

# MINDFULNESS BASED RELAPSE PREVENTION

**FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING**

Peter Chen, Farah Jindani  
and Nigel E. Turner





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# Preface

This manual is intended for an 8-session mindfulness group, aimed at people experiencing problems with gambling who wish to add to their relapse prevention skills. The manual includes lesson plans for the 8 sessions for facilitators as well as handouts for clients.

**Chapter 1** of the manual is an introduction that provides some background about mindfulness and practical suggestions about the group facilitation.

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**Chapter 2** discusses running mindfulness groups with diverse populations.

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**Chapter 3** is a brief introduction to mindfulness and trauma and its suitability with this population.

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**Chapters 4–11** present the 8 lesson plans in the order we usually hold them. Each lesson plan is followed by the relevant handouts.

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**Chapter 12** presents concluding remarks and resources.

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**Appendix 1** is an evaluation form.

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**Appendix 2** provides a more detailed discussion of the scientific research evaluating mindfulness.

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# Acknowledgments

The Buddha, Jack Kornfield, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Zindel V. Segal, Sarah Bowen, Neha Chawla, G. Alan Marlatt, Christopher Germer, Kristin Neff, John D. Teasdale, J. Mark G. Williams, Sharon Salzberg, Pema Chodron, Ron Segal, Eckhart Tolle and Gil Fronsdal, to name a few.

This manual has been greatly influenced by three previous mindfulness based programs; *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* by Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy* by Segal, Williams and Teasdale and especially *Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention* by Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt.

The development of this manual came out of a need to provide something more gambling specific to clients struggling with gambling problems. Practitioners in the Problem Gambling Treatment System were also requesting a gambling specific mindfulness manual that they could use, especially as interest in the application of mindfulness to gambling treatment had grown in the field.

Special mention should be given to the clients who participated in the mindfulness groups and were willing to try something new and provide us with feedback. We learnt as much from them as they learnt from us.

Funding for this project was based on a grant from the Gambling Research Exchange Ontario. The project was reviewed by the CAMH ethics review board and approved as Protocol #046/2014. The ideas expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of either Gambling Research Exchange Ontario, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario, or the University of Toronto.

Mindfulness is essentially an awareness and acceptance of your own moment to moment experience, including thoughts, emotions and body sensations.





## Chapter 01

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# An introduction to mindfulness

The Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention for Problem Gambling (MBRPPG) program is intended for clients attending problem gambling treatment in the action or maintenance stages of change. Their gambling behaviour would need to be relatively stabilized and would need to include gambling goals of abstinence or controlled gambling. The development of this program was based on the structure and format of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) ( Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002, 2013) and Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) (Bowen, Chawla, & Marlatt, 2011), but has been tailored to the unique aspects of people experiencing problems with gambling.

Clinicians working in addiction treatment programs have noted that their clients can benefit from exercise and relaxation techniques. Mindfulness meditation goes beyond relaxation by teaching clients how to be present in a non-judgemental way. It does this by teaching clients how to step out of the usual habits of the busy mind, instead teaching them to observe and be with their experience in any given moment. Segal (MBCT) ( Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002, 2013) refers to developing the “being mind” as opposed to the “doing mind.”

The “doing” mind is the mode of mind that we are in most of the time. It helps us get things done

and problem solve. It is the logical mind. We access the “being” mind less often. It is the creative part of the mind. The moment when we behold a beautiful sunset, and we become awestruck and have no words or thoughts, we might be in the “being” mode of mind. However, this may only last a split second and then we return to the “doing” mind, conceptualizing the sunset and returning to our thoughts.

The aim of a mindfulness approach is for clients to become aware of and accept, without judgement, their present moment experience and to learn to see thoughts and emotions as passing mental events. The goal is not to change anything about one’s experience, but, as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990), to pay “attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally” (as cited in Bowen et al., 2011, 46). In mindfulness practice, the client is encouraged to cultivate an attitude of curiosity, openness, friendliness, non-judgemental awareness, and acceptance of one’s present moment experience.

### **What is mindfulness?**

Mindfulness is essentially an awareness and acceptance of your own moment-to-moment experience, including thoughts, emotions and body sensations. It does not mean suppression of thoughts, emotions, or body sensations. It is non-judgemental awareness but also involves a sense of detachment from thoughts, emotions and body sensations. That is, you are aware of the content of your thoughts, but do not identify with them or feel that you have to act upon them, and can let them slide in and out of awareness. It is well known that you cannot will yourself to stop thinking about something. In fact, the opposite happens; trying not to think about something makes it more difficult to unhook the thought. Rather than trying to suppress unwanted thoughts, the mindful person brings awareness to those thoughts and lets them be. This process is one of the key principles taught in a mindfulness class.

### **Relation of problem gambling to mindfulness-based approaches**

Relapse prevention from a Cognitive Behavioral perspective involves helping clients develop greater awareness of individual triggers and urges to gamble. Mindfulness practice also helps clients develop greater awareness of triggers and urges, as well as develop a different relationship to their experience by adopting an attitude of curiosity and non-judgemental awareness.

According to Toneatto, Vettese, and Nguyen (2007):

*[d]istinguishing mental events from the responses to them provides a choice to the gambler regarding how best to respond, rather than react, to gambling related cognition. It is argued that improving gambler’s mindfulness can help them overcome the erroneous beliefs and automatic behaviours associated with problem gambling. Learning to relate differently to gambling cognitions may be as important as, if not more important than, challenging the specific content of the thoughts (Toneatto et al., 2007, 94).*

Through mindfulness meditation practice, clients become aware of their urges but do not feel compelled to act on them. The key is learning to recognize the impermanence of experiences and understanding urges as passing mental events that do not have to be acted upon or fought.

## **Moderate and severe gambling problems affect approximately 2.5% of the adult population in Ontario.**

We believe this is particularly important for problem gambling because of the critical role of erroneous beliefs about gambling games and the tendency of gamblers to switch into autopilot while gambling. The mindful approach to erroneous cognitions brings awareness to the automatic nature of these thoughts. Gamblers often do know that these thoughts are inaccurate, but in the excitement of gambling, they go into autopilot. We believe that mindfulness may be a means of breaking that cycle by helping the client avoid autopilot.

In recent years there has been a growing literature on the relationship between mindfulness and problem gambling (see de Lisle et al., 2012; Shonin et al., 2013b). According to de Lisle et al. (2012) the literature indicates that there is an inverse relationship between dispositional mindfulness and psychological distress, and this may be mediated by a number of factors including emotional, cognitive, and behavioural flexibility. For example, Lakey et al. (2007) found a significant negative correlation between gambling problems and mindfulness amongst undergraduate students. For more information on research into mindfulness, see Appendix 2.

MBRPPG groups are experiential in nature. The best way to learn mindfulness is by the direct experience of the practice itself. The process of teaching mindfulness is different from other groups, where the theory and concepts are first discussed and then followed by practice of the skill to be learned. In contrast, mindfulness groups usually start with a mindfulness practice such as the body scan, sitting meditation, mindful eating, and follow with a discussion—called the inquiry.

### **Inquiry**

Following every mindfulness practice, facilitators ask group members what they noticed during the practice. This serves to enhance the learning of the practice itself and emphasize the direct experience of the practice. Inquiry is different from other treatment group discussions that centre on the analysis and interpretation of events. Inquiry is about what is observed during the mindfulness practice, focusing on body sensations, thoughts and emotions in a curious and non-judgemental manner.

### **Facilitators**

MBRPPG facilitators need to have expertise in problem gambling counseling, including cognitive-behavioral relapse prevention strategies. Most importantly, they should have specific training in leading mindfulness groups (such as MBSR or MBCT group facilitation training) and a personal mindfulness practice. It is of utmost importance that facilitators have their own mindfulness practice. Facilitators can only embody and model mindfulness if they cultivate their own mindfulness. Returning to the bicycle example, it is difficult to teach someone to ride a bicycle if you cannot ride a bicycle yourself!

### **Problem gambling**

Moderate and severe gambling problems affect approximately 2.5% of the adult population in Ontario (Williams & Volberg 2013). Or about 332,000 adults in the province of Ontario. People with problems related to gambling may also have other co-occurring mental health issues,

such as depression and anxiety, and other behavioral challenges, such as substance use, internet overuse, over eating, compulsive shopping or unhealthy relationships (see Malat et al., 2010). According to Malat et al. (2010), the most common behavioral addictions in his problem gambling client population are over eating, unhealthy relationships, and compulsive shopping.

### **Treatment of problem gambling**

In Ontario, treatment for people with problems related to gambling was first implemented in 1995, in response to the opening of the first commercial casino in Windsor. Knowledge about what constitutes effective treatment has been growing ever since. There is no one approach that suits everyone, as each individual has differing needs. However, an extensive knowledge base on what works has been developed, based on extensive clinical experience and excellent research. Over the past three decades, mindfulness has been increasingly integrated into a variety of addictions and mental health programs. The mindfulness groups have been offered at the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario (PGIO) as a regular part of programming since 2010.

Treatment services, for the most part, have adopted an eclectic and holistic approach including a bio-psycho-social-spiritual model employing different methods for different clients. One of the reasons for the introduction of mindfulness groups is because problem gambling clinicians felt that their clients could benefit from learning ways to be more aware of their thoughts while unhooking from them and not giving in to them. This is especially true given problem gamblers' tendency to hold erroneous beliefs (Toneatto et al., 1997) and to engage in automatic thinking before, during, and after gambling (Jacobs, 1988; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998). People with gambling problems tend to have more cognitive and belief issues to deal with, but on the other hand have fewer physiological withdrawal issues. They also tend to be higher functioning and less likely to show impairment in their cognitive abilities compared to substance use clients because gambling does not harm the brain. This means, on the one hand, that self-awareness may be easier compared to other addiction clients, but on the other hand, they may also be very good at denial and rationalization. For example, gamblers will come up with systems such as doubling after a loss that they believe will allow them to beat the odds (see Turner, 1998) and are good at finding reasons to justify their gambling, even when the systems fail (see Toneatto et al., 1997).

### **Relapse prevention**

A characteristic of problem gambling is recurring relapse of the gambling behaviour. The purpose of the mindfulness group is to improve a client's chance of preventing further gambling by integrating mindfulness with relapse prevention strategies. In the group, clients will learn skills to help them manage their urges and cravings to gamble. They will learn these skills in a group with other people who are also experiencing gambling problems. The group will meet for eight weekly 2-hour sessions to learn ways of dealing with the thoughts and feelings that are part of the urges and temptations to gamble. They will also have opportunities to share their experiences with other group members and ask questions about the mindfulness practice.

## **Practice is the key**

It is important for clients to know that learning the skill of mindfulness is going to take effort and practice. This approach depends a lot on the client's willingness to do home practice between class meetings. Home practice involves tasks such as listening to the recorded meditations that will be provided, and bringing mindfulness to daily routine activities, such as eating, taking a shower, cooking, walking, brushing your teeth and so on. Many barriers to practice will come up, and these will be discussed in the group. However, the commitment to spend time on home practice is an essential part of the group.

Keeping up the practice on a regular basis over time is important. Similar to all skills, clients will only see results after repeated practice. Persistence in the face of gambling losses is a hallmark of a gambling problem, and this same attribute can help problem gamblers succeed in meditation.

Gambling habits took a long time to develop and so will these new habits, but they are possible to learn. Encourage your clients not to keep up the practice by committing time and effort, and encourage them. Becoming more self-aware is not difficult, but it does take motivation and practice.

## **Turning toward rather than avoiding**

The mindfulness practices that clients will learn in the group and at home will enable them to be more fully aware and present in each moment of their life. They will learn to turn towards difficulties in their life rather than away from them, like they may have done in the past. For many people with gambling problems, what motivates them to gamble is to escape or avoid reality, to dream about the big win, or to zone out and not think of anything. But using gambling as an escape is problematic; eventually it is gambling that they have to escape from. In contrast, mindfulness means accepting the good and the bad in our lives and not clinging to what we want and pushing away what we don't want. In the long run, this approach is more effective and liberating than gambling could ever be, and free of the financial issues that result from problem gambling.

Being more present and aware in one's life and able to "see" more clearly is central to preventing further gambling problems, and to making more skillful decisions that are grounded in the present. In the group sessions, clients will learn to remain open to and face difficulties, and be supported by the instructor and the other group members.

## What others have learned from the group

Here are some things that participants in past groups have reported:  
(Chen, Jindani, Perry, & Turner, 2014)

Now I can recognize what [s] happening internally and separate myself from what I'm thinking.	I have become more aware of the present moment. I have become more mindful and conscious about the present moment, learning to take things one step at a time.
My brain is very busy but in this course, I learned how to stay on NOW, in this moment.	I had a bit of a crisis while I took this course and it got me through by practicing mindfulness and journaling.
Mindfulness/awareness of warning signs and triggers is my main tool to not returning to coping via gambling.	Much better listener and not affected by small things. Conflicts are less severe when you don't react right away.
Learn how to calm down by using the 3 minute breathing meditation.	Stop and think before I do any harm or damage to myself.
I learned to discipline myself better.	To be able to control going into auto pilot.
Learned how I sometimes get rid of bad thinking and be relaxed.	Mental and physical health has improved greatly.
Always brightened my mood.	Feel more positive.
I have more patience and am aware of my heartbeat.	Learnt about taking your time on something without stressing yourself.
Learn how to calm down—Less anxiety.	

During the group, clients will find that there are many different ways to be mindful. By trying all the mindfulness practices, they discover the ones that are most useful for them. The weekly group also provides the opportunity to practice being kinder and gentler to yourself.



Mindfulness practice is based on learning to pause and become attuned to your own mind and body and develop enhanced awareness.





## Chapter 02

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# Mindfulness and diverse populations

Scientific evidence demonstrates that mindfulness-based interventions are beneficial for numerous physical and mental health concerns, including but not limited to: cancer, chronic pain, eating disorders, stress reduction, depression, anxiety, and, trauma (Amaro et al., 2014; Dimidjian et al., 2014; Karyadi et al., 2014; Liehr & Diaz, 2010). Mindfulness treatments have been effective for specialized and often marginalized populations, including: women with substance use disorders, youth, ethno-racial populations, perinatal depression, traumatized women, gamblers, and, older adults (Amaro et al., 2014; Dimidjian et al., 2014; Gallego et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2014).

As the empirical literature suggests, the potential impacts of mindfulness are vast. However, there are a number of issues that may present when implementing this approach with individuals from underserved and underrepresented backgrounds (e.g., marginalized racial groups, low socioeconomic groups, persons with disabilities, etc.). For instance, there are a number of systemic barriers in the environment that can limit opportunities for employment, heighten stressors and impact oppression (Sobczak & West, 2013). Mindfulness strategies offer an opportunity to identify some of the emotions associated with the various oppressions and struggles in your life. This section discusses the use of mindfulness as a tool for working with individuals from diverse groups. The relationship between gambling and mindfulness is also illustrated.

An overarching theme of the existing research and practice base is that mindfulness is holistic in nature—supporting the mind, body and spirit. Mindfulness practice is based on learning to pause and become attuned to your own mind and body and develop enhanced awareness. When you can learn to focus and attune your attention in the present moment, it is possible to become aware and open to novel experiences, multiple perspectives, develop a greater sense of compassion for self and others, leading to a state of acceptance (Langer, 1990). Essentially, you can learn to have a more positive relationship with your emotions and thoughts.

While the benefits of mindfulness in a person's life over the long-term are predominantly positive, some people may struggle with imparting mindfulness practices into their life. Stresses related to racism may impact how people may perceive the practices (Amaro, 2014). As an example, the avoidance of emotions may have been a protective factor for a racialized woman struggling with employment and housing. Having experienced numerous instances of racism in early life, she may engage in gambling as an outlet for dealing with emotions. She may or may not be aware of her gambling related triggers. Despite her resilience in maintaining steady employment and raising healthy and successful children, her gambling may have increased to a point that is no longer healthy. This woman might now label herself as a gambler and feel a sense of guilt and regret regarding her gambling behaviours. Such feelings can lead to a sense of powerlessness.

Mindfulness offers an opportunity to help individuals to become fully aware of and engage with their emotions. Through mindful practice, you can identify values that are important to yourself and become aware of what would lead to living a meaningful life. Gambling treatment can raise numerous emotions and challenges related to health, finances, employment, and relationships. Numerous other external or internal stresses may coexist. Encouraging clients to “sit and be silent” with their feelings can be overwhelming, challenging or viewed as a silly exercise.

Acknowledging that gambling clients may be experiencing numerous barriers and challenges, it may be valuable for a clinician who is introducing mindfulness to clients to explain the ways in which the avoidance of distressing emotions may be related to their gambling related feelings and behaviours. The clinician must also acknowledge the emotional pain and discomfort that may arise when painful emotions arise in the mindfulness process (Sobczak & West, 2013). Validation of client experiences and an encouragement to continue with mindfulness can allow emotions to surface for further exploration, allowing acceptance of past challenges and a stance of living in the present. This process can help lead to greater self-esteem, self-regulation and perceptions of self in relation to others (Chen et al., 2014).

For people who are experiencing gambling related challenges, treatment using a mindfulness-based approach offers the potential to be in touch with emotions and grapple with what is important in terms of living a valued, meaningful and purposeful life. In exploring what is important, people who have been struggling with gambling have the opportunity to become in touch with their gambling-related triggers, relationships, values regarding money and how they wish to live life when gambling is no longer the central aspect of their life. An important step in this process is identifying their values at this point in life (Sobczak & West, 2013). For instance, for a client who has been gambling for the last five years and is now coming to terms with the financial losses and debts, they may experience great guilt, anger, anxiety and frus-

**Eckhart Tolle defined spirituality as not having to do with a belief, but about one's relationship with the present moment.**

tration with their prior gambling behaviours. Rather than these emotions being triggers to further gambling, mindfulness can promote the acceptance of challenges in the face of adversity (Sobczak & West, 2013).

Aspects of mindfulness modalities can be practiced at any time, making this approach empowering for clients. As clients attend to their own emotions and sensations, they are encouraged to reconnect to aspects of their lives that are valuable and to consider what is meaningful. Space to consider your own values, beliefs and emotions and acting on what is meaningful can be an empowering process for individuals from diverse backgrounds (Sobczak & West, 2013).

A challenge that may arise in the presentation of mindfulness as a treatment option is the concern that mindfulness is religious. Given its origin in Buddhism, some people may feel it clashes with their own beliefs. According to Dr. Eifring at the University of Oslo, "meditation has been performed for several thousand years, and appears in all the major religions" (University of Oslo, 2014, May 13) and is also an integral part of ritual trances used in shamanistic cultures (Basilov, 1990). There are "numerous forms of meditation" (University of Oslo, 2014, May 13), far more than we are familiar with today. A major difference between Western and Asiatic meditation is that in the West, meditation focuses on the individual's relationship with God(s) and includes prayer and the contemplation of specific religious passages. Western meditation tends to be about the content of contemplation, whereas in the Asian tradition, meditation is more about the techniques (e.g., breathing, yoga stretches). Since the 1950s, meditation has become less about the content and more about the technique (University of Oslo, 2014, May 13). Nonetheless, Asian forms of meditation may be controversial to some people from Western religious traditions, perhaps because they view meditation as tied to faith. It may be valuable for clinicians to provide psychoeducation about mindfulness as a therapeutic tool and its efficacy regardless of spirituality (Sobczak & West, 2013). If the client already has a religious or spiritual practice, aspects of mindfulness might be integrated into current practices. Sobczak & West (2013) also suggest that it would also be valuable for the clinician to explore with the client strategies that they have implemented in the past to overcome challenging situations, and the extent to which they found these strategies helpful. Mindfulness can be offered as one of several strategies that clients may find valuable. To note, most religious traditions contain some sort of contemplative practice where one cultivates stillness and presence (University of Oslo, 2014, May 13), similar to mindfulness. Prayer, for example, can be viewed as a type of meditation. Eckhart Tolle defined spirituality as not having to do with a belief, but about one's relationship with the present moment. With an emphasis on technique rather than content, anyone can obtain a deeper understanding of themselves and learn to live in the moment using meditation, without accepting any Buddhist religious ideas.

Mindfulness is about learning to get in touch with your inner world, cultivating greater self-awareness and insight. In this way, irrespective of ethnic or cultural backgrounds, learning mindfulness does not impose any particular belief or approach on the practitioner, but simply helps them be present in a curious and non-judgemental manner.

In an embodied way, people can learn to become aware of their triggers to gambling and learn tools for processing and sitting with those reactions. Mindfulness is synonymous with embodied self-reflection, and emotions are at the root of self-reflection. By learning to become aware

of emotions and physical attributes associated with behavior, mindfulness teaches skills for compassion toward self and others.

As a skill-based treatment intervention, people experiencing problems with gambling can learn through mindfulness practice how to become aware of their physiological and emotional experiences in a manner that allows them to become an observer of their experiences. In this empowering way, those who diligently practice mindfulness, irrespective of diverse backgrounds, no longer identify themselves as a “label” but can learn to become aware and accept their personalized issues of diversity and addiction. This occurs through detachment but not dissociation from their experience, through non-judgemental awareness. In fact it’s the opposite of dissociation. Dissociation is a loss of awareness, going into a dream world to escape it; meditation is an increased awareness while learning how to relax, accept, be non-reactive and non-judgemental so that they don’t need to escape.

Self-acceptance of identity, values and sense of meaning can lend to a fuller understanding and appreciation of how experience and perspective impacts emotions and behaviours. Irrespective of differences, this can be an empowering experience for anyone. Honouring and accepting one’s own experience translates into a greater sense of awareness towards others. Awareness through mindfulness practice offers the opportunity for self-development in a healthy manner.



**Mindfulness  
can help trauma  
survivors address  
the symptoms of  
PTSD: avoidance,  
hyperarousal,  
re-experiencing,  
and negative  
cognitions.**



## Chapter 03

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# Mindfulness and trauma

### **Why mindfulness and trauma?**

A growing body of research suggests that mind and body oriented interventions for trauma can enhance outcomes for clients affected by trauma (Follette et al, 2015). This section will explore the integration of Mindfulness and CBT to prevent or reduce various symptoms or problems associated with trauma (including anxiety, panic, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, suicidality, self-injurious behavior, dissociation, low self-esteem, and chronic pain).

### **Prevalence of trauma in problem gambling treatment population**

Clients attending problem gambling treatment programs have a high incidence of histories of trauma, not unlike clients attending substance abuse programs. Gambling, like substance abuse, can serve as a means of escape from the symptoms of trauma or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is therefore important that gambling counsellors have an understanding of how to work with and support clients affected by trauma, and mindfulness provides skills for counsellors to use.

## **Clinical benefits of mindfulness**

The skill of mindfulness offers clients many clinical benefits, including the ability to stay present with their experiences regardless of if the experience is good or bad (Jindani & Khalsa, 2015). Mindfulness can help trauma survivors address the symptoms of PTSD: avoidance, hyperarousal, re-experiencing, and negative cognitions.

Learning to be aware of mind and body can help trauma survivors cope with intrusion symptoms by teaching them skills to stay present and not react to intrusive memories and triggers (Jindani et al., 2015).

Similarly, with avoidance symptoms, trauma survivors can learn through mindfulness to turn toward what they are experiencing with curiosity and non-judgement.

Mindfulness practices have a calming effect on the nervous system, so, trauma survivors can become less aroused (Magyari, 2015) and they can also become more aware of their surroundings, thus promoting a sense of safety (Jindani et al., 2015).

Trauma survivors can also learn to avoid the downward spiral of depressive rumination by not reacting to negative mood and cognitions, instead seeing thoughts and emotions as passing mental events (Magyari, 2015; Segal et al., 2002). They can learn to develop a different relationship to their experience.

They can also learn to respond to self-critical thoughts with greater kindness and self-compassion, as will be discussed in the section below on self-compassion (Germer & Neff, 2015; Kearney et al., 2013).

## **Using mindfulness in trauma therapy**

Mindfulness augmented trauma therapy (Briere, 2015; Vujanovic et al., 2016) refers to therapy for trauma survivors where mindfulness has been integrated into the therapy program. John Briere (Briere, 2015) suggests the following guidelines when considering introducing trauma survivors to a mindfulness-based approach.

### **The first step is to screen for the appropriateness of meditation:**

Trauma survivors may have difficulty with mindfulness meditation if they are experiencing intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, rumination or easily triggered trauma memories. Mindfulness meditation is about being fully present with what is, thus decreasing avoidance and providing greater exposure to unpleasant experience. Some trauma survivors may be lacking in affect regulation coping skills and thus be more easily overwhelmed when triggered. They may need some initial preparatory work in individual sessions prior to referring them to a mindfulness group. The purpose of this preparatory work is to gradually introduce the experience of mindfulness meditation and to stabilize the PTSD symptoms to the extent that they can comfortably participate in a group. That said, practicing mindfulness is about learning to be present with discomfort. Jon Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness as “paying



## **Practicing mindfulness is about learning to be present with discomfort.**

attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994. p 4).

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Psychosis, extreme depression, dissociative disorder, mania/hypomania, substance addiction, or suicidality may be other reasons for clients to avoid mindfulness meditation groups, at least until they experience some improvement in these symptoms or conditions.

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When available and appropriate, trauma survivors may be referred to a mindfulness group or a qualified meditation or yoga center. If available, specialized trauma-focused mindfulness groups may be especially useful (Jindani & Singh, 2015).

Learning mindfulness skills can be very useful for trauma survivors to deal with PTSD symptoms, especially when done concurrently with trauma-focused psychotherapy.

### **Integrating mindfulness and Western approaches**

There are similarities between mindfulness and Western approaches. Both approaches acknowledge that cognitive variables such as an excessive need for control, inaccurate expectations, and negative attributions can make the impact of trauma symptoms worse, and that avoidance can also prolong and intensify these effects. In both approaches, increased awareness can improve outcomes along with greater insight into their subjective reactions. There is one major difference, which is, that Western interventions rely on the diagnosing and treating of a psychological disorder. Buddhist approaches, on the other hand, focus on developing greater awareness and insight, and acceptance and clear seeing of reality. The aim is to develop new understandings, capacities, and skills, rather than labeling the pathology and fixing the problem.

### **Individual psychotherapy is of utmost importance**

Although teaching trauma survivors mindfulness can be very beneficial clinically, it is recommended that individual psychotherapy be a crucial component (Briere, 2015). Mindfulness is usually taught in a group setting and tends not to be clinically focused, instead focused on teaching the skill of mindfulness. The clinical benefits of developing a safe and trusting relationship with an individual therapist is of utmost importance and may not be replicated in a group setting (Briere, 2015).

### **Working with clients individually.**

Tara Brach, PhD (Brach, 2015; see also Herman, 1998) refers to three stages that trauma survivors need to go through in the healing process. In order to heal, they need to recontact the painful emotions associated with the past trauma, but from a more spacious perspective. This can only be done after a trauma survivor has established an environment of sufficient safety, care, and connection with a trusted therapist, while also strengthening their own inner resources.

## Stage 1

The first stage involves the development of what she calls, “a caring presence” in the therapist. Trauma survivors’ relationships may have become associated with danger and therefore, the therapeutic alliance with a trusted therapist is of utmost importance and can be more impactful than any particular intervention, as indicated in the treatment outcome literature (Lambert & Barley, 2001; Lambert & Okishi, 1997). In addition, trauma survivors can learn that such relationships are possible. When such a trusting relationship has been developed between client and therapist, trauma survivors may be in a better position to work through the intense fear that they can sometimes experience.

## Stage 2

The second stage is “de-shaming the trauma” (Brach, 2015; Herman, 1998). Trauma survivors experience tremendous self-blame and self-hatred; they lack compassion towards themselves (Germer & Neff, 2015). They need to understand that addictions, dissociation, and avoiding intimacy were their solutions/adaptive strategies and that they were doing the best they could. Ultimately, they need to learn self-acceptance and self-compassion for healing to occur, as described later in this section.

## Stage 3

The third stage is “cultivating inner refuge” (Brach, 2015; Herman, 1998). A sense of acceptance, safety, worth, or love must be experienced from within for healing to occur and be sustained. For this to occur, the therapist acts as a bridge from “outer to inner refuge”—the therapist provides the outer refuge for the client through the therapeutic alliance and helps the client through a process whereby they eventually learn to trust their own selves (the inner refuge) (Brach, 2015).

Modern technology has shown what happens in the brains of meditators when attention is focused on love. The left frontal cortex, the part of the brain that gets deactivated during trauma, lights up during loving-kindness and compassion meditations (Brach, 2015; Salzberg, 1995; Wilson, 2016). The more that individuals practice such meditations, the more these positive emotions take hold (Jindani & Khalsa, 2015; Brach, 2015; Salzberg, 1995). This can be done

through internally generated words, images, or self-touch. As a result, the intensity of the trauma symptoms can be reduced while new associations, new inner resources, and new ways of coping and understanding begin to emerge (Brach, 2015). For example, visualizing being held by a loved one or the use of gentle self-touch. Internally generated words of loving kindness and self-compassion include: “I love and accept myself just the way I am” and “May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I live with ease.” Trauma survivors can also identify an ally, mentor, or supportive and trusting person to call to mind whenever in distress. (Brach, 2015; Salzberg, 1995)

**Tara Brach also suggested questions to help clients develop an inner refuge of safety and love. These questions are best considered when not in the grip of fear. They are:**

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When and where do you feel most at home—safe, secure, relaxed, or strong?

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What events or experiences or relationships have best revealed to you your strength, your courage, your potential?

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What about yourself helps you to trust your goodness?

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When you are caught in fear, what is it that you most want to feel?

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(Follette et al., 2015, 31–42)

## **Working with clients in group**

Teaching mindfulness has usually been done in a group setting. Many of the mindfulness groups that have evolved today have been based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program that he developed over three decades ago at the stress reduction clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

## **MBSR program**

The MBSR program consists of an eight-week group, meeting once per week for about two-and-a-half hours each week, plus a one-day retreat. Jon Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness as “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, while non-judgementally”. (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4)

As mentioned above, there are clinical challenges to teaching mindfulness to people affected by trauma. However research and clinical experience shows that it is a well-accepted and extremely effective approach for dealing with the effects of trauma (Magyari, 2015).

The skills of mindfulness are usually taught through the following practices in MBSR groups: mindful eating, the body scan, mindfulness of the breath, body sensations, sounds, thoughts and emotions, mindful walking, mindful stretching, and, yoga. Some of the principles/attitudes that are taught include: cultivating presence, non-judgement, impermanence, acceptance, curiosity, beginner’s mind, cultivating being mind vs doing mind, non-striving, and, self-compassion (mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness).

The following are what some clients in the mindfulness groups at The Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario at The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health have said that they learned from participating in the group:

Learning about mindfulness and focusing on the present, thinking before you speak. I've learned patience, deep breathing in angst situations.

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I learned the past is finished, the future is unknown and all we have is the present moment. Our thoughts are just that...thoughts. They will come and they will go.

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Learning to be more compassionate, less or at least no judgement. Breathing and taking it into the next level by being more and more relax as you go along with the home practice, it might not be the same as in the class or group but being mindful gives me more peace, serenity and easy to calm down in times of anxiety and panic attacks.

---

Mindful tool and skill that allow you to focus in the now and not worry about what you can't change.

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I learned how to put space in between my thoughts, cravings, urges. Learned that I have more control of my emotions, cravings and urges when I am present, not in auto pilot. A lot more aware of my feelings and body.

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3-part mindfulness—integrating an attitude of mindfulness throughout my daily activities—developing awareness—bodily, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually & environmentally helps me not to be reactive.

---

I learned that being mindful and doing mindfulness takes practice. I am more aware than I was before. I learned to be more reflective.

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The most valuable thing I got from the course was to get a better understanding of my feelings and reactions. Also to slow things down so I could take in more things.

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Learning to be mindful, being aware of my surroundings, learning to breathe and control the breath.

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Learned to find my inner peace; that I can relax.

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I learned the value of mindfulness in everyday life (every moment life!) This course has positively changed my daily life. I am practicing regularly and I think that my outlook is significantly brighter.

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Taught me calmness—less rigidity. Techniques of mindfulness. Awareness of the moment. Awareness of my breath and body. Awareness of things around me.

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# Reducing PTSD symptoms using mindful self-compassion

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Germer and Neff (2015) defined mindful self-compassion as consisting of three components: mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness. The first component, mindfulness, involves bringing mindful awareness to your suffering. The second component, common humanity, involves recognition that suffering is a part of the human experience, and that you are not alone in your suffering. The third component, self-kindness, is about being kind to yourself and not being hard on yourself. Many of us, especially trauma survivors, are hard on ourselves when going through some kind of suffering or pain. If a good friend who was having a hard time, we would treat them with compassion. But we don't treat ourselves that way (Germer & Neff). Trauma survivors need to learn how to be more compassionate to themselves (Germer & Neff, 2015).

Trauma survivors can benefit greatly from learning self-compassion by working with an individual therapist and developing what Tara Brach referred to as an "Inner Refuge" (Brach, 2015). First, they learn to receive compassion from a trusted person, and eventually they learn to give compassion to themselves. Since trauma survivors are often hard on themselves, self-compassion is essential to their growth and recovery from the effects of trauma.

Individuals with PTSD often fail to demonstrate appropriate emotional responses because they are engaged in a pattern of re-living their prior trauma (Jindani, et al., 2015). As a result, people with PTSD have symptoms of arousal, avoidance and intrusions corresponded with the stress response of fight, flight and freeze (Germer & Neff, 2015). This in turn corresponds to our reactions to internal stress including self-criticism, self-isolation and self-absorption (Brach, 2015; Germer & Neff 2015; Jindani, et al., 2015). Self-compassion can be a healthy, alternative response to trauma. Self-kindness can have a soothing effect on the trauma survivor's aroused state, common humanity takes them out of isolation and shame, and mindfulness can help them to unhook from intrusive thoughts and feelings.

## **Self-compassion has been linked to many positive results**

Self-compassion has been linked, through research, to many positive outcomes (Germer & Neff, 2015). These include: well-being; life satisfaction; happiness; self-confidence; optimism; motivation; healthy behaviours; personal accountability; coping and resilience; better romantic relationships; and, better other-focused concern. It has also been linked with a decrease in anxiety, depression, stress, rumination, perfectionism, shame and negative body image. In addition, individuals who score high on self-compassion have been shown to also be less likely to develop PTSD (Germer & Neff, 2015). Jindani (2015) reported that mindful yoga resulted in significant improvements in measures of sleep, positive affect, perceived stress, anxiety, stress and resilience.

### **How to develop mindful self-compassion**

Research indicates that those attending MBSR and MBCT programs score higher on self-compassion as a result of participation in the group, even though the group is not specifically focused on teaching self-compassion (Germer & Neff, 2015). There are programs focused specifically on teaching mindful-self-compassion. These are called: Mindful Self-Compassion Training and Compassionate Mind Training. The respective websites for these two programs are: [www.CenterForMSC.Org](http://www.CenterForMSC.Org) and [www.Compassionate-Mind.co.uk](http://www.Compassionate-Mind.co.uk)

### **Conclusion**

Trauma survivors can learn to cope with the effects of trauma and live a fulfilling and meaningful life, free from debilitating fear and anxiety. Mindfulness is another skill that they can learn to change their circumstances.



Mindfulness practices such as the raisin exercise and body scan provide an opportunity to develop the “being mind” rather than the “doing mind”.





## Session 01

### Chapter 04

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# Lesson plan for stepping out of automatic pilot

We now turn to the actual lesson plans for running a mindfulness group with problem gamblers. People often do things while being unaware of what they are doing. Have you ever driven to work and encountered construction activity along your usual route to work? You then decide, in your mind, to take a different route the next day, only to find yourself on the same construction route before you catch yourself. This may even go on for another couple days before you can catch yourself and take a different route from the start.

How often do you meet someone and they tell you their name and immediately afterward, you forget what their name is? Is this a problem with memory? What exactly is happening?

These are examples of operating on automatic pilot. Most of us live our lives operating on automatic pilot, not being fully aware of what it is we are doing from moment to moment. People with gambling problems often gamble on autopilot. How can they learn to break out of this?

In our first session, we discuss the concept of “automatic pilot”. Automatic pilot is our tendency to act and react to what is happening around us without full awareness. Understanding autopilot is particularly important for people with gambling problems because they will often



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## Agenda

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Introductions/  
goals and  
expectations  
for group

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Establishing  
group norms  
and safety

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Experiential  
nature of group

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Raisin exercise  
and inquiry

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What is  
mindfulness?

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Body scan  
meditation  
and inquiry

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Home practice

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Closing

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gamble away their money while on autopilot, until all their money is gone. We explore and discuss automatic pilot and relapse by considering how it is connected with triggers, cravings, and urges to gamble.

Our exploration of mindfulness begins with the experiential exercises of the raisin exercise and the body scan, where we have the opportunity to fully bring our attention to what is happening in the present moment through mindful eating and being grounded in our bodies. Our description of the raisin exercise is based on a number of sources including Bowen et al. (2011), Segal (2002), and Kabat-Zinn (1990) as well as our own experience using this exercise in group.

The raisin exercise is an introduction to mindfulness. A different way of being and doing things, mindfully and with presence. Mindfulness is a different way of being and doing things, mindfully and cultivating presence in your everyday life, while maintaining a non-judgemental attitude of acceptance for whatever is happening.

### → Introductions /goals and expectations for group

Ask participants to pair up and take turns introducing themselves to their partner by stating their first names, what made them decide to attend this group and what they are hoping to get out of the group. This could be synonymous with their goals for the group. When they have each taken turns to do so with their partner, reconvene as a large group, and invite each participant to introduce their partner to the group by their first name, reasons for attending and goals for the group. Keep a flipchart of responses to the two questions for the group to see. The group leader can save the flipcharted list and bring it back to the group in session eight as a way of ending the group, and looking at whether their goals had been accomplished or not.

Group leaders can choose to use name tags in the group or not. Participants are encouraged to try and remember each other's name without the use of name tags. We may forget people's names when we meet them because we are in automatic pilot during the encounter. Participants can use this as an opportunity to practice being present/mindful in the group and observe what happens in ourselves when we encounter someone for the first time. It is not a test to remember names, but simply to notice what is happening.

### → Establishing group norms and safety

Generate a discussion with group members about what will make for a safe and well-functioning group. The group leader can brainstorm with the group members what issues might arise and flipchart their responses. Typical responses might include (but are not limited to): confidentiality, respect for differences and opinions, being on time for the group, consistency in attendance, honesty, a non-judgemental attitude, and, a commitment to the learning process.

### → Experiential nature of group

This group is experiential in nature. It is centered around the mindfulness practices: mindful eating, the body scan, sitting meditation, mindfulness of seeing, mindfulness of hearing, mindfulness of movement, mindful walking, the breathing space.

**The term mindfulness might be misleading because it sounds as if the mind is full, but in actuality it is closer to the opposite. It is about paying attention to your body and being aware of your body.**

Typically, when learning a new skill, there is an initial discussion of the theory and concepts, followed by the practice of the skill. Mindfulness is taught in the reverse order, where you practice the skill first and then have a discussion of the experience. The discussion of the experience is centred on the direct experience of the practice, called inquiry.

### → Raisin exercise/stepping out of automatic pilot

As noted above, people often do things while being unaware of what they are doing; operating on automatic pilot, not being fully aware of what is it we are doing from moment to moment. For gambling this is in particular an issue. An entire gambling session might be done on automatic pilot. But it is not so much the gambling itself that concerns us here, it is how automatic pilot behavior can result in gambling. For example, someone can get into a habit of going gambling without really thinking about what they are doing. Someone may gamble on autopilot because of a hard day at work, a disagreement with a spouse or just feeling bored. How do we break out of this?

The raisin exercise is an introduction to mindfulness. It is about cultivating presence in your everyday life while maintaining a non-judgemental attitude.

### → What is mindfulness?

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined mindfulness as awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgementally to things as they are:

*Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally.*

It is not a relaxation or stress management practice as some people often might think, although relaxation and stress reduction are often by-products of this practice.

Mindfulness is essentially an awareness and acceptance of your own moment to moment experience; including thoughts, emotions and body sensations. It does not mean suppression of thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. It is non-judgemental awareness and involves a sense of detachment from thoughts, emotions and body sensations. That is, you are aware of the content of your thoughts, but do not identify with them, or feel that you have to act upon them. You can let them slide in and out of awareness. You cannot will yourself to stop thinking about something. In fact the opposite happens; trying not to think about something makes it more difficult to unhook from the thought. Rather than trying to suppress unwanted thoughts, the mindful person brings awareness to those thoughts and lets them be. This process is one of the key principles taught in a mindfulness class.

### → Body scan meditation

This meditation practice is an opportunity to shift attention away from thinking and mental events, and into the body.

The term mindfulness might be misleading because it sounds as if the mind is full, but in actuality it is closer to the opposite. It is about paying attention to your body and being aware of your body.

Awareness of the body is a major part of training in mindfulness. Bringing awareness to the body helps to anchor us in the present moment, where thinking diminishes. Thoughts are usually focused on the past or future, while the body is always in the present.

People often live their lives in their heads, without much awareness of their bodies. Our bodies express sensations that can give us valuable information about feelings, emotions and mental events. When we are not aware of our bodies, we drive ourselves beyond limits, not realizing how it is affecting us until it is too late.

Mindfulness practices such as the raisin exercise and body scan provide an opportunity to develop the “being mind” rather than the “doing mind” (Segal et al., 2013). The “doing mind” relates to the part of our brain that tends to be more analytical and logical, the mind that we are all used to and use most of the time. We need this to do our jobs and function on a daily basis. The “being mind”, on the other hand, relates to the part of the brain that we do not access very often, the mind that has to do with the creative and artistic. When we are accessing the being mind, there is very little thinking happening and thoughts are diminished. For example, the very instant that we encounter a beautiful sunset, there are no words and we become captivated by the experience, even just for a brief moment. But after a second or two, thinking returns and the experience is lost. We may start thinking about what time it is, where we are and what we need to do later. We start seeing the world again through the veil of concepts, and pure awareness falls away.

This practice involves moving attention to different parts of the body and is usually practiced lying down, but can also be done sitting in a chair, depending on the size of the room or the preference of the individual. If the person is tired, then practicing in a sitting position might be preferred to promote wakefulness. If there are physical issues of pain or restrictions in movement, the person can adopt a comfortable posture on the floor, a cushion or a chair.

### → Home practice

Handouts will be given, including the meditation CDs. The group leader can review the home practice with participants at the next session. It is important to do the home practice to get the most out of the group, because with mindfulness, like any skill, the more you practice, the better at it you become. Also, home practice will help bridge the gap between the group and the rest of the participant’s life and make it more likely that they will continue practicing mindfulness after the group has ended.

### → Closing

At the end, participants are invited to say what they are noticing in the present moment; indicating thoughts, feelings or body sensations. This type of closing is in the spirit of mindfulness, where participants are observing their present moment experience as it is happening.

## HANDOUTS

1 Introduction to Session 01

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2 Definition of mindfulness

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3 Home practice

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4 Provide access to meditation recordings by Farah Jindani and Peter Chen

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### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Mindful eating practice: raisin exercise**

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I am going to place an object in each of your palms and provide you with instructions on what to do next with this object. Imagine that you are from another planet and have never seen this object before.

---

Observe the object as it rests on the palm of your hand. What does it feel like? How heavy is it? What do you notice about it? Gaze at this object with attention and curiosity. Allow your eyes to explore each part of this object in your hand and examine its qualities, texture and unique features. How would you describe these?

---

Turn over the object in your hand with your fingers. Notice the texture of the object in your hand. Notice what it feels like, for instance, with your eyes closed and then with your eyes open.

---

Pick up the object with your other hand and bring it to your ears, squishing it around with your fingers to notice any sounds. What do you hear?

---

When you are ready, bring the object just below your nose and notice the smells associated with this object, the fragrance. Also, notice if you feel any sensations in your mouth or in your tummy as you smell the object.

---

Now bring the object to your lips and notice what it feels like.

---

Slowly place it in your mouth and notice if there are any urges to bite into it, but refrain from doing so. Do not chew it, just place the object on your tongue and notice any sensations. Spend a few moments exploring the sensations that arise in your mouth as you allow your tongue to explore the object.

---

When you are ready, you can slowly begin to take a bite into the object. Slowly and with awareness, take a few more bites and notice the taste or any other sensations as you chew. Notice any impulse to swallow the object. Without swallowing, notice any textures and sensations in your mouth. You can now begin to slowly swallow. Notice as the object passes down your throat and into your belly.

---

### Optional questions to ask

Do you feel one raisin heavier?

---

At what point does the raisin stop being a raisin and become part of you?

---



### INQUIRY

What did you notice in doing this exercise?

---

Invite participants to stay focused on the direct experience of eating the raisin and what they observed in terms of thoughts, feelings, body sensations.

---

### Other questions to ask

Is this your typical experience of eating?

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How do you usually eat?

---

What does this exercise have to do with addressing gambling related problems?

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### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Body scan mindfulness practice**

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Sit in a chair or lie on the floor, making yourself as comfortable as possible. Choose a posture in which you are comfortable and will be able to remain in for the next little while. Gently begin to close your eyes. When you are feeling comfortable, take a few moments to become aware of your breath and the sensations of your body.

---

Begin by bringing awareness to the physical sensations of your body, noticing the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. Become aware of any sensations of touch or pressure, perhaps where your body makes contact with the floor or the chair. As you breathe out, allow yourself to let go of any stresses, trying to sink a little deeper into the chair or the floor beneath you.

---

Your intention in this practice is not to achieve anything in particular, or to feel different, or end the practice relaxed or calm. While this may happen, the only thing we are attending to is noticing the sensations of the mind and body. Bring attention to any sensations you notice as you focus your attention on each part of the body.

---

Begin by bringing your attention to the sensations of the belly. Become aware of any sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out. You may notice your belly rise and fall with each breath in and each breath out. Notice any sensations as they arise.

---

When you are ready, you will move your attention to your left foot, to the toes of the left foot. Focus on your big toe, your baby toe and all the toes in between. Bring an attitude of curiosity to the quality of the physical sensations as they arise. You may notice what your foot feels like resting on the floor beneath you if you are sitting or lying down. Perhaps you notice no particular sensation. You can begin to notice the sensations of the sole of your foot and your heel.

---

On the next outbreath, when you are ready, bring your attention to the rest of your foot, to the ankle, and top of the foot. You may notice the sensations of your bones and joints. Just notice whatever it is that is arising for you at this time. If you find that your mind has wandered, just notice this and gently bring your attention back to observing the sensations of your foot and ankle.

---

On the next outbreath, shift the focus of your attention to the lower left leg, to your calf, shin, knee, knee cap and notice any sensations that arise. When you are ready, on the next outbreath, bring the same level of curiosity and openness to the physical sensations of the upper leg, perhaps noticing any sensations as your leg rests on the chair or the floor beneath you.

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The body scan mindfulness practice described here was based on Bowen et al., (2011), Segal et al., (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990).



You will then move your attention to the right toes, to the big toe, the baby toe and all the toes in between. Just noticing any sensations as they rise. When you are ready, move your attention to the rest of the right leg, to the lower leg, the shin, and knee, noticing any sensations present. Gently, and with awareness, bring your awareness to the upper right leg. Your only task is to notice any sensations as they arise in your right leg at this time.

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In a similar fashion, gently and without judgement, bring attention to the abdomen, noticing the inhale and exhale; to the back, perhaps noticing how your back feels on the chair or the floor below, to your chest and lungs. Perhaps you notice your lungs expand and contract with each breath in and each breath out. When ready, move your attention to your fingers, noticing any sensations as they arise. Perhaps you notice some tingling, some warmth, or whatever you notice for yourself. Just notice with curiosity and non-judgement. When you are ready, shift your attention to the wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, and shoulders, becoming aware of any sensations present.

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Now, bring your attention to your neck, face, and top of the head and notice any sensations that may arise.

---

In the last few moments of this practice, take a few moments to scan the entirety of the body from bottom of the feet to the top of the head, noticing any final sensations as they rise.

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Noticing your breath, with each breath in and each breath out.

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When you are ready, you can slowly and with awareness, open your eyes.

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## INQUIRY

What did you notice in doing this practice?

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Invite participants to stay focused on the direct experience of doing the body scan in terms of thoughts, feelings or body sensations that they noticed.

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The object of this practice is to just pay attention to various parts of the body without judgement. There are no right or wrong experiences. It is not unusual for people to fall asleep or find that the mind gets distracted by thoughts or sounds, for instance. When this happens, gently bring your attention back to the body.

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## Other questions to ask following the inquiry

Are you typically aware of your body in this way?

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What does this have to do with dealing with problems with gambling?

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# HANDOUT 1: SESSION 01

## Stepping out of automatic pilot

People often do things while being unaware of what they are doing. Have you ever driven to work and encountered construction activity along your usual route to work? You then decide, in your mind, to take a different route the next day, only to find yourself on the same construction route the next day before you catch yourself. This may even go on for another couple days before you can catch yourself and take a different route from the start.

How often do you meet someone and they tell you their name and immediately afterward, you forget what their name is? Is this a problem with memory, or what exactly is happening?

Most of us live our lives operating on automatic pilot, not being fully aware of what it is we are doing from moment to moment. How do we break out of this?

In our first session, we discuss the concept of “automatic pilot”. Automatic pilot is our tendency to act and react to what is happening around us, without full awareness. We explore and discuss automatic pilot and relapse by considering how it is connected with triggers, cravings and urges to gamble.

Our exploration of mindfulness begins with the experiential exercises of the raisin exercise and the body scan. In these exercises, we have the opportunity to fully bring our attention to what is happening in the present moment, through mindful eating in the raisin exercise and being grounded in our bodies in the body scan.

The raisin exercise is an introduction to mindfulness, which is a different way of being and doing things, mindfully and with presence. It is about cultivating presence in your everyday life while maintaining a non-judgemental attitude of acceptance for whatever is happening.

### **What is mindfulness?**

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, “mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, J., 1994).

Mindfulness is essentially an awareness and acceptance of your moment-to-moment experience, including thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. It does not mean suppression of thoughts, emotions, or body sensations. It is non-judgemental awareness, and involves a sense of detachment from thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. That is, you are aware of the content of your thoughts, but do not identify with them, or feel that you have to act upon them. You can let them slide in and out of

awareness. You cannot will yourself to stop thinking about something. In fact the opposite happens; trying not to think about something makes it more difficult to unhook from the thought. Rather than trying to suppress unwanted thoughts, the mindful person brings awareness to those thoughts and lets them be. This process is one of the key principles taught in a mindfulness class.

→ **HOME PRACTICE** (week following Session 01)

- 1 Body scan.** For this first week, practice the body scan at least once a day for a minimum of 5 minutes.
- 2 Mindfulness of a daily activity.** Choose an activity that you do on a daily basis (e.g., brushing your teeth, drinking tea, washing dishes, taking a shower, eating, etc.) and do it mindfully. For example, when taking a shower, notice the sensations of the water on your skin, and the feeling of the soap and lather. Notice where your thoughts are. Are you thinking about what you will be doing next or is your awareness actually in the shower and what is happening?

Whatever you are doing in the moment, just do that and nothing else.

---

When you are eating, just eat, without reading the newspaper or watching television, and notice the tastes and sensations of the food as you are chewing and swallowing.

---

Be fully present to whatever you are doing.

---

When in conversation with someone, let them be like the raisin and be open, curious and non-judgemental to the experience.

---

Mindfulness practices help with developing this process of awareness because, with practice, we can interrupt the automatic reactions that are typically associated with triggers.



## Session 02

### Chapter 05

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# Lesson plan for developing awareness and coping with cravings and barriers to practice

This session focused on learning to attend to our triggers with full awareness. We practice observing our experiences without automatically reacting. This involves learning to attend to our triggers in the moment and bringing non-judgemental awareness to the body sensations, thoughts and feelings associated with the triggers. Mindfulness practices help with developing this process of awareness because, with practice, we can interrupt the automatic reactions that are typically associated with triggers. This allows us to make healthier, more skillful choices in the moment.

#### → Check in

Ask participants to say their first name and one thing they are noticing in the present moment; indicating thoughts, feelings or body sensations. As mentioned previously, this type of check in reflects the spirit of mindfulness practice, observing present moment experience as it unfolds without judgement.



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## Agenda

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Check in

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Body scan

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Home practice review and common barriers to practice

---

Awareness of our interpretation of events

---

Coping with urges and cravings in a different way

---

Reconnecting with our inner steadfastness

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Home practice

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Closing

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### → Body scan

Starting in the second session, the sessions will start with a 20-to-30 minute meditation practice, in line with the experiential nature of this group. As discussed above, in mindfulness groups, we practice the skill first and then talk about the experience of the practice, called the inquiry. This is the reverse of the way skills are usually taught, by first discussing the theory and then practicing the skill.

### → Home practice review and common barriers to practice

Review with the group how the home practice went, both the formal and informal practices. The formal practice involved finding some time during the day to practice using the meditation tapes provided. The informal practice involved doing something that you would do routinely every day, such as taking a shower, eating, cooking, walking to the bus, or driving, and doing it with mindful awareness.

### Were they able to do the practice and what challenges or barriers got in the way?

If they were able to do the practice, what was their experience of doing so? What was helpful? Group leaders, if they choose, can share with the group members about their own experiences of practicing mindfulness and the barriers they faced. This illustrates that mindfulness is an ongoing learning process.

If they were not able to practice, what seemed to get in the way or what prevented them from doing so? It is important for the instructor to bring an attitude of non-judgemental curiosity to the inquiry.

### Barriers to meditation are common

Mindfulness meditation has been around for thousands of years and so have the barriers to meditation. These barriers are quite common and everyone experiences them. Our lesson on barriers reaches back to ancient Buddhist ideas of Hindrances and draws on the clinical experience of Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2002), Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt (2011), Kabat-Zinn (1990), and Fronsdal (2016), as well as our own research (Chen et al., 2014) and practical experience. It does not mean that you are doing it wrong. Refer back to how we define mindfulness meditation:

*Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally. (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 4)*

From the definition, we can note that it is about noticing whatever is happening in the present moment with curiosity and non-judgement, and not about doing it right, or about getting rid of whatever is happening before being able to practice. We do not have to wait for conditions to be right before we can practice.

**“To have doubt about mindfulness, of the value and importance of just being mindful, borders on having doubt about the value of being present for life in general, because mindfulness and being present for life is the same thing.” Gil Fronsdal**

Barriers to meditation can originate from five main areas or habits of mind (which are discussed in more detail below). They affect how we experience life and can be obstacles to presence and happiness. They can weaken our wisdom and cause us to make decisions that are not as good for us. They are always present in everyday life and not just when trying to meditate. The object is to get to know them. They persuade us to do what is least beneficial. For example, when we are restless, we tend to want to do more, which creates more restlessness. They are not only barriers to meditation, but can also be barriers to what we want to do in life. They convince us that they are not barriers when they arise. They can colour and dull the mind. When these barriers are absent, the mind is clear and sharp.

The idea of the five hindrances goes back to ancient Buddhist philosophy. Bowen calls them common challenges to meditation. Our discussion is based on various sources including Bowen, Chawla and Marlat (2011), Segal et al. (2002), and Fronsdal (2016).

**The five habits of mind that become barriers to meditation are as follows:**

- 1 Desire/sensual pleasures:** A desire for sensual pleasure has to do with cravings, wanting, pulling toward something, and not being content with the present moment (Bowen et al., 2011; Fronsdal, 2016). In essence, wanting something other than what is. People may not necessarily see this as a bad thing and can cause a lot of damage when acted upon in cases such as excessive gambling. People may also desire one thing in order to push something else away. For example, someone may desire gambling in order to push depression away. When desire arises, focus on the consequences of acting on it and the impermanent nature of the desire. Being bored or just wanting to do something else are examples of this barrier. We are not content with the way things are. This means that we are not accepting of the present moment and therefore not fully in the present moment (Bowen et al., 2011). Similarly with gambling, thinking about gambling or an urge to gamble can be a barrier (Chen et al., 2015).
- 2 Aversion and ill-will:** This has to do with not wanting or pushing away what is here and can generate feelings such as irritation, anger, and frustration (Fronsdal, 2016). Aversion can be the flip side of desire mentioned above.
- 3 Sloth and torpor/sleepiness and sluggishness:** Practicing mindfulness is about developing a mind that is both tranquil and alert (Fronsdal, 2016). Too much tranquility and no alertness leads to what is called “sinking mind”. Too much alertness without tranquility can lead to tension and anxiety. Sloth and torpor refers to the physical and mental aspects, such as heaviness of body and dullness of mind, and includes drowsiness, sluggishness, low energy, sleepiness and lethargy. The mind can feel like mud or glue, making you feel lazy. Notice the pattern of thoughts that may precede this. Sloth and torpor can be a reaction to the constant habit of tension and anxiety. When we are finally able to sit still, we feel the exhaustion of this constant tension. You can counter this by the following suggestions: sit up straight, take a few deep breaths, count the breath, be curious about what is happening, remind yourself of why you are meditating, open the eyes, look at a light, change posture, get some fresh air, splash cold water on the face, do walking meditation instead of sitting or lying.

**4 Restlessness, anxiety or worry:** Sometimes, putting too much effort into anything can result in agitation of mind (Fronsdal, 2016). This can result in the mind racing and not being able to sit still, accompanied by feelings of anxiety. This can be unpleasant and the tendency is to want to push it away. This can add to it, as resisting it further enhances restlessness. Worry and anxiety arise out of fear of what will happen in the future. This results in restlessness of the body, wanting to shift posture, and tightness and tension. Other forms it can take include: planning, self-judgement, regret of the past, nervousness, and, remorse. Regardless of what it is, it is usually about the past or future and not being in the present, which is where peace and happiness exist. People often think that mindfulness meditation is a relaxation practice but that is not the original intent. Mindfulness is about being present with what is. So, if you are feeling agitated, notice that you are and be present with it, even if it is uncomfortable.

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**5 Doubt:** This can be one of the first areas to be uprooted, leaving you saying things like “this is not for me” and “others can do it, it hasn’t worked for me”. Doubt serves to confuse us and make us indecisive, causing us to hold back and not fully apply ourselves. It is a mood that creates feelings of uncertainty and can create more doubt. Other excuses include “There was too much discomfort” or “The conditions weren’t right” or “I kept getting distracted”. Thinking a lot can also cause doubt. Doubt can cause us to give up. We can doubt either our ability to practice or the teachings themselves. It is not productive or useful. Bring mindful attention to doubt whenever it arises, regardless of how strong the doubt is. If doubt is persistent, you can speak with a teacher who you respect and make sure that you understand the instructions clearly. Also, you can suspend doubt until you have had a chance to practice for a period of time to test out the practice and see for yourself.

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*To have doubt about mindfulness, of the value and importance of just being mindful, borders on having doubt about the value of being present for life in general, because mindfulness and being present for life is the same thing. (Gil Fronsdal, 2016, p. 7)*

### **How to address the hindrances: The RAIN Formula**

To deal with these habits or hindrances, Fronsdal (2016) uses the acronym RAIN as an easy to remember guide to dealing with stress, anxiety and unwanted thoughts that act as barriers to meditation. It stands for Recognize, Accept, Investigate, and Non-identification. RAIN was first introduced by Michele McDonald (Brach, 2016) and has been used by many Western mindfulness teachers since including Tara Brach, Gil Fronsdal, and others.

Regardless of what type of barrier it is, pay full attention to what is happening with non-judgment and curiosity (Fronsdal, 2016). The more you pay attention to something, the more it becomes interesting and fascinating. Have some belief that the practice works to overcome doubt. Don't nourish the doubts. Know what they feel like.



Use the RAIN Formula (Fronsdal, 2016) to help you deal with these hindrances:

**R Recognize** them when they are present as barriers. Which hindrance or combination of hindrances are they?

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**A Accept** them. Accept these sensations. Do not try to resist. Let them wash over you.

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**I Investigate** them. Be curious about your doubts, your desires, and your aversion. What are they like? How do these hindrances feel in the body? Are they pleasant? Unpleasant? Changing? How does this barrier make me feel emotionally? What is the energy level of these feelings? Do you feel like you are rushing, sinking, lifting? What are your thoughts, beliefs or stories about these feelings? Do you have an urge to act? What are you clinging to?

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**N Non-identification** with them. Such feelings are just passing mental events and are impermanent in nature. They do not define you. Let the sensations go.

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## Other excuses

Other barriers to meditation can be a combination of these hindrances. They include having a mind that is racing, being too busy, or falling asleep.

**Being too busy:** According to Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002) people are often just simply too busy or could not find the time to practice meditation. This could be the result of a number of hindrances including doubt, restlessness, or even desire. However, when people take the time to reflect with non-judgemental curiosity on how they spend their day, they might realize that there are periods of time when they could have done some sort of practice; be it mindfulness of the breath while waiting for a bus, or staying focused on the now while driving (not going into autopilot). The paradox is that when people do make the time to practice, they often realize that there is more opportunity to practice in the day than they had ever anticipated. You can bring mindfulness to whatever you are doing on a daily basis, such as driving, walking the dog, feeding the baby, cooking, eating, and so on. Remember that formal mindfulness meditation is just a method for cultivating “presence” that is always right here and now, regardless of what you are doing. One of the most common ways to do this is by becoming aware of the breath in any given moment (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002).

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**Mind racing:** Another barrier is that your mind is racing or you can't stay still. This is a variation on Hindrance 4, restlessness. As noted above sometimes we have too much alertness. People often think that the purpose of mindfulness meditation is to clear the mind or to slow it down and when this does not happen, they think they are doing it wrong. Being aware that your mind is racing, is in itself being mindful. However, you will find that with practice, your mind will slow down and relax.

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**Falling asleep:** A variation of Hindrance 3, some people fall asleep. As noted above, sometimes we have too much tranquility. There is nothing wrong with sleeping and we all need to sleep, but sleep is not the same as meditation. Mindfulness meditation, is about “falling awake”, rather than falling asleep (Kabat-Zinn, quoted in Moyers, 1993). It is not unusual for someone to fall asleep while meditating. People work long hours and often get very little sleep. We run around all day on automatic pilot, doing things that seem important to us. Ironically, for most people we have more leisure time today than ever before. We have shorter work days, weekends off, holidays, and so many devices to make life easier such as cars, laundry machines, dishwashers, vacuums, microwaves, electronic ovens, blenders, food processors, and coffee makers. Despite so much advancement in technology to help us save time, people still feel stretched.

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### **Summary of dealing with hindrances**

Regardless of what hindrances or barriers you experience, when we refer back to the definition of mindfulness, “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally”, we realize that all of the above reasons are self-imposed barriers. Each moment is the “perfect moment” to practice. Regardless of what barrier is arising, pay full attention to what is happening with non-judgement and curiosity. The more you pay attention to something, the more it becomes interesting and fascinating. Have faith that the practice works and you can overcome doubt. Do not nourish the hindrances, but know what they feel like. To help you address the hindrances, use the RAIN Formula (Fronsdal, 2016) as described above, so that when these barriers arise, just notice them with curiosity and non-judgement awareness of how you react to them.

Not unlike the raisin exercise and the body scan, we can bring mindful awareness and a gentle, friendly, non-judgemental curiosity to any experience we are having—good, bad or indifferent—and learn to be open to it rather than push it away. Why do this? When we try not to think about something we actually think about it even more. Instead, if you bring non-judgemental awareness to whatever you are thinking, it may be easier to let the thought pass. This can teach us to be more accepting of all experiences, including the ones that are challenging, such as urges and temptations to act out in problematic gambling. More information about dealing with barriers can be found in Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2002), Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt (2011), Kabat-Zinn (1990), and Fronsdal (2016).

### **→ Awareness of our interpretation of events exercise**

In this exercise, the intent is to recognize the power of thoughts and interpretations in shaping feelings and behavior (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Bowen, Chawla & Marlatt, 2011).

Sit comfortably and close your eyes gently if you feel comfortable to do so, or keep your eyes open focusing gently downward.

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Imagine that you are walking down a street. This street could be in your own neighborhood or where you work. It is a street that you are familiar with. Imagine that it is a pleas-

ant summer day and you can hear the birds chirping, the sounds of traffic, you can feel a light breeze on your body and experience various sounds and sights. Approaching you on the other side of the street, you notice a familiar face. When the person gets closer, you wave and smile at him/her. They continue without any response.

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What thoughts and reactions come up for you?

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Participants share in the large group. The facilitator can use a flipchart to record their responses and note the variety of reactions to this scenario. There is no right or wrong response.

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This exercise gives an example of how our thoughts can determine and influence our emotional reactions and moods. The point here is that there can be so many different reactions and interpretations to an event, depending on what we each bring to it, and there is no right or wrong. These reactions and interpretations can sometimes have a profound effect on us, causing unnecessary pain and anguish. Mindfulness practice can be helpful in allowing us to unhook from these reactions and therefore derail any further suffering.

### → Coping with urges and cravings in a different way: urge surfing

Bowen, Chawla and Marlat (2011) advocate that instead of fighting an urge, to think of an urge to gamble as an ocean wave. Waves come and go. Similarly, instead of fighting an urge to gamble, ride the wave. Urge surfing can help a person overcome overconfidence, self-testing to prove one is in control, and self-blaming (Lloyd, 2003), as well as helping them deal with other high risk situations for relapse described by Turner et al. (2014). Instead of fighting the urge, you accept that the urge will come and go and you experience the urge passing through your consciousness. When you feel an urge to gamble, imagine that it is like riding a surfboard on a wave, with the urge to gamble being like the wave. The wave rises and falls and eventually dissipates, as it is impermanent, like everything else. The surfboard could be like your breath, that you can use to help you to ride the wave of the urge. Urges come and go. They can be challenging when they occur and throw you off balance, but with practice, you can learn to ride the wave of the urge until it subsides. You can then feel like you are on solid ground again.

### → Reconnecting with our inner steadfastness: mountain meditation

Sometimes stress, family problems, and the worries and responsibilities of life can become difficult to tolerate. An urge to gamble can at times seem overwhelming, like an avalanche about to crush you.

Another technique described by Bowen et al. (2011), is mountain meditation which involves imagining yourself like a mountain. A mountain is steadfast, strong and unmoving, despite what is happening around it, such as the weather and changing seasons. There can be snowstorms, hailstorms, wind, rain, fire, cold, extreme heat, and landslides, but the mountain perseveres and remains steadfast. The mountain is like the awareness of the breath and present moment, unmoving and still, like the blue sky that is always above the clouds or the stillness

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Urge surfing is based on Bowen, Chawla and Marlat (2011) and Lloyd (2003).

Mountain meditation is based on Bowen, Chawla and Marlat (2011) and Kabat-Zinn (1990).

that is always at the depths of the ocean. Practicing this meditation can help to cultivate mountain-like qualities of perseverance, steadfastness, and stillness.

**Imagine being this mountain. Calm, steadfast, and serene. To a mountain, the wind, the weather, storms, or avalanches are an everyday occurrence.**

### **→ Home practice**

Practice at home the body scan and bring mindfulness to a routine activity such as brushing your teeth, eating, cooking, or taking a shower. Note any barriers to practice that come up and the thoughts and feelings associated with these barriers. What do you tell yourself?

### **→ Closing**

Ask participants to say what they are noticing in the present moment, indicating their thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.



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# HANDOUT 1: SESSION 02

## Developing awareness and coping with cravings and barriers to practice

This session focused on learning to attend to our triggers with full awareness. We practiced observing our experiences without automatically reacting. This involves learning to attend to our triggers in the moment and bringing non-judgemental awareness to the body sensations, thoughts and feelings that are associated with the triggers. Mindfulness practices help with developing this process of awareness. With practice, we can interrupt the automatic reactions that are typically associated with triggers, allowing us to make healthier, more skillful choices in the moment.

### → HOME PRACTICE

- 1 **Practice the body scan** for 5–6 days this week.
  - 2 **Continue with mindfulness** of a daily activity practice.  
(e.g., drinking tea, washing dishes, brushing teeth, eating, etc.)
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## HANDOUT 2: SESSION 02

# Mindfulness based relapse prevention for problem gambling

### Barriers to meditation

Mindfulness meditation has been around for thousands of years and so have the barriers to meditation. These barriers are quite common and everyone experiences them. It does not mean that you are doing it wrong. Refer back to how we define mindfulness meditation.

*Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally. – Jon Kabat-Zinn*

From the definition, it is about noticing with curiosity and non-judgement whatever is happening in the present moment and not about doing it right, nor is it about getting rid of whatever is happening before being able to practice. We don't have to wait for conditions to be right before we can practice.

Barriers to meditation can originate from five main areas or habits of mind as described by Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt (2011) and Fronsdal (2016). The following are a list of these habits that become barriers:

- 1 Desire/sensual pleasures:** Includes craving, wanting, pulling toward, not content with the present moment and wanting something else other than what is. People may not necessarily see this as a bad thing.
- 2 Aversion and ill-will:** Not wanting to focus on the here and now can generate feelings such as irritation, anger, frustration. Aversion can be the flip side of the desire mentioned above.
- 3 Sloth and torpor/sleepiness and sluggishness:** A goal of practicing mindfulness is to develop a mind that is both tranquil and alert. Too much tranquility and no alertness leads to drowsiness, sluggishness, low energy, sleepiness and lethargy. Too much alertness without tranquility can lead to tension and anxiety (discussed below). Sloth and torpor can be a reaction to the constant habit of tension and anxiety.
- 4 Restlessness and anxiety or worry:** Sometimes, putting too much effort into anything can result in agitation of mind or the feeling that the mind is racing. This is the opposite of Barrier 3 (sloth, sleepiness and sluggishness). You need to find a balance between being overly tranquil and being overly alert.

- 5 Doubt:** Doubt serves to confuse us and make us indecisive, causing us to hold back and not fully apply ourselves. It's a mood that creates feelings of uncertainty and can create more doubt. "To have doubts about the value of mindfulness, borders on having doubts about the value of being present for life in general". (Fronsdal, 2016, p. 7)
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The barriers noted above are not only barriers to meditation, but can also be barriers to what we want to do in life. They can colour and dull the mind. When these barriers are absent, the mind is clear and sharp. These habits are based on Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt (2011) and Fronsdal (2016).

To help you address the hindrances, use the RAIN Formula (Fronsdal, 2016).

**The Rain Formula**

**R Recognize** them when present as barriers.

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**A Accept** them.

---

**I Investigate** them. Be curious about your doubts, your desires, and your aversions. What are they like? How do they feel in terms of energy, belief, emotion, physical nature? Do you have an urge to act?

---

**N Non-identification** with them. Such feelings are just passing mental events and impermanent in nature.

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**List hindrances and barriers to practice mindfulness that you've experienced:**

Hindrances or barriers to meditation you have experienced	Write out a plan of how to overcome this barrier



## HANDOUT 3: SESSION 02

### Meditation techniques

#### **Coping with urges and cravings in a different way: urge surfing**

When you feel an urge to gamble, imagine that it is like riding a surfboard on a wave with the urge to gamble being like the wave. The wave rises and falls and eventually dissipates, as it is impermanent, like everything else. The surfboard could be like your breath, you can use it to help you to ride the wave of the urge. The point here is that urges come and go. They can be challenging when they occur and throw you off balance, but with practice, you can learn to ride the wave of the urge until it subsides and you can feel like you are on solid ground again.

#### **Reconnecting with our inner steadfastness: mountain meditation**

Sometimes stress, family problems, and the worries and responsibilities of life can become difficult to tolerate. An urge to gamble can at times seem overwhelming; like an avalanche about to crush you.

Mountain meditation involves imagining yourself like a mountain. A mountain is steadfast, strong and unmoving, despite what is happening around it, such as the weather and changing seasons. There can be snowstorms, hailstorms, wind, rain, fire, cold, extreme heat and landslides, but the mountain perseveres and remains steadfast. The mountain is like the awareness of the breath and present moment, unmoving and still, like the blue sky that is always above the clouds or the stillness that is always at the depths of the ocean. Practicing this meditation can help to cultivate mountain-like qualities of perseverance, steadfastness and stillness.

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Urge surfing is based on Bowen, Chawla and Marlat (2011) and Lloyd (2003).

Mountain meditation is based on Bowen, Chawla and Marlat (2011) and Kabat-Zinn (1990).





Imagine being this mountain. Calm, steadfast and serene. To a mountain, the wind, the weather, storms, or an avalanche are insignificant. In the middle of this photo are two small avalanche paths. From the perspective of the mountain, they are tiny and insignificant disturbances.

A regular mindfulness practice can support us in increasing our awareness and help us to make more skillful and healthy lifestyle choices.



## Session 03

### Chapter 06

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# Lesson plan for bringing mindfulness to everyday activities

A regular mindfulness practice can support us in increasing our awareness and help us to make more skillful and healthy lifestyle choices. Becoming aware of the breath is a simple practice that brings us into the present moment, as we pause and pay attention to our breath and sensations in our body. In this state of being in the present moment, we are more aware, less reactive and can make choices from a clearer state of thinking and being. The 3-step breathing space is a mindfulness practice that can be done anywhere, anytime. It can be done in daily situations and challenges that we may face, whether it is feeling stressed, having a craving to gamble or behaving in some reactive manner.

#### → Check in

Ask participants to say their first name and one thing that they are noticing in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.

#### → Awareness of hearing

The facilitator invites participants to tune into their sense of hearing, becoming aware of sounds. We can become aware of the present moment by tuning into our five senses, as Jon Kabat-Zinn



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## Agenda

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### Check in

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### Awareness of hearing and inquiry

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### Home practice review

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### Breath meditation and inquiry

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### Video

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### 3-step breathing space

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### Home practice

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### Closing

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called his book “Coming to our Senses.” Participants can become aware of sounds without any judgement about what is being heard. Try to listen without words or concepts; do not try to figure out what the sound is or where it is coming from. It is as if we do not yet have any language to describe what we hear. Participants can notice the automatic tendency of the mind to add commentary to everything, often with judgement. Invite participants to cultivate an attitude of curiosity and friendliness to all experiences as in “beginner’s mind”.

### → Home practice review

Ask participants about their home practice. Were they able to do it? If they did, how was it? If they were not able to do it, what got in the way? Refer back to session two on “Challenges to meditation are common”.

### → Breath meditation

This week, we will introduce a different meditation, mindfulness of the breath. This meditation is usually practiced in a sitting position on the floor or sitting on a chair but can also be done lying down, depending on the individual preference or if there are any physical limitations.

Attention to posture is important here. You want to adopt a posture that denotes dignity and alertness. As mentioned earlier, mindfulness meditation is about falling awake rather than falling asleep. You also want to keep the back straight, but not stiff, with the head balanced on top of the shoulders. If sitting on a chair, have your legs uncrossed and feet flat on the ground. You may also want to have your back supported independently and away from the backrest of the chair. Slouching or leaning on the back of the chair may promote sleepiness. If seated on the ground, it is recommended to have your buttocks higher than your knees for comfort. This can be done by sitting on a meditation cushion, if one is available.

This is one of the most fundamental meditations in mindfulness. The object of focus is the breath. We bring our attention to the breath as it goes in and out, not thinking about the breath, but really feeling the breath in each given moment. The practice is not just about staying with the breath, but also noticing the patterns of the mind; noticing what the mind does from moment to moment and where the mind tends to go. Acknowledge where the mind goes to, such as body sensations, feelings or thoughts, and then gently bring it back to the breath. This practice of repeatedly bringing the mind back to the breath is like going to the gym and doing repetitions with weights, which builds up the muscles. In a similar way, the mind is strengthened by the breath practice.

#### The breath as an object of focus is important for a few reasons:

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It is always happening in the present moment and so connects us to the present.

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It is happening in the body and so connects us to our bodies.

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## Becoming aware of the breath is a simple practice that brings us into the present moment, as we pause and pay attention to our breath and sensations in our body.

It is portable and so we can take it wherever we go.

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It is always happening and there is nothing we need to do. The body knows how to breathe itself, we just need to let go and let it be.

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### → Video

Show the “Healing and the mind” video with Bill Moyers (1993), documenting the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center with Jon Kabat-Zinn. The video is about forty minutes long and follows a group through the eight week program, demonstrating how the group members benefited from what they learned in the group. Even though the group members in the video are there for physical health issues, not addiction or mental health concerns, the benefits are similar. The impact that mindfulness meditation can have on peoples lives is similar, regardless of the issue concerned.

#### The skill and attitudes of mindfulness meditation being learned and applied include:

Being fully present, here and now

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Experiencing unpleasant thoughts and feelings non-judgementally

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Not avoiding

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Greater connectedness with self and environment

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Greater self-awareness

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Less disturbed and less reactive to unpleasant experiences

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Letting be and letting go

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Impermanence of everything

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Greater balance in life

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Greater calm and peacefulness

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Self-acceptance and self-compassion

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Group leader can ask group members for comments or reactions following the video.

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This video can be found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKCFeRL49Es](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKCFeRL49Es)

### → 3-step breathing space

This is an adaptation of the three-minute breathing space from the Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) program. It is also known by the acronym SOBER (Stop, Observe, Breathe, Expand, Respond) described by Bowen et al. (2011), Segal Bowen et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990). This method is used in the Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) program for people dealing with substance abuse; however we modified it to be more acceptable to a non-substance addiction clients. This is a clever exercise for people who are abstaining from substance abuse problems, but it also works well for problem gambling clients.

This brief practice is a portable, quick, and easy technique for connecting with the present and bringing awareness to whatever you are experiencing in the moment. It can be used as a time out or a strategy for dealing with stressful situations.

**Become aware:** Become aware of what is happening right now by tuning into your senses, feelings, body sensations, and thoughts. What are you noticing happening right now? What are you seeing? What are you hearing? What sensations are you noticing in your body? What thoughts are arising in the mind?

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**Breathe:** Become aware of your breath as it goes in and out of your body. Notice your chest and belly rising and falling with each breath in and out. What is the quality of your breath? Is it fast, slow, deep, or shallow? Just allow breathing to happen all on its own.

---

**Body:** Become aware of your entire body, expanding your awareness from where you are experiencing breathing. Now that you are more fully in the present moment, how would you respond to this moment?

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### → Home practice

Home practice for this week will include practicing the breath meditation using the recording provided and the 3-step breathing space. Also, continue to bring mindful awareness to routine activities such as eating, walking, taking a shower, and brushing your teeth.

### → Closing

Ask participants to state what they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.

### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Awareness of hearing**

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Allow yourself to settle into the present moment and notice what is happening right now. Notice the sensations of your body resting on the chair. Notice the sensations of your feet resting on the floor. Notice your breath as it goes in and out of your body.

---

Now, bring your attention to the sense of hearing. Hear any and all sounds. Bring an attitude of curiosity and non-judgement to this experience of hearing. Notice the quality of the sounds. Notice the mind's tendency to want to label the sounds and know where they are coming from. A car horn, trees, birds, people, traffic, etc. What would hearing be like if we had no language to label each sound?

---

Notice that hearing is usually accompanied by thinking. There is usually some kind of commentary that accompanies the sounds. Try to separate the hearing from the thinking and just hear, with no language to describe what is being heard.

---

You can also become aware of your breath at the same time that hearing is happening. What does that feel like?

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### **INQUIRY**

What did you notice in doing this practice? Stay with the direct experience of the exercise rather than trying to interpret it.

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### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Breath meditation practice**

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Allow yourself to settle into the present moment and sit comfortably in your chair.

---

Posture is important during meditation practice. Adopt a posture that denotes wakefulness and comfort. Keep your back straight, but not stiff. Uncross your legs and arms so as to allow the energy to flow freely through your body. You may want to sit with your back away from the backrest of the chair, so that it is self-supporting.

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Notice what is happening right now, in terms of thoughts, feelings or body sensations.

---

Notice the sensations of your body resting on the chair and feet planted firmly on the ground. You may close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, focus gently downward, a few feet in front of you.

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Bring your attention to the sense of hearing and notice sounds. Notice the quality of sounds. Notice at what point your hearing and the sound intersect.

---

Try to stay with the experience of hearing, and not thinking about what you are hearing.

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Leaving hearing in the background, now bring your attention to the breath. Notice where in your body you are experiencing breathing—the chest, belly, nostrils. Notice the chest and belly as they rise and fall with each breath in and out.

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Notice that the body knows how to breathe itself. There is nothing that you need to do to make it happen, just allow it to happen.

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Notice the quality of the breath. Is it fast, slow, deep, or shallow?

---

Notice, with curiosity, when the mind has wandered away from the breath. Maybe the mind was drawn to thoughts, feelings, or body sensations. This is normal and happens a lot. It is what the mind does. If you noticed that thinking was happening, just label it as “thinking” and gently bring your attention back to the breath, without judgement.

---

This practice is as much staying with the breath as it is bringing the mind back from where it wandered.

---

Continue to stay with the breath.

---

When you are ready, gently open your eyes, while maintaining awareness.

---





## INQUIRY

What did you notice in doing this practice?

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Stay with the direct experience of having done the practice without interpretations about the practice.

---

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Breath meditation practice script is based on Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990).



# HANDOUT 1: SESSION 03

## Bringing mindfulness to everyday activities

A regular mindfulness practice can support us in increasing our awareness and help us to make more skillful and healthy lifestyle choices. Becoming aware of the breath is a simple practice that brings us into the present moment, as we pause and pay attention to our breath and sensations in our body. In this state of being in the present moment, we are more aware, less reactive and can make choices from a clearer state of thinking and being. The 3-step breathing space is a mindfulness practice that can be done anywhere and anytime. It can be done in the daily situations and challenges that we may face, whether it is feeling stressed, craving to gamble or behave in some reactive manner.

### → HOME PRACTICE

- 1 **Practice the sitting meditation** 6 days this week.
- 2 **Begin to integrate** the 3-step meditation practice in your daily life.



---

## HANDOUT 2: SESSION 03

### The 3-step breathing space or the three B's of presence

This is a brief 3-step meditation practice that can be done anywhere and anytime. It can be used to take a time-out from a hectic day or when feeling overwhelmed by a stressful event, when you need to be brought back into the present, to center yourself.

- 1 Become aware:** Become aware of what is happening right now by tuning into your senses, feelings, body sensations and thoughts. What are you noticing happening right now? What are you seeing? What are you hearing? What sensations are you noticing in your body? What thoughts are arising in the mind?

---

  - 2 Breathe:** Become aware of your breath as it goes in and out. Notice your chest and belly rising and falling with each breath in and out. What is the quality of your breath? Is it fast, slow, deep or shallow? Just allow breathing to happen all on its own.

---

  - 3 Body:** Become aware of your entire body, expanding your awareness from where you are experiencing breathing. Now that you are more fully in the present moment, how would you respond to this moment?
- 

---

3-step breathing space is based on based on Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990).

Mindfulness practices  
allow us to develop  
a sense of spaciousness  
between our thoughts,  
feelings and behaviours.



## Session 04

### Chapter 07

---

# Lesson plan for being mindful when at risk to gamble

Mindfulness practices allow us to develop a sense of spaciousness between our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This sense of spaciousness between stimulus and response is particularly useful in situations where we may feel challenged and triggered. Mindfulness practices can help us to stay focused on our breath and sensations in our body, which can keep us in the present moment. We can then relate differently to gambling and other triggers with awareness, rather than on automatic pilot.

#### → Check in

Ask participants to say their name and one thing they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings or body sensations.

#### → Awareness of seeing

This practice may be easier with a window so that participants can look outside. If no window is available, the facilitator can revert to awareness of hearing.



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## Agenda

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### Check in

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### Awareness of seeing

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### Home practice review

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### Sitting meditation: sound, breath, sensation, thought

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### The inventory of gambling situations

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### 3-step breathing space in a challenging situation

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### Walking meditation

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### Home practice

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### Closing

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Tune into your sense of seeing. Notice what you see. Notice when thoughts about what you are seeing arise. Notice the times when you are just seeing without thinking and the times when thinking is involved. We generally take in external experience through concepts. We have thoughts and interpretations about what we sense, whether it is seeing, feeling, tasting, smelling, or hearing. We are rarely just seeing what is there, without an interpretation or judgement. We usually interpret what we see in the external world through concepts and preconceptions.

### → Home practice review

Ask participants about how their home practice went. If they were not able to practice, what barriers came up for them? Discuss and process with non-judgemental curiosity.

### → Sitting meditation: Sound, breath, sensation, and thought

The previous week's meditation introduced mindfulness of the breath. This week the focus will expand to other sense experiences such as sound, body sensations and thoughts. In later sessions, mindfulness of emotions will be added.

As previously noted, the practice involves bringing non-judgemental awareness to these mental events as they come and go in each passing moment. We tune into the present moment by tuning into our senses. Thoughts are included here, with the mind being the sense organ and thoughts the sense object.

### → The CAMH–Inventory of Gambling Situations (IGS)

In this session, we will look at how mindfulness can be applied to high-risk situations. High risk situations are times when someone might be triggered to behave reactively, such as gambling, lashing out at someone or withdrawing.

These high-risk situations can be categorized into the following ten areas, as described in the CAMH Inventory of Gambling Situations (CAMH-IGS) (Turner et al., 2013):

1 Negative emotions

6 Worried about debts

2 Conflict with others

7 Winning and chasing

3 Pleasant emotions

8 Confidence in skill

4 Social pressure to gamble

9 Testing personal control

5 Need for excitement

10 Urges and temptations

**Although it is called Mindfulness, there is a huge emphasis on awareness of the body, because the body is always in the present moment.**

Each of these categories involves various situations or events that could trigger someone to gamble. There are thoughts and emotions associated with each of these situations or events, including:

---

**Negative emotions:** Gambling may be triggered by feelings of boredom, experiencing depression, sadness, guilt or some other negative emotion.

---

**Conflict with others:** Gambling may be triggered by a disagreement with someone, like a family member, resulting in feelings of anger and frustration.

---

**Pleasant emotions:** According to the CAMH-IGS, someone may gamble excessively when feeling good or may gamble impulsively without worrying about the consequences. For example, gambling as a way to celebrate a birthday or anniversary.

---

**Social pressure to gamble:** Gambling may be triggered by peer pressure such as friends going to casino and being asked to join, or being in the company of people discussing results of a sporting event or other gambling event.

---

**Need for excitement:** Gambling may be triggered by having nothing to do and looking for something to help alleviate boredom.

---

**Worried about debts:** Gambling may be triggered when worrying or feeling desperate about one's financial situation and thinking that gambling will help solve debt problems.

---

**Winning and chasing:** According to the CAMH-IGS, someone may gamble excessively when winning, chasing losses, or dreaming of winning. The person may become caught up in gambling and gamble longer than intended. They may believe that if they keep gambling they will recoup their losses.

---

**Confidence in skill:** Gambling may be triggered when someone feels confident about their skill or knowing the system. They may have mistaken beliefs about how odds work. Even though some games seem to benefit from skills or knowledge, there is still too much randomness to assure wins over the long term.

---

**Testing personal control:** Gambling may be triggered when a person thinks that they can gamble and exercise control and limits, or go to the casino and simply be an observer.

---

**Urges and temptations:** Gambling may be triggered when gambling is easily available and accessible, or when events or circumstances makes a person think of gambling.

---

Regardless of what the situation is, practicing mindfulness is about bringing awareness to the various thoughts and emotions that arise during the craving and not reacting to them from a place of automatic pilot. The following exercise can be helpful in such a situation.

### → 3-step breathing space in challenging situations

This is an opportunity to apply the 3-step breathing space in a situation where participants find themselves stressed or feeling overwhelmed.

Invite participants to recall a situation where they have felt triggered to react by either gambling or acting out in an inappropriate manner. Participants can choose from one of the ten CAMH-IGS categories listed above. For the purpose of practicing the 3-step breathing space, ask them to choose a situation that is not too overwhelming and is moderate or mild in intensity. The objective here is for them to learn how to apply the 3-step breathing space in challenging situations, in order to step out of automatic pilot and respond from a place of groundedness and clarity.

### → Walking meditation

This practice is an opportunity for participants to experience mindful walking. Mindfulness meditation is about learning to be present without judgement and there are many ways to cultivate presence, walking being one of them. The focus here is on the act of walking and noticing what is happening in the body and mind. What body sensations are present and what thoughts are arising? How often do people notice what is happening in the moment when they are walking? Are their minds usually occupied elsewhere? Maybe their minds are already at their destination or still have not left where they are just coming from. Are they fully in the present and aware of their surroundings? Nowadays, people are often focused on their handheld devices, such as cell phones, ipods, or tablets, texting, talking or listening to something.

Mindful walking, yoga and mindful movement/stretching are not unlike mindful breathing, where we are simply being a witness to what is unfolding moment by moment, while being unattached. We also observe when thinking is happening and may even get hooked into it, but gently let it go and return to witnessing. When we truly witness, we let go of judgement.

Although it is called mindfulness, there is a huge emphasis on awareness of the body, because the body is always in the present moment. That is why mindfulness is sometimes referred to as a mind/body or body-centered approach. Sinking into the body grounds us and brings us to awareness and sensing, rather than thinking and conceptualizing.

### → Home practice

Participants are given handouts with home practice included. Participants can practice sitting meditation, and 3-step breathing space in a challenging situation, and mindful walking.

### → Closing

Participants are asked, “What are you noticing in the present moment regarding thoughts, feelings or body sensations?”

---

The CAMH-IGS is available on the internet free of charge at the following web address:  
[www.problemgambling.ca/EN/ResourcesForProfessionals/Pages/IGS.aspx](http://www.problemgambling.ca/EN/ResourcesForProfessionals/Pages/IGS.aspx)



### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Awareness of seeing practice**

---

Bring your attention to awareness of seeing.

---

Notice how seeing is almost always accompanied by thinking.

---

Try to separate the act of seeing from thinking about what is being seen.

---

Imagine seeing without having words or language to describe what you are seeing.

---

Imagine what it might be like for babies, who do not have the ability to speak yet.

---

We usually see things through concepts, interpretations and judgement or preconceived biases.

---

Stay with the breath while doing this practice, as this can help you to stay focused on the present.

---



### **INQUIRY**

What was it like doing this practice?

---

What did you notice?

---

Stay with the direct experience of doing the practice.

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Awareness of seeing practice script is based on Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990).

### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Sitting meditation practice: Sound, breath, body sensation, thought**

---

Allow yourself to settle into the present moment and sit comfortably in your chair.

---

Posture is important during meditation practice. Adopt a posture that denotes wakefulness and comfort. Keep your back straight but not stiff. Uncross your legs and arms so as to allow the energy to flow freely through your body. You may want to sit with your back away from the backrest of the chair, so that it is self-supporting.

---

Notice what is happening right now, in terms of thoughts, feelings or body sensations.

---

Notice the sensations of your body resting on the chair and feet planted firmly on the ground. You may close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, focus gently downward, a few feet in front of you.

---

Bring your attention to the sense of hearing and notice sounds. Notice the quality of sounds. Notice at what point your hearing and the sound intersect.

---

Try to stay with the experience of hearing and not thinking about what you are hearing.

---

Leaving hearing in the background, now bring your attention to the breath. Notice where in your body you are experiencing breathing, the chest, belly, nostrils. Notice the chest and belly as they rise and fall with each breath in and out.

---

Notice that the body knows how to breathe itself. There is nothing that you need to do to make it happen, just allow it to happen.

---

Notice the quality of the breath. Is it fast, slow, deep or shallow?

---

Notice, with curiosity, when the mind has wandered away from the breath. Maybe the mind was drawn to thoughts, feelings or body sensations. This is normal and happens a lot. It is what the mind does. If you noticed that thinking was happening, just label it as “thinking” and gently bring your attention back to the breath, without judgement.

---

This practice is as much staying with the breath as it is bringing the mind back from where it wandered.

---

Continue to stay with the breath for a few more moments.

---

Now expand your awareness to the rest of your body as a whole. Scan for any compelling sensations or tension.

---

If there are any sensations that are drawing your attention, rest your awareness on that sensation and breathe into it. When ready, you can bring your awareness back to the rest of the body.

---

Again, notice when the mind has wandered away from awareness of the body to thoughts, feelings or sounds.

---

When this happens, gently bring your attention back to awareness of the body, without judgement.

---

Now shift your attention away from the body, leaving it in the background and bring your attention to any thoughts that may be arising. See if you can notice the next thought.

---

Observe thoughts as you may observe clouds floating across the sky.

---

Notice when you get carried away by a particular thought and find yourself lost in it, rather than just observing it from the outside.

---

After observing thoughts for a few moments, come back to the breath and stay with the breath.

---

When you are ready, gently open your eyes, while maintaining awareness.

---



## INQUIRY

What did you notice in doing this practice?

---

Stay with the direct experience of having done the practice without interpretations about the practice.

---

### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **3-step breathing space in challenging situations**

---

Recall a time, maybe recently, when you felt triggered and gambling crossed your mind. For the purpose of this practice, do not choose a situation that is the most challenging but something that is mild or moderate in intensity.

---

**When you have brought this situation to mind:**

**The first step** is to become aware of what is happening in the moment. What body sensations are you noticing and what thoughts and emotions have arisen? Remember to bring an attitude of non-judgemental curiosity to what you are experiencing.

---

**The second step** is to bring your attention to where in your body you are noticing breathing happening, to help you to become more fully present.

---

**The third step** is to expand your awareness to your entire body.

---

Now, from a place of increased groundedness in the present moment, how would you like to respond to this situation?

---

---

3-step breathing space script is based on the SOBER Breathing Space concept described by Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990), however we modified it to be more acceptable to a non-substance addiction clients.

### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Walking meditation**

---

Depending on the space available, participants can walk in a circle or along a hallway and then return, going back and forth a few times.

---

#### **Invite participants to:**

Stand with feet comfortably apart and find their center of balance by rocking side to side.

---

Keeping eyes open and focused gently downward, walk slowly while paying attention to the sensations of walking.

---

Notice the shift in body weight from the left leg to the right leg, as you walk.

---

Notice the left foot lifting and stepping forward as all the weight rests on the right leg, keeping the knees slightly bent in the right leg for balance.

---

Notice what the balancing feels like as one leg is lifting.

---

Notice the heel of the left leg as it contacts the floor and the rest of the foot follows.

---

This is repeated as the right leg steps forward and all the body weight is now in the left leg.

---

Repeat this process of lifting and shifting the body weight over and over.

---

Notice what is happening with the rest of the body as walking takes place.

---

Notice what is happening in the mind, for example, any thoughts such as “this is silly.”

---

Continue this process for a few minutes while remembering to breathe throughout this process.

---



#### **INQUIRY**

What did you notice in doing this practice?

---

Stay with the direct experience of doing the walking meditation practice.

---

---

Walking meditation script is based on Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990).



---

# HANDOUT 1: SESSION 04

## Being mindful when at risk to gamble

Mindfulness practices allow us to develop a sense of spaciousness from our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This sense of spaciousness between stimulus and response is particularly useful in situations where we may feel challenged and triggered. Mindfulness practices can help us to stay focused on our breath and sensations in our body, which can keep us in the present moment. We can relate differently to gambling and other triggers with awareness, rather than on automatic pilot.

### → HOME PRACTICE

- 1 Practice sitting meditation** 6 days a week.
- 2 Practice the 3-step breathing space regularly** and notice when you are experiencing challenging emotions, thoughts or body sensations.
- 3 Practice walking mindfully** and paying attention to walking. You can focus on the act of walking and what it feels like in the body. You can also alternate between awareness of the different senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, and body sensations. If you are walking outside, you can notice what is happening around you as you walk. You can notice the sounds of birds, traffic, other people, the wind, and so on. Also notice what is happening in your mind and body.



## HANDOUT 2: SESSION 04

### Walking meditation

#### Not mindful: thinking about the future or the past.

---



I've got to hurry, I must be on time.



Still upset at my friend. Got to stop thinking about it. Stop.



When I get there I'll make an excuse about the bus.



Hope I can catch the Leaf's game tonight.



Better check my messages. That one's important.



Hey! Damn bike almost crashed into me.

#### Mindful walking: being in the moment.

---



Humm, I'm thinking I might be late. I'll walk fast. Good exercise. Breathing in.



The air feels good in my lungs. Still upset at my friend. No big deal. We'll talk.



I feel my feet touching the sidewalk. Breathing out.



The cracks in the sidewalk feel bumpy. Oh look, there's Joe. "Hi". Breathing in.



It's April and people have their bikes out already.



Breathing out, 1, 2, 3, 4... Is that a Robin? Nice.



# HANDOUT 3: SESSION 04

## High risk situations

**Negative emotions:** Anger, sadness, boredom, depression.

---

**Conflict with others:** Arguments, not being treated well, anger and frustration.

---

**Pleasant emotions:** Being in a good mood, happy, having a celebration.

---

**Social pressure to gamble:** Other people want to gamble, others invite you to a game.

---

**Need for excitement:** A need for excitement or action, or to alleviate boredom.

---

**Worried about debts:** Mounting debts, trying to solve a debt problem.

---

**Winning and chasing:** Wins, memory of wins, chasing losses, dreaming of past winning.

---

**Confidence in skill:** Confident in your skill or knowledge of the system, thinking you now know how to win.

---

**Testing personal control:** Believing you can now control your gambling, testing will power.

---

**Urges and temptations:** A casino is near by, cravings triggered by advertisement.

---



As with the hindrances and barriers, complete the following table with some high risk situations you've experience and then list how you reacted in the situation.

High risk situations	My response

Accepting and allowing “what is” without resistance or judgement is the first step in the change process.



## Session 05

### Chapter 08

---

# Lesson plan for cultivating a different relationship to experience through acceptance and clear seeing

Stressful situations can leave us feeling triggered and filled with negative emotions. In these instances, it becomes difficult to accept what is happening in the moment. For example, getting stuck in traffic on route to a very important work meeting after intentionally leaving home early, can leave us feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. These kinds of situations can be triggers for gambling because they leave us feeling defeated. There are many situations that are not in our control. When we learn to accept what is happening in the moment, we are not struggling with or resisting what is already happening. Accepting and allowing “what is” without resistance or judgement is the first step in the change process. When we accept ourselves and the situations around us as they are, we are on the journey for long-term beneficial change. Acceptance does not mean being passive but is a first step toward action.

#### → Check in

Invite participants to say their names and one thing they are noticing in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.



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## Agenda

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### Check in

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**Sitting meditation: sound, breath, sensation, thought, emotion.**  
Read Rumi's poem *The Guest House*

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### Practice review

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### 3-step breathing space

---

Applying the 3-step breathing space in high risk situations

---

What does acceptance mean?

---

Mindful movement/ yoga

---

Home practice

---

Closing

---

### → **Sitting meditation: Sound, breath, body sensation, thought, and emotion**

Practice mindfulness of sound, breath, body sensation, thought, and emotion. This meditation is an opportunity to notice discomfort and how one relates to it. Our usual tendency is to push away or deny that which is unpleasant or painful, and hang on to experiences that are pleasant or feel good. This meditation is an opportunity to cultivate a different way of relating to all experiences, uncomfortable or pleasant.

Why do this? Because some of our experiences are unpleasant, causing us to resist and push away. When we get in the habit of resisting and pushing away, we never learn to deal with adversity in an effective way. Rumi describes in his poem, that to invite all experiences in, laughing and grateful, it may be clearing us out for some new delight.

### → **Practice review**

Review how their home practice went. If they were able to practice, how was it and what did they notice? This is also an opportunity for participants to ask questions about the practice.

If participants were not able to practice, what got in the way? Review the barriers from week two that may apply here. Participants are encouraged to observe what barriers got in the way, without judgement.

### → **3-step breathing space**

Ask participants to pair up and talk with their partner about something that tends to annoy or frustrate them, such as waiting in line or traffic. After a few minutes, once they have both had a chance to get into their situations, ask them to stop and do the 3-step breathing space. The group leader can coach participants through this. After, ask participants what they observed from doing this exercise. Did it help them to regain presence and calm down?

### → **Applying the 3-step breathing space in high risk situations**

This is an opportunity for participants to practice the 3-step breathing space in a high risk situation. Invite them to recall a situation that was difficult for them, but not overwhelming, such as an argument with someone or some other situation when they may have been triggered to gamble. When they have imagined themselves back in the situation, they can practice the 3-step breathing space as a way of centering themselves and evaluating their choices for action.

### → **What does acceptance mean and how does it lead to clear seeing?**

Brainstorm with participants what comes to mind when they hear the word “acceptance” and flipchart participants’ responses. Refer to the list on the flipchart to generate discussion. This is an opportunity for the group to discuss the concept of acceptance and what it means to them.

Remind group members that acceptance is a simple concept but can be difficult to achieve.

## Acceptance does not mean being passive but is a first step toward action.

### Questions for group members to consider:

What does acceptance mean?

---

What does acceptance have to do with being fully present?

---

Can you be fully present without being accepting of what is happening in the present moment?

---

Remind group members of the following **Serenity Prayer** to generate further discussion:

Grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change.  
Courage to change the things I can.  
And wisdom to know the difference.  
Acceptance does not mean condoning or agreeing,  
nor is it about being passive.

### → Mindful movement

Similar to walking meditation, this is another opportunity for participants to practice various movements and stretches to cultivate awareness of the body. These movements and stretches can be grounded in Yoga, Tai Chi or Martial Arts training as examples of disciplines to draw from that would be conducive to cultivating mindful awareness of the body and mind connection. The body is always in the present moment, and it is the perfect doorway for entering the present moment, for example, in awareness of breathing. See the yoga images and accompanying instruction below that can also be provided to group participants as handouts for them to continue to practice at home. The group facilitator may use these or other movements of their choice.

### → Home practice

Distribute handouts to participants for the home practice, which includes sitting meditation, the 3-step breathing space and mindful movement.

### → Closing

Ask participants to say their name and one thing they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.

### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Sitting meditation practice: sound, breath, body sensation, thought, and emotion**

---

Allow yourself to settle into the present moment and sit comfortably in your chair.

---

Posture is important during meditation practice. Adopt a posture that promotes wakefulness and comfort. Keep your back straight, but not stiff. Uncross your legs and arms so as to allow the energy to flow freely through your body. You may want to sit with your back away from the backrest of the chair, so that it is self-supporting.

---

Notice what is happening right now, in terms of thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.

---

Notice the sensations of your body resting on the chair and feet planted firmly on the ground. You may close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, focus gently downward, a few feet in front of you.

---

Bring your attention to the sense of hearing and notice sounds. Notice the quality of sounds. Notice at what point your hearing and the sound intersect.

---

Try to stay with the experience of hearing and not thinking about what you are hearing.

---

Leaving hearing in the background, now bring your attention to the breath. Notice where in your body you are experiencing breathing: the chest, belly, or nostrils. Notice the chest and belly as they rise and fall with each breath in and out.

---

Notice that the body knows how to breathe itself. There is nothing that you need to do to make it happen, just allow it to happen.

---

Notice the quality of the breath. Is it fast, slow, deep, or shallow?

---

Notice, with curiosity, when the mind has wandered away from the breath. Maybe the mind was drawn to thoughts, feelings or body sensations. This is normal and happens a lot. It is what the mind does. If you notice that thinking is happening, just label it as “thinking” and gently bring your attention back to the breath, without judgement.

---

This practice is as much staying with the breath as it is bringing the mind back from where it wandered.

---

Continue to stay with the breath for a few more moments.

---

Now expand your awareness to the rest of your body. Scan for any compelling sensations or tension.

---

If there are any sensations that are drawing your attention, then rest your awareness on that sensation and breathe into it. When ready, you can bring your awareness back to the rest of the body.

---

Again, notice when the mind has wandered away from awareness of the body, to thoughts, feelings, or sounds.

---

When this happens, gently bring your attention back to awareness of the body, without judgement.

---

Now shift your attention away from the body, leaving it in the background and bring your attention to any thoughts that may be arising. See if you can notice the next thought.

---

Observe thoughts as you may observe clouds floating across the sky.

---

Notice when you might get carried away by a particular thought and find yourself lost in it, rather than observing it from the outside.

---

After observing thoughts for a few minutes, leave that in the background and shift your attention to awareness of emotions.

---

See if you can notice any emotions present and bring your awareness to them. Also, notice any thoughts that may be associated with the emotions. Try to stay with the sensations of the emotions, the experience of them, without thinking.

---

Bring your awareness to the breath at the same time and stay with that for a while.

---

When you are ready, shift your attention away from emotions and just on the breath.

---

When you are ready, gently open your eyes, while maintaining awareness.

---



## INQUIRY

What did you notice in doing this practice?

---

Stay with the direct experience of having done the practice without interpretations about the practice.

---

The intention here  
is greater awareness  
of and groundedness  
in the body, while  
noticing what is  
happening in the mind.





---

# Mindful movement/yoga practice

Copies of this can be provided as a handout.

For this practice, the group leader can lead the participants through various movements of the group leader's choice, such as yoga exercises or various stretching exercises. Or the group leader can return to mindful walking.

Keep in mind to invite participants to stay present in their body while doing this practice and always remember to breathe.

## The instruction is:

**Bringing awareness to the sensations in the body and noticing when the mind has wandered and then gently bringing the attention back to sensations in the body.**

The intention here is greater awareness of and groundedness in the body, while noticing what is happening in the mind.

---

## Seated Mountain

Sit upright on the edge of the chair. Place your palms on your thighs. Stare straight ahead and ensure that the crown of the head points toward the ceiling. Keep your shoulders down and back in a relaxed position. This pose aids in focusing and improves the alignment of the spine. This is a calming pose and helps in breath awareness.



---

### Arm warm-up

Stretch your arms outward. Hold. Slowly bring your arms up, inhaling. On the exhale, bring the arms back to an extended position. Repeat this movement 7 times slowly. Stay with the breath with each movement. This is a warm up exercise for the upper body.



---

### Neck rolls

The start position for the neck roll is with the head straight and gaze forward. Before beginning the movement, notice any tension that may be present in the muscles and top of the shoulders. Inhale as you move your head gently to the left.

Pay attention to how your neck feels during this movement. Exhale as you roll your head back to neutral position. Inhale and gently roll your head to the other side. Exhale and return to neutral. Repeat this movement 5 times on each side. This movement keeps muscles flexible and aids in pain relief.



---

### Cat/Cow in chair

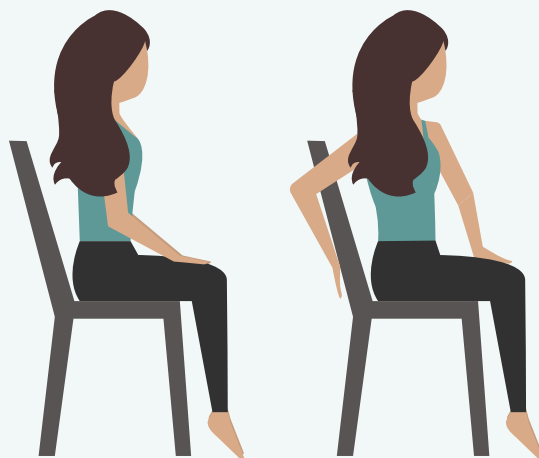
Start by sitting near the front of the chair seat and place hands on the knees. Try to straighten the arms. As you inhale, start to move the pelvis and hips forward so your weight comes more to the front edge of the sitting bones. Exhale and come back to a neutral position. Repeat 5 times moving fluidly with each breath. This position supports spinal mobility.



---

### Seated twist

Sit in the chair with your spine tall and straight. Inhale and as you exhale, twist to one side from the bottom of your spine (more from your abdomen, less from your back) grabbing the armrest or back of the chair. Be gentle and only go to your comfort level. Notice your breathing here as you hold this position for a few seconds and slowly come back to your original position. Repeat on the other side. Repeat the movement at least 3 times on each side.



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### Knee hug

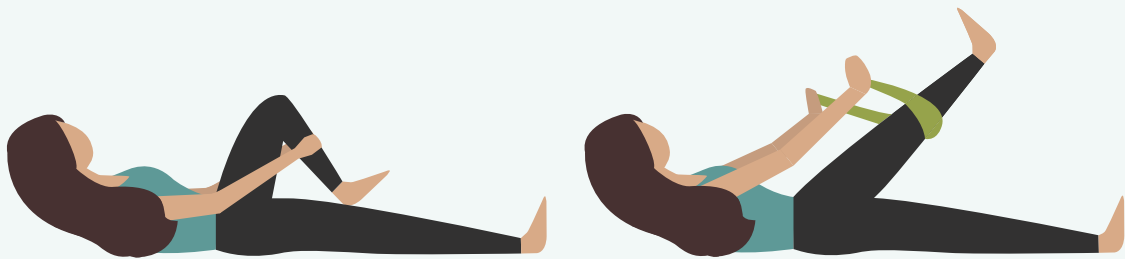
Bend both knees towards your chest and place your hands around your knees or shins. Take a deep breath in and gently squeeze your things closer to the chest. Hold for 20–30 seconds and repeat twice. This posture releases tight muscles around the hips and lower back.



---

### Leg stretch

Lying flat on your back on the ground, start by hugging your right knee in towards your chest. Release the knee and then with your leg outstretched, as in the diagram, place a strap (or tie or towel) under the lower leg, as shown in the diagram. Holding on to the strap with both hands, gently stretch the legs straight up as far as you can without discomfort. You will notice a gentle stretching sensation along your right leg, particularly the hamstrings. Hold this position for a few seconds while remembering to breathe. Lower the right leg and then repeat on the left leg. Do this exercise at least twice on each side. This position stretches the hamstring muscles.



---

### **Pelvic tilts/Bridge pose**

Lying flat on the floor with arms on the side. You can place a blanket under shoulders to protect the neck. Bend your knees so that your feet are now flat on the ground as in the diagram. Keep your arms beside your body, palms facing down. Inhaling, slowly lift your back off the floor, gently roll in the shoulders, supporting your weight with your shoulders, arms and feet. Keep breathing easily. Exhale as you gently release the pose. Repeat this movement 7 times slowly. This posture is beneficial for strengthening the back and stretches the chest, neck and spine.



---

### **Corpse pose/Resting pose**

Lie flat on your back, letting the arms and legs drop open as feels right. You can place a blanket or cushion under or over your body as is comfortable. Close the eyes and take slow deep breaths through the nose. All your whole body to become soft, letting it relax onto the floor. As the body relaxes, feel the whole body rising and falling with each breath. Scan the body from the toes to the top of the head and consciously relax and release any tension. Let your body move into a deeper state of relaxation. Try to stay in this position for at least 10 minutes.

To release, slowly deepen the breath, wiggle the toes and fingers, reach the arms overhead and stretch out the entire body. Exhale, bend the knees into the chest and roll over to one side, into fetal position. Slowly, inhale up to a seated position.

This pose is essential to any yoga practice, rejuvenating the body and mind while reducing tension and stress.



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Yoga exercises were based on Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990) as well as our own clinical practice and research (Jindani, et al., 2015).



---

## HANDOUT 1: SESSION 05

### Cultivating a different relationship to experience through acceptance and clear seeing

Stressful situations can leave us feeling triggered and filled with negative emotions. In these instances, it becomes difficult to accept what is happening in the moment. For example, getting stuck in traffic on route to a very important work meeting after intentionally leaving home early, can leave us feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. These kinds of situations can be triggers for gambling because they leave us feeling defeated. There are many situations that are not in our control and when we learn to accept what is happening in the moment, we are not struggling with or resisting what already is happening. Accepting and allowing “what is” without resistance or judgement is the first step in the change process. When we accept ourselves and the situations around us as they are, we are on the journey for long-term beneficial change. Acceptance does not mean being passive, but is a first step toward action.

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#### → HOME PRACTICE

- 1 **Practice sitting meditation, body scan or mindful walking** 5–6 days this week.
  - 2 **Practice the 3-step breathing space regularly** and notice thoughts and body sensations that arise.
-



## HANDOUT 2: SESSION 05

### Using the 3-step breathing space when at risk to gamble

Log of triggers and high-risk situations (see handout of high risk situations).

High-risk situation or trigger	Reactions? Thoughts? Feelings?	3-step breathing space (yes/no)	Did it work? (yes/maybe/no)

---

# The guest house

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

**Jelaluddin Rumi**

---

Translation by Coleman Barks.  
Permission granted by Coleman Barks.





**Mindfulness meditation encourages us to notice and pay attention to our wandering minds.**



## Session 06

### Chapter 09

---

# Lesson plan for seeing thoughts as passing mental events

Mindfulness meditation encourages us to notice and pay attention to our wandering minds. Mindfulness meditation is based on learning to attend to the present moment and return our focus to our body sensations and the breath. Similarly, we can learn to intentionally bring awareness to our thoughts as they come and go. Thoughts are not facts. They can be seen as passing mental events. They can come in the form of images or words that we may or may not choose to believe, similar to the scenes on a movie screen. Notice how our thoughts tend to be repetitive and go around in circles.

In this session, we will learn how thoughts are involved in the gambling relapse process.

**Gambling related thoughts can include:**

---

I am feeling lucky.

---

I can win.

---



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## Agenda

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### Check in

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### Sitting meditation: thoughts

---

### Home practice review

---

### Connection between thoughts and relapse

---

### The relapse process

---

### 3-step breathing space

---

### Developing your home practice to promote continuity after the eight weeks

---

### Closing

---

This is my lucky day.

---

I am due for a win.

---

I will go and stay only one hour and spend just \$50.

---

What are other gambling related thoughts that you have had?

### → Check in

Ask participants to say their name and one thing they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.

### → Sitting meditation: Thoughts

The focus of this sitting meditation will be on awareness of thoughts. This involves observing thoughts without judgement as they come and go, in and out of awareness. The use of metaphors can be helpful for seeing thoughts as passing mental events, rather than getting engaged in the content of the thought.

**The first metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as clouds floating across the sky. Each cloud represents an individual thought floating across the sky. Many clouds represent many thoughts on your mind, and racing thoughts are represented by thoughts drifting rapidly across the sky, maybe due to a strong wind blowing.

---

**The second metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as individual railroad cars on a long train, with each car being a thought, and observing the train passing by from a distance. Sometimes, however, we get caught up in our thoughts and we may suddenly find ourselves on the train. When we realize that we have suddenly hopped on the train, we can choose to get off the train and return to observing.

---

**The third metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as leaves floating by on a stream, while sitting on the side of the stream or on a bridge. Each thought can be represented by one of the leaves floating by on the stream. Racing thoughts are represented by a fast moving stream.

---

**The fourth metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as bubbles rising up from the bottom of a pond, with each bubble representing a thought.

---

Participants can choose which metaphor suits them best for this practice or create their own metaphor that is suitable.

**With mindfulness, we learn to see thoughts as passing mental events. We learn to unhook from our thoughts and become observers of them, not identifying with them.**

### → Home practice review

Review how their home practice went. If they were able to practice, how was it, and what did they notice? This is also an opportunity for participants to ask questions about the practice.

If participants were not able to practice, what got in the way? Review the common barriers from week two. Participants are encouraged to observe what barriers got in the way, without judgement.

### → Connection between thoughts and relapse

Group members can consider the following question and statement:

What are thoughts and how do they relate to relapse?

Thoughts are just thoughts and not necessarily facts or the truth of things.

Refer back to session four, mindfulness in high-risk situations and the Inventory of Gambling Situations, where we looked at the various thoughts and emotions that can be involved in relapse.

With mindfulness, we learn to see thoughts as passing mental events. We learn to unhook from our thoughts and become observers of them, not identifying with them. As with the “walking down the street” exercise in week two, we see how our thoughts can fuel our feelings and emotions and trigger us. This can lead to relapse if not being mindful.

### → The relapse process

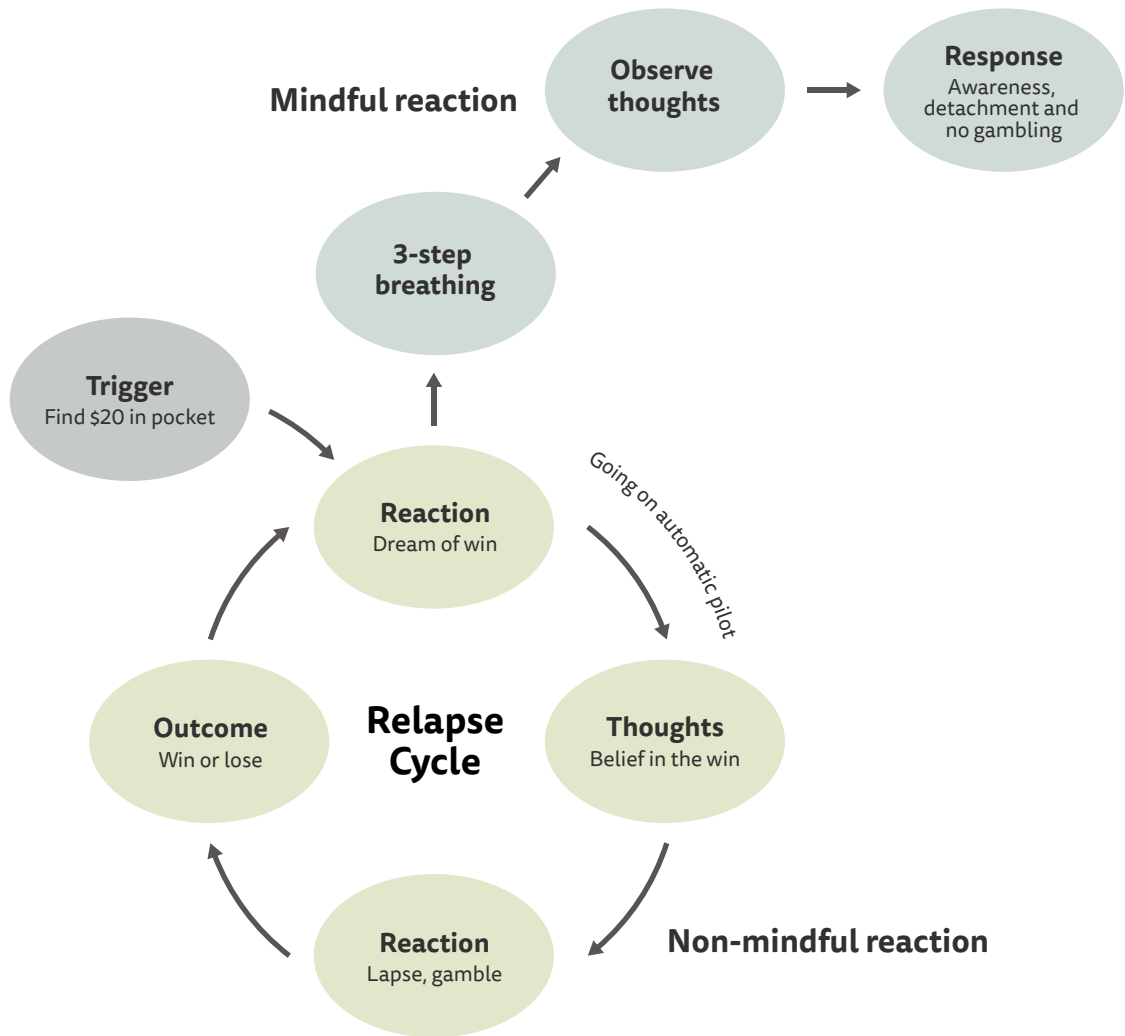
Ask participants to generate examples of specific situations where they might be triggered to gamble, as in one of the CAMH-IGS categories from session four. After recalling such a situation, identify any thoughts and emotions that could be present at the time. Choose one of these examples to walk through with the group on the flipchart, following the diagram below.

On the left of the diagram, write down the triggering situations the participants describe. Then, write down the thoughts, sensations and emotions that would arise. Participants can then follow through the chain of events that, on the one hand, leads to gambling or on the other hand, leads to stepping out of “automatic pilot” and choosing alternative action.

In this example, participants can see how thoughts and emotions are at the core of relapse and that it is possible to bring awareness to what is happening and choosing to do something else.

## Relapse process exercise

Use the flipchart to follow a specific example from the group, illustrating the possible paths where different choices will lead. Highlight the role of thoughts in the relapse process, and the possibility of stepping out of “automatic pilot” to make more conscious choices at any point along the way.



This diagram is based in part on the relapse cycle described in Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt (2011), but modified for gambling situations based on our own research into relapse with gambling (e.g., Turner et al., 2013).

### → 3-step breathing space

**Become aware:** Become aware of what is happening right now by tuning into your senses, feelings, body sensations, and thoughts. What are you noticing happening right now? What are you seeing? What are you hearing? What sensations are you noticing in your body? What thoughts are arising in the mind?

---

**Breathe:** Become aware of your breath as it goes in and out. Notice your chest and belly rising and falling with each breath in and out. What is the quality of your breath? Is it fast, slow, deep, or shallow? Just allow breathing to happen all on its own.

---

**Body:** Become aware of your entire body, expanding your awareness from where you are experiencing breathing. Now that you are more fully in the present moment, how would you respond to this moment?

---

### → Developing your home practice to promote continuity after the eight weeks

Invite participants to choose one or more of the practices that they have learned and find ways to weave it into their daily routines:

Mindful eating	Body scan
Mindful walking	3-step breathing space
Sitting meditation	Mindful stretching or yoga

Participants may sometimes ask, “When is the best time to practice?” Some people may prefer mornings and others may prefer evenings or some other time. Sometimes, people may be less inclined to fall asleep when practicing in the morning and others may have more time in the evenings. Regardless of the time of day, ask participants to choose a time when they are more likely to be able to continue the practice, considering long-term gains over short-term.

### → Closing

Ask participants to say their name and one thing they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.

### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Sitting meditation: thoughts**

---

The focus of this sitting meditation is on awareness of thoughts. This involves observing thoughts without judgement, as they come and go, in and out of awareness. The use of metaphors can be helpful for seeing thoughts as passing mental events, rather than getting engaged in the content of the thought.

---

**The first metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as clouds floating across the sky. Each cloud represents an individual thought floating across the sky. Many clouds represent many thoughts on your mind, and racing thoughts are represented by thoughts drifting rapidly across the sky, maybe due to a strong wind blowing.

---

**The second metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as individual railroad cars on a long train, with each car being a thought, and observing the train passing by from a distance. Sometimes, however, we get caught up in our thoughts and we may suddenly find ourselves on the train. When we realize that we have suddenly hopped on the train, we can choose to get off the train and return to observing.

---

**The third metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as leaves floating by on a stream while sitting on the side of the stream or on a bridge. Each thought can be represented by one of the leaves floating by on the stream. Racing thoughts are represented by a fast moving stream.

---

**The fourth metaphor** involves seeing thoughts as bubbles rising up from the bottom of a pond with each bubble representing a thought.

---

Participants can choose which metaphor suits them best for this practice or create their own metaphor that is suitable.

---

Begin by noticing what is happening in the present moment. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so or if you prefer to keep them open, focus your attention gently downward in front of you. Become present by tuning into your senses and starting with noticing your body sensations. Notice the feeling of your body resting on the chair, feet planted firmly on the ground and your hands resting on your lap.

---

Now, bring your attention to your sense of hearing and notice sounds. Remember to bring an attitude of curiosity and non-judgement to all of your experience.

---

Shifting your attention away from sounds, direct your attention to where breathing is happening, in your chest and abdomen. Notice the rise and fall with each breath in and out. Notice the quality of your breath. Is it fast, slow, deep, or shallow? We don't have to



change it but to just bring awareness to it, as it is happening. Notice that the body knows how to breathe itself. Whenever, the mind gets distracted by something else, acknowledge this and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

---

Now, tell yourself that it is okay to think and notice any thoughts arising in your awareness without engaging in the content of the thought. You can use one of the metaphors mentioned above as a way of seeing your thoughts as they come and go. Observe your thoughts as you had observed your breath. Notice that they just come and go without us having to do anything. Maintain an attitude of curiosity and non-judgement as you observe your thoughts arise and fall out of awareness. Some thoughts may be more compelling than others. For these compelling thoughts, bring non-judgemental awareness to them as you breathe into them.

---

Let go of thinking and bring awareness back to your breath for the final few moments of this practice.

---

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

---



## **INQUIRY**

Invite participants to comment on their direct experience of this practice.

---



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# HANDOUT 1: SESSION 06

## Seeing thoughts as passing mental events

Mindfulness meditation practices encourage us to notice and pay attention to our wandering minds. Mindfulness meditation is based on learning to attend to the present moment and return our focus to our body sensations and the breath. Similarly, we can learn to intentionally bring awareness to our thoughts as they come and go. Thoughts are not facts. They can be seen as passing mental events. They can come in the form of images or words that we may or may not choose to believe, similar to the scenes on a movie screen. Notice how our thoughts tend to be repetitive and go around in circles.

In this session, we learned how thoughts are involved in the gambling relapse process.

### Gambling related thoughts can include:

I am feeling lucky.

---

I can win.

---

This is my lucky day.

---

I am due for a win.

---

I will go and stay only one hour and spend just \$50.

---

### → HOME PRACTICE

**1 Choose one and practice as often as you can:** mindful eating, body scan, sitting meditation, mindful walking, mindful stretching or yoga.

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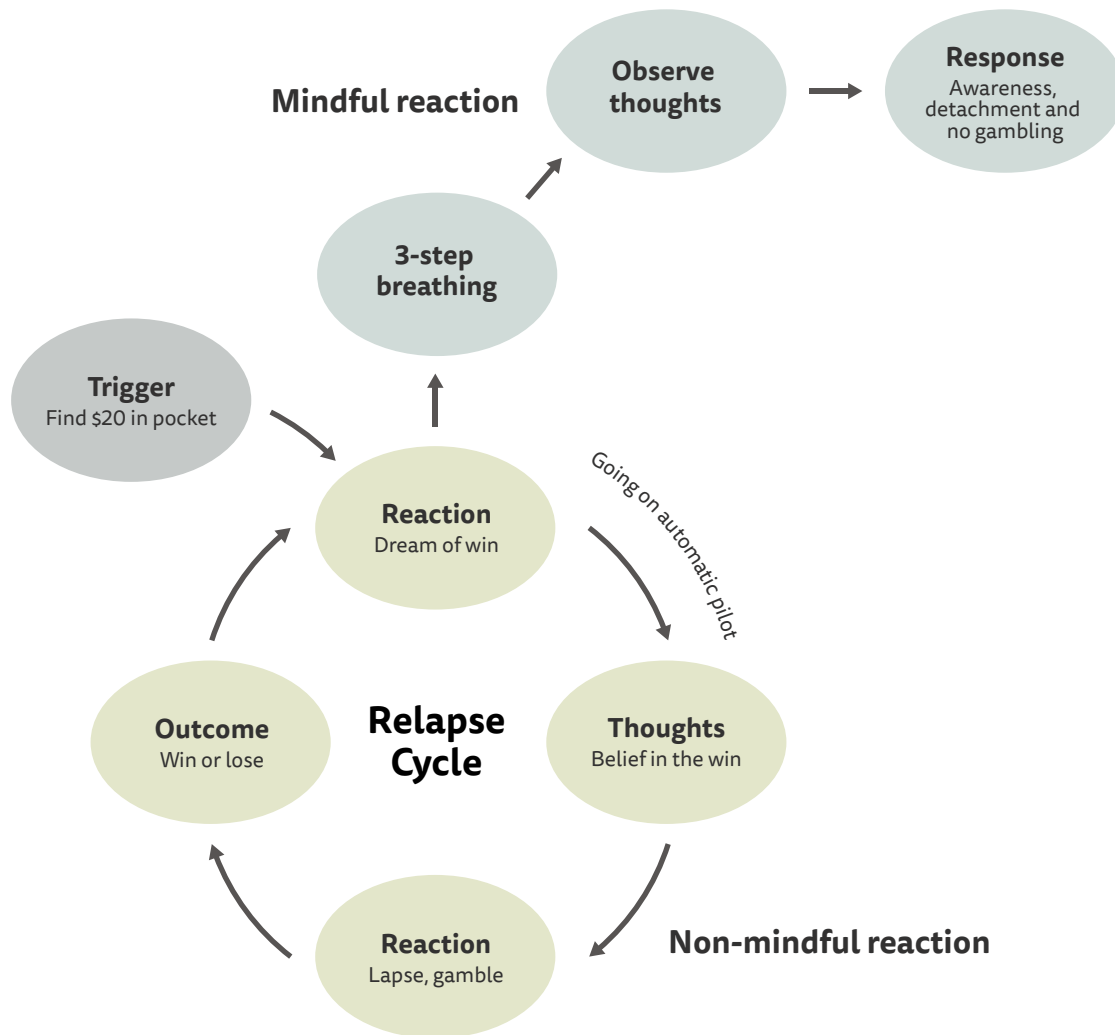
**2 Continue to practice the 3-step breathing space regularly.**

---



# HANDOUT 2: SESSION 06

## Relapse process worksheet



This diagram is based in part on the relapse cycle described in Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt (2011), but modified for gambling situations based on our own research into relapse with problem gamblers gambling (e.g., Turner et al., 2013).

Mindfulness practices encourage us to attend to thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that could put us at risk for gambling.



## Session 07

### Chapter 10

---

# Lesson plan for being good to yourself

Mindfulness practices encourage us to attend to thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that could put us at risk for gambling. Participating in activities that we enjoy and nourish us is an aspect of being good to ourselves. Being good to yourself is important in recovery from gambling problems.

This session allows us to consider what aspects of our daily lives are nourishing and what aspects of our lives put us at risk for gambling problems. Living a life that is good for us includes balance and compassion for ourselves. Cultivating mindfulness in our daily lives can remind us to take better care of ourselves and be more fulfilled.

#### → Check in

Ask participants to say their name and one thing they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.



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## Agenda

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### Check in

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### Sitting meditation: loving kindness

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### Practice review

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### Daily activities worksheet

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### The big picture

---

### 3-step breathing space

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### Home practice

---

### Closing

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## → Sitting meditation: Loving kindness/self-compassion

This practice is about cultivating loving kindness and compassion for yourself and others. People who have suffered from addiction problems, including gambling problems, are often very hard on themselves as a result of the problems they have had.

Loving kindness and self-compassion are qualities that can be cultivated and have been linked through research to many positive benefits, including: increased well-being and positive emotions, decreased chronic pain, increased empathy, altruism, compassion, social connection, acceptance and non-judgement, and decreased self-criticism.

It is not necessary to have warm, loving feelings when doing this practice, it is more about cultivating good intentions for yourself and others. This practice can change how we relate to pain and suffering to bring more kindness and compassion to ourselves and others when we are going through a difficult time.

It is also about opening up to the idea of a shared humanity; that we are all human and everybody suffers at some point in our lives. No one is immune to suffering. We all want to be happy and no one is perfect.

We start by cultivating loving kindness/compassion to ourselves because then, it is easier to have loving kindness for others. Secondly, we cultivate loving kindness for someone that we respect and admire, such as a mentor or spiritual advisor. Thirdly, we cultivate loving kindness to a friend, a neutral person, and then to someone that we find challenging.

## → Practice review

Review how their home practice went. If they were able to practice, how was it and what did they notice? This is also an opportunity for participants to ask questions about the practice.

If participants were not able to practice, what got in the way? Review the common challenges from week two. Participants are encouraged to observe what challenges got in the way, without judgement.

## → Daily activities worksheet

Invite participants to complete this worksheet and to comment on what it was like to do this.

### Elicit responses from group participants on the following question:

Did anyone realize how many depleting activities there were in their day or was there an equal balance of both nourishing and depleting activities?

Is there anything that they can do about any of the depleting activities, such as decreasing the number of such activities, changing something about them to make them less depleting or changing their attitudes toward the activity?

## Cultivating mindfulness in our daily lives can remind us to take better care of ourselves and be more fulfilled.

Depleting activities are activities that someone might not like doing and therefore would tend to drain their energy. Examples of depleting activities might be taking the trash out or having to wait in line or traffic.

Nourishing activities, on the other hand, are activities that someone might like doing and therefore would tend to energize or uplift them, such as taking a bath or having lunch with a best friend.

Keep in mind that these choices are really subjective and what one person might find depleting another person might find nourishing or neutral.

With a change in perspective, an activity that someone might have previously found depleting, they may start to find nourishing.

### → The big picture

In previous sessions we looked at specific triggers to relapse such as conflict with someone or worry about debts (as described in the CAMH-IGS). We now switch to the big picture including lifestyle changes. How would participants know that they might be heading down a slippery slope? One example may be when they find themselves withdrawing from others.

The acronym **HALT** may be useful here for participants to monitor themselves. It has been used in various recovery programs for this purpose and may have originated from Alcoholics Anonymous.

#### HALT stands for:

**Hungry:** Are your physical and nutritional needs being taken care of?

---

**Angry:** Are your emotional needs being taken care of?

---

**Lonely:** Are your social and relational needs being taken care of?

---

**Tired:** Are you getting enough rest and rejuvenation?

---

If someone is lacking in any of these areas, they would need to tend to their needs in order to not be vulnerable to triggers. This is a way for someone to monitor their basic self-care needs. Practicing being mindful may allow someone to slow down and pay attention to their mind and body and not get too stressed out.

### → 3-step breathing space

**Become aware:** Become aware of what is happening right now by tuning into your senses, feelings, body sensations, and thoughts. What are you noticing happening right now? What are you seeing? What are you hearing? What sensations are you noticing in your body? What thoughts are arising in the mind?

---

**Breathe:** Become aware of your breath as it goes in and out. Notice your chest and belly rising and falling with each breath in and out. What is the quality of your breath? Is it fast, slow, deep or shallow? Just allow breathing to happen all on its own.

---

**Body:** Become aware of your entire body, expanding your awareness from where you are experiencing breathing. Now that you are more fully in the present moment, how would you respond to this moment?

---

### → Home practice

Distribute handouts to participants. Home practice will include sitting meditation and the 3-step breathing space.

### → Closing

Ask participants to say their name one thing they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings or body sensations.



### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Loving kindness meditation**

---

Allow yourself to settle into the present moment and sit comfortably in your chair.

---

Posture is important during meditation practice. Adopt a posture that denotes wakefulness and comfort. Keep your back straight but not stiff. Uncross your legs and arms so as to allow the energy to flow freely through your body. You may want to sit with your back away from the backrest of the chair, so that it is self-supporting and could promote a sense of wakefulness.

---

Notice what is happening right now, in terms of thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.

---

Notice the sensations of your body resting on the chair and feet planted firmly on the ground. You may close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, focus gently downward, a few feet in front of you.

---

Bring your attention to the sense of hearing and notice sounds. Notice the quality of sounds. Notice at what point your hearing and the sound intersect.

---

Try to stay with the experience of hearing and not thinking about what you are hearing.

---

Leaving hearing in the background, now bring your attention to the breath. Notice where in your body you are experiencing breathing, the chest, belly, or nostrils. Notice the chest and belly as they rise and fall with each breath in and out.

---

Notice that the body knows how to breathe itself. There is nothing that you need to do to make it happen, but just allow it to happen.

---

Notice the quality of the breath. Is it fast, slow, deep, or shallow?

---

Notice, with curiosity, when the mind has wandered away from the breath. Maybe the mind was drawn to thoughts, feelings or body sensations. This is normal and happens a lot. It is what the mind does. If you noticed that thinking was happening, just label it as “thinking” and gently bring your attention back to the breath, without judgement.

---

Loving kindness meditation is primarily about connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness.

---

Now, bring to mind someone that you look up to and have positive feelings toward. It could be someone that is like a mentor or spiritual advisor, teacher, or guide. Notice any feelings that come up as you bring this person to mind.

---

Bring your attention to the area around your heart and notice any sensations there, if any.

---

Now, imagine yourself sending well wishes to this person, using the following statements:

**May you be safe.**  
**May you be happy.**  
**May you be healthy.**  
**May you live with ease.**

---

Repeat these statements a few times. In turn, imagine this person sending well wishes back to you:

**May you be safe.**  
**May you be happy.**  
**May you be healthy.**  
**May you live with ease.**

---

Repeat these statements a few times.

---

And now, you can offer these well-wishes to yourself:

**May I be safe.**  
**May I be happy.**  
**May I be healthy.**  
**May I live with ease.**

---

Repeat these statements a few times.

---

Now offer these well wishes to everyone in the group. And eventually, you can offer these well wishes to everyone on the planet.

---

Bring your attention back to your breath and when ready, gently open your eyes.

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Loving kindness meditation is based on Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) and Kabat-Zinn (1990) as well our own clinical practice and research (Chen et al., 2014; Jindani, et al., 2015).



# HANDOUT 1: SESSION 07

## Being good to yourself

Mindfulness practices encourage us to tune in to the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that could put us at risk for gambling. Participating in activities that we enjoy and nourish us is an aspect of being good to ourselves. Being good to yourself is important in recovery from gambling problems.

This session allowed us to consider what aspects of our daily lives are nourishing and what aspects of our lives put us at risk for gambling problems. Living a life that is good for us includes balance and compassion for ourselves. Cultivating mindfulness in our daily lives can remind us to take better care of ourselves and be more fulfilled.

### → HOME PRACTICE

- 1 Choose a practice that we have learned that you like to do** (e.g. 3-step breathing space, body scan, mindful walking, sitting meditation, mindful eating) and find a time in your weekly schedule so that you can practice regularly.
- 2 Participate in at least 3 activities** that you have identified as nourishing for yourself.



---

# HANDOUT 2: SESSION 07

## Daily activities worksheet

List situations that you encounter in your daily activities, such as meeting a person, being somewhere, or interacting with something. Some situations may increase your chance of relapse, but others may strengthen you. In the second column, note if that situation you encountered makes you feel depleted or worn down, or if it makes you feel uplifted, in terms of your energy or mood. To protect people's privacy, do not use their full name or use pseudonyms.

**Check off if the situation depletes or uplifts you.**

Situations (activity, person, place)	Deplete	Uplift

---

Daily activities worksheet is based on Bowen et al. (2011), Segal et al. (2002) as well as our own research into relapse situations (Turner et al., 2013).



Regular mindfulness practice enables us greater freedom because we can learn to be more aware and less reactive in our lives.



## Session 08

### Chapter 11

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# Lesson plan for maintaining practice after group ends

Over the past eight weeks, we have learned mindfulness skills that we can use in daily life. Mindfulness enables us to fully accept our experiences in the present moment and to make choices from a wiser and clearer stance. It is not easy to incorporate these practices into our lives but we need to develop patience and compassion for ourselves.

We have reviewed risk factors for relapse into gambling and other behaviors, while learning to live a balanced lifestyle.

Participation in a group provides support and a network of people interested in recovery from gambling problems and learning mindfulness practice. When we have support in our lives, we can more easily become aware of triggers for relapse early on, through our social support networks. Another benefit of working with others is that it can help with maintaining our practice.

Mindfulness practices provide us with awareness and acceptance of what is occurring in the present moment and the understanding that there are some things in our lives that we can control and other things that we cannot. Regular mindfulness practice enables us greater freedom because we can learn to be more aware and less reactive in our lives. While difficulties and challenges will arrive with these practices, practicing in itself is a sign of growth. We can learn to be gentle with ourselves and to cultivate an acceptance of who we are, at each moment in time.



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## Agenda

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### Check In

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### Body scan or sitting meditation

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### Practice review

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### Connecting with resources in the community

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### Evaluation of the course

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### Review goals from session one flipchart

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### Concluding meditation

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### → Check in

Ask participants to say their name and one thing they notice in the present moment, indicating thoughts, feelings or body sensations.

### → Body scan or sitting meditation

We return to the body scan as a way to complete the circle of practice and to provide participants with one more opportunity to do this practice. Participants can then compare this practice with the first one in session one to look at what might have changed for them.

The body scan is an opportunity for participants to pay attention to something that is not necessarily interesting and can even be boring at times. Keeping with the spirit of the practice, they can notice their reactions to bringing their attention to something that can be boring and the common reaction to want to push it away or make it interesting. Boredom is a common reason cited by people with gambling problems for relapse.

Following the meditation practice, the group leader can read the poem **The Paradox**, which can be a wonderful way of depicting the nature of meditation.

### → Practice review

Review how their home practice went. If they were able to practice, how was it and what did they notice? This is also an opportunity for participants to ask questions about the practice.

If participants were not able to practice, what got in the way? Review the common barriers from week two. Participants are encouraged to observe what barriers got in the way, without judgement.

### → Connecting with resources in the community

How do participants stay connected to the practice and to the experience of the present moment? It is easy to forget this once the group has ended. There are many resources to be found online and in the community, including groups that people may be able to attend and participate. Interest in mindfulness meditation has grown exponentially over the years. Staying connected is not just about connection to others with similar interests, but also connectedness to yourself and your inner experience.

### → Reflections on the course

Invite participants to complete the questionnaire found at the end of this manual and if they feel comfortable, to share anything that came up for them while doing so.

### → Review goals from session one

The group facilitator can revisit the goals that the group had come up with in session one, to remind the participants of the reasons they joined the group. These goals can reinforce their



**When we have support in our lives, we can more easily become aware of triggers for relapse early on, through our social support networks.**

motivations for continuing the practice. Participants can also see how the practice may have benefited them over the course of the group.

**→ Concluding meditation**

Participants can be given an opportunity to reflect on their meditation over the past eight weeks with each other and provide feedback and well wishes moving forward.

It has been found from past groups that even though this is not a process oriented group and discussions are mostly centred on the direct experience of the practice, group members still seem to connect quite well together. There is something about meditating together that can be quite intimate, not unlike the connectedness that can be achieved through a process group.

### **Meditation script for facilitator**

*It is recommended that the facilitator develop their own script spontaneously as they lead the practice.*

## **Concluding meditation practice**

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Sit comfortably in your chair. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so or keep them open and focused gently downward.

---

Notice what is happening right now by tuning into the senses: hearing, body sensations, thoughts, and emotions.

---

Bring your attention to the sensations of the breath in the body.

---

Reflect on the past eight weeks together with the other group members and your experience of meditating together in this group.

---

As in the loving kindness meditation practice, send each of the group members well wishes:

**May you be safe.**  
**May you be happy.**  
**May you be healthy.**  
**May you live with ease.**

---

Now, send well wishes back to yourself.

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**May I be safe.**  
**May I be happy.**  
**May I be healthy.**  
**May I live with ease.**

---

In the remaining few minutes, bring your attention back to the breath.

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When you are ready, gently open your eyes.

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# HANDOUT 1: SESSION 08

## Maintaining practice after group ends

Over the past eight weeks, we have learned mindfulness skills that we can use in daily life. Mindfulness enables us to fully accept our experiences in the present moment and to make choices from a wiser and clearer stance. It is not easy to incorporate these practices into our lives, but we need to develop patience and compassion for ourselves.

We have reviewed risk factors for relapse into gambling and other behaviours, while learning to live a balanced lifestyle.

Participation in a group provides support and a network of people interested in recovery from gambling problems and learning mindfulness practice. When we have support in our lives, we can more easily become aware of triggers for relapse early on, through our social support networks. Another benefit of working with others is that it can help with maintaining our practice.

Mindfulness practices provide us with awareness and acceptance of what is occurring in the present moment and the understanding that there are some things in our lives that we can control and other things that we cannot. Regular mindfulness practice enables us greater freedom because we can learn to be more aware and less reactive in our lives. While difficulties and challenges will arrive with these practices, practicing in itself is a sign of growth. We can learn to be gentle with ourselves and to cultivate an acceptance of who we are at each moment in time.

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# Paradox of noise

It is a paradox that we encounter so much internal noise  
when we first try to sit in silence.

It is a paradox that experiencing pain releases pain.

It is a paradox that keeping still can lead us  
so fully into life and being.

Our minds do not like paradoxes. We want things  
To be clear, so we can maintain our illusions of safety.  
Certainty breeds tremendous smugness.

We each possess a deeper level of being, however,  
which loves paradox. It knows that summer is already  
Growing like a seed in the depth of winter. It knows  
that the moment we are born, we begin to die. It knows  
that all of life shimmers, in shades of becoming—  
that shadow and light are always together,  
the visible mingled with the invisible.

When we sit in stillness we are profoundly active.  
Keeping silent, we hear the roar of existence.  
Through our willingness to be the one we are,  
We become one with everything.

**Gunilla Norris**

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Permission granted by Gunilla Norris.



Happiness is not the absence of suffering, but the ability to live your life amidst whatever suffering might be present, because suffering is a part of life.



## Chapter 12

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# Concluding remarks

The integration of mindfulness into clinical practice has been ever increasing. It only makes sense that being more present in our lives can help us better to deal with life issues that come our way.

*To have doubt about mindfulness, of the value and importance of just being mindful, borders on having doubt about the value of being present for life in general, because mindfulness and being present for life is the same thing. – Gil Fronsdal*

When mindfulness groups were first piloted at the Problem Gambling Service of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, we did not know what to expect. The group was immediately well accepted and the clients asked for more. This encouraged us to continue to provide these groups to the gambling clients in the service. The clients were learning that there was another way of being, rather than automatic pilot and avoidance. They learned to be present in their lives to face pain and suffering, because the energy and mindset it took to avoid pain and suffering also blocked out whatever joy and happiness might be emerging. Happiness is not the absence of suffering, but the ability to live your life amidst whatever suffering might be present, because suffering is a part of life. It is unavoidable. Happiness is having the spaciousness to hold everything, the good and the bad. Clients also learned to be more compassionate and understanding to themselves and of others.

It continues to be a joy running these groups for clients of the service and to observe their transformation with the mindfulness program.

We have provided a resource list for additional information about mindfulness. **Appendix 1** contains an evaluation survey that may be useful so that you can obtain feedback from your clients and make modifications for future groups. **Appendix 2** provides a discussion of the scientific research on problem gambling and mindfulness, including a list of references.



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# References

## Websites

An archive of mindfulness teachings by Gil Fronsdal, Andrea Fella, and various guest speakers at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, CA.

[www.audiodharma.org](http://www.audiodharma.org)

Downloadable meditation teachings and instruction from Dharma Seed.

[www.dharmaseed.org](http://www.dharmaseed.org)

Links and articles relevant to meditation and recovery.

[www.buddhistrecovery.org](http://www.buddhistrecovery.org)

Downloadable meditations by Ronald D. Siegel, PsyD.

[www.mindfulness-solution.com/DownloadMeditations.html](http://www.mindfulness-solution.com/DownloadMeditations.html)

## Books

The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions, by Christopher K. Germer. New York: Guilford Press, 2009.

The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness, by J. Mark G. Williams, John D. Teasdale, Zindel V. Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn. New York: Guilford Press, 2007.

The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation, by Thich Nhat Hanh. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.

Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living, by Pema Chödrön. Boston: Shambhala, 1994.

When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times, by Pema Chödrön. Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life, by Jon Kabat-Zinn. New York: Hyperion, 1994.

The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment, by Eckhart Tolle. Canada: Namaste Publishing, 1999.

Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. New York: Bantam Dell, 1990.

Coming to Our senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. New York: Hyperion, 2006.

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Additional resources are listed in the reference section of Appendix 2.



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# Appendix 1

## **Evaluation material**

Group participants can provide feedback about the group program by completing this questionnaire.

## **Feedback on the mindfulness group**

Please take a moment to provide us with feedback about the course. Your feedback is very important in helping us understand what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong.

- 1 What aspects of this course did you find most valuable? In particular, what did you learn that you find particularly useful in your day-to-day life?

- 
- 2 What barriers or hindrances did you experience to your meditation during the past few weeks?

- 
- 3 What could be done to improve the course?



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## Appendix 2

The following is a short discussion of the research on mindfulness. It provides some background into the nature of mindfulness and problem gambling, and discusses the research on the use of mindfulness and problem gambling.

### Origin and purpose

The concept of mindfulness, as it is known today, originated from Buddhist contemplative practices that date back over 2500 years. The practice was born from a religious quest to achieve enlightenment. In recent years, mindfulness has been increasingly integrated into a variety of physical and mental health care programs. For example it has been used to help clients deal with chronic pain (Gardner-Nix, 2009; Morone et al., 2008), and cope with cancer (Mackenzie et al., 2007). In addition, it has been used to help clients with mental health problems, including depression (Segal, Williams, and Teasdale, 2013) and substance use problems (Bowen, Chawla and Marlatt, 2011). Several studies report positive effects of mindfulness meditation. For example, Morone et al. (2008) reported that meditation helped their clients relieve pain, improve attention, improve sleep and improve their sense of wellbeing. Similarly, Shonin et al. (2013a) reported that participants with issues of stress and low mood experience an improvement in psychological wellbeing because of receiving meditation awareness training.

Toneatto, Vettese, and Nguyen (2007) speculated on the role that mindfulness could play in problem gambling recovery. The purpose of the current manual is to further this body of knowledge by offering a manual for a mindfulness-based approach, based on the mindfulness groups that have been run for the past few years at the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario (PGIO) at the Centre of Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto.

### Overview of mindfulness-based approaches

One of the first researchers in the addiction field to recognize the potential for mindfulness was Alan Marlatt (1985a). Marlatt recognized that the greatest challenge of substance abuse was not quitting, but staying sober. Marlatt was a pioneer in the area of relapse prevention (RP). Marlatt realized that meditation could act as a coping strategy for individuals who were at risk for relapse. As such, practicing meditation could be used as a relapse prevention strategy, by providing benefits such as reducing stress and achieving balance in a person's life. According to Marlatt,

*[O]ne of the most significant effects of regular meditation practice is the development of mindfulness—the capacity to observe the ongoing process of experience without at the same time becoming ‘attached’ or identifying with the content of each thought, feeling, or image. Mindfulness is a particularly effective cognitive skill for the practice of RP. If clients can acquire this ability through the regular practice of meditation, they may be able to ‘detach’ themselves from the lure of urges, cravings, or cognitive rationalizations that may otherwise lead to a lapse. (p. 319)*

In the 1990s, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) pioneered the implementation of mindfulness in western medicine through the development of his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. His focus was to treat patients at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre who suffered from chronic pain and a variety of other medical issues, including living with HIV infection and heart disease. In his approach, the focus of mindfulness-based approaches, also called acceptance-based approaches, is on an individual's relationship to thoughts and emotions. The aim of the MBSR approach is for clients to become aware of and accept, without judgement, their present moment experience and to learn to see thoughts and emotions as passing mental events. It is important to understand that the goal of the contemplative practice is not to change experience or thoughts, but simply to

*pay attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally.*  
(Jon Kabat-Zinn 1990 as cited in Bowen et al., 2011, p.46)

Rather than trying to suppress the unwanted thoughts, the client is encouraged to cultivate an attitude of curiosity, openness, friendliness, non-judgemental awareness, and acceptance of the present moment experience. It is well known that trying not to think about something will often fail. Instead, mindfulness teachings encourages someone to allow those thoughts into awareness, and rather than getting upset about them, to bring a gentle non-judgemental awareness to them and let them be. These attitudes are emphasized through teaching and learning about such themes as non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting be (see Bowen et al., 2011).

Since the initial work of Kabat-Zinn and Marlatt, mindfulness-based approaches have been integrated into a variety of other therapies/programs including: Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT, see Linehan, 1993), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT, see Hayes, et al., 1999), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT, see Segal et al., 2002; 2013), Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP, see Bowen, et al., 2011). A core element of a number of these programs (e.g., MBSR, MBCT, MBRP) is that they all follow an eight week group protocol that uses similar mindfulness meditation practices, such as the body scan, mindful eating, sitting meditation (i.e., mindfulness of the breath, body, sounds, thoughts, and emotions), mindful walking, and yoga.

### **Clinical evaluations of mindfulness based relapse prevention**

In recent years mindfulness has been increasingly recognized as clinically effective. Baer (2003) conducted a review of the literature and found that mindfulness-based interventions were efficacious across a wide variety of patient populations and disorders including chronic pain, depression, anxiety, and stress reduction. A recent meta-analysis by Goyal et al. (2014) reviewed 18, 753 citations, and identified 47 trials with 3515 participants. When combined, they found that mindfulness meditation programs had moderate evidence of improved anxiety (effect size, 0.38 [95% CI, 0.12–0.64] at eight weeks and 0.22 [0.02–0.43] at eight months), depression (0.30 [0.00–0.59] at eight weeks and 0.23 [0.05–0.42] at eight months), and pain (0.33 [0.03–0.62]). These findings scientifically demonstrate that mindfulness can be a helpful therapeutic method. It is noteworthy that only 47 of the 18,753 citations were set up in a way that made meta-analysis possible. Goyal et al. (2014) noted a need for stronger and more consistent study

designs to determine the effects of meditation programs in improving the positive dimensions of mental health and stress-related behavior. Another study by Kuyken et al., (2015) reported that MBCT was as effective and as cost effective as anti-depressant in preventing relapse.

### **Relation of problem gambling to mindfulness-based approaches**

Cognitive factors, such as erroneous beliefs about random chance, play a role in a gambler's difficulty in controlling the impulse to engage in repeated, persistent gambling (see Petry, 2005; Toneatto, 1999). For example, many problem gambling behaviours (e.g., chasing, incremental betting) are linked to erroneous beliefs about the concept of randomness (see Kahneman and Tversky, 1982; Toneatto et al., 1997; Turner, 1998; Turner, et al., 2006). Chasing for example would work if the gamblers were correct that their chance of winning does in fact increase with repeated gambling (Turner, 1998). Yet even if people are taught about the concept of independence of random events, the act of gambling itself can overpower what they have learned (see Benhsain, et al., 2004; Sevigny and Ladouceur, 2003). Furthermore, people with gambling problems often report going into a trance-like state while gambling. Some even report being totally dissociated with their physical body, a passive observer while their body gambles away their money. These reports suggest that problem gambling often involves automatic thoughts that take place outside of awareness (see Jacobs, 1988; Gupta and Derevensky, 1998). These observations suggest that gamblers might benefit from greater awareness of their present moment experience, so they can avoid slipping into autopilot and being overwhelmed by their thoughts. Many attempts have been made to help gamblers by teaching them a greater understanding of probability (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2013), but a key problem is that when they gamble, they operate on autopilot. According to Toneatto et al. (2007):

*[D]istinguishing mental events from the responses to them provides a choice to the gambler regarding how best to respond, rather than react, to gambling related cognition. It is argued that improving gambler's mindfulness can help them overcome the erroneous beliefs and automatic behaviours associated with problem gambling. Learning to relate differently to gambling cognitions may be as important as, if not more important than, challenging the specific content of the thoughts. (Toneatto et al., 2007, 94)*

Thus, the mindful approach to erroneous cognitions brings awareness to those thoughts and, in particular, the automatic nature of those thoughts. By bringing awareness to their thoughts, they can recognize them as just thoughts and not act on them. As noted, gamblers often do know that these thoughts are inaccurate, but in the excitement of gambling, go into autopilot. We believe that mindfulness may be a means of breaking out of that cycle by helping the client avoid autopilot.

If people learn how to cultivate non-judgemental awareness of their thoughts and emotions by practicing mindfulness, the urges and cravings that often drive a person to gamble, or relapse to gambling, may be overcome. Learning to be mindful can prevent the kind of autopilot that gamblers often report. One technique described by Bowen et al. (2011) uses an "urge surfing" analogy to help clients cope with the intensity of their cravings. Riding the wave of craving (e.g., the urge to gamble) is like riding on a surfboard without being submerged by the intensity of the wave. The gambler accepts the idea that the urge will happen, but through this meditation

exercise, clients become aware of their urges and are thus not ruled by them. The key learning here is recognizing the impermanence of all experience and understanding that urges are passing mental events that do not have to be acted upon or fought. One simply accepts the urge as thoughts, feelings, body sensations—nothing more—and lets them slide in and out of awareness.

### **Cognitive research on mindfulness**

Previous research on mindfulness suggests that brief mindfulness meditation can help improve attention, problem solving, and working memory in students (Leverty, 2012). In addition to its clinical utility, mindfulness has been shown to improve cognitive functioning, including orientation and alerting attention (Jha et al., 2007). A study by Zeidan et al. (2010) found that just four sessions of mindfulness for 20 minutes a day improved executive functioning, working memory, and visuospatial processing. In addition, research on mindfulness meditation demonstrates a positive relationship between the benefits one receives and the amount of daily practice one engages in (Carmody and Baer, 2008). However, Leverty (2012) examined the effects of brief mindfulness on cognitive test performance, but did not find any evidence of an effect. Moore et al. (2012) studied how regular, brief mindfulness meditation practice improved electrophysiological markers of attentional control. They used a longitudinal randomized control group using an EEG to study the brain. The results suggest that mindfulness meditation may alter the efficiency of allocating cognitive resources, leading to improved self-regulation of attention. Lykins (2009) examined the effects of mindfulness and meditation experience on cognitive and emotional functioning. Ninety-eight individuals (33 meditators, 33 age-matched non-meditating controls, and 32 students) completed self-report and behavioral measures of attention, learning, memory, cognitive and emotional biases, and self-regulation. Results demonstrated that meditation practice related to few of the measured constructs, but there were significant group differences detected between the meditators and non-meditators in short-term memory, long-term memory, and self-regulation. Self-reported mindfulness in the non-meditators was related to self-reported psychological wellbeing. Taking all these studies into account, there appears to be some evidence that mindfulness alters attention, however more research is needed in order to draw strong conclusions. These studies suggest that mindfulness has a real effect on cognition, but more research is needed to explore the potential benefits.

### **Research on mindfulness and gambling problems**

In recent years there has been a growing literature on the relationship between mindfulness and problem gambling (see de Lisle, et al., 2012; Shonin et al., 2013b). According to de Lisle et al. (2012), there is an inverse relationship between dispositional mindfulness and psychological distress. This may be mediated by a number of factors, including emotional, cognitive and behavioural flexibility. That is, people who are more mindful may feel less psychological distress.

A study by Lakey et al. (2007) reported a significant negative correlation between gambling problems and mindfulness amongst undergraduate students. In a second study, Lakey et al. (2007) reported that mindfulness was related to better performance on two risk-related judgement and decision-making tasks. Thus, improving a client's mindfulness may improve decision-making.



Lahey et al. (2007) speculated that “greater attention to and awareness of ongoing internal and external stimuli that characterizes mindfulness may represent an effective means of mitigating the impulsive and addictive responses and intemperate risk-attitudes of individuals with PG” (p. 1708). A few studies have examined how mindfulness works to mitigate problem gambling. In a study by de Lisle et al. (2011, as reported in de Lisle et al., 2012) the authors, found that problem gamblers had lower levels of dispositional mindfulness than the normative samples of adult community members and university students, and “that dispositional mindfulness was negatively related to gambling urges, gambling pre-occupation, problem gambling severity, gambling expenditure, and gambling frequency” (de Lisle et al., 2012, p. 721).

A study by Riley (2012) reported that while thought suppression was positively related to problem gambling, mindfulness was negatively related to problem gambling. A big question is how mindfulness works. In an attempt to answer this, de Lisle et al. (2012) reviewed the evidence for a number of different mechanisms that may be involved in mindfulness, including: dealing with issues such as a myopic focus on reward, psychological distress, rumination, thought suppression, and improving emotional, cognitive, and behavioural flexibility. They also discuss a number of theoretical models of how mindfulness may be related to problem gambling. They conclude that the relationship between “mindfulness and problem gambling behaviour is likely to be very complex” (de Lisle et al., 2012, p. 731) because mindfulness is itself a complex construct.

Only a small number of studies have been published that evaluate the clinical application of mindfulness for problem gambling. Two case studies have been published that describe the use of mindfulness (see de Lisle et al., 2012), and in both cases, mindfulness was successful in helping the client towards recovery. In addition, we know of two research studies that have examined the efficacy of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), which includes mindfulness as a component of the treatment. The first study was by Korman et al. (2008) and used a DBT model to provide an integrated treatment for problem gambling, anger, and substance abuse. They found that the integrated treatment model reduced substance use, but no measure of specific mindfulness skills were reported. Their results were promising, but it is not clear if the effectiveness of the program was due to mindfulness, or more generally to the integrated nature of the treatment that included problem gambling, anger management and substance abuse treatment. Recently, Christensen et al. (2013) reported an evaluation of the use of a modified DBT approach with treatment-resistant problem gamblers. They found that mindfulness improved significantly from pre-test to post-test. In their study 14 “treatment resistant” problem gamblers received eight weeks of DBT, and at the end of therapy measured changes in mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion dysregulation, and negative relationships. Although there were no statistically significant improvements in measures of gambling behaviour, 83% of participants were abstinent or reduced their gambling expenditure pre- to post-treatment. Participants also reported statistically and clinically significant improvements in psychological distress, mindfulness, and distress tolerance. Moreover, there were no increases in alcohol or substance use, indicating that the clients were not substituting a second addiction.

## **Development of this manual**

Chen et al. (2014) reported an evaluation of a mindfulness group that was run as part of the standard treatment offered at PGIO in Toronto. This manual is based on our experience working with groups teaching mindfulness since 2010. A mindfulness group was first run in 2010 and incorporated into the standard treatment for clients at PGIO in 2011. The data described in this manual were used to evaluate part of the regular treatment program and not collected as a research project. The study reported by Chen et al. (2014) was not a controlled study; it assessed the extent to which the participants reported improving their levels of mindfulness over the course of the therapy. Chen et al. (2014) reported the results of a study that evaluated an eight week mindfulness group program that included 17 clients from PGIO at the CAMH (88% male) using questionnaires that were distributed at the first group session and at the final group session. The evaluation was a mixed method design that included both qualitative and quantitative feedback about the group. All of the participants showed an improvement in their levels of mindfulness after the eight week treatment program. The mindfulness of the clients was measured using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). This scale has 15 items designed to assess core characteristics of dispositional mindfulness, namely, open or receptive awareness and attention to what is taking place in the present. The scale has strong psychometric properties and has been validated with college, community, and cancer patient samples. Correlational, quasi-experimental, and laboratory studies have shown that the MAAS measures a unique quality of consciousness that is related to, and predictive of, a variety of self-regulation and wellbeing constructs (see Brown & Ryan, 2003). After the eight week program, the MAAS scores increased from a pre-test score of 3.65 (SD = 1.01) to a post-test score of 4.40 (SD = 0.78). Qualitative feedback about the group also highlighted a number of improvements in the clients' lives that included being more in control, relaxed and able to stay in the now. The results indicated that mindfulness was successfully taught during the eight week group program.

## **Summary**

In summary, there exists a body of research in a number of health care domains—including pain management, dealing with cancer, stress reduction, and depression—that indicates mindfulness is useful. We believe that mindfulness can also be applied to problem gambling clients. The application of mindfulness to problem gambling is particularly relevant because of the large role that erroneous beliefs play in problem gambling (e.g., Toneatto, et al., 1997; Turner, et al., 2006). In addition, the tendency of people who have problems with gambling to engage in automatic thoughts while gambling (e.g., Benhsain et al., 2004; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998; Jacobs, 1988) make improving the client's awareness and avoiding going into autopilot particularly relevant. We believe that becoming aware of these automatic thoughts should improve a gambler's ability to resist his or her urge to gamble. The results of Chen et al.'s (2014) study indicated that our treatment program was successful at teaching people with gambling problems how to engage in mindful awareness practice. The scores from both the MAAS scale and the responses from the qualitative feedback questions show that the mindfulness program was successfully implemented in a group setting. Further study is needed to determine how effective this program is in terms of improving the outcome for treatment and reducing relapse compared to other programs. In addition, Shonin et al. (2013b) have also noted that other aspects of Buddhist-derived interventions may also be of benefit to individuals with addictions. These techniques may open up other potential avenues for research and treatment for the problem gambler.

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