

## The 3 step breathing space

- **Awareness** - bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. If possible, close your eyes. Then ask: "What is my experience right now...in thoughts...in feelings...and in bodily sensations? Acknowledge and register your experience, even if it is unwanted.
- **Gathering** - Then, gently redirect full attention to breathing, to each in-breath and to each out-breath as they follow, one after the other. Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.
- **Expanding** - expand the field of your awareness around your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment. The key skill is to maintain awareness in the moment. Nothing else.

Audio version here:

[07Track07](#)

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Adapted from the Three-Step Breathing Space exercise used in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (Segal, Williams & Teasdale).

## **Getting present**

When we talk about getting present we mean using the five senses to bring awareness to the present moment rather than being 'lost in thinking'. As we all know, our mind is whirring away in the background, often with little awareness and the content of our thinking can really affect how we feel. One thought automatically tends to lead to another and our minds can take us to some really bleak or anxious places. It is at these times that it may be helpful to 'get present'. Being present also opens up the joyful, the uplifting and the things in life that make us feel vital and connected. And finally, the only place we can ever take action is in the present. Being present helps us to take more effective action based on what is actually happening *right now*, rather than what our thinking minds might be remembering or predicting.

### **Noticing**

The first step in getting present is to **notice** that we have become lost in thinking so that we have the opportunity to make a choice about what to do next. We might begin to notice that we have become lost in thought when we feel our mood dip or we begin to feel dissatisfied, or anxious in some way. We might also simply notice that we have been thinking a lot about our problems, circumstances that we are not able to change and we are going around in circles.

### **Using our five senses**

We can actively use our five senses to get present so that we are able to step away from thinking and re-focus our efforts on whatever it is we are doing.

We can use our five senses to get present in any activity although sometimes some senses will be more helpful to use than others depending upon the situation and what you are doing. It is touch, seeing and hearing that are most often used to get present.

The five senses are:

- Smell
- Taste
- Touch
- Hear
- See

Stay curious about your experience of getting present and as best as you can be playful when you begin to explore this new way of being in your life!

### **Bringing our minds back**

You'll notice that your mind keeps wandering off as you try to get present. This is what minds do and is nothing to worry about; everybody's mind is the same in this respect. Just gently re-focus yourself on whatever sense it is that you are using. This is all part of the experience!

### **Getting present: using the sense of touch**

You can try this now! Read through this and then have a go. As best you can, feel into' (rather than think about) the sensations of sitting (or lying if you happen to be lying down). Feel your feet flat on the floor, your bottom on the seat of the surface that is supporting you and your hands resting in your lap on or your legs. See if it is possible to notice any tingling, buzzing, sense of aliveness in those parts of the body, any sense of coolness or warmth and any sense of weight as your body rests wherever it is that you are sitting. You can try this in other places. You could sit outside and feel the sun or rain or wind on your face, the grass on bare skin, and lots of other sensations coming from the skin.

### **Getting present: using the sense of sight**

We can use sight whenever it is light enough to see. We can notice light and shade, movement, stillness, shapes, textures, tones and colours. You're probably already pretty familiar with using sight to get present although you may not have thought about it in this way before. A walk in the

park or just walking along a street can become a different experience when we pay attention in this way rather than being lost in thinking.

### **Getting present: using hearing**

Noticing the sounds around you can be very interesting. Here you can focus on loud/quiet, tone and pitch (high/low), and just the different quality of sounds. You can notice, for example, the difference between birdsong and a heavy skip lorry rumbling by. Notice how sometimes there are 'layers' of sound, and how sounds emerge from the quietness and then as they subside, fall away from awareness.

### **Activities to do to practice getting present:**

Showering is a good one. There is a lot to feel, see, and smell.

Washing up. Feel the warmth of the water, look at the appearance of the bubbles in the washing up liquid and the dishes, at first dirty and then clean. Feel the weight of the dishes and pans in your hands and the movements of your body as it coordinates your movement to clear the dishes, place them in the water and then take them out.

Peeling vegetables. Notice the colours and feel the textures, shapes and weight of the vegetables as you hold them in your hands. Notice the change in the colour as you peel and the different aromas of the vegetables.

Stroking the dog/cat. Look closely. Feel the texture of the fur, look at the colour and the way that the light changes the colour of the fur. Feel the warmth of the dog/cat as you stroke. Can you feel their heartbeat? Look at the expression on their face.

And last but not least. Being present with people who are important to you in your life. Try using all of the senses for this.

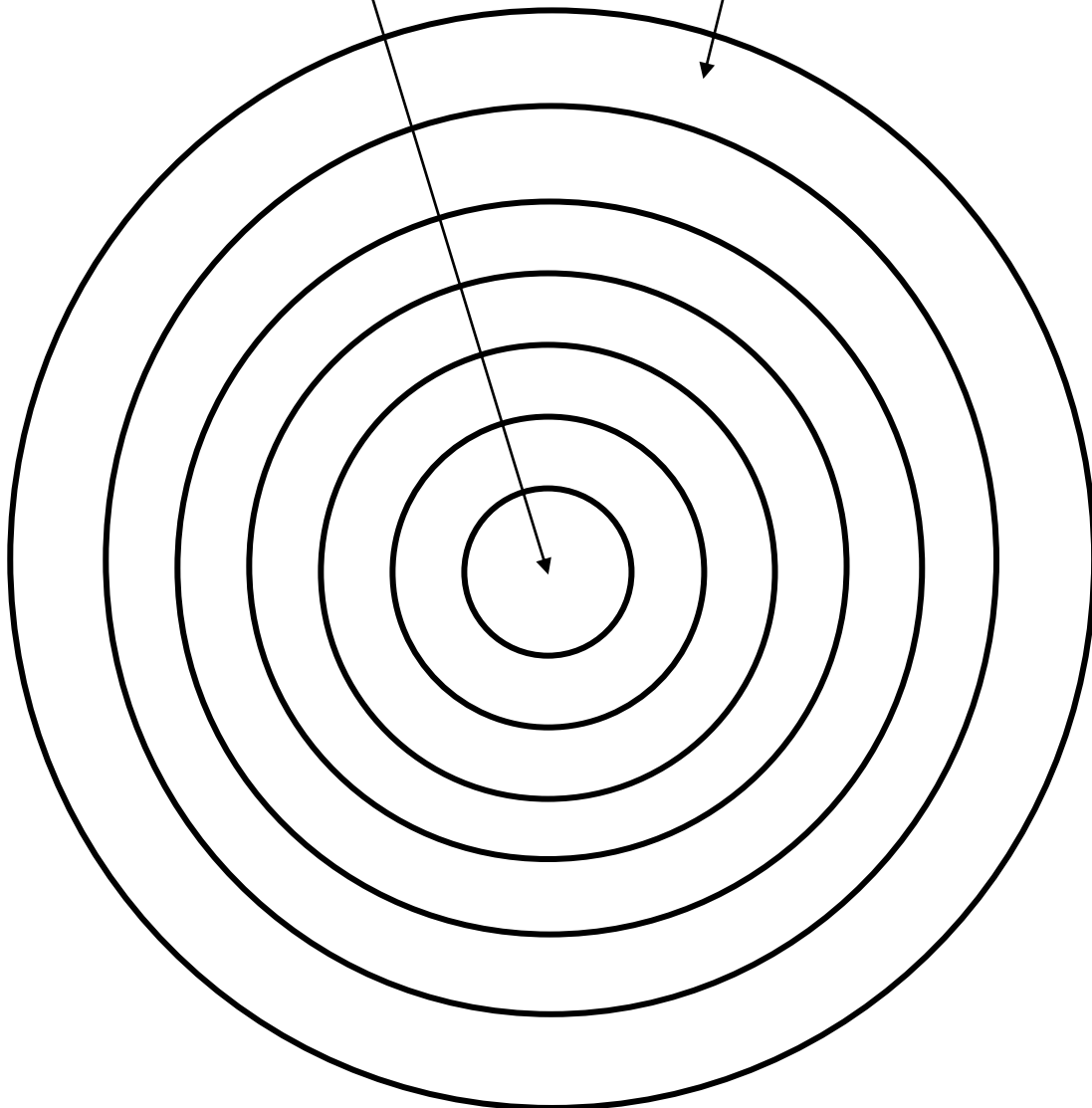
Adapted from established mindfulness and ACT-based approaches

**Over the last week.....**

Place a mark on the bullseye that represents your actions over the last week

*I am living fully by  
my values*

*I have lost touch  
with my values*



Pick one action that **you** could do **today**, without any of your circumstances having to change, that would move you closer to the centre of the bullseye. This will be any action that is consistent with the sort of person you want to be and how you want to behave. It could be a very small action. Write it in the space below

**AWAY**

Acting ineffectively,  
behaving unlike the  
sort of person you  
want to be.

**TOWARDS**

Acting effectively,  
behaving like the  
sort of person you  
want to be.

**HOKED**

**UNHOOKED**

**HELPERS**

Who do you care about?  
What matters to you?  
What activities and areas of life  
are important?  
Values, Goals, Strengths, Skills.

"Hooked" means my thoughts & feelings  
dominate me; they hook me and reel me  
in; jerk me around like a puppet on a  
string, push and pull me into ineffective  
types of behaviour

"Unhooked": my thoughts and feelings  
no longer dominate me or jerk me  
around. They lose their impact and  
influence over me. This makes it much  
easier for me to choose how I behave.

Situation(s)  
Thoughts & Feelings

### **Opening up to emotions**

- Identify an emotion that comes up as you consider taking an action in line with your values.
- This exercise can be done at home or out, and it might help if you sit down. Today you can have your eyes shut, or open and looking down if you're not comfortable with that.
- Step 1: Notice where you feel, or felt, the emotion most in your body. Emotions are often centred in your stomach, chest, throat, or head area. Use your imagination, if you have to, to describe it. Or pretend you're relating what this emotion feels like to someone who's never had an emotion.
- To yourself, describe the physical aspects of your emotion (or sensation) in terms of: where is it, ... what's its shape, .... what's its colour, .... size, .... form, ..... density, .... temperature ....etc. (e.g., it's in the chest, pulsing, tight, round, heavy, hollow, fluttery, red, hot or cold etc.).
- Name the emotion if you can.
- Step 2: Breathe through your nose gently (or just a little slowly and deeply) in and around the physical place of the feeling. (pause)
- Now repeat to yourself "I'm willing to have this emotion". You don't have to like it or want it.
- You can also say to yourself "I can make room for it, I can open up to it." (wait 20 seconds or more)
- Notice where the feeling *is not* in your body. It's probably not in every part of your body. So you can remind yourself that you can still talk, walk, make decisions and act on your values and goals, even with strong feelings. (wait 10 seconds or so)
- Step3: Now breathe gently *into* the emotion area. Again, say to yourself, "I am willing to have this emotion, I can open up to it". You don't have to like it.
- Remember you are not trying to relax or get rid of the feeling – this is about opening up, letting go of any struggle with it. Keep doing that for 30 seconds or so.
- Now you can wriggle your fingers and toes and open your eyes.

Adapted from ACBS resource

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