

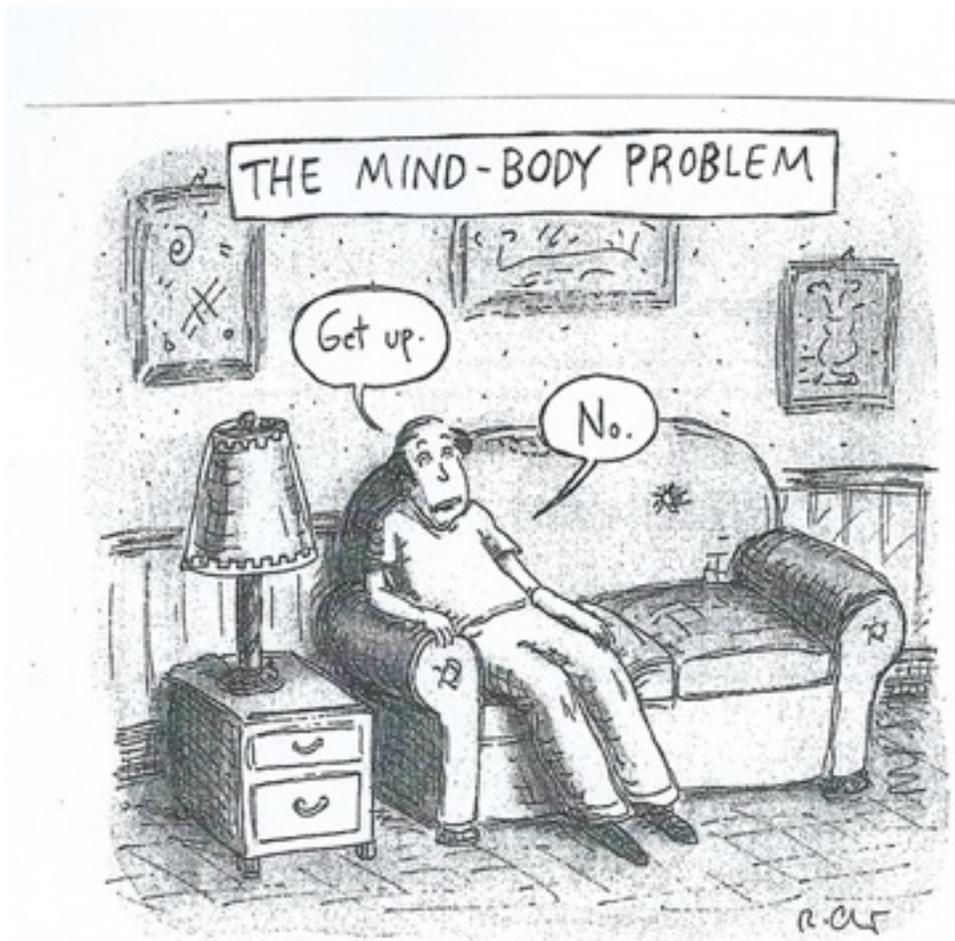


## Mindfulness East Bay

*Finding the space between stimulus and response*

### HANDOUT PACKET FOR MBCT WK 4 – RECOGNIZING AVERSION

“Everything is perfect, but there is always room for improvement.” – Suzuki Roshi





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### RECOGNIZING ATTACHMENT AND AVERSION

Pleasant or unpleasant? Good or bad? Our minds are constantly evaluating, judging, and sorting our experiences into these binary categories. Once sorted, we then know what to do: those experiences that we've judged to be pleasant or good we try to hang on to. We do the same with people we've judged to be pleasing or good – we form *attachments*.

What do we do with those experiences or people we've judged to be unpleasant or bad? We try to avoid them, get rid of them, run away from them – or if we can't do that, we ignore, pretending that they don't exist. This is what we call *aversion*.

And what about those experiences or people who we judge to be neither pleasant or unpleasant, neither good or bad? These neutral experiences are so *boring* to our minds, we typically don't even notice them. And yet much of our experience falls into this *neutral zone*.

Trying to hold on to that which we've judged to be pleasing or good for us takes energy. It also takes energy to avoid or ignore the unpleasant or bad. And because nothing in life stays the same, as everything is constantly changing, we can find ourselves expending a great deal of energy desperately trying to hold on to what we've become attached to, and feeling increasingly stronger aversion towards whatever we don't want in our lives.

In Buddhist philosophy, it's said that both kinds of behavior, attachment and aversion, cause *suffering*. We suffer when we can't get what we want, or when we feel it slipping away from us, or when we have it but constantly worry about losing it. This is the suffering of attachment.

We also suffer when we expend energy avoiding, ignoring, or trying to escape from what we don't want to deal with in our lives, or what we're afraid of. This is the suffering of aversion.

What can we do to ease our suffering? We can learn to recognize these patterns of attachment and aversion, and then practice gradually lessening our grip on our attachments, and relaxing our defenses against our aversions. There's a saying, "*that which we resist, persists.*"

Can you identify how attachment shows up for you? What thoughts do you find yourself thinking about the people, things, and experiences that you have formed attachments to? What emotions come into play? Where do you feel it in your body? Take a few moments now to ask yourself these questions, and note your answers either mentally or on paper.

And how do you experience aversion? What are your typical thoughts about the people, things, and experiences you have been desperately trying to avoid or ignore? What emotions are involved? And where do you feel aversion in the body? Again, take a few moments to ask yourself these questions and note your answers.

## HANDOUT 12

# Automatic Negative Thoughts

Do you experience or have you experienced the following thoughts?

	Yes	No		Yes	No
1. I feel like I'm up against the world.			17. I hate myself.		
2. I'm no good.			18. I'm worthless.		
3. Why can't I ever succeed?			19. I wish I could just disappear.		
4. No one understands me.			20. What's the matter with me?		
5. I've let people down.			21. I'm a loser.		
6. I don't think I can go on.			22. My life is a mess.		
7. I wish I were a better person.			23. I'm a failure.		
8. I'm so weak.			24. I'll never make it.		
9. My life's not going the way I want it to.			25. I feel so helpless.		
10. I'm so disappointed in myself.			26. Something has to change.		
11. Nothing feels good anymore.			27. There must be something wrong with me.		
12. I can't stand this anymore.			28. My future is bleak.		
13. I can't get started.			29. It's just not worth it.		
14. What's wrong with me?			30. I can't finish anything.		
15. I wish I were somewhere else.					
16. I can't get things together.					

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## Words Used To Describe Sensation

Tender  
Sensitive  
Bruised  
Achy  
Sore  
Tense  
Tight  
Nauseous

Shaky  
Trembly  
Throbbing  
Pounding  
Fluttery  
Shivery  
Queasy  
Wobbly  
Bubbly  
Dizzy  
Spacey  
Breathless

Prickly  
Electric  
Tingling  
Nervy  
Burning  
Radiating  
Referring  
Buzzy  
Itchy

Wooden  
Congested  
Dull  
Dense  
Frozen  
Icy  
Disconnected  
Thick  
Blocked  
Contracted  
Heavy  
Suffocated  
Cold  
Numb  
Closed  
Dark  
Hollow  
Empty

Tense  
Tight  
Constricted  
Clenched  
Knotted  
Hot  
Full  
Sweaty

Calm  
Energized  
Smooth  
Streaming  
Flowing  
Warm  
Cool  
Relaxed  
Open  
Light  
Spacious  
Airy  
Releasing  
Expanding  
Expansive  
Floating  
Fluid  
Draining



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### **FOCUSING AND THE FELT SENSE**

Mindfulness-based courses and therapies emphasize the importance of connecting with the body, so as to get off that hamster wheel of ruminative thinking and into the present moment. But some people have trouble identifying body sensations and feelings. If you're one of those, here's another approach that might help:

#### What is the Felt Sense?

We all have a bodily orienting sense that allows us to move through the world without running into things or people, and regulates movement. The scientific word for this is proprioception. But this bodily knowing can extend more deeply, whether we call it a "sixth sense" or a "gut feeling" or just a sense of your body "knowing" the whole of your experience. When you learn how to really listen to this "felt sense," you can tap into the body's innate wisdom and ability to heal.

#### What is Focusing?

Focusing is a process of self-awareness and emotional healing that was originally developed by Eugene Gendlin, a psychologist at the University of Chicago in the 1960s. It's a simple process that begins with noticing a body sensation or feeling, getting curious about it, and then engaging in a conversation with the body: "*Hmm, what's up with that? Tell me more.*" You can do the Focusing process on your own, or with a Focusing-trained therapist. Here's a summary of the six-step process developed by Gendlin and his colleagues:

#### The Six Step Process

1. Clearing a Space: Pause and sit silently for a moment, then turn your attention inward, as you invite the felt sense by asking a question like "*what in me wants expression?*"
2. Felt Sense: Pay particular attention to the area of the neck, chest, and abdomen, and allow a sense of the whole of the question and its answer to arise.
3. Handle: Let a word, a phrase, or an image come up from the felt sense itself. Stay with the quality of the felt sense as you try out the word (phrase or image) to see if it fits.
4. Resonating: Toggle back and forth between the felt sense and the word (phrase or image) to check how they resonate with each other. See if there is a bodily sensation that lets you know that the word fits. If not, go back to step #3 and try again.
5. Asking: What is it about this (problem or situation) that makes it so (the word, phrase or image)? You may need to keep asking until you feel a shift in the felt sense.
6. Receiving: Receive whatever comes with a shift in a friendly way. Stay with it a while, even if it is only a slight release. Then remember to thank your body for sharing!

#### Where to Learn More:

The International Focusing Institute <https://focusing.org/felt-sense/what-focusing> has video demonstrations of the focusing process and descriptions of the felt sense and the six-step process. A good introduction to the felt sense and focusing is the book *The Power of Focusing* by Ann Weiser Cornell (1996) Berkeley, CA: New Harbinger.



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### **WALKING MEDITATION**

Walking meditation can be very enjoyable. We walk slowly, alone or with friends, if possible in some beautiful place. Walking meditation is really to enjoy the walking – walking not in order to arrive, but just to walk. The purpose is to be in the present moment and, aware of our breathing and our walking, to enjoy each step. Therefore, we have to shake off all worries and anxieties, not thinking of the future, not thinking of the past, just enjoying the present moment. We can take the hand of a child as we do it. We walk, we make steps as if we are the happiest person on Earth.

Although we walk all the time, our walking is usually more like running. When we walk like that, we print anxiety and sorrow on the Earth. We have to walk in a way that we only print peace and serenity on the Earth. We can all do this, provided that we want it very much. Any child can do it. If we can take one step like this, we can take two, three, four, and five. When we are able to take one step peacefully and happily, we are working for the cause of peace and happiness for the whole of humankind. Walking meditation is a wonderful practice.

When we do walking meditation outside, we walk a little slower than our normal pace, and we coordinate our breathing with our steps. For example, we may take three steps with each in-breath and three steps with each out-breath. So we can say, “In, in, in. Out, out, out.” “In” is to help us identify the in-breath. Every time we call something by its name, we make it more real, like saying the name of a friend.

If your lungs want four steps instead of three, please give them four steps. If they want only two steps, give them two. The lengths of your in-breath and out-breath do not have to be the same. For example, you can take three steps with each inhalation, and four with each exhalation. If you feel happy, peaceful, and joyful while you are walking, you are practicing correctly.

Be aware of the contact between your feet and the Earth. Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet. We have caused a lot of damage to the Earth. Now it is time for us to take good care of her. We bring our peace and calm to the surface of the Earth and share the lesson of love. We walk in that spirit. From time to time, when we see something beautiful, we may want to stop and look at it – a tree, a flower, some children playing. As we look, we continue to follow our breathing, lest we lose the beautiful flower and get caught up in our thoughts. When we want to resume walking, we just start again. Each step we take will create a cool breeze, refreshing our body and mind. Every step makes a flower bloom under our feet. We can do it only if we do not think of the future or the past, if we know that life can only be found in the present moment.

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This essay by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh is from his book *Peace is Every Step* (1991) New York, NY: Bantam Books.