

Staying with Emotions

Guided Meditation

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

☐

Thoughts?

☐

Heart?

☐

Body?

☐

None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



Releasing Emotions Through Physical Focus

PURPOSE / EFFECTS

Emotions are an essential part of the human experience. For many people, it's the part that we listen to most, that provides motivation and meaning.

When emotions are positive, all may be well, but when they're painful, they can send us into a spiral of depression, confusion and blame. And, in spite of their importance in our lives, many of us don't know a lot about how emotions actually work or how we can learn to be with them in ways that cultivate our well-being and connection with ourselves and others.

It helps to know there are three parts to an emotional experience centred in different parts of your brain: physical sensations (like tightness), an emotion (like anger or grief) and the thoughts about it (like the story about what happened). Most people have learned to focus on—and believe—the emotion and the thoughts that surround it, and don't pay much attention to its physical expression.

There are many traditional mindfulness practices designed to help balance and enrich your emotional life. One approach guides you to go deeply into these often-ignored physical sensations that arise from the oldest part of your brain. When you pay attention to the physical expression for a sustained period of time, it settles down, and the emotions and thoughts follow. You then have a greater balance of body, mind and heart to guide your understanding and behaviour.

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Releasing Emotions Through Physical Focus

Here's a practice you can do any time you'd like to feel more grounded in the midst of a difficult emotion.

SUMMARY

When you notice a troubling emotion, pay attention to its physical sensations, rather than the emotional or mental labels you give it.

INSTRUCTIONS

DO A GENTLE BODY SCAN

- Find a comfortable position and take a couple of full breaths. Your breathing can become shallow when you're stressed or upset, so try to feel your chest and belly expand when you breathe in and really let go when you breathe out.
- Let your attention gently move through your body from your head to fingertips to toes, watching for places you may be tensing or holding. It's common to clench your jaw or literally sit on the edge of your seat if you're feeling a difficult emotion. Do your best to kindly notice the tension and relax just a little in those areas.

WHERE DOES YOUR EMOTION LIVE

- Feel the emotion that's with you right now. Where do you feel it most strongly? There might be one place or several places where you feel the emotion's physical expression—around your heart or solar plexus, throat or belly.
- See if you can be curious about the sensations. If you want to move away or resist them, that's totally natural. See if you can be with them with kindness and curiosity, just for a moment. Remember to breathe.
- You can use words to help you stay connected to the physical part of your experience, like "tight" or "swirling" or "hard," whatever feels right for you.
- You're just listening to your body's expression in this moment. You're not trying to make anything happen or stop anything from happening.

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- You may have an emotional label come up, like “grief” or “fear.” That’s all part of the practice. Notice the label and bring your attention gently back to the physical sensation that’s here now.
- Does your experience change in some way when you apply an emotional label, like “sadness,” or a physical label, like “tightness?”
- You may have a thought or a story come up, remembering what someone did or said to you. That’s part of the practice, too. Just notice it and, if you can, also notice if the thought creates an echo in your emotions or physical sensations. Then come back again to whatever physical sensations are most prominent.
- If an emotion is physically uncomfortable, you can try to create a little space around it. Gently explore the area to see what else is there, any relaxation or openness. Or, see if you can find the edges and, right there, soften a little. Breathe into that space.
- You can do this practice for as long as you like: doing the best you can to let your thoughts and emotions go, and stay connected with the physical manifestation of your emotion.

Big emotions can seem like impenetrable experiences that “just happen.” This practice will help you recognize the physical, emotional and mental components of your emotion, and what is calling most for your attention and self-compassion.

REFLECTIONS

Was it easy or hard for you to distinguish between physical, emotional and mental parts of your experience? When you were able to stay with the physical sensations, did your experience of the emotion change? Did you notice any thoughts that triggered an emotion or a physical sensation?

