



# MBWP

MINDFULNESS BASED WELLNESS & PEDAGOGY

[www.mbwp.org](http://www.mbwp.org)

## Basic Exercises

### 4-7-8

For regulating excessive levels of physiological arousal or distress, try using a 4-7-8 breathing exercise. 4-7-8 breathing may help calm you down through activating your parasympathetic nervous system<sup>1</sup>:

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Make sure body is fluid and flexible to allow for deep, unobstructed breathing.
- Take four to five measured breaths using the following pattern:
  - Exhale all the air out of your body
  - Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 counts
  - Hold your breath for 7 counts
  - Exhale for 8 counts
  - Repeat steps 2-4 three to four times
- After completing the exercise, spend a few moments attending to the sensations of your breath without interfering. If you get distracted, label your distraction and gently refocus on the breath.

### Mindful Breath Awareness

Practices such as mindful breath awareness may assist you in disengaging from troubling distractions and may improve our focus<sup>2</sup>.

- Sit comfortably on a chair or on the ground while maintaining an alert and dignified posture.
- Set a timer for a few minutes, or a bit longer if you feel comfortable doing so.
- Place your hands on your lap or in another comfortable position.
- You may keep your eyes open or closed.
- Anchor your attention on the natural ebb and flow of your own breathing. Do not attempt to interfere with this flow in any way, simply notice as your breath enters, moves through, and exits your body.
- While focusing on your breath, allow yourself to notice any thought, feeling, or sensation that might naturally arise.
- As you become aware of these thoughts, feelings, or sensations, simply notice and then label them as they pass through your awareness. For instance, 'tension in my stomach', 'sweaty hands', 'anxious feelings', 'happy feelings', etc.
- Do not fixate on any sensation or association. Instead, acknowledge each experience non-judgmentally or with a sense of curiosity, label it, and then return attention to your breath for as long as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerritsen, Roderik JS, and Guido PH Band. "Breath of life: The respiratory vagal stimulation model of contemplative activity." *Frontiers in human neuroscience* 12 (2018): 397.

<sup>2</sup> Sedlmeier, Peter, Juliane Eberth, Marcus Schwarz, Doreen Zimmermann, Frederik Haerig, Sonia Jaeger, and Sonja Kunze. "The psychological effects of meditation: a meta-analysis." *Psychological bulletin* 138, no. 6 (2012): 1139.

- At the conclusion of this meditation, declare an intention to bring this quality of focus and non-attachment to distracting thoughts during your next activity.

### Mindful STOP

Building self-awareness and self-regulation is an important social-emotional skill that may be cultivated through practices such as Mindful STOP. Before transitioning from one activity to the next, or next time you sense yourself getting, try the following:

- Stop what you are doing. It is likely that your mind is on 'autopilot' and pausing may allow you to become aware of your internal state before you act in ways that may be misaligned with your intentions for this practice session.
- Take a few deep breaths. Slow your physiology down through a few slow and measured breathing cycles, making your exhalations slightly longer than your inhalations. For instance, breathe into your abdomen for four counts, hold your breath for seven counts, and then exhale slowly through your mouth for eight counts.
- Observe your sensations, feelings, and thoughts with a sense of curiosity. Notice if there are any physical sensations that arising in your awareness. Is your heart racing? Are you tense or feeling pain somewhere? Now, notice what emotions you are feeling, perhaps labeling them with a statement such as 'feeling angry', 'feeling sad', or 'feeling excited'. What kind of story is your mind creating about the present situation? Listen carefully but without judgment to your inner narrative. Sometimes, just engaging in a bit of non-judgmental noticing is sufficient to take us out of autopilot and into a more intentional state of thinking and behavior.
- Proceed with intention. Anchor your awareness in your body, assume a dignified presence, and bring to mind your goals for this practice session. If you begin to feel your thoughts or feelings spinning out of control at any point, simply pause and repeat the steps above.

### Developing Self-Compassion and Prosociality

Self-compassion is associated with decreased fear of failure, psychological wellbeing, and prosocial behaviors such as generosity and kindness<sup>3</sup>. A wonderful resource for self-compassion exercises has been developed by Dr. Kristen Neff at: <https://self-compassion.org/guided-self-compassion-meditations-mp3-2/>. At MBWP, we have developed a version of this practice that we share with others at workshops and other venues:

Guided self-compassion practices are abundant and can be accessed through Dr. Kristin Neff's website<sup>4</sup> as well as other resources. Using the principles outlined in Neff's work, I have developed my own version of this practice that I use in both personal and pedagogical settings:

- When I sense some level of distress is arising in my awareness, I take a moment to pause, disengage from any digital, interpersonal, or other tasks I am in engaged in, and breathe deeply into my belly.
- In order to help moderate my physiology, I make my exhalations a little longer than my inhalations, and I pause for a moment in between each breath.

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<sup>3</sup> Neff, Kristin D., Stephanie S. Rude, and Kristin L. Kirkpatrick. "An examination of self-compassion in relation to positive psychological functioning and personality traits." *Journal of research in personality* 41, no. 4 (2007): 908-916.

<sup>4</sup> <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>

- While acknowledging my experience of distress, I engage in self-talk or prompts such as, “this really hurts right now” or “this is a moment of suffering.” The language here purposefully avoids over-identification with whatever you are experiencing (no “I”). This is consistent with the idea that while our feelings are part of who we are, they do not represent WHO we are as a totality.
- To acknowledge our common humanity, I then repeat something such as “we all suffer sometimes,” or “I am not the only one that suffers.”
- Then, I offer myself some compassion by making statements such as, “May I be patient and strong” or “may I forgive myself.” Kristin Neff recommends putting your hand over your heart or using other gestures of kindness to more fully embody the experience.
- To end the practice, I commit myself to bringing this level of self-kindness and self-compassion to my next interaction if possible.