Seminar 2: Insight

Journal Exercise: Leaves in a River

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Seminar 2 Worksheet: Understanding your struggle

As you continue to reflect on the Acceptance for Understanding exercise, please record the details of your experience here.

Reactions to this exercise:

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What have you learned about your internal experience?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What thoughts, feelings, or beliefs did you identify as hooking you?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What does having this experience say about what’s important to you, about your life, about yourself? Maybe what’s missing in your life as a result of struggling?

Remember: If it isn’t important, you wouldn’t be experiencing discomfort/pain.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Remember the Tug-of-War metaphor: Emotional pain is like a monster that wants to play “tug-of-war” with us. The goal is to understand what the pain means to us so that we can drop the rope instead of trying to fight the monster.
Journal Exercises: Homework
Take some time to continue practice using what you learned from Seminars 1 & 2. (See the appendix for a list of helpful tools.) At the conclusion of each practice session, please take some time to write down your reactions. Record your practice on page 11 as well.

Remember to use “and” instead of “but” to increase flexibility in your thinking.
Tips for COPE and other
Mindfulness/Relaxation/Meditation Exercises

As you go through some of the exercises in COPE and on your own, you may find the following helpful:

1. Even though you may have what feels like thousands of thoughts running through your mind and you don't feel as if you are relaxing, you will likely notice at least some level of relaxation when you finish. As you practice this skill, this relaxation will increase.

2. Sometimes old or hidden pain can arise during these exercises. If you find that you are suddenly angry, frightened, depressed, etc. and you feel safe, gently allow yourself to experience the sensation without forcing yourself to try to understand it. If you feel the need, talk to someone about your experience (i.e., friend, therapist, family member, etc.)

3. You may have heard about “perfect” conditions for these types of exercises (i.e., only in a quiet place, using certain body positions, only 2 hours after you've eaten, etc.). If you find that you can't find an absolutely quiet place or the only time you can practices these exercises is right after dinner, don't let it stop you. If you find whatever is distracting you particularly bothersome (i.e., rumbling stomach, noises outside), try to incorporate it into your exercise.

4. You may not always want to practice these skills. Be gentle with yourself and find creative ways to make your practice more comfortable.

5. A few ideas that may help you maintain your skills practice include:
   a. Picking a regular time and honoring that appointment as you would a doctor's appointment or class time
   b. Finding a local meditation group
   c. Download an app that will help you remember
Simple Ways to Get Present

Take Ten Breaths
This is a simple exercise to center yourself and connect with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until the lungs are completely empty—and then allow them to refill by themselves.
3. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they’re just passing cars, driving past outside your house.
4. Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and feel.

Drop Anchor
This is another simple exercise to center yourself and connect with the world around you. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Plant your feet into the floor.
2. Push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
3. Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
4. Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
5. Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you’re doing.

Notice Five Things
This is yet another simple exercise to center yourself and engage with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment
2. Look around and notice five things that you can see.
3. Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
4. Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
5. Finally, do all of the above simultaneously

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Informal Mindfulness Practice

1. *Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine*

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you’re doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what’s happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

For example, when you’re in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you’ll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2. *Mindfulness of Domestic Chores*

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors—something mundane that you have to do to make your life work—and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes, notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you’re doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

3. *Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities*

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you’re doing.
Leaves on a River (from COPE Seminar #2)

Get into a comfortable position where you are sitting. Perhaps sitting upright with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, and your hands resting in your lap or on your thighs, whichever is more comfortable.

Allow your eyes to gently close. If you would prefer to keep your eyes open, soften your gaze and gently focus on a spot a few feet in front of you. Taking a few moments to Arrive by getting in touch with the physical sensations in your body, especially the sensations of touch or pressure where your body makes contact with where you are sitting.

Being aware of your feet, your body being supported by the chair, how your hands feel with how they are making contact with your body.

Now, Gathering your attention by simply focusing on your breathing. Slowly breathing in...and slowly breathing out....breathing in....breathing out. Noticing the rise and fall of your belly and chest as you breathe in...out...in ...out... It’s okay for your mind to wander away to thoughts, sensations, or feelings. Simply observing that your mind has wandered, observing your thoughts and feelings, acknowledging their presence, and then returning your attention back to the breath. Passively observing the flow of your thoughts, one after another, without trying to figure out their meaning or their relationship to one another.

As best you can, bringing an attitude of gentle acceptance to all of your experiences. There is nothing to be fixed or worked on at this time. Simply allowing your experiences to be your experiences, without needing it to be other than what it is, as you find it, in this moment. You might even catch a glimpse that there is a part of you noticing what you are noticing.

Now, allowing yourself to imagine a beautiful, slow-moving river...the water flowing along... Notice how wide or narrow it is...Noticing the color of the water....

Imagining the day – Is it sunny or overcast? Warm or cool? What season is it...? Imagining you are sitting underneath a tree on the bank of the river. Perhaps your back is resting against the trunk, gently supported. Take a deep breath. See if you can you smell the richness of the earth beneath you or perhaps scent of the land around you. Take a moment to look up into the tree. Notice the leaves
rustling in the gentle breeze. What color are the leaves? What shape do they have? Listening to the sound of the gentle stirring of the leaves. Noticing that once in a while you observe a leaf dropping onto the river and flowing away. Now gazing at the river... noticing leaves floating by on the surface of the water. Looking at the leaves and watching them...slowly drifting along downriver.

As you sit beneath the tree on the bank of this river, becoming aware of the thoughts that are passing by in your mind. You might notice planning for something later today, reminding yourself not to forget something, remembering something that has already happened, or even judging or evaluating this exercise. Whatever you notice, each time you become aware of a thought, imagining yourself placing the thought on one of those leaves. If you think in words, putting them on a leaf in words. If you think in images, putting them on a leaf as an image.

Whenever a new thought enters into your mind, putting each one on a leaf...observing each thought as it is on the leaf...passing in front of you...and then watching it moving away from you... eventually drifting out of sight...down the river.... Allowing the river to move along at its own speed...

Returning to gazing at the river, waiting for the next leaf to float by with a new thought on it. When one comes along, again watching it passing in front of you and then letting it drift out of sight. The river is ever flowing...carrying each leaf along. The river is doing what is natural for rivers to do and that is to carry along whatever is floating on the surface. Thinking whatever thoughts you think, observing them, placing them on a leaf, and allowing them to flow freely along downriver, one by one.

Now, when you are ready, allowing yourself to take a different perspective. Allowing yourself to become the riverbed. Imagining yourself as the riverbed, holding the river and each of the leaves on the surface of the river, and even the thoughts that each leaf carries as it flows by.

As the riverbed, being aware that you are the container for the river... the leaves... and the thoughts. Perhaps even becoming aware that you do not begin or end at the banks of the river...that you extend beyond the banks of the river into the earth itself...
Imagining what the riverbed must see, experiencing the river, the leaves, and thoughts floating along. Wondering what it is like for the riverbed when the river is rushing by or when it is barely trickling, wondering if the riverbed even cares since it merely sets the context for everything to happen. Without the riverbed, there would be no river and no river to carry along the leaves and thoughts. Wondering if the riverbed cares if it is autumn with lots of leaves on the river, or spring with very few leaves.

Now, letting go of those thoughts and images and gradually widening your attention to take in the sounds around you in the room...the feeling of the chair beneath you...the feeling of the breath in your lungs.

Taking a deeper than normal breath and slowly exhaling. Taking a moment to make the intention to bring this sense of gentle-allowing and self-acceptance into the present moment ... When you are ready, slowly opening your eyes.
**Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing**
You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

**Breath-Counting Exercise**
This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you don’t have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may either be focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, “one...” As you exhale, count, “two...” Inhal, “three...” Exhale, “four...” Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with “one” on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.
Metaphors for Getting Unstuck

When trying to over-control your internal experience
Imagine you are in a pool, playing with a beach ball. The ball is your thoughts, memories, and feelings. At some point, you decide you don’t want the beach ball anymore, so you try to push it under the water and out of your consciousness. Every time you push the ball under, it pops back up so you have to keep pushing it down and holding it under. Struggling in this way keeps the ball close to you, and you become tired and frustrated. Imagine yourself letting go of the ball and allowing it to just float on the surface of the water. It may float nearby or float away. Either way, your hands are free and you can now enjoy a swim in the pool.

Clarifying your values
A professor stood before his class with a large jar on the table in front of him. He filled the empty jar with ping pong balls and asked the class if the jar was full. They all agreed that it was.

Then the professor picked up a container of small rocks and poured them into the jar so they filled the space between the balls. Again, he asked the class if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous yes.

Next, the professor picked up a bag of sand and poured it into the jar, filling the spaces between the rocks and balls. When he asked if the jar was full, the classroom agreed it was.

The professor said, “This jar represents your life. The ping pong balls are the important things—your family, physical health, friendships, passions—things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The small rocks are the other things that matter, like your career, your home, and your car. The sand is everything else—the little stuff. If you put sand in the jar first, you won't have room for the rocks, let alone the ping pong balls. The same goes for life. If you fill all your time and energy on the little stuff, you won't have space for the things that are the most important to you. Make time for things that are crucial to a meaningful life. Play with your pets. Call your grandmother. Take time to get a checkup. Laugh with your friends. Go on vacation. There will always be time to do the chores around the house and change the light bulbs. Prioritize the ping pong balls first, the things that really matter. The rest is just sand.”

You are greater than your internal experiences
Imagine yourself as the sky, and your thoughts, feelings, and other internal experiences are the weather. The weather changes continuously, but no matter how bad it gets, it can’t
hurt the sky. The mightiest thunderstorms, hurricanes, and blizzards rage through the sky and yet the sky remains unharmed, unchanged. And no matter how big the storms get, the sky has room for it. Plus, sooner or later, the weather always changes, leaving the same beautiful blue sky in its wake.

**Committing to Action**
Imagine you are the driver on a bus that is on the route of your life. Passengers, like thoughts, memories, feelings, get on and off, and you continue to drive. Some of the passengers are scary. Maybe they shout “You’re useless!” or “You’re going the wrong way!!” What if they start threatening you, telling you they’ll hurt you unless you do what they say?

It’s as if you’ve made a deal with the passengers, and the deal is, “You sit quietly in the back of the bus where I can’t see you, and I’ll do whatever you say.” So, you drive the bus on a different route, one that keeps the scary passengers quiet. You can almost forget they’re there. At some point, you get tired of this route and try to turn onto a new street. Immediately the scary passengers jump up, shouting and threatening again. They seem bigger and scarier than before, and you immediately keep going where they want you to go.

What if you turned anyway? The scary passengers haven’t ever hurt you. In fact, they can’t hurt you without stranding themselves. Imagine you decide to turn. You brace yourself, check the mirror, and turn onto a new street. The passengers yell, threaten, and get right up in your face. And you keep driving. You make it back to the route you truly wanted to be on, and the passengers eventually get tired of yelling and sit back down. Everyone once in a while one of the passengers tries to threaten you again, but you don’t allow it to push you off course. This is your bus, and you want to get back to living your life, to driving on the route you have chosen for your life.
Online Resources

CCSD Website
http://www.ecu.edu/counselingcenter

Integrative Health Partners
http://www.integrativehealthpartners.org/resources.shtml

Think Mindfully
http://www.thinkmindfully.com

Mayo Clinic Stress Reduction Website http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mindfulness-exercises/MY02124

Meditation Oasis
www.meditationoasis.com

Mindful www.mindful.org

Mindfulness Research Guide
http://www.mindfulexperience.org/

WebMD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apps for your Smartphone, Tablet, or Computer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing Techniques by Hemalayaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBTi-Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindshift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a break!</td>
</tr>
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Books for Further Reading

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Bourne (2011)
Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life by Hayes & Smith (2005)
The Mindful Way Workbook by Teasdale, Williams, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn (2014)

Scientific References


COPE Workbook