

Mindfulness Practice Toolkit



Beach Cities
Health District

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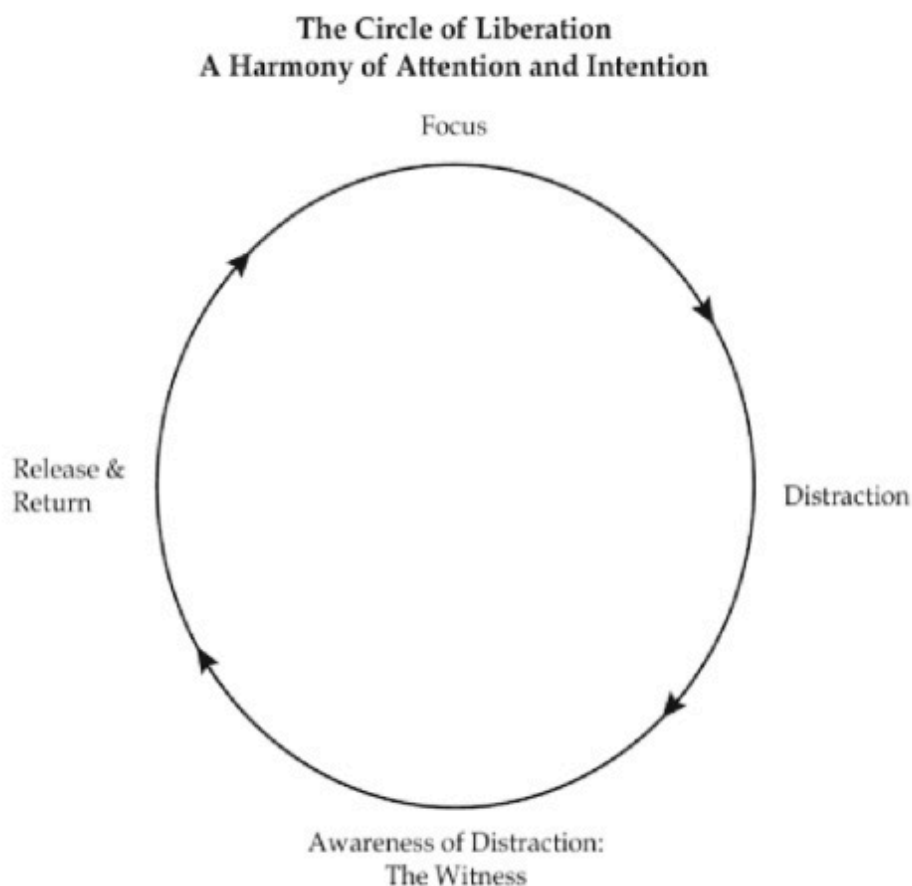


Introduction

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice in paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental way. This benefits the mind, body and spirit.

“Mindfulness is deliberately paying attention, being fully aware of what’s happening both inside yourself -- in your body, heart and mind -- and outside yourself in your environment. Mindfulness is awareness without judgement or criticism.” – Jan Chozen Bays



Focus – on a task, your surroundings, the breath

Distraction – by a thought, worry, emotion or physical sensation

Awareness of Distraction – noticing the mind has drifted

Release & Return – letting go of distraction with patience and kindness for self and simply returning to focus

Core Skills of Mindfulness

1. Clarifying, Setting and Reaffirming Intention

- For an event, a quality, a relationship, etc.
- Answering the question: "What am I practicing?"

2. Cultivating a Witnessing Awareness

- Developing meta-cognition: awareness of the state of your awareness and your inner landscape
- Practicing outer non-reactivity: witnessing your inner landscape without auto-pilot reactions

3. Strengthening Self-Regulation

- Setting negative energies intentionally: shortening the time that difficult emotions keep you stuck
- Avoiding (or recovering from) emotional hijackings: bringing your whole brain back on line

4. Stabilizing Attention

- Strengthening the ability to hold your intentional focus
- Nurturing the Harmony of Intention and Attention
What is it that I want to remember at this moment?

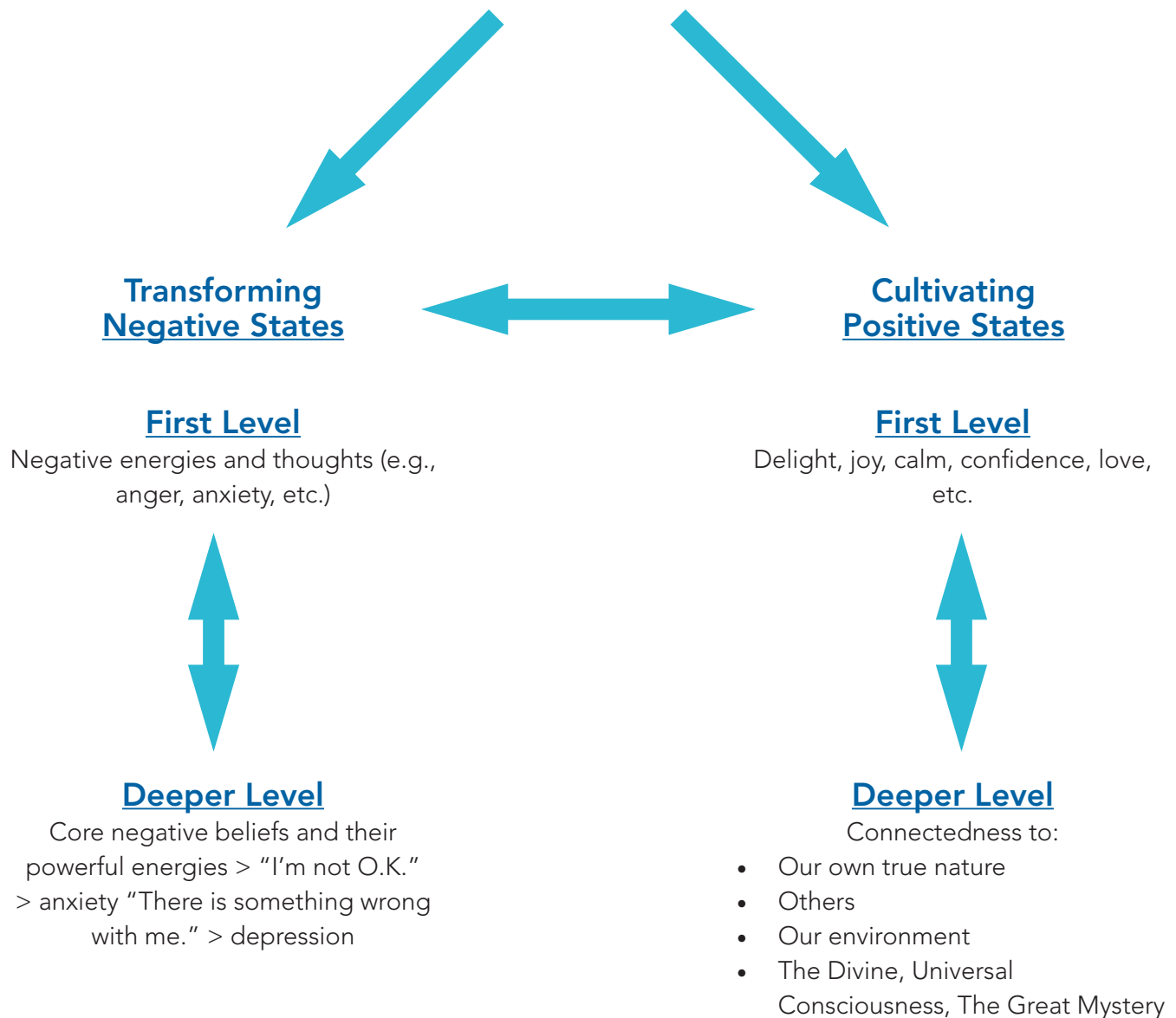
5. Practicing Loving-Kindness

- Calming the inner critic and self-judgement
- Practicing non-judgmental awareness leading to kindness and compassion for yourself and others:

Unlimited, unconditional kindness towards self that then radiates out to others

-Pema Chodron

Mindfulness Path for Growth



*Essential Question:
What am I practicing?*

Why Mindfulness?

Beach Cities Health District (BCHD) identified Social-Emotional Health as a health priority for 2019-2022.

BCHD uses the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index to measure stress among residents living in the Beach Cities (Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach and Redondo Beach). The daily stress in the Beach Cities has increased from 41.1% in 2015 to 43.3% in 2017 and is statistically worse than the national daily stress level of 40.9%.

To address this issue, BCHD introduced mindfulness programming to target stress, anger and worry. We prioritize social-emotional health and are devoted to integrating mindfulness in everything we do.

This mindfulness resource guide includes evidence-based practices to conduct in the community.

Benefits of Practicing Mindfulness:

- Reduces stress
- Reduces chronic physical pain
- Increases ability to relate in new ways to difficulties
- Reduces addictive behavior (eating disorder, alcoholism, smoking)
- Boosts the body's immune system to fight disease
- Enhances coping with painful life events (death and major illness)
- Increases ability to deal with negative emotions (anger, fear, greed)
- Improves attention and concentration
- Creates a space where creative solutions can arise
- Enhances performance, whether in work, sports or academics
- Positively changes the actual structure of our brains
- Increases interpersonal skills and relationships
- Increases compassion
- Improves mental health
- Decreases unconscious bias

Source::

Smalley, S and Winston, D. (2010). "Fully Present."

Hicks, S. (2009). "Mindfulness and Social Work."

Smith, Jeremy A., Suttie, Jill, Jazaieri, Hooria, & Newman, Kira M. (2017). "The State of Mindfulness Science."

Facilitation Tips

From Shiori Lange, LCSW and Tiana Rideout

Atmosphere

- Room setup – chairs in rows, around a conference room table or in a circle. You can give people the option of sitting on the floor.
- Lighting – ideal to dim half of the lights in the room. Some people like the option to sit on the darker or lighter side.
- Outside noises – if possible, close the door and place a sign that says “Quiet please, mindfulness practice in progress”
- Position yourself in the room where people can hear you. Have a chair for yourself if speaking for more than 5 minutes. Have a timer in sight, preferably with seconds.
- Remind everyone to silence phones.

Speaking Style

- Speak clearly at a volume that can be heard by everyone in the room (no need to shout)
- Your delivery should be received as calm, comforting and clear
- Look around the room to make sure everyone is comfortable

Pacing

- Read the script aloud ahead of time and time it with the pauses of silence, make notes on the script to remind yourself of how long to pause
- During the silent pauses, focus on your own breathing to gain insight to the participant experience. Generally, give a minimum pause length of 4 inhales and 4 exhales.
- Put yourself in the listener’s seat, try not to talk too fast or provide too much information all at once. You do not want to distract from or interrupt their experience. Your voice is intended to guide them, and the pacing needs to deliver a balance of instruction and room to make it their own.
- Keep an eye on the clock. It is important to end within the timeframe allotted with an extra couple minutes for participants to ease into the next agenda item/task.

Keep in mind that you are free to make your mindfulness practice your own.

How to Open a Mindfulness Practice

Introduce yourself, share a bit about your mindfulness experience (optional) and the type of meditation practice that you will be leading.

Hi my name is _____. I have a personal mindfulness practice and have been facilitating for group meditation for _____. Today, we will be doing a 15-minute mindful breathing guided meditation (adjust length and type of meditation). This meditation will help you learn to simply be and to look within yourself.

- **OPTION 1:** Sit comfortably. Focus on your posture, back is straight. Both feet on the floor. If they were crossed, please un-cross them. Hands on lap or by your sides, wherever feels right for you. Relax your body. Gently close your eyes and now listen to the sound of this bell from the beginning to the end.
- **OPTION 2:** Sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Put your back straight, head up, feet on the floor and your arms in your lap. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long and complete exhalations. Watch your breath going in and going out. Let the in-breath touch these sensations and the out-breath open the sensations further.
- Give option to open or close eyes.
- If you would like to keep them open ...
 - Just gaze downward at about 45-degree angle with the lids not fully closed.
 - Just looking down at the floor at a 45-degree angle.
 - Look at the area on the floor about 3-4 feet away from you.

How to Close a Mindfulness Practice

OPTION 1: If you have a bell

- Before you open your eyes slowly, please listen to the sound of this bell from the beginning to the very end. When you no longer hear the sound of this bell, please open your eyes.
- If you've had your eyes closed, now bring your attention fully to the room as you gently open your eyes; aware of the body, aware of the breath, aware of sight and aware of sound as you attend to the bell signaling the end of this formal period of meditation practice.

[Bell rings]

OPTION 2: If you don't have a bell

- When you are ready please open your eyes slowly and stretch if needed. Continue your day with a sense of awareness of your body, mind and spirit.
- Now that you are calm and relaxed, you can return to your usual activities. Give yourself a moment to reawaken your body. Move your fingers and toes a little to wake them up. Roll your shoulders. Stretch your arms and legs if you would like. Open your eyes and wait until you are fully alert. When you are ready, you can resume your usual activities, keeping with you a calm, relaxed feeling.

Self-Regulation Techniques

We all get caught at times in strong negative energies such as anxiety, frustration, aggravation, impatience, anger and stress. Getting stuck in these energies takes a tremendous toll on our bodies, impairs our thinking and makes it difficult to speak or act effectively. Consequently, developing a self-regulation strategy is essential to minimizing the burden of these negative energies and living mindfully. Experiment with the techniques below to create a personal self-regulation practice.

1. The softening quality of the exhale

- Bring your attention to the exhale, and
- Connect with it's relaxing energy (the energy of the sigh).

2. The body/mind communication

- Pick a word or a short phrase, such as relax, let go, soften, slow down, be careful, be happy.
- Silently repeat the word or phrase as you exhale.

3. Imagination

- As you connect with the exhale and repeat your settling word or phrase, imagine your body softening and your energy settling.

4. Positive visualization

- Select an unconditionally positive memory, landscape or image.
- Strengthen your connection by sharpening your internal image.
- Use the visualization to shift from & settle the negative energy.

5. Blessing, affirmation, intention or prayer

- Select or make up a short recitation that is soothing for you.
- Memorize it and recite it when negative energies arise.
- This can become your mantra, a protector of your mind/heart.

6. Anchoring

- Using touch of the body to settle your body and energy.

7. Humming, singing, chanting

- Sound clears the space and settles negative energies.

Breathing Practices

1. The Three-Minute Breathing Space (3 min.)

- **Objective:** To assist individuals to feel relaxed and reduce any negative emotions.
- **Preparation:** Have members seated.

The three-minute breathing space is a brief practice and can be used when we find our thoughts or mood spiraling in a negative direction. The first thing we do with this practice because we want to come into the present moment quickly is to take a very definite posture. The back is erect, but not stiff, letting the body express a sense of being present and awake.

Now, closing your eyes, if this feels comfortable, take the first step of becoming aware of what is going on with you right now. Becoming conscious of what is going through your mind:

what thoughts are around? Here again, as best you can, just noting thoughts as mental events...so we note them, and then we note the feelings that are around at the moment ... in particular, turning toward any sense of discomfort or unpleasant feelings.

(1 min.)

So, rather than try to push them away or shut them out, just notice them, perhaps saying, "Ah there you are; that's how it is right now." Similarly, with sensations in the body... are there sensations of tensions, of holding, of letting go? And again, becoming aware of them, simply noting whatever is arising in this moment.

Silence (15 sec.)

So, you have a sense of what is going on right now, having stepped out of automatic pilot. The second step is to collect your awareness by focusing on a single act -- the movement of the breath. So now really gather yourself, focusing your attention down in the movements of the abdomen, the rise and fall of the belly as the breath moves in and out... spending a minute or so to focus on the motion of the abdominal wall, moment by moment, breath by breath, as best you can right here, right now.

(1 min.)

Noticing when the breath is moving in, and when the breath is moving out, being with the breath as it moves into your body and out, binding your awareness to this process, to be present right now.

Silence (25 sec.)

And now, the third step, is allowing your awareness to expand to the entire body, bringing a more spacious awareness to your experience, letting the breath be present but in the background. Bringing attention to the entire length of the body from head to toe, including any tightness or sensations related to holding or bracing. In this moment holding your awareness in this spaciousness place, breathing in and breathing out.

(Silence)

And when you are ready, opening your eyes, letting go of this brief practice.

Silence (20 sec.)

2. Breathing Meditation (~5:31 min.)

- **Objective:** To assist individuals to feel relaxed and reduce any negative emotions.
- **Preparation:** Have members seated. You will also need a bell.

Find a relaxed, comfortable position
Seated on a chair or on the floor, on a cushion
Keep your back upright, but not too tight
Hands resting wherever they're comfortable
Tongue on the roof of your mouth or wherever it's comfortable
And you can notice your body. From the inside

Noticing the shape of your body, the weight, touch
And let yourself relax
And become curious about your body. Seated here
The sensations of your body. The touch
The connection with the floor. The chair
Relax any areas of tightness or tension
Just breathe. Soften
(1:30 min.)

And now begin to tune into your breath. In your body
Feeling the natural flow of breath
Don't need to do anything to your breath
Not long not short just natural
And notice where you feel your breath in your body
It might be in your abdomen. It may be in your chest or throat. Or in your nostrils
See if you can feel the sensations of breath
One breath at a time. When one breath ends, the next breath begins

Now as you do this you might notice that your mind might start to wander
You might start thinking about other things
If this happens this is not a problem. It's very natural
Just notice that your mind has wandered
You can say "thinking" or "wandering" in your head softly
And then gently redirect your attention right back to the breathing
So we'll stay with this for some time in silence
(1:30 min.)

Just a short time
Noticing our breath
From time to time getting lost in thought and returning to our breath
See if you can be really kind to yourself in the process
And once again you can notice your body, your whole body, seated here
Let yourself relax even more deeply
And then offer yourself some appreciation
For doing this practice today
Whatever that means to you
Finding a sense of ease and wellbeing for yourself and this day
[bell rings]

Meditations

1. Body Scan (2:44 min.)

- **Objective:** To help bring calmness and attention.
- **Preparation:** Have members seated.

Begin by bringing your attention into your body
You can close your eyes if that's comfortable to you
You can notice your body, seated, wherever you're seated
Feeling the weight of your body, on the chair, on the floor

And take a few deep breaths
And as you take a deep breath
Bring in more oxygen and livening the body
And as you exhale
Have a sense of relaxing more deeply

You can notice your feet on the floor
Notice the sensation of your feet touching the floor
The weight and pressure, vibration, heat
(1 min.)

You can notice your legs against the chair
Pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness
Notice your back against the chair
Bring your attention into your stomach area
If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften
Take a breath

Notice your hands
Are your hands tense or tight?
See if you can allow them to soften
Notice your arms
Feel any sensation in your arms
Let your shoulders be soft
Notice your neck and throat
Let them be soft, relaxed
Soften your jaw
Let your face and facial muscles be soft
(1 min.)

Then notice your whole body present
Take one more breath
Be aware of your whole body, as best you can
Take a breath
And then when you're ready
You can open your eyes

2. Loving-Kindness (~9:31 min.)

- **Objective:** To help bring calmness and attention.
- **Preparation:** Have members seated. You will also need a bell.

To begin this practice

Let yourself be in a relaxed and comfortable position

We're going to do the practice of cultivation positive emotion

In this case, loving kindness

Which is the desire for someone to be happy

Or yourself to be happy

It's not dependent on something, it's not conditional

It's just a natural opening of the heart

To someone else or to yourself

So, you can check in to your body and notice how you're feeling right now

Letting whatever is here, be here

Now let yourself bring to mind

Someone whom, the moment you think of them, you feel happy

See if you can bring to mind

It could be a relative, a close friend

Some with not too complicated a relationship

Just a general sense, that when you think of them you feel happy

Can pick a child

Or you can always choose a pet. A dog or a cat

A creature it's fairly easy to feel love for

(1 min.)

So let them come to mind

Have them-- have a sense of them being in front of you

You can feel them, sense them, see them

And as you imagine them

Notice how you're feeling inside

Maybe you feel some warmth

Or there's some heat to your face

A smile, sense of expansiveness

This is a loving kindness

This is a natural feeling that's accessible to all of us at any moment

So now having this loved one in front of you

Begin to wish them well

May you be safe and protected from danger

May you be happy and peaceful

May you be healthy and strong

May you have ease and wellbeing

And as I say these words, you can use my words or your own words

And have a sense of letting this loving kindness come from you

And begin to touch this loved one

(1 min.)

Reaching out
You might think in images
You might have a sense of colour or light
You might just have a feeling
The words may continue to bring on more of this feeling
And I encourage you to say whatever feels meaningful to you

May you be free from stress and anxiety
May you be free from all fear

And so as you're sending out these words and these feelings of loving kindness
Also check into yourself and see how you're feeling inside
And now imagine that this loved one turns around
And begins to send it back to you
So see if you can receive the loving kindness
Take it in

And they're wishing you well, may you be happy
Meaning you
May you be peaceful and at ease
May you be safe and protected from all danger
May you have joy, well being

Letting yourself take it in
Now if you're not feeling anything at this point
Or before in the meditation
It's not a problem
This is a practice that plants seeds
(1 min.)

And if you're feeling something else other than loving kindness
Just check into that
What is it I'm feeling
There may be something to learn here
Now if it's possible and it's not always easy to do this
But see if you can send loving kindness to yourself
You can imagine it coming down your body from your heart
You can just have a sense of it

May I be safe and protected from danger
May I be healthy and strong
May I be happy and peaceful
May I accept myself just as I am

And as you ask yourself the question "what do I need to be happy?"
See what arises
And offer that to yourself
May I have meaningful work
A joyful life
Close friends and family

And now checking into yourself
And noticing what it is you feel as you do this
And now let yourself bring to mind one person
Or a group of people that you wish to send the loving kindness to
Imagine them in front of you
Sense them, feel them

May you be happy and peaceful
May you be free from all stress and anxiety and fear
Worry
Grief
May you have joy and happiness
Wellbeing
(1 min.)

And now let this loving kindness expand out
Spreading
Touching anyone that you want to touch right now
In all directions
People you know, people you don't know
People you have difficulty with
People you love
Just imagine expanding and touching
And each person or animal
Whoever is touched by this loving kindness

Each person is changed
You can imagine that
So may everyone everywhere be happy and peaceful and at ease
May we all experience great joy
[bell rings]

Connection and Gratitude

1. Capitalizing on Positive Events (5 min.)

- **Objective:** To help nurture positive feelings with peers.
- **Preparation:** Have members seated.

Why

When people close to us—friends, family members, significant others—tell us about positive things that happened to them, these moments have the potential to make us feel significantly closer to one another—depending on how we respond. This activity offers tips for responding in a way that has been shown to nurture positive feelings on both sides of the relationship and to increase feelings of closeness and relationship satisfaction.

How

Ask a colleague to tell you about a good thing that happened to him or her today. It does not matter what type of event or how important it was, as long as it was a positive thing that happened to him or her and he or she feels comfortable discussing it.

As they share, listen and try to respond in an “active-constructive” manner, meaning that you:

- Make good eye contact, showing that you are interested in and engaged in what they have to say.
- Express positive emotion by smiling, or even cheering (if appropriate!).
- Make enthusiastic comments—e.g., “That sounds great,” “You must be so excited,” or “Your hard work is definitely paying off.”
- Ask constructive questions to find out more about the positive aspects of the event. For example, if the person tells you about receiving recognition at work for a project he or she completed, you could ask for more details about the project, of what aspects of the project he or she feels especially proud, and how it felt to receive recognition for it.
- Comment on the positive implications and potential benefits of the event. For example, “I bet this means you have a better chance of getting a promotion this year.”

Many people, when they first hear about this exercise, worry that when they try to do it, their responses will sound phony or scripted. However, once they start, people report that it feels natural and easy to do.

One strategy is to pick a specific aspect of the event that resonates with you and begin by commenting on that: “You seem really happy about what your boss said—tell me more.” Or, “It must have been satisfying to do so well on something you worked so hard for.”

2. Gratitude Journal (10 min.)

- **Objective:** To help individuals become more aware of the positive things in life.
- **Preparation:** Have members have a pen and paper or can verbally share with a peer.

Why

It's easy to take the good things and people in our lives for granted, but research suggests that consciously giving thanks for them can have profound effects on our well-being and relationships. This exercise helps you develop a greater appreciation for the good in your life. In fact, people who routinely express gratitude enjoy better health and greater happiness.

How

There's no wrong way to keep a gratitude journal, but here are some general instructions as you get started.

Write down up to five things for which you feel grateful. The physical record is important—don't just do this exercise in your head. The things you list can be relatively small in importance ("The tasty sandwich I had for lunch today.") or relatively large ("My sister gave birth to a healthy baby boy."). The goal of the exercise is to remember a good event, experience, person, or thing in your life—then enjoy the good emotions that come with it.

As you write, here are nine important tips:

1. Be as specific as possible—specificity is key to fostering gratitude. "I'm grateful that my co-workers brought me soup when I was sick on Tuesday" will be more effective than "I'm grateful for my co-workers."
2. Go for depth over breadth. Elaborating in detail about a particular person or thing for which you're grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of many things.
3. Get personal. Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful.
4. Try subtraction, not just addition. Consider what your life would be like without certain people or things, rather than just tallying up all the good stuff. Be grateful for the negative outcomes you avoided, escaped, prevented, or turned into something positive—try not to take that good fortune for granted.
5. See good things as "gifts." Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts guards against taking them for granted. Try to relish and savor the gifts you've received.
6. Savor surprises. Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude.
7. Revise if you repeat. Writing about some of the same people and things is OK, but zero in on a different aspect in detail.
8. Write regularly. Whether you write every other day or once a week, commit to a regular time to journal, then honor that commitment. But...
9. Don't overdo it. Evidence suggests writing occasionally (1-3 times per week) is more beneficial than daily journaling. That might be because we adapt to positive events and can soon become numb to them—that's why it helps to savor surprises.

3. Gratitude Meditation (3:30 min.)

- **Objective:** To help individuals develop a greater appreciation for the good in their life.
- **Preparation:** Have members seated.

Begin with a basic sitting meditation, attending to the breath for a few minutes.
Then move your awareness from noticing the breath to noticing sounds.
Simply let hearing happen: you do not need to search out for sounds,
just allow yourself to notice whatever presents itself to your ears.
Notice sounds near to you, in the room, and beyond.
Notice the wide expanse of sounds that are available to you.
When your attention wanders, as it naturally will, notice where it wandered to,
make a mental note of this,
and then gently return your attention back to noticing that hearing is happening.
(1 min.)

This is the same as returning to the breath as practiced in basic sitting meditation,
except that the object of awareness that we return to is sounds.
Especially notice judgements about sounds as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant.
Notice what happens when you let go of these judgements as simply thoughts, mental events.
How does this letting go affect your experience of hearing sounds as sounds?

Perhaps by now you are aware of a broader landscape of possibility by practicing mindful awareness of hearing.
Within this broader landscape,
ask yourself what you are grateful for here and now.
Ask yourself, "What am I grateful for?" on the in-breath,
and then "listen" on the out-breath for possible answers.
Ask yourself this question several times,
listening for answers each time, letting go of censoring your answers.
(1 min.)

What are you grateful for today?
Perhaps a small kindness by a stranger,
or an unexpected break in the busyness of the day,
or the familiar comfort of a food or beverage or routine?

What are you grateful for in the past week, month and year?
Consider each of these in turn, asking each several times, and listening for answers.

What events in your life, as a whole, are you grateful for?
How have some of the most arduous experiences in your life bestowed significant gifts?

Allow yourself to focus on three things that you are especially grateful for.
Contemplate each in turn.
On the in-breath, be aware of the first thing, or blessing, and on the out-breath, be aware of the gift, relief, joy,
helpfulness, or whatever benefit you have received from this blessing.
Do the same for the other two blessings.
Know that you carry these blessings with you all the time.
And when you open your eyes, record these three blessings on your "Gratitude List" (optional).