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Practice 1: Relaxing Sighs

Inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth, making a quiet, relaxing sigh as you exhale. Taking long, slow, gentle breaths that raise and lower your abdomen as you inhale and exhale. Focus on the sound and feeling of the breath.

You can use cues throughout your daily routine to remind yourself to take three to six relaxing sighs (red lights while driving, telephone sounds, waiting for elevators, waiting in line, etc). You may want to place stickers in areas where you look frequently, or areas that cause you stress as a reminder (computer, refrigerator, watch, cell phone, spouse's forehead (just joking!)).

Practice 2: The Soles of the Feet

Rationale

When you are in a stressful situation or anticipating a stressful situation you can use this short practice to help bring yourself into the present moment, and thereby into a space in which you can make considered choices.

The Steps

1. If you are sitting, make yourself comfortable, with the soles of both feet on the floor. If you are standing, stand in a natural posture, allowing the weight of the arms to pull the shoulders down, and bending the knees slightly. If you are walking, slow your pace and, again, allow the arms to help relax the shoulders.
2. Allow your breath to flow naturally. And allow yourself to feel the emotions of the moment, being aware of whatever thoughts and body sensations are arising, without restricting or attempting to change them. Simply observe.
3. Then move your attention to the soles of your feet. Feel your heels on the floor or inside your shoes; feel the curves of the arches, the balls of the feet, and the toes – perhaps moving the toes to make them more present in sensation.
4. After a moment or two, notice again the quality of thoughts and body sensations.
5. When you feel as if you can respond and not react, remember that you can choose to disengage, or those to respond with clarity and creativity.

Special Considerations

1. We all feel stress and strong emotions. The object of this practice is not to stamp them out but to work with them creatively.
2. In context, the feelings of the moment may hold valuable information that can be used for a positive solution or helpful response.
3. You can rehearse this practice to gain more confidence in its use by playing scenarios from the past (or the future!) in your imagination and working with the emotions and body sensations that are generated just by thought.

Freely adopted from: Singh, NN, Wohler, R.G., Adtkins, A.D. & Myers, R.E. (2003). Soles of the Feet: A mindfulness based self-control intervention for aggression by an individual with mild mental retardation and mental illness. Research in Developmental Disabilities 24:158-169.

Practice 3: The Three-Minute Breathing Space

Minute 1: Awareness

Taking a pause. If you care to, closing your eyes. Bringing your attention to your body: noticing bodily sensations (e.g., heaviness, lightness, temperature, breath rate, heart rate, etc.); then attending to thoughts: is your mind calm? Or are thoughts racing? What's the quality of thought? (i.e., dense, light, fleeting, sticky, etc.); and attending to mood states: how do you feel in the moment? (e.g., peaceful, anxious, joyful, sad, etc.). Acknowledge and register your experience, even if it is unwanted.

Minute 2: Gathering

Then, gently bring your attention to your breathing, to each in-breath and to each out-breath as they follow, one after the other. When your attention is drawn away, noticing that, and gently bringing it back to the breath.

Minute 3: Expanding

Expanding the field of your awareness beyond the breath, back to the sensations in the body, then to thoughts, and then to mood state. Checking in to how it is with you now.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment.

Freely adopted from Segal, Z.V., Williams, J.M.G. & Teasdale, J.D. (2002). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression. A new approach to preventing relapse. New York: Guilford Press.