

## Everyday Mindfulness: Leader's Guide

This lesson is designed to help participants give more attention and awareness to their thoughts and feelings in the present moment of everyday life. Mindfulness practice increases awareness of thoughts and feelings and has been documented to impact positively physical and emotional health and relationships with others. It emphasizes a process of growth and behavior change that helps individuals deal with the stresses of everyday life. The lesson objectives help participants: 1) understand what the practice of mindfulness is and is not as well as its possible benefits; 2) practice beginning mindfulness exercises that focus on the breath, the mind, and the body; and 3) discuss how everyday mindfulness can be incorporated into their lives. If the group is interested, a final objective is: 4) discuss and plan appropriate activities to support the practice of mindfulness in community activities.

Remember, to increase impact of this lesson, you may choose to break the exercises into three or four additional lessons: 1) Mindful relaxation, 2) Breathing techniques, 3) Imagery and body exercises, and 4) Do-in exercise. When you break this lesson into three or four exercises, it may be necessary to reiterate the “Seven Principles of Mindfulness” at the beginning of each session.

**Audience:** This lesson targets an adult audience.

### Preparation

- » Read through the entire teaching guide (MF3425) and accompanying fact sheet (MF3424) before you present the lesson. Try to present the lesson in your own words without reading the materials. Practice the exercises given in the fact sheet and the imagery exercise given in this leader's guide.
- » Prepare yourself by mentally thinking about people's reactions and how you will lead the discussion.
- » Obtain copies of the fact sheet to distribute to participants.

- » Optional: Prepare a note card for each participant with the word STOP written in large letters on each one.

## The Lesson

Refer to the fact sheet and present in your own words the following sections:

- » Introduction
- » Mindfulness Definitions
- » Seven Principles of Mindfulness
- » Benefits of Mindfulness
- » Mindfulness in Work and Social Settings
- » Mindfulness Resources
- » Beginning Mindfulness Exercises

include the imaging exercise given only in this leader's guide.

Brainstorm with participants on how they can incorporate everyday mindfulness into their lives. Summarize their responses when you are ready to bring the discussion to a close.

**Closing:** Prior to asking participants to complete an evaluation form, conclude the lesson with the following (*Note: you could hand out note cards with STOP printed in large letters*):

### Try STOPping

STOP, a mnemonic, provides an easy way to practice being mindful in the face of stress. When an event triggers stress or negative emotions, which lead to a negative reaction, follow the steps below.

- » Slow down
- » Take a breath
- » Observe: Bodily feelings, thoughts, and possibilities
- » Proceed, considering multiple possibilities.

It helps to bring an attitude of kindness to this practice, accepting thoughts and feelings as they are. It also helps to bring curiosity to explore the situation with new eyes and an openness to new possibilities. These practices target a sense of well-being and can be practiced in small moments to develop skills ready to be used for more challenging crises.

*Source: Louise Delagran, MA, MEd. "Taking Charge of Your health and Wellbeing."  
University of Minnesota*

## Guided-Imagery Script: A Walk in the Country

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You're giving yourself some time to quiet your mind and body. Allow yourself to settle comfortably, wherever you are right now. If you wish, close your eyes. Breathe in deeply, through your nose, expanding your abdomen and filling your lungs; and pursing your lips, exhale through your mouth slowly and completely, allowing your body to sink heavily into the surface beneath you...And once again breathe in through your nose and all the way now to your abdomen,, and then breathe out slowly through pursed lips-letting go of tension, letting go of anything that's on your mind right now and just allowing yourself to be present in this moment...

Imagine yourself walking along a peaceful old country road. The sun is gently warming your back...the birds are singing...the air is calm and fragrant...

With no need to hurry, you notice your walking is relaxed and easy. As you walk along in this way, taking in your surroundings, you come across an old gate. It looks inviting and you decide to take the path through the gate. The gate creaks as you open it and go through.

You find yourself in an old, overgrown garden-flowers growing where they've seeded themselves, vines clinging over a fallen tree, soft green wild grasses, shade trees.

You notice yourself breathing deeply...smelling the flowers...listening to the birds and insects...feeling a gentle breeze cool against your skin. All of your senses are alive and responding with pleasure to this peaceful time and place...

When you're ready to move on, you leisurely follow the path out behind the garden, eventually coming to a more wooded area. As you enter this area, your eyes find the trees and plant life restful. The sunlight is filtered through the leaves. The air feels mild

and a little cooler...You savor the fragrance of trees and earth...and gradually become aware of the sound of a nearby stream. Pausing, you allow yourself to take in the sights and sounds, breathing in the cool and fragrant air several times...And with each breath, you notice how refreshed you are feeling...

Continue along the path for a while, you come to the stream. It's clear and clean as it flows and tumbles over the rocks and some fallen logs. You follow the path easily along the creek for a way, and after a while, you come out into a sunlit clearing where you discover a small waterfall emptying into a quiet pool of water.

You find a comfortable place to sit for a while, a perfect niche where you can feel completely relaxed.

You feel good as you allow yourself to just enjoy the warmth and solitude of this peaceful place...

After a while, you become aware that it is time to return. You arise and walk back down the path in a relaxed and comfortable way, through the cool and fragrant trees, out into the sun-drenched overgrown garden...One last smell of the flowers, and out the creaky gate.

You leave this country retreat for now and return down the road. You notice you feel calm and rested. You feel grateful and remind yourself that you can visit this special place whenever you wish to take some time to refresh yourself and renew your energy.

And now, preparing to bring this period of relaxation to a close, you may want to take a moment to picture yourself carrying this experience of calm and refreshment with you into the ordinary activities of your life...And when you're ready, take a nice deep breath and open your eyes.

## **Reduce Stress with Art Exercises**

These art exercises are a way for you to reduce stress and renew your spirit by expressing creativity for personal growth, enjoyment, and mental challenges. Don't worry about doing these art exercises "right"—trust your intuition as you work. Most of all, never compare your art to anyone else.

### **Art Exercises:**

#### **1. Drawing Your Breath**

This art exercise helps you become aware of the natural rhythms of your body by "drawing" your breath. Start by breathing normally. Place a colored pencil or other media on a piece of paper. Think of your breath as a line as you draw it on the paper. Use different widths of lines and notice how breathing faster or slower changes the pattern. For relaxation, breathe deeply and slowly. Notice how the lines change. Keep the pencil on the paper making a continuous line, only draw the line as you exhale and pause as you inhale or vice-versa.

#### **2. Effect of Music on Your Art**

Use different colored markers or watercolors to draw lines or shapes that represent the music you are listening to. Use music that is instrumental and relaxing. How does your body react to different rhythms of the music?

Try to keep from getting distracted by other thoughts. Being aware in the present is the core of mindfulness. We will be more relaxed and less worried about the past and the future.

#### **3. Abstract Feelings with Art**

The primary emotions are happiness, anger, fear/anxiety, and sadness. Use only lines, colors, and shapes to represent your feelings. These abstract expressions through art help you be more aware of your emotions and give you a way to release them in a healthy way.

Although you can use any art media, many people find water-color paints seem to work best for expressing emotions. Use anything you have available, even torn paper or clay.

To start this exercise, do a 1-2-minute warm-up by using different abstract lines and shapes to cover a page.

Then do 4-5-minute pictures of each of the primary emotions using only shapes, lines and/or colors.

Next using only lines, shapes and colors make a picture of how you are feeling today. What are your feelings in this moment? How much energy do you have? Think back on what your

emotions were at various times during the day. Make that picture. Try this exercise to track and express your emotions for several days. If you want add art to your journaling.

#### **4. Mandala Art Exercises**

What is a mandala? It's a geometric figure representing the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism. In some religions, the mandala is a symbol in a dream representing the dreamer's search for completeness and self-unity. In others, it is a circle enclosing a square used to aid in meditation. Usually a mandala is a circular image made up of symmetrical patterns. You can also create an asymmetrical design. Drawing or coloring a mandala can be a relaxing experience. A couple types of mandalas are patterned, and nature inspired. Lines and shapes make patterns that radiate from the center point of the circle following around in a circular pattern.

To make a patterned mandala start by drawing or tracing a circle for your base. Place a dot in the center of your circle. Lightly draw your template with a pencil so you can erase it later when you are finished drawing your pattern. First draw a horizontal line and then a vertical line to divide the circle in fourths. Then divide each of those sections again to make eight areas radiating out from the center. Draw one or two smaller circles within the larger circle. You can use that grid as a guide for your mandala pattern. Make it radiate out from the center. Enjoy the process and don't worry about making your mandala perfect.

The nature inspired mandala is a good one to do if you have to spend a lot of time inside. Make an effort to help yourself de-stress by spending time outdoors in nature. Be aware of the sounds, smells and colors of things you see or feel around you. Start your nature inspired mandala with a circle and fill it with drawings of leaves and/or flowers you see or take one leaf you like and trace it around the circular mandala form. Overlap the leaf as you go around. Color or paint the design you've created.

#### **5. Your Life Through Art**

Draw a path or road in an art piece to represent the positives and negatives of your life's journey. Use as big a piece of paper as you need. Think about the things that brought you to this time and place in your life. What positive and negative experiences have you gone through both personally and professionally? Which education or work experiences have shaped your approach to life? Who has supported and impacted your life the most? Add drawings, photos, and words, etc. as you go down your path.

## **6. Nature Art**

When you go on your nature walk concentrate on the world around you. Use all your senses to help you be more aware. Collect natural objects; such as, stones, leaves, flowers, sticks, seeds, etc.== anything that is interesting, or you think is beautiful. Arrange the objects to create an image or pattern you like. You can take a picture to remember your art piece or simply enjoy the experience.

## **7. Gratitude Art Journal**

Making art a part of your daily gratitude journal helps combat burnout, negativity, decreases stress, and improves your mood. Put only images in your journal or combine writing and art. You can also create a larger art piece once and include many things you are grateful for.

## **8. Vision Collage**

This art exercise has you envision your life as you really want it to be. Establish your goals.

What do you need to bring into your life and what do you need to cut out of it?

Create small pages in a journal or make one large art piece. Find images and words in magazines, search Pinterest or other websites on the internet or draw images yourself that reflect the life you WANT to be living—your passions, dreams for the future, goals and relationships. Give yourself time to reflect as you work on this collage. You can always add things later. You might find an image you like but don't know why. Include it anyway. Review your vision art periodically to see how much you have moved closer to your vision goals. This will remind you what you are aiming for.

\*For more ideas on art journals search the internet or attend art workshops.

## **Other Ways to Use These Art Exercises**

- As a warm-up at the beginning of your study group meeting;
- Set up three or more tables at your district meeting with various art media supplies. Have attendees rotate to different tables to create one or more of these art projects.
- For their own personal enjoyment and creative growth have your children or grandchildren try these exercises.



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Think spending hours coloring is only a childhood pastime? Think again!

The adult coloring book trend has spread nationwide, with some even popping up on bestseller lists. With the countless health benefits of coloring for adults, it might be time to pull out the crayons, colored pencils and markers!

**REDUCE STRESS AND ANXIETY<sup>12</sup>** Coloring has the ability to relax the fear center of your brain, the amygdala. It induces the same state as meditating by reducing the thoughts of a restless mind. This generates mindfulness and quietness, which allows your mind to get some rest after a long day at work.

**IMPROVE MOTOR SKILLS AND VISION** Coloring goes beyond being a fun activity for relaxation. It requires the two hemispheres of the brain to communicate. While logic helps us stay inside the lines, choosing colors generates a creative thought process.

**IMPROVE SLEEP** We know we get a better night's sleep when avoiding engaging with electronics at night, because exposure to the emitted light reduces your levels of the sleep hormone, melatonin. Coloring is a relaxing and electronic-free bedtime ritual that won't disturb your level of melatonin.

**IMPROVE FOCUS** Coloring requires you to focus, but not so much that it's stressful. It opens up your frontal lobe, which controls organizing and problem solving, and allows you to put everything else aside and live in the moment, generating focus.

You don't have to be an expert artist to color! If you're looking for an uplifting way to unwind after a stressful day at work, coloring will surely do the trick. Pick something that you like and color it however you like!

## Everyday Mindfulness

The term, “mindfulness” seems to be everywhere — it’s touted as the new yoga, the answer to stress, or the alternative to prescription drugs. But beyond the buzz, do you understand the concepts of “mindfulness”? With this fact sheet, the authors aim to provide a definition of mindfulness, share some of the benefits of practicing mindfulness, provide samples of simple exercises, and provide resources to explore.

### Mindfulness Has Many Definitions

- » Living in the present moment/awareness of the present moment — paying close attention to thoughts, physical sensations, and our surroundings.
- » Observing personal experiences of mindfulness, being completely focused on a project — reading a book, doing a hobby, or playing a sport. This heightened awareness is mindfulness.
- » Taking a few deep breaths — becoming fully aware of the present moment.
- » Having nonjudgmental awareness in which each thought, feeling, and sensation is acknowledged and accepted in their present state. This steady and non-reactive attention usually differs from the way people normally operate in the world.
- » Paying attention, precisely, to the present moment without judgment.

A common concern of people relates to a misperception that “mindfulness” ties to particular religions. Remember, meditation has its origin dating back thousands of years and may be included in religious practice. At the same time, “mindfulness” sits comfortably in secular circles. Does mindfulness have to be a spiritual practice? Certainly not. The fact that many traditions — religious and secular, spiritual and philosophical — come back to these fundamental practices of compassion and awareness suggests that mindfulness remains part of the human experience.

Today, hospitals, clinics, schools, military bases, and corporations use Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction



(MBSR), developed in the late 1970s by Jon Kabat-Zinn, a physician at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn developed MBSR based on his knowledge of meditation and yoga, but he stripped the metaphysical and spiritual components away from it, making MBSR a non-religious practice.

Thousands of MBSR courses across the United States teach basic meditation practices such as body scans and breath awareness, as well as gentle yoga and movement exercises. Completely secular, these courses teach life skills for coping with stress, pain, and the human experience.

### Seven Principles of Mindfulness

Seven principles serve as the basis for mindfulness. Each can help you act skillfully and not emotionally in stress situations:

- » Non-judging: Be a neutral observer to each experience.
- » Patience: Allow each experience to emerge at its own pace.
- » Beginner’s mind: Avoid bringing in what you know to the current moment and try experiencing it as if it is the first time.
- » Trust: Believe in your intuition and your ability to see things in a new way.
- » Non-striving: Avoid the need for winning or losing or striving for a purpose — it is about “being” and “non-doing.”

- » Acceptance: See things as they are in the present moment.
- » Letting go: Take the time to detach from your usual feelings and thoughts.

## Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness should not be considered a “cure-all.” However, science suggests that practicing mindfulness creates changes in brain function as well as changes in the body’s response to stress. The practice of mindfulness may have an important impact on physical and emotional health.

Mindfulness helps to improve work-life balance. When we look at the dominant cultural patterns of the United States, we find that we value dominating nature, being goal-bound, controlling the future, being involved in constant activity and action with no time to “sit and talk,” being autonomous, and being individualists. With that as a dominant cultural pattern, when do we have time to be mindful?

Many people look for relief from their worries. Sometimes this stress presents physically, such as a stiff neck or headache. A review published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found evidence of the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions for pain in varying degrees. Another group of researchers compared the positive effect of mindfulness on depression to that of anti-depression medications — without the side effects.

The practice of mindful meditation proved effective in reducing stress and improving overall well-being. One study from Loyola University of Maryland showed that people who meditate tended to recover more quickly from stressful events. Other benefits that come from a regular meditation practice include:

- » Increased ability to relax.
- » Improved concentration.
- » Increased energy and enthusiasm for life.
- » Increased creativity.
- » Increased self-awareness.
- » Improved self-esteem.
- » Improved work/school performance.

## Mind Full?



## Or Mindful?



Mindful meditation proved effective in school settings to help children manage and work through behavior challenges. From her article, “Why Teachers Say Practicing Mindfulness is Transforming their Work,” Anya Kamenetz shared classroom success stories from the CARE for Teachers program. CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience for Educators) teaches mindfulness exercises for calming the body and mind through breathing and movement and uses insights from psychology to help students regulate their emotions.

Professor Michael Yellow Bird, North Dakota State University, enjoys great success with indigenous nations, indigenous communities, with tribal colleges’ students, and among leadership groups in using mindfulness. Yellow Bird’s mindfulness techniques draw from research, brain images, and stories to illustrate changes to the brain under duress from conflict, displacement, and oppression. He writes on the positive changes in quality of life when indigenous populations engage in healing through mindfulness meditation.



## Mindfulness in Work and Social Settings

Every day you encounter people who are not like you. Humans tend to impose judgments as they look for conformity, and when they see difference, they may opt for negative judgment. What does that do to you? Negative judgment prohibits you from connecting to those who are different. Why do people judge difference? Many may draw from learned experiences or those spheres of influence during each stage of their lives. These spheres of influence shape your outlook on life, how you view situations, and how you see one another in work and social settings. How do you address the urge to judge in the face of difference? Look for common ground with the person or the situation. Draw mindful comparisons. It becomes counterproductive to judge negatively. Find a way to identify with the person or situation. Be present in the moment with that person or situation by using the Seven Principles of Mindfulness. With your busy lives, you may ask yourselves, “When do I have time to be mindful?” Here are some simple mindfulness strategies as a beginning.

## Mindfulness Resources

The “Taking Charge of your Health & Wellbeing” on-line newsletter, produced at the University of Minnesota (<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu>), devoted one of its articles to learning relaxation techniques (<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/health/stress-mastery/learn-relaxation-techniques>). It’s a reminder of the many ways to enhance healthy behaviors and reduce reliance on destructive habits. Learning how to turn off the body’s fight-or-flight reflex through breathing exercises and relaxation techniques marks a good first step.

## Beginning Mindfulness Exercises

**Practice mindful relaxation:** Mindful relaxation combats stress effectively. With practice, one soon learns how to shift into a relaxation mode. The brain responds to relaxation by increasing alpha brain wave activity, lowering blood pressure, pulse rate, respiration rate, and metabolic rate.

Try these steps to help achieve mindful relaxation:

1. Commit to an uninterrupted time each day to practice a mindful meditation. Begin with as little as 5 minutes. Many benefit from increasing meditation time to 20 minutes or more.



2. Choose a quiet place away from any technology.
3. Find a comfortable body position — in a chair or sitting comfortably on the floor.
4. Focus on your breath flowing in and out.
5. Let any negative thoughts float away like clouds.

**Try breathing techniques:** When people feel stress they tend to take short, shallow gasps of air. The resulting lack of oxygen restricts blood flow and causes muscles to strain. As deep breaths increase, the heart rate slows and blood pressure lowers, which breaks the stress cycle. You may choose any time or any place to think about your breathing — even stopped at traffic signals waiting for the green light or standing in line to buy groceries.

**Use imagery:** Imagery exercises work with or without a facilitator. A common imagery practice invites you mentally to picture yourself in a quiet, calm setting. Take note of how this setting encourages your body and mind feel calm and relaxed.

**Add body exercises:** Sit in a chair or lie on the floor. Put your arms above your head and stretch as high as your arms and shoulders allows. At the same time, stretch your legs and feet as your body allows. Then focus on one side of your body and repeat the stretching on the other side. Now stretch the right arm and left leg followed by stretching the left arm and right leg. Finish the exercise by starting at the top of your head and consciously relaxing your scalp and facial muscles. Move on down your body, consciously relaxing each part of your body until you reach your toes. Continue to sit or lie in this relaxed state for a few moments.

**Do-In exercises:** “Self-shiatsu” appears to be the easiest way to describe Do-In (dough-eeen). Consider these practices as “exercises for health.” The “Do” of Do-In means to open up channels and facilitate the movement of energy along specific routes. “In” of Do-In means to move and stretch your limbs to achieve this purpose. Basically, the Do-In exercises encourage mind and body integration. Integration of mind and body allows the “Ki” (life energy) to flow freely throughout the body. Do-In stimulates the energy flow along the acupuncture meridians. Focus on imagery, breathing, and relaxation when performing Do-In exercises. Practice this simple form of exercise alone or with a partner, using any spare time ([www.kyo-jitsu.co.uk/do-in/](http://www.kyo-jitsu.co.uk/do-in/)).

## Conclusion

When it comes to everyday mindfulness, remember to practice, practice, practice! Some people like to team up with a mindfulness group to get started. If you find that inconvenient or uncomfortable, start with breathing exercises and gradually add more movement as you explore ways to relax your body and mind.

## Additional Mindfulness Resources:

*Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life.* Book and CD set by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

*Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life.* Book by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

References for this lesson are in the leader’s guide, MF3425.

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