



WEEK SEVEN



**HOW CAN I BEST TAKE CARE OF
MYSELF? SELF-COMPASSION**

WEEK SEVEN - How can I best take care of myself?

Recap:

Last week in Session Six (Thoughts are not facts) we started the process of moving awareness beyond ourselves by paying attention to the ways we communicate with others. At a subtle level that brought a level of compassion (empathy) to how we relate to others. In Session we delve deeper into our natural tendency to connect and care about others, and consider the value and potential of bringing compassion home:

Self-compassion.



Session 7: Bringing awareness to times of Difficulty:

By being present in more of our moments and making mindful decisions about what we really need in each of those moments, we can use activity to become more aware and alert, and to regulate our mode of mind. After all, our daily moment-to-moment activities are what make up our lives.

These activities and how we feel about them, what we think about them, can be a very powerful influence affecting our general well-being and our ability to respond skilfully to the challenges of our lives.

Try asking yourself these questions:

- Of the things that I do- *what NOURISHES me*? What energizes me? What increases my sense of being alive & present, rather than merely existing? (**'N' Activities**)
- Of the things that I do - What drains or **DEPLETES** me? What decreases my sense of being alive and present? What makes me feel I am merely existing, or worse? (**'D' Activities**)
- Accepting that there are some aspects of my life that I simply cannot change- Am I consciously choosing to increase the time and effort I give to 'N' activities?

By being present in more of our moments and making mindful decisions about what we really need in each of those moments, we can use activity to become more aware and alert and to help regulate our mode. (i.e.- the most direct way to take care of mental & physical health is to engage in daily exercise, be it a couple of 10 minute walks, mindful stretching, swimming etc - any exercise once it is in your daily routine


it now is a readily available response in times of stress. Also, we can notice how, by paying attention to the tasks we are involved in, many of them can be more nourishing than we thought. It is often our thoughts about certain activities that make them depleting. When approached with a beginner's mind and with full attention, may become nourishing. We can use our day-by-day experience to discover and cultivate activities that we can use as tools to cope with periods of challenge. Having these tools already available means that our habitual responses to these times can change or upheaval. Indeed, *the breathing space* provides a way to remind us to use activity to respond skilfully to stress.

Using the Breathing Space: (The Action Step)

After reconnecting with an expanded awareness in the Breathing Space, it may feel appropriate to take some considered action. **Ask yourself...**

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

The core point is to use your awareness of where you are at in each moment to make the best choices for yourself. These choices will necessarily be unique to you and to the moment. So, when dealing with difficulty or anxious feelings the following activities may be particularly helpful:

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- ❖ **Do something pleasurable.** *Be kind to your body:* Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to your favourite food without feeling guilty; have your favourite hot drink; give yourself a facial or manicure.

Engage in enjoyable activities: Go for a walk (maybe with the dog or a friend); visit a friend; do your favourite hobby; do some gardening; take some exercise; phone a friend; spend time with someone you like; cook a meal; go shopping; watch something funny or uplifting on TV; read something that gives you pleasure; listen to music that makes you feel good.

- ❖ **Do Something that gives you a Sense of Achievement, Mastery or Satisfaction** Do something that you have been putting off doing; clear out a cupboard or drawer; do some work; pay a bill; clean the house; take some exercise.

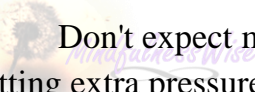
It is very important to be KIND to yourself and to congratulate yourself whenever you complete a task or even part of a task!

If things are particularly difficult you may wish to break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time.

Acting Mindfully

To help declutter the mind which may be caught in the spiral of stress we explored together it can help to focus your entire attention on just what you are doing right now; keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in **THE PRESENT**. This is vital as when we are under pressure we are more likely to revert to old habits of mind .e.g. *"...Now I am walking down the stairs... now I can feel the banister beneath my hand...now I'm walking into the kitchen... now I'm turning on the light..."*; *be aware of your breathing as you do other things; be aware of the contact of your feet with the floor as you walk.*

Remember:

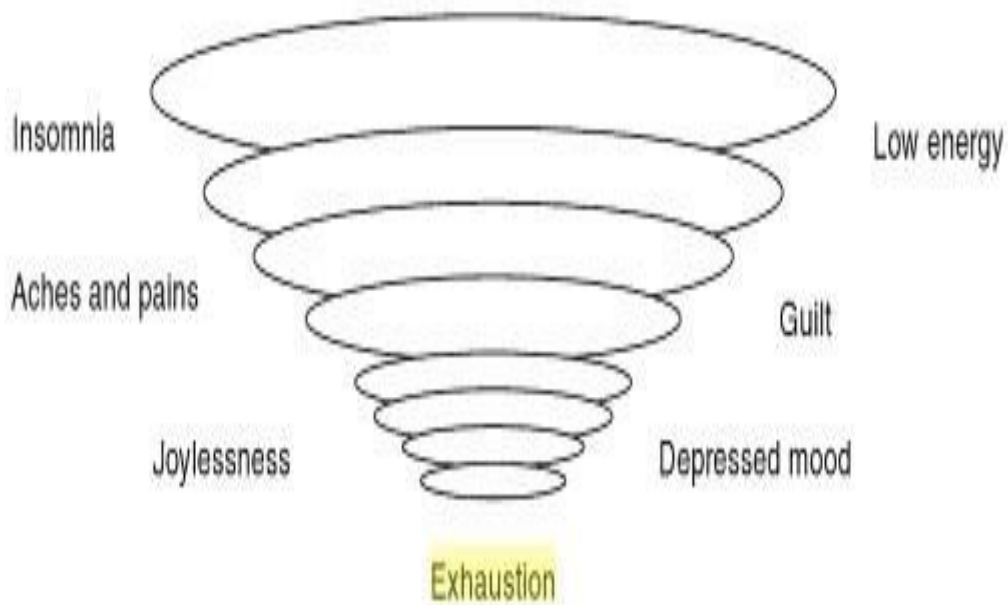
1. Try to perform your action as an experiment. Try not to prejudge how you will feel after it is completed. Keep an open mind about whether doing this will be helpful in any way.
2. Consider a range of activities and don't limit yourself to a favoured few. Sometimes trying new behaviours can be interesting in itself. "Exploring" and "enquiring" often work against "withdrawal" and "retreat."
3.  Don't expect miracles. Try to carry out what you have planned as best you can. Putting extra pressure on yourself by expecting this to alter things dramatically may be unrealistic. Rather, activities are helpful in building your overall sense of control in the face of shifts in your mood. (ref- breathingspacelondon.org)

YOUR STRESS INDICATORS:

Each of us has different tell-tale signs of mounting stress. Sometimes those around us can tell when we are getting stressed better than we can ourselves, we pay so little attention to our own process. Tuning in to our own personal stress indicators can be very helpful in making those wise decisions about how to best take care of ourselves. Stress indicators can be: headaches, insomnia, irritation, feeling overwhelmed, loss of a sense of humour (often humour gives us a sense of proportion), immobilisation, exhaustion...

RUNNING ON EMPTY: STRESS/BURNOUT

The Exhaustion Funnel (Professor Marie Asberg)



When we get overwhelmed-

life tends to become exhausting, the range of our behaviour repertoire narrows & the Spaciousness of thinking & emotional responses restricts and any sense of ease in our bodies tends to dissipate

My STRESS Warning Signs

Tuning into the warning signs of mounting stress or agitation enables us to make healthy decisions about self-care, interrupting our habitual reactivity to stress. In the table below, you might try listing some of the unhelpful strategies you use in the left-hand column and make an extensive list of helpful or potentially helpful strategies for responding to the warning signs in the right hand column.

ACTION/STRATEGIES: Take a moment-

Stress Indicators: WARNING SIGNS	
<i>e.g. Cramming too much in sense-of compulsion, headaches, irritability, going to bed later, sleeplessness, procrastination, etc.</i>	
Actions/Strategies	
Unhelpful	Helpful
<i>ating too much / not eating, more coffee/painkillers, unhelpful self-talk/guilt, avoidance, working harder, mindless telly, drink etc .</i>	<i>e.g. Listening to music, going for a run/ physical exercise, turn tell y off, talk with friends, do some tidying, have a bath, etc .</i>

Love After Love

*The time will come when, with
elation, you will greet yourself
arriving at your own door, in your
own mirror, and each will smile at
the other's welcome,*

*And say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was
yourself. Give wine. Give bread. Give
back your heart to itself, to the stranger
who has loved you*

*all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by
heart.*

Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

*the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.*

- Derek Walcott, *Sea Grapes* 1976

HOME PRACTICE FOR WEEK 7

1. Practice for 45 minutes each day over the next 6 days. Work with different combinations of the three main practices that we have been learning – BODY SCAN, MINDFUL MOVEMENTS and SITTING MEDITATION. You could experiment with different practices on different times of the day; splitting the practice into two shorter sessions; bringing different practices into the same session and working at times in silence without a CD.
2. THE BREATHING SPACE - REGULAR: Practice three times a day at times that you have decided in advance.
3. THE BREATHING SPACE - COPING plus ACTION; practice whenever you notice unpleasant thoughts or feelings.



My DAILY Routine

From the time you wake up until bed time – make a list of your daily activities

ACTIVITY	N	D	M
			

Now you have finished- look down the list & categorize each one with an –

N ~ Nourishing activity

D ~ Depleting/Draining Activity

M~ Mastery Activity(something that may not be pleasant in it-self but feels good after you have completed it – cleaning oven, clearing presses etc!

Home Practice Record Form—Session 7

Record on the Home Practice Record Form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
	<i>MindfulnessWise</i>	