for a worldwide directory of certified facilitators of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy.

Now go forth and enjoy living as the person you were meant to be!

Glossary

Animal-Assisted Therapy - an experiential form of therapy in which animal assistants help to facilitate the therapeutic process.

archetype – an inborn symbol, image, or concept common to all people and present at birth in the unconscious mind. The collection of all archetypes common to all humans is what Jung called the *collective unconscious*.

autonomic nervous system – the part of the central nervous system that regulates automatic functions like breathing and heartbeat. The autonomic nervous system is made up of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

beginner's mind - The ability to greet each day with a new mind, without assumptions, preconceptions, or judgments. It is about cultivating a childlike sense of wonder about the world around us, and about ourselves.

being mode – The antithesis of doing mode; the process of focusing on what your senses are telling you in the present moment rather than focusing on the thinking cycle.

being non-judgmental – the act of setting aside assumptions and preconceptions about the motives and actions of others and of self; the ability to be gentle and forgiving.

catastrophizing – a ruminating cycle in which a person creates negative predictions about the outcome of future events, usually through the process of *musturbating*.

centering - one of the skills of mindfulness; centering involves letting go of thoughts about the past or future and bringing thoughts to the present moment by focusing on one thing at a time and living in the now.

collective unconscious – according to Carl Jung, the collective unconscious is the repository of all archetypes, or symbols, shared by all of humankind. This repository resides in the unconscious mind and is inborn rather than learned.

connecting - the act of joining with others, or with the divine, or with nature and ourselves in a loving, respectful and grateful way

crystal ball thinking – trying to predict the future or read other people's thoughts and feelings by making assumptions and judgments about their thoughts, feelings, or intentions.

describing – one of the skills of mindfulness; the process of taking energy out of the thinking cycle and placing energy into the sensing cycle by describing the details of a thing to oneself.

doing mode – the opposite of *being mode*; the state of engaging the thinking cycle in an effort to find solutions to a problem or to ruminate over problems or feelings.

downstairs brain – the feeling part of the brain, consisting of the limbic system and related structures. The downstairs brain only has three ways it can respond to stimuli: fight, flight, or freeze.

ecopsychology – the study of the effects of nature on the psychology of humans and other animals.

ecotherapy – the use of the tools and techniques of ecopsychology in a therapeutic way and/or in a therapeutic setting.

emotional mind – the state of mind when one is being ruled by one's emotions.

experiential avoidance – the act of trying to stop stressful thoughts or emotions, thereby making the stressful thoughts and feelings cycle worse.

fascination - a natural interest in the environment, requiring no effort of concentration

fight, flee or freeze – the only three options for response that the downstairs brain of the limbic system has.

focused attention - a concentrated cognitive effort to avoid distractions in the environment.

focusing on one thing at a time - one of the skills of mindfulness; the ability to direct one's attention to one task at a time or one experience at a time in order to avoid getting overwhelmed with a multitude of tasks.

fully participating – one of the skills of mindfulness; the act of engaging all the senses to focus on the here and now, thereby enriching the moment-to-moment experience of life.

grounding - one of the skills of mindfulness; the process, during meditation, of connecting yourself to the earth by imagining roots of energy extending from your trunk and into the ground.

Hebb's Postulate - "What fires together, wires together;" i.e., as neurons are activated in new pathways, they tend to connect to each other, strengthening the connection. The more those pathways are used, the stronger the connection becomes. This is how habits of thinking and feeling are formed.

Ideal Self – In Rogerian therapy, the Ideal Self is the person an individual would like to be; who we would be if we could "get out of our own way."

individuation - The process of striking a balance between the Shadow and the Persona. The Shadow represents the forces of chaos and darkness within an individual, and the Persona represents the forces of order and light.

insanity - doing the same thing in the same ways and expecting different results this time

intention, the power of - one of the skills of mindfulness; the process of creating solutions instead of focusing on the problem.

Internal Observer – the self that is not part of the thought or feeling cycle, the True Self.

letting go - one of the skills of mindfulness; the ability to change the things one can while accepting the things one cannot change.

limbic system – the "downstairs brain" responsible for emotions; the limbic system can only respond to a situation in one of three ways: fight, flee or freeze.

living in the now – living in the present moment

living in True Self - see "True Self, living in"

meme - an idea or a belief that gets passed on from one person to another: an imitated thing

mind trap - to be trapped by the mind into dwelling on memories of the past, or projections of memory onto the future.

mindful acceptance – the art of being able to let go of the things in your life you cannot change.

mindful awareness – the process of shifting from doing mode to being mode.

mindful openness - the quality of learning to "zoom out" and see things in the bigger picture. The ability to focus on our values instead of on the day-to-day details.

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) - a blending of mindfulness and ecopsychology. MBE uses nature to facilitate mindful awareness. MBE is used as a framework for helping individuals and families to find deeper connections in their own lives, and to give more meaning and enjoyment to the activities of daily living.

musturbating - a type of mind trap in which we become caught in ruminating cycles that lead to catastrophizing. Musturbating often takes the form of phrases like, "I must do this," or "I must not do this."

naming ceremony – a rite of passage in which a person takes a new spiritual name, or is given one.

natural experiences – experiences in nature.

nature as healer – one of the skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy; the skill of using nature to facilitate healing.

nature as metaphor - one of the skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy; the skill of using nature as a metaphor for one's life journey to living in True Self.

nature as nurture - one of the skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy; the skill of creating a reciprocal nurturing cycle with nature.

nature as teacher - one of the skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy; the skill of using nature as a teacher.

numinous - an experience that gives one a spiritual sense of connection to the divine, to others, or to self

observing – one of the skills of mindfulness; the ability to shift from thinking mode to sensing mode by paying attention to and observing the present moment.

parasympathetic nervous system – the part of the autonomic nervous system responsible for calming and soothing.

Perceived Self – the way we see ourselves.

Persona – the face, or personality, or *mask*, which we present to others.

power of intention - see intention, power of

radical acceptance – the concept that we must accept the things we cannot change; the realization that we cannot change others, we can only change ourselves.

rational mind – the reasoning, logical mind, devoid of emotion.

reconnecting – the process of connecting again to nature in order to restore spiritual balance.

root meme – the meme that is the source of all other memes in a complex idea or belief.

ruminating cycle – sometimes referred to as 'snowballing,' a ruminating cycle is the process by which one stressful thought or feeling leads to another and to another until we are overwhelmed.

sacred space – a natural space (preferably outdoors) that is set aside for quiet contemplation, meditation, and connecting with nature.

sensing mode – the opposite of thinking mode; moving energy and attention out of the thinking cycle and into the sensing cycle by focusing on what your senses are telling you.

sensory integration meditation - a type of mindful meditation that allows us to bring our minds more in tune with our bodies by focusing only on the information we get from our senses

Serenity Prayer - "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

Shadow – in Jungian psychoanalysis, the Shadow is the counterpart to the Persona; the Shadow consists of all the behaviors and impulses we would prefer to hide from others.

situation-specific learning – a type of learning in which two stimuli become linked together so that being stimulated by one causes the recall of the other as well, e.g., if a bell is rung every time a dog is fed, the dog will eventually begin to salivate whenever a bell is rung because he is expecting to be fed.

sympathetic nervous system – the part of the autonomic nervous system responsible for activating the fight, flight, or freeze response.

thinking mode – the counterpart of sensing mode; the process of engaging in the ruminating cycles of doing mode.

spirit – an animal guide or assistant selected by an individual as an archetype and a metaphor for oneself.

True Self – the Ideal Self, who you would be if you could live without limits.

True Self, living in – the process of individuation; a skill of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy; becoming the person you were born to be.

upstairs brain – the cerebral cortex; the part of the brain that regulates thinking.

wise body – a body informed by the skills of mindfulness.

wise mind – a balance of rational mind and emotional mind; emotion tempered by reason and reason informed by emotion.

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ABOUT THE MINDFULNESS-BASED ECOTHERAPY PROGRAM

The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Program is an evidence-based 12-week program that utilizes nature's healing power to facilitate well-being. It is available for use at any mental health organization. If you are a mental health professional interested in presenting the program at your organization, training is available for facilitators at



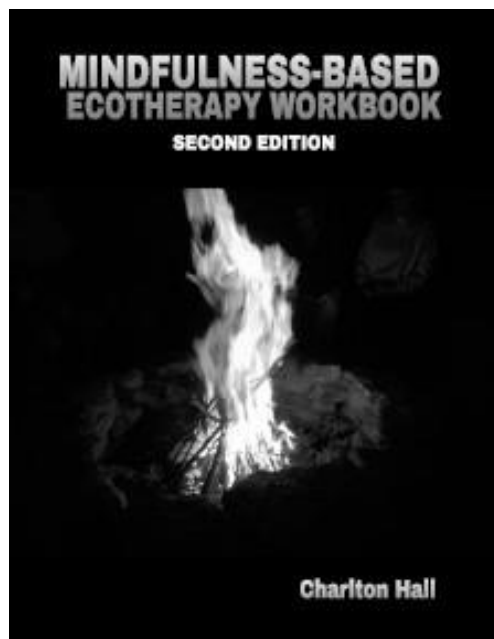
www.mindfulecotherapy.org. The facilitator certification training is completely online and self-paced. It includes dozens of experiential activities in ecotherapy and mindfulness. For a directory of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy programs worldwide, please visit <https://mindfulecotherapy.org/directory-2>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prior to becoming a Marriage and Family Therapist, Charlton (Chuck) Hall worked in the addiction treatment field. Chuck's area of research and interest is using Mindfulness and Ecopsychology to facilitate acceptance and change strategies within a family framework, and he has presented research at several conferences and seminars on this and other topics. Chuck has retired from his former position as a Marriage and Family Therapy Supervisor and Registered Play Therapy Supervisor to serve full-time as the Director of the Mindful Ecotherapy Center, LLC in Tacoma, Washington.



Books by Charlton Hall



The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook

This is the second edition of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook. The original workbook was published in 2015, and the sciences of mindfulness and ecotherapy have advanced a great deal since that time. This second edition was updated to reflect this new research. This edition, like its predecessor, was written to accompany the 12-week Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy workshop series. Some of the exercises in this new edition have changed based on participant feedback regarding what is more helpful in facilitating nature experiences.

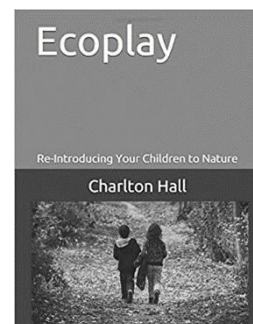
This new version of the handbook introduces the 12 skills of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) and introduces one of these skills at each of the 12 sessions in the program. Although this book is designed to accompany the 12-week Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy workshop series, it may also be completed on your own at home. The experiential nature of the work allows anyone with access to outdoor spaces the opportunity to complete the series. If you are interested in

participating in a workshop series near you, you can visit the Mindful Ecotherapy Center's website at www.mindfulecotherapy.org. The website contains a directory of Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy programs worldwide at

<https://mindfulecotherapy.org/directory-2>

Ecoplay: Re-Introducing Your Children to Nature

Ecoplay is an evidence-based eight-session training program designed to give parents and their children the opportunity for experiential activities outdoors that combine mindfulness, ecopsychology and the skills of positive parenting. Ecoplay is an authoritative, rather than authoritarian, approach to discipline and parenting. It is a framework for guiding your child(ren) to reconnect to nature in healing ways. Ecoplay trains parents to be nature-based play therapy facilitators for their own children. It is also a theoretical framework and approach to parenting that allows children to express themselves in play, their natural language. Ecoplay allows this expressive play to happen in healthy natural outdoor environments.



The Mindful Mood Management Workbook

This workbook is a resource book for those dealing with problems of emotional aggression and emotional addiction. Although it was designed to be used in conjunction with the 12-week Mindful Mood Management program, it may also be useful as a reference for those who have difficulty with emotional regulation.