

MINDFULNESS SKILLS WORKBOOK for Addiction

Practical Meditations and Exercises
to Change Addictive Behaviors

Morgan Fitzgerald, MA



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Interior and Cover Designer: Heather Krakora

Art Producer: Samantha Ulban

Editor: Nicky Montalvo

Production Editor: Matthew Burnett

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ISBN: Print 978-1-64611-265-4 | eBook 978-1-64611-266-1

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I dedicate this book to my shining star mom. Her courage and bravery drive me to be the best counselor and person that I can be.



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INTRODUCTION

My experience with the illness of addiction came very early in life. If you looked at my family tree, you would see that addiction to various substances exists in nearly every generation. I spent much of my upbringing learning how to be a supportive family member to someone struggling with addiction. I remember attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings with my mom, fascinated while listening to stories filled with resiliency, courage, and bravery—along with negative emotions such as shame, regret, and guilt. I found it a beautiful thing to be in the midst of people who, standing at a precipice, could change the entire course of their life. I looked to those that I loved and found their ability to overcome addiction moving—so much so that once I started college, I began studying the field of addiction and counseling. I was given the opportunity to work at a few different levels of care for those with addiction, in different programs ranging from outpatient to residential treatment. This breadth of experience guided me toward bringing mindfulness practices to aid treatment for people of different backgrounds in this group. Through my work, I found that mindfulness skills seemed to really help my clients with their more immediate emotional and thought-based struggles.

Many of the other types of therapy I was implementing helped as well, but in general they took longer to get results. Learning mindfulness takes time, too, but for some people the skills developed begin calming the mind and body very quickly. I felt that helping those struggling with addiction in this way focused less on their substance use specifically, which also gave them skills to better their lives as a whole. Mindfulness is not about focusing on one problem to fix; instead, it encourages viewing the self as perfectly imperfect. For those dealing with addiction issues, thinking in this way seems more hopeful. This hope can feel like a driving force toward finding the right kind of change. Seeing my clients foster this hope gave me hope as well. Since learning this, I have been working on honing my skills to teach others about mindfulness, so that they feel more at ease and are able to gain a sense of peace within their own lives. The perceived ledge they feel they are teetering

on is transformed into a step—one they can mindfully manage with practice.



CHAPTER ONE

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND ADDICTION

Addiction is complex, and it can be difficult to understand where an addiction comes from. Many factors contribute to the development of an addiction, including genetic makeup, the environment one is or was exposed to (i.e., one's current situation and/or one's upbringing), past trauma, mental health issues, and the availability of resources. Addiction is not a lack of self-discipline, nor is it the result of poor choices. It is classified as a disorder in which changes within the brain can be detected, and which directly affects the way that the brain functions.

But for recovery, focusing on where an addiction comes from is less important than focusing on the emotional patterns, thoughts, and stress that someone struggling with addiction is experiencing, at first. All of those things can either increase their feeling of connection to their life or create barriers toward managing the addiction.

The practice of mindfulness is an antidote to the feeling of disconnection that can arise as people try to leave their addiction behind. Its principles are intended to guide the mind to be more focused on the present. By grounding our attention in the here and now, we learn to acknowledge, accept, and let go of difficult

emotions and thoughts. Instead of avoiding them, we handle them more intentionally, creating a healthy mind space that's less likely to fall back into addictive behavior.

THE ADDICTED MIND

Our understanding of how to effectively treat addiction has changed. In the past, a medical model was the most widely-used approach, focusing on treating addiction as a disease with a goal of reducing symptoms. But since the 1990s, that method has been evolving into what's known as the *biopsychosocial* model of treatment. As the name implies, this approach focuses on the connections between different factors that affect our well-being. Biological, psychological, and socioenvironmental influences are all considered; that is, treatment should account for issues relating to body, mind, and the world we live in.

Under this model, treatment for addiction is more personalized. People struggling with addiction learn to manage their condition based on their own specific needs, rather than the same broad goals that are applied to everyone. This provides more options for getting well, and the flexibility creates more motivation to stick with a treatment plan. Living with addiction is highly personal. Two people in the same addiction support group, though struggling with similar addictions, probably won't find that the exact same treatment helps them both in the same way. What does help is to learn coping skills that you can adapt to your own situation.

Mindfulness aligns very well with the biopsychosocial approach to managing addiction, for two important reasons:

It's individual. The practice of mindfulness is tailored to each person's individual journey right from the get-go. Starting with the first exercise you try, you're in the driver's seat, choosing when and where to employ the strategies and methods. Furthermore, the principles of mindfulness emphasize that we all have ownership of our own experiences, no matter what those experiences look like.

It works. Mindfulness is backed up by a significant body of credible research. For example, a 2018 analysis of multiple research studies found that people living with addiction who were taught mindfulness skills experienced a decrease in intense cravings and urges.

Let's look at some of the challenges faced by people coping with addiction, and explore how mindfulness can help.

Stress and Trauma

Managing addiction is made more difficult by the effect that trauma has on the brain. According to James Douglas Bremner, MD, a researcher at Emory University School of Medicine, traumatic stress changes the way our brain processes information. In particular, it has lasting effects on areas of the brain responsible for how we handle stress.

When exposure to stress and trauma overwhelms our brain's ability to handle negative emotions, it's difficult for us to find a healthy way to cope with them. We find ourselves tempted to use maladaptive—that is, unhealthy—coping methods, including the use of addictive substances or behaviors. This pressure makes it more difficult for someone struggling with addiction to carry out their responsibilities and find peace and calmness in their lives.

Trauma has wider effects on one's health, too. One study done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the health insurer Kaiser Permanente interviewed thousands of people about their childhood experiences. They found that occurrences of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and various infectious diseases, as well as mental health problems and addiction, were greater in people who reported adverse childhood experiences.

Thought and Beliefs

It's not just external factors like stress and trauma that affect how well one can manage addiction. Our own thoughts and beliefs have a bigger impact than you might think. Imagine watching a play: If the narrator were to speak negatively about the main character, you'd experience the story differently than if the narration was positive or took a humorous tone. We are the narrators of our own lives, so our thoughts and beliefs constantly impact the way we view the world around us. People who are able to keep that narration in check tend to find themselves more motivated and equipped to handle stress and worry. People who burden themselves with negative narration, and view it as reality, tend to struggle to manage stressors in their life.

Emotional Patterns

If you're in an addictive cycle, emotions can be difficult to process. Part of what keeps people stuck in a cycle of addiction is the avoidance of difficult emotional states. The use of addictive substances or behaviors acts as a barrier, changing our perception of our feelings in the moment, so that we don't feel as motivated to cope with difficult emotions. When we begin to manage our addiction, that avoidance mechanism is no longer available to us. And because of this, we can feel like we're left without any coping skills. On top of that, since addiction has been disconnecting and numbing our emotions, perhaps for quite some time, entering a withdrawal stage can feel like a flood of emotions coming back into our body. All of this makes it tempting to fall back into addictive behavior.

Treatment

There are many effective ways for treating addiction. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), a combination of behavioral counseling and medication management, with attention to treating addiction, preventing relapse, and supporting mental health, offers the greatest likelihood of success. NIDA recommends that treatment take into account each person's particular social, emotional, and drug-related problems. For each treatment option, there are multiple avenues for success depending on the unique characteristics, needs, and experiences of the individual. See the resource list at the end of this book if you need guidance for finding treatment options.

The Cycle of Addiction

Though everyone's journey is different, addiction tends to follow a pattern called the *cycle of addiction*. Treatment should include assessing where a patient is within this cycle. Establishing that fact begins with examining *initial use*—the first time a particular behavior, or substance use, occurred. *Abuse* is defined as the point when someone feels like they're using more of the substance or behavior than they intend to, and

stopping is becoming more difficult. The next stage is *tolerance*, when one's usage must increase to get the same effect as before. As use increases, dependence on the drug also begins to increase, and the addiction starts to affect daily functioning. This leads to the *addiction* stage, in which someone no longer feels in control of how much they use the substance or behavior. In this stage they may find themselves taking bigger and bigger risks to engage in the addiction. *Withdrawal* occurs when the person has quit use, and the body is trying to return to the way it functioned before the addiction began. *Relapse* can happen after withdrawal and is a return to the use or behavior.

WHY CHOOSE MINDFULNESS?

In our daily life, we're constantly bombarded with messages, both overt and subtle, encouraging us to be mentally anywhere but in the present moment. Our attention is pulled in countless directions: We go on social media and review everyone else's lives; we binge-watch a series or play games to escape our day-to-day pressures. From deadlines at work to the ever-revolving schedule of our kids' after-school activities, modern life seems to keep us too busy too much of the time.

Mindfulness is a simple concept with profound implications. At its core, mindfulness means placing our attention on the here and now, noticing the thoughts, feelings, and sensations we're experiencing without attaching to or judging them. When our mind inevitably wanders, we acknowledge this and gently bring our focus back to the present. Though it's often associated with meditation, mindfulness can be practiced anytime, during any activity, from sitting quietly to walking to engaging in a hobby or work activity.

When our brains are worried about the future or past, we view our present moment through a filter, clouded with the events that could or did happen in our lives. We rely on our inner narrator, a voice that's rooted in past beliefs and thoughts. But when we choose mindfulness, we choose the present over everything else. In a mindful state, we're hyperaware of the "now." And our brains are able to process information in a way that feels more manageable, because we're centered on what's within our immediate environment. We're

able to experience our thoughts and emotions without placing value on the worries of the past and future.

People struggling with addiction can feel driven away from their present state by powerful thoughts and feelings. They may feel unable to manage intense emotions without resorting to addictive behavior, since they probably haven't practiced other alternatives for some time, or found that the alternatives were less helpful. Without healthy coping skills, negative emotions like anxiety and fear can drive our decisions, which makes us feel like we're out of control. This can prompt us to reach for our addiction. Cultivating mindfulness provides strategies for handling those emotions, and for building confidence that we can manage our addiction successfully.

According to the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*, mindfulness stems from 25 centuries of Buddhist teachings, adapted in the 1980s for use in healthcare and wellness. Researchers studying mindfulness to treat addiction describe it as a process characterized by “non-judgmental cognitive awareness.” In other words, with mindfulness we're tuned in to our present moment, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and actions without worrying about the past or future. Choosing mindfulness is choosing freedom to think, and be, without the pressure to complicate our experience by reading something into each and every encounter in order to act on it (as people managing addiction are prone to do). Through the various principles taught in mindfulness, the individual is able to be more connected and appreciate the present, while also validating their own past experience.

Ready to start? We'll begin by getting acquainted with the main principles, or pillars, that make up the practice of mindfulness. These seven pillars are described in the book *Full Catastrophe Living*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. (Kabat-Zinn popularized mindfulness principles to the West in the 1970s by developing a stress-reducing program called “mindfulness-based stress reduction.”)

The Beginner's Mind, which we'll explore in [chapter 2](#), is an attitude that strips our ego from the idea of “mastering” the skill of mindfulness. In mindfulness there is no mastery level, just a constant state of gaining awareness of ourselves. We should always approach mindfulness with the mindset of a beginner. Think of this as giving you the freedom to be a constant student of the art of mindfulness.

Non-Judgment will be our topic in [chapter 3](#). This frame of mind means we take our experiences at face value. Instead of categorizing our thoughts, feelings, and experiences—defining them as “good,” “bad,” “right,” or “wrong,” non-judgment encourages us to allow them to roam freely in our awareness, without assigning any value.

Acceptance, discussed in [chapter 4](#), is the process of acknowledging each moment in time as it’s happening. This helps us find ways to view each moment as separate from the next, which takes away our need to judge them as good or bad.

Patience will be the subject of [chapter 5](#). Mindfulness considers patience to be the practice of allowing things to come to fruition in their own time. Patience brings the awareness that when we’re living in the moment, we allow the mind to work at its own pace to find what it needs.

Trust will be explored in [chapter 6](#). In the context of mindfulness, trust is about cultivating a sense of confidence and hopefulness in yourself and your decisions. When we achieve trust, we no longer look toward external influences to determine what we should do or how to feel.

Non-Striving asks us to focus on our experiences as they are and separate them from the goals or deadlines that we create. In [chapter 7](#), we’ll learn to appreciate who we are in the moment and give gratitude toward ourselves as we are, rather than criticize ourselves for not reaching artificial objectives.

Letting Go will conclude our examination of the pillars of mindfulness. It’s the process of cutting ties with thoughts and beliefs that we hold onto because we want a sense of “control.” Letting go gives our brain room to process our immediate, present state.

Mindfully Managing Addictive Behaviors

Many of the complications associated with addiction are rooted in distraction and avoidance. People struggling with addiction look for ways to numb themselves from the pain of the human experience. At some juncture in their

lives, after feeling pain and disappointment, they began to feel like their emotions, environment, and beliefs about themselves and the people closest to them were untrustworthy. When being in the present moment became difficult, they felt driven to find an alternative for coping with current emotions or thoughts. Being resilient problem-solvers, human beings tend to find the easiest, fastest ways to manage these feelings. Unfortunately, much of the time that easier and faster way doesn't allow us to properly process our experiences, which leaves us feeling continually in crisis.

Mindfulness offers an alternative. It allows someone struggling with addiction to remain in the present, and cope with difficult thoughts and emotions without resorting to addictive behavior. It also helps reframe the experience of addiction itself. When we use drugs or struggle with addictive behaviors like gambling, our brain and body no longer drive our decisions. The addiction takes precedence over our wants and needs. When we view addiction mindfully, we allow ourselves to accept that this process exists, and stop viewing it with judgment or blame. Changing the way that addiction is viewed can help to take pressure off of *why* this is happening to us, and put the focus back on *what* is available in our present state to manage it. This reframing helps people feel understood, instead of stigmatized.

All of the tools and pillars of mindfulness can help you if you're experiencing addiction. And these tools can be used no matter how much time has passed, or where you are in the addiction cycle (see "[The Cycle of Addiction](#)"): in the beginning, after a relapse, or after years of recovery. Each mindfulness pillar serves a purpose and acts as a stepping-stone to a deeper level of insight. Learning these lessons furthers your understanding and acceptance that recovery, like mindfulness, has no end point to achieve. Recovery, like mindfulness, is a process.

With the patience that mindfulness cultivates, you'll be able to let go of the idea that people who struggle with addiction are broken or need to be fixed. Mindfulness shows us that we're managing our experiences in the best way we can. Adding mindfulness to your treatment program enhances the mind's ability to manage addiction as a whole, creating a greater sense of confidence and helping remove the feeling that addiction makes our experiences bad or wrong. When we allow people to free themselves from the stigma of addiction, they're able to take a breath and trust that they can find peace amongst chaos.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This book has been written with all types of readers in mind. Whatever your particular situation, this book can teach you mindfulness skills to help manage your addiction and offers tools to use when facing the threat of relapse. Your recovery will not only benefit being prepared for the worst—better to have tools at hand than to need and not have them—the exercises and fundamental teachings will lead you to a better understanding of your behavior patterns and yourself.

As mentioned, the workbook is organized according to the pillars of mindfulness, with each chapter focusing on one principle and offering mindfulness activities and exercises relating to it. You'll find a range of exercises (lists, reflection questions, experiential activities, meditations, and so on) in each chapter to fit diverse needs and help you understand the many ways you can implement these principles in your life. Finding which exercises best fit your needs will help you grasp the core mindfulness principles. Practicing exercises more than once can deepen your understanding, as well as your motivation for changing past behaviors.

You can work through this book from front to back or explore the chapters in any order you like. You're free to follow a sequence that feels best to you, but please review "[Notes about Exercises](#)". That said, jumping around and finishing chapters at your own pace is a legitimate way to make this journey your own. You can always return to a chapter without hindering your progress. Appropriately, the freedom to choose what is in your best interests is a big step toward accepting the self in its current state. By finding your own path through this book, you're beginning to enact the pillars of mindfulness without even meaning to.

Finally, keep in mind that this workbook is a complementary tool for managing addiction, not a replacement for other types of prescribed treatment. Using these principles and learning the material can be helpful for gaining insight and finding peace, but should not replace finding professional help to discuss more difficult topics and gain deeper self-insight. Luckily, you are not alone in your mindfulness journey. At the end of this workbook you'll find a list of references and additional resources to help you find professionals in your area who specialize in helping people with addiction.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Each exercise in this book is to be completed at your own pace. There's no timeframe; it's up to you to complete them in your own time, whatever that means to you. In addition to reading the chapters, take time to think about them, and reflect on how to find ways to implement these exercises in your life. Some readers may find that working through these pillars is a difficult process. Change is hard. Learning new ways of understanding ourselves can be painful, especially when coping with addiction. You may find that things that have happened in your life which you thought were in the past are now at the front of your mind. When or if this occurs, don't lose hope! Continue moving forward and dig deeper into the fundamental mindfulness steps. They will help you process these emotions in a healthy way, possibly for the first time in your life.

Although it may sometimes be a painful process, you should be proud of yourself for embarking on this journey. Many people find themselves stuck in unhappy and unhealthy situations that leave them afraid to change, for fear things may get worse. If you're reading this workbook, you're looking for a change in your life, which is an admirable goal no matter what the journey toward that goal looks like. So, congratulations! I look forward to embarking on this journey with you.

Notes about Exercises

In each chapter, we'll begin the selection of exercises with a simple meditation to help you feel grounded in your intention. In general, the exercises in this book will be more beneficial if practiced and reflected on more than once. You may notice that you learn something different about yourself each time. Trying most exercises three times a week is a good rule of thumb, but decide for yourself which are most helpful, and how often to use them.

Most of these activities work best if performed in a safe, comfortable, quiet space; a place where you won't be interrupted or distracted. For some people this may be a bedroom or den. For others it could be outdoors in a favorite spot. It depends on what feels

comfortable for you in the moment you're doing your practice.

Some exercises invite you to close your eyes, but if you prefer to keep them open, just relax the muscles around your eyes and let your vision soften. If during your mindfulness practice you find that you experience a flashback or begin to panic, it's important to pause the meditation and examine ways to help calm your body in the moment. Some options include calling a friend to help ground you; switching to a coping activity that can help calm your brain, such as coloring, journaling, or listening to music; or engaging in some physical exercise, like walking or yoga. Overall, it's important to listen to your body if flashbacks and panic happen. If these continue to occur, consult with a mental health professional to better understand why this is happening.



CHAPTER TWO

BEGINNER'S MIND

Watching children play can be a joyous experience, can't it? They get so excited about the smallest things, like throwing a ball and watching it bounce. To an adult, this is a known situation and therefore an unremarkable one. But a child's experience of newness brings an all-encompassing happiness that we can feel just by watching them. This is how mindfulness characterizes the beginner's mind: By looking at the world with the eyes of a beginner, we are able to change our perspective and breathe life back into even the most mundane aspects of our existence.

THE MINDFUL WAY

“You think you know, but you have no idea.” This was the opening slogan for the early-2000s MTV documentary show *Diary*. It gave the audience a personal view of the lives, thoughts, and feelings of celebrities. Other reality shows were also popping up, each trying to entice people to experience life through someone else’s eyes. These types of programs have only grown in popularity since; there’s something intriguing about seeing the world from a new perspective. The mindfulness principle of beginner’s mind is a way to harness our interest in novel experiences as a way to make deeper connections with our own needs and wants.

In his book *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice*, Zen master Shunryū Suzuki describes the beginner’s mind as viewing our awareness as empty, ready to be filled by each experience. By doing so, we are able to experience each moment, with each feeling, thought, and belief, as brand new. Think about the first time you learned a new skill. It was exciting, and the outcome was unknown. At some point, though, the newness wears off and the experience starts to feel boring. Boredom is a difficult feeling to manage; it can lead to losing focus and motivation, causing us to forget the reasons that led us to try something new in the first place. For people struggling with addiction, boredom can be an unbearable driving force, with drug use or an addictive behavior becoming a way to cope with it.

When regular life feels boring, we can handle it in ways that increase our connection to the world around us. We might try traveling, reaching out to friends, or taking up a new hobby. But those suffering with addiction may be tempted to use a substance or begin a new addictive behavior, because doing so created a new experience for them in the past. Researchers at the University of Cambridge studying personality traits found that people with addiction were more likely to make impulsive and riskier, sensation-seeking decisions. They pointed out that some of this tendency may be due to physical changes, as addiction seems to decrease the gray matter within the brain, interfering with the connection and speed at which brain cells communicate with each other.

The good news is that these brain changes seem reversible. One study found that using mindfulness techniques to reduce stress increased the brain's gray matter, allowing brain cells to communicate more rapidly and increasing their interconnectedness.

If you're dealing with addiction, you may initially struggle with developing the beginner's mind, partly because it's a new concept, but also because it may seem to lack the level of stimulation you're used to seeking. Dealing with emotions without relying on addictive behavior to disconnect you can be difficult at first. But stay with it. With time, a beginner's mind brings an excited feeling about small everyday occurrences, which will take hold and lead you to feeling more connected.

The beginner's mind is about stripping away what you think you know, and viewing the world around you as fresh. This is an especially helpful principle when following a treatment plan. When people begin to work on changing behavior to manage their addiction, the first day is always the best. The schedule is new, there are cool insight-building activities to try, and you may feel the pull of something greater happening. At some point, though, that newness inevitably wears off. The treatment program starts to feel patterned. Feeling like we "have to" seeps into our awareness, creating a disconnect that separates us from what we could learn, and turns the process into a painstaking responsibility.

That's where beginner's mind can help. Mindfulness enables us to experience a sense of newness again. By fully experiencing each moment, we're no longer driven by the feeling that we "have to." We're guided to a more positive state, feeling more connected and knowledgeable.

Common Mental and Emotional Patterns

As we explore the pillars of mindfulness, we'll devote part of each chapter to some examples of specific addictions and how they interact with that chapter's mindfulness principle.

For those struggling with *gambling addiction*, it may be easy to justify their losses because the wins seem so great in the moment. They may find themselves unable to view how the other aspects of the addiction affects their lives. This is where the principle of beginner's mind can be helpful. It offers

a new perspective on their life that's not focused on winning or losing.

People struggling to quit *drinking* may create limits for their drinking habits. For example, they may say that they will only drink a certain kind of alcohol, or limit their intake to a specific number of drinks. This negatively affects the beginner's mind, because it brings a preconceived notion of how they're "supposed" to behave. Working through this difficulty requires being mindful about what their preconceived ideas are and how those may be keeping their addiction going.

People struggling with a *shopping addiction* may rationalize their addictive behavior with the notion that "other people do it, too." Beginner's mind removes the need to classify what is and isn't "normal" based on the actions of others, or based on one's own past experiences.

People who struggle with an addiction to *methamphetamine* may feel like life is more exciting with the drug, because their first time using made them feel more connected to the world as a whole. They worry that by losing use of the substance, they'll also lose the excitement that comes with it. The principle of beginner's mind eases those concerns, because it shows that everyday life can seem new and exciting again.

In each of the examples above, the common denominator is the inability to be present with current emotions. Addictions are often used as a way to change the immediate perception of a person's environment. Those struggling with addiction keep rules and avoidances in place—such as only using on certain days or setting a quantity limit—so they can avoid obsessing about what's on their minds. Using the principle of beginner's mind grants you a greater awareness of your needs in the moment, without the fear of an unknown outcome or what it could mean.

Sydney's Story

Sydney struggled with an addiction to alcohol for many years. She tried different approaches for managing her addiction. But each time, she felt like she was just doing the same thing, over and over again. This mindset made it difficult for her to focus, and she inevitably lost motivation to keep up with the program she was trying to follow. When she began learning mindfulness techniques, Sydney felt that the

overwhelming emotions around her addiction became less powerful and more manageable. She cultivated a beginner's mind to keep herself motivated as she worked with a counselor to understand her addiction better. Sydney went into each session planning that if her thoughts began to fall into familiar patterns, she'd find one cool or interesting thing in the lesson to focus on. She found that this application of beginner's mind gave her more connection to the material, and she grew excited about participating. She learned that her boredom and disconnect in previous programs had been, in part, a defense mechanism for resisting change. Learning the reasons for her defensiveness helped her find healthier ways of coping.

SIMPLE MEDITATION

The simple meditations that start each chapter's exercise set can be a beneficial way to start the day by setting a mindful intention.

1. Find a comfortable position, sitting or lying down, that allows your body to fully relax. You can begin with your eyes focused on some neutral spot in the room, like a blank space on a wall.
2. Take five deep breaths. Make them well-paced and try not to rush. Breathe in and out without overly exerting yourself. Your breathing should feel natural and comfortable. Feel your body become more settled with each breath.
3. Find five things in the room that are a color of your choosing. For example, you might look for five things that are blue. Observe each item in turn, noticing the differences and similarities in their colors. How does the lighting change the look of each one? Which are the closest to each other in hue? Move your attention from one object to the next, noticing unique qualities about each.
4. Continue breathing slowly and comfortably throughout the exercise. If your mind wanders, return to paying attention to your breath. This will help you stay in the present moment, aware of what surrounds you.

Continue the meditation for up to five minutes.

EXERCISE 1: EATING MINDFULLY

To practice beginner's mindset, it can help to experience parts of your everyday life with a different intention. For this exercise, we'll use mindfulness to try and re-experience what it feels like to eat something you enjoy.

To begin, you'll need a quiet space and a piece of candy of your choice. If candy or sugar aren't part of your diet, you can choose some other small, flavorful snack like a piece of fruit.

1. Sit comfortably and take slow, deep breaths to bring your attention to the present moment.
2. Hold the candy in your hand. Focus your attention on it and observe how it looks. Experience the shape, the colors, the texture. Examine it from all sides. How does it reflect the light? How does its appearance change as you move it?
3. Focus on your sense of touch. How does the texture feel on your fingertips? Does the warmth of your hand cause it to soften or get sticky? If it's packaged, what does the packaging feel like? What are the sensations as you open the wrapper?
4. Place the candy in your mouth. What are the initial flavors and scents as your sense of taste is activated? How many separate flavors can you detect? Move the candy around, feeling its weight and texture on your tongue. How do the sensations change as the candy dissolves?
5. Try to make the candy last as long as possible. Examine the experience as if this was your first time eating candy, savoring each moment. What's the texture like as you eat it? Experience every sensation of the experience.

This exercise shows how an experience you typically consider to be automatic can feel new using beginner's mind. By slowing down and noticing the details, we're reminded to be more present. The same approach can help us manage difficult emotions, experiencing emotional moments as if they were happening for the first time, instead of responding automatically in

unhelpful ways.

EXERCISE 2: CHALLENGING THE NEGATIVE

This exercise will focus on testing your preconceived beliefs about yourself and your flaws, offering a new perspective.

Using the lines below, write down a negative belief that you have about yourself—something that you believe to be an undeniable fact.

Example: I have to do everything perfectly.

Next, write your justifications for supporting this belief, and possible reasons you could be wrong.

Example: I was late sending a birthday gift to my aunt because I kept looking for a scarf I was certain she'd like. This shows how I don't like to fail, or let people down, by making a wrong choice.

Now write an outcome of the negative belief.

Example: I have trouble starting projects, completing my responsibilities, and I get anxious about trying new things, because I get caught up in wanting to do everything flawlessly.

Last, rewrite the belief from the first column in a more positive light.

Example: I try my best in whatever I am doing, and want to do as good a job as I can. I just need to have reasonable standards and accept that no one is perfect.

Call on this exercise whenever you find yourself struggling with mindfulness or beginner's mind, or when you feel a need to deepen your connection with the present.

EXERCISE 3: REACTING TO THE UNEXPECTED

Many people struggling with implementing beginner's mind find it difficult to let go of what they think is going to happen. Such predictions get in the way of reacting in a helpful way to an unexpected situation. This exercise strengthens your beginner's mind by giving you a chance to respond again to difficult recent events.

Instructions: Choose three situations that you experienced in the past week in which something happened that you did not think would happen, but the outcome was difficult or painful to experience. You might describe something minor, like realizing that you forgot to bring home groceries for dinner, or a more serious example, like finding out a loved one is facing a health crisis.

For each experience, answer these questions:

1. What are your feelings regarding this instance? Did it scare you or worry you?

Event 1:

Event 2:

Event 3:

2. How did you handle the event?

Event 1:

Event 2:

Event 3:

3. How could you have handled it better?

Event 1:

Event 2:

Event 3:

It's important to remember that there is no "right" way to practice mindfulness. If you have invasive or unwanted thoughts during the meditations or prompts, allow that to be your experience, and understand that it's normal. Your experience is your experience, no matter what develops during the process. Mindfulness is about being present in your body and in the moment, without judgment from the outside world or from yourself.

EXERCISE 4: BEGINNER'S DIALOGUE

This will be an experiential exercise, prompting you to practice beginner's mind in conversation with some else. You'll experience how the principle works in a real-world situation.

To put this into practice, strike up a conversation with a friend or family member. Initiate a discussion on a topic of your choosing, a subject you're not too invested in. Encourage the other person to share their knowledge or beliefs on the topic and listen to them as a beginner would. Hear and try to understand what they are saying; don't think about what you're going to say next. Strictly listen and take in the other person's ideas.

For example, you might ask a friend a typical icebreaker question, like "What's your favorite music to listen to these days?" Your goal is to just listen to the answer as if you had never heard of the music they talk about. Let your beginner's mind ask questions: "What does this band sound like?" "What do you admire about their music?" "What's your favorite song?" These are just a few examples of how this might go; there are many more. Let your beginner's mind guide you.

Afterward, reflect on any assumptions that you had going into that conversation, and write them down.

Were there times during the conversation when you wanted to chime in with your own beliefs and knowledge? Describe below.

EXERCISE 5: REFLECTING ON BEGINNER’S MIND

Reviewing the information about beginner’s mind, what do you think are the most difficult emotions that come up when viewing the world through a new lens? Revisit this question as you strengthen your beginner’s mind.

MINDFUL MOMENT: BEGINNER’S MIND

Throughout the book *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, author Shunryū Suzuki details all aspects of how a beginner’s mind affects one’s ability to be zen. The principle, if read simply, makes it seem like just changing the way you think will lead to greater mindfulness. However, he points out that everything, from the way that you walk to how you speak to others, affects our ability to be more mindful. When beginning a meditation, intentionally finding a clear mind is important, but there should also be a focus on the seemingly small aspects, like where your hands are placed. This isn’t a call for perfection, or doing everything in exactly the “right” way. Rather, it means you should think about small details that may affect your overall feeling of mindfulness. If your posture is making you uncomfortable, change it. If you need a drink of water, go get it. Whether during a meditation exercise or during some other activity, you have the freedom to make whatever adjustments will help you move forward.

The beginner’s mind is excellent for identifying small details that may be holding us back. If you were to take 20 steps, at what point would you stop thinking about walking? Most of us wouldn’t even think about the processes involved in taking the first step. For a young child, however, walking is a

challenge to master. They begin by learning to crawl, then find ways to pull themselves up, then discover how to take steps while holding on to things. As adults, our brains don't have to figure out each motion consciously. This allows us to multitask while walking, but also disconnects us from the process.

Imagine the experience of walking those 20 steps while actively paying attention to each move, the way a child must. If you were monitoring how much weight was on each foot, how the rest of your body reacts to each step, you'd be more aware of details you may have been ignoring: a too-tight shoe, perhaps, or a tendency to stomp your feet. That's the promise of beginner's mind. It heightens our awareness of the current moment. With that heightened sense of awareness, we're also forced to acknowledge difficult emotions or processes in the moment that they occur.

In order to find balance after struggling with an addiction, we must begin to view as many experiences as possible as if they were new occurrences. By doing so, it's as if our worldview is reprogrammed to be rooted in being present. This sense of newness can be incredibly powerful, a feeling we may not have experienced since the initial stages of addiction.

AFFIRMATION

Affirmations are phrases or words we can repeat to ourselves to change our internal dialogue. By placing these positive driving phrases in our mind, we're able to overcome things that scare us. Each chapter will close with an affirmation that you can call to mind for extra strength whenever you need it.

It's easy to hear the negative voice in your head, reminding you of past mistakes and failures. True change can only occur when you become your own cheerleader. Try this affirmation as a reminder: **"Each moment is its own."** Know that no matter what happened previously, you have an opportunity in each moment to make your own decision without being a hostage to the past.



CHAPTER THREE

NON-JUDGMENT

Mindfulness allows us to manage day-to-day life without feeling driven by our emotions. Non-judgment helps this process by reminding us that we can feel emotions without needing to fix them. Emotions are normal, after all; they exist to help us navigate our world. When they're not helpful—when they create barriers to our present experience—we can decide how much attention to pay them. Non-judgment gives us the tools to allow these emotions to pass without placing value on them.

THE MINDFUL WAY

It may feel like we make many of our decisions solely as gut reactions. It's a trait that we inherit from our prehistoric ancestors, who had to make decisions accurately and instinctively as a matter of survival. Taking this into consideration, it's understandable why the human brain interprets thoughts and emotions with such urgency. In fact, the structures of the brain that are responsible for our emotional state also govern our ability to take action without thinking, interpreting our emotions and triggering reactions in a seamless fashion. Among other things, this is why when a triggering experience happens, you may feel an immediate need to respond.

But there are ways to retrain the brain, slow down this process, and experience our thoughts and feelings without needing to immediately react to them. Mindfulness skills give us the ability to regulate our response to emotional triggers. The non-judgment principle teaches us to be more aware of the thoughts we are having. We come to understand that thoughts which place blame, or that change the way we view a situation based on past events, are not part of our present experience.

The idea of non-judgment is particularly healing for people who live with addiction, who may feel constant judgment from themselves and the people around them. When we struggle with addiction, the judgment we have about our addiction can cloud our motivation to get help. We isolate ourselves from others because we worry about judgment we may receive. When we feel this occurring, mindfulness skills that support non-judgment can help us refocus our attention back to our needs.

Common Mental and Emotional Patterns

Challenges that arise with the principle of non-judgment can vary depending on what one's addiction struggle looks like.

People working on *recovery* may find it difficult to manage intense feelings. The principle of non-judgment creates connection with the present moment by teaching you not to place so much significance on the emotions you're

experiencing.

People struggling with an *addiction to food* may view a lack of control within their life as chaos, which feels threatening and uncomfortable. To counteract their negative feelings about chaos, they may use food to comfort themselves and to evoke a sense of control by choosing what food they're putting in their body. With non-judgment, they can learn to tolerate the chaos they feel without resorting to their addiction.

When feeling emotionally overwhelmed, people managing an addiction to *nicotine* may believe that smoking allows them to see their problems as a whole. Learning to implement the principle of non-judgment will help them balance these overwhelming thoughts and feelings, lessening the drive to smoke.

When learning to process thoughts or emotions mindfully, the absence of an addictive substance or behavior can leave us feeling like there should be another step. For example, if you're used to having *caffeine* to help you focus, you may feel like you're missing something without it. People who have rituals with their drug use, like those who use *intravenous drugs* (IV drugs), can find it unsatisfying not to have some physical activity as part of their coping strategy. This can be especially difficult for those struggling with behavior addictions, like *gambling*, since multiple actions have been part of their coping experience. Non-judgment will help you accept that feeling without needing to act on it. In such cases, learning to practice non-judgment with physical activity, like the [Everyday Mindfulness exercise](#), can help. You could also pair a mindfulness meditation with some simple physical activity, like walking.

Craig's Story

Craig has been sober, on and off, for the last ten years. He has tried multiple programs and has been in and out of treatment, but nothing he tries seems to stick. Craig finds that managing his addiction while he is in a program is easy, because he's held accountable by other people. Once a program is no longer a mainstay in his life, however, Craig finds himself acting out, especially when he's angry. Craig's temper is a driving force for his addiction: He's quick to anger and unable to table

his angry thoughts to make them stop. Whether triggered by people around him or his own frustrations, Craig's short fuse makes it hard for him to relax, pushing him back to addiction. When he was introduced to the principle of non-judgment, the idea that he didn't have to react to the judgments he had about himself really resonated. He's since been able to identify that his behaviors are rooted in his unconscious mind, which was reacting to perceived threats around him. This hypervigilance was interfering with Craig's ability to be present in the moment. His mindful practice of non-judgment has enabled him to manage his anger better and decrease his impulsiveness. He also feels more at ease overall.

SIMPLE MEDITATION

In this meditation, you'll be grounding your body by intentionally focusing on your breath. If your mind wanders, don't be concerned; this is normal. In fact, the exercise is intended to help you learn to handle intrusive thoughts. Simply notice the thoughts as they pass, and return your attention to your breathing.

1. Find a comfortable sitting location. Sit in a place where you feel relaxed and at ease (on the floor or in a chair). Position your arms comfortably with your hands resting in your lap.
2. While staying in your position, take a deep breath, and straighten your back and upper body, so that you're sitting in a comfortable but upright posture, facing forward, with no strain on your neck or shoulders.
3. Close your eyes, or if you prefer to keep your eyes open, let your eyelids relax and gently rest your vision on something in front of you.
4. Focus your attention on your breathing. Feel the sensations as you breathe in and out.
5. Breathe in, taking a five-count breath. Mentally count to five as evenly as you can, at a pace that doesn't require you to rush your breathing or slow it uncomfortably.
6. Breathe out to the same count of five, not exhaling too slowly or feeling

rushed. Your breathing should feel natural but intentional.

Settle into your breathing pattern, continuing for up to five minutes, focusing on the sensations of your breath. When your mind wanders, notice the thought, then return your attention to your breathing. Whenever you're ready to stop, just open or widen your eyes, wiggle your toes and fingers, and gently come out of the meditation.

This exercise is a useful way to practice allowing thoughts to pass by without feeling a need to automatically judge and react to them. If you try this exercise a few times a week, you'll gradually increase the amount of time that you're able to be in a meditative state.

EXERCISE 1: REWRITE YOUR THOUGHTS

For this exercise, we'll be focusing on understanding judgmental thoughts. Choose one day to record three judgmental thoughts that you have about yourself during the course of the day's activities; write the thoughts down or capture them with your smartphone's notes app.

Afterward, record the thoughts in the left-hand column provided.

Example: I'm a failure because I relapsed.

In the second column, write down any feelings you had and actions you wanted to take (or did take) because of each thought.

Example: Shame, guilt, being triggered to use again.

In the third column, write any objective facts related to each judgmental thought.

Example: I did relapse, two weeks ago, and I had to restart my program.

In the fourth column, rewrite each initial thought, taking a non-judgmental viewpoint, applying the facts and information gathered in the other columns.

Example: The feeling of failure is a result of a past decision, it's not connected to my current state. I can let that feeling pass without being forced to hang on to the feeling.

This exercise will help you understand why we create judgments and how

doing so affects our feelings and behaviors. When you are done with this exercise, you will be better at practicing taking judgmental thoughts and changing them to non-judgmental thoughts. Doing so will help you to react more calmly when these thoughts come up.

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EXERCISE 2: LEAVES ON A TREE

For this exercise, we will use a 10-minute guided meditation to practice

letting go of unnecessary thoughts and emotions.

1. Find a comfortable sitting position, in a place where you can easily relax (on the floor or in a chair). Set a timer for five minutes. Rest your hands in your lap with your arms relaxed. While staying in your position, take a deep breath and straighten your posture.
2. Take a deep calming breath. As you breathe out, close or relax your eyes.
3. Imagine a big tree in a meadow. Detail the tree in your head. Notice the size and length of its branches, the leaves hanging daintily, marking the edge of the tree's growth. Take it all in.
4. Focus on your breath as you envision the tree in your mind. Continue breathing in a relaxed manner, steadily pace your breathing in and out, feeling the sensations of breathing.
5. As you notice your mind wandering, picture the distracting thoughts coming to rest on the leaves of your tree. See each thought or feeling land on a leaf. Watch the leaves fall from the tree to the meadow, taking the thoughts with them, gracefully falling into the tall grass.
6. Continue this practice until time is up. Focus on your breath, and when a thought arises, see it fall gently to the ground on a leaf from the tree.

When time is up, slowly open your eyes and come out of the meditation.

Reflection Questions

1. How did it feel to imagine letting your thoughts and feelings go, without judging them in the moment?

2. What can you learn from this exercise regarding the way you think about the world?

3. Describe any differences you felt, emotionally or physically, when you finished the exercise compared to when you started.

EXERCISE 3: THE RESTAURANT

The ability to be non-judgmental in our life depends on our awareness of how we feel and react in a situation when we make a judgment. In this exercise, we'll practice using non-judgment by simply noticing how we feel, validating those feelings, and reflecting on them without changing them.

Sit in a comfortable position. Imagine yourself in a crowded restaurant. Picture what it looks like, detailing the tables, the sounds you hear, the aromas of the food. Take your place at a table. While sitting down, imagine you see a friend across the room. You wave to them, but they do not wave back.

Pause the visualization and describe your feelings in this moment:

During the visualization, when your friend did not wave back after seeing you, what were you thinking?

If this had actually happened in real life, how do you think your thoughts and feelings in the moment would have affected you?

This exercise is good to repeat after you feel like you're making progress in practicing mindfulness and non-judgment. Reflecting on the visualization strengthens your understanding of what it means to experience a non-judgmental attitude.

Encouraging Words

In this chapter, many of the exercises are challenging because you're beginning to view your thoughts and feelings differently than you're used to. It takes practice to harness these skills, but with time, this way of thinking can become your new normal. Even if you sometimes find yourself feeling frustrated or defeated, keep at it. You can achieve mindfulness successfully with practice.

EXERCISE 4: EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS

The practice of mindfulness isn't limited to meditative exercises. By placing one's attention in the present moment, it's possible to enact mindfulness while doing almost anything. In this exercise, you'll put mindfulness into practice during an everyday activity.

1. Pick an activity that you enjoy doing. Choose something that's relaxing and easy to focus on. Examples might include *knitting*, *coloring*, *drawing*, *painting*, or *gardening*.
2. Put away all distractions. Turn off electronics, gather the materials you need and find a quiet place for your activity. Set a timer for 10 minutes.
3. Begin the activity. As you perform the actions, focus on the physical sensations—what you see, hear and feel, and the motions you make. When you notice your thoughts wandering, simply acknowledge the thoughts and let them pass, then focus back on the task at hand. Continue until time is up.

Reflection Questions

1. What types of thoughts did you notice during the activity?

2. Were any of them judgments about the past or present?

3. How did it feel to allow those judgments to come and go while continuing the activity?

EXERCISE 5: CHALLENGING THE JUDGMENT

Think of a time when you acted reactively due to a judgment you believed to be true. Outline what happened before and after the event. From what you know about non-judgment, try describing how this situation could have been different if you were able to be more mindful at the time.

MINDFUL MOMENT: NON-JUDGMENT

As Jon Kabat-Zinn describes it, we have a need to unconsciously react to and categorize our emotions. As we go about our day, our brain is constantly taking in information, prioritizing certain feelings that arise in our minds and discarding others. We're naturally drawn to people and experiences that increase our positive feelings, while we avoid negative emotions and ignore neutral experiences almost entirely. While this process is going on, the brain is also using past experiences as a guide to categorize what we're experiencing. But if you've experienced addiction, your brain struggles to decide if an emotion you're feeling is a normal reaction, or an intense, addiction-related emotional craving. This struggle can feel overwhelming in the moment.

Practicing the principle of non-judgment enables us to acknowledge that struggle, recognizing that these thoughts and emotions are there, without the need to act on them. Through the principle of non-judgment you can decide, for example, that a situation made you feel bad, validate that feeling, and then allow the bad feeling to pass with time. We're not forced to react to anything that is unhelpful to our present. Non-judgment can feel like relinquishing all control, but in practice we are intentionally positioning ourselves to feel more in control of our present experience than ever before. Negative thoughts and feelings no longer command our attention.

AFFIRMATION

Being in recovery is hard. There are intense moments that seem overwhelming. Some days it may feel like even a second lasts a lifetime. Something to remember is that each moment is different from the last. The phrase **“This will pass”** can be a powerful affirmation when you feel like you have no strength to fight against the intense feelings of the moment. Use it as a reminder that whatever you're feeling is temporary, and will change.



CHAPTER FOUR

ACCEPTANCE

This principle of mindfulness can be difficult to grasp at first. Doesn't enacting change mean we have to disapprove of the way things are? Can we accept our present experience while also striving toward managing addiction? What the principle of acceptance really means is accepting the self in its present state. Acceptance shows us that in order to be fully present, we have to acknowledge whatever the present looks like.

THE MINDFUL WAY

Acceptance is looking at ourselves clearly, as we really are. Sometimes when we're in pain, we may avoid that reality. We numb and disregard our feelings, fearing that if we looked at ourselves clearly, we'd be unable to handle the truth. However, actively avoiding this truth takes effort and distracts us from focusing on our journey to recovery. Avoiding halts our growth, because we don't process things the way we need to. Acceptance allows us to move forward: You can't get through or around an obstacle if you don't admit that it's there.

In terms of addiction, acceptance helps us to see our present selves, and our present state, clearly. This principle of mindfulness is especially helpful for people struggling with addiction, because it counters one of addiction's biggest consequences: loss of control. Because addiction interferes with so much of one's existence, and becomes the reason behind so many decisions, many people in recovery worry that they won't be able to face the reality of what it's done to their life. But accepting loss of control is the healthy way to respond. Research done at Australia's Deakin University, for example, studied loss of control in elderly people who were moved to long-term care facilities. Those who learned acceptance of their situation reported greater rates of life satisfaction. These results support the idea that when we feel we are losing control of our life, our discontent is eased if we're able to accept our situation and sit with the difficult emotions that come with the loss of control.

Common Mental and Emotional Patterns

People dealing with *alcohol addiction* may not consider their drinking to be "as bad as other people." This comparison can act as a barrier to them clearly understanding their use, because their perceptions are clouded by other people's experiences. Mindful acceptance of our struggle removes the need to define what our life should look like based on the lives of others.

If someone is living with an *addiction to opioids*, they may decide that their

drug use is a way to manage previous injuries or chronic pain. This belief can keep them from seeing the effect of the drug on their life. They struggle with lessening the dose or asking for help because they feel ill-equipped to do without the drug. The principle of acceptance can help bring a closer connection with the self, clarifying the drug's true impact.

A person with an addiction to *gambling* may rationalize that their behavior is reasonable because it's not putting their family in immediate financial risk. This type of rationalizing can lead to making bigger and bigger bets, until financial jeopardy is inevitable. By viewing this situation with acceptance, they can see their gambling addiction for what it is.

Someone with an addiction to *cocaine* may conclude that they don't have a problem because they only use the drug socially. They may not recognize a growing need to keep using in order to be active in their life. The principle of acceptance removes this type of weakness by providing a clear look at what's really happening, and how addiction is affecting their life in the moment.

Mariah's Story

On the outside, Mariah seems to be stable and have all of her responsibilities in place. She takes her children to their activities, manages her own business, and has a long-standing marriage. However, a closer look shows how her sex addiction interferes with her life. She's active on affair dating sites and keeps multiple affairs going at one time. Mariah describes herself as living two separate lives. As she began working through a mindfulness program, she struggled to find acceptance and connection between the person she showed to others and the person she felt she actually was. This disconnect was a result of struggling to accept and forgive choices that she'd made in the past. She noticed that when she began advocating for her needs, she began to allow herself to accept herself and her experiences, despite the repercussions of her actions.

SIMPLE MEDITATION

This guided meditation will connect the idea of acceptance to a visual image.

1. Take a comfortable seated position with your hands resting in your lap. Set a timer for five minutes.
2. Take some deep breaths and repeat this phrase in your mind: “I accept myself as I am currently.” Close or relax your eyes.
3. Envision a mental image that’s a symbol of acceptance to you. Choose something from nature that’s beautiful even though it hasn’t reached its future potential yet. Examples include *a caterpillar* or *a budding flower*.
4. Keep breathing with slow, steady breaths while you take stock of the beauty that is acceptance. Continue until time is up.

EXERCISE 1: FIND THREE THINGS

For this exercise, find three things in your immediate environment that are imperfect, whether it’s due to their appearance, the memories that come up when you look at them, or because they just don’t seem to fit with the surroundings.

Now, find acceptance of each object by pointing out three positive or interesting things about it. Try to focus on facts when describing it. Say these things out loud or quietly to yourself.

Reflection questions:

1. What thoughts came to mind when you were trying to accept your first object?

2. Did the exercise become easier as you continued?

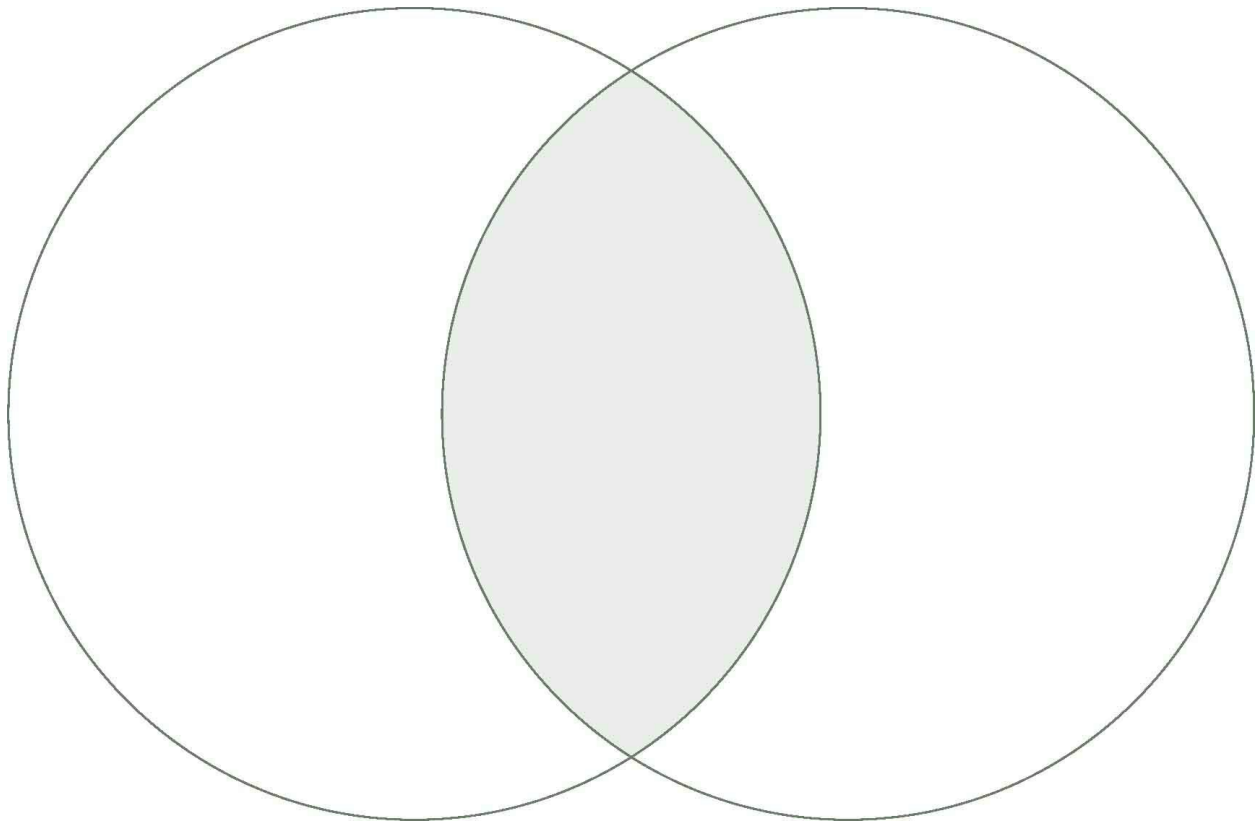
3. How does using the principle of acceptance affect the way that you view yourself?

Practice this exercise weekly, and in different settings, giving yourself many different opportunities to apply acceptance. For example, if you're out walking, you might find a twig, a leaf, and a rock. Look at each and think about what makes them unique and interesting.

EXERCISE 2: TWO CIRCLES

Acceptance involves looking at our patterns of thoughts and behaviors to better understand ourselves. For this exercise, you will use the diagram below to compare how you would describe yourself versus how others describe you. (If you want more space to write, copy the diagram onto a larger sheet of paper.)

1. In the left circle, write down the words you would use to describe yourself. In the right circle, write down the words that others would use to describe you. Feel free to ask someone in your life to describe you, if you're unsure of what to write in that circle.
2. Consider the two lists you've written. In the overlapping area, copy the characteristics that appear in both circles. Add any other characteristics that apply to both descriptions of you.



EXERCISE 3: EXAMINING AVOIDANCE

This exercise has been adapted from Russ Harris's book *The Happiness Trap*. You'll use a mix of questions and prompts to better understand how avoiding and numbing your negative feelings affects your behavior. Respond to each prompt honestly, taking as much time as you need.

1. Write down the ways that you avoid painful thoughts, feelings, and memories. Include substances, actions, or ways of thinking that you use to relieve unpleasant feelings.

2. Generally, how long do these activities delay the negative feelings? How soon do they return?

3. List scenarios in which using these avoidance techniques *increased* the negative thoughts and feelings you had about yourself. For example, your negative feelings may have worsened because you missed an important event, or your avoidance behavior kept you from meeting a deadline.

4. After examining your thoughts and actions in these examples, do you think this way of coping helped you accept yourself and your life? Why or why not?

Encouraging Words

Acceptance is something that's already happening within your mind. The brain is naturally able to see itself clearly—acceptance is about tuning in to this capacity we all have. Although acceptance can be difficult to access, trust that because this is something the brain naturally does, you will be able to make it part of your mindful practice. Learning to see the whole picture of yourself will increase your confidence and self-esteem, allowing you to appreciate all the traits and intricacies that you're made of.

EXERCISE 4: BODY SCAN

This exercise is a way to strengthen your connection with your body, which will help you accept how you feel in the moment.

1. Find a comfortable position, sitting or lying down. You can even do this exercise in bed when you first wake up in the morning or as part of your pre-sleep ritual.

2. Begin a consistent breathing pattern that feels comfortable: not so fast that you are out of breath, but not so slow that it feels forced. Focus attention on your breathing; feel the air moving in and out.
3. When you've established a steady breathing pattern, close or relax your eyes.
4. Bring awareness to a specific part of your body. If you like, you can start with your feet. Or begin with an area that you feel particularly aware of at the moment. Check in on that area, noticing the pulses, twitches, and unintentional movements that occur. Focus on any sensations in that part of your body: tightness, soreness, pain, warmth, even the feeling of your clothing against your skin. If nothing comes to mind, notice that, too. Just accept whatever state that area of your body is in.
5. Move on to other areas of your body, checking in with each part without feeling obligated to change its current state. You can move your attention methodically from your feet up to your head, or move your attention around however you wish. If you find your mind wandering, accept those thoughts, and gently refocus on a body part. Continue until you've scanned your entire body.

EXERCISE 5: FINDING ACCEPTANCE

What are some ways that you can use the pillar of acceptance when you interact with others? How can you begin to use this same strategy toward yourself? As an example, consider two different people, someone you love and someone you don't like. Find something about each of them that you can admire. Next, reflect on your own strengths and aspects of yourself that you're not proud of.

MINDFUL MOMENT: ACCEPTANCE

If you're struggling with an addiction, you may sometimes imagine having a different life. You picture being able to accept yourself because you're the person you want to be, or because you were able to make different choices. Often, we lack connection to this ideal person because we're unable to connect even with our current self.

Acceptance encourages a big-picture way of looking at the self. It cultivates reconnection with who you are now, increasing your present understanding of yourself. Acceptance encourages true self-exploration, helping us manage and direct our thoughts, emotions, and patterns of behavior.

Carrying disapproving beliefs about our present self means disregarding our own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. What if you told your best friend that you wouldn't listen to anything about their past and would only focus on their future potential? Not only would you be discounting everything that shaped who they are, you would be ignoring their most innate, unique characteristics. (Which your friend would probably consider quite dismissive, if not downright insulting.) By learning to use acceptance, we gain the ability to look at ourselves, understand our faults, and appreciate the person we are in this moment. We can say, "I understand why these faults exist, which explains my behavior patterns, but this is me, and that is enough."

In his book *Full Catastrophe Living*, Jon Kabat-Zinn suggests that cultivating acceptance allows healing to begin because we are fully seeing ourselves for what we are. Prior to this occurring, people use much of their energy to focus on avoiding their unpleasant parts. Using avoidance to keep away from triggers and memories of traumatic events can create a barrier between what we believe is going on and what is really bothering us. Learning to manage addiction, instead of avoiding the negatives, increases our understanding of how much these negative emotions are interfering with our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

You may have noticed an ongoing theme in this book: People struggling with addiction may be unable to manage intense emotions, because the addiction becomes an automatic way to numb, hide from, or avoid intense feelings. For some, the fear of what may come when addictive behaviors are no longer available makes mindful acceptance a difficult concept to understand. But

acceptance connects us with our true selves, which includes appreciating the strides we've made and acknowledging our strengths. It enables us to focus on our wants and needs in the moment, keeping us grounded and allowing us to work toward finding the good parts in our experience.

AFFIRMATION

This chapter is all about learning to view the self with unbridled acceptance, despite what that truth may look like. It's about accepting both your strengths and faults in order to gain a better understanding of the self as a whole. An affirmation that can be helpful when working on this mindfulness pillar is **"I am worthy."** Use this phrase to remind yourself that despite what difficulties you've been through, you're still worthy of good things in your life.



CHAPTER FIVE

PATIENCE

When you read a story, there's a sequence to follow. The author has the freedom to arrange the twists and turns of the plot in calculated ways. The reader has the freedom to skip around, but generally agrees to follow the progression set by the author and read from beginning to end. In return, the reader expects the story to feel complete. If the writer leaves out something important, or the characters lack believable details, or the ending doesn't make sense, the reader can feel disconnected from the words on the page.

Cultivating patience in our life is a way of staying connected to the story we're living, a story in which we are both writer and reader. When we try to skip parts of our story, even if they're unpleasant, we feel disconnected from ourselves. We lose sight of what went on and how we got here, as if we were characters dropped into a novel without a convincing backstory. In this chapter, we will discuss ways to implement patience, and by doing so deepen our understanding of our own powerful story.

THE MINDFUL WAY

Patience is a virtue, or so they say. Merriam-Webster defines *patient* as “being able to bear pains or trials calmly or without complaint.” Although a succinct definition, there’s complexity in the beginning phrase: “being able.” Humans as a species have profound resiliency, which allows us to withstand astronomical hardship. The ability to handle what life throws at us is a capacity that’s present for everyone. The difficulty, though, is in accessing that ability. Patience is one of the coping skills that helps us during our pains and trials; by being patient, we are validating our current state instead of acting out against it. But it would be unhealthy to be patient all of the time, as there are many cases when it’s beneficial to take action and make a change. So learning patience is about learning balance.

To fully understand how patience and addiction are connected, let’s review different types of patience. According to psychologist Sarah Schnitker of Baylor University, there are three different kinds of patience:

Interpersonal patience has to do with other people; it helps you deal with their interruptions in your daily life and manage your emotions in the face of their shortcomings. For someone coping with addiction, interactions with other people may serve as triggers for drug use. Another person’s presence may serve as a reminder of negative thoughts and emotions we try to avoid. Without sufficient interpersonal patience, succumbing to the addiction may seem like the only way to get rid of those feelings.

Life-hardship patience is employed when external forces create barriers in our lives that we have to overcome. An eviction notice, or even something ostensibly positive like a new job opportunity, requires us to face new challenges. For someone with an addiction, life-hardship patience is needed to handle the emotional disturbance of these kinds of events, or they’ll feel a need to numb or avoid their feelings using an addictive substance or behavior.

Daily hassle patience describes our tolerance for mundane delays and

obstacles that come up in our daily lives and are out of our control. These situations are mostly unavoidable: waiting for a website to load, having to cook dinner before being able to eat, or being put on hold after calling a customer service number. These frequent, small challenges require significant patience because there's not much we can do to immediately change them. People who are in the throes of an addiction tend not to develop this kind of patience, because they use an addictive substance or behavior as a substitute. Once in recovery, they'll need to rebuild their atrophied patience skills in order to cope with daily hassles.

It was once thought that lack of patience is simply due to a lack of willpower, but newer research casts that idea in doubt. One study directed by psychology researcher Adrianna Jenkins, PhD, found that we can increase our patience by practicing specific skills. Jenkins found that when these skills are not practiced—as is often the case during addiction—tolerance for obstacles lessens. The research found that the skill-building tools which increased patience the most involved imagining ways to implement patience. People diagnosed with an addiction are often stigmatized as generally lacking the willpower to say no. But this research is evidence that having patience is mainly the result of cultivating it in daily life, not a consequence of one's inherent willpower. We can all create a deeper level of patience in our lives, including those of us managing addiction.

COMMON MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL PATTERNS

Some struggling with *pornography addiction* may have fears that by stopping, they will experience a decrease in sexual pleasure. This worry is increased by a fear that their relationship may dissolve as a result, thereby leaving them alone with their thoughts. These worries, although valid, can be extreme in the moment, driving a feeling of overwhelming fear that keeps the addiction going. The principle of patience can help to keep these feelings in perspective and so the fear becomes more manageable.

Some people who struggle with *inhalant abuse* find that their thought process seems slowed and foggy when withdrawal starts. They wonder if their brain

functioning will ever return to what it was. The principle of patience can help to make this change feel less scary by taking the timeline of expectation away. The worry about when things will return to what they used to be is gone, because there is an understanding that events will play out in their own time.

Fears, rationalizations, and disconnections are what keep people feeling stuck in a cycle of addiction. By practicing patience, we embrace these fears and remind ourselves that although barriers exist that interfere with our life, this is part of the process of the human experience.

Noelle's Story

Noelle is a 24-year-old horse trainer struggling with managing an addiction to heroin. She has been working on using mindfulness to help with her addiction and to increase her overall life satisfaction. Noelle has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and struggles with flashbacks because of it. When she began working on the pillar of patience, initially Noelle found it hard to allow things to happen at their own pace. Her ability to be patient took time to cultivate. But after she began implementing the pause and assess skill (see [the Pause and Assess exercise](#)), Noelle noticed that she did not feel as driven by her flashbacks. Developing patience helped her with difficult emotions, taking away the pressure to immediately fix the intense feelings that arose during her mindfulness exercises. Increasing her patience threshold empowered Noelle to feel more emotionally stable, even when situations around her felt overwhelming. Through her mindfulness practice, she gained a better understanding of herself overall.

SIMPLE MEDITATION

In this meditation, we'll be building on our mindfulness skills by adding the repetition of a meaningful word (also known as a *mantra*). Use of a mantra is a good way to quiet thoughts that interfere with mindfulness, as it helps refocus the brain to a specific state. Repeating the mantra guides our

overactive minds toward the word, which in turn quiets the brain. For this exercise, we'll be using the word *serene*. Serenity reminds us to remove expectations and accept our present state.

1. Focus on the word *serene*.
2. Find a comfortable upright sitting position. Take a quick body scan and relax any tense muscle groups.
3. Rest your hands softly in your lap and close or relax your eyes. Let your breathing slow to a comfortable, steady pace.
4. Begin repeating the mantra silently to yourself. Try repeating the word at different speeds. Find what pace feels most natural to you.
5. If unwanted thoughts come through your mind, bring them to your awareness and make a mental note to address them after the meditation.
6. Continue repeating the mantra until you feel grounded and focused.

You can repeat this exercise with the given mantra, or choose one more reflective of your current situation. In choosing future mantras, find a phrase or word that feels connected to what you are trying to accomplish. If you were trying to gain confidence in certain areas, for example, a word like *strength* could be used.

EXERCISE 1: PAUSE AND ASSESS

When we feel out of control—like we need to react quickly to something, and a decision cannot wait—this can indicate that intense feelings surrounding a situation are making it difficult to employ our patience skills. When this happens, we can practice increasing our patience by following the guide below. This exercise can be used specifically when you're feeling triggered, or when you're concerned about possibly relapsing. The intentional pause will help raise your awareness of your emotions, which will increase your self-confidence, enabling you to manage your reactions in a healthy way.

1. **Pause.** Literally stop what you're doing and be still. With your emotions activated, your instinct to act immediately in order to make the feeling go away can be very strong. Pausing allows the more thoughtful parts of your

brain to engage.

2. **Breathe.** Take in five deep breaths. This will help center and calm your mind while also helping to encourage a more mindful reaction.
3. **React.** Focus on the emotions you're feeling, and on what you believe you can do in the moment. Decide that you will react intentionally, which will give you confidence that your action will align with your values and beliefs.

When you're feeling emotionally heightened or in a state of relapse, remember to pause, breathe, and then react. This will help you make healthier decisions that are more in your control than an immediate emotional response.

Encouraging Words

Sometimes being patient is the last thing that you want to do when it comes to managing addiction. The exercises can be difficult, because along the way you may experience negative feelings that you immediately want to avoid. But those feelings are there to signal a change that needs to happen, and ultimately, they'll help you to gain a better understanding of yourself. If you feel like you're rushing through an exercise, take a breath and remind yourself that you can do this successfully, as long as you keep trying.

EXERCISE 2: RESILIENCY TIMELINE

Sometimes it helps to step back and see our passage from where we've been to where we are now. For this exercise, you'll fill in a personal timeline of the obstacles you've faced in your life. You can use the line provided, or draw your own on a blank sheet of paper. The left end represents the beginning of your life; the right end represents where you are now.

Beginning with your earliest memories, list the difficult obstacles you've had

to contend with. Mark each one on the line, noting the date (or as close as you can come to it). On top of the timeline, write a brief description of each situation: “Lost a loved one,” “Had to move away from my support system,” “Missed an opportunity,” etc. Under the line, in a different color, describe how you reacted to each obstacle. When you’re finished, circle the times when you handled the situation in a way that you’re proud of.

A horizontal timeline with six dots. Above the line, three dots have vertical lines extending upwards to four horizontal lines each. Below the line, three dots have vertical lines extending downwards to four horizontal lines each.

EXERCISE 3: PATIENCE CHECKLIST

Part of learning a new mindfulness skill is being able to identify the current state of your body and mind, so you can see where you’re starting from. For this exercise, use the first checklist below and check the most relevant feelings that come up for you when you are feeling impatient. In the second checklist, check each box for any coinciding feelings when you’re feeling patient.

When I am feeling impatient, I experience:

☐ Feeling like I am always running behind

- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ General nervousness
- ☐ Snap decision-making
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Anger when faced with an obstacle
- ☐ Restlessness
- ☐ Tense muscles
- ☐ Jaw clenching
- ☐ Clenching fists
- ☐ Foot shaking
- ☐ Frequent time-checking
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

When I am patient I feel:

- ☐ General calmness in body
- ☐ Steady breath
- ☐ Balanced thoughts
- ☐ Relaxed muscles
- ☐ Stillness
- ☐ Deep breathing
- ☐ Intentional decision making
- ☐ Able to notice details
- ☐ Confidence
- ☐ Energized
- ☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

Reflection questions:

1. In the first list, which feelings are the most noticeable to you when they are happening?

2. In the second list, which feelings are least noticeable in the moment?

3. Were there any experiences on either list that were surprising to you? How so?

EXERCISE 4: DIFFICULT SITUATIONS ACTION PLAN

Often, it can be hard to recognize when a reaction we have to a situation is justifiable or rooted in our inability to practice patience. This exercise will help you better understand your emotional and physical responses in different situations in order to identify when and how to implement this pillar. It will guide you through examining why you feel rushed to act, resulting in impulsive decision making, by giving you awareness and allowing you to make a plan of action toward healthy coping skills.

In the space provided, describe difficult situations that triggered behaviors from you in the past that you feel could have benefited from practicing patience. Then, write a breakdown of these behaviors in detail—what they

are, and how you feel before, during, and after the experience. Lastly, create a plan of action outline for yourself to help you cultivate the principle of patience during a difficult time. Practice this exercise with several different scenarios over the course of a few weeks to give yourself a better understanding of your behavior patterns. Return to this exercise whenever you are struggling with impulsivity or feelings of disconnect with the present and need to increase patience in the moment.

1. Think of a time when you felt a need to numb or avoid the feelings associated with the experience you were having. What was happening in this situation that drove you away from the principle of patience?

2. Describe your behaviors during this difficult moment.

Examples: having the impulse to use, anger, avoidance.

3. Action Plan: List healthy coping alternatives to use when difficult situations arise.

EXERCISE 5: IDEAL VS. REAL

Imagine the most ideal version of yourself implementing patience. What characteristics would that ideal version exhibit? How would that person view life differently than you do now?

MINDFUL MOMENT: PATIENCE

Jon Kabat-Zinn defines patience as a type of wisdom that accepts that things must happen at their own pace and timeline. There are reasons that we do not automatically skip to the ending of a TV series after the first episode: You'd hate to miss all of the details in the storyline. Being patient allows us to appreciate the moment, because we have a knowledge that this moment is necessary in order for us to get where we need to go.

If you were to view a single atom, you might wonder what its purpose is. One atom seems no more notable than another. But when put together, they create everything around us. Often, important things happen when we least expect it, and they are ultimately just fleeting experiences that make up the whole of our existence. When placed all together, these fleeting moments create the masterpiece that is our life. Mindfulness is being able to see the bigger picture, and patience is being able to appreciate each moment within that picture.

AFFIRMATION

The affirmation for this pillar can be helpful because it reinforces calm, stress management, and trusting in the process in order to move on. Try using the phrase **“There is purpose to the process.”** Let this affirmation serve as a reminder of the larger picture, and a reinforcement when you feel like it's hard to be patient because you're not progressing as quickly as you'd like.



CHAPTER SIX

TRUST

If you were to search the word *trust* on the Internet, you would get millions of results about how to gain, use, and understand it. Advice from all over the world would come flooding to your attention, claiming to teach you how to better understand trust. However, for this chapter and for mindfulness purposes, you will be asked to look within yourself and at your needs and beliefs, to find your own version of trust.

THE MINDFUL WAY

In the world of Buddhism, there are few voices as well-known as the Dalai Lama. In his book *The Art of Happiness*, he describes trust as having two parts—a trust in others and a trust in ourselves. He notes that having trust in others allows us to connect with them, by what he describes as being able to open our inner door. On the other hand, having trust in the self allows greater awareness and understanding toward our own emotions and moods. The Dalai Lama goes on to say that when both forms of trust are strong, we have a sense of a true inner home. From this home, we understand and interpret our own world-view, and also interpret the actions of others. When we allow others in by trusting them, we are able to fully engage and be present. When we are untrusting of others, we have a sense that we need to be on guard, which keeping us from being present in the moment while interacting with another person.

When we struggle with addiction, we may feel fearful of trusting others because of incidents in the past, when we've been hurt by others we trusted. Sometimes this general mistrust is perceived as resistance to help. Implementing mindfulness, and focusing on the pillar of trust, allows us to see the intentions of others more clearly. This can create a sense of confidence in our connection with other people, allowing us to open that inner door.

When we are untrusting of ourselves, we may disregard and second-guess our experiences. We find it difficult to be present, because there is a constant questioning of our own perceptions. When we are struggling with addiction, even trusting our own needs can seem scary. Lack of trust in yourself is another expression of being disconnected from yourself and your life. Journalist Johann Hari has spoken about how disconnection fuels addiction: When we feel connected to ourselves and people who treat us well, life is more enjoyable, and an addictive substance or behavior is less appealing. Conversely, addiction keeps people from being connected, which in turn feeds into their need to lean on the addiction. Mindfulness offers a way out of that trap, strengthening your connection to the self, so you can learn to trust yourself and others.

COMMON MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL PATTERNS

People battling *opioid addiction* may struggle with trusting their own emotions when they're not using. They may also have difficulty with trusting others to ask for help, in fear it may create a barrier in their relationship. Once they cultivate trust in themselves and others, they can feel a sense of relief in being able to manage their addiction while being supported.

People struggling with an addiction to *video games* may be unable to trust others who tell them that their behavior is problematic. Because other people are able to play games without having intense symptoms of addiction, admitting that it's creating problems in their lives makes them feel like something is "wrong" with them. Mindfulness can reestablish their trust in their own thoughts and feelings about their behavior.

A common pattern for those struggling with an addiction to *methamphetamine* may be that they don't trust the negative feelings associated with their drug use, because when they are using, life feels euphoric. When the principle of trust is harnessed, it creates a balanced understanding of feelings that are connected to reality, versus those distorted by drug use.

People having problems quitting *cannabis* use may be untrusting of any information stating that it has negative health effects. They may rationalize that the type of cannabis they buy is of better quality. They may believe that if the substance was really that detrimental, it would not be legalized anywhere. Developing mindful trust can help them find accurate information not colored by their own bias. By learning to trust our own reality and knowledge of ourselves, we are better able assess others' trustworthiness, because we're viewing our needs and ideas honestly.

Damon's Story

Damon, an aspiring rap artist, spends much of his time focusing on ways to harness his craft. During a long recording session, a friend told him to mix codeine with soda as a way to loosen up when performing.

Damon started drinking the mixture each time he recorded, and it quickly began to interfere with other aspects of his life. He also found that while the drug relaxed him, it was keeping him from writing music in between recording. Damon began using mindfulness as a way to feel more connected with his music. While working on the principle of trust, he found it difficult to believe in his musical ability without the use of the drug. He had grown so dependent that he struggled to perform without it. By practicing guided imagery about managing his anxious feelings, Damon has been able to relax without relying on his addiction. With mindfulness, he was able to trust in his own ability again, find better ways to manage his emotions in the moment, and continue working toward his goals.

SIMPLE MEDITATION

For this simple meditation, we will identify objects in your present awareness using four of our senses. You'll use your environment as a guide to help increase your present awareness.

To start, sit comfortably and take five deep breaths in and out. Look around and take note of your surroundings. Work through the instructions below at your own pace, responding out loud or in your mind.

1. List five things you see.
2. List four things you feel.
3. List three things you hear.
4. List two things you smell.
5. Name one accomplishment you're proud of.

Finish with five deep breaths.

This exercise will help ground you to your immediate environment, building trust by strengthening your connection to what's happening in the present.

EXERCISE 1: SITTING WITH THE SELF

When we don't trust ourselves, we can end up relying on avoidance and numbing behaviors to handle our difficult thoughts and emotions, which in turn keeps us from being able to connect with our true selves. For this exercise, we will practice sitting with the self as a way of learning trust. Set a timer for 10 minutes before you begin.

1. Find a comfortable sitting position. Relax any tense muscles and rest your hands in your lap.
2. Find your breath. Focus on your breathing, making it as consistent and deep as is comfortable. Feel the sensations of breathing in and out.
3. Be still. Sit with your thoughts and body. Pay attention to any thoughts and emotions that arise, without judging them. Simply notice them and let them pass by, and return your attention to your breathing. Focus on just being present with yourself in the moment.

When time is up, gently bring yourself out of the meditation and reflect on the following questions.

Reflection Questions

1. How did it feel to sit with your thoughts and emotions?

2. Are there any areas of your body or mind that feel more affected than others by this exercise?

EXERCISE 2: APPRECIATING THE WINS

Trust is cultivated when we identify both positives and negatives about our present. For this exercise, you will reflect on specific times and discuss positive experiences you have had. The goal is to build up as many facts as

you can which support being able to trust yourself.

Think about the last 24 hours. Write down three wins that you had.

Think about the last week. Write down three wins that you had.

Think about the last 12 months. Write down three wins that you had.

The definition of a win is up to you. For some, taking a shower or brushing their teeth may be a success for the day. For others it might be finding a job, stating their needs to someone else, or sticking up for themselves.

EXERCISE 3: BE YOUR OWN EXPERT

Part of understanding self-trust is learning to accept and validate your experience. This exercise is a guided imagery meditation that will place you in the teaching role of helping others to manage addiction. When we imagine teaching others this concept, we increase our confidence and knowledge about the subject. When we think about telling others what we think will help, we are also validating what has worked for us.

Imagine you are giving a presentation about what success looks like when managing addiction in everyday life, based on your own experiences. Fill the room with people who appreciate and respect you.

How would you guide people to be successful in this goal?

What are the three most important tasks for you in giving this presentation?

What worries or concerns come up when you think about being the expert of

your own recovery?

Encouraging Words

Finding trustworthy characteristics in yourself and others can be daunting but rewarding during your journey of exploration through the self. You may find that there are things about yourself that you didn't know, but now understand more fully. These exercises may change the way that you see yourself, or may give you more confidence in making choices than ever before. This can be an exciting journey to a new understanding of you.

EXERCISE 4: CREATING BOUNDARIES

Along with rebuilding our ability to trust, it's important that we put effort into creating healthy boundaries—that is, rules to keep ourselves from being used by others. Healthy boundaries allow us to connect with other people without feeling like we are being taken advantage of. For this exercise, you will create recovery boundaries in order to have stronger feelings of self-trust in managing your addiction.

Respond to the writing prompts below, taking as much time as you need.

Boundaries for myself:

Examples: Separating my emotions from those of other people; validating my emotions without trying to fix them.

Boundaries in social situations:

Examples: Not oversharing; feeling confident that I do not have to entertain people and can just be present.

Boundaries for family situations:

Example: Keeping toxic family members at a distance if I feel taken advantage of.

Things that can help me to keep these boundaries in place:

Example: Reviewing my boundaries before a social event.

EXERCISE 5: TRUSTING YOUR INSTINCTS

Think of a time when you felt confident in your gut to make a decision which was best for you. That moment in which you trusted yourself is an example of using the principle of trust in mindfulness. Describe how you knew to follow that gut instinct. What were you feeling in your body? What in your mind made it feel like the right decision? How can following these feelings help in the future?

MINDFUL MOMENT: TRUST

External motivators—money, food, achievements, or anything outside of ourselves—tend to be more superficial and short-lived than internal motivators—like starting our own business, reading a book that interests us, or collecting objects that we enjoy—which satisfy our internal needs. The principle of trust is the internal motivator that makes mindfulness possible. For instance, Jon Kabat-Zinn states that trust is necessary for mindfulness training, because you cannot achieve mindfulness without using your own intuition and trusting your own authority. Mindfulness is all about gaining a better understanding and appreciation for each of the small moments within your life. The only one who has the best knowledge of this moment is you.

The goal of mindfulness is being present in the moment, and in order to do so you must trust the experience of the moment. That trust gives us confidence in finding peace within our experience. This also sets us up for success in other areas of our life, because we first need to find trust in our own emotions, thoughts, and beliefs in order to trust external things. The ability to trust ourselves is a stepping-stone to being free of judgment and fear. Viewing the present experience with trust creates the peace of mind that we are on the right path, and doing what we believe to be right.

AFFIRMATION

This affirmation is a good reminder for cultivating trust: **“I’m my own expert.”** When repeating this phrase, focus on remembering that you’re able to trust your beliefs and validate your experiences because your abilities and knowledge are valuable. There is power in being an expert—own that part of yourself.



CHAPTER SEVEN

NON-STRIVING

Our modern way of life incentivizes goal-oriented behavior. But as we move from one goal to the next, we don't always know how to separate our lives from the goals we're pursuing. This fixation on goals can make non-striving a hard principle to grasp at first. A non-striving mindset values the state of *being* over the act of *doing*. When we have a "doing mindset," we require some form of validation of our actions in order to feel that we've accomplished something. But if we're in a "being mindset," we require only the experience itself to feel this same level of success.

THE MINDFUL WAY

We can think of the mind as having two separate but connected processes happening concurrently. The first, conscious thought, includes all the thoughts, ideas, and feelings that occur within our awareness. The second, subconscious thought, consists of thoughts, ideas, and feelings that are involuntary and automatic. The particulars of these two aspects of our mind have been, and continue to be, endlessly studied and debated in the scientific community. But whatever the nuances, what is known is that there's more happening within our brains than what we're overtly aware of. The principle of non-striving places equal importance to both the conscious and subconscious portions of our thinking, allowing the mind to be attracted to the things that are inherently good for it. Over time, non-striving encourages us to not struggle toward specific goals or directions, but rather to keep our positively driven thoughts to the forefront so they will guide our general well-being.

In *Full Catastrophe Living*, Jon Kabat-Zinn wrote that the best way to feel connected in our life is to stop directly striving to obtain a specific goal, and focus our attention on accepting each moment for what it is. He further states that by doing so, the mind will begin to find a way to meet these goals, without us having to overtly force it. The goals in question, however, are not necessarily the goals that we consciously believe we need to reach. Rather, they're the achievements that feel the most natural to our body. When we find an inherent connection to our world, our mind will instinctively follow it. Therefore, the principle of non-striving seeks to calm the controlling part of our brain, increasing our awareness of our environment. Then we'll be drawn toward experiences where all of our needs can be met: people who make us feel good, work that we find rewarding, hobbies that strengthen our skills and confidence.

An inherent problem with goals is that we stop when we reach them, never knowing if we could have gone further. But if goal-seeking is problematic, how do we achieve non-striving without working directly toward it? The trick is to find balance within this seeming contradiction. In order to gain greater overall mindfulness through non-striving, you do have to have a sort of

direction. But when trying to move in that direction feels frustrating, that can be an indicator to bring your focus back to the present moment. This keeps our actions intentional and gives us an appreciation of our experiences as they unfold.

For many people in addiction, the goal is to be successful in recovery. It takes courage to want to drastically change your life, and it takes even more resiliency to actually start working toward that objective. The principle of non-striving doesn't declare that having this goal is unworthy; the caution is for it to not become so all-encompassing that we lose the awareness toward the present moment. Non-striving is about how much of our conscious awareness is oriented to the goal, and how much we allow our connection to our world—cultivated by mindfulness—to draw us toward the goal without regard to a predetermined schedule or guideline.

The Stigma of “Addict”

Applying the term “addict” to a person who lives with addiction is stigmatizing and puts a label on someone based entirely on an outside observation. When someone labels us as an “addict,” it can feel like our entire worth is determined by our struggle with addiction. And the term carries significant negative connotations and stereotypes. Sometimes we apply this stigma to ourselves, creating a storm of negative emotions in which we feel we'll never be able to manage our illness. The term interferes with non-striving because it creates a state to either strive toward or against. If you find yourself caught up in this stigma, the simple meditations in this book can help you feel more fully grounded in the person you really are, outside of this label.

Common Mental and Emotional Patterns

While learning about this pillar, some people may feel a lack of direction for achieving what they want to achieve. As a result, they may find themselves getting stuck in unhelpful behaviors while they work to incorporate non-striving into their daily life. They may question what managing their addiction looks like. Someone trying to quit *tobacco*, for example, may find it

difficult to manage their addiction without striving, because they don't feel like they can trust their instincts without having clear goals. They may try to begin lessening their use, without a clear direction of what that means, only to find themselves falling back into old patterns of behavior. If this happens, reorienting to this principle can help them keep a focus on their needs, and trust their gut instinct, in order to manage their addiction.

Someone managing their addiction to *benzodiazepine* may find that implementing meditation when they feel emotionally escalated helps to decrease their use. But their body's physical symptoms of withdrawal from the drug can make focusing on non-striving in mindfulness very difficult. When this happens, understanding that this is part of the body's reaction to chemical changes can help them stay the course until it gets easier.

Someone working on using mindfulness to manage their addiction to *shopping* might expect that allowing only one specified spending week per month will enable them to better manage their desire to shop. However, they may find that throughout the month their emotions quickly become negative, and they have no outlet to cope. This frustration builds in part because of the preconceived notion that if they don't stay on the schedule they've set, they "fail." A non-striving mindset reframes any lapse in behavior as part of the process. This frees the person from having to harshly judge themselves based off of a bad decision.

Last, someone who has a history of *fentanyl* abuse may struggle with recovery using mindfulness because they wonder how they will be able to manage their chronic pain without the drug. They worry that when they begin to stop their use, their pain will flare and interfere with their life. Using the pillar of non-striving, they would be able to manage their emotions and experiences as they come, including any chronic pain. Non-striving keeps them focused on their experience in the moment, without projecting future difficulties on it. This enables them to acknowledge their physical experience as it is, and work on alternate ways of managing pain.

In each of these examples, not focusing on one's needs in the moment causes a disconnect, which leads the mind to return to old ways of dealing with uncomfortable emotions and mental patterns. In each case, the mindfulness principle of non-striving can give options outside of relying on an addictive substance or behavior.

Deidra's Story

Deidra began smoking cannabis as a way to hang out with her friends socially, because it calmed her nerves. She used it to feel calm in other situations, too: at work, before working out, and as a way to wind down when she got home. But when she wasn't smoking, Deidra found that her mind and emotions felt like a jumbled, chaotic mess. When her counselor urged her to begin using mindfulness practice instead of cannabis to calm herself, Deidra did not believe it would help. However, once she started practicing, she began to notice an almost immediate change in her focus and her connection with herself. She wanted to quit smoking but was finding it difficult to follow through with strict sober guidelines. As she learned more about non-striving, Deidra felt that the openness surrounding the principle was more in line with her needs. To cultivate non-striving in meditation, she would focus her mind to let go of any preconceived notions she had about herself and allow her mind to just be. When this occurred, she felt an immense sense of released pressure. Deidra noticed that even without making a goal of reducing her use, the decrease in stress and openness to the present moment inadvertently lessened how much she was smoking. By using non-striving, Deidra was able to focus on her bigger issues, while not having to evaluate her growth solely on her drug use.

SIMPLE MEDITATION

This brief, simple grounding exercise can be done anywhere there is stillness and quiet. The act of counting out loud within each breath will help you practice breathing slowly and steadily.

1. To begin, take a comfortable, seated position, hands resting in your lap. You can do the exercise with eyes closed or open.
2. Take in a big cleansing breath. Pause when you feel like you can't breathe in anymore.

3. Breathe out slowly. As you breathe out, say the number “one.” Continue breathing until you have let out all the breath.
4. Breathe in again, just as deeply as before.
5. As you breathe out, say the number “two” out loud.
6. Continue to breathe in and out until you reach the number five.

EXERCISE 1: STRIVING VS. NON-STRIVING

This exercise will help to identify feelings, thoughts, and ideas associated with non-striving by examining what striving behaviors feel like.

In first column below, write a goal you’re striving for or have tried to achieve in the past.

Examples: Wanting to master a new skill, like playing an instrument; working hard toward a job promotion; getting into better shape.

In the second column, write any thoughts that come up when you’re trying to reach that goal.

Examples: I want to find a healthier lifestyle. I want to be better at communicating.

In the third column, write any emotions that come up when you’re trying to reach that goal.

Examples: On edge, motivated, scared, excited.

GOALS	THOUGHTS	EMOTIONS
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Consider what you wrote, and in the lines below, discuss how you believe these things could affect addiction as a whole. Do they increase or decrease use? How do they affect triggers and cravings?

EXERCISE 2: YOUR NON-STRIVING PLACE

Non-striving can feel like an abstract concept. In this exercise, you'll envision a physical place that represents non-striving, which you can call to mind when feeling triggered by deadlines, goals, or strict timelines. Whenever you feel yourself being pulled emotionally, this meditation can ground you to the principle of non-striving.

To Prepare: For this meditation, you'll be asked to envision yourself in a place that signifies non-striving for you. Think about the term *non-striving* as a principle connected to feelings of being, freedom, and acceptance. If this principle were an actual place on Earth, where would it be? What would it look like?

If you need a prompt, think of the most peaceful place you can envision, where you feel comfortable and relaxed. This could be a real or imagined place, or based partially on something you know or remember: on a beach, on a mountain, in a favorite room, at a spa, in the middle of a field. It's a place where you can be yourself without the pressures of daily life.

1. Find a comfortable sitting position in a place free of distractions, where you feel safe to explore the mind.
2. Set a timer for ten minutes. Find a focus point in the room, a spot you can keep your attention on. Stay centered on it and take five breaths in and out. On the fifth breath, close or relax your eyes.
3. Imagine yourself in the non-striving place that you created in the preparation phase. Look around with your mind's eye and take in what it is like to be in this space. Imagine experiencing it with all your senses.

When time is up, come out of the meditation at your own pace. Take a few deep breaths while transitioning back to full awareness.

EXERCISE 3: BALANCED MIND WORKSHEET

Instructions: Read through the questions below, and answer based on how balanced you currently feel.

Do you feel overwhelmed most days? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Would you say that you constantly go from one thing to the next, non-stop? ☐

Yes ☐ No

Do your emotions get in the way of things that you enjoy? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does your brain feel foggy most of the time? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does your life feel unmanageable? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have “go-to” coping skills to use when you are stressed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you satisfied with the amount of connection you get from others? ☐ Yes
☐ No

When you are out with friends, do you have an easy time focusing on the present? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you afraid of what will happen if you’re left alone for too long? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does it feel like your mind tends to wander more often than you would like?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Looking at your answers, circle the three questions that seem to be causing the most disconnection within your life.

How would these things be changed by viewing them through non-striving? List at least three examples.

Adapted from the Lifestyle Balance Worksheet in *Overcoming Your Alcohol or Drug Problem: Effective Recovery Strategies Workbook*, 2nd edition, by Dennis Daley and G. Alan Mariatt.

Encouraging Words

Throughout your work on this principle, keep focused on the present, especially your reasons for exploring mindfulness. This work will be hard, but you can do it. You may feel like you’re fighting with your own mind. But remember to embrace your thoughts, because the way you think is

important. There is no perfect way of “doing” mindfulness. There is only connecting to and experiencing the moment. Keep in mind that your connection to non-striving is important, and useful to your growth as a whole.

EXERCISE 4: EXAMINE YOUR GOALS

For this three-part exercise, we will focus on how to rethink the goals that you may have had for managing your addiction. You’ll examine your thoughts about goals and explore how they relate to the idea of non-striving.

PART 1

List the goals you’ve made for managing your addiction. Be as specific as possible. If strong thoughts and feelings come up, observe them and stay connected to them without judgment.

Example: I want to be completely sober.

PART 2

After reviewing the goals that you’ve listed, examine what managing your addiction would look like if you were no longer focused solely on these goals. Be specific in describing the difference for each goal. Actively notice any differences in emotions while you work on this.

Example: If I were using a non-striving stance, this goal would be difficult to achieve, because there’s a lot of pressure to focus on this aspect of my addiction. It makes it seem that if I mess up once, I’m automatically failing. This will make me worry that I’ll continue to fail at finding peace in recovery. If I were thinking from a non-striving principle, I would focus on what recovery looks like across my whole life, not just the aspect of being

sober or not.

PART 3

How did the previous sections affect you emotionally? What thoughts came up? Reflect on this in the lines below.

Example: My goal felt strict and overwhelming, because I can't even envision a long period of time when I've been perfect at something. By viewing recovery through a non-striving lens, I feel better equipped to handle relapses if they happen, because success is about creating a healthier life in general.

EXERCISE 5: RESTORING THE CONNECTION TO THE SELF

Think of times in your past when you were driven by goals. Explore the nature of goal seeking, using these questions as a starting point.

How did living in this way change how you viewed the world around you?

How can using non-striving restore a connection with your own beliefs, ideas, and feelings?

Who was putting the expectations of obtaining these goals on you?

Did it affect other areas of your life? How did it affect basic aspects like eating, sleeping, or your relationships with others?

MINDFUL MOMENT: NON-STRIVING

The principal of non-striving, when implemented for dealing with addiction, is freeing. It allows each person to focus on their needs and wants for their life, as opposed to obsessing over various metrics of the addiction, such as how much we're using or the feelings associated with it. With non-striving, growth is encouraged not only with regard to the addiction, but for the individual as a whole. This is useful if, during healing, we become focused on negative aspects of our past, including thoughts that come up surrounding past occurrences or choices we made. In a striving mindset, past relapses and other negative outcomes would be viewed as failures. And that feeling of failure makes us see ourselves through a lens that's not true to who we actually are. Using non-striving, we are able to become more in touch with our true selves, by finding greater balance between the negatives and positives and achieving a more mindful presence.

Addiction's way of disconnecting the brain from the present moment can make non-striving, and other aspects of mindfulness, more difficult than they'd otherwise be. But the effort is worth it. As we use mindfulness to discover ways of being more present, we're naturally guided toward better coping strategies in our life. With non-striving, the brain naturally gravitates toward increasing its close relationship to the present. Using this pillar can be a way to manage anxieties that come with constantly trying to do the "right" thing for our recovery. Triggers and flashbacks are no longer seen as "bad" experiences that keep us from a goal, but as reactions to an emotion that was occurring in the moment. Non-striving is like a Jedi mind trick for managing addiction. You are not overtly focusing on specific measurements of success, but on your experience as a whole. By doing so, you feel more calm, which decreases impulsive decision-making as well as unfocused attention.

AFFIRMATION

Because this principle is focused on the bigger picture, by giving up a micro-focus on any one aspect of managing addiction, the affirmation for this chapter is **“Leave expectation behind.”** Let this statement refocus your brain to take pressure off achieving the immediate goal and allow you to just be. Do not fret over following a specific direction but focus on the journey as a whole.



CHAPTER EIGHT

LETTING GO

“Just let it go!” If you’ve ever been overly worried about something, you know what an unhelpful, cringe-worthy phrase that can be. But in mindfulness, the idea of letting go is more complex and interesting than you might expect. Letting go can bring increased feelings of openness to experiences and increased happiness within the present. Although the phrase may often be used to make light of difficult situations, in mindfulness practice it actually allows the you to dig deeper into your self-awareness.

THE MINDFUL WAY

In *The Art of Happiness*, the Dalai Lama describes ideal ways to implement mindfulness in order to enhance our general state of being. Specifically, he points out how useful the process of letting go can be. By enhancing our general self-awareness, it enables us to separate from any expectations and emotional connection to the moments in our life. We become aware of our present state, without it being skewed by whatever emotional experience we have moment to moment.

If we can't let go, we're saddled with an inability to find peace. Our brains constantly categorize each experience we have, making assumptions about what the experience means. This tendency to organize our experiences according to the feelings associated with them can be problematic, because we'll only be able to connect with an experience if we have a category to place it in. Other experiences will seem unimportant and may fall to the wayside without our paying attention to them, limiting our whole view of the present. This constant categorization requires us to be always thinking about the past, predicting how an event will affect our future, and planning our next moves—all at the cost of not connecting with the present as it happens. The Dalai Lama goes on to say that by letting go, we gain a greater ability to connect with our present experience, because we are no longer burdened by our emotional ties to things not happening right now.

It may seem like letting go is an act of not caring about the past or the feelings associated with it, of detaching from our emotions or experiences as a whole. A 2018 journal article titled “Paradoxes of Mindfulness” discusses this and other concepts of mindfulness that can seem contradictory. In fact, this pillar of mindfulness teaches us to let go in order to gain a better awareness of ourselves, with our emotions and experiences included.

Learning new ways of viewing our emotions and the world around us, we find out how to bypass our default switch; that is, to get past our tendency to freak out about each interaction, change in mood, or situation. Ultimately, bypassing the switch allows us to find ways toward peace when surrounded by chaos. The principle of letting go is not about detaching from our reality, but about being more connected because we're not afraid to face whatever

chaos it consists of. Letting go produces a decrease in our impulsive reactivity, giving us the ability to understand what's going on in our lives by looking at the process in all its glory.

Life can often feel like a big, chaotic mess—it makes sense that our brains get caught up in all the external drama of dealing with other people, following schedules, and fulfilling our responsibilities. People suffering from addiction may find themselves having an even harder time managing a chaotic present, due to changes in the brain which decrease emotional regulation. According to the National Institute of Health, addiction specifically impairs areas of the brain responsible for judgment, decision-making, learning, behavior control, and memory. Practicing mindfulness is difficult for people not struggling with addiction, so for those with this illness, it can sometimes seem monumentally hard.

Though it may be trite, the hardest things are sometimes the most rewarding. This is the case for practicing mindfulness while learning to live with managing addiction. Although addiction impairs parts of the brain, learning the principle of letting go can result in new skills that make these differences in brain functioning less impactful:

When it comes **decision-making**, letting go allows us to view each of our decisions as separate, not letting emotions around one decision have a snowball effect that impacts the others.

Freed of pressure to form quick and impulsive opinions, our capacity for **judgment** can operate with a more peaceable, calm approach.

People dealing with addiction may feel like they are not able to process things at the same speed as they did before their addiction, which can hinder **learning and memory**. Letting go of expectations allows them to work more effectively with their present capabilities.

Lastly, in terms of **behavior control**, our ability to let go of our own preconceived notions about past and future consequences creates a healthier environment to make thoughtful decisions, with the focus on our needs in the moment.

Letting go can aid in quieting the mind, because it reduces the stimulation that distracts us from the here and now. It enables us to feel like we're prepared. This increases our confidence in our ability to make decisions, lets

us trust our gut reactions, and allows us to focus on being in the present moment.

Common Mental and Emotional Patterns

The act of letting go keeps us from dwelling on immediate emotional feelings, including internal reminders that make addiction difficult to live with, like triggers and cravings. These feelings can be powerful, but often they come with small windows when we can circumvent the overarching feeling, and that's the point when mindfulness can be used to manage them. Letting go can allow us to think about other needs, rather than focusing on the biggest feeling that we currently have.

People struggling with a *love addiction*, for example, may feel hopeless because they continue to find themselves in the same cycle, constantly revolving their lives around finding “the one” in fear that they will be left alone in life. Learning to let go can help someone find peace independently of achieving a romantic connection with another.

Someone suffering with an addiction to *gambling* may find themselves so caught up in the euphoria they experienced in past winnings, that they are unable to connect to their present state. This blinds them to the effect that their addiction is having on their current life. The principle of letting go allows them to see the unhealthy consequences of tying their current experiences to past feelings, happy though those feelings may be.

Those managing an addiction to *fentanyl* can feel that chaotic emotions make their lives difficult to manage. They tend to struggle to find ways to detach from experiences, and are consequently driven to numb themselves with drugs in order to make their brain stop churning. Letting go can be an alternative, allowing them to calm their minds without resorting to their addiction.

Often, someone struggling with an addiction to *alcohol* relies on the way that drinking changes their feelings. Their alcohol use heightens the positive and creates an ability to not care about anything that creates negative emotions. They can feel detached from important experiences in their life, a feeling enhanced by their addiction. As with fentanyl and other drugs, letting go can become a healthier way to cope with difficult emotions.

Dominique's Story

Dominique suffers with an addiction to crack cocaine. In implementing the pillar of letting go, Dominique found herself struggling with learning how to remove her emotional connection without totally detaching herself from the situation. She worried that if she stopped caring about anything, this would make her addiction even more difficult to manage. After delving deeper into the practice of mindfulness, Dominique realized that she was highly triggered to act impulsively when she believed others were mad at her. She noticed her drug use would be less thought out and more destructive during these times, because she was searching for a way to make the pain of disappointing people go away. Dominique began to use meditation to keep herself grounded in the moment. With her mindfulness practice, she began to slow her reaction to things that stimulated her addiction, intentionally noticing and validating her feelings in the moment and allowing herself to let go of the feelings keeping her tied down. She used affirmations to help remind herself that no matter what was happening, she had the ability to leave the emotions in the moment and move forward. She found she was able to regain her thought processes, and compose herself more easily using her mindfulness tools. This helped her to cut back on her use, and gave her confidence to feel able to manage her triggers more effectively.

SIMPLE MEDITATION

You can do this exercise anywhere, whenever you need a quick grounding practice to feel more connected to the present moment. It can even be done with other people around.

Instructions: Choose an object or scene in your immediate environment, something you can clearly see. Begin describing it to yourself, in your mind, as if you were trying to explain it to someone who was not in the room with you. Use all your senses to describe the object.

Use this exercise to find a more balanced and in-control emotional state whenever you feel overly stressed, overwhelmed or panicked. You’re practicing the principle of letting go by focusing your attention on your present state, without allowing the emotion to overwhelm you. Practice it regularly so you’ll be able to employ it more easily when your emotions are heightened.

EXERCISE 1: LABELING EMOTIONS

Instructions: On the left-hand side of the table provided, write out different emotions you’ve experienced, both negative and positive. On the right-hand side, for each emotion list ways you can work toward letting them go when they come up. (For a positive emotion, letting go means appreciating the positive without unduly fixating on it.)

Examples:

- Happy:** list the reasons I’m excited (to focus on this positive emotional experience)
- Sad:** cry or talk to a friend
- Discontent:** reflect on when it started and why it feels this way
- Vulnerable:** use a mantra to reinforce that vulnerability isn’t scary
- Guilt:** write a letter of apology for what I feel guilty for
- Shame:** talk it through with a professional or friend

EMOTIONS	WAYS TO LET THEM GO
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EXERCISE 2: LETTING GO BODY SCAN

This adapted body scan exercise guides you to release emotions and thoughts that you're struggling with. You'll practice focusing their energy into your hands. With each thought, you squeeze your hands and then intentionally release the thoughts.

1. Find a comfortable, seated position. Take a moment to control your breathing to a natural, consistent pace.
2. Bring attention to any thoughts that are bothering you in this moment.
3. Next, bring attention to your hands. Notice their weight, and any energy that you feel when you focus on them.
4. Now think about the difficult thoughts you've identified. Imagine them as energy in your hands. Begin to squeeze your hands, squeezing them as hard as you can, and count to five. Continue breathing while doing this;

try not to hold your breath at any point.

5. Open your hands, releasing the troublesome thoughts to float or fall away. Repeat this until you begin to feel that you are less affected by these thoughts.
6. Repeat the process using other intrusive or difficult thoughts you've been struggling with, until you have a general feeling of calm and ease.

EXERCISE 3: FORGIVENESS LIST

Letting go of our emotional ties can be difficult without forgiveness. Often we do not want to move on because we're struggling to forgive wrongdoings done by ourselves or others. This exercise gives you a sample of how it feels to forgive.

Instructions: Make a list on a sheet or piece of paper of wrongdoings that you find yourself feeling punished for or that you want to punish others for doing. After examining the list, carefully consider which transgressions seem more possible to work through. When you're done, either safely burn, cut up, or dissolve the paper as a way to practice letting go.

In the lines below, reflect on how the exercise made you feel.

Encouraging Words

The mindfulness practice of letting go is not always easy. It may not seem as difficult as training physically for a marathon, but at times it sure feels like a marathon for the brain. Training your brain takes courage, because it means you're willing to look at the world in a new way. Remember that you are brave and strong. Through your willingness to learn these skills, you've shown that you're ready to let go of

the things that create barriers in your life. Lean into that courage.

EXERCISE 4: EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

For this exercise, we'll examine the emotional baggage that we may be carrying around with us—envisioning it as if it was actual baggage.

Instructions: Think about experiences that you feel interfere with your connection to the present. Envision these things as contents inside a suitcase, purse, backpack, or some other type of bag. Use familiar imagery to imagine what each of these experiences looks like. For example, if I struggle with trusting others, it may be due to a memory of people not showing up to my birthday party. The image for that could be a birthday cake.

Describe the content of your emotional bag under the prompts below.

- 1. List the different contents within the bag.** What are situations from the past that were painful and still affect you today? What are big moments that changed your life that you feel negatively affect your life to this day? If you could create a personal image for each of these situations, what would they be?

- 2. Discuss how each item in your bag could be affecting your daily life.** How would your life be different if the experience had never happened? Did it change the way you viewed the future? Do you feel like you're a different person because of it?

- 3. What is it like to examine these things?** What emotions come up in your mind when you think about the contents of your bag? Did you feel any physical sensations when you started thinking about these experiences?

EXERCISE 5: SUCCESS IN LETTING GO

Think of a time when you were successful at letting go of the emotions tied to a difficult situation. What gave you the confidence to be successful during this moment?

Detachment vs. Letting Go

If you find that when faced with an obstacle in your life, you have to check out emotionally, or have to rationalize your way past it, often that's the brain's way of taking the reins and coping with an overwhelming amount of feeling in the moment. This detachment protects us when we're overwhelmed, as our mind tries to separate itself from the pain. But it's not the same as mindfully letting go, because it's done without processing the emotions that are overwhelming us. Which means they'll be back. Detachment is like a Band-Aid on a deep flesh wound—it can only do so much. Letting go is the dressing that covers and helps to heal the wound. Detachment is not a bad sign in itself, but when it occurs, some grounding is needed to bring you back to the present moment. A quick meditation or grounding exercise can help.

MINDFUL MOMENT: LETTING GO

The term “emotional baggage” comes to mind when studying the concept of

letting go. Before learning about this principle, we may struggle to let go of our baggage. The items within our bags are personal and specific to our experiences; it can feel like we have to carry them everywhere. Sometimes we get so used to this bag being with us that the idea of not having it makes us feel incomplete. This feeling of ownership and protection over our emotional baggage is what the principle of letting go fights against. Acknowledging the bag and its contents, validating its existence, and then putting it away is how this principle gives us control. Once we process its contents—the emotions, thoughts, and beliefs attached to it—we're able to view our next experience with a fresher state of mind, because we're not overwhelmed by looking at the present with the past in mind.

AFFIRMATION

The affirmation to help you feel connected by using the principle of letting go is **“I am unafraid of the present.”** This affirmation reminds you that not only can you find a more calm way of managing whatever stresses you, letting go allows you to experience intense emotions in the moment without a need to act on or solve them.



CHAPTER NINE

ONWARD, UPWARD

You've learned the principles, practiced the exercises, and begun deepening your connection to the present moment. Now it's time to discuss the possibilities that mindfulness opens up for you and look ahead toward building on your successes.

FINDING WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

After completing this workbook, you may be unsure of how to continue working on the principles of mindfulness. So, your next step is to create a maintenance program that you can implement and follow to keep growing your mindfulness practice managing your addiction.

A good way to start is to go through the exercises in the book and note which seemed to work best for you. Thoughtfully consider what it was about these exercises that made them interesting and helpful. For instance, if you found many of the guided meditations particularly beneficial, write them down and continue to practice them regularly. Create new meditations of your own based on the ones that had the most impact. If you found the exercises that involved journal prompts to be especially helpful, starting a mindfulness journal could be an effective way to continue your growth. The most important part of your maintenance is that it's created with your needs in mind. This will help you to maintain and advance the growth you have already gained through these exercises.

Where have you grown since starting your mindfulness journey, and where do you want to continue to grow? The answers will give you a direction to take. Be sure that your plan includes strategies to follow if relapse occurs. Even if abstinence is not required in your addiction management, have a plan in place to handle behaviors that interfere with your recovery and create problems in your life. Creating both short- and long-term goals can be helpful to guide you through future mindfulness practice. This doesn't mean fixating on specifics, like staying sober for a particular length of time, but, rather, it's about focusing on thoughts or emotions that you want to be able to handle more successfully in the future. Understand that even if our recovery goals are not met, by orienting our mind to them we will be naturally drawn toward healthier behaviors.

SHORT-TERM OUTLOOK

This workbook was designed as a complementary guide to building a

mindfulness practice. The exercises were curated to be useable in any stage within one's journey of managing addiction. And they were created to be worked through more than once. Each principle of mindfulness takes practice for the concept to truly become part of your life. As you come to understand a mindfulness pillar more deeply, that can be a good time to complete some of the related exercises again. Doing so can help in two ways: You may find that other aspects of addiction become clearer to you, and you'll be able to see how far you have come since beginning your mindfulness journey. Principles that were tricky to approach the first time can be easier to absorb the second or third time around.

Following through with the exercises should give you some immediate skills to better manage addiction. Implement them at your own pace, with regard to your own needs, to be most helpful to your growth. When sitting down to do exercises for a second or third time, try viewing the exercise with fresh eyes. For example, try not to think directly about how you previously answered specific questions, but explore them again in the interest of discovering new things about yourself. Repeating exercises helps to further increase your awareness of that principle. It can also bring up thoughts or feelings you weren't aware of before, or that have deeper roots you weren't ready to consider in the past.

Always remember: There's not a specific amount of times that it takes to craft the art of mindfulness. Each moment that you're oriented toward being mindful allows you to better understand yourself and appreciate the present moment deeper than you have before.

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK

Although there is not a clear and fast way to make addiction go away, mindfulness can help you feel better equipped to manage your addiction day-to-day. Newfound clarity brings increased awareness of the emotions, thoughts, and patterns that make the addiction more difficult to manage. In the long term, this can help to decrease the strength of the addiction and increase our emotional stability.

While practicing the concepts within this workbook to help you manage your

addiction, remember that—as with many chronic illnesses—relapses are a normal part of the process. Implementing recovery strategies over the long term takes time and practice. And even if these strategies were perfect, sometimes life becomes difficult to manage and we fall back into old patterns of coping. Addiction does not go away completely. Some may quit using or stop their addictive behaviors, but internally it still takes work to continue managing old habits, especially unhealthy ones. Keeping a non-judgmental attitude about our experience allows us to better manage stress, and an attitude of acceptance when a relapse occurs makes it easier to bounce back and reinstate a mindfulness practice. If you feel like you continue to relapse and you need more support, there are mental health providers and programs you can contact to find help (see the [resources list](#), for starting points).

The strategies within this workbook can make a difference in managing common behaviors experienced by those living with addiction. Approaching the principles, as well as the exercises, as a continuous learning process can help you better manage the emotions and thoughts that happen with addiction. These exercises also help increase motivation by focusing on the positive aspects of your personality, and your strengths. It may sometimes be difficult for others to see that you're practicing mindfulness, as the real change occurs within the brain. But *you* know your progress, and what you need in your life to continue growing in a healthy way. Keep allowing yourself to grow, and positive results will follow.



RESOURCES

ADDICTION RELATED

For information about addiction, as well as treatment locations:

[SAMHSA.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)

Information about drugs and addiction:

[DrugAbuse.gov](https://www.drugabuse.gov)

MENTAL HEALTH

For information about mental health and help finding a therapist:

[PsychologyToday.com/us](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us)

For information about mental health:

[NAMI.org](https://www.nami.org)

MINDFULNESS

[MBCT.com](https://www.mbct.com)

[Mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org)

FINDING A THERAPIST

[FindATherapist.com](https://www.findatherapist.com)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank all of my professors; without their training and patience I would never have become the clinician I am today. To my family, for their continued push to always be better. To my husband, who always knows the right things to say when I need the courage to keep moving forward. To my son and his ability to light up any day. To the various supervisors that trained me to be diligent in my work as well as to continue striving for greatness. Finally, thanks to my colleagues who inspire me every day with their unwavering care for their clients and the field of addiction.

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