

Mindfulness Exercise – Sitting with Emotions

Feelings can't hurt us. They are felt in the body and even the most difficult emotional pain is actually minor when it comes to its physical sensation. For example, let's try to conjure up an intense feeling such as anger/resentment, fear, or craving for a fatty food or alcohol. Bring back the thoughts, pictures, and sensations as if the situation was happening now. Notice your body. Where in your body are you feeling the sensations? Is it a tension in your shoulders? A burning or hollowness in your stomach? Tightness in your forehead?

If you were to rate that physical sensation on a scale of 1 to 10, how bad was it really? Maybe the situation felt like a "10" but the actual physical sensation of an emotion hardly registers on the scale of physical pain.

What is the problem is our thinking about our emotions – "I can't stand feeling this way." "It isn't right that I feel so bad." These thoughts tend to fuel the emotion and tend to make the emotions stick. The thoughts also interfere with effective problem solving.

An alternative to reacting to strong emotions is to "sit with" the strong emotion and observe it as it ebbs and flows in our body. All emotions will come and go if we let them. Once the emotion has softened, then you can think of ways you want to respond (or not respond) to the situation.

Let's get started (exercise is about 3 minutes):

- Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.
- Gently let your mind wonder to a recent situation that was stressful for you. Replay the situation in your mind. Conjure up the emotions you were feeling at the time.
- Do a brief body scan. Where are you noticing sensations? Stay with whatever is there. Notice the sensation (maybe tension in an area of your body) and investigate it with curiosity and without judging. Just notice its rising and falling and shifting.
- If you get lost in thought, come back to the breath and then again, rest your attention on the body sensation. See if you can ride out the sensations like you would a wave in the ocean. Keep awareness on the sensation until it subsides. Then, come back to your breath and do another body scan to see if there is anymore sensation that is prevalent. Let your attention rest there, paying full attention to that sensation.
- Once you have concluded this exercise, slowly open your eyes.