

# **Mindfulness and Acceptance Group Therapy for Problem Gambling (MAGT-PG)**

Therapist Handbook & Participant Workbook

**Mindfulness and Acceptance Group Therapy  
for Problem Gambling  
(MAGT-PG)**

**Therapist Handbook**

2016 – Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Toronto, Canada

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## Copyright & Acknowledgments

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# **Session 1 – Introduction**

## **A. Opening**

### **1. Opening remarks**

Welcome everyone to the meeting. Check that everyone is here for the mindfulness training program that is part of the research study on problem gambling. Take attendance. Additional opening remarks are tailored to the group and therapist.

### **2. Introductions**

Going around the circle and beginning with the therapist, group members take turns introducing themselves. For instance, each person can state their name, something they do in daily life (e.g., work, school, taking care of kids, etc.), and something interesting about themselves. Alternatively, the therapist might introduce an “icebreaker” exercise that is appropriate for this population (i.e., sensitive to possible triggers, no pressure to self-disclose) and considerate of any (dis)abilities in the group.

### **3. Housekeeping**

Meeting location and time: *Ask participants to record this information in their Workbooks*

#### Structure of the meetings

1. Research part: Questionnaires and interview
2. Checking in
3. Mindfulness exercise
4. Homework review
5. Presentation and discussion of the week’s theme
6. Mindfulness exercise
7. Assigning homework
8. Checking out

#### Information about assessments

- 30 minutes before session starts
- weekly: two questionnaires about mood and gambling cravings
- biweekly: interview about gambling activity
- who will administer the assessments
- importance of the assessments

#### Policy on missed sessions

- group member absence: 24 hour notice (more than two absences = drop-out)
- therapist absence: will reschedule group session

#### Expectations for group behaviour

- confidentiality and privacy
- attendance and punctuality

- engagement with group and homework assignments
- any other expectations

## B. Session theme: Autopilot vs. Mindfulness

We are not truly aware of most of the things we do. Things like brushing our teeth in the morning, drinking coffee while at work, or walking up a flight of stairs, happen pretty much on their own, without having to pay much attention to how we're doing them. For example, when riding a bicycle, we're not constantly thinking about moving the left pedal with our left foot, and the right pedal with our right foot. It's like we have an automatic pilot. This autopilot has important advantages: it allows us to do several things at once. But there are also disadvantages. We might cycle right past our destination if we are too busy thinking about something else.

Just as your body does things for you automatically, so does your mind. For instance, people develop habitual ways of thinking about unpleasant experiences and emotions. They also learn to rely on certain strategies for responding and coping with them. Some of those ways are healthier than others. For example, some people cope with stress by exercising, listening to music, or playing video games; some people seek out the company, advice, or affection of people close to them; other people might drink a glass of wine, or two, or three, or smoke a joint. Everyone has their own preferred or habitual activities that make them feel more happy, excited, less lonely, or less stressed out.

Gambling is also one of those activities. Research on problem gambling indicates that, for most people, gambling, like any of those other activities or substances, becomes an addiction because we come to depend on it as a way to meet some kind of personal need. So gambling actually serves a psychological function in our lives, and—for a short while—it might actually make us feel better. However, it can get us into a lot of trouble in the long run. Especially when we gamble on autopilot until all our money is gone. That's why an important part of helping people who have problems with gambling is about finding healthier ways to manage stress and deal with unpleasant emotions and experiences.

One way of doing that, which has helped a lot of people with all sorts of different problems, is mindfulness. Mindfulness originated from Eastern philosophies, primarily Chinese Buddhism, and is used in mental health and addiction treatment as a way to help people unlearn some of the unhelpful automatic reactions that they've learned in life. But mindfulness doesn't actually try to make painful emotions, thoughts, and experiences go away; in fact, Buddhism assumes that pain and suffering are an inevitable part of life. That's why mindfulness is designed to teach us to recognize, observe, and accept stressful or painful experiences as they happen in the moment, so that we don't go into automatic pilot and engage in all sorts of potentially unhealthy behaviours as a way to avoid or escape from those negative experiences.

That's why paying attention to what's happening inside and outside us in the here-and-now is the most important part of being mindful. It involves paying attention on purpose, with deliberate intent, so that we have a clear reason for being mindful. Another important part of mindfulness is learning to observe our thoughts, emotions, memories, and other experiences without judging them as bad; without seeing them as things that need to be avoided, ignored, or gotten rid of. Finally, mindfulness also involves living life from moment to moment with a deep awareness of our personal values—but without getting attached to whether or not we fail or succeed in our goals. This means treating ourselves with compassion, especially in those unavoidable situations when things don't go according to plan. The definition of mindfulness is nicely summed up by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who pioneered the use of mindfulness in healthcare. According to Kabat-Zinn, "mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."



*Illustration: Being mindful is like turning off the automatic pilot.*

## C. Exercise: Raisin exercise

### **Instructions**

Before we get into the details of how mindfulness can help us with our problem gambling, let's get started with a simple exercise to introduce some of the essential skills. We are going to practice something called the Raisin Exercise, which is an example of mindful eating.

*Therapist provides each participant with a raisin.*

### **Guided meditation**

Start by placing your raisin the palm of one hand. Now, focus on seeing the raisin as if you've never seen one before, using your "beginner's mind"—noticing the shape, size, and color of the raisin—turning it around in your fingers, noticing the folds and where the surface reflects light, bringing an attitude of curiosity to seeing all aspects of the raisin. Whenever you notice thoughts about the raisin, such as *It's so wrinkly* or *I wish I had a bigger one*, or you notice yourself thinking about anything other than the raisin, gently redirect your attention to seeing the raisin, allowing your experience to be, exactly as it is, in this moment without judging it in any way. That is, perceive the raisin fully without worrying whether it is good or bad.

Next, focus on feeling the texture of the raisin between your fingers, noticing any softness,

hardness, coarseness, smoothness, stickiness, or any other aspect of texture, simply being with your experience of feeling this raisin.

Now, holding the raisin below your nose, pay attention to smelling it, noticing the qualities of its aroma. Is it sweet, sour, musty? Is the aroma intense or faint, or is there no scent at all? If you notice your mind judging the smell, such as with thoughts like *The sweetness is lovely* or *This is too sour*, simply note the mind judging and return your focus to the pure sensation of smell.

Now, taking the raisin to one ear and rolling it between your fingers, notice any sound the raisin makes. Notice any thoughts about doing this: *This is crazy, raisins don't make sounds. Wow, I can hear the raisin*. Redirect your attention to simply hearing the raisin.

Now place the raisin in your mouth but do not bite it. Instead, as before, just observe it, perhaps you may notice your mouth watering as you do so. Focus on the feeling of the raisin in your mouth, exploring it with your tongue, noticing its shape, texture, and any initial taste. Bring your beginner's mind to the feel of the raisin in your mouth.

Now, mindfully and with full attention bite into the raisin. As you do notice any flavours that are released, letting go of judgments, simply being with the taste of this raisin. As you slowly chew the raisin, pay attention to its changing consistency and the flow of saliva in your mouth.

When you first notice the urge to swallow the raisin, stay with the urge for a few moments, noticing the location and intensity of the urge, allowing it to be there as it is.

Now intentionally swallow the raisin, noticing any sensations as it passes down your throat and into your stomach.

You can repeat the exercise with another raisin or try contrasting the experience of mindful eating with how you would normally eat one or more raisins.

### **Inquiry part 1: Paying Attention on Purpose**

What was your experience like?

What did you notice about the raisin?

What did you notice about yourself?

How was this different from your usual way of eating?

Mindful attention is deliberate. At the beginning of the exercise, you were invited to set your intention: to mindfully eat a raisin. What was your experience of that intention? Did you lose sight of it at any time during the exercise? When we mindfully eat raisins in the first sessions of our group, some people find it embarrassing to slowly eat a raisin in front of other people. Other group members report that intentions to be mindful simply evaporate into "mindless" awareness, with their attention flitting about from here to there (for example, from reviewing the day to planning for tomorrow to noticing sounds and bodily sensations and so on).

The tendency to lose sight of the intention to be mindful is very common and completely normal. However, with practice, your ability to stay intentionally focused will get stronger and stronger. In the remaining chapters, you will have opportunities to practice bringing intentional focus to bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts, and, lastly, your gambling cravings. In those situations, you will practice staying focused on purpose, on what really matters. No matter how often your attention is drawn to cravings or opportunities to gamble, you will always have the choice to redirect your focus to your valued goals.

### **Inquiry part 2: Paying Attention in the Present Moment**

Mindful attention is firmly rooted in the present: in the unfolding of your direct experience from moment to moment. (Your direct experience is that which is registered by your five senses: sight,

hearing, touch, smell, and taste. *Thinking* about something, like a raisin, is *not* the same as directly experiencing it – there is no next step; mindful attention begins and ends with the experience).

For how much of the exercise were you able to “stay present” with your raisin? How often did your mind wander to thoughts about the raisin (*It’s sweet, This is weird, Hope I don’t choke*), or to thoughts about other things (*What should I have for dinner tonight*), and to awareness of unintended targets (for example, bodily sensations or sounds in the room)? What was your experience of the raisin when you *were* able to stay present with it? Our clients often comment that the exercise gives them the opportunity to really “know” raisins: how they look, feel, smell, sound, and taste. In the same vein, staying present to your direct experience of negative urges and cravings can give you opportunities to really “know” them, and base your opinions (and actions) on that knowledge—not on what your mind tells you about the situation. So much of our time is spent ‘doing’ things that our mind is constantly in transit—running off to the next task, rather than remaining still and present in the moment.

As we proceed with additional mindfulness exercises, you will have many opportunities to practice remaining fully present to your experience. Fortunately, this will be very much facilitated by the third and final part of the mindfulness definition, paying attention nonjudgmentally.

### **Inquiry part 3: Paying Attention Nonjudgmentally, with Acceptance**

What sort of judgments did people notice during this exercise? For example, you might have been thinking something like *‘Why are we eating raisins. This is stupid.’* Or maybe *‘This is a waste of time. How is this going to help me with my gambling.’* How did you do with remaining open to your experience of eating a raisin? Was it difficult to let go of judgment and resistance, and simply let your experience be, in the moment? If you were able to do that (for even a few seconds), what was that like? Was it perhaps liberating to gain some distance and freedom from your judging mind?

With mindful attention, we bring a nonjudging, open attitude to our experience. We also refer to this way of relating to feelings and thoughts as *acceptance*, defined as opening to and allowing your experience to be exactly as it is, without trying to avoid it, escape it, or change it.

When we pay attention nonjudgmentally, we don’t *stop* judging, we *step back* from it. As described by Jon Kabat-Zinn:

“Mindfulness is cultivated by assuming the stance of an impartial witness to your own experience. To do this requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are all normally caught up in, and learn to step back from it... When you find the mind judging you don’t have to stop from doing that. All that is required is to be aware of it happening. No need to judge the judging and make matters even more complicated for yourself.” Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*, p. 34.

### **Inquiry part 4: Relevance to Problem Gambling**

Now that you’ve had a taste of what mindfulness is about, how do you think these skills might be useful in helping you with your gambling?

Can you think of situations where your automatic pilot might get you into trouble with gambling?

In what kind of situations could you use mindfulness to help you say, as an alternative to gambling? Are there sensations, activities, things to experience that now seem boring or mundane that might be perceived differently when perceived mindfully and nonjudgmentally?



Over the coming ten weeks, we're going to focus on some of the most important issues people face that contribute to mindless behavior, including gambling. Activities like gambling tend to be overly stimulating, distracting or immersive so that they forcefully take us away from our present experience. But as you've just seen with the raisin, even things we usually take for granted can acquire richness and depth through mindful attention. The sessions you attend over the next 9 weeks will explore other areas of our lives where mindfulness may have a similar effect. This may involve, for example, exploring the relationships between our thoughts, emotions, gambling cravings, and behaviour. We will identify the situations and experiences that trigger our cravings, and learn how mindfulness can help us recognize and respond intentionally and skillfully to those triggers and cravings rather than switching to autopilot. We will also look at the different kinds of thought processes and beliefs that play a role in problem gambling, and learn how to use mindfulness skills to reduce their influence on our behaviour. We will also take time to carefully consider how our judgments can undermine us. This may include the judgments we make about ourselves. Through mindfulness we will explore how an alternative attitude where we are kind and compassionate to ourselves, as well as other people, can help us transform the negative self-talk and self-image many of us carry around. Finally, we will spend some time identifying and clarifying our personal values, not just with respect to our gambling, but to life in general. As we develop our capacity for mindfulness, we will strengthen our ability to respond to life situations in ways that are aligned with our personal values, and become less controlled by the automatic pilot or beliefs of how we think we ought to behave. In our final session, we will talk about our long-term goals and consider ways to help us to continue living mindfully in the future. By the end of this training, you will have learned a lot about using mindfulness to skillfully respond to challenging situations in life. You will hear me use that word—"skillful"—pretty often over the next ten weeks. In the context of this training, it means using mindfulness skills to respond to situations, feelings, and urges with deliberate awareness, nonjudgment, compassion, in line with your personal values.

## D. Group exercise: Mindfulness training expectations and goals

At this point we've had an introductory experience of mindfulness, heard about a few of the different topics and lessons that will be covered in this program, and gotten a very general idea of how mindfulness can help with automatic behaviors like problem gambling. Now I'd like to invite you to start thinking about some goals and expectations you might have with respect to this training program. In doing this, it might be helpful to consider some of the things we've reviewed so far, such as the relationship between unpleasant experiences and cravings; the role of thoughts in problem gambling; and the difference between automatic pilot and mindful behaviour. What kind of things do you hope to learn, practice, or achieve in this program?

I'd like us to get together into groups of three or four people. Talk with each other about what you'd like to get out of your experience in this training. Then write down your ideas so we can all discuss them together in the group.

*Participants may bring up goals related to gambling, e.g., reduction or abstinence; finances; interpersonal relationships; stress and emotions. Clarify and emphasize the relationship between mindfulness and outcomes, so that participants understand the main goal of this training: Developing mindfulness skills and applying them to gambling-related thoughts, feelings, cravings, and behaviour.*

*Explain that desired outcomes, such as reduced gambling or improved relationships, may not occur by the end of the training. Clarify that mindfulness training alone may not be enough to effectively disrupt their problem gambling behaviour—but it is certainly expected to help. Explain and*

*emphasize the difference between goals and values, such that attachment to goals sets people up for success or failure, while choosing values allows people to have a direction they can follow, with less risk of getting attached to a desired outcome. Finally, the following section emphasizes the importance of practice.*

## E. Importance of homework/practice

This program incorporates a few different kinds of homework that we'll assign at the end of every meeting. One kind of homework involves weekly readings related to the topics we covered during the day's session. Another kind of homework involves self-reflection; reflecting on your gambling behaviour and other aspects of your life, and filling in related forms or questionnaires that may help you understand your patterns of thinking and behaviour. There are two forms which we will ask you to fill out every day, because they will provide important data for the researchers who are evaluating the effects of this training program. Finally—and this is the most important kind of homework—you will be assigned different kinds of mindfulness exercises and activities that should be practiced at home every day.

It's important to do the home practice to get the most out of the group, because mindfulness, like any skill, takes a lot of practice. The more you practice, the better at it you become. Some people compare mindfulness to a muscle; it will only become stronger with regular exercise. Another reason for daily practice is to help bridge the gap between the group and the rest of your life; mindfulness can only make a difference in your life if you allow it to, by bringing the skills to everyday situations outside of the group. Finally, practicing mindfulness will help you develop a habit of living mindfully, so that you'll be more likely to continue practicing mindfulness after the group has ended.

## F: Session 1 Homework

### **Mindfulness practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

1. **Mindful Eating.** Just as you did in the Raisin Exercise, mindfully eat one meal, part of a meal, or one snack per day; How many minutes did you spend eating mindfully this week? Keep a record of your mindfulness practice and observations using the *Mindfulness Log*.

2. **Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, doing the dishes, showering, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Keep a record of your mindfulness practice and observations using the *Mindfulness Log*.

### **Worksheets**

1. **Costs and benefits of gambling.** Please complete this form according to the instructions provided in class. Bring your completed form with you to our next meeting.

2. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II & III).** Please complete both of these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### **Readings**

1. **Session 1 reading 1**

2. **Session 1 reading 2: Raisin exercise and discussion**

## **Session 2 – Avoidance/acceptance**

### **A. Checking 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 judgment.

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

#### **Instructions**

We are going to start off with a brief meditation in order to bring ourselves fully into the present moment. This is a simple breathing exercise that we'll practice at the beginning of each session from now on. The breath is one of the most important tools we have in our mindfulness toolkit. It's always there, and it always follows the same predictable pattern: in, out, in, out. This means your breath can serve as a kind of anchor to keep you connected to the here and now. Whenever you notice yourself being distracted, you can simply return your awareness to your breathing to get back on track. Let's begin the exercise.

#### **Guided meditation (5-7 minutes)**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position....

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, returning to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to get away from thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, return to watching your thoughts coming and going.

And now continuing with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

### **Inquiry**

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to turn to your homework exercise from last session, about the benefits and costs of gambling. Now may be an especially good time to appreciate the difference in how you feel and your sense of awareness at this moment as compared with when you gamble. When you consider what gambling offers, you may wish to consider your thoughts and feelings now at this moment compared to your feelings when you gamble. With this as a context, what would you say are some of the benefits that gambling has to offer? What are some of the drawbacks or costs?

## **C. Homework review**

### **Benefits and costs of gambling**

*Members share responses. The therapist takes notes on a whiteboard or flip chart. Therapist sums up what the costs and benefits of gambling are for this group. Tell group members to hang on to their homework sheets, because we will come back to their responses in a later session when we talk about identifying personal values.*

### **Mindfulness Inquiry: Mindful Eating and Everyday Mindfulness homework**

Now let's turn to the mindful exercises assigned for this week.

*Ask participants to bring out their weekly mindfulness logs.*

How did everyone experience the mindfulness exercises?

What kind of activities did you experiment with?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

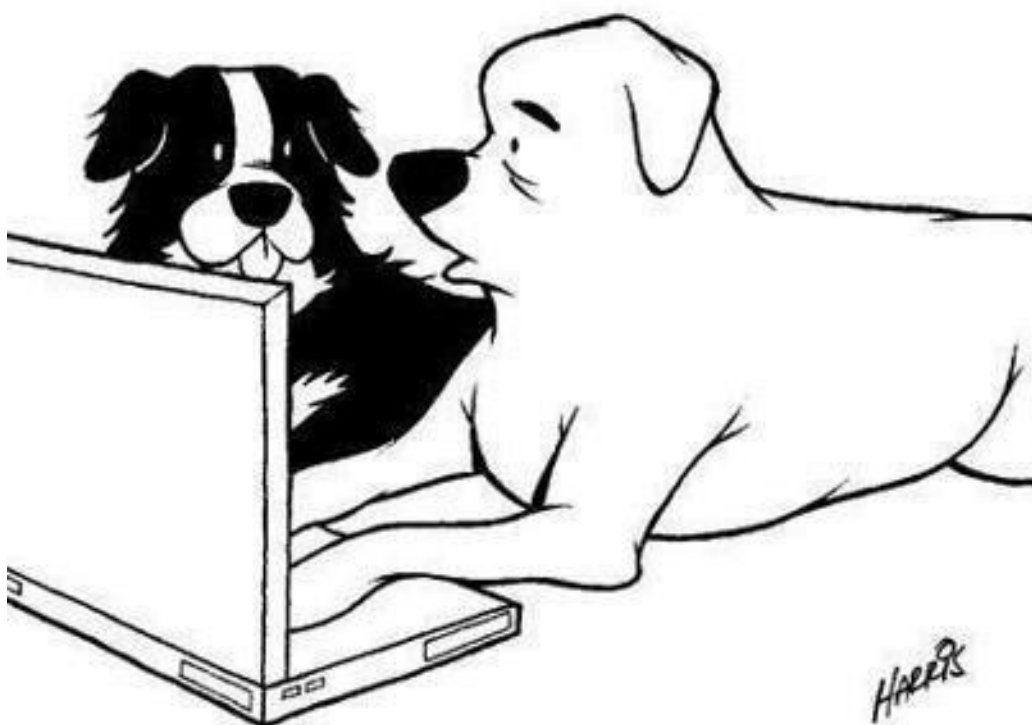
Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used the Everyday Mindfulness meditation? Tell me about that."*

## **D. Barriers to mindfulness practice**

Let's talk some more about things that can be challenging about mindfulness. And not just about being mindful, but even about finding time to practice in the first place. It's not always easy to make

space for a new activity in your life, and there are lots of other things that can get in the way of practice. Often people report that they could not find the time or were too busy during the day to practice. This is not unlike what someone may say about going to the gym, that they were too busy or must wait till they feel “motivated.” However, when people take the time to reflect, with non-judgmental 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. Furthermore, 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 anticipated.



*“And then I just hit delete. I haven’t actually eaten any homework for years.”*

*Illustration: We can be very creative in coming up with reasons for not practicing mindfulness.*

I want to emphasize that this is a judgment-free zone. Although practicing is essential for developing mindfulness skills, no one here is going to interrogate you or punish you for not practicing or doing the homework. Besides, sometimes people really are just too busy to make time for practice. That being said, if you are too busy, you can still try to 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 with us. We just need to learn to be more fully present

on a moment by moment basis, and one of the most common ways to do this is by becoming aware of the breath in any given moment.

What are some of the other challenges people faced in practicing mindfulness, either at home or in the breathing exercise we just did?

Other challenges people often report relate to experiences that seem to interfere with their mindfulness practice. For instance, that their mind was racing and they couldn't concentrate. Or that they were unable to relax enough to meditate, or that they kept getting distracted. It's important to remember that mindfulness isn't a method for resting or ridding yourself of thoughts. We're not trying to change anything about our experience; just to observe it with a particular frame of mind. If we're getting distracted, then that's perfectly normal and expected. We can use that distraction to practice coming back to our present awareness, for instance, by focusing on the breath.

Other challenges people report include feeling bored or unmotivated, or feeling like the conditions just weren't right to practice. What is boredom? Is it about having nothing to do, wanting to do something else, or is it about not being content with the way things currently are? Feeling bored can be a great opportunity for mindfulness; try looking at that boredom, and noticing with curiosity what that boredom feels like, what it looks like; what it's doing in your body. You can do the same with feeling unmotivated. How does your lack of motivation present itself to you? What kinds of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations are associated with that lack of motivation?

Sometimes people cut their meditation exercise short because they feel like they're doing it wrong. That may be a valid concern, and there will be time for questions if people want help understanding the practice and checking whether they're doing it right. On the other hand, we may just be overly worried or unnecessarily doubting ourselves. Again, remember that we are simply trying to observe what's happening inside us, without judging it or pushing it away. Distractions are completely normal and shouldn't be seen as a sign that you're doing it wrong. In fact, noticing that you're distracted means you're doing it right! It means you're paying attention. If those doubting or worrying thoughts come up, then try observing them with an open, curious, and nonjudgmental attitude.

Another possible challenge is that you started to think about gambling, felt a craving, or even went gambling. If you did notice gambling thoughts, then it's great that you noticed—even if you did end up gambling. And if you gambled without really paying attention to your thoughts, then that's a good example of your automatic pilot at work. In this session we're going to take a closer look at what happens when we experience the urge to gamble.

## E. Session theme: Avoidance versus acceptance

Humans have a natural tendency to want to avoid unpleasant or problematic things in life. When we're sad, we often try to cheer ourselves up or distract ourselves. When we're lonely, we seek out the company of others. When someone hurts us, we often walk away from them. And when we do things that aren't really good for us, we try to stop. You are all here because you believe gambling is a serious problem in your life, and it's proven difficult to control your gambling on your own. How many people here have tried using willpower to stop gambling? And how often has that really worked for you? Maybe some of you have even noticed that things get worse when you try to use

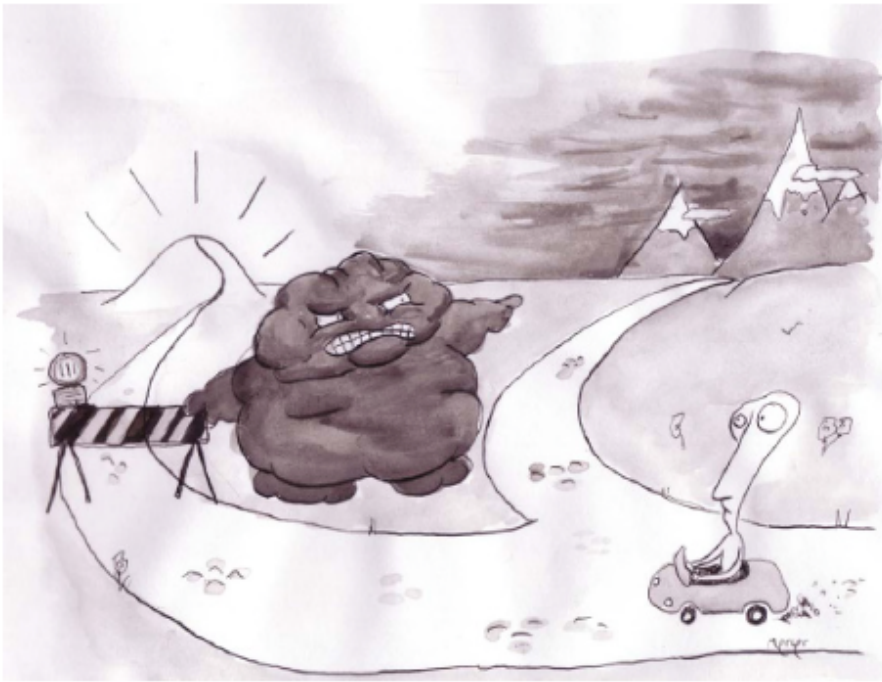
willpower to stop. The psychologist Carl Jung used to tell his students and patients, 'what you resist, persists.' Addiction is a great example of that.

Mindfulness takes a completely different approach. It's not about using willpower or other strategies for change that rely on active resistance. In fact, rather than doing something about our troubling experiences, the focus is on simply letting them be. So mindfulness is all about acceptance. It means accepting your experiences in the here and now, without trying to change them.

Now this might seem counterintuitive at first, so let me start by clarifying what acceptance is not. It does not mean simply surrendering to your gambling problems and letting them run your life. It also doesn't mean feeling good about your problems, or even just tolerating them. Rather, acceptance, as understood in mindfulness practice, is about "opening up to and allowing your experience to be exactly as it is, without trying to avoid it, escape it, or change it". The key to understanding this form of acceptance is that it happens in the here and now; it's about accepting what's happening inside and outside of you *in the present moment*. So why is this important? What does this achieve?

Let's say you just had a heated argument with someone; it could be your partner, or a housemate, a friend, or a coworker. Now your mind is racing with thoughts, you're feeling upset or angry, your heart rate is through the roof, and there is a tight feeling in your chest or stomach. This is an unpleasant feeling. Now your instinct is to want to do something with that feeling; to put it somewhere, to get rid of it, or just to ignore it. Maybe you feel like going back and giving that person a piece of your mind. Maybe you feel like running away, or doing something else that makes you feel less upset or stressed. And maybe thoughts of gambling start to appear in your mind. Once you start thinking about gambling, your anticipation begins to grow. You look forward to planning your bets, to the risk and excitement of the game, maybe hanging out with your gambling friends, and the big win that's just around the corner. Or maybe you look forward to just taking a break from everything; spending some time just focusing on gambling, not having to think about that argument or all the other sources of stress in your life. As these thoughts take hold they may create momentum or a sense of urgency to act – this in turn may impel you back to gambling.





*Illustration: Anxious thoughts send you down the path of avoidance (from Ciarrochi & Mercer, 2005)*

This sequence of events might feel very familiar to many of you. The reason for telling this story is that there were several moments in it where mindfulness and acceptance could have been used to deal with the situation in a healthier way. Let me simplify the sequence of events even more (*draw on board*):

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

In our first session we talked about how gambling can become a strategy for coping with stress and other difficulties in life, and that automatic pilot's job is to activate that strategy in times of need. Just to review, the idea here is that once we've become dependent on gambling, all that needs to happen is for something stressful or painful to come up, and the autopilot kicks in. And just to be clear, it doesn't have to be something that's happened recently that starts this chain of events. We also tend to want to avoid unpleasant experiences that we know or think are going to happen in the future. We even try to avoid unpleasant experiences that have happened long ago, when they come back to us as memories. The thing that's important to recognize is that, whenever or wherever these events are, our *experience* of them always happens in the present moment. Whether it's anger about an argument, worry about the future, or a painful memory, that experience is always occurring in the here and now, and it's that immediate experience that makes us uncomfortable and brings on the urge to gamble. We might not interpret it that way when it's happening; we might just feel like gambling, without necessarily linking that feeling to something negative we're experiencing. Because that's how the automatic pilot works; it thinks and acts for us, so we don't have to pay attention to what's bothering us.

Mindfulness allows us to interrupt that sequence of events, prevent those automatic reactions, and provide the time and space for us to respond in healthier ways. The key to observing those uncomfortable experiences and gambling urges without acting on them is acceptance. This means looking at a feeling, a thought, a sensation, or a craving with an attitude of curiosity and openness.

*Okay, so this is what I'm feeling right now. Ah, there is that thought again. Look at it go. Oh, there is a sinking feeling happening in my stomach. What does that feel like? Hey, here is that urge to gamble. This is what I'm experiencing right now. This is what it's like.* We can watch what's happening inside us with a sense of acceptance. We are allowing our experience to exist. Letting it be. Just noticing it, without wanting to change it, run away from it, or replace it with something else.

And that allows us to notice something else about the experience: Eventually, it goes away by itself. When we adopt the viewpoint of an observer we are no longer pushed and pulled around by our thoughts and feelings. They become the object of awareness rather than an engine or force that drives us in a certain direction.



*Illustration: You can choose the path toward your values and take your anxious thoughts along for the ride (from Ciarrochi & Mercer, 2005)*

*Therapist invites questions and/or discussion from group.*

### **Urge Surfing**

Before we delve into the feelings, memories, thoughts, and life situations that we try to avoid or cope with by gambling, I'd like us to first focus on how we can use mindfulness and acceptance when those urges or cravings arise. This involves doing something we call 'urge surfing.' One of the key concepts in mindfulness is that thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and other experiences are a lot like waves in the ocean. Waves are always coming and going. In and out. Some waves are big, some are small; some come in hard and fast, while others are harder to notice. Our experiences typically happen the same way. When it comes down to it, pretty much everything we experience simply appears in our awareness, and then eventually disappears. And just like waves, we can learn to "ride" our experience—surf the wave—until it peters out and recedes back to the depths. We do that by paying attention, observing our experiences, and accepting them as they happen. This is what urge surfing is all about. And just like surfing, this attitude is *a skill* that we can develop. The

more we practice, the more readily it comes to us and we can begin to feel confident that we won't be overwhelmed even if the mental or emotional waves are huge and frightening.

I know that this way of thinking about our experiences might be new to you. Are there any questions about this concept, that experiences are like waves? Or the notion of urge surfing?

## F. Mindfulness exercise: Mindful listening

### Instructions

Now we're going to do another mindfulness exercise that involves focusing on one of our five senses as a way to connect to our experience in the here and now. We are going to practice mindfully listening to the world around us with attention and acceptance. This means paying attention to any sounds or noises we can pick up in the environment, and also listening to the silence in between. Many people become uncomfortable during extended periods of silence. The lack of distractions from the external world makes room for things in our internal world to make their way into awareness. Some of these internal experiences may make us uncomfortable. If, during this exercise, you notice any thoughts, feelings, memories, or bodily sensations that make you uncomfortable, then you can try to simply observe them with an open, curious, and accepting attitude—without trying to change them. Just allow them to exist. When you're ready, you can gently guide your attention back to listening. If it helps, you can focus on your breath to help you anchor yourself in the present moment. While doing this, notice how all of these experiences are like waves, in that they're constantly appearing and disappearing, coming and going, in and out.

If during the course of this exercise you have a thought or feeling that is so disturbing as to be overwhelming, I want you to feel free to stop the exercise – take a break – get a drink of water or come and talk to me after the group if you wish. Remember you have just been introduced to mindfulness, so the skills may not yet be sufficiently developed to enable you to tolerate very strong thoughts or feelings. This is not a failure of you or the practice – it is you honouring yourself and acting mindfully to help yourself.

### Guided meditation

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control your breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

Now bring your awareness to your hearing. Begin to notice sounds as they arise, wherever they arise.

As best you can, become aware of sounds as pure sensations. Letting go of the urge to label what you are hearing. Simply noticing whatever is entering your ear in the here and now. See if you can strip the sounds you hear of their meaning, just focusing purely on what it sounds like. Patterns of pitch, tone, volume and duration.

When you notice you are thinking about sounds or the mind has drifted elsewhere, gently acknowledge where the mind has gone, and then reconnect, as best you can, to pure hearing.

And if you are uncomfortable with the silence, try to focusing your awareness back on your breathing. Just connecting to that experience of breathing in and out, feeling each inhale of your body, and also the sensation of your body resting on the chair with your feet firmly on the ground.

There's no need to go searching for sounds, or listening for particular sounds. Simply be open to sounds as they arise. Sounds that are close, sounds that are far away, inside the room, outside the room, outside the building. You may also notice sounds coming from your body, or the bodies of other people in the room. Try to just notice these sounds, without labelling them or judging them.

And again, if you notice your mind wandering, recognizing without judgment that you've gotten distracted, and then gently turning your attention back to listening. Or if you don't feel with this exercise, feeling free to just open your eyes, to take a break, or get some water if you like.

Continuing to be mindful of listening, see if you can also notice the spaces between sounds, or perhaps no sound at all. What does silence sound like?

And now continuing with awareness of listening until the sound of the bell.

### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like? Can you think of some adjectives to describe it – e.g., pleasant/unpleasant; tiring/energizing; soothing or distressing?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Any other observations?

## **G. Session 2 Homework**

### **Mindfulness practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

1. **Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, eating a meal, doing the dishes, showering, getting ready for your day, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Make sure to record your practice in the log.

2. **Mindful Listening.** Practice the Mindful Listening exercise we learned today. Besides paying attention to sounds and silences in your environment, notice any uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, memories, bodily sensations that come up, and practice being open and accepting toward these experiences. You can use the breath to help return your awareness to the here and now, and then mindfully come back to listening. If you notice yourself getting distracted, remember to observe this with openness and acceptance, and remind yourself that it's okay to be distracted. Then gently

return your awareness to the listening exercise. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

**3. Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? Or it can lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. The same skills can be used in any situation, including the practice of acceptance. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

### **Worksheets**

**1. Inventory of External Gambling Situations.** Please complete the questionnaire and bring your completed form to the next meeting. We will then score the questionnaires and identify your most significant triggering situations.

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Please complete both of these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### **Readings**

**1. Session 2 reading**

## **Session 3 – External triggers**

### **A. Checking in**

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

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position....

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, returning to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to get away from thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and going.

And now continuing with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

### **C. Homework review**

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review

the homework assignments from last week.

### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

How did the **Mindful Listening** go?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What kind of barriers to practice did you experience?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used the Mindful Listening meditation? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used urge surfing? Tell me about that."*

### **IGS – External situations**

*Ask group members to produce their list of high-risk external situations.*

How was your experience completing the IGS survey?

Any difficulties?

Did you learn anything about yourself or your gambling while completing the survey?

Any thoughts about this survey or your responses to them?

## **D. Session theme: Navigating high-risk situations – *External***

As you learned from this week's homework exercise, there are many different kinds of situations which can trigger the urge to gamble, and increase temptations or opportunities to gamble. The items in the questionnaire were drawn from the Inventory of Gambling Situations, a survey created here at CAMH which was based on extensive research on the many kinds of situations in which people are more likely to gamble. These situations can elevate the risk of gambling in different ways for different people, so something that's risky for one person may not be a risk for someone else. I'd like us to review some of these situations together and explore how we might use mindfulness skills to get through them without giving in to that automatic urge to gamble.



*Illustration: There is no shortage of issues in life that can stress us out and trigger cravings.*

#### *Interpersonal conflict*

Let's start off with situations that involve conflict with other people. This could involve getting into arguments or fights with people in our lives, be they partners, relatives, friends, coworkers, or even strangers. It may not be a fight; maybe you simply felt criticized or insulted by someone, or maybe they did something that disappointed, upset, or angered you. What these situations have in common is that difficult experiences that happen in the context of interpersonal relationships can have an effect on your gambling behaviour. If these kinds of situations do tend to trigger your urge to gamble, there are multiple ways to address them – in addition to mindfulness. Because other people are involved, your ability to be mindful may be valuable but not sufficient to resolve them. Additional approaches include strategies to improve communication, conflict management, anger management, or in some cases, seeking relationship counselling. The point here is to not rule out additional support or tools that may complement what you gain from mindfulness.



For now, let's think about how practicing mindfulness might help us in a situation where we experience conflict with another person. Any ideas?

*Discuss how mindfulness (acceptance, nonjudging, presence, etc.) can help group members own and contain their experiences of stress and unpleasant emotions. Emphasize that mindfulness can also help to prevent the automatic pilot from leading them into maladaptive reactions to interpersonal conflict, which might just make things worse. Mindfulness creates space for skillful responding. Mindfulness also creates room for compassion – for yourself and others.*

*Let's consider some other risky situations or triggers for gambling.*

#### *Habitual gambling contexts*

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that present us with opportunities to gamble, or which remind us of gambling. For instance, you might be at a party or some other social event where gambling is taking place; or perhaps you just happen to be in the neighborhood of your favorite casino, lotto vendor, or what have you. You might be together with friends who invite, encourage, challenge, or simply expect you to gamble. Sometimes it's just a matter of having some free time and feeling bored. What these situations have in common is that they make it easier for you to engage in gambling—or, stated differently, they make it difficult *not* to gamble. Can you think of some ways in which mindfulness might be helpful in these situations?

*Discuss how mindfulness can help group members stay out of autopilot mode. There is an urge to “DO something” rather than simply to sit and “BE” with your thoughts and feelings. That paying attention to thoughts and feelings and letting them go can help create psychological space and time that allows them to surf their urges, remember their values, and consider more skillful responses to the situation. And if they do engage in gambling, mindfulness can help them recognize and let go of thoughts and feelings that tend to make things worse (which will be the focus of Session 5).*

#### *Financial concerns*

Another external factor that influences gambling behaviour is worry about finances. When you're in need of money, whether it's to pay off losses you have incurred, or settle your debts, or simply pay the rent, gambling can seem like a possible solution. Especially when it looks like a big win is right around the corner, or like luck is on your side. Matters are made worse if you're being pressured by the law, financial institutions or others who have made loans to you to come up with the money. These are extremely challenging situations that might make it seem like more gambling is your only hope. On the other hand, considering the situation objectively, you will realize that the odds are against you, as they are in all forms of gambling, and so gambling will very likely make money problems worse. As unlikely as it may seem, mindfulness can even be helpful in these situations. Any ideas how?

*The key here is that mindfulness doesn't solve problems; it helps people to prevent themselves from repeating or exacerbating problems, and get into a psychological space where they might consider alternative solutions. With respect to financial worries, mindfulness skills can be used to “sit with” those thoughts and feelings of worry. Without minimizing or negating these very real financial concerns, it is possible to look at worries with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude; allowing them to appear and disappear according to their natural rhythm. Gambling can be seen for what it truly is in this regard: not a solution to financial problems, but a strategy for avoiding or escaping the experience of worry. Not allowing those feelings to trigger the automatic pilot may at least prevent things from getting worse, if not improve one's access to more effective problem-solving skills.*

What I'd like everyone to take away from this discussion is this. First off, it is unrealistic to expect that these situations won't continue to happen, at least not for the time being. Relationship problems and interpersonal conflicts are a normal part of life; you may continue to be confronted with opportunities to gamble and spend time with friends who gamble; and money problems are not solved overnight. What is realistic, however, is the possibility of living with these very real challenges without being overwhelmed and controlled by them. So when you find yourself in a high-risk situation that triggers your urge to gamble, taking a moment to mindfully connect with your experience in the here and now can actually help. Remembering to breathe mindfully is a really helpful strategy here. Research studies have found that spending even just a couple of minutes attending to the breath can make people feel more centered, more calm, and more clear in their thinking. Part of your homework for the coming week will be to watch out for the risky situations you identified with the questionnaire, and to experiment with using mindfulness skills to effectively handle those situations. We can talk about this more when we discuss next week's homework at the end of the session. First now let's see if we can address any questions or concerns about what has been discussed so far.

### **Group discussion**

*Ask participants to form small groups of 3 to 4 people. The goal is to reflect on the discussion about external triggers and raise any concerns or questions about the concepts involved. For instance, it's possible that members may feel skeptical about successfully using mindfulness to calm their financial worries, or to overcome their urge to gamble in enabling social contexts. Such concerns should be explored, listened to, and addressed by the therapist with an open, validating, and nonjudging stance, while attempting to clarify any potential misunderstandings or confusions about the concepts discussed.*

## **E. Mindfulness exercise: Walking meditation**

### **Introduction**

In order to practice being mindfully aware of external situations and their effects on us, we're going to practice an exercise called walking meditation. This will involve taking our awareness through the experience of walking. You will notice that there is a lot you can be aware of while doing walking meditation. After the exercise, we will discuss our experiences and see how they might relate to other aspects of life.

### **Guided meditation**

#### *Standing*

So, to begin this period of walking meditation, first of all let's simply stand. Just stand on the spot, being aware of your weight being transferred through the soles of your feet into the earth. Being aware of all of the subtle movements that go on in order to keep us balanced and upright. Very often we take this for granted, our ability to be able to stand upright. But actually, it took us a couple of years to learn how to do this. So be aware of the constant adjustments that you're making in order to maintain your balance.

## *Walking*

To optimize our use of space, we should line up against the wall and walk in a straight line to the opposite wall. Agree with the people on either side of you which side you are going to walk on. And then you can begin to walk at a fairly slow but normal walking pace, and in a normal manner. We're not going to be changing the way that we walk; we're simply going to be aware of it.

## *Awareness of others*

The first thing you'll become aware of is a natural consequence of practicing this exercise in a small enclosed space. In order to avoid bumping into one another, we need to pay attention not just to our own walking, but those around as well. Try to pay just enough attention to the other group members to keep from getting in their way. If needed, you can make eye contact with someone or nonverbally signal your direction to them. During this exercise you might bump into someone and laugh, or feel irritated when someone gets in your way. Whatever happens, try to simply notice the event with an open and nonjudging attitude. It's merely something that happened which you can let go. Then gently return your awareness to the experience of walking.

## *Awareness of your body*

As you are walking mindfully, direct your attention to the soles of your feet, being aware of the alternating patterns of contact and release; being aware of your foot as the heel first makes contact, as your foot rolls forward onto the ball, and then lifts and travels through the air. Be aware of all the different sensations in your feet, not just a contact in the soles of your feet but the contact between the toes, the feeling of the inside of your shoes, the fabric of your socks, and let your feet be as relaxed as you can. Become aware of your ankles. Notice the qualities of the sensations in those joints – as your foot is on the ground, as your foot travels through the air.

And let your ankle joints be relaxed – make sure you're not holding on in any way. You can become aware of your lower legs – your shins, your calves. You can be aware of the contact with your clothing; be aware of the temperature on your skin; you can be aware of the muscles. And notice what the calf muscles are doing as you're walking. You might even want to exaggerate for a few steps what the calf muscles are doing – just so that you can connect with that – and then let your walking go back to a normal relaxed rhythm. Encourage your calf muscles to be relaxed.

And then become aware of your knees- noticing the qualities of the sensations in your knee joints. Then expand your awareness into your thighs. Be aware of the skin, again the contact with your clothing, the temperature. Be aware of the muscles, and notice what the muscles on the fronts of the thighs, and the muscles on the backs of the thighs are doing. And once more you might want for a few paces just to exaggerate what those muscles are doing – exaggerate the action of those muscles. And then let your walk go back to a normal rhythm.

Becoming aware of your hips – the muscles around your hip joints — and relax those muscles. Really relax. Even when you think you've relaxed – relax them some more. And just notice how that changes your walk. Notice how the rhythm and the gait of your walk change as your hips relax. You can be aware of the whole of your pelvis – and notice all of the movements that are going on your pelvis. One hip moves forward and then the other; one hip lifting, the other sinking.

And you can be aware of the complex three-dimensional shape that your pelvis is carving out through space as you walk forwards. The lowest part of your spine – your sacrum – is embedded in the pelvis. So as you feel your spine extending upwards – the lumbar spine, the thoracic spine – you can notice how it moves along with the pelvis. Your spine is in constant motion. It's swaying from

side to side. There is a twisting motion around the central axis. Your spine is in constant, sinuous, sensuous motion.

Notice your belly – you might feel your clothing in contact with your belly – and notice how your belly is the center of your body. Very often it feels like it's "down there" because we are so much in our heads. So see to what extent you can feel your belly as the center of your body, as the center of your being. Notice your chest, and just let your breathing happen. Notice the contact that your chest makes with your clothing. Notice your shoulders. Notice how they are moving with the rhythm of your walking. Let your shoulders be relaxed, and let your shoulders passively transmit the rhythm of your walk down into your arms. Let your arms simply hang by your sides and swing naturally. Notice all the motions in your arms – your upper arms, your elbows, your forearms, your wrists, your hands. And feel the air coursing over the skin on your hands and fingers as your arms swing through the air.

Become aware of your neck – and the muscles supporting your skull. Notice the angle of your head. And notice that as you relax the muscles on the back of your neck, your chin slightly tucks in and your skull comes to a point of balance. And you might want to play around with the angle of your head and see how it changes your experience. You might notice that when you tuck your chin close into your chest, your experience becomes darker and more emotional – that you're more inward turned, somber. And if you lift your chin and hold it in the air you might notice that your experience becomes much lighter – that you become much more aware of the outside world and perhaps caught up in the outside world, or much more aware of your thoughts and caught up in your thoughts. And then, bring your head back to a point of balance, your chin slightly tucked in.

Relax your jaw. Relax your eyes — and just let your eyes be softly focused, gently looking ahead – not staring at anything, not allowing yourself to be caught up in anything that's going past you.

### *Feelings*

You can be aware of the feelings that you're having; not in terms of emotions here, but just the feeling tone. Are there things that feel pleasant; are there things that feel unpleasant – in your body, or outside of you. So if you notice things in your body that are pleasant or unpleasant, just notice them. Don't either cling onto them, or push them away, but just notice them. If you notice things in the outside world that are either pleasant or unpleasant, just allow them to drift by – just notice them drift by without following them or averting your gaze from them.

### *Thoughts and Emotions*

You can notice your emotional states. Are you bored? Are you content? Are you irritated? Are you feeling very happy to be doing what you're doing? Again just notice whatever emotions happen to be present. And notice your mind also. Is your mind clear, or dull? Is your mind busy, or is it calm? Are you thinking about things unconnected with this practice – or do whatever thoughts that you have center on what you're doing just now? Just notice these things with no particular judgment – just noticing.

### *Balancing Inner and Outer*

And you can notice the balance between your experience of the inner and the outer. I often find that if I can be aware of both the inner world and the outer world in equal balance, then my mind settles at a point of stillness, and calmness, and clarity.

So see if you can find that point of balance, where you're equally aware of the inner and the outer, and your mind is calm, content, and quiet.

### *Stopping*

So, in a few seconds, I'm going to ask you to stop. And I'd like you to come to a natural halt. So, you're not freezing on the spot; you're just allowing yourself to come to a stop. So do that now; come to a stop. And just experience yourself standing. Just notice what it's like to no longer be in motion. Notice once more the complex balancing act that's going on to keep you upright. Feel once again, the weight traveling down through the soles of your feet into the earth; simply standing, and experiencing yourself and, finally, bringing this exercise to a close.

### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like? Can you think of some adjectives to describe it – e.g., pleasant/unpleasant; tiring/energizing; soothing or distressing?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

How was this different from your normal experience of walking?

Any other observations?

*Try to link the exercise and inquiry back to the session theme about external high-risk situations and triggers. E.g., what happened when you needed to avoid someone in the group, or when someone bumped into you? What happened when you got bored? Frustrated? Also, emphasize for participants that Walking Meditation can be practiced any time they are walking, whether indoors or outdoors, whether a short distance between two rooms or a longer walk through the city or a park. Point out that, like in any other exercise, the breath can serve as a way to connect to the present moment, while the main focus should be on the physical experience of walking. All other events and distractions can be mindfully noticed and let go.*

## **F. Session 3 Homework**

### **Mindfulness practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

**1. Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness.

**2. Walking Meditation.** Try to practice the walking meditation at least once this week, for about 10 minutes or longer if you can. The idea is to focus your awareness on the experience of walking, while nonjudgingly observing any other experiences that enter your awareness, before gently returning your attention to the experience of walking.

**3. Mindful of External High-Risk Situations and Triggers.** Over the course of the coming week, you may find yourself in one or more of the high-risk situations we discussed today. Try as best as you can to recognize when this is happening. You may spend just a few minutes focusing on your experience of breathing to mindfully connect to the present moment, remembering to observe any thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude.

Be especially aware of any automatic thoughts that seem to push you in the direction of gambling. If you can do so, practice urge surfing over any physical or mental feelings of craving that arise. Try to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

**4. Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? Or it may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

## **Worksheets**

**1. Inventory of Internal Gambling Situations.** Bring your completed questionnaires to the next meeting. We will score the questionnaires and identify your most significant triggering situations.

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet. It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. For next week, see if you can identify and rank the top three feelings on the PANAS that seem to trigger the urge to gamble. Also, find out which 1 or 2 items on the GCS apply best to your situation. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

## **Readings**

**1. Session 3 Readings**

## **Session 4 – Internal triggers**

### **A. Checking in**

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

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body. You may find it helpful to label these two phases of breathing to describe what happens to your abdomen or chest, for example “rising... falling... rising... falling...”

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, returning to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to get away from thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and going.

And now continuing with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

## C. Homework review

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review the homework assignments from last week. Let's reflect on the mindfulness practice.

### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

How did the **Walking Meditation** go?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of walking?

What was difficult?

What kind of barriers to practice did you experience?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used the Walking meditation? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used urge surfing? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice **being mindful of risky external situations and triggers**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?



What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have been mindful of an external trigger or risky situation? Tell me about that."*

### **IGS – Internal situations homework**

Now I'd like us to turn to the next piece of homework assigned for this week.

*Ask group members to pull out their list of high-risk internal situations.*

How was your experience completing the IGS survey?

Any difficulties?

Did you learn anything about yourself or your gambling while completing the survey?

Just as we did last week with the external situations survey, we are going to go through our individual lists and identify the internal experiences that are most risky for us. That is, which ones are most likely to result in the urge to gamble? Grab the pen and clipboard under your seat. As part of this homework assigned, you rated each situation on the form with a score from 1 to 4, with 1 representing the lowest gambling craving, and 4 the highest. Take a look to see which of the items you rated the highest, and then choose the three you feel are the most significant sources of gambling urges. Then rank those three from highest to lowest, so that the top item is the most powerful situation in terms of how much it influences your urge to gamble.

*Give participants a few minutes to complete the task. Make sure to check whether everyone has understood what was asked, and attend to any group members experiencing difficulties. If needed, help them identify their top three.*

Now that we have identified our top three urge situations, I'd like to get a sense of where everyone is at. If you feel comfortable sharing, which internal experience did you place at the very top of your list? And perhaps you could give an example of an actual situation in your life?

*Members share responses. The therapist takes notes on a whiteboard or flip chart. Therapist inquires further about how participants view their most problematic internal experiences. Explore what kinds of situations give rise to those experiences, and how they might lead to gambling. For instance, do they recognize any aspects of the pattern previously discussed in the group? (Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling) Do they recognize a tendency towards experiential avoidance? At what point does the idea to gamble enter into awareness? What kinds of factors influence whether they do or do not give in to the urge?*

*Therapist sums up which internal triggers and situations function as risks for this group. Ask participants to hold on to their top three lists, as they will be used for imaginal exposure exercises in Session 7.*

## D. Session theme: Navigating high-risk situations – *Internal*

Now that we have explored which types of external situations are associated with gambling or that trigger the urge to gamble, we will shift our attention to look at internal situations. By internal I mean anything that happens inside of us, including thoughts, feelings, moods, and bodily sensations. First off, I need to acknowledge that there is no black and white division between internal and external experiences, since our emotions typically occur in response to something that happens. But let's take a closer look at those internal experiences, and explore how mindfulness can help us respond to them more skillfully.

Let's refresh our memory about the basic pattern of experience and behaviour that underlies a lot of addictions. Here it is again:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

I should clarify that this is not a one-size-fits-all model. Sometimes there may not be a specific event that triggers an emotion; sometimes we just feel a certain way without necessarily knowing why. In fact, we may not even be aware of the relationship between our feelings and gambling, because spend so much time in automatic pilot mode. Also, I want to point out that we can easily flip this pattern to show the similar role of positive experiences:

Pleasant event → Desirable emotion → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

This also became clear from the homework assignments, where we found that pleasant situations and emotions, or the anticipation of positive emotions, can be just as influential in leading us to engage in gambling. And that these positive and negative experiences are often related, as in the gambling process itself—for example, winning bets encourage you to bet again in case you're on a spree, while losing bets encourage you to bet again because you expect to eventually win. This just goes to show that feelings are deeply connected to our gambling urges. So let's explore some of the most common types of internal experiences and how they're linked to gambling.

*Therapist leads a group activity by asking participants to name both positive and negative emotions. Record each emotion on the flipchart under its corresponding category (pleasant/unpleasant). Ask participants for concrete examples, real or hypothetical, that illustrate the connection between internal experiences and gambling. Discuss the possible motives involved in each example. Explore the possible role of automatic pilot and avoidance in each example. If relevant, link examples back to external high-risk situations covered previously, in order to solidify the link between external events, internal experiences, automatic pilot, avoidance, craving, and gambling. Make sure that each of the following are included in the list/discussion:*

### **Unpleasant emotions**

Sadness/depression

Loneliness

Anger/ Frustration

Anxiety

Stress

Boredom

Worry about debts

Worry about relationships

## **Pleasant emotions**

Happiness/joy

Excitement (or the need for excitement)

Confidence in skill (or confidence in control over gambling)

Love

We now have a clear picture of different kinds of internal experiences and the ways in which they trigger our gambling urges. Note that we've categorized them according to whether we find them pleasant or unpleasant. We've been judging emotions this way because that's how we're used to judging our own feelings. We each instinctively know which experiences we find pleasant or unpleasant, which is how the autopilot knows which experiences to avoid. But let's pause for a moment. Have you ever wondered why nature gave us unpleasant emotions? And why do emotions exist at all? Do they have any particular purpose or function?

*Therapist leads group discussion about the function of emotions. Explore examples of how emotions serve to express and communicate human needs. What does sadness tell us? What does anger tell us? What about anxiety? Fear? Joy? Pride? Love? Etc. What about frustration (unmet needs)? What about stress? Clarify the difference between emotion and stress, which is the body's response to perceived threats to our well-being, e.g., the idea that we cannot cope with circumstances or experiences (prolonged activation of fight/flight/freeze response).*

Emotions serve to communicate and express our personal needs. So what happens when we prevent ourselves from fully experiencing them? It makes it very difficult to truly understand ourselves and our needs in the present moment! And because we don't have that conscious understanding, the automatic pilot takes over and tries to fulfill our needs in whatever way it's learned to do that—by triggering a desire to gamble, for example.

So now we've seen that judging our internal experiences can prevent us from understanding our needs. Another thing that happens when we judge our feelings is that it actually changes the way we feel. Research studies have shown that judging an emotion often results in a second emotion that emerges in response to the first, which psychologists call a secondary emotion. For example, if we judge sadness as a negative experience, then we will perceive that sadness as something undesirable; something to be avoided. And so the threat of experiencing sadness will actually make us feel anxious. Thus anxiety is the secondary emotion. As another example, if something happens that makes us angry but we judge anger as a negative thing, then we might deny ourselves that experience, and feel sad about what happened instead. So in this case sadness is the secondary emotion. Because we often judge our feelings automatically, we may not notice those deeper, primary emotions, and instead we believe that our secondary emotions actually reflect the way we feel. What might be some consequences of that?

*Therapist inquires about the consequences of acting on secondary, rather than primary emotions. E.g., a primary emotion of anger could be empowering, while a secondary emotion of sadness could be victimizing.*

So now we've seen that judging and automatically responding to our emotions can prevent us from being in touch with our deeper feelings, as well as keeping us unaware of our deeper needs. Another consequence of not being aware of emotions is that it prevents us from skillfully responding to situations. Reacting to experiences in automatic pilot can be problematic, sometimes even disastrous, for ourselves and the people around us. What are some examples of automatic reactions to emotions that don't really work?

*Therapist elicits ideas about maladaptive responding in various domains, e.g., interpersonal, eating habits, substance abuse, self-harm, other forms of impulsive behaviour, and of course, gambling. Explore alternative responses to hypothetical situations that are skillful.*

So now we have discussed a number of important factors that show why it's helpful to actually experience our emotions in an accepting, nonjudging way. This shows that mindfulness can help us:

1. Listen to what our emotions are trying to tell us about our needs and values.
2. Discover deeper feelings underneath our secondary emotions.
3. Short-circuit the automatic pilot.
4. Create psychological space and time for skillful responding.

Now let's explore some practical mindfulness skills we can use to help us pay attention to our emotions with purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment. There is a lot of overlap here with the concept of urge surfing. For instance, recognizing that feelings, like any internal experience, are like waves; they appear and disappear, each in their own natural rhythm of coming and going. In that sense they're also similar to breathing; breath comes in, breath goes out.

In fact, emotion and breath are like two peas in a pod: Did you know that each type of emotion is associated with a specific kind of breathing? For example, people experiencing fear tend to breathe with very rapid and shallow breaths. Anger is associated with forceful and uneven breathing. People who are depressed or anxious may hold their breath and not exhale deeply enough. There is a very deep connection between the way we feel and the way we breathe. This is also why the breath is so important in mindfulness. We can use the breath, not only as an anchor to the present moment, but as a kind of emotional barometer. It connects us directly to our internal experience.

As you pay attention to your feelings, you will inevitably notice thoughts happening. Thoughts that judge, such as "I don't like this feeling," or "This feels bad." Thoughts that seek understanding or blame, like "Why do I feel like this?", or "I feel this way because so-and-so did X, Y, and Z to me." Or thoughts that judge the self, such as "I'm a bad person for feeling this way," or "It's my own fault." You may notice memories connected to those feelings, either recent ones or from a long time ago, or thoughts about the future that make you feel anxious or sad. The point is that there will never be a shortage of thoughts arising in response to your feelings. That is normal and to be expected. It's simply what brains do—what many meditators call *monkey mind*. The incessant chattering of thoughts. So you do not need to take each and every thought seriously. You don't need to buy into all your thoughts. You can just let them be. Being mindful means not getting caught up in your thoughts. Not letting them drag you along into their stories. Just noticing them as they come and go. And recognizing when you've gotten sidetracked, then gently returning your attention to your immediate experience.

Mindfulness involves a genuine curiosity about what is happening in the here and now. But some feelings may be very difficult to face, and even harder to accept. They may be frightening and overwhelming. And while it may be helpful to recognize that those are only judgements, it's also important to respect those feelings. You may not be ready to fully experience certain feelings that are too painful or frightening. It's a fact of human existence that some things are very difficult to deal with. That being said, you can still negotiate those difficult experiences in a mindful way; instead of feeling overwhelmed to the point that you want to run and hide, which increases the risk of going into autopilot, it's possible to just pause and acknowledge, with acceptance, that this particular experience is too much to handle. And you can do this nonjudgingly: you're simply

making an observation about what's true for you at this point in time. There is no need to make any judgments about that. And in response to this difficult experience, you can choose to pay attention to something else that's happening in the here and now. Or you can do something else entirely. Just try to make your choice one that is based in mindfulness, rather than mindless avoidance.

We have covered a lot of information so far. You'll be provided with handouts at the end of the session, so you can review this information at home. Are there any questions – or anything that we've discussed that is unclear? Does everyone feel reasonably confident that they can apply the strategies we've talked about up till now? At this point I'd like to move on to a new exercise.

## **E. Mindfulness exercise: Body scan**

### **Introduction**

While our focus has been on emotion, and to some extent on thoughts, which will be the topic of next week's session, there is another category of internal experience: bodily sensations. Just like the breath, bodily sensations are intimately connected to our emotions. For example, everyone is probably familiar with the feeling of having a knot in your stomach when you're anxious. Or a lump in your throat when you're sad. Or tightness in your chest when you're angry. The following exercise will allow us to become aware of what's happening inside our bodies.

### **Guided meditation**

The intention of this practice is to bring mindful awareness to sensations in the body as you focus your attention systematically on each part of the body in turn. It is to be aware of your experience as it is unfolding, however it is. Not to change the way you are feeling or to become more relaxed or calmer.

First, making yourself comfortable lying on your back, in a place where you will be warm and undisturbed. Lying on a mat, a rug, the floor, or a bed. Lying with palms open to the ceiling, feet falling apart from each other, and eyes gently closed. As best you can, keeping still during the exercise, but if you need to move or adjust your position, doing so mindfully, with complete awareness.

So to begin, just becoming aware of breathing. Taking the attention to the abdomen, noting it rise with the in-breath and fall with the out-breath.

Not trying to manipulate the breath in any way, just experiencing it as it is, as it moves in and out of the body. Full attention in each moment to breathing.

And on the next out-breath, moving your awareness down your body to the toes of both the left foot and the right foot, and noticing whatever sensations are present in the toes. Perhaps noticing warmth, coolness, tingling, moisture, itching, whatever is arising from the toes, whether there are sensations or no sensations. Being aware of the big toes and the little toes and the toes in between.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of your toes in your mind's eye and moving your attention to the rest of the feet. To the tops of both feet. The soles of both feet, and the ankles.

Just staying open to whatever sensations you find there. And if there are no sensations, that is just fine.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the awareness of the feet, and shifting the focus of attention to the lower legs. Becoming aware of the calves, perhaps noting where they touch the floor or the mat. Becoming aware of the shins, the skin over the legs, and just being attentive to this part of your body.

And on the next out-breath, allowing the lower legs to dissolve in your mind's eye as you

move gently with your attention to the knees. Becoming aware of the part under the knee, and on top of the knee, perhaps being aware of what a complex joint the knee is, with tendons and ligaments and the kneecap. And just being here with your knees, letting them predominate in your field of awareness, in the moment. And now gently releasing the knees and moving your attention to the thighs. Noticing whatever sensations arise in the left thigh and the right thigh.

And if your mind has wandered, just gently and kindly bringing your attention back to the thighs.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of awareness of the thighs as you bring your attention to the pelvic region. To the buttocks, the tailbone, the pelvic bone, the genitals. Staying open to whatever sensations you find, just being attentive to this part of your body.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the awareness of the pelvic region and moving your attention to the abdomen. Bringing a gentle curiosity and openness to whatever you find in this moment. Perhaps noticing a gentle rise of the abdomen with the in-breath and the fall of the abdomen with the out-breath.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the abdomen in your mind's eye and moving your attention to the chest area, the area that contains your heart and lungs. Perhaps noticing the beating of your heart or the expansion of the rib cage as you breathe in. Staying open to whatever sensations you find in the chest.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the chest in your mind's eye as you bring your attention to the lower back. A part of the body that often carries a lot of tension. Just noticing whatever sensations arise, whether there be tension or no tension and not trying to make it be any different, just accepting the sensations that are there. Letting go of the tendency we all have to want things to be different.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the awareness of the lower back and bringing your awareness to the upper back, the back ribs, and the shoulder blades. Another area where the body holds tension. And just being with the upper back, not going anywhere or doing anything but developing an openness to all that is arising from this part of the body. And as thoughts arise, just being present for thoughts and then returning to paying attention to the upper back.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the upper back in your mind's eye as you move gently with your attention to the hands. Becoming aware of the fingers, the palms, the backs of the hands, and the wrists. Becoming aware of any sensations arising in the hands. Perhaps warmth, or coolness, tingling or moisture. Just bringing a compassionate awareness to whatever arises in the hands.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the hands in the mind's eye and moving your attention to the arms. To the lower arms, the elbows, and the upper arms. Bringing a gentle curiosity and openness to whatever you find in this moment. And now gently releasing the arms and shifting the

focus of attention to the neck. Noticing whatever sensations arise in the neck. And if your mind has wandered, gently and kindly bringing your attention back to the neck.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of awareness of the neck, as you bring your awareness to the face and the rest of the head. Becoming aware of the jaw, the mouth, the nose, the cheeks, the ears, the eyes, the forehead, the scalp, and the back and top of the head. Noticing whatever sensations arise in the face and the head. Just noticing without judgment. There is no right way to feel when you are doing this. The way you feel is the way you feel.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of awareness of the face and the head. And now, taking a few deep breaths, breathing in through the nose, and allowing the breath to move

through the body to the tips of your toes, and then allowing the breath to move up from your toes, through your body, as you exhale through the nose. And doing this a few times, breathing in all the way through the body to the toes and back out through the nose.

And now letting go of the awareness of breathing and getting a sense of the body as whole and complete. Resting in this state of openness to things as they are.

### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like? Can you think of some adjectives to describe it – e.g., pleasant/unpleasant; tiring/energizing; soothing or distressing?

What did you notice?

Did you discover any connections between sensations in your body and your emotions? Your thoughts?

What was difficult?

Were there any sensations that were difficult to look at, that made you want to move away from them?

What went well?

Any other observations?

*Try to link the inquiry back to the session theme about internal high-risk situations and triggers. Were there any observations that participants recognized as relevant to their gambling urges? Sensations or feelings they tend to avoid? That make them want to seek out familiar coping strategies like gambling?*

## **F. Session 4 Homework**

### **Mindfulness Practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### **1. Everyday Mindfulness.**

**2. Body Scan.** Try to practice the body scan at least once this week, for about 10 to 20 minutes if you can. Use the instruction handout as a script for this exercise. The idea is to guide your awareness through each part of your body, while nonjudgingly observing any other experiences that enter your awareness. Make sure to record your exercise in the mindfulness log.

**3. Mindful of Internal High-Risk Situations and Triggers.** Over the course of the coming week, you may find yourself having any of the internal experiences we discussed today. Try as best as you can to recognize when this is happening. You can spend just a few minutes focusing on your experience of breathing in order to mindfully connect to the present moment, remembering to observe any thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude. Be especially aware of any automatic thoughts that seem to push you in the direction of gambling. If you can do so, practice urge surfing over any physical or mental feelings of craving that arise. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log.

**4. Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? Or it may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. If you *do* gamble, is it possible for you to choose that option without judgment? Is it possible to choose to do something that is ‘bad for you and do so nonjudgmentally? If you choose to gamble, can you examine the thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that contributed to that? The same skills can be used in any situation, including the practice of acceptance. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

### **Worksheet**

**1. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It’s best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your forms with you to our next meeting.

### **Readings**

#### **1. Session 1 Readings**



## **Session 5 – Relationship to Thoughts**

### **A. Checking in**

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

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen. Some people find it helpful to label each phase in the breathing cycle based on sensations in their belly, such as “rising,” “falling”, “rising,” “falling.” This may be a special case, as breathing is the default target for meditative attention since it is always happening. If this kind of labelling helps you focus, then go ahead and use it. If not, then just proceed in the way that works best for you.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, return to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to

avoid thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and going.

And now continue with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

## C. Homework review

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review the homework assignments from last week. Let's reflect on the mindfulness practice.

### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

How did the **Body Scan** go?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of walking?

What was difficult?

What kind of barriers to practice did you experience?

What went well?

Other observations?

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used the Walking meditation? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice **being mindful of high-risk internal experiences (i.e., cravings, physical sensations or emotional triggers)**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

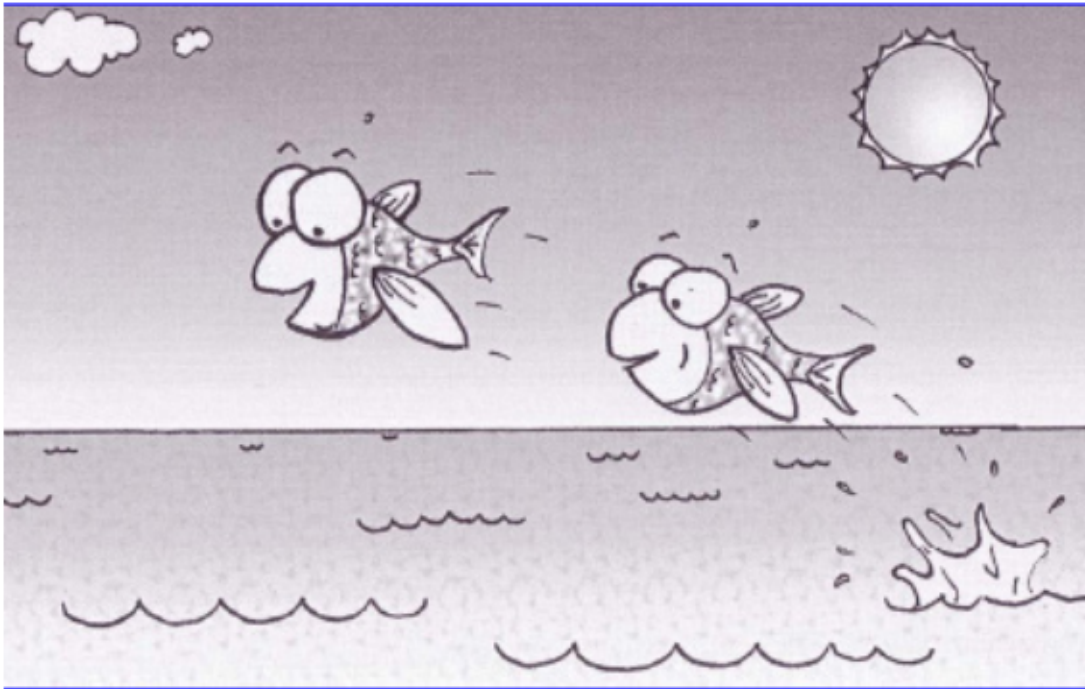
*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used mindfulness to navigate internal triggers? Tell me about that."*

*Link back to discussion of relationship between emotional distress, avoidance, and gambling urges. Explore ways in which participants used mindfulness (or other resources) to handle those emotions, step out of autopilot, respond skillfully. Explore whether participants were able to uncover deeper primary emotions and/or learn about their needs by listening to what their feelings were telling them.*

## D. Session theme: Changing your relationship to thoughts

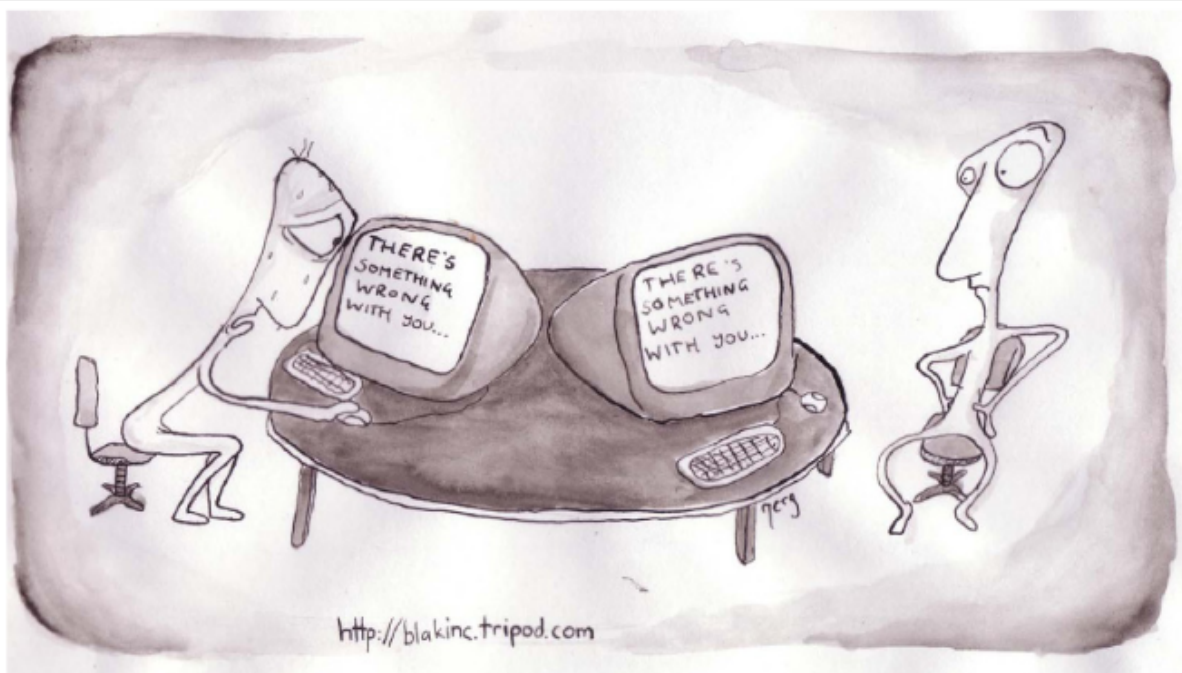
Today's session marks the halfway point in our mindfulness training program. So far we have explored the relationship of mindfulness gambling urges as well as the internal and external situations that trigger them, with a special focus on emotions. In today's session we'll be taking a closer look at thought processes. While thinking is obviously essential to our daily lives, thoughts can also make us feel lousy and lead us toward behaviours that don't align with our preferred values. That's essentially because we have a tendency to buy into thoughts that don't really work for us. Thoughts that tell us how we should or shouldn't be, thoughts that tell us we're a good or bad person. Sometimes you just want to turn those thoughts off! So today we will explore ways in which we can use mindfulness skills to change our relationship to thoughts. Note the term "relationship." It implies that our thoughts are not identical with ourselves or our values or beliefs. Sometimes our thoughts are intentional and helpful, like when we are solving a problem. Sometimes they are involuntary and unhelpful or even harmful. The key point is that once we recognize that we do not need to identify with our thoughts, we are free to simply observe them and *choose* how we wish to respond in a given situation rather than react in an automatic way because we had a particular thought.

The mind is always generating thoughts—that is its job—and most of the time we're not even aware of it. Sometimes we can get "lost in thought." You've probably all had the experience of suddenly realizing that you've been immersed in thought and not really aware of anything else around you. This first illustration is a metaphorical way to look at this. So you can imagine what happened here. These two fish were swimming in the water, as they always do, day in and day out, and one fish said to the other "Hey did you know that we're actually surrounded by some stuff called water?" The other fish said "What are you talking about. What's water?" And so his buddy gets him to leap out of the water to actually see it, to gain an awareness of water as something separate from being a fish. Today we're going to take you through some strategies that will, in a sense, help you to "leap out of" the river of your thoughts and see them as separate from yourself, as automatic products of your mind.



**“See... that’s the stuff I was talking about”**

In the second illustration of a guy looking at computer screens, the guy on the left is completely buying into his thoughts, “There’s something wrong with you,” and he looks pretty distressed as a result. The alternative is not to change the thoughts to something positive, like “you’re great,” but to observe them for what they are, like the guy on the right who is sitting back, just observing his thoughts and not getting all caught up in them.



## Fused vs. Defused ways of relating to “There’s something wrong with you...”

That is what it means to be “fused” with your thoughts: responding to them as though they are telling the truth; as though they have some kind of power in and of themselves; as though they define you and your world. In contrast, the Buddhist philosophy on which mindfulness practice is based views thoughts as something more like leaves floating in a stream. An endless supply, always coming and going, and none particularly more true or valuable than the other—unless we believe them to be so. They’re just leaves. Imagine if we could feel that way about all the judgmental thoughts we have about ourselves. Just letting them pass through without reacting to them, without buying into them. Can you come up with some examples of thoughts that, upon closer inspection, probably aren’t worth buying into?

*Therapist leads discussion about maladaptive thought patterns, e.g., rumination, worry thoughts, critical self-talk. Explore with group members how distressing thoughts may be connected to high-risk external situations and internal experiences; gambling urges; and also post-gambling experience (e.g., remorse, shame, guilt, worry, self-loathing). Make sure to record on the flipchart some key thoughts that resonate with the group.*

Like the fish in that first picture, this might be a new concept for some. The idea that thinking is something separate from being conscious; that it is possible to, in a sense, look *at* your thoughts, instead of looking at reality *from* your thoughts. If we think again about the metaphor of the river, in which each thought is a leaf floating on the surface, then perhaps you could picture your awareness as sitting in a boat on the water, watching the leaves float past around the boat. Or even standing on the shore, watching from a distance. That is a very different perspective than the one we are used to: swimming in the river, where leaves are coming at you from all directions, dragging you along, perhaps even pulling you down. Are there any questions about this way of looking at your thoughts?

*Check for understanding in the group.*

Now that we have an idea of what it means to be fused with your thoughts, or overly attached to them, let's explore some techniques and exercises designed to help us *defuse* from our thoughts—to create more distance between us and them. Some of these ideas might seem a little silly, but that's precisely the point. They're meant to show us how silly, unnecessary, or irrational some of our thoughts can be, and so they can help us to take those thoughts less seriously and diminish their influence over us.

*Try to practice each technique below using thoughts volunteered by the group that are distressing and/or relevant to problem gambling.*

**Word repetition.** We are going to repeat a word as fast as we can out loud for 30 seconds. *[Pick one of the group's thoughts from the flipchart].* Just keep saying the word over and over as fast as you can while still pronouncing the full word each time. How did this feel? What was the experience like? What happened to the meaning of the word?

*(It is common for the word to lose meaning, to sound strange/odd, for the beginning and end to blur, to pay more attention to the muscles of the mouth as it being said compared to usual, etc. If there is an emotional link to this word, then it is possible that the emotional function has gone down.)*

**Singing your thoughts.** *Using a short phrase volunteered by a group member [or selected from the flipchart], sing it to the tune of Happy Birthday (or another well-known song).*

**Slowing down your thoughts.** *Using a short phrase taken from the flipchart, repeat it as a group v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y. Inquire about the experience.*

**I am having the thought that...** For example, I am having the thought that "I am having the thought this stuff isn't going to help me with my gambling." Or "I am having the thought that I'm too weak to change my gambling habit." Or "I am having the thought that gambling is ruining my life."

**Name what the mind is doing.** Name the type of thinking that is happening. For example, worry thoughts, judgments, self-criticism, gambling urges, rationalizing...

**Give real names to your thoughts.** For example, "Worrying Wilma," or "Judgy Jamie."

**Thank the mind.** For example, "Thanks for the memory."

**Defuse with Dr. Phil.** "How's that thought working for you?"

**Get off your butts.** For the following sentence, "I'd like to go to the party but I'm afraid I'll be anxious", try replacing "but" with "and." "I'd like to go to the party and I'm afraid I'll be anxious".

**Replace "I" with "you" or your name.** For example, instead of thinking "I hate doing the dishes," try "You hate doing the dishes," or even "[your name] hates doing the dishes.]

## E. Mindfulness exercise: Mindfulness of thoughts

### Instructions

Finally, one very simple and effective way to unhook yourself from your thoughts is by mindfully observing them. Just noticing your thoughts go by, watching them without judgment; without getting dragged along; without reacting to them or trying to push them away. Simply observing with a curious and accepting attitude. Let's take a few minutes to practice being mindful of our thoughts.

### Guided meditation

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

With your eyes closed or looking down with a soft gaze, begin to focus on your breathing. Notice the feeling of air rushing into your nose, filling your chest and abdomen, and then flowing back out. Notice the sensation of your chest and belly rising and falling with each breath. Follow each inhale and exhale as you connect with what is happening in this moment.

Now gently shifting our awareness to thinking – to paying attention to thoughts as events in the mind. As best you can, bring your awareness to thoughts as they arise in the mind, through the space of the mind, and eventually disappear. There is no need to censor or encourage thinking in any direction. Simply allow thoughts to arise naturally, not holding on to thoughts, pushing them away, or analyzing their contents, simply observe thoughts as events in the field of awareness.

It may help to imagine that you are sitting in a movie theatre in front of a large blank screen. As thoughts, memories and mental images appear in your mind, see them projected onto the screen, and watch each thought for as long as it remains on the screen.

Thoughts may move slowly or quickly across the screen, some dominating the screen more than others. At times, the screen may go blank; at other times it may be completely filled with thoughts. Whatever is on the screen, remain curious about the process of thinking itself, noticing your ability to be an impartial observer.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of thinking, fusing with your thoughts, getting caught up in one of the stories unfolding on the screen. When that happens, return to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to avoid thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and going.

And now continue with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

### Inquiry

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of thinking?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

## F: Session theme (cont'd): Relationship to thoughts

Now that we've spent some time getting familiar with mindfulness of thoughts, I'd like to explore some specific kinds of thoughts that are particularly relevant to problem gambling. There are types of thinking that make us more likely to gamble, even in the face of significant loss. Thoughts that make us believe we have a special ability to win, that make us unrealistically confident in our gambling skills. Thinking that we have special insider knowledge or an effective "system" to help us win. These all result from distortions in thinking that prevent us from acting skillfully – and get us stuck in our gambling. Let's go through some important examples.

The first example is called the *Gambler's Fallacy*. This is such a common distortion that it's actually named after gambling. It's all about the way we think about probability and randomness. Say we flip a coin: What are the odds that it will land heads up? 50 percent, right? Let's say we take that coin and flip it ten times, and we get heads nine times in a row. What are the odds that it will land tails up on the tenth flip?

Still 50 percent.

If any of you thought that the probability of landing tails on the tenth flip was higher because we got heads the previous nine times, then you just committed the gambler's fallacy. It is critical to understand that each time you flip the coin, the odds are still 50 percent. Every single time. This is because nature does not keep score. There is no law in physics that tells the coin, "You've landed heads too many times, now you have to land tails to even out the playing field." Even if you flipped your coin a million times and landed heads each time, there is no reason to expect that number one-million-and-one will land tails. This may seem like a fairly straightforward idea, yet it seems to be human nature to think that the odds will eventually change in our favour. Can you see how this distortion is especially relevant to gambling? Are there any questions about this?

*Check for understanding in the group. Explore how the gambler's fallacy applies to different kinds of gambling preferred by group members, e.g., slot machines, lotto, poker, electronic gaming machines, sports betting, bingo, blackjack, online gambling, etc.*

Another common distortion has to do with how we explain wins and losses. We often have a tendency to overestimate the importance of our skills or abilities. It seems to be human nature to explain good things that happen in terms of something we have control over, like our skills or abilities, while explaining losses in terms of something we have less control over, like luck or the influence of other people. That is not to say that skill doesn't play a role in whether or not a bet will lead to a win or a loss. Just that we tend to significantly overrate our choices or strategies when winning, and underrate the role of pure chance.

A very common thought among people who gamble is that it is possible to recognize or manipulate luck. For example, the idea of "streaks." Sometimes luck appears to be on your side, and sometimes not. Another example: Perhaps you've also had the experience of something lucky happening to you in some other aspect of your life, like at work or while walking down the street, and then thinking, "this would be a good moment to place a large bet." Or maybe you've been around someone whom you felt influenced your luck because they seemed particularly lucky or unlucky. Or perhaps you know a slot machine, lotto station, deck of cards, or what have you, that you felt was particularly lucky or unlucky. These are all examples of irrational beliefs about luck.



Why are they irrational thoughts? Because human beings have a natural tendency to perceive patterns in random information. Say we have two separate events called event A and event B, and we notice that event A and event B sometimes happen at the same time. We may be inclined to think there is a relationship between A and B, just because they occurred together. For example, say you wore blue socks one day and won a large sum of money. A few days later you win some more money, and you notice that again you were wearing blue socks. You wonder if there is a relationship, so you start to wear your “lucky” blue socks every time you gamble. When you win, you may attribute it to those lucky socks. If you lose, you think something must have interfered—some other influence got in the way, or it was just an unlucky day. This is exactly how superstitions are born. The same goes for omens, gut feelings, and other things we think of as signs telling us to bet one way or another. When the gamble goes as hoped, we see it as a confirmation of our superstition or skill. When it goes the other way, we think something else got in the way or we made a mistake.

Finally, another common mental distortion has to do with selective memory. We are more likely to remember wins, especially big wins, and less likely to remember losses. Wins tend to be rare, they produce positive feelings, and they reinforce the hope that we will win again. So they stick out in our memory. Loss, on the other hand, is common and feels like failure, so we are motivated not to remember our losses. As a result, the idea of winning is more present in our thoughts, and so we are more likely to gamble—ignoring the reality that loss is by far the most common outcome.

To sum up, the most common mental distortions that are related to gambling have to do with a basic misunderstanding of how randomness and probability work; an exaggerated confidence in our skills or ability; and perceiving patterns that make us believe we can recognize or manipulate luck.

From the standpoint of mindfulness, we can reduce the control such distortions have by remembering that our thoughts are not the same as ourselves and by de-fusing from gambling-related thoughts or distortions around that are not skillful – i.e., that do not assist us with our goal of not gambling.

Are there any questions about gambling-related distortions? What do you think about them?

*Therapist checks for understanding and elicits opinions from group members. Mindfully explore any resistance to the ideas discussed. Inquire about the possibility of an irrational belief persisting in the face of intellectual understanding and disconfirming evidence.*

The interesting thing about these mental distortions is that, even when people understand them and agree that they are irrational, research has shown that people become far less critical of their own thought processes while they are engaged in gambling. In the moment of betting, we seem to enter a different state of mind in which these distortions have free rein. This means there is an opportunity for practicing mindfulness. We can use the skills we’ve been learning to try and recognize those irrational thoughts. And in keeping with the idea of acceptance and nonjudgment, we can experiment with this as well. What happens if we simply notice these thoughts, rather than complying with them or trying to change them? Perhaps we can just give them a name; for example, “oh, there is the gambler’s fallacy.” Or “Now I’m having a superstitious thought.” Rather than judging the thoughts as good or bad, we’re simply labelling them and letting them be. Giving them a name might just have the effect of decreasing their power over our behaviour.

For next week I’d like you to reflect on which kinds of beliefs and thoughts you notice play a significant role in your gambling. Whether you do this before, during, or after gambling, see if you can mindfully notice how you think about the roles of luck, skill, and probability in your gambling

behaviour. Do you recognize any irrational thoughts? Mental distortions? Superstitions? You can record these on a special form I will hand out for the homework. The underlying idea is that becoming more aware of your habitual thought patterns around gambling will help you to avoid buying into those ways of thinking. Any questions?

## G. Session 5 Homework

### **Mindfulness practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

**1. Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, eating a meal, doing the dishes, showering, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring it the log to our next session.

**2. Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? It may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. The same skills can be used in any situation, including the practice of acceptance. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

**3. Mindful of Thoughts.** Over the course of the coming week, try to practice the Mindfulness of Thoughts experience at least 4 times, for at least 5-10 minutes or more per exercise. You can start by focusing on your experience of breathing in order to mindfully connect to the present moment, and then shift your awareness to your thoughts. Observe them with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude. Notice any changes that occur: Do the thoughts become louder or quieter over time? More or less frequent? More or less pleasant/unpleasant?

See if you can use the techniques discussed in class to defuse from your thoughts (see *Thought defusion strategies* handout). Experiment with which techniques feel useful and comfortable for you. Notice what happens when you try using these strategies; what kind of feelings and thoughts come up? What happens to the thought? What kind of thoughts appear in response? You may also try to visualize your thoughts as leaves in a stream, mentally writing down your thought on a leaf and watching it float away.

When you find yourself distracted and dragged along by thoughts or other experiences, simply notice your distraction without judgment, and gently shift your focus back to your thoughts. Be especially aware of any automatic thoughts that seem to push you in the direction of gambling. If you can do so, practice urge surfing over any physical or mental feelings of craving that arise. Try to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

## **Worksheets**

**1. Gambling thoughts and beliefs.** The gambling thoughts and beliefs form allows you to record any thoughts and beliefs you recognize in yourself that influence your gambling. They can include thoughts about probability and randomness (e.g., the gambler's fallacy), about your confidence or skill in gambling, or your ability to recognize and manipulate luck by detecting certain patterns or omens. You can also list any behaviours, objects, or other things you associate with luck or gambling, like a lucky game, lucky day, lucky machine, lucky dealer, lucky website, etc. (or unlucky ones). In the column on the right, you can try to write down your reasoning as to why you think this is an irrational or mistaken thought, belief, or behaviour. Bring your form to our next meeting.

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

## **Readings**

**1. Session 5 Reading 1**

**2. Session 5 Reading 2**

## **Session 6 – Self-Compassion**

### **A. Checking 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 judgment.

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone without judgment, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, returning to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to avoid thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and

going.

And now continuing with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

## C. Homework review

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review the homework assignments from last week. Let's reflect on the mindfulness practice.

### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used urge surfing? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice **being mindful of thoughts**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of thinking?

What was difficult?

What went well?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have been mindful of thoughts? Tell me about that."*

Did you use any of the **cognitive defusion strategies**?

How was that experience?

Which ones worked for you?

Which didn't?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used cognitive defusion strategies? Tell me about that."*

*Link back to discussion of relationship between thoughts, distress, avoidance, and gambling urges. Explore ways in which participants used mindfulness (or other resources) to handle those thoughts, step out of autopilot, respond skillfully. Explore whether participants were able to uncover deeper primary emotions and/or learn about their needs by listening to what their feelings were telling them.*

## D. Session theme: Self-compassion

When we are mindful of thoughts, we discover very early on that the mind is often busy being critical, and a lot of that criticism is directed at ourselves. That critical voice lives inside all of us. One reason it exists is that we learn from an early age what parents and society expect from us, and we internalize those expectations. Another reason is that work, family, relationships, life place a lot of demands on us. That means we are constantly dealing with “shoulds” and “shouldn’ts.” When we don’t live up to all those shoulds and shouldn’ts, we’re often the first to criticize and put ourselves down for it. This tendency to self-judge and criticize is particularly strong in people who struggle with dependency or addictions. These people frequently get stuck in a cycle of trying to quit, eventually slipping up and relapsing, and then berating themselves for what they perceive as a failure. If you recognize yourself in that description, you are probably familiar with this tendency to judge and criticize yourself. Does it ever really accomplish anything? How does it feel?

*Lead discussion about self-critical thoughts and other forms of negative self-directed attitudes and behaviour. Therapist can offer own examples of self-judgment, negative self-talk, etc. How do they make you feel? When do those thoughts tend to arise? Where do you think they come from? What is their purpose? Have you tried to change them? How did that go? Explore relationships between negative self-talk and emotion, behaviour, and gambling.*

Another common experience in struggling with addiction is loneliness. Our struggles can often make us feel isolated and alone. Some of you may know what it’s like to lose friends and relationships due to problems associated with gambling, or to withdraw from other people out of shame or fear of confrontation. However, even people who are surrounded by friends and relatives can still feel painfully alone with their experiences, be they addiction, depression, anxiety, or other issues. A common thought is to feel as though almost everyone you see appears to be doing just fine in life, while you are struggling just to get through the day. Feeling so alone in our suffering can make us feel invisible and disconnected from humanity. What’s more, aside from feeling isolated from other people, our self-criticism and judgment can even alienate us from ourselves. We tend to reject the part of us that gambles because it is unwanted; not who we wish to be; not really us. But that rejection creates a division within the self that is experienced as a painful lack of wholeness. If you’ve ever thought to yourself that you feel “broken,” it may be this internal sense of isolation and separateness which gives rise to that feeling.

*Invite discussion about members’ experiences of these kinds of loneliness. Therapist can lead with some disclosure about own experience. Rather than elaborating on stories about broken relationships and abandonment, focus on what it feels like and the thoughts that go with it. Ask about possible links between negative self-talk and experiences of isolation and loneliness, including the rejection and separation of parts of the self. Explore these themes in the context of problem gambling, including the cycle of abstinence/relapse.*

As you’ve no doubt experienced in your mindfulness practice, the negative self-talk we engage in tends to happen without conscious effort, or even against our will. It’s that automatic pilot again. When we criticize ourselves without awareness, we buy into those thoughts, react to them automatically, and we end up feeling lousy. And when those critical thoughts and painful feelings overwhelm us, we cope in less than skillful ways, such as gambling. This means that self-criticism fits neatly inside the process we’ve previously discussed:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

In this way our negative self-talk actually serves to create more stress and emotional distress. Despite our best intentions to change, it has the opposite effect and actually perpetuates the problem. So instead of relating to ourselves so harshly, how about we explore some ways to cultivate a more gentle and caring relationship with ourselves.

Everyone is familiar with the concept of having compassion for other people. Most humans have a natural tendency to sympathize and empathize with others, especially those we are close to, which is why compassion is seen as an important value across different cultures. Strangely enough, however, most of us don't treat ourselves with the same degree of kindness and care that we extend to other people—as if it's not okay for us to be imperfect and make mistakes. But can we be truly compassionate toward other people if we can't be compassionate with ourselves? Buddhism holds that we cannot find peace in the world unless we have peace within ourselves. That's why self-compassion is an essential part of mindfulness meditation. The fact is that we've actually been practicing self-compassion all along: By practicing nonjudgment and acceptance; by being gentle with ourselves when we get distracted, make mistakes, or find ourselves gambling again; and by tending to our experiences in the here and now with a curious and open-minded attitude. So what else can we do to cultivate self-compassion?

Kirstin Neff is an American psychologist who specializes in the study and practice of self-compassion. Through her research she has found that self-compassion is a vital component of mental health and consists of three parts: Self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. Let's look at each of these individually. About self-kindness she writes:

*Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or [punishing] ourselves with self-criticism. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable, so they tend to be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences rather than getting angry when life falls short of set ideals. People cannot always be or get exactly what they want. When this reality is denied or fought against, suffering increases in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism. When this reality is accepted with sympathy and kindness, greater emotional equanimity is experienced.*  
(self-compassion.org)

For some of you, this may seem like a very different way of relating to yourself than you are accustomed to. In fact, some of you may even notice certain thoughts arising in protest: But how can I improve myself if I just accept my shortcomings instead of pointing them out? How can I motivate myself to change if my attitude is, “oh well, you made a mistake, that's okay”? These are normal reactions—especially if you were raised to believe that punishment is an effective way to learn. But think about, for example, how children respond to judgment and harsh discipline. Kids have a deep desire to be accepted, understood, nurtured, and encouraged. They usually do not react positively to criticism and punishment; even though in some cases it can force them to behave, it can also make them feel pretty awful—guilty, ashamed, powerless, and afraid. And being told not to feel that way teaches them to ignore their emotions. At the same time, it's important to recognize that parents usually have the best intentions, and they are only human themselves.

Now imagine, if you will, that we all carry an inner child inside of us; a part of us that is vulnerable, has a need to be loved and cared for, and is still learning how to live life, with all the mistakes and imperfections that involves. Then imagine that we also carry an inner parent inside of us. What kind

of relationship exists between your inner parent and your inner child? Is it one that criticizes, disciplines, punishes, and neglects? Or is it one that offers protection, guidance, and support through love, caring, and encouragement? A bit of both, perhaps? If this way of relating to yourself makes sense, then you can try experimenting with becoming more aware of your inner parent and child. Applying your mindfulness skills to relate to yourself in a more compassionate way. Recognizing the needs of your inner child, but also acknowledging that even that your inner parent or inner critic deserves compassion and can be nurtured and loved, helping it to reframe its criticisms in more gentle and skillful ways. How do you think this form of self-kindness might affect your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours?

*Therapist invites discussion about the “self-kindness” aspect of self-compassion and how it relates to problem gambling. Mindfully explore misunderstandings and possible resistance, being sure to validate and normalize any experiences and opinions offered. Explore whether or not the idea of inner parent/inner child resonates with the group, how it may be useful as a strategy for coping with distress and gambling cravings in a compassionate way.*

The second aspect of self-compassion identified in Kirstin Neff’s research is a common sense of humanity. She writes:

*Frustration at not having things exactly as we want is often accompanied by an irrational but pervasive sense of isolation – as if “I” were the only person suffering or making mistakes. All humans suffer, however. The very definition of being “human” means that one is mortal, vulnerable and imperfect. Therefore, self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience – something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to “me” alone.*  
(self-compassion.org)

You may have various reactions to the idea that you are not alone in your suffering, and that recognizing this can help you feel less isolated and lonely. One reaction might be that no one could possibly understand how much you are suffering—especially if no one else in your life is dealing with the same problems you are. And please don’t get this wrong: Nobody is saying that your suffering isn’t real or valid. In fact, it’s quite the opposite: Everyone in this group is here because they are suffering in some way or another. For some of you this might be the first time you’ve had a chance to meet other people with similar experiences. Hopefully, being able to share your stories and feelings has allowed you to see that, in fact, you are not alone. That being said, your suffering is not only shared with other people with gambling problems; it’s shared by all of humanity. Whether it’s addiction, mental illness, relationship problems, trouble at work, trauma and abuse, poverty or war—suffering is common to all human beings. Even the people we think of as happy and successful, who seem to have it all, may be suffering behind closed doors.

At this point you may be noticing another kind of reaction in your thoughts: But our suffering pales in comparison to people who have it much worse! Who am I to feel sorry for myself when others are suffering from war, starvation, etc.? This is a valid question, and it may even be helpful to recognize that from time to time, just to take a different perspective that allows us to remember that not everything is hopeless; that there are things in life to be grateful for and look forward to. However, does this mean we don’t have a right to feel bad? Not at all. Again, it’s quite the opposite: Every person’s suffering is real to them, no matter how small or large, and to deny that reality would be to deny one’s humanity. Having the courage to truly look at that suffering and to own it is what self-compassion and mindfulness are all about. Not denying or running away from painful experiences, but allowing them to exist, responding to them gently with loving-kindness, and



recognizing that they are part and parcel of what it means to be human. Reminding yourself that you are not alone; that, in fact, your painful experiences connect you to the rest of humanity. Any questions or comments about the relationship of self-compassion to loneliness and suffering? How do you see this being relevant to your gambling behaviour, or not?

*Therapist invites discussion about the “common humanity” aspect of self-compassion and how it relates to problem gambling. Mindfully explore misunderstandings and resistance, being sure to validate and normalize any experiences and opinions offered. What does it mean to participants that they are not alone? How could this knowledge serve as a source of resilience and self-compassion?*

Kristin Neff identifies a third component of self-compassion, namely, mindfulness:

*Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. This equilibrated stance stems from the process of relating personal experiences to those of others who are also suffering, thus putting our own situation into a larger perspective. It also stems from the willingness to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental, receptive mind state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. At the same time, mindfulness requires that we not be “over-identified” with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.*  
(self-compassion.org)

At this point there may appear to be a contradiction in terms. Neff says mindfulness is part of self-compassion, while all along we’ve been saying that self-compassion is part of mindfulness. So which is it? The truth is that these two concepts are so closely related that distinguishing them really just boils down to semantics. They are two sides of the same coin. The relationship between self-compassion and mindfulness is captured by this key sentence in Neff’s description: “We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time.” In order to practice self-compassion, you need to pay attention with purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment. This will allow you to become aware of your painful emotions and distressing thoughts, so that you can respond to them with self-compassion. Compassion and empathy for oneself are not the same as feeling sorry for oneself. Compassion and empathy provide support through acknowledgement, whereas feeling sorry for oneself focuses on the injustice of our situation. Whereas compassion and empathy can strengthen and promote our inherent self-worth, feeling sorry for oneself may actually intensify our sense of victimization, and paradoxically, our righteous sense of being special in our suffering. In short, compassion and empathy encourage us to connect with humanity whereas feeling sorry for oneself may undermine this sense of common imperfect happiness.



*Illustration: Mindfulness allows us to become aware of our negative self-talk*

There is something that often happens when people first practice becoming mindful of their self-judgment: They respond to their self-criticism with more criticism! “Oh, I shouldn’t be critical of myself, that’s wrong.” And then: “I shouldn’t be critical of my being critical.” And perhaps again: “I shouldn’t be critical of my being critical of my being critical,” and so on and so forth. People can easily get caught in this repeating loop of judging judgment, and when they realize what they’ve been doing, they sometimes burst into laughter. How might you use mindfulness and self-compassion to skillfully respond to those cycles? What other cycles of judgment can you identify in your life?

*Therapist leads discussion the role of mindfulness in self-compassion. How to skillfully negotiate those mental loops of judging judgment? Try to link the discussion back to experiences of self-judgment, guilt, and shame after gambling, as well as more general self-criticism about their progress in changing their gambling behaviours. Also explore how self-compassion is relevant to the mindfulness training itself, if participants have a tendency to judge their (lack of) perceived progress in developing skills.*

Now that we have a good understanding of what it means to be self-compassionate and how that might be useful in the context of problem gambling, I’d like to introduce you to a meditation exercise designed to elicit self-compassion.

## E. Mindfulness exercise: Cultivating self-compassion

### Instructions

In this exercise, we will focus on visualizing a compassionate image and connecting it to our experiences.

### Guided meditation

Begin by taking a posture that allows you to feel a sense of being firmly rooted and alert. We are cultivating a specific quality of mind that includes focused intention and commitment.

Taking a posture of gentle uprightness and dignity will help you cultivate this quality of mind. If it feels comfortable allow the eyes to close or simply choose a spot on the floor to focus the gaze on.

Begin by simply noticing how it feels to breathe in and to breathe out. Perhaps a gentle expansion as you breathe in, and releasing or dissolving as you breathe out. Perhaps a sense of spaciousness as you breathe in, and a sense of grounding or rootedness as you breathe out.

The first step in cultivating a compassionate image is to connect to the feeling in your own body and breath. For example, a felt quality of compassion might be spaciousness or expansiveness, that is, the ability to hold what is already happening. You might notice this quality is already present in your breath. Take a few breaths and see if you can connect to that physical feeling of space, the expansion as you inhale and dissolving as you exhale.

Another felt quality of compassion is that of being centered or grounded and rooted. See if you can feel that quality, perhaps in your feet connected to the earth, and your seat connected to the chair. Perhaps you feel the centered balance of the spine as it lengthens up out of the pelvis, perhaps a physical, visceral feeling of being grounded and centered.

Another felt quality of compassion is that of warmth, or perhaps of energy or action. And you can feel this in your own heartbeat. Perhaps you can sense your own heartbeat or your own pulse. Feel free to take your hand to your heart or your wrist where you can feel that action and warmth of your own heart or pulse. And if you don't feel anything in particular, then that's fine too.

And letting your hands rest back down again, and allowing yourself to experience a felt quality of compassion in your whole body and breath.

Now, bring to mind someone who represents for you a supremely compassionate being. This could be a person you know now or knew in the past. It could be a religious figure or even an animal. This person or being would have the qualities of caring, acceptance, wisdom and strength. You do not need to worry about choosing the perfect person or being for this image, just accept that whoever or whatever comes to mind for now is good enough for this exercise.

As you picture this being, notice what it feels like to be in their presence. Now, imagine that you too, in the presence of this compassionate being could embody these qualities of compassion: of strength, wisdom, caring and acceptance. Imagine and feel yourself as a compassionate being with these qualities. Now imagine that you could breathe in and out through the heart area or the centre of the chest, picturing or sensing a warm glowing light at the centre of the chest as you experience

any feelings of caring, acceptance, warmth and strength.

And with this feeling of being anchored by your breath, bring to mind some situation in your life where you were worried, or stressed or unhappy. It could be in the past or the present. It might be a situation where there was conflict, disappointment, or illness. It might be a situation where you did not succeed at something you really wanted or felt put down by someone you know. Choose a specific memory, and notice how you feel about yourself when you think about such an experience.

How does your heart feel?

Do you feel self pity, and small?

Do any self critical judgments arise in your mind making you feel or believe at some level that you're no good?

That you deserved what you experienced or that there is something wrong with you?

Let your normal habitual responses arise to this scenario, how you might ordinarily talk to yourself and feel about this scenario.

And now contemplate a different way of relating to yourself in the face of difficulty and suffering.

Recognize that you can respond with compassion, with a sense of nonjudgmental concern, tenderness, and without the urge to do something about it.

Now refresh your feeling of being in the presence of your compassionate image and embodying the qualities of compassion. Imagine what it would be like to relate to your own suffering with warmth, acceptance, wisdom, caring and strength. Notice again any sensations you might feel around your heart area or the centre of the chest.

Imagine again that you could inhale and exhale through the centre of the chest. And as you breathe in, imagine warm light coming from your compassionate image. Imagine as you breathe in that this warmth and light can transform the constriction and tension of your suffering.

Imagine as you exhale there is a sense of releasing and letting go. And silently say to yourself:

May I be free from suffering.  
May I be free from pain and sorrow  
May I know peace and joy

Breathing in warmth and light. Breathing out, releasing, and letting go. Repeating silently again to yourself:

May I be free from suffering  
May I be free from pain and sorrow  
May I know peace and joy.

Notice what it is like to offer yourself these wishes. If there is any difficulty, saying silently to that part of yourself that resists:

May that which resists compassion in me be free from suffering  
May that which resists compassion in me be free from pain and sorrow  
May that which resists compassion in me know peace and joy.

Now bring your awareness back to the simple sensations of breathing in and out, of your posture here in the chair, the sensations of making contact with the ground and the chair. In your mind's eye begin to visualize the room and space around you. Acknowledge your willingness to participate in this practice and to be present for any feelings that arose.

And getting ready to open your eyes, with a refreshed sense of presence, at the sound of the bell.

### **Inquiry**

What was that like?  
What did you notice?  
How was this different from your normal way of relating to yourself?  
What was difficult?  
What went well?  
Other observations?

## **F. Session theme (cont'd): Self-care**

I'd like to briefly take a moment to highlight another form of self-compassion: Taking care of yourself. Looking after your physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. Making sure that you are well-fed, well-rested, connecting with other people, and able to express and cope with your emotions. All these things are part of taking care of yourself. This is also an important part of moving away from gambling and toward your preferred values. A useful acronym for monitoring your own needs is H.A.L.T.:

**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?

For people who have a relationship with spirituality or religion, we could add the question: Are your spiritual needs being taken care of? Being hungry, angry, lonely, tired, and out of touch with your spirituality makes you more vulnerable to triggers. You can practice being mindful of your mind, body, and spirit in order to recognize when any of these need attention.

## **G. Session 6 Homework**

### **Mindfulness practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### **1. Everyday Mindfulness.**

**2. Urge surfing.** If you notice yourself experiencing the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards.

**3. Mindful Self-compassion.** Over the course of the next week, try to practice the Self-Compassion experience at least 4 times, for at least 10-15 minutes. You can start by focusing on your experience of breathing in order to mindfully connect to the present moment, and then shift your awareness to other aspects of your experience. As you begin to form a compassionate image within your mind, observe your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude. Practice viewing any painful emotions and/or critical thoughts with self-compassion; with tenderness, empathy, forgiveness, and encouragement. If you get distracted, get stuck in a loop of judgment, or find it challenging to treat yourself with compassion, then try focusing on the breath again to ground yourself in the present moment. Then gently open up your awareness to observe whatever experiences come up. Try to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring it with you to our next session. *If you don't feel comfortable with the exercise included, you may visit [www.self-compassion.org/category/exercises](http://www.self-compassion.org/category/exercises) to find free mp3s with guided self-compassion meditations created by Kristin Neff. Keep track of which exercises you practice in your mindfulness log.*

## **Worksheets**

**1. Compassionate letter to myself.** For next week you are invited to write yourself a compassionate letter. In this exercise you will imagine a good friend who perfectly embodies the quality of compassion, and write yourself a letter from the perspective of this imaginary friend, focusing on your problem gambling. Refer to the detailed instructions on the handout.

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

## **Readings**

**1. Session 6 Readings 1 & 2**

## **Session 7 – Being A.W.A.K.E.**

### **A. Checking in**

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

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. You may find it helpful to label your breath cycles as “Rising” and “Falling,” “Rising,” “Falling,” or a similar descriptive label that’s easy to follow with your inner voice. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, returning to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to avoid thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and

going.

And now continue with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

## C. Homework review

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review the homework assignments from last week. Let's reflect on the mindfulness practice.

### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used Urge Surfing? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice **mindful self-compassion**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of relating to yourself?

What was difficult?

What went well?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used Mindful Self-Compassion? Tell me about that."*

*Link back to discussion of relationship between thoughts, distress, avoidance, and gambling urges. Explore ways in which participants practiced self-compassion for skillful responding to triggers and negative self-talk.*

### **Compassionate Letter to Yourself**

Last week's assignment was to write yourself a compassionate letter. Were you able to do this?

What was the experience like? How mindful were you while writing the letter? Was it easy or difficult to find a compassionate place in yourself from which to write? What were some examples of self-kindness in your letter? Of common humanity? Of mindfulness? What did it feel like writing this? What did it feel like reading it afterward? Could you see yourself being so kind to yourself in regular life?



## D. Session theme: Review & Becoming A.W.A.K.E.

Today I'd like to start off by reviewing our progress so far. In the six meetings we've had to date, we have covered a lot of different aspects of mindfulness. We began with a general introduction to the concept of the automatic pilot, learning that many of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours happen without being fully aware of them. We then discussed the role of avoidance; how the autopilot tends to activate during experiences we prefer not to deal with. We explored how the practice of mindful acceptance, instead of avoidance, can help us tolerate those challenging experiences and prevent the autopilot from leading us into problematic situations and behaviour. We learned about urge surfing, which allows us to ride out cravings by mindfully observing and accepting our experiences in the here and now. After that we explored some specific external situations, such as relationship issues, work stress, and family tensions, that are linked to emotions which tend to trigger the urge to gamble. We practiced being mindful during those situations in order to monitor our feelings and gambling cravings. In the next session we took a closer look at emotions, stress, and memories, identifying which experiences are most likely to trigger avoidance, automatic behaviour, and gambling urges. This allowed us to discern one of the main patterns underlying the gambling addiction cycle:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

We recognized that positive events and emotions can also lead us toward gambling. In the next session we discussed our relationship to thoughts; how mindfulness and other cognitive defusion skills allow us to create distance from unhelpful thoughts, so that we don't need to buy into them and react with emotions and behaviours that don't really work for us. We also explored some specific thoughts involved in gambling, such as distorted beliefs about probability, luck, skill, and chance, and discussed ways to mindfully recognize such thoughts in order to lessen their influence on our behaviour. Finally, last week we focused on the vital concept of self-compassion; how self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, mindfulness, and self-care can support our well-being and help us skillfully respond to those cycles of gambling, self-criticism, and guilt or shame. All along we've been applying these concepts by practicing mindfulness at our meetings and at home, including our ongoing practice of Everyday Mindfulness and Urge Surfing, along with various written exercises and mindfulness logs to keep track of our progress.

At this point I'd like to touch base with the group to find out where everyone is at. Are there any concepts or techniques that you are finding challenging? Are there any that don't seem to work for you? Others that you've found especially helpful or insightful? Are there specific areas of your life, emotions, thoughts, memories, that you find difficult to integrate with mindfulness practice? Others that have been successful? How do you feel about your progress in this group? How do you feel about the results of the training so far? Let's take a moment to mindfully reflect on the past six weeks, to check in with ourselves about how things have been going.

*Therapist allows some time for group members to reflect on their progress and results, followed by a discussion. Mindfully explore any issues that require attention in the group; questions and doubts to be clarified; feelings and concerns to be addressed; barriers to be acknowledged and mindfully problem-solved, if possible; intragroup differences to be resolved; any other issues to be aware of.*

Now that we have reviewed our progress to date and explored any lingering issues, I'd like to point out something all these concepts and skills have in common: They create room for skillful responding. Rather than going down the road of the automatic pilot, being mindful allows us to take a step back and consider other possible actions to take. So when we become aware of our habitual

ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving while they're happening, we gain the freedom to choose how we want to respond in a given situation. For example, we can choose to just observe, letting those experiences and impulses rise and fall like a wave, or drift past like a leaf on a river. If some kind of action is required, then we can choose not to react automatically, but select from a range of possible behaviours that might be more skillful and better suited to the situation. In contrast, we can also choose to surrender to whatever thought, feeling, behaviour, or urge presents itself—if it feels too overwhelming, perhaps—but even then we can do so mindfully; as a conscious choice rather than an automatic reaction. Although hopefully being mindful will allow you to negotiate those challenging moments in a more skillful way. In any case, what all these choices have in common is that they are chosen from a place of awareness. Instead of sleepwalking through triggering situations in automatic pilot mode, we are fully awake.

### DENNIS THE MENACE



*Illustration: Being consciously present in the here-and-now allows us to reflect before we act.*

This brings me to an acronym which you might find useful. One of the biggest challenges in learning mindfulness skills is to remember to actually use them when it matters. Although frequent and persistent practice is really the most important in that regard, acronyms and other mnemonics can serve as helpful reminders of what mindfulness's all about. And it's all about being awake. A. W. A. K. E., awake:

*Therapist writes down A.W.A.K.E. vertically on the flipchart. Fill in the the associated words and*

*phrases as you progress down the page.*

**“Alert** to triggers and cravings.”

This is the most important step, because without it, the other steps probably won't happen. If you don't recognize a trigger or craving in the moment, then that moment might be lost to mindlessness. This is why we spent the first half of this training exploring and identifying your personal triggers; those high-risk internal and external situations and the gambling thoughts and urges that are linked to them. So if you know which experiences tend to trigger your urge to gamble, you can be alert to those moments in your day-to-day life. When you recognize a triggering situation or a craving, you can tell yourself, “Wake up!” This is a moment to be AWAKE!

**“Watchful** of the present moment (*breath and body, thoughts and feelings, urges*)”

Once you've noticed a trigger or craving, or any other experience, happening in the moment, you can choose to be mindful. Just watch the present moment as it unfolds in your awareness. If it helps, start by focusing on the breath to ground yourself in the here and now. Then mindfully, with openness and curiosity, observe your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations as they present themselves. Watch that automatic pilot try to do its thing. If you're experiencing thoughts or feelings related to gambling, practice defusing from those thoughts—taking some distance from them to let them pass by without reacting. This can be accomplished by adopting the role of observer rather than actor or reactor.

**“Accepting** of your experience”

Acceptance means nonjudgment. Taking a gentle and somewhat detached stance toward your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations. Surfing the urge involves being aware of and accepting the natural rhythm of cravings and all other experiences; how they wax and wane, rise and fall, appear and disappear. If you lose your focus, fall into automatic pilot, or give into the urge, then simply take note; no need to judge yourself or your experiences.

**“Kind** to yourself”

Mindfulness entails self-acceptance and self-compassion. This means treating yourself with the same tender care as you would a good friend. Recognizing that challenges and painful experiences are common to all humankind. Being mindful of your pain so you can tend to it, instead of hiding from it. Nurturing your inner child and softening your inner parent to replace self-criticism with self-kindness. Attending to the basic needs of your mind, body, and soul, to keep you strong, creative, and aware.

**“Expanding** your options”

Being awake and mindful puts you in the driver's seat, instead of the automatic pilot. Observing your thoughts, feelings, and actions with acceptance and self-compassion in the here and now creates possibilities; a broader perspective from which alternative choices can be seen and made. When faced with a choice, become aware of your values and preferred directions; you can mindfully choose not to react, or to respond with skillful behaviour in line with your values. Excessive or compulsive behavior – including gambling - really represents a narrowing or perceived narrowing of our range of responses to a given thought, feeling or event. Mindfulness can

restore flexibility by encouraging and assisting us to expand our range of response options in a given situation.

*Therapist invites feedback on the A.W.A.K.E. model. Do participants think this might be useful? What kind of barriers prevent them from being mindful in triggering situations? How might they remember to become AWAKE? What other strategies can they think of to remember their skills and overcome barriers to practice?*

## D. Exercise: Mindful imaginal exposure

### Instructions

We have discussed ways to stay mindful in challenging situations, and how that lets us expand our options for skillfully responding. Now I'd like to introduce an exercise that will allow you to practice this. We are going to mindfully imagine ourselves in a triggering situation and visualize a skillful response. Please take out your completed homework assignments from sessions 3 and 4, with your list of top three internal and external triggers.

*If participants have forgotten their sheets or not filled them out, refer to the flipchart pages from those sessions and try to match internal and external triggers with participants, or work with them to recall/identify triggers.*

We would like to perform this exercise with something that is relevant to your daily life, but we don't want you to be overwhelmed by painful feelings or thoughts. Identify which external situation and internal experience on your top three list are the least troubling to you. Decide whether they feel safe enough to visualize in this mindfulness exercise. If all of the items on your list seem like they might be too challenging to bring into this space, then think about some other possible triggers you identified in previous sessions. If you rate your triggers on a scale from 1 to 5 in terms of their emotional intensity, you probably want to be around a 3 for this exercise.

Now that you have identified an internal and external trigger for this exercise, ask yourself whether these two might be somehow connected. For example, does the external situation frequently result in the emotional experience or stress of the internal situation? Let's say your triggers were "fighting with partner" and "feeling sad." These might be related experiences, where one follows another. However, if your internal and external situations aren't connected in this way, see if there are other triggers you can identify that are somehow related. Maybe one is "bad day at work" and the other is "feeling stressed." But if you can't find a connection between your two lists, that's okay. Just identify an external trigger you feel comfortable using for this exercise, and we'll take it from there.

In this exercise we will be using the breath as an anchor to keep us grounded in the here and now. Because you'll be visualizing your most triggering experiences and emotions, the exercise may create some discomfort. If you notice yourself getting upset, you can shift your attention back to the breath and focus your awareness on the here and now. There is no obligation to remain focused on the trigger to the point of acute distress. Self-compassion means being supportive in the face of unpleasant experiences but not coercive.

If and when you're ready, you can bring your attention back to the exercise. However, if you feel overwhelmed by your experience, you can take a break from the exercise. In that case you can just

open your eyes, perhaps do some light stretching. And maybe join the exercise later on if you feel ready.

### **Guided meditation**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body, rising and falling, rising and falling.

At the same time, become aware of the sensation of your body resting in your seat. The contact between your body, your clothes, and the chair. And also the feeling in the bottom of your feet. Noticing the weight of your feet on the floor. Just sensing your immediate physical presence in the here and now.

Now bring to mind the external situation from your list. Imagine where you are. What is the space? What time of day is it? Who is there with you? Include as many details of the situation as necessary to bring it to life in your mind's eye. Take a few moments to fully picture yourself within that situation.

As you imagine yourself in this situation, what are you thinking? Notice which kinds of thoughts are rising to the surface. Are they thoughts related to the situation itself? A memory or image perhaps? Or are they thoughts about this present moment, in the here and now? Is there judgment happening, toward other people or yourself?

Whatever it is you're thinking, see if you can just notice your thoughts. Without losing yourself in their stories... just watching them appear and disappear. Not judging them, just accepting and letting them be. They're only thoughts.

If you notice yourself getting caught up in your thinking, then compliment yourself for recognizing that. Maybe thank your mind for the thoughts. And then turn your awareness back to the here and now, spending a few moments connecting to your breath if that helps.

And then shift your awareness back to the image of the situation. As you focus on what it's like to be in that situation, become aware of which bodily sensations are associated with what's happening. Any physical feelings that stand out? Notice those sensations in your body with a sense of curiosity and openness. Without judging them as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. Just letting them be there, and seeing what happens.

If you get distracted, then gently turn back to the breath. Focusing on the sensation of breathing, in and out, as the air moves through your nose, down your throat, into your chest and belly, and back up again.

And then turning your awareness back to the imagined situation. Picturing yourself in those

challenging circumstances.

Now focus your awareness inward. Begin to mindfully observe your mood. What kind of feelings do you notice? Is there one predominant emotion happening? More than one? Does it change? See if you can identify the emotion; give it a name. Is the emotion connected to any sensations in your body? To a certain thought or memory?

See if you can hold the image of the situation in your mind and focus on your feelings in the present moment. Explore those feelings with an open and curious attitude. Allowing them to be there. Accepting their presence. It's what you're experiencing in this moment. If it's not the emotion you had on your list, that's okay. The point is to become aware of what's happening inside you right now.

And every time you lose focus, concentrating on your breath to bring it back. And the same if your feelings are too strong or too scary. Take a step back from those experiences; reorient yourself toward the breath, and notice the sensation of your body sitting in the chair. Perhaps even opening your eyes if you need to, doing whatever feels right. Gently acknowledge your limits with self-compassion. Doing so in a mindful, accepting way. No one is judging you. There's no need for that.

*---Briefly check in with the group. If the exercise is challenging for some, take a 3-5 minute break before continuing.---*

Imagining yourself in this triggering situation, can you notice any urge to react in a particular way? Are there any thoughts of escaping the situation? Or confronting it head on, or confronting a specific person? What sort of habitual reactions come to mind? Do you notice any thoughts about gambling?

Still focusing on how your situation makes you feel—the experience of being triggered—become aware of your values. Of your ideals. Of your self-compassion. Of your wisdom and strength. How would you like to see yourself in this situation? What kind of skills would you like to be able to apply in this situation?

If you notice yourself getting distracted, this would be a great time to return your awareness to your breath. Becoming aware, once again, of the sensation of breathing. Following the movements of your body as you breathe. Finding your way back to the here and now. And then gently shifting your attention back to an awareness of your values in the imagined situation.

As you reflect on your values, hopes, and dreams, take another look at the situation, but this time look at it through the lens of your values. At whatever circumstances and people are there, and at whatever emotions, stress, or urges you're experiencing. Still mindful of your values, what kind of thoughts and images come up? Can you imagine yourself responding to the situation in a skillful way?

Identify which way of responding feels the most skillful and the most in line with your values. Whether it involves doing something or not doing something, visualize yourself responding to the situation in that way. What does it feel like? What kind of thoughts come up? Spend a few moments becoming aware of the experience. Observing whatever thoughts and feelings present themselves in the process. Allowing them to come and go with an accepting, nonjudging stance. Checking in with your breathing to bring yourself back into the present if needed.

Now visualize the outcome of your skillful response. Imagine what would happen if you responded this way. What direction would the situation take? If other people are involved, how might they

react? How would this make you feel? Be mindful of the thoughts and emotions that come up in your awareness. Noticing each one as it appears. Not judging it. Just noticing. Being aware of how you would experience the fruits of your response as you imagine it now.

We are getting ready to finish the exercise. At this time I'd like you to gently turn your awareness back to the breath. Spend a few moments following the movement of the breath in your body, following the rise and fall of your belly.

Then noticing the sensation of your body resting on your seat. The contact between body and chair. And the weight of your feet on the ground. Gradually becoming more aware of your presence in this physical space.

In a moment you will hear the bell. When ready, you may gently open your eyes. Taking a few moments to mindfully take in your surroundings. Being fully present in the here and now. Try to bring this of mindfulness with you into the discussion coming up.

## **Inquiry**

*Therapist leads discussion about this experience, looking both at the content of participants' experiences as well as their awareness. Invite critical feedback, inquiring with curiosity about why the exercise may not have worked for some; how it might have gone differently; etc. Explore whether participants think this was a useful exercise. Whether it might reflect real life situations. Whether they might be able to practice mindfulness in such situations, or why not. And really exploring to what extent participants became aware of alternative ways of responding.*

What was this experience like?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Did you become aware of other ways of responding to the situation, different from what you might normally do?

Were you able to identify a skillful response?

What kind of outcome did you imagine happening?

What was that like?

Other observations?

This exercise can be especially difficult because it asks us to directly attend to our triggers without resorting to our default response of gambling. You should all congratulate yourselves for getting through this. If you are still experiencing feelings, thoughts or sensations of wanting to gamble, recognize that this is normal and that this is the perfect place to discuss them, if you wish to. You are also welcome to stay after the session, if necessary, to work through persistent feelings or urges until you feel you are back to equilibrium.

## **Three Best Things exercise**

In order to move away from heavy feelings and possible distress brought up by the previous exercise, have group members team up in pairs and tell each other the three best things that happened to them today or over the past week. Take turns describing each best thing, and invite group members to explore why each good thing happened.

## E. Session 7 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

1. **Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, eating a meal, doing the dishes, showering, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Consider experimenting with the AWAKE model to see if it's helpful for you. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log.

2. **Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without trying to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Considering using the A.W.A.K.E. model to recognize and mindfully negotiate your cravings. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

3. **Becoming A.W.A.K.E.** Over the course of the coming week, practice becoming and staying AWAKE in various situations. The emphasis should be on situations that may be triggering, especially those you listed in your top three. See if you can keep an awareness of those triggers in mind throughout the week, so that you can be Alert to triggers and cravings as they happen in the moment. Then practice Watching your experience, Accepting what comes up, being Kind to yourself, and mindfully Expanding your options for responding. You may also apply the AWAKE strategy to other situations just to practice. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

### Worksheet

1. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)** (see **Appendix II and III**). Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

1. **Session 7 readings**

### Optional

1. **Three Quick Mindfulness Practices to Overcome Worry, Anxiety, and Panic.** These are three short and simple mindfulness exercises you can try at home or on the go.



## **Session 8 – Loving-Kindness**

### **A. Checking 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 judgment.

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. Rising and falling, rising and falling. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, returning to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to get away from thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and going.

And now continuing with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

## C. Homework review

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review the homework assignments from last week. Let's reflect on the mindfulness practice.

### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used Urge Surfing? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice the **A.W.A.K.E.** strategy?

What was that like?

Was it useful or not?

More generally, what were people's experiences of mindfully responding to triggers?

Were you able to be alert and recognize triggers?

Were you able to watch your experiences in the present moment? With acceptance and kindness?

Did you become aware of different possibilities for responding to the situation?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal way of responding?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used the AWAKE strategy? Tell me about that."*

*Two factors can be emphasized in this discussion: Recognizing triggers in the moment and being mindful of a range of optional responses (including not reacting). How to recognize triggers? What are barriers to mindfulness when recognizing triggers? How to become aware of skillful ways to respond? How to know what it is skillful? Etc.*

## D. Session theme: Loving-kindness

In a previous session we discussed and practiced the concept of self-compassion; how being kind to yourself, finding a sense of common humanity in your suffering, and being mindful nurtures and enhances your well-being. Today's session will explore the possibility of extending those attitudes

and practices to other people. Research in psychology has found that feeling and practicing compassion towards others actually tends to make us feel good, and it may have all sorts of benefits for our health and relationships. But before we delve into this topic, I'd like to ask the group: Have you noticed any changes in how you see and behave around other people since beginning this training? Has practicing mindfulness had any effect on your personal relationships or how you view other people in general?

*Therapist leads discussion about interpersonal functioning. Has your mindfulness practice allowed you to learn about your own ways of seeing and interacting with other people? About other people's behaviour? If so, how? Have acceptance and nonjudgment played a role? Have you become aware of things you'd like to do differently? What was that like? Have you experienced any other changes in your thinking and feeling about other people? Your behaviour with others? Any other things you noticed?*

When we become mindful of our interactions with other people, we usually notice that there's often a lot of judgment happening. Much of it tends to happen outside of our awareness; automatic reactions that occur when people don't act the way we want or need them to. Sometimes our responses are justified; after all, people are imperfect beings. But careful reflection can show that much of the judging and criticism we engage in, whether in our heads or in real life, is probably unnecessary and unjustified. Moreover, judging others can make us feel bad—especially if we set ourselves up as victims. Being in the victim role does not feel good.

Instead of reacting automatically or feeling like a victim, perceiving and treating other people with compassion can help us feel stronger, more resilient, and more empowered. Take the example of getting cut off in traffic. There are various ways to interpret this. One is to think that the person cutting you off is a bad driver or a jerk, getting angry, and feeling like you ought to be treated with more respect and consideration. Another possibility is that the person is having a bad day, feels stressed, and got distracted, and so their behaviour has nothing to do with you personally. In the first scenario, the reaction is to judge, which makes you feel frustrated and victimized. In the second scenario, the reaction is not to judge; you may still feel angry about what happened (after all, cutting off can be dangerous and annoying), but this won't make you feel victimized. In this case you interpret the other person's behaviour within the context of their experience, instead of your own. Which is a form of empathy.

You could even take this approach a step further by, for instance, forgiving the person who cut you off. Perhaps even wishing them a better day so they don't feel so stressed out and get distracted in traffic. In this scenario, instead of judging and feeling bad, you are actually injecting positivity into the world and tapping into your inner strength and compassion. So here we have a specific illustration of the beneficial effects of mindfulness on your interpersonal functioning: It shows that observing your judgment of other people can lead you toward a positive action. Similarly, being kind toward yourself can also prompt you to be kind to others.

Buddhists refer to this compassionate attitude toward other people as *loving-kindness*. For many Buddhists, loving-kindness is at the core of their spiritual practice, and many meditations are designed to cultivate loving-kindness. Similar to compassion, it involves recognizing that all living beings suffer and wishing to ease their suffering. Although the terms are related, loving-kindness involves a somewhat more active stance than compassion; one might say that loving-kindness means acting on one's compassion. Similar concepts and values can be found in most religions, and many recognize the beneficial effects of loving-kindness not only on other people and the world, but on oneself. In addition, much scientific research has been done to investigate the benefits of loving-

kindness. These include:

- Increasing positive emotions and decreasing negative emotions and stress
- Decreasing pain, migraines, and psychological symptoms of trauma
- Strengthening empathy and emotional intelligence
- Improving relationships and social connectedness
- And even slowing down the aging process

In the West, the most common explanation for what loving-kindness actually is, is caring for the well-being of another living being, independent of approving or disapproving of them, or expecting anything in return. In other words, you don't need to like someone or approve of their actions in order to show them loving-kindness. When someone cuts you off in traffic, it is possible to disapprove of their behaviour while still showing them compassion.. It starts with the assumption that everyone is deserving of kindness including people that we don't like. In fact, people who have received kindness are usually happier, so there is the potential to transform unlikable people by practicing loving-kindness. Note that practicing loving-kindness towards another does not mean we endorse or encourage behaviors that are harmful to us or to others. Rather, it means that we focus on considering the person without judgment and offering him or her goodwill.

I would like to know your thoughts about this concept of loving-kindness. But before we start a discussion, it might be helpful to practice a loving-kindness meditation to get a feel for what this concept entails.

## E. Mindfulness exercise: Loving-kindness exercise

### **Instructions**

In this exercise we'll begin by becoming mindful of our experience in the present moment. Then I will introduce a phrase or mantra that embodies loving-kindness, which we will practice repeating with different people in mind. You may participate or not participate in any way you feel comfortable with.

### **Guided meditation**

Start by getting into a comfortable position and allowing your eyes to close gently. And becoming aware of the body and mind and whatever is being carried within—perhaps feelings or thoughts from the day's events or whatever has been going on within you recently.

Simply allowing and acknowledging whatever is within and letting it be without evaluation, judgement or any form of analysis.

Gradually, shift the focus of awareness to the breath, breathing normally and naturally. As you breathe in, be aware of breathing in, and as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out. Just being aware of breathing.

Now bring awareness into your chest and heart area, feeling any sensations within. Allowing sensations to go wherever they need to go.

Now gently bring awareness to your beating heart and reflect upon how fragile and precious life is. The heart is the gateway into deeper compassion and love for yourself and for all beings. All of us live with certain realities that cannot be escaped. From the moment we were born we began the irreversible process of aging and subsequent illness, separation and death. These are powerful reflections to meditate upon, for they open the heart to what is important.

Now feeling into your own precious life with compassion and kindness, recognizing and accepting the imperfectly perfect being that you are. And silently repeating to yourself the following three phrases, letting them sink into your being:

*May I be safe. May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace.*

Next, bringing to mind someone you care about, a friend, family member, or other loved one, perhaps even a beloved pet. With a vivid picture in mind, repeating to yourself:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Now bringing to mind someone who is going through a difficult time; is perhaps ill or struggling with another problem. Expanding the field of loving-kindness to this person by repeating to yourself:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Next, bringing to mind a neutral person, perhaps an acquaintance, someone you may know from work, or who lives in your neighbourhood, someone you don't know very well and don't have strong feelings about. Thinking to yourself:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Next, thinking of someone who you don't like, perhaps someone who has wronged you in some way, or a politician or other well-known person whom you dislike for other reasons. Trying not to get caught up in the reasons for disliking the person you brought to mind, extending compassion to this person as well:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Now, bringing to mind everyone you have extended loving-kindness to in this exercise: yourself, the person you care about, the person who is struggling, the neutral person, and the person you don't like.

*May they be safe. May they be free from suffering. May they be at peace.*

Now, opening up to include everyone in your life and saying to yourself:

*May they be safe. May they be free from suffering. May they be at peace.*

And now, opening up even more to include all living beings. Repeating to yourself:

*May they be safe. May they be free from suffering. May they be at peace.*

And now coming back to the breath, and sensing and feeling into the whole body as you breathe in and out. Feeling the body as a single, complete organism, connected and whole.

And acknowledging that by practicing this meditation, it is contributing to your health and wellbeing. May you know that this is an act of loving-kindness.

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### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Did you enjoy the experience or not? Why or why not?

Other observations?

*Therapist inquires further about how group members feel about loving-kindness. To what extent do they feel comfortable with the practice? Are there certain people or beings they would not readily view or treat with loving-kindness? What would happen if they tried?*

*Try to link the discussion back to problem gambling. How might loving-kindness play a role in managing and/or overcoming gambling addiction? E.g., reframing relationships that tend to involve triggering experiences. How might they integrate loving-kindness with their mindfulness practice? Point out that the “K” part of the A.W.A.K.E. strategy can now be expanded: “Kindness to self and others.”*

## **F. Homework**

This mindfulness training program has introduced a number of values as part of its theoretical and practical framework, most notably self-compassion and loving-kindness. These values are included in the training because (a) they are part and parcel of the spiritual tradition of mindfulness, and (b) there is good science to back up their positive effects on well-being. We hope that similar effects will be found with regard to your own experiences. You may notice that, in contrast to gambling, which necessarily divides us into winners and losers, loving-kindness ignores such artificial categories and encourages us to extend positive feelings and actions to everyone regardless of their distinguishing characteristics; whereas gambling divides, loving-kindness unites us.

That being said, the most important values—those worth striving toward in real-life—are the ones we choose ourselves. The ones that inform our hopes, dreams, and goals. Values are about the quality of our actions, and so they typically serve as a standard by which we judge ourselves. We may not always act according to our values; for example, problems associated with gambling might involve us doing things that go against our values. We may not even be aware of some of our values. At the same time, we may have goals that aren’t completely compatible with our values, without realizing it.

Next week we will explore and discuss our values in the context of mindfulness and problem gambling. Although we’ve mentioned becoming aware of values a few times in previous sessions (e.g., while considering expanded options for skillful responding in the AWAKE model), in our next session we will try to really focus in on values. The purpose will be to heighten our awareness of

our values in order to provide a clear direction in life; to serve as a compass for our behaviour, especially while we are mindfully experiencing triggers or cravings. I would like you to prepare for next week's session by imagining your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party.

*Explain 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party exercise.*

### **Mindfulness practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### **1. Everyday Mindfulness.**

**2. Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without trying to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Considering using the A.W.A.K.E. model to recognize and mindfully negotiate your cravings. Make sure to record your observations in the log.

**3. Becoming A.W.A.K.E.** Over the course of the coming week, practice becoming and staying AWAKE in various situations. The emphasis should be on situations that may be triggering, especially those you listed in your top threes. See if you can keep an awareness of those triggers in mind throughout the week, so that you can be Alert to triggers and cravings as they happen in the moment. Then practice Watching your experience, Accepting what comes up, being Kind to yourself, and mindfully Expanding your options for responding. You may also apply the AWAKE strategy to other situations just to practice. Make sure to record your exercises in the log.

**4. Loving-Kindness meditation.** Practice the Loving-Kindness meditation each day this week. If you don't feel comfortable wishing loving-kindness to certain people or beings, then you may skip those sections. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

### **Worksheets**

**1. 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party exercise.** For this exercise you will imagine that you are attending your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party. You have managed to live your life in a way that really matters to you. How would you want your life to be characterized? What would you want your friends and family to say about you in a speech?

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your forms with you to our next meeting.

## **Readings**

### **1. Session 8 readings**



## **Session 9 – Mindful of Values**

### **A. Checking in**

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

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settling into a comfortable sitting position....

Bringing your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply letting the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allowing your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bringing attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, following with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. And perhaps noticing pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath. Labelling the sensations of each inbreath and outbreath – rising and falling, rising and falling – if that helps to maintain focus. Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning,

daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shifting awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and paying attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shifting your awareness to the nostrils. Paying attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just noticing any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledging where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

### **C. Homework review**

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review the homework assignments from last week. Let's reflect on the mindfulness practice.

#### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**? Or the **A.W.A.K.E.** strategy?

What was that like?

What did you notice?  
How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?  
What was difficult?  
What went well?  
Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you imagine a situation where you could have used urge surfing or the AWAKE strategy? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice the **Loving-Kindness meditation**?  
What was that like?  
What did you notice?  
How was this different from your normal way of relating to other people?  
What was difficult or challenging?  
Were there some people you felt more or less comfortable sending loving-kindness?  
Did you notice any thoughts or feelings related gambling?  
What went well?  
Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you imagine a situation where you could have used loving-kindness meditation? Tell me about that."*

*Therapist may invite discussion about how participants view the concept and application of loving-kindness. Could it play a role in their lives? Could it play a role in their recovery from problem gambling? What kind of barriers to loving-kindness might they face?*

### **80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party**

Did you have a chance to work on the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party assignment? Let's take a moment to imagine what it might be like to attend your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party. What would you like to remember from your life? How would you like people to remember you? Spend a moment reflecting on the choices and actions you would like to be able to remember from your life.

What was that like for you? Do you feel close or far to this 80 year old version of yourself? Do you share common values with this person? Common goals? Today we're going to take a closer look at our values and goals, and see how they relate to mindfulness and gambling.

## **D. Session theme: Mindful of values**

This mindfulness program has introduced a number of values as part of its theoretical and practical framework, including mindfulness, self-compassion, and loving-kindness. These values are included in the training because (a) they are part and parcel of the spiritual tradition of mindfulness, and (b) there is good science to back up their positive effects on well-being.

That being said, the most important values—the ones worth striving for in life—are probably the ones we choose ourselves. Values are about the quality of our actions. They guide our hopes, dreams, and goals. They often serve as a standard by which we judge our actions. And we may not always act according to our values; we might even do things that go against our values. Sometimes

we fail to realize that the goals we set for ourselves are not compatible with our values. And sometimes we aren't even fully aware of what our values actually are.

We briefly mentioned becoming aware of values a few times in our previous meetings; for instance, when considering alternative options for skillful responding in the AWAKE model. In today's session we will try to focus in on our own values and how they relate to goals. The purpose will be to heighten our awareness of our values in order to provide a clear direction in life; to serve as a compass for our actions, especially when we find ourselves in challenging situations that can trigger the automatic pilot and result in gambling behaviour.

People who want to change their habits, whether it's dieting, quitting smoking or gambling, often begin by setting goals for themselves. "This year I won't eat any whole bars of chocolate. I will quit smoking by Christmas. Starting next week, I will never gamble again." But in this program we've hardly talked about goals at all. In fact, I actually emphasized some of the risks associated with setting goals. So what happens when we focus too much on goals? When we become too invested in them?

*Brief discussion about overattachment to goals. The link between goal-setting and failure, e.g., abstinence and relapse. Tying that to the abstinence violation effect and other negative outcomes of failing to meet goals (e.g., shame, guilt, self-loathing, self-criticism, selective attention on failure, attribution bias).*

The great thing about values is that, instead of looking toward some hoped for future goal, we can live out our values in the here and now. Values are like a compass you use to navigate your daily life. As long as you know your direction, you can also know when you are moving in that direction regardless of how fast or slow you proceed. From this perspective your values provide a reference point to guide you in the right direction without necessarily prescribing a specific goal. Can we think of some examples of life values and directions, and how one can facilitate the other?



*Elicit group examples of life directions (values) ideally linking them according to a common theme or purpose. Use the metaphor of the compass to clarify the role of values in decision-making, action, and reaction. Just as the person in the picture holds on to their compass, participants can hold on to their values when navigating their worlds. Discuss what happens when you think, feel, or act in a way that goes against your values. Does this say something bad about you? Or is it okay not to be perfect all the time? Remind participants of the power of self-compassion when we feel down about ourselves.*

Now we are going to do a short exercise to reflect on our values. First we'll run through an example together, and then I'll ask you to complete a worksheet on your own. Can someone offer a personal

value to start off with? Maybe something based on your 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party exercise? *Therapist writes down responses.*

What is the value?

Is this value specific to a particular activity or endeavor or more general?

Which area of life is this value associated with? E.g., Intimate Relationships, Friendships and Other Social Relationships, Family Relationships, Career/Employment, Education/Learning, Leisure/Recreation, Health/Physical Well-Being, Community Participation, Spirituality, Other Life Areas.

Which motivations underlie this value? E.g., if the value is “protecting the environment.” If the value is “share my love with others.” In many cases what appear to be self-oriented motivations are in fact the foundations of selfless values. Protecting the environment is a value I care about, so when I do it I feel good about myself. Supporting another person is a value that I care about and when I do it I establish a connection that provides support for me.

*Repeat this process a few more times until there seems to be a good understanding of the exercise among group members. Then hand out the Choosing Values worksheet (pg. X in the Workbook).*

Now that we’ve run through this process a few times, I’d like to ask you to spend a few minutes filling in this worksheet. Please identify three or four key values. Perhaps one general and a few specific values. Identify which Life Area the value belongs to, and also which motivations are associated with that value.

*Allow 5-10 minutes for participants to fill in their sheets, monitoring their progress as they go, stepping in to address any questions when needed. When ready, lead a discussion enquiring about participants’ experiences and results with this exercise... Did you learn anything new about your values? Did you encounter any challenges or contradictions in this exercise? What is the relationship between your values and motivations (**theme of self-care and that ALL love begins with self-love**)? What is the relationship between your values and behaviour? What is the relationship between values and mindfulness? How might becoming more aware of your values help in you in daily life? In your recovery?*

## E. Mindfulness exercise: Mountain exercise (Fleming, p.23)

### 1. Instructions

Now that we’ve become more aware of our values, I’d like to introduce a new exercise that will allow us to practice being mindful of our values in the moment, including under challenging circumstances. In this exercise we will visualize ourselves as a mountain. The mountain represents the stable, present, and grounded aspect of ourselves—which includes our values. No matter what happens to the mountain, its core remains present and stable.

## 2. Guided meditation

Get into a comfortable position and allow your eyes to close gently. Start by taking a few moments to connect with your breathing, noticing each full in-breath and each full out-breath.

And as you focus on the breath, you may become aware of thoughts—perhaps about things that happened today or during the week, or thoughts about tonight’s session or your plans for after the session—whatever thoughts show up, simply acknowledge them and gently return your focus back to the breath.

Now, bring to mind the image of a mountain, perhaps a mountain you have visited or seen in photographs, or one of your own imagination. Bring into focus as many details of this mountain as possible. Imagine its size and shape. Perhaps it has a snow-covered peak with trees and meadows on its lower slopes. Notice that your mountain, like all mountains, has a solid, unmoving base.

However the mountain appears, just sitting and breathing with the image of this mountain, observing it and noting its qualities. And when you feel ready, see if you can bring the mountain into your own body, so that your body and the mountain become one. Perhaps your head is the mountain’s peak, your shoulders and arms are the sides of the mountain, and your bottom and legs are its solid base. Your personal values lay deep inside the mountain, an inseparable part of the whole. And with each breath you become a little more the mountain—solid, still, and centered and a little more in tune with your values.

And, as you connect with the solid core of your mountain, can you also observe its surface, noticing the multitude of changes that take place on it, from day to day, and season to season? As day turns to night, perhaps noticing how the temperature drops, and the light gradually fades. In spring, perhaps you can feel a gentle rain, or notice dense fog obscuring the view from your mountain. In summer, meadows may be filled with wildflowers, mountain goats graze in the warmth of the sun, or forest fires may ravage the surface. In winter, you may watch as snow falls softly on stately evergreens, or avalanches destroy everything in their paths.

You may also notice people on your mountain voicing their differing opinions of it—it is the best or worst mountain they have seen, or it is too easy or too difficult to climb. And, as you observe all of these changes on the surface of your mountain, can you also realize that its solid base remains unchanged?

Perhaps at times, in your own day-to-day life, you can connect with your inner mountain, embodying its strength and stability, observing your thoughts and feelings as you would the ever-changing surface of a mountain. And realize, as you notice thoughts, feelings, as well as unwanted experiences like cravings come and go, that your essential self—your core awareness and your values—remains unchanged. Notice that the experiences we find so compelling when we are ungrounded lose their power when we connect with our grounded core beliefs and values – our essential selves – quiet and steadfast regardless of the superficial comings and goings on the surface. And so, in the remaining moments, continuing to sit with your observing mountain, until the sound of the bell.

## 3. Inquiry

What was that like?  
What did you notice?

What was difficult or challenging?

What went well?

Other observations?

Do your values feel like a part of you, of your mountain, or as something separate?

What are some ways to become aware of your values in challenging or triggering situations?

*Remind participants of the A.W.A.K.E. strategy; emphasize that part E (Expanding options) can include values. Being awake means having the space and time to check your compass. Incorporating your values into skillful ways of responding to situations.*

## F. Session 9 Homework

### **Mindfulness practice**

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### **1. Everyday Mindfulness.**

**2. Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without trying to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Considering using the A.W.A.K.E. model to recognize and mindfully negotiate your cravings. Make sure to record your observations in the log.

**3. Becoming A.W.A.K.E.** Over the course of the coming week, practice becoming and staying AWAKE in various situations. The emphasis should be on situations that may be triggering, especially those you listed in your top threes. See if you can keep an awareness of those triggers in mind throughout the week, so that you can be Alert to triggers and cravings as they happen in the moment. Then practice Watching your experience, Accepting what comes up, being Kind to yourself, and mindfully Expanding your options for responding. You may also apply the AWAKE strategy to other situations just to practice. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

**4. Mountain exercise.** Practice the Mountain exercise each this week. Refer to your completed *Choosing Values* worksheet to remind yourself of the values you wish to keep in mind. Those values can live inside the core of your mountain. Practice imagining different kinds of things happening on and around your mountain. Maybe one day a lot of unpleasant things, like avalanches, forest fires, and thunderstorms might happen; and another day could see pleasant things like sunshine, beautiful waterfalls, flowers, and dancing children. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

## **Worksheet**

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II & III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

## **Readings**

### **1. Session 9 reading**

## **Session 10 – Mindful Future**

### **A. Checking in**

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

### **B. Brief opening exercise: Mindful breathing**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body.

Perhaps sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath enters the body on the inbreath and leaves the body on the outbreath. And perhaps notice pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the next inbreath.

Sooner or later, the mind will wander away from focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreaming, whatever. This is ok. It is simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or failure.

When you notice your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently acknowledge where it has gone, and gently escort your awareness back to the lower abdomen.

Now shift awareness to the back of the throat, noticing any sensations as the breath passes through the windpipe, on its way to the lungs, and pay attention to any sensations at the back of the throat as the breath moves back up the windpipe on its way out of the body.

Now shift your awareness to the nostrils. Pay attention to the breath as it enters the body through the nostrils and as it leaves the body through the nostrils. Just notice any sensations, perhaps feelings of warmth or coolness or itching, or no sensations at all.

And when the mind wanders, as best you can, gently acknowledge where it has gone, bringing the attention back to the breath.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of breathing, getting caught up in your thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. When that happens, returning to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to get away from thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and going.



And now continuing with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

## C. Homework review

Now that we are all a little more relaxed and present in the here and now, I'd like to review the homework assignments from last week. Let's reflect on the mindfulness practice.

### **Mindfulness Inquiry**

Did anyone have a chance to practice **urge surfing**? Or the **A.W.A.K.E.** strategy?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of those activities?

*Where you able to mindfully consider your values while exploring your options for skillful responding?*

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used Urge Surfing or the AWAKE strategy? Tell me about that."*

Did anyone have a chance to practice the **Mountain exercise**?

What was that like?

What did you notice?

What was difficult or challenging?

How did you perceive the outer conditions? Did you notice any thoughts or feelings related gambling?

How did you perceive yourself? Your values?

What went well?

Other observations?

*If no experiences are offered, you can ask: "OK. Can you describe a situation where you could have used the Mountain exercise meditation? Tell me about that."*

## D. Session theme: Mindful Future

### **Review**

We will use today's session both to look back at the last 10 weeks, and to explore ways of staying connected to mindfulness in the future. First I'd like to remind you of the many subjects and skills we've covered over the course of this training. We began with a general introduction to the concept of the automatic pilot, learning that many of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours happen without being fully aware of them. We then discussed the role of avoidance; how the autopilot tends to activate during experiences we prefer not to deal with. We explored how the practice of mindful acceptance, instead of avoidance, can help us tolerate those challenging experiences and prevent the autopilot from leading us into problematic situations and behaviour. We learned about urge

surfing, which allows us to ride out cravings by mindfully observing and accepting our experiences in the here and now. After that we explored some specific external situations, such as relationship issues, work stress, and family tensions, that are linked to emotions which tend to trigger the urge to gamble. We practiced being mindful during those situations in order to monitor our feelings and gambling cravings. In the next session we took a closer look at emotions, stress, and memories, identifying which experiences are most likely to trigger avoidance, automatic behaviour, and gambling urges. This allowed us to discern one of the main patterns underlying the gambling addiction cycle:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

We recognized that positive events and emotions can also lead us toward gambling. In the next session we discussed our relationship to thoughts; how mindfulness and other cognitive defusion skills allow us to take distance from unhelpful thoughts, so that we don't need to buy into them and react with emotions and behaviours that don't really work for us. We also explored some specific thoughts involved in gambling, such as mistaken beliefs about probability, luck, skill, and chance, and discussed ways to mindfully recognize such thoughts in order to lessen their influence on our behaviour. Finally, last week we focused on self-compassion; how self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, mindfulness, and self-care can support our well-being and help us skillfully respond to those cycles of gambling, self-criticism, and guilt or shame. In session 7 we checked in with the group to discuss our progress to date, learned about the A.W.A.K.E. shortcut for remembering mindfulness skills, and practiced being mindful of triggering situations and visualizing skillful responses. In session 8 we learned about loving-kindness, how to extend compassion toward others and the whole world as a way to enhance our well-being and nurture our relationships. Finally, in last week's session we explored our personal values and goals, discussing and practicing ways to incorporate those values in our mindfulness-based skillful responding to triggering situations and elsewhere in life. All along we've been doing homework and practicing these concepts during our meetings and at home.

In our first meeting we explored what kinds of goals and expectations you had for this training. I'd like to look back on those goals, see to what extent we may or may not have achieved them, and discuss.

*Post flipchart of the goals that the group had come up with in session one and review them to see if they have been accomplished.*

At this point I'd like to invite a group discussion to reflect on your experiences in the training program. If you feel comfortable participating, you are welcome to be completely free and open in sharing your thoughts and feelings.

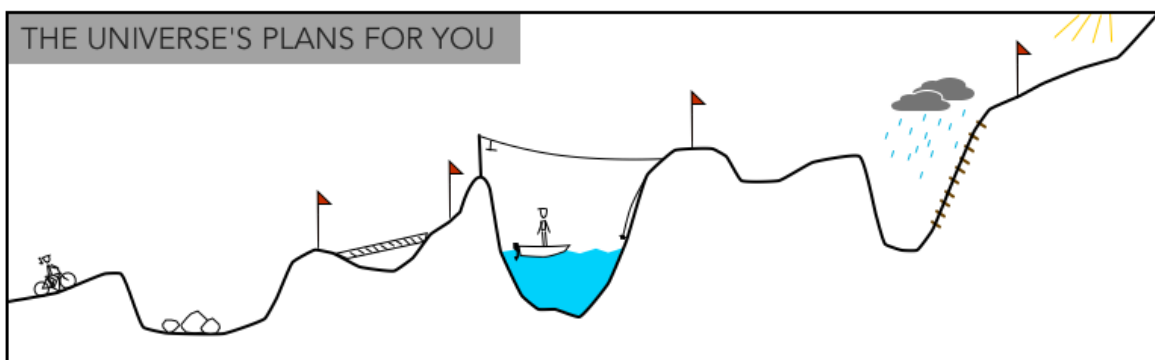
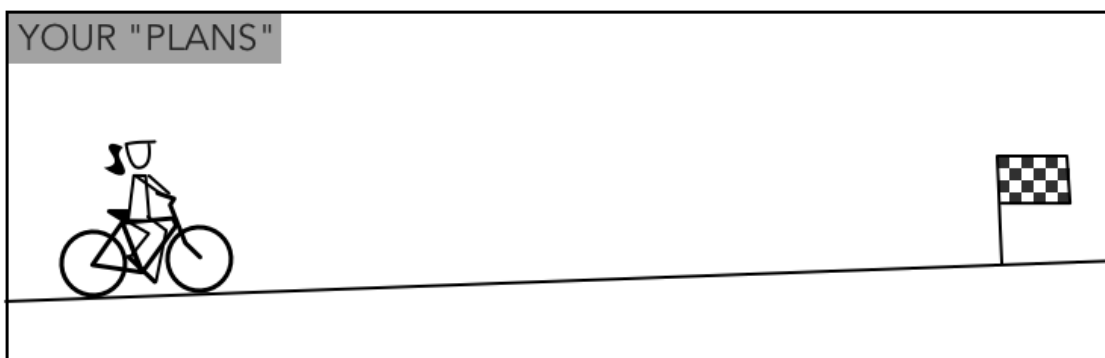
*Invite participants to share anything that came up for them while doing so, if they feel comfortable.*  
*Ideas for discussion:*

- What did you find most valuable about this course?
- What, if anything, did you learn?
- What, if anything, has changed for you over the past 10 weeks as a result of your participation?
- Was there anything that got in the way of your learning or growth or that might have improved the course for you?
- Other comments?
- How important has this program been to you? How come?

-How likely are you to continue engaging in formal mindfulness practice after this training? E.g., body scan, sitting meditation, yoga, ec.)

-How likely are you to continue engaging in Informal mindfulness practice after this training? E.g., urge surfing, AWAKE, everyday mindfulness, mindful walking)

Depending on time, perhaps have participants do the Body Scan here. Afterwards, inquire about differences between this experience and first experience with Body Scan (Session 5).



DOGHOUSEDIARIES

### Planning the Future

Now that we have taken some time to review our experiences in this group, I'd like to turn your attention to your experiences in the future. We found that a number of the goals that were set at the beginning of this training remain works in progress. This is ok. In fact, it is to be expected if we view life as a process rather than as a series of outcomes. Fully tuning into our minds and bodies should enrich the experience of our "down-time" between events – and hopefully shift the excessive emphasis on outcomes toward an appreciation of all moments and all aspects of our experience.

As was mentioned in previous sessions, mindfulness practice may not be enough on its own to help bring about the changes you'd like to see in your life. However, hopefully this training has shown you that mindfulness can have a significant positive influence on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, especially as a way to cope with and skilfully respond to cravings and challenging experiences. Then again, many of you have also experienced that there are various barriers and challenges that can make it difficult to stay connected to mindfulness and keep up the practice. So if you would like to continue using and developing your mindfulness skills in the future, whether

formally and informally, what are some things you could do to help realize that goal?

*Therapist invites discussion about strategies to continue practicing mindfulness after the training, reminding participants that mindfulness is like a muscle that requires regular practice in order to work and grow stronger. Explore differences between formal and informal practice; whether participants might prefer one type over the other, or perceive greater barriers to practice with one than the other. Explore what kinds of barriers exist and what kind of strategies and resources could be used to overcome those barriers.*

Besides the strategies and resources we just discussed, some of you might find it helpful to continue working on mindfulness in a group setting. Mindfulness meditation has become very popular in recent years and there are many groups, schools, and other kinds of resources available. A growing number of employers now also offer meditation groups. In Appendix IV of your workbooks you will find a list of local mindfulness training and psychotherapy resources.

## E. Exercise: Stone Meditation

### Instructions

As a way to bring our final session to a close, I'd like to introduce a new twist on an older meditation. You will remember the Raisin Exercise from our very first meeting. This time I'd like you to use a stone as the object of your attention. Please pick a stone.

*Therapist passes around a container with stones of diverse sizes, shapes, and colours.*

### Guided Meditation

Settle into a comfortable sitting position and place your stone in the palm of one hand.

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

Now look at the stone in your hand. Focus on seeing the stone as if you've never seen one before. Notice the shape of the stone. Any interesting or irregular features of its shape. Then noticing the stone's colour. Is it solid or mixed? Are there different shades? And now mindfully observing the texture of the stone. Any visible patterns, or lack of patterns? Notice where the stone's surface reflects light. Bringing an attitude of curiosity to seeing all aspects of the stone.

Whenever you notice thoughts about the stone, such as *It's so dull* or *I wish I had a different one*, or you notice yourself thinking about anything other than the stone, gently redirect your attention to seeing the stone, allowing your experience to be, exactly as it is in this moment... without judging it in any way. That is, perceive the stone fully without worrying whether it is good or bad.

Next, focus on feeling the texture of the stone between your fingers. Noticing any softness, hardness, coarseness, smoothness, stickiness, or any other aspect of texture. Any patterns you can detect. And simply being with your experience of feeling this stone. If you find your mind wandering, you can turn your attention to the breath to come back to the here and now. Then

gently redirect your attention to the stone.

Now, holding the stone below your nose, pay attention to smelling it, noticing the qualities of its aroma. Is it earthy, metallic, dusty? Is the aroma intense or faint, or is there no scent at all? If you notice your mind judging the smell, simply note the mind judging and return your focus to the pure sensation of smell.

Now, taking the stone to one ear and rolling it between your fingers, notice any sound the stone makes. Notice any thoughts about doing this: *This is crazy, stones don't make sounds. Wow, I can hear the stone.* Redirect your attention to simply hearing the stone.

Now, shift your attention to your inner experience. Begin to pay attention to what kinds of thoughts, feelings, or memories come up as you sense your stone. Does the stone remind you of anything? Does it make you feel a certain way? And whenever you lose your focus, gently turning your attention back to the inner experience of holding your stone. Using your breath as an anchor if that is helpful. Just noticing whatever your mind comes up with in relation to your stone. Not judging, simply observing.

And now coming back to the breath. Paying attention to the sensation of inhaling and exhaling; to the rise and fall of your chest and belly along with your breath. Getting ready to bring this exercise to a close at the sound of the bell. Taking care to carry this mindful state of awareness with you into whatever happens next.

## SOUND OF BELL

### **Inquiry**

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal way of experiencing a stone?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

*Let participants know that their stones are theirs to keep. The idea being that the stone can serve as a physical memento of their mindfulness training, which they can carry with them or keep in a prominent place to remind them to stay connected to mindfulness. Just like a "little mountain," they can also invest certain values or goals into the stone. These may be related to mindfulness specifically, to their recovery goals, or other aspects of their lives.*

## **F. Concluding Remarks**

*Therapist express thanks to group members for participating in the training, sharing their experiences with the group, contributing to one another's growth, etc. Therapist also thanks group members for taking part in the research; that their participation contributes to the enhancement of knowledge and treatment of problem gambling. Also remind participants of the need to attend the post-training assessments and follow-up assessments. Invite participants to share their closing thoughts with the group, if they feel comfortable. Final goodbyes.*

**Mindfulness and Acceptance Group Therapy  
for Problem Gambling  
(MAGT-PG)**

**Participant Workbook**

2016 – Centre for Addiction and Mental Health  
Toronto, Canada

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# Housekeeping

## Group meeting location and time

The group will meet for ten consecutive weeks at the same time and location (with some exceptions). Please write down the following information:

Location: Room \_\_\_\_\_

Day: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Structure of the meetings

1. Assessment (questionnaires and interview)
2. Checking in
3. Mindfulness exercise
4. Homework review
5. Presentation and discussion of the week's theme
6. Mindfulness exercise
7. Assigning homework
8. Checking out

## Assessments

Assessments will begin 30 minutes before the session start. During this time you will be asked to complete two questionnaires about your mood and gambling craving; once every two weeks you will also complete a brief interview with the Research Assistant. This is a very important part of the study, so please be available on site 30 minutes before the start of the session.

## Policy on missed sessions

If you cannot make it to a session, please provide 24 hour notice to the Research Assistant by contacting [gamestudy@camh.ca](mailto:gamestudy@camh.ca) or leaving a message at 416-535-8501 ext. 36743. More than two absences may cause you to be dropped from the study. If the group facilitator cannot make it to session, we will give as early notice as possible, and reschedule for the following week.

## Expectations for group behaviour

*Confidentiality and privacy:* Respect for confidentiality and privacy are essential for building and maintaining trust in the group, as well as respecting the dignity and safety of other group members. Do not discuss any personal information or experiences shared in the group outside of meetings.

*Attendance and punctuality:* It is very important to attend each of the scheduled group meetings, both for the purpose of the research study and for the training itself. Each week we will cover new topics that are key to developing mindfulness skills. Please try to be on time to each session; if you arrive late, please be respectful of the group when entering the room.

*Homework:* Homework is an essential part of this group mindfulness training program. It is not possible to develop effective mindfulness skills without practice. We will explore the importance of homework and practice in our first and second sessions together.



# **Session 1 – Introduction**

## **Session 1 Reading 1: Autopilot vs. Mindfulness**

We are not truly aware of most of the things we do. Things like brushing our teeth in the morning, drinking coffee while at work, or walking up a flight of stairs, happen pretty much on their own, without having to pay much attention to how we're doing them. For example, when riding a bicycle, we're not constantly thinking about moving the left pedal with our left foot, and the right pedal with our right foot. It's like we have an automatic pilot. This autopilot has important advantages: it allows us to do several things at once. But there are also disadvantages. We might cycle right past our destination if we are too busy thinking about something else.

Just as your body does things for you automatically, so does your mind. For instance, people develop habitual ways of thinking about unpleasant experiences and emotions. They also learn to rely on certain strategies for responding and coping with them. Some of those ways are healthier than others. For example, some people cope with stress by exercising, listening to music, or playing video games; some people seek out the company, advice, or affection of people close to them; other people might drink a glass of wine, or two, or three, or smoke a joint. Everyone has their own preferred or habitual activities that make them feel more happy, excited, less lonely, or less stressed out.

Gambling is also one of those activities. Research on problem gambling indicates that, for most people, gambling, like any of those other activities or substances, becomes an addiction because we come to depend on it as a way to meet some kind of personal need. So gambling actually serves a psychological function in our lives, and—for a short while—it might actually make us feel better. However, it can get us into a lot of trouble in the long run. Especially when we gamble on autopilot until all our money is gone. That's why an important part of helping people who have problems with gambling is about finding healthier ways to manage stress and deal with unpleasant emotions and experiences.

One way of doing that, which has helped a lot of people with all sorts of different problems, is mindfulness. Mindfulness originated from Eastern philosophies, primarily Chinese Buddhism, and is used in mental health and addiction treatment as a way to help people unlearn some of the unhelpful automatic reactions that they've learned in life. But mindfulness doesn't actually try to make painful emotions, thoughts, and experiences go away; in fact, Buddhism assumes that pain and suffering are an inevitable part of life. That's why mindfulness is designed to teach us to recognize, observe, and accept stressful or painful experiences as they happen in the moment, so that we don't go into automatic pilot and engage in all sorts of potentially unhealthy behaviours as a way to avoid or escape from those negative experiences.



*Illustration: Being mindful is like turning off the automatic pilot.*

That's why paying attention to what's happening inside and outside us in the here-and-now is the most important part of being mindful. It involves paying attention on purpose, with deliberate intent, so that we have a clear reason for being mindful. Another important part of mindfulness is learning to observe our thoughts, emotions, memories, and other experiences without judging them as bad; without seeing them as things that need to be avoided, ignored, or gotten rid of. Finally, mindfulness also involves living life from moment to moment with a deep awareness of our personal values—but without getting attached to whether or not we fail or succeed in our goals. This means treating ourselves with compassion, especially in those unavoidable situations when things don't go according to plan. The definition of mindfulness is nicely summed up by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who pioneered the use of mindfulness in healthcare. According to Kabat-Zinn, "mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."

## Session 1 Reading 2: Raisin exercise & discussion

### Instructions

Before we get into the details of how mindfulness can help us with our problem gambling, let's get started with a simple exercise to introduce some of the essential skills. We are going to practice something called the Raisin Exercise, which is an example of mindful eating.

### Guided meditation

Start by placing your raisin the palm of one hand. Now, focus on seeing the raisin as if you've never seen one before, using your "beginner's mind"—noticing the shape, size, and color of the raisin—turning it around in your fingers, noticing the folds and where the surface reflects light, bringing an attitude of curiosity to seeing all aspects of the raisin. Whenever you notice thoughts about the raisin, such as *It's so wrinkly* or *I wish I had a bigger one*, or you notice yourself thinking about anything other than the raisin, gently redirect your attention to seeing the raisin, allowing your experience to be, exactly as it is, in this moment without judging it in any way. That is, perceive the raisin fully without worrying whether it is good or bad.

Next, focus on feeling the texture of the raisin between your fingers, noticing any softness, hardness, coarseness, smoothness, stickiness, or any other aspect of texture, simply being with your experience of feeling this raisin.

Now, holding the raisin below your nose, pay attention to smelling it, noticing the qualities of its aroma. Is it sweet, sour, musty? Is the aroma intense or faint, or is there no scent at all? If you notice your mind judging the smell, such as with thoughts like *The sweetness is lovely* or *This is too sour*, simply note the mind judging and return your focus to the pure sensation of smell.

Now, taking the raisin to one ear and rolling it between your fingers, notice any sound the raisin makes. Notice any thoughts about doing this: *This is crazy, raisins don't make sounds. Wow, I can hear the raisin*. Redirect your attention to simply hearing the raisin.

Now place the raisin in your mouth but do not bite it. Instead, as before, just observe it, perhaps you may notice your mouth watering as you do so. Focus on the feeling of the raisin in your mouth, exploring it with your tongue, noticing its shape, texture, and any initial taste. Bring your beginner's mind to the feel of the raisin in your mouth.

Now, mindfully and with full attention bite into the raisin. As you do notice any flavours that are released, letting go of judgments, simply being with the taste of this raisin. As you slowly chew the raisin, pay attention to its changing consistency and the flow of saliva in your mouth.

When you first notice the urge to swallow the raisin, stay with the urge for a few moments, noticing the location and intensity of the urge, allowing it to be there as it is.

Now intentionally swallow the raisin, noticing any sensations as it passes down your throat and into your stomach.

You can repeat the exercise with another raisin or try contrasting the experience of mindful eating with how you would normally eat one or more raisins.

### Inquiry part 1: Paying Attention on Purpose

What was your experience like?

What did you notice about the raisin?

What did you notice about yourself?

How was this different from your usual way of eating?

Mindful attention is deliberate. At the beginning of the exercise, you were invited to set your intention: to mindfully eat a raisin. What was your experience of that intention? Did you lose sight of it at any time during the exercise? When we mindfully eat raisins in the first sessions of our group, some people find it embarrassing to slowly eat a raisin in front of other people. Other group members report that intentions to be mindful simply evaporate into “mindless” awareness, with their attention flitting about from here to there (for example, from reviewing the day to planning for tomorrow to noticing sounds and bodily sensations and so on).

The tendency to lose sight of the intention to be mindful is very common and completely normal. However, with practice, your ability to stay intentionally focused will get stronger and stronger. In the remaining chapters, you will have opportunities to practice bringing intentional focus to bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts, and, lastly, your gambling cravings. In those situations, you will practice staying focused on purpose, on what really matters. No matter how often your attention is drawn to cravings or opportunities to gamble, you will always have the choice to redirect your focus to your valued goals.

### **Inquiry part 2: Paying Attention in the Present Moment**

Mindful attention is firmly rooted in the present: in the unfolding of your direct experience from moment to moment. (Your direct experience is that which is registered by your five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. *Thinking* about something, like a raisin, is *not* the same as directly experiencing it – there is no next step; mindful attention begins and ends with the experience).

For how much of the exercise were you able to “stay present” with your raisin? How often did your mind wander to thoughts about the raisin (*It’s sweet, This is weird, Hope I don’t choke*), or to thoughts about other things (*What should I have for dinner tonight*), and to awareness of unintended targets (for example, bodily sensations or sounds in the room)? What was your experience of the raisin when you *were* able to stay present with it? Our clients often comment that the exercise gives them the opportunity to really “know” raisins: how they look, feel, smell, sound, and taste. In the same vein, staying present to your direct experience of negative urges and cravings can give you opportunities to really “know” them, and base your opinions (and actions) on that knowledge—not on what your mind tells you about the situation. So much of our time is spent ‘doing’ things that our mind is constantly in transit—running off to the next task, rather than remaining still and present in the moment.

As we proceed with additional mindfulness exercises, you will have many opportunities to practice remaining fully present to your experience. Fortunately, this will be very much facilitated by the third and final part of the mindfulness definition, paying attention nonjudgmentally.

### **Inquiry part 3: Paying Attention Nonjudgmentally, with Acceptance**

What sort of judgments did people notice during this exercise? For example, you might have been thinking something like *‘Why are we eating raisins. This is stupid.’* Or maybe *‘This is a waste of time. How is this going to help me with my gambling.’* How did you do with remaining open to your experience of eating a raisin? Was it difficult to let go of judgment and resistance, and simply let your experience be, in the moment? If you were able to do that (for even a few seconds), what was that like? Was it perhaps liberating to gain some distance and freedom from your judging mind?

With mindful attention, we bring a nonjudging, open attitude to our experience. We also refer to this way of relating to feelings and thoughts as *acceptance*, defined as opening to and allowing your experience to be exactly as it is, without trying to avoid it, escape it, or change it.

When we pay attention nonjudgmentally, we don't *stop* judging, we *step back* from it. As described by Jon Kabat-Zinn:

"Mindfulness is cultivated by assuming the stance of an impartial witness to your own experience. To do this requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are all normally caught up in, and learn to step back from it... When you find the mind judging you don't have to stop from doing that. All that is required is to be aware of it happening. No need to judge the judging and make matters even more complicated for yourself." Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*, p. 34.

#### **Inquiry part 4: Relevance to Problem Gambling**

Now that you've had a taste of what mindfulness is about, how do you think these skills might be useful in helping you with your gambling?

Can you think of situations where your automatic pilot might get you into trouble with gambling?

In what kind of situations could you use mindfulness to help you say, as an alternative to gambling? Are there sensations, activities, things to experience that now seem boring or mundane that might be perceived differently when perceived mindfully and nonjudgmentally?

Over the coming ten weeks, we're going to focus on some of the most important issues people face that contribute to mindless behavior, including gambling. Activities like gambling tend to be overly stimulating, distracting or immersive so that they forcefully take us away from our present experience. But as you've just seen with the raisin, even things we usually take for granted can acquire richness and depth through mindful attention. The sessions you attend over the next 9 weeks will explore other areas of our lives where mindfulness may have a similar effect. This may involve, for example, exploring the relationships between our thoughts, emotions, gambling cravings, and behaviour. We will identify the situations and experiences that trigger our cravings, and learn how mindfulness can help us recognize and respond intentionally and skillfully to those triggers and cravings rather than switching to autopilot. We will also look at the different kinds of thought processes and beliefs that play a role in problem gambling, and learn how to use mindfulness skills to reduce their influence on our behaviour. We will also take time to carefully consider how our judgments can undermine us. This may include the judgments we make about ourselves. Through mindfulness we will explore how an alternative attitude where we are kind and compassionate to ourselves, as well as other people, can help us transform the negative self-talk and self-image many of us carry around.

Finally, we will spend some time identifying and clarifying our personal values, not just with respect to our gambling, but to life in general. As we develop our capacity for mindfulness, we will strengthen our ability to respond to life situations in ways that are aligned with our personal values, and become less controlled by the automatic pilot or beliefs of how we think we ought to behave. In our final session, we will talk about our long-term goals and consider ways to help us to continue living mindfully in the future. By the end of this training, you will have learned a lot about using mindfulness to skillfully respond to challenging situations in life. You will hear me use that word—"skillful"—pretty often over the next ten weeks. In the context of this training, it means using mindfulness skills to respond to situations, feelings, and urges with deliberate awareness, nonjudgment, compassion, in line with your personal values.

# Session 1 Homework

## Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

1. **Mindful Eating.** Just as you did in the Raisin Exercise, mindfully eat one meal, part of a meal, or one snack per day; How many minutes did you spend eating mindfully this week? Keep a record of your mindfulness practice and observations using the *Mindfulness Log*.

2. **Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, doing the dishes, showering, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Keep a record of your mindfulness practice and observations using the *Mindfulness Log*.

## Worksheets

1. **Costs and benefits of gambling.** Please complete this form according to the instructions provided in class. Bring your completed form with you to our next meeting.

2. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II & III).** Please complete both of these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

## Readings

1. **Session 1 reading 1**

2. **Session 1 reading 2: Raisin exercise and discussion**

# Session 1: Costs and Benefits of Gambling Exercise

Think of the most important benefits (left column) and costs (right column) of your gambling behaviour in your life. Reflect on what you get out of gambling versus what you give up in various areas of your life (relationships, family, friends, work, school, finances, happiness, hobbies, self-esteem, etc.).

Benefits of gambling	Costs of gambling





## **Session 2 – Avoidance versus Acceptance**

### **Session 2 Reading: Avoidance versus Acceptance**

Humans have a natural tendency to want to avoid unpleasant or problematic things in life. When we're sad, we often try to cheer ourselves up or distract ourselves. When we're lonely, we seek out the company of others. When someone hurts us, we often walk away from them. And when we do things that aren't really good for us, we try to stop. You are all here because you believe gambling is a serious problem in your life, and it's proven difficult to control your gambling on your own. How many people here have tried using willpower to stop gambling? And how often has that really worked for you? Maybe some of you have even noticed that things get worse when you try to use willpower to stop. The psychologist Carl Jung used to tell his students and patients, 'what you resist, persists.' Addiction is a great example of that.

Mindfulness takes a completely different approach. It's not about using willpower or other strategies for change that rely on active resistance. In fact, rather than doing something about our troubling experiences, the focus is on simply letting them be. So mindfulness is all about acceptance. It means accepting your experiences in the here and now, without trying to change them.

Now this might seem counterintuitive at first, so let me start by clarifying what acceptance is not. It does not mean simply surrendering to your gambling problems and letting them run your life. It also doesn't mean feeling good about your problems, or even just tolerating them. Rather, acceptance, as understood in mindfulness practice, is about "opening up to and allowing your experience to be exactly as it is, without trying to avoid it, escape it, or change it". The key to understanding this form of acceptance is that it happens in the here and now; it's about accepting what's happening inside and outside of you *in the present moment*. So why is this important? What does this achieve?

Let's say you just had a heated argument with someone; it could be your partner, or a housemate, a friend, or a coworker. Now your mind is racing with thoughts, you're feeling upset or angry, your heart rate is through the roof, and there is a tight feeling in your chest or stomach. This is an unpleasant feeling. Now your instinct is to want to do something with that feeling; to put it somewhere, to get rid of it, or just to ignore it. Maybe you feel like going back and giving that person a piece of your mind. Maybe you feel like running away, or doing something else that makes you feel less upset or stressed. And maybe thoughts of gambling start to appear in your mind. Once you start thinking about gambling, your anticipation begins to grow. You look forward to planning your bets, to the risk and excitement of the game, maybe hanging out with your gambling friends, and the big win that's just around the corner. Or maybe you look forward to just taking a break from everything; spending some time just focusing on gambling, not having to think about that argument or all the other sources of stress in your life. As these thoughts take hold they may create momentum or a sense of urgency to act – this in turn may impel you back to gambling.



*Illustration: Anxious thoughts send you down the path of avoidance (from Ciarrochi & Mercer, 2005)*

This sequence of events might feel very familiar to many of you. The reason for telling this story is that there were several moments in it where mindfulness and acceptance could have been used to deal with the situation in a healthier way. Let me simplify the sequence of events even more (*draw on board*):

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

In our first session we talked about how gambling can become a strategy for coping with stress and other difficulties in life, and that automatic pilot's job is to activate that strategy in times of need. Just to review, the idea here is that once we've become dependent on gambling, all that needs to happen is for something stressful or painful to come up, and the autopilot kicks in. And just to be clear, it doesn't have to be something that's happened recently that starts this chain of events. We also tend to want to avoid unpleasant experiences that we know or think are going to happen in the future. We even try to avoid unpleasant experiences that have happened long ago, when they come back to us as memories. The thing that's important to recognize is that, whenever or wherever these events are, our *experience* of them always happens in the present moment. Whether it's anger about an argument, worry about the future, or a painful memory, that experience is always occurring in the here and now, and it's that immediate experience that makes us uncomfortable and brings on the urge to gamble. We might not interpret it that way when it's happening; we might just feel like gambling, without necessarily linking that feeling to something negative we're experiencing. Because that's how the automatic pilot works; it thinks and acts for us, so we don't have to pay attention to what's bothering us.

Mindfulness allows us to interrupt that sequence of events, prevent those automatic reactions, and provide the time and space for us to respond in healthier ways. The key to observing those uncomfortable experiences and gambling urges without acting on them is acceptance. This means looking at a feeling, a thought, a sensation, or a craving with an attitude of curiosity and openness. *Okay, so this is what I'm feeling right now. Ah, there is that thought again. Look at it go. Oh, there is a sinking feeling happening in my stomach. What does that feel like? Hey, here is that urge to gamble. This is what I'm experiencing right now. This is what it's like.* We can watch what's happening inside

us with a sense of acceptance. We are allowing our experience to exist. Letting it be. Just noticing it, without wanting to change it, run away from it, or replace it with something else.

And that allows us to notice something else about the experience: Eventually, it goes away by itself. When we adopt the viewpoint of an observer we are no longer pushed and pulled around by our thoughts and feelings. They become the object of awareness rather than an engine or force that drives us in a certain direction.



*Illustration: You can choose the path toward your values and take your anxious thoughts along for the ride  
(from Ciarrochi & Mercer, 2005)*

## Urge Surfing

Before we delve into the feelings, memories, thoughts, and life situations that we try to avoid or cope with by gambling, I'd like us to first focus on how we can use mindfulness and acceptance when those urges or cravings arise. This involves doing something we call 'urge surfing.' One of the key concepts in mindfulness is that thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and other experiences are a lot like waves in the ocean. Waves are always coming and going. In and out. Some waves are big, some are small; some come in hard and fast, while others are harder to notice. Our experiences typically happen the same way. When it comes down to it, pretty much everything we experience simply appears in our awareness, and then eventually disappears. And just like waves, we can learn to "ride" our experience—surf the wave—until it peters out and recedes back to the depths. We do that by paying attention, observing our experiences, and accepting them as they happen. This is what urge surfing is all about. And just like surfing, this attitude is *a skill* that we can develop. The more we practice, the more readily it comes to us and we can begin to feel confident that we won't be overwhelmed even if the mental or emotional waves are huge and frightening.

I know that this way of thinking about our experiences might be new to you. Are there any questions about this concept, that experiences are like waves? Or the notion of urge surfing?

## **Session 2 Mindfulness exercise: Mindful listening**

### **Instructions**

Now we're going to do another mindfulness exercise that involves focusing on one of our five senses as a way to connect to our experience in the here and now. We are going to practice mindfully listening to the world around us with attention and acceptance. This means paying attention to any sounds or noises we can pick up in the environment, and also listening to the silence in between. Many people become uncomfortable during extended periods of silence. The lack of distractions from the external world makes room for things in our internal world to make their way into awareness. Some of these internal experiences may make us uncomfortable. If, during this exercise, you notice any thoughts, feelings, memories, or bodily sensations that make you uncomfortable, then you can try to simply observe them with an open, curious, and accepting attitude—without trying to change them. Just allow them to exist. When you're ready, you can gently guide your attention back to listening. If it helps, you can focus on your breath to help you anchor yourself in the present moment. While doing this, notice how all of these experiences are like waves, in that they're constantly appearing and disappearing, coming and going, in and out.

If during the course of this exercise you have a thought or feeling that is so disturbing as to be overwhelming, I want you to feel free to stop the exercise – take a break – get a drink of water or come and talk to me after the group if you wish. Remember you have just been introduced to mindfulness, so the skills may not yet be sufficiently developed to enable you to tolerate very strong thoughts or feelings. This is not a failure of you or the practice – it is you honouring yourself and acting mindfully to help yourself.

### **Guided meditation**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control your breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

Now bring your awareness to your hearing. Begin to notice sounds as they arise, wherever they arise.

As best you can, become aware of sounds as pure sensations. Letting go of the urge to label what you are hearing. Simply noticing whatever is entering your ear in the here and now. See if you can strip the sounds you hear of their meaning, just focusing purely on what it sounds like. Patterns of pitch, tone, volume and duration.

When you notice you are thinking about sounds or the mind has drifted elsewhere, gently acknowledge where the mind has gone, and then reconnect, as best you can, to pure hearing.

And if you are uncomfortable with the silence, try to focusing your awareness back on your breathing. Just connecting to that experience of breathing in and out, feeling each inhale of your body, and also the sensation of your body resting on the chair with your feet firmly on the ground.

There's no need to go searching for sounds, or listening for particular sounds. Simply be open to sounds as they arise. Sounds that are close, sounds that are far away, inside the room, outside the room, outside the building. You may also notice sounds coming from your body, or the bodies of other people in the room. Try to just notice these sounds, without labelling them or judging them.

And again, if you notice your mind wandering, recognizing without judgment that you've gotten distracted, and then gently turning your attention back to listening. Or if you don't feel with this exercise, feeling free to just open your eyes, to take a break, or get some water if you like.

Continuing to be mindful of listening, see if you can also notice the spaces between sounds, or perhaps no sound at all. What does silence sound like?

And now continuing with awareness of listening until the sound of the bell.

### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like? Can you think of some adjectives to describe it – e.g., pleasant/unpleasant; tiring/energizing; soothing or distressing?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Any other observations?

## Session 2 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

1. **Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, eating a meal, doing the dishes, showering, getting ready for your day, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Make sure to record your practice in the log.
2. **Mindful Listening.** Practice the Mindful Listening exercise we learned today. Besides paying attention to sounds and silences in your environment, notice any uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, memories, bodily sensations that come up, and practice being open and accepting toward these experiences. You can use the breath to help return your awareness to the here and now, and then mindfully come back to listening. If you notice yourself getting distracted, remember to observe this with openness and acceptance, and remind yourself that it's okay to be distracted. Then gently return your awareness to the listening exercise. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.
3. **Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? Or it can lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. The same skills can be used in any situation, including the practice of acceptance. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

### Worksheets

1. **Inventory of External Gambling Situations.** Please complete the questionnaire and bring your completed form to the next meeting. We will then score the questionnaires and identify your most significant triggering situations.
2. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Please complete both of these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

1. **Session 2 reading**

## **Session 2: Inventory of External Gambling Situations**

Place here

## Session 3 – External triggers

### **Session 3 Reading: Navigating high-risk situations – *External***

As you learned from this week's homework exercise, there are many different kinds of situations which can trigger the urge to gamble, and increase temptations or opportunities to gamble. The items in the questionnaire were drawn from the Inventory of Gambling Situations, a survey created here at CAMH which was based on extensive research on the many kinds of situations in which people are more likely to gamble. These situations can elevate the risk of gambling in different ways for different people, so something that's risky for one person may not be a risk for someone else. I'd like us to review some of these situations together and explore how we might use mindfulness skills to get through them without giving in to that automatic urge to gamble.



*Illustration: There is no shortage of issues in life that can stress us out and trigger cravings.*



### *Interpersonal conflict*

Let's start off with situations that involve conflict with other people. This could involve getting into arguments or fights with people in our lives, be they partners, relatives, friends, coworkers, or even strangers. It may not be a fight; maybe you simply felt criticized or insulted by someone, or maybe they did something that disappointed, upset, or angered you. What these situations have in common is that difficult experiences that happen in the context of interpersonal relationships can have an effect on your gambling behaviour. If these kinds of situations do tend to trigger your urge to gamble, there are multiple ways to address them – in addition to mindfulness. Because other people are involved, your ability to be mindful may be valuable but not sufficient to resolve them. Additional approaches include strategies to improve communication, conflict management, anger management, or in some cases, seeking relationship counselling. The point here is to not rule out additional support or tools that may complement what you gain from mindfulness.

### *Habitual gambling contexts*

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that present us with opportunities to gamble, or which remind us of gambling. For instance, you might be at a party or some other social event where gambling is taking place; or perhaps you just happen to be in the neighborhood of your favorite casino, lotto vendor, or what have you. You might be together with friends who invite, encourage, challenge, or simply expect you to gamble. Sometimes it's just a matter of having some free time and feeling bored. What these situations have in common is that they make it easier for you to engage in gambling—or, stated differently, they make it difficult *not* to gamble. Can you think of some ways in which mindfulness might be helpful in these situations?

### *Financial concerns*

Another external factor that influences gambling behaviour is worry about finances. When you're in need of money, whether it's to pay off losses you have incurred, or settle your debts, or simply pay the rent, gambling can seem like a possible solution. Especially when it looks like a big win is right around the corner, or like luck is on your side. Matters are made worse if you're being pressured by the law, financial institutions or others who have made loans to you to come up with the money. These are extremely challenging situations that might make it seem like more gambling is your only hope. On the other hand, considering the situation objectively, you will realize that the odds are against you, as they are in all forms of gambling, and so gambling will very likely make money problems worse. As unlikely as it may seem, mindfulness can even be helpful in these situations. Any ideas how?

The key here is that mindfulness doesn't solve problems; it helps us to prevent ourselves from repeating or exacerbating problems, and helps get us into a psychological space where they might consider alternative solutions. With respect to financial worries, mindfulness skills can be used to "sit with" those thoughts and feelings of worry. Without minimizing or negating these very real financial concerns, it is possible to look at worries with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude; allowing them to appear and disappear according to their natural rhythm. Gambling can be seen for what it truly is in this regard: not a solution to financial problems, but a strategy for avoiding or escaping the experience of worry. Not allowing those feelings to trigger the automatic pilot may at least prevent things from getting worse, if not improve one's access to more effective problem-solving skills.

What I'd like everyone to take away from this discussion is this. First off, it is unrealistic to expect that these situations won't continue to happen, at least not for the time being. Relationship problems and interpersonal conflicts are a normal part of life; you may continue to be confronted with opportunities to gamble and spend time with friends who gamble; and money problems are not solved overnight. What is realistic, however, is the possibility of living with these very real challenges without being overwhelmed and controlled by them. So when you find yourself in a high-risk situation that triggers your urge to gamble, taking a moment to mindfully connect with your experience in the here and now can actually help. Remembering to breathe mindfully is a really helpful strategy here. Research studies have found that spending even just a couple of minutes attending to the breath can make people feel more centered, more calm, and more clear in their thinking. Part of your homework for the coming week will be to watch out for the risky situations you identified with the questionnaire, and to experiment with using mindfulness skills to effectively handle those situations.

## Session 3 Mindfulness exercise: Walking Meditation

### Introduction

In order to practice being mindfully aware of external situations and their effects on us, we're going to practice an exercise called walking meditation. This will involve taking our awareness through the experience of walking. You will notice that there is a lot you can be aware of while doing walking meditation. After the exercise, we will discuss our experiences and see how they might relate to other aspects of life.

### Guided meditation

#### *Standing*

So, to begin this period of walking meditation, first of all let's simply stand. Just stand on the spot, being aware of your weight being transferred through the soles of your feet into the earth. Being aware of all of the subtle movements that go on in order to keep us balanced and upright. Very often we take this for granted, our ability to be able to stand upright. But actually, it took us a couple of years to learn how to do this. So be aware of the constant adjustments that you're making in order to maintain your balance.

#### *Walking*

To optimize our use of space, we should line up against the wall and walk in a straight line to the opposite wall. Agree with the people on either side of you which side you are going to walk on. And then you can begin to walk at a fairly slow but normal walking pace, and in a normal manner. We're not going to be changing the way that we walk; we're simply going to be aware of it.

#### *Awareness of others*

The first thing you'll become aware of is a natural consequence of practicing this exercise in a small enclosed space. In order to avoid bumping into one another, we need to pay attention not just to our own walking, but those around as well. Try to pay just enough attention to the other group members to keep from getting in their way. If needed, you can make eye contact with someone or nonverbally signal your direction to them. During this exercise you might bump into someone and laugh, or feel irritated when someone gets in your way. Whatever happens, try to simply notice the event with an open and nonjudging attitude. It's merely something that happened which you can let go. Then gently return your awareness to the experience of walking.

#### *Awareness of your body*

As you are walking mindfully, direct your attention to the soles of your feet, being aware of the alternating patterns of contact and release; being aware of your foot as the heel first makes contact, as your foot rolls forward onto the ball, and then lifts and travels through the air. Be aware of all the different sensations in your feet, not just a contact in the soles of your feet but the contact between the toes, the feeling of the inside of your shoes, the fabric of your socks, and let your feet be as relaxed as you can. Become aware of your ankles. Notice the qualities of the sensations in those joints – as your foot is on the ground, as your foot travels through the air.

And let your ankle joints be relaxed – make sure you're not holding on in any way. You can become aware of your lower legs – your shins, your calves. You can be aware of the contact with your

clothing: be aware of the temperature on your skin; you can be aware of the muscles. And notice what the calf muscles are doing as you're walking. You might even want to exaggerate for a few steps what the calf muscles are doing – just so that you can connect with that – and then let your walking go back to a normal relaxed rhythm. Encourage your calf muscles to be relaxed.

And then become aware of your knees- noticing the qualities of the sensations in your knee joints. Then expand your awareness into your thighs. Be aware of the skin, again the contact with your clothing, the temperature. Be aware of the muscles, and notice what the muscles on the fronts of the thighs, and the muscles on the backs of the thighs are doing. And once more you might want for a few paces just to exaggerate what those muscles are doing – exaggerate the action of those muscles. And then let your walk go back to a normal rhythm.

Becoming aware of your hips – the muscles around your hip joints — and relax those muscles. Really relax. Even when you think you've relaxed – relax them some more. And just notice how that changes your walk. Notice how the rhythm and the gait of your walk change as your hips relax. You can be aware of the whole of your pelvis – and notice all of the movements that are going on your pelvis. One hip moves forward and then the other; one hip lifting, the other sinking.

And you can be aware of the complex three-dimensional shape that your pelvis is carving out through space as you walk forwards. The lowest part of your spine – your sacrum – is embedded in the pelvis. So as you feel your spine extending upwards – the lumbar spine, the thoracic spine – you can notice how it moves along with the pelvis. Your spine is in constant motion. It's swaying from side to side. There is a twisting motion around the central axis. Your spine is in constant, sinuous, sensuous motion.

Notice your belly – you might feel your clothing in contact with your belly – and notice how your belly is the center of your body. Very often it feels like it's "down there" because we are so much in our heads. So see to what extent you can feel your belly as the center of your body, as the center of your being. Notice your chest, and just let your breathing happen. Notice the contact that your chest makes with your clothing. Notice your shoulders. Notice how they are moving with the rhythm of your walking. Let your shoulders be relaxed, and let your shoulders passively transmit the rhythm of your walk down into your arms. let your arms simply hang by your sides and swing naturally. Notice all the motions in your arms – your upper arms, your elbows, your forearms, your wrists, your hands. And feel the air coursing over the skin on your hands and fingers as your arms swing through the air.

Become aware of your neck – and the muscles supporting your skull. Notice the angle of your head. And notice that as you relax the muscles on the back of your neck, your chin slightly tucks in and your skull comes to a point of balance. And you might want to play around with the angle of your head and see how it changes your experience. You might notice that when you tuck your chin close into your chest, your experience becomes darker and more emotional – that you're more inward turned, somber. And if you lift your chin and hold it in the air you might notice that your experience becomes much lighter – that you become much more aware of the outside world and perhaps caught up in the outside world, or much more aware of your thoughts and caught up in your thoughts. And then, bring your head back to a point of balance, your chin slightly tucked in.

Relax your jaw. Relax your eyes — and just let your eyes be softly focused, gently looking ahead – not staring at anything, not allowing yourself to be caught up in anything that's going past you.

### *Feelings*

You can be aware of the feelings that you're having; not in terms of emotions here, but just the feeling tone. Are there things that feel pleasant; are there things that feel unpleasant – in your body, or outside of you. So if you notice things in your body that are pleasant or unpleasant, just notice them. Don't either cling onto them, or push them away, but just notice them. If you notice things in the outside world that are either pleasant or unpleasant, just allow them to drift by – just notice them drift by without following them or averting your gaze from them.

### *Thoughts and Emotions*

You can notice your emotional states. Are you bored? Are you content? Are you irritated? Are you feeling very happy to be doing what you're doing? Again just notice whatever emotions happen to be present. And notice your mind also. Is your mind clear, or dull? Is your mind busy, or is it calm? Are you thinking about things unconnected with this practice – or do whatever thoughts that you have center on what you're doing just now? Just notice these things with no particular judgment – just noticing.

### *Balancing Inner and Outer*

And you can notice the balance between your experience of the inner and the outer. I often find that if I can be aware of both the inner world and the outer world in equal balance, then my mind settles at a point of stillness, and calmness, and clarity.

So see if you can find that point of balance, where you're equally aware of the inner and the outer, and your mind is calm, content, and quiet.

### *Stopping*

So, in a few seconds, I'm going to ask you to stop. And I'd like you to come to a natural halt. So, you're not freezing on the spot; you're just allowing yourself to come to a stop. So do that now; come to a stop. And just experience yourself standing. Just notice what it's like to no longer be in motion. Notice once more the complex balancing act that's going on to keep you upright. Feel once again, the weight traveling down through the soles of your feet into the earth; simply standing, and experiencing yourself and, finally, bringing this exercise to a close.

### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like? Can you think of some adjectives to describe it – e.g., pleasant/unpleasant; tiring/energizing; soothing or distressing?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

How was this different from your normal experience of walking?

Any other observations?

## Session 3 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

**1. Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness.

**2. Walking Meditation.** Try to practice the walking meditation at least once this week, for about 10 minutes or longer if you can. The idea is to focus your awareness on the experience of walking, while nonjudgingly observing any other experiences that enter your awareness, before gently returning your attention to the experience of walking.

**3. Mindful of External High-Risk Situations and Triggers.** Over the course of the coming week, you may find yourself in one or more of the high-risk situations we discussed today. Try as best as you can to recognize when this is happening. You may spend just a few minutes focusing on your experience of breathing to mindfully connect to the present moment, remembering to observe any thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude. Be especially aware of any automatic thoughts that seem to push you in the direction of gambling. If you can do so, practice urge surfing over any physical or mental feelings of craving that arise. Try to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

**4. Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? Or it may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

### Worksheets

**1. Inventory of Internal Gambling Situations.** Bring your completed questionnaires to the next meeting. We will score the questionnaires and identify your most significant triggering situations.

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet. It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. For next week, see if you can identify and rank the top three feelings on the PANAS that seem to trigger the urge to gamble. Also, find out which 1 or 2 items on the GCS apply best to your situation. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

**1. Session 3 Readings**

## **Session 3: Inventory of Internal Gambling Situations**

Place here

## **Session 4 – Internal triggers**

### **Session 4 Reading: Navigating high-risk situations – *Internal***

Now that we have explored which types of external situations are associated with gambling or that trigger the urge to gamble, we will shift our attention to look at internal situations. By internal I mean anything that happens inside of us, including thoughts, feelings, moods, and bodily sensations. First off, I need to acknowledge that there is no black and white division between internal and external experiences, since our emotions typically occur in response to something that happens. But let's take a closer look at those internal experiences, and explore how mindfulness can help us respond to them more skillfully.

Let's refresh our memory about the basic pattern of experience and behaviour that underlies a lot of addictions. Here it is again:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

I should clarify that this is not a one-size-fits-all model. Sometimes there may not be a specific event that triggers an emotion; sometimes we just feel a certain way without necessarily knowing why. In fact, we may not even be aware of the relationship between our feelings and gambling, because spend so much time in automatic pilot mode. Also, I want to point out that we can easily flip this pattern to show the similar role of positive experiences:

Pleasant event → Desirable emotion → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

This also became clear from the homework assignments, where we found that pleasant situations and emotions, or the anticipation of positive emotions, can be just as influential in leading us to engage in gambling. And that these positive and negative experiences are often related, as in the gambling process itself—for example, winning bets encourage you to bet again in case you're on a spree, while losing bets encourage you to bet again because you expect to eventually win. This just goes to show that feelings are deeply connected to our gambling urges.

Emotions serve to communicate and express our personal needs. Typically we experience negative emotions when our needs aren't being met, and positive emotions when our needs are being met. So what happens when we prevent ourselves from fully experiencing an emotion? It makes it very difficult to truly understand ourselves and our needs in the present moment! And when we don't have that conscious understanding of what's going on with our needs, the automatic pilot takes over and tries to meet our needs in whatever way it's learned to do that—like triggering a desire to gamble.

So now we've seen that judging our internal experiences can prevent us from understanding our needs. Another thing that happens when we judge our feelings is that it actually changes the way we feel. Research studies have shown that judging an emotion often results in a second emotion that emerges in response to the first, which psychologists call a secondary emotion. For example, if we judge sadness as a negative experience, then we will perceive that sadness as something undesirable; something to be avoided. And so the threat of experiencing sadness will actually make us feel anxious. Thus anxiety is the secondary emotion. As another example, if something happens that makes us angry but we judge anger as a negative thing, then we might deny ourselves that



experience, and feel sad about what happened instead. So in this case sadness is the secondary emotion. Because we often judge our feelings automatically, we may not notice those deeper, primary emotions, and instead we believe that our secondary emotions actually reflect the way we feel. What might be some consequences of that?

So now we've seen that judging and automatically responding to our emotions can prevent us from being in touch with our deeper feelings, as well as keeping us unaware of our deeper needs. Another consequence of not being aware of emotions is that it prevents us from skillfully responding to situations. Reacting to experiences in automatic pilot can be problematic, sometimes even disastrous, for ourselves and the people around us. What are some examples of automatic reactions to emotions that don't really work?

So now we have discussed a number of important factors that show why it's helpful to actually experience our emotions in an accepting, nonjudging way. This shows that mindfulness can help us:

1. Listen to what our emotions are trying to tell us about our needs and values.
2. Discover deeper feelings underneath our secondary emotions.
3. Short-circuit the automatic pilot.
4. Create psychological space and time for skillful responding.

Now let's explore some practical mindfulness skills we can use to help us pay attention to our emotions with purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment. There is a lot of overlap here with the concept of urge surfing. For instance, recognizing that feelings, like any internal experience, are like waves; they appear and disappear, each in their own natural rhythm of coming and going. In that sense they're also similar to breathing; breath comes in, breath goes out.

In fact, emotion and breath are like two peas in a pod: Did you know that each type of emotion is associated with a specific kind of breathing? For example, people experiencing fear tend to breathe with very rapid and shallow breaths. Anger is associated with forceful and uneven breathing. People who are depressed or anxious may hold their breath and not exhale deeply enough. There is a very deep connection between the way we feel and the way we breathe. This is also why the breath is so important in mindfulness. We can use the breath, not only as an anchor to the present moment, but as a kind of emotional barometer. It connects us directly to our internal experience.

As you pay attention to your feelings, you will inevitably notice thoughts happening. Thoughts that judge, such as "I don't like this feeling," or "This feels bad." Thoughts that seek understanding or blame, like "Why do I feel like this?", or "I feel this way because so-and-so did X, Y, and Z to me." Or thoughts that judge the self, such as "I'm a bad person for feeling this way," or "It's my own fault." You may notice memories connected to those feelings, either recent ones or from a long time ago, or thoughts about the future that make you feel anxious or sad. The point is that there will never be a shortage of thoughts arising in response to your feelings. That is normal and to be expected. It's simply what brains do—what many meditators call *monkey mind*. The incessant chattering of thoughts. So you do not need to take each and every thought seriously. You don't need to buy into all your thoughts. You can just let them be. Being mindful means not getting caught up in your thoughts. Not letting them drag you along into their stories. Just noticing them as they come and go. And recognizing when you've gotten sidetracked, then gently returning your attention to your immediate experience.

Mindfulness involves a genuine curiosity about what is happening in the here and now. But some feelings may be very difficult to face, and even harder to accept. They may be frightening and

overwhelming. And while it may be helpful to recognize that those are only judgements, it's also important to respect those feelings. You may not be ready to fully experience certain feelings that are too painful or frightening. It's a fact of human existence that some things are very difficult to deal with. That being said, you can still negotiate those difficult experiences in a mindful way; instead of feeling overwhelmed to the point that you want to run and hide, which increases the risk of going into autopilot, it's possible to just pause and acknowledge, with acceptance, that this particular experience is too much to handle. And you can do this nonjudgingly: you're simply making an observation about what's true for you at this point in time. There is no need to make any judgments about that. And in response to this difficult experience, you can choose to pay attention to something else that's happening in the here and now. Or you can do something else entirely. Just try to make your choice one that is based in mindfulness, rather than mindless avoidance.

## Session 4 Mindfulness exercise: Body scan

### Introduction

While our focus has been on emotion, and to some extent on thoughts, which will be the topic of next week's session, there is another category of internal experience: bodily sensations. Just like the breath, bodily sensations are intimately connected to our emotions. For example, everyone is probably familiar with the feeling of having a knot in your stomach when you're anxious. Or a lump in your throat when you're sad. Or tightness in your chest when you're angry. The following exercise will allow us to become aware of what's happening inside our bodies.

### Guided meditation

The intention of this practice is to bring mindful awareness to sensations in the body as you focus your attention systematically on each part of the body in turn. It is to be aware of your experience as it is unfolding, however it is. Not to change the way you are feeling or to become more relaxed or calmer.

First, making yourself comfortable lying on your back, in a place where you will be warm and undisturbed. Lying on a mat, a rug, the floor, or a bed. Lying with palms open to the ceiling, feet falling apart from each other, and eyes gently closed. As best you can, keeping still during the exercise, but if you need to move or adjust your position, doing so mindfully, with complete awareness.

So to begin, just becoming aware of breathing. Taking the attention to the abdomen, noting it rise with the in-breath and fall with the out-breath.

Not trying to manipulate the breath in any way, just experiencing it as it is, as it moves in and out of the body. Full attention in each moment to breathing.

And on the next out-breath, moving your awareness down your body to the toes of both the left foot and the right foot, and noticing whatever sensations are present in the toes. Perhaps noticing warmth, coolness, tingling, moisture, itching, whatever is arising from the toes, whether there are sensations or no sensations. Being aware of the big toes and the little toes and the toes in between.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of your toes in your mind's eye and moving your attention to the rest of the feet. To the tops of both feet. The soles of both feet, and the ankles.

Just staying open to whatever sensations you find there. And if there are no sensations, that is just fine.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the awareness of the feet, and shifting the focus of attention to the lower legs. Becoming aware of the calves, perhaps noting where they touch the floor or the mat. Becoming aware of the shins, the skin over the legs, and just being attentive to this part of your body.

And on the next out-breath, allowing the lower legs to dissolve in your mind's eye as you

move gently with your attention to the knees. Becoming aware of the part under the knee, and on top of the knee, perhaps being aware of what a complex joint the knee is, with tendons and

ligaments and the kneecap. And just being here with your knees, letting them predominate in your field of awareness, in the moment. And now gently releasing the knees and moving your attention to the thighs. Noticing whatever sensations arise in the left thigh and the right thigh.

And if your mind has wandered, just gently and kindly bringing your attention back to the thighs.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of awareness of the thighs as you bring your attention to the pelvic region. To the buttocks, the tailbone, the pelvic bone, the genitals. Staying open to whatever sensations you find, just being attentive to this part of your body.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the awareness of the pelvic region and moving your attention to the abdomen. Bringing a gentle curiosity and openness to whatever you find in this moment. Perhaps noticing a gentle rise of the abdomen with the in-breath and the fall of the abdomen with the out-breath.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the abdomen in your mind's eye and moving your attention to the chest area, the area that contains your heart and lungs. Perhaps noticing the beating of your heart or the expansion of the rib cage as you breathe in. Staying open to whatever sensations you find in the chest.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the chest in your mind's eye as you bring your attention to the lower back. A part of the body that often carries a lot of tension. Just noticing whatever sensations arise, whether there be tension or no tension and not trying to make it be any different, just accepting the sensations that are there. Letting go of the tendency we all have to want things to be different.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the awareness of the lower back and bringing your awareness to the upper back, the back ribs, and the shoulder blades. Another area where the body holds tension. And just being with the upper back, not going anywhere or doing anything but developing an openness to all that is arising from this part of the body. And as thoughts arise, just being present for thoughts and then returning to paying attention to the upper back.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the upper back in your mind's eye as you move gently with your attention to the hands. Becoming aware of the fingers, the palms, the backs of the hands, and the wrists. Becoming aware of any sensations arising in the hands. Perhaps warmth, or coolness, tingling or moisture. Just bringing a compassionate awareness to whatever arises in the hands.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of the hands in the mind's eye and moving your attention to the arms. To the lower arms, the elbows, and the upper arms. Bringing a gentle curiosity and openness to whatever you find in this moment. And now gently releasing the arms and shifting the focus of attention to the neck. Noticing whatever sensations arise in the neck. And if your mind has wandered, gently and kindly bringing your attention back to the neck.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of awareness of the neck, as you bring your awareness to the face and the rest of the head. Becoming aware of the jaw, the mouth, the nose, the cheeks, the ears, the eyes, the forehead, the scalp, and the back and top of the head. Noticing whatever sensations arise in the face and the head. Just noticing without judgment. There is no right way to feel when you are doing this. The way you feel is the way you feel.

And on the next out-breath, letting go of awareness of the face and the head. And now, taking a few deep breaths, breathing in through the nose, and allowing the breath to move

through the body to the tips of your toes, and then allowing the breath to move up from your toes, through your body, as you exhale through the nose. And doing this a few times, breathing in all the way through the body to the toes and back out through the nose.

And now letting go of the awareness of breathing and getting a sense of the body as whole and complete. Resting in this state of openness to things as they are.

### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like? Can you think of some adjectives to describe it – e.g., pleasant/unpleasant; tiring/energizing; soothing or distressing?

What did you notice?

Did you discover any connections between sensations in your body and your emotions? Your thoughts?

What was difficult?

Were there any sensations that were difficult to look at, that made you want to move away from them?

What went well?

Any other observations?

## Session 4 Homework

### Mindfulness Practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### 1. **Everyday Mindfulness.**

2. **Body Scan.** Try to practice the body scan at least once this week, for about 10 to 20 minutes if you can. Use the instruction handout as a script for this exercise. The idea is to guide your awareness through each part of your body, while nonjudgingly observing any other experiences that enter your awareness. Make sure to record your exercise in the mindfulness log.

3. **Mindful of Internal High-Risk Situations and Triggers.** Over the course of the coming week, you may find yourself having any of the internal experiences we discussed today. Try as best as you can to recognize when this is happening. You can spend just a few minutes focusing on your experience of breathing in order to mindfully connect to the present moment, remembering to observe any thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude. Be especially aware of any automatic thoughts that seem to push you in the direction of gambling. If you can do so, practice urge surfing over any physical or mental feelings of craving that arise. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log.

4. **Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? Or it may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. If you *do* gamble, is it possible for you to choose that option without judgment? Is it possible to choose to do something that is ‘bad for you and do so nonjudgmentally? If you choose to gamble, can you examine the thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that contributed to that? The same skills can be used in any situation, including the practice of acceptance. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

### Worksheet

1. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)** (see **Appendix II and III**). Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It’s best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

#### 1. **Session 1 Readings**

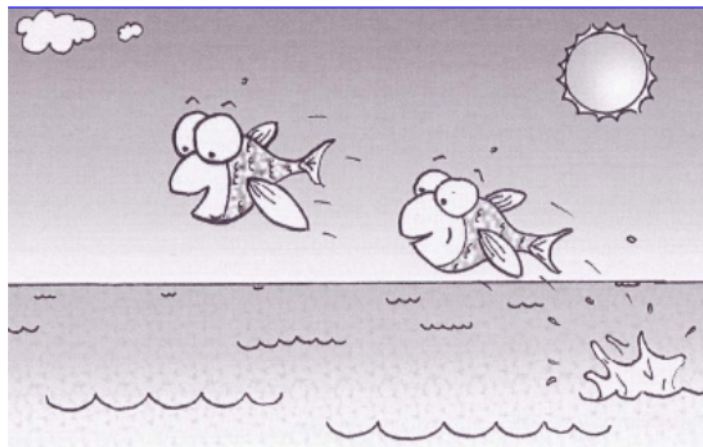


## Session 5 – Relationship to Thoughts

### **Session 5 reading 1: Changing your relationship to thoughts**

Today's session marks the halfway point in our mindfulness training program. So far we have explored the relationship of mindfulness gambling urges as well as the internal and external situations that trigger them, with a special focus on emotions. In today's session we'll be taking a closer look at thought processes. While thinking is obviously essential to our daily lives, thoughts can also make us feel lousy and lead us toward behaviours that don't align with our preferred values. That's essentially because we have a tendency to buy into thoughts that don't really work for us. Thoughts that tell us how we should or shouldn't be, thoughts that tell us we're a good or bad person. Sometimes you just want to turn those thoughts off! So today we will explore ways in which we can use mindfulness skills to change our relationship to thoughts. Note the term "relationship." It implies that our thoughts are not identical with ourselves or our values or beliefs. Sometimes our thoughts are intentional and helpful, like when we are solving a problem. Sometimes they are involuntary and unhelpful or even harmful. The key point is that once we recognize that we do not need to identify with our thoughts, we are free to simply observe them and *choose* how we wish to respond in a given situation rather than react in an automatic way because we had a particular thought.

The mind is always generating thoughts—that is its job—and most of the time we're not even aware of it. Sometimes we can get "lost in thought." You've probably all had the experience of suddenly realizing that you've been immersed in thought and not really aware of anything else around you. This first illustration is a metaphorical way to look at this. So you can imagine what happened here. These two fish were swimming in the water, as they always do, day in and day out, and one fish said to the other "Hey did you know that we're actually surrounded by some stuff called water?" The other fish said "What are you talking about. What's water?" And so his buddy gets him to leap out of the water to actually see it, to gain an awareness of water as something separate from being a fish. Today we're going to take you through some strategies that will, in a sense, help you to "leap out of" the river of your thoughts and see them as separate from yourself, as automatic products of your mind.



**"See... that's the stuff I was talking about"**



In the second illustration of a guy looking at computer screens, the guy on the left is completely buying into his thoughts, “There’s something wrong with you,” and he looks pretty distressed as a result. The alternative is not to change the thoughts to something positive, like “you’re great,” but to observe them for what they are, like the guy on the right who is sitting back, just observing his thoughts and not getting all caught up in them.



**Fused vs. Defused ways of relating to “There’s something wrong with you...”**

That is what it means to be “fused” with your thoughts: responding to them as though they are telling the truth; as though they have some kind of power in and of themselves; as though they define you and your world. In contrast, the Buddhist philosophy on which mindfulness practice is based views thoughts as something more like leaves floating in a stream. An endless supply, always coming and going, and none particularly more true or valuable than the other—unless we believe them to be so. They’re just leaves. Imagine if we could feel that way about all the judgmental thoughts we have about ourselves. Just letting them pass through without reacting to them, without buying into them. Can you come up with some examples of thoughts that, upon closer inspection, probably aren’t worth buying into?

Like the fish in the first picture above, this might be a new concept for some. The idea that thinking is something separate from being conscious; that it is possible to, in a sense, look *at* your thoughts, instead of looking at reality *from* your thoughts. If we think again about the metaphor of the river, in which each thought is a leaf floating on the surface, then perhaps you could picture your awareness as sitting in a boat on the water, watching the leaves float past around the boat. Or even standing on the shore, watching from a distance. That is a very different perspective than the one we are used to: swimming in the river, where leaves are coming at you from all directions, dragging you along, perhaps even pulling you down.

Now that we have an idea of what it means to be fused with your thoughts, or overly attached to them, let’s explore some techniques and exercises designed to help us *defuse* from our thoughts—to

create more distance between us and them. Some of these ideas might seem a little silly, but that's precisely the point. They're meant to show us how silly, unnecessary, or irrational some of our thoughts can be, and so they can help us to take those thoughts less seriously and diminish their influence over us.

**Word repetition.** We are going to choose a word and repeat it as fast as we can out loud for 30 seconds. Just keep saying the word over and over as fast as you can while still pronouncing the full word each time. How did this feel? What was the experience like? What happened to the meaning of the word?

**Singing your thoughts.** *Using a short phrase reflecting one of your thoughts, sing it to the tune of Happy Birthday (or another well-known song).*

**Slowing down your thoughts.** *Using a short phrase reflecting one of your thoughts, repeat it as a group v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y.*

**I am having the thought that...** For example, "I am having the thought this stuff isn't going to help me with my gambling." Or "I am having the thought that I'm too weak to change my gambling habit." Or "I am having the thought that gambling is ruining my life."

**Name what the mind is doing.** Name the type of thinking that is happening. For example, worry thoughts, judgments, self-criticism, gambling urges, rationalizing...

**Give real names to your thoughts.** For example, "Worrying Wilma," or "Judgy Jamie."

**Thank the mind.** For example, "Thanks for the memory."

**Defuse with Dr. Phil.** "How's that thought working for you?"

**Get off your butts.** For the following sentence, "I'd like to go to the party but I'm afraid I'll be anxious", try replacing "but" with "and." "I'd like to go to the party and I'm afraid I'll be anxious".

**Replace "I" with "you" or your name.** For example, instead of thinking "I hate doing the dishes," try "You hate doing the dishes," or even "[your name] hates doing the dishes.]

## **Session 5 Mindfulness exercise: Mindfulness of thoughts**

### **Instructions**

Finally, one very simple and effective way to unhook yourself from your thoughts is by mindfully observing them. Just noticing your thoughts go by, watching them without judgment; without getting dragged along; without reacting to them or trying to push them away. Simply observing with a curious and accepting attitude. Let's take a few minutes to practice being mindful of our thoughts.

### **Guided meditation**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

With your eyes closed or looking down with a soft gaze, begin to focus on your breathing. Notice the feeling of air rushing into your nose, filling your chest and abdomen, and then flowing back out. Notice the sensation of your chest and belly rising and falling with each breath. Follow each inhale and exhale as you connect with what is happening in this moment.

Now gently shifting our awareness to thinking – to paying attention to thoughts as events in the mind. As best you can, bring your awareness to thoughts as they arise in the mind, through the space of the mind, and eventually disappear. There is no need to censor or encourage thinking in any direction. Simply allow thoughts to arise naturally, not holding on to thoughts, pushing them away, or analyzing their contents, simply observe thoughts as events in the field of awareness.

It may help to imagine that you are sitting in a movie theatre in front of a large blank screen. As thoughts, memories and mental images appear in your mind, see them projected onto the screen, and watch each thought for as long as it remains on the screen.

Thoughts may move slowly or quickly across the screen, some dominating the screen more than others. At times, the screen may go blank; at other times it may be completely filled with thoughts. Whatever is on the screen, remain curious about the process of thinking itself, noticing your ability to be an impartial observer.

At times you may lose touch with your awareness of thinking, fusing with your thoughts, getting caught up in one of the stories unfolding on the screen. When that happens, return to the feeling of the breath, not as a way to avoid thoughts or make the mind blank, rather as a way to anchor yourself in the present moment, as you escort your mind back to its seat, returning to watching your thoughts coming and going.

And now continue with awareness of thinking until the sound of the bell.

### **Inquiry**

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal experience of thinking?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

## Session 5 Reading 2: Relationship to thoughts

Now that we've spent some time getting familiar with mindfulness of thoughts, I'd like to explore some specific kinds of thoughts that are particularly relevant to problem gambling. There are types of thinking that make us more likely to gamble, even in the face of significant loss. Thoughts that make us believe we have a special ability to win, that make us unrealistically confident in our gambling skills. Thinking that we have special insider knowledge or an effective "system" to help us win. These all result from distortions in thinking that prevent us from acting skillfully – and get us stuck in our gambling. Let's go through some important examples.

The first example is called the *Gambler's Fallacy*. This is such a common distortion that it's actually named after gambling. It's all about the way we think about probability and randomness. Say we flip a coin: What are the odds that it will land heads up? 50 percent, right? Let's say we take that coin and flip it ten times, and we get heads nine times in a row. What are the odds that it will land tails up on the tenth flip?

Still 50 percent.

If any of you thought that the probability of landing tails on the tenth flip was higher because we got heads the previous nine times, then you just committed the gambler's fallacy. It is critical to understand that each time you flip the coin, the odds are still 50 percent. Every single time. This is because nature does not keep score. There is no law in physics that tells the coin, "You've landed heads too many times, now you have to land tails to even out the playing field." Even if you flipped your coin a million times and landed heads each time, there is no reason to expect that number one-million-and-one will land tails. This may seem like a fairly straightforward idea, yet it seems to be human nature to think that the odds will eventually change in our favour. Can you see how this distortion is especially relevant to gambling?

Another common distortion has to do with how we explain wins and losses. We often have a tendency to overestimate the importance of our skills or abilities. It seems to be human nature to explain good things that happen in terms of something we have control over, like our skills or abilities, while explaining losses in terms of something we have less control over, like luck or the influence of other people. That is not to say that skill doesn't play a role in whether or not a bet will lead to a win or a loss. Just that we tend to significantly overrate our choices or strategies when winning, and underrate the role of pure chance.

A very common thought among people who gamble is that it is possible to recognize or manipulate luck. For example, the idea of "streaks." Sometimes luck appears to be on your side, and sometimes not. Another example: Perhaps you've also had the experience of something lucky happening to you in some other aspect of your life, like at work or while walking down the street, and then thinking, "this would be a good moment to place a large bet." Or maybe you've been around someone whom you felt influenced your luck because they seemed particularly lucky or unlucky. Or perhaps you know a slot machine, lotto station, deck of cards, or what have you, that you felt was particularly lucky or unlucky. These are all examples of irrational beliefs about luck.

Why are they irrational thoughts? Because human beings have a natural tendency to perceive patterns in random information. Say we have two separate events called event A and event B, and we notice that event A and event B sometimes happen at the same time. We may be inclined to

think there is a relationship between A and B, just because they occurred together. For example, say you wore blue socks one day and won a large sum of money. A few days later you win some more money, and you notice that again you were wearing blue socks. You wonder if there is a relationship, so you start to wear your “lucky” blue socks every time you gamble. When you win, you may attribute it to those lucky socks. If you lose, you think something must have interfered—some other influence got in the way, or it was just an unlucky day. This is exactly how superstitions are born. The same goes for omens, gut feelings, and other things we think of as signs telling us to bet one way or another. When the gamble goes as hoped, we see it as a confirmation of our superstition or skill. When it goes the other way, we think something else got in the way or we made a mistake.

Finally, another common mental distortion has to do with selective memory. We are more likely to remember wins, especially big wins, and less likely to remember losses. Wins tend to be rare, they produce positive feelings, and they reinforce the hope that we will win again. So they stick out in our memory. Loss, on the other hand, is common and feels like failure, so we are motivated not to remember our losses. As a result, the idea of winning is more present in our thoughts, and so we are more likely to gamble—ignoring the reality that loss is by far the most common outcome.

To sum up, the most common mental distortions that are related to gambling have to do with a basic misunderstanding of how randomness and probability work; an exaggerated confidence in our skills or ability; and perceiving patterns that make us believe we can recognize or manipulate luck.

From the standpoint of mindfulness, we can reduce the control such distortions have by remembering that our thoughts are not the same as ourselves and by de-fusing from gambling-related thoughts or distortions around that are not skillful – i.e., that do not assist us with our goal of not gambling.

The interesting thing about these mental distortions is that, even when people understand them and agree that they are irrational, research has shown that people become far less critical of their own thought processes while they are engaged in gambling. In the moment of betting, we seem to enter a different state of mind in which these distortions have free rein. This means there is an opportunity for practicing mindfulness. We can use the skills we’ve been learning to try and recognize those irrational thoughts. And in keeping with the idea of acceptance and nonjudgment, we can experiment with this as well. What happens if we simply notice these thoughts, rather than complying with them or trying to change them? Perhaps we can just give them a name; for example, “oh, there is the gambler’s fallacy.” Or “Now I’m having a superstitious thought.” Rather than judging the thoughts as good or bad, we’re simply labelling them and letting them be. Giving them a name might just have the effect of decreasing their power over our behaviour.

For next week I’d like you to reflect on which kinds of beliefs and thoughts you notice play a significant role in your gambling. Whether you do this before, during, or after gambling, see if you can mindfully notice how you think about the roles of luck, skill, and probability in your gambling behaviour. Do you recognize any irrational thoughts? Mental distortions? Superstitions? You can record these on a special form I will hand out for the homework. The underlying idea is that becoming more aware of your habitual thought patterns around gambling will help you to avoid buying into those ways of thinking. Any questions?

## Session 5 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

1. **Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, eating a meal, doing the dishes, showering, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring it the log to our next session.

2. **Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. The feeling may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? It may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindfulness skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. The same skills can be used in any situation, including the practice of acceptance. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

3. **Mindful of Thoughts.** Over the course of the coming week, try to practice the Mindfulness of Thoughts experience at least 4 times, for at least 5-10 minutes or more per exercise. You can start by focusing on your experience of breathing in order to mindfully connect to the present moment, and then shift your awareness to your thoughts. Observe them with an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude. Notice any changes that occur: Do the thoughts become louder or quieter over time? More or less frequent? More or less pleasant/unpleasant?

See if you can use the techniques discussed in class to defuse from your thoughts (see *Thought defusion strategies* handout). Experiment with which techniques feel useful and comfortable for you. Notice what happens when you try using these strategies; what kind of feelings and thoughts come up? What happens to the thought? What kind of thoughts appear in response? You may also try to visualize your thoughts as leaves in a stream, mentally writing down your thought on a leaf and watching it float away.

When you find yourself distracted and dragged along by thoughts or other experiences, simply notice your distraction without judgment, and gently shift your focus back to your thoughts. Be especially aware of any automatic thoughts that seem to push you in the direction of gambling. If you can do so, practice urge surfing over any physical or mental feelings of craving that arise. Try to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

### Worksheets

1. **Gambling thoughts and beliefs.** The gambling thoughts and beliefs form allows you to record any thoughts and beliefs you recognize in yourself that influence your gambling. They can include

thoughts about probability and randomness (e.g., the gambler's fallacy), about your confidence or skill in gambling, or your ability to recognize and manipulate luck by detecting certain patterns or omens. You can also list any behaviours, objects, or other things you associate with luck or gambling, like a lucky game, lucky day, lucky machine, lucky dealer, lucky website, etc. (or unlucky ones). In the column on the right, you can try to write down your reasoning as to why you think this is an irrational or mistaken thought, belief, or behaviour. Bring your form to our next meeting.

**2. Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Please remember to bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### **Readings**

**1. Session 5 Reading 1**

**2. Session 5 Reading 2**

# Session 5: Gambling Beliefs form

In the left column, list some thoughts, beliefs, skills, behaviours, objects, or other things that you tend to associate with luck, ability, and good outcomes of betting. In the right column, right down why you think this is an irrational or mistaken thought, belief, or behaviour.

Thought, belief, behaviour, or object	Reason why this is irrational or mistaken





## **Session 6 – Self-Compassion**

### **Session 6 reading: Self-compassion**

When we are mindful of thoughts, we discover very early on that the mind is often busy being critical, and a lot of that criticism is directed at ourselves. That critical voice lives inside all of us. One reason it exists is that we learn from an early age what parents and society expect from us, and we internalize those expectations. Another reason is that work, family, relationships, life place a lot of demands on us. That means we are constantly dealing with “shoulds” and “shouldn’ts.” When we don’t live up to all those shoulds and shouldn’ts, we’re often the first to criticize and put ourselves down for it. This tendency to self-judge and criticize is particularly strong in people who struggle with dependency or addictions. These people frequently get stuck in a cycle of trying to quit, eventually slipping up and relapsing, and then berating themselves for what they perceive as a failure. If you recognize yourself in that description, you are probably familiar with this tendency to judge and criticize yourself. Does it ever really accomplish anything? How does it feel?

Another common experience in struggling with addiction is loneliness. Our struggles can often make us feel isolated and alone. Some of you may know what it’s like to lose friends and relationships due to problems associated with gambling, or to withdraw from other people out of shame or fear of confrontation. However, even people who are surrounded by friends and relatives can still feel painfully alone with their experiences, be they addiction, depression, anxiety, or other issues. A common thought is to feel as though almost everyone you see appears to be doing just fine in life, while you are struggling just to get through the day. Feeling so alone in our suffering can make us feel invisible and disconnected from humanity. What’s more, aside from feeling isolated from other people, our self-criticism and judgment can even alienate us from ourselves. We tend to reject the part of us that gambles because it is unwanted; not who we wish to be; not really us. But that rejection creates a division within the self that is experienced as a painful lack of wholeness. If you’ve ever thought to yourself that you feel “broken,” it may be this internal sense of isolation and separateness which gives rise to that feeling.

As you’ve no doubt experienced in your mindfulness practice, the negative self-talk we engage in tends to happen without conscious effort, or even against our will. It’s that automatic pilot again. When we criticize ourselves without awareness, we buy into those thoughts, react to them automatically, and we end up feeling lousy. And when those critical thoughts and painful feelings overwhelm us, we cope in less than skillful ways, such as gambling. This means that self-criticism fits neatly inside the process we’ve previously discussed:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

In this way our negative self-talk actually serves to create more stress and emotional distress. Despite our best intentions to change, it has the opposite effect and actually perpetuates the problem. So instead of relating to ourselves so harshly, how about we explore some ways to cultivate a more gentle and caring relationship with ourselves.

Everyone is familiar with the concept of having compassion for other people. Most humans have a natural tendency to sympathize and empathize with others, especially those we are close to, which is why compassion is seen as an important value across different cultures. Strangely enough, however, most of us don’t treat ourselves with the same degree of kindness and care that we extend

to other people—as if it’s not okay for us to be imperfect and make mistakes. But can we be truly compassionate toward other people if we can’t be compassionate with ourselves? Buddhism holds that we cannot find peace in the world unless we have peace within ourselves. That’s why self-compassion is an essential part of mindfulness meditation. The fact is that we’ve actually been practicing self-compassion all along: By practicing nonjudgment and acceptance; by being gentle with ourselves when we get distracted, make mistakes, or find ourselves gambling again; and by tending to our experiences in the here and now with a curious and open-minded attitude. So what else can we do to cultivate self-compassion?

Kirstin Neff is an American psychologist who specializes in the study and practice of self-compassion. Through her research she has found that self-compassion is a vital component of mental health and consists of three parts: Self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. Let’s look at each of these individually. About self-kindness she writes:

*Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or [punishing] ourselves with self-criticism. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable, so they tend to be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences rather than getting angry when life falls short of set ideals. People cannot always be or get exactly what they want. When this reality is denied or fought against, suffering increases in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism. When this reality is accepted with sympathy and kindness, greater emotional equanimity is experienced.*  
(self-compassion.org)

For some of you, this may seem like a very different way of relating to yourself than you are accustomed to. In fact, some of you may even notice certain thoughts arising in protest: But how can I improve myself if I just accept my shortcomings instead of pointing them out? How can I motivate myself to change if my attitude is, “oh well, you made a mistake, that’s okay”? These are normal reactions—especially if you were raised to believe that punishment is an effective way to learn. But think about, for example, how children respond to judgment and harsh discipline. Kids have a deep desire to be accepted, understood, nurtured, and encouraged. They usually do not react positively to criticism and punishment; even though in some cases it can force them to behave, it can also make them feel pretty awful—guilty, ashamed, powerless, and afraid. And being told not to feel that way teaches them to ignore their emotions. At the same time, it’s important to recognize that parents usually have the best intentions, and they are only human themselves.

Now imagine, if you will, that we all carry an inner child inside of us; a part of us that is vulnerable, has a need to be loved and cared for, and is still learning how to live life, with all the mistakes and imperfections that involves. Then imagine that we also carry an inner parent inside of us. What kind of relationship exists between your inner parent and your inner child? Is it one that criticizes, disciplines, punishes, and neglects? Or is it one that offers protection, guidance, and support through love, caring, and encouragement? A bit of both, perhaps? If this way of relating to yourself makes sense, then you can try experimenting with becoming more aware of your inner parent and child. Applying your mindfulness skills to relate to yourself in a more compassionate way. Recognizing the needs of your inner child, but also acknowledging that even that your inner parent or inner critic deserves compassion and can be nurtured and loved, helping it to reframe its criticisms in more gentle and skillful ways. How do you think this form of self-kindness might affect your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours?

The second aspect of self-compassion identified in Kristin Neff's research is a common sense of humanity. She writes:

*Frustration at not having things exactly as we want is often accompanied by an irrational but pervasive sense of isolation – as if “I” were the only person suffering or making mistakes. All humans suffer, however. The very definition of being “human” means that one is mortal, vulnerable and imperfect. Therefore, self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience – something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to “me” alone.*  
(self-compassion.org)

You may have various reactions to the idea that you are not alone in your suffering, and that recognizing this can help you feel less isolated and lonely. One reaction might be that no one could possibly understand how much you are suffering—especially if no one else in your life is dealing with the same problems you are. And please don't get this wrong: Nobody is saying that your suffering isn't real or valid. In fact, it's quite the opposite: Everyone in this group is here because they are suffering in some way or another. For some of you this might be the first time you've had a chance to meet other people with similar experiences. Hopefully, being able to share your stories and feelings has allowed you to see that, in fact, you are not alone. That being said, your suffering is not only shared with other people with gambling problems; it's shared by all of humanity. Whether it's addiction, mental illness, relationship problems, trouble at work, trauma and abuse, poverty or war—suffering is common to all human beings. Even the people we think of as happy and successful, who seem to have it all, may be suffering behind closed doors.

At this point you may be noticing another kind of reaction in your thoughts: But our suffering pales in comparison to people who have it much worse! Who am I to feel sorry for myself when others are suffering from war, starvation, etc.? This is a valid question, and it may even be helpful to recognize that from time to time, just to take a different perspective that allows us to remember that not everything is hopeless; that there are things in life to be grateful for and look forward to. However, does this mean we don't have a right to feel bad? Not at all. Again, it's quite the opposite: Every person's suffering is real to them, no matter how small or large, and to deny that reality would be to deny one's humanity. Having the courage to truly look at that suffering and to own it is what self-compassion and mindfulness are all about. Not denying or running away from painful experiences, but allowing them to exist, responding to them gently with loving-kindness, and recognizing that they are part and parcel of what it means to be human. Reminding yourself that you are not alone; that, in fact, your painful experiences connect you to the rest of humanity. Any questions or comments about the relationship of self-compassion to loneliness and suffering? How do you see this being relevant to your gambling behaviour, or not?

Kristin Neff identifies a third component of self-compassion, namely, mindfulness:

*Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. This equilibrated stance stems from the process of relating personal experiences to those of others who are also suffering, thus putting our own situation into a larger perspective. It also stems from the willingness to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental, receptive mind state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. At the same time, mindfulness requires that we not be “over-identified” with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and*

*swept away by negative reactivity.*  
(self-compassion.org)

At this point there may appear to be a contradiction in terms. Neff says mindfulness is part of self-compassion, while all along we've been saying that self-compassion is part of mindfulness. So which is it? The truth is that these two concepts are so closely related that distinguishing them really just boils down to semantics. They are two sides of the same coin. The relationship between self-compassion and mindfulness is captured by this key sentence in Neff's description: "We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time." In order to practice self-compassion, you need to pay attention with purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment. This will allow you to become aware of your painful emotions and distressing thoughts, so that you can respond to them with self-compassion. Compassion and empathy for oneself are not the same as feeling sorry for oneself. Compassion and empathy provide support through acknowledgement, whereas feeling sorry for oneself focuses on the injustice of our situation. Whereas compassion and empathy can strengthen and promote our inherent self-worth, feeling sorry for oneself may actually intensify our sense of victimization, and paradoxically, our righteous sense of being special in our suffering. In short, compassion and empathy encourage us to connect with humanity whereas feeling sorry for oneself may undermine this sense of common imperfect happiness.



*Illustration: Mindfulness allows us to become aware of our negative self-talk*

There is something that often happens when people first practice becoming mindful of their self-judgment: They respond to their self-criticism with more criticism! "Oh, I shouldn't be critical of myself, that's wrong." And then: "I shouldn't be critical of my being critical." And perhaps again: "I shouldn't be critical of my being critical of my being critical," and so on and so forth. People can easily get caught in this repeating loop of judging judgment, and when they realize what they've been doing, they sometimes burst into laughter. How might you use mindfulness and self-

compassion to skillfully respond to those cycles? What other cycles of judgment can you identify in your life?

Now that we have a good understanding of what it means to be self-compassionate and how that might be useful in the context of problem gambling, I'd like to introduce you to a meditation exercise designed to elicit self-compassion.

## **Session 6 Mindfulness exercise: Cultivating Self-Compassion**

### **Instructions**

In this exercise, we will focus on visualizing a compassionate image and connecting it to our experiences.

### **Guided meditation**

Begin by taking a posture that allows you to feel a sense of being firmly rooted and alert. We are cultivating a specific quality of mind that includes focused intention and commitment.

Taking a posture of gentle uprightness and dignity will help you cultivate this quality of mind. If it feels comfortable allow the eyes to close or simply choose a spot on the floor to focus the gaze on.

Begin by simply noticing how it feels to breathe in and to breathe out. Perhaps a gentle expansion as you breathe in, and releasing or dissolving as you breathe out. Perhaps a sense of spaciousness as you breathe in, and a sense of grounding or rootedness as you breathe out.

The first step in cultivating a compassionate image is to connect to the feeling in your own body and breath. For example, a felt quality of compassion might be spaciousness or expansiveness, that is, the ability to hold what is already happening. You might notice this quality is already present in your breath. Take a few breaths and see if you can connect to that physical feeling of space, the expansion as you inhale and dissolving as you exhale.

Another felt quality of compassion is that of being centered or grounded and rooted. See if you can feel that quality, perhaps in your feet connected to the earth, and your seat connected to the chair. Perhaps you feel the centered balance of the spine as it lengthens up out of the pelvis, perhaps a physical, visceral feeling of being grounded and centered.

Another felt quality of compassion is that of warmth, or perhaps of energy or action. And you can feel this in your own heartbeat. Perhaps you can sense your own heartbeat or your own pulse. Feel free to take your hand to your heart or your wrist where you can feel that action and warmth of your own heart or pulse. And if you don't feel anything in particular, then that's fine too.

And letting your hands rest back down again, and allowing yourself to experience a felt quality of compassion in your whole body and breath.

Now, bring to mind someone who represents for you a supremely compassionate being. This could be a person you know now or knew in the past. It could be a religious figure or even an animal. This person or being would have the qualities of caring, acceptance, wisdom and strength. You do not need to worry about choosing the perfect person or being for this image, just accept that whoever or whatever comes to mind for now is good enough for this exercise.

As you picture this being, notice what it feels like to be in their presence. Now, imagine that you too, in the presence of this compassionate being could embody these qualities of compassion: of strength, wisdom, caring and acceptance. Imagine and feel yourself as a compassionate being with these qualities. Now imagine that you could breathe in and out through the heart area or the centre of the chest, picturing or sensing a warm glowing light at the centre of the chest as you experience any feelings of caring, acceptance, warmth and strength.

And with this feeling of being anchored by your breath, bring to mind some situation in your life where you were worried, or stressed or unhappy. It could be in the past or the present. It might be a situation where there was conflict, disappointment, or illness. It might be a situation where you did not succeed at something you really wanted or felt put down by someone you know. Choose a specific memory, and notice how you feel about yourself when you think about such an experience.

How does your heart feel?

Do you feel self pity, and small?

Do any self critical judgments arise in your mind making you feel or believe at some level that you're no good?

That you deserved what you experienced or that there is something wrong with you?

Let your normal habitual responses arise to this scenario, how you might ordinarily talk to yourself and feel about this scenario.

And now contemplate a different way of relating to yourself in the face of difficulty and suffering.

Recognize that you can respond with compassion, with a sense of nonjudgmental concern, tenderness, and without the urge to do something about it.

Now refresh your feeling of being in the presence of your compassionate image and embodying the qualities of compassion. Imagine what it would be like to relate to your own suffering with warmth, acceptance, wisdom, caring and strength. Notice again any sensations you might feel around your heart area or the centre of the chest.

Imagine again that you could inhale and exhale through the centre of the chest. And as you breathe in, imagine warm light coming from your compassionate image. Imagine as you breathe in that this warmth and light can transform the constriction and tension of your suffering.

Imagine as you exhale there is a sense of releasing and letting go. And silently say to yourself:

*May I be free from suffering.*

*May I be free from pain and sorrow*

*May I know peace and joy*

Breathing in warmth and light. Breathing out, releasing, and letting go. Repeating silently again to yourself:

*May I be free from suffering*

*May I be free from pain and sorrow*

*May I know peace and joy.*

Notice what it is like to offer yourself these wishes. If there is any difficulty, saying silently to that part of yourself that resists:

*May that which resists compassion in me be free from suffering*

*May that which resists compassion in me be free from pain and sorrow*

*May that which resists compassion in me know peace and joy.*



Now bring your awareness back to the simple sensations of breathing in and out, of your posture here in the chair, the sensations of making contact with the ground and the chair. In your mind's eye begin to visualize the room and space around you. Acknowledge your willingness to participate in this practice and to be present for any feelings that arose.

And getting ready to open your eyes, with a refreshed sense of presence, at the sound of the bell.

### **Inquiry**

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal way of relating to yourself?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

## Session 6 Reading 2: Self-care

I'd like to briefly take a moment to highlight another form of self-compassion: Taking care of yourself. Looking after your physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. Making sure that you are well-fed, well-rested, connecting with other people, and able to express and cope with your emotions. All these things are part of taking care of yourself. This is also an important part of moving away from gambling and toward your preferred values. A useful acronym for monitoring your own needs is H.A.L.T.:

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

**A**ngry: Are your emotional needs being taken care of?

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

**T**ired: Are you getting enough rest and rejuvenation?

For people who have a relationship with spirituality or religion, we could add the question: Are your spiritual needs being taken care of? Being hungry, angry, lonely, tired, and out of touch with your spirituality makes you more vulnerable to triggers. You can practice being mindful of your mind, body, and spirit in order to recognize when any of these need attention.

## Session 6 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### 1. **Everyday Mindfulness.**

2. **Urge surfing.** If you notice yourself experiencing the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without wanting to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards.

3. **Mindful Self-compassion.** Over the course of the next week, try to practice the Self-Compassion experience at least 4 times, for at least 10-15 minutes. You can start by focusing on your experience of breathing in order to mindfully connect to the present moment, and then shift your awareness to other aspects of your experience. As you begin to form a compassionate image within your mind, observe your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations an open, curious, nonjudging, and accepting attitude. Practice viewing any painful emotions and/or critical thoughts with self-compassion; with tenderness, empathy, forgiveness, and encouragement. If you get distracted, get stuck in a loop of judgment, or find it challenging to treat yourself with compassion, then try focusing on the breath again to ground yourself in the present moment. Then gently open up your awareness to observe whatever experiences come up. Try to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring it with you to our next session. *If you don't feel comfortable with the exercise included, you may visit [www.self-compassion.org/category/exercises](http://www.self-compassion.org/category/exercises) to find free mp3s with guided self-compassion meditations created by Kristin Neff. Keep track of which exercises you practice in your mindfulness log.*

### Worksheets

1. **Compassionate letter to myself.** For next week you are invited to write yourself a compassionate letter. In this exercise you will imagine a good friend who perfectly embodies the quality of compassion, and write yourself a letter from the perspective of this imaginary friend, focusing on your problem gambling. Refer to the detailed instructions on the handout.

2. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (see Appendix II and III).** Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

#### 1. Session 6 Readings 1 & 2

## Session 6: Compassionate Letter to Myself

Everybody has something about themselves they don't like; something that causes them to feel shame, insecure, or not "good enough." Please think of an issue you have that tends to make you feel bad about yourself (a mistake you made, your appearance, relationship issues, etc.)

Now think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally wise, loving and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and weaknesses, including what you don't like about yourself. This friend recognizes the limits of human nature, and is kind, accepting, and forgiving.

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend, focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for. What would this friend say to you from the perspective of unlimited compassion? And if you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, how might these suggestions embody feelings of care, encouragement, and support?

After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back to it and read it again, really letting the words sink in. Feel the compassion as it pours into you, soothing and comforting you. Love, connection and acceptance are your birthright. To claim them you need only look within yourself.

If you prefer, you can also:

Write a letter as if you were talking to a dearly loved friend who was struggling with the same concern that you are. What words of compassion and support would you offer? Then go back and read the letter, applying the words to yourself.

Write to yourself from the perspective of a friend who cares deeply about you, savor the feeling, put the letter down, and then read it to yourself later on.

NOTE: BLANK PAGES ARE PROVIDED BELOW, BUT YOU MAY ALSO WRITE YOUR LETTER ON A COMPUTER OR USE SEPARATE PAGES.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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## **Session 7 – Being A.W.A.K.E.**

### **Session 7 Reading: Review & Becoming A.W.A.K.E.**

Today I'd like to start off by reviewing our progress so far. In the six meetings we've had to date, we have covered a lot of different aspects of mindfulness. We began with a general introduction to the concept of the automatic pilot, learning that many of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours happen without being fully aware of them. We then discussed the role of avoidance; how the autopilot tends to activate during experiences we prefer not to deal with. We explored how the practice of mindful acceptance, instead of avoidance, can help us tolerate those challenging experiences and prevent the autopilot from leading us into problematic situations and behaviour. We learned about urge surfing, which allows us to ride out cravings by mindfully observing and accepting our experiences in the here and now. After that we explored some specific external situations, such as relationship issues, work stress, and family tensions, that are linked to emotions which tend to trigger the urge to gamble. We practiced being mindful during those situations in order to monitor our feelings and gambling cravings. In the next session we took a closer look at emotions, stress, and memories, identifying which experiences are most likely to trigger avoidance, automatic behaviour, and gambling urges. This allowed us to discern one of the main patterns underlying the gambling addiction cycle:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

We recognized that positive events and emotions can also lead us toward gambling. In the next session we discussed our relationship to thoughts; how mindfulness and other cognitive defusion skills allow us to create distance from unhelpful thoughts, so that we don't need to buy into them and react with emotions and behaviours that don't really work for us. We also explored some specific thoughts involved in gambling, such as distorted beliefs about probability, luck, skill, and chance, and discussed ways to mindfully recognize such thoughts in order to lessen their influence on our behaviour. Finally, last week we focused on the vital concept of self-compassion; how self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, mindfulness, and self-care can support our well-being and help us skillfully respond to those cycles of gambling, self-criticism, and guilt or shame. All along we've been applying these concepts by practicing mindfulness at our meetings and at home, including our ongoing practice of Everyday Mindfulness and Urge Surfing, along with various written exercises and mindfulness logs to keep track of our progress.

At this point I'd like to touch base with the group to find out where everyone is at. Are there any concepts or techniques that you are finding challenging? Are there any that don't seem to work for you? Others that you've found especially helpful or insightful? Are there specific areas of your life, emotions, thoughts, memories, that you find difficult to integrate with mindfulness practice? Others that have been successful? How do you feel about your progress in this group? How do you feel about the results of the training so far?

Now that we have reviewed our progress to date and explored any lingering issues, I'd like to point out something all these concepts and skills have in common: They create room for skillful responding. Rather than going down the road of the automatic pilot, being mindful allows us to take a step back and consider other possible actions to take. So when we become aware of our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving while they're happening, we gain the freedom to choose how we want to respond in a given situation. For example, we can choose to just observe, letting

those experiences and impulses rise and fall like a wave, or drift past like a leaf on a river. If some kind of action is required, then we can choose not to react automatically, but select from a range of possible behaviours that might be more skillful and better suited to the situation. In contrast, we can also choose to surrender to whatever thought, feeling, behaviour, or urge presents itself—if it feels too overwhelming, perhaps—but even then we can do so mindfully; as a conscious choice rather than an automatic reaction. Although hopefully being mindful will allow you to negotiate those challenging moments in a more skillful way. In any case, what all these choices have in common is that they are chosen from a place of awareness. Instead of sleepwalking through triggering situations in automatic pilot mode, we are fully awake.



*Illustration: Being consciously present in the here-and-now allows us to reflect before we act.*

This brings me to an acronym which you might find useful. One of the biggest challenges in learning mindfulness skills is to remember to actually use them when it matters. Although frequent and persistent practice is really the most important in that regard, acronyms and other mnemonics can serve as helpful reminders of what mindfulness's all about. And it's all about being awake. A. W. A. K. E., awake:

## **“Alert** to triggers and cravings.”

This is the most important step, because without it, the other steps probably won't happen. If you don't recognize a trigger or craving in the moment, then that moment might be lost to mindlessness. This is why we spent the first half of this training exploring and identifying your personal triggers; those high-risk internal and external situations and the gambling thoughts and urges that are linked to them. So if you know which experiences tend to trigger your urge to gamble, you can be alert to those moments in your day-to-day life. When you recognize a triggering situation or a craving, you can tell yourself, “Wake up!” This is a moment to be AWAKE!

## **“Watchful** of the present moment (*breath and body, thoughts and feelings, urges*)”

Once you've noticed a trigger or craving, or any other experience, happening in the moment, you can choose to be mindful. Just watch the present moment as it unfolds in your awareness. If it helps, start by focusing on the breath to ground yourself in the here and now. Then mindfully, with openness and curiosity, observe your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations as they present themselves. Watch that automatic pilot try to do its thing. If you're experiencing thoughts or feelings related to gambling, practice defusing from those thoughts—taking some distance from them to let them pass by without reacting. This can be accomplished by adopting the role of observer rather than actor or reactor.

## **“Accepting** of your experience”

Acceptance means nonjudgment. Taking a gentle and somewhat detached stance toward your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations. Surfing the urge involves being aware of and accepting the natural rhythm of cravings and all other experiences; how they wax and wane, rise and fall, appear and disappear. If you lose your focus, fall into automatic pilot, or give into the urge, then simply take note; no need to judge yourself or your experiences.

## **“Kind** to yourself”

Mindfulness entails self-acceptance and self-compassion. This means treating yourself with the same tender care as you would a good friend. Recognizing that challenges and painful experiences are common to all humankind. Being mindful of your pain so you can tend to it, instead of hiding from it. Nurturing your inner child and softening your inner parent to replace self-criticism with self-kindness. Attending to the basic needs of your mind, body, and soul, to keep you strong, creative, and aware.

## **“Expanding** your options”

Being awake and mindful puts you in the driver's seat, instead of the automatic pilot. Observing your thoughts, feelings, and actions with acceptance and self-compassion in the here and now creates possibilities; a broader perspective from which alternative choices can be seen and made. When faced with a choice, become aware of your values and preferred directions; you can mindfully choose not to react, or to respond with skillful behaviour in line with your values. Excessive or compulsive behavior – including gambling - really represents a narrowing or perceived narrowing of our range of responses to a given thought, feeling or event. Mindfulness can restore flexibility by encouraging and assisting us to expand our range of response options in a given situation.

## **Session 6 Mindfulness exercise: Mindful imaginal exposure**

### **Instructions**

We have discussed ways to stay mindful in challenging situations, and how that lets us expand our options for skillfully responding. Now I'd like to introduce an exercise that will allow you to practice this. We are going to mindfully imagine ourselves in a triggering situation and visualize a skillful response.

We would like to perform this exercise with something that is relevant to your daily life, but we don't want you to be overwhelmed by painful feelings or thoughts. Identify which external situation and internal experience on your top three list are the least troubling to you. Decide whether they feel safe enough to visualize in this mindfulness exercise. If all of the items on your list seem like they might be too challenging to bring into this space, then think about some other possible triggers you identified in previous sessions. If you rate your triggers on a scale from 1 to 5 in terms of their emotional intensity, you probably want to be around a 3 for this exercise.

Now that you have identified an internal and external trigger for this exercise, ask yourself whether these two might be somehow connected. For example, does the external situation frequently result in the emotional experience or stress of the internal situation? Let's say your triggers were "fighting with partner" and "feeling sad." These might be related experiences, where one follows another. However, if your internal and external situations aren't connected in this way, see if there are other triggers you can identify that are somehow related. Maybe one is "bad day at work" and the other is "feeling stressed." But if you can't find a connection between your two lists, that's okay. Just identify an external trigger you feel comfortable using for this exercise, and we'll take it from there.

In this exercise we will be using the breath as an anchor to keep us grounded in the here and now. Because you'll be visualizing your most triggering experiences and emotions, the exercise may create some discomfort. If you notice yourself getting upset, you can shift your attention back to the breath and focus your awareness on the here and now. There is no obligation to remain focused on the trigger to the point of acute distress. Self-compassion means being supportive in the face of unpleasant experiences but not coercive.

If and when you're ready, you can bring your attention back to the exercise. However, if you feel overwhelmed by your experience, you can take a break from the exercise. In that case you can just open your eyes, perhaps do some light stretching. And maybe join the exercise later on if you feel ready.

### **Guided meditation**

Settle into a comfortable sitting position...

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

And as your awareness settles on the breath, bring attention to the lower abdomen, noticing physical sensations there as the breath moves in and out of the body, rising and falling, rising and falling.

At the same time, become aware of the sensation of your body resting in your seat. The contact between your body, your clothes, and the chair. And also the feeling in the bottom of your feet. Noticing the weight of your feet on the floor. Just sensing your immediate physical presence in the here and now.

Now bring to mind the external situation from your list. Imagine where you are. What is the space? What time of day is it? Who is there with you? Include as many details of the situation as necessary to bring it to life in your mind's eye. Take a few moments to fully picture yourself within that situation.

As you imagine yourself in this situation, what are you thinking? Notice which kinds of thoughts are rising to the surface. Are they thoughts related to the situation itself? A memory or image perhaps? Or are they thoughts about this present moment, in the here and now? Is there judgment happening, toward other people or yourself?

Whatever it is you're thinking, see if you can just notice your thoughts. Without losing yourself in their stories... just watching them appear and disappear. Not judging them, just accepting and letting them be. They're only thoughts.

If you notice yourself getting caught up in your thinking, then compliment yourself for recognizing that. Maybe thank your mind for the thoughts. And then turn your awareness back to the here and now, spending a few moments connecting to your breath if that helps.

And then shift your awareness back to the image of the situation. As you focus on what it's like to be in that situation, become aware of which bodily sensations are associated with what's happening. Any physical feelings that stand out? Notice those sensations in your body with a sense of curiosity and openness. Without judging them as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. Just letting them be there, and seeing what happens.

If you get distracted, then gently turn back to the breath. Focusing on the sensation of breathing, in and out, as the air moves through your nose, down your throat, into your chest and belly, and back up again.

And then turning your awareness back to the imagined situation. Picturing yourself in those challenging circumstances.

Now focus your awareness inward. Begin to mindfully observe your mood. What kind of feelings do you notice? Is there one predominant emotion happening? More than one? Does it change? See if you can identify the emotion; give it a name. Is the emotion connected to any sensations in your body? To a certain thought or memory?

See if you can hold the image of the situation in your mind and focus on your feelings in the present moment. Explore those feelings with an open and curious attitude. Allowing them to be there. Accepting their presence. It's what you're experiencing in this moment. If it's not the emotion you had on your list, that's okay. The point is to become aware of what's happening inside you right now.

And every time you lose focus, concentrating on your breath to bring it back. And the same if your feelings are too strong or too scary. Take a step back from those experiences; reorient yourself toward the breath, and notice the sensation of your body sitting in the chair. Perhaps even opening

your eyes if you need to, doing whatever feels right. Gently acknowledge your limits with self-compassion. Doing so in a mindful, accepting way. No one is judging you. There's no need for that.

Imagining yourself in this triggering situation, can you notice any urge to react in a particular way? Are there any thoughts of escaping the situation? Or confronting it head on, or confronting a specific person? What sort of habitual reactions come to mind? Do you notice any thoughts about gambling?

Still focusing on how your situation makes you feel—the experience of being triggered—become aware of your values. Of your ideals. Of your self-compassion. Of your wisdom and strength. How would you like to see yourself in this situation? What kind of skills would you like to be able to apply in this situation?

If you notice yourself getting distracted, this would be a great time to return your awareness to your breath. Becoming aware, once again, of the sensation of breathing. Following the movements of your body as you breathe. Finding your way back to the here and now. And then gently shifting your attention back to an awareness of your values in the imagined situation.

As you reflect on your values, hopes, and dreams, take another look at the situation, but this time look at it through the lens of your values. At whatever circumstances and people are there, and at whatever emotions, stress, or urges you're experiencing. Still mindful of your values, what kind of thoughts and images come up? Can you imagine yourself responding to the situation in a skillful way?

Identify which way of responding feels the most skillful and the most in line with your values. Whether it involves doing something or not doing something, visualize yourself responding to the situation in that way. What does it feel like? What kind of thoughts come up? Spend a few moments becoming aware of the experience. Observing whatever thoughts and feelings present themselves in the process. Allowing them to come and go with an accepting, nonjudging stance. Checking in with your breathing to bring yourself back into the present if needed.

Now visualize the outcome of your skillful response. Imagine what would happen if you responded this way. What direction would the situation take? If other people are involved, how might they react? How would this make you feel? Be mindful of the thoughts and emotions that come up in your awareness. Noticing each one as it appears. Not judging it. Just noticing. Being aware of how you would experience the fruits of your response as you imagine it now.

We are getting ready to finish the exercise. At this time I'd like you to gently turn your awareness back to the breath. Spend a few moments following the movement of the breath in your body, following the rise and fall of your belly.

Then noticing the sensation of your body resting on your seat. The contact between body and chair. And the weight of your feet on the ground. Gradually becoming more aware of your presence in this physical space.

In a moment you will hear the bell. When ready, you may gently open your eyes. Taking a few moments to mindfully take in your surroundings. Being fully present in the here and now. Try to bring this of mindfulness with you into the discussion coming up.

## **Inquiry**

What was this experience like?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Did you become aware of other ways of responding to the situation, different from what you might normally do?

Were you able to identify a skillful response?

What kind of outcome did you imagine happening?

What was that like?

Other observations?

This exercise can be especially difficult because it asks us to directly attend to our triggers without resorting to our default response of gambling. You should all congratulate yourselves for getting through this. If you are still experiencing feelings, thoughts or sensations of wanting to gamble, recognize that this is normal and that this is the perfect place to discuss them, if you wish to. You are also welcome to stay after the session, if necessary, to work through persistent feelings or urges until you feel you are back to equilibrium.

## Session 7 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

1. **Everyday Mindfulness.** Choose a brief, routine, and simple daily activity to practice mindfulness. Ideas include brushing your teeth, eating a meal, doing the dishes, showering, etc. Practice doing this activity with mindfulness. Consider experimenting with the AWAKE model to see if it's helpful for you. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log.

2. **Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without trying to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Considering using the A.W.A.K.E. model to recognize and mindfully negotiate your cravings. Make sure to record your observations in the mindfulness log, and bring the log with you to our next session.

3. **Becoming A.W.A.K.E.** Over the course of the coming week, practice becoming and staying AWAKE in various situations. The emphasis should be on situations that may be triggering, especially those you listed in your top three. See if you can keep an awareness of those triggers in mind throughout the week, so that you can be Alert to triggers and cravings as they happen in the moment. Then practice Watching your experience, Accepting what comes up, being Kind to yourself, and mindfully Expanding your options for responding. You may also apply the AWAKE strategy to other situations just to practice. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

### Worksheet

1. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)** (see **Appendix II and III**). Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

1. **Session 7 readings**

### Optional

1. **Three Quick Mindfulness Practices to Overcome Worry, Anxiety, and Panic.** These are three short and simple mindfulness exercises you can try at home or on the go.



### **3 Quick Mindfulness Practices to Overcome Worry, Anxiety, and Panic**

By Jodie Glen

#### **1. Anchoring**

One of the best ways to calm yourself down is to anchor yourself by directing your attention into the lower half of your body. Begin by focusing on your feet and how they feel inside your socks or shoes and against the ground. Expand your attention to include the sensations first in your lower legs and then in your upper legs – do they feel heavy or light? Warm or cool? Tingly or numb? Now include the sensations of your breathing, really relaxing as you breathe out.

This is a great way of anchoring yourself and you can do it any time, with your eyes open or closed, while sitting or even while walking around. Anchor yourself. Then breathe.

#### **2. Breath counting**

This technique can be used in conjunction with anchoring or on its own. Anchor first. On your next in-breath, count up to 6 as you breathe all the way in, and then on the out-breath, count up to 10 as you breathe all the way out. This technique has the effect of lengthening both the in-breath and the out-breath, slowing down your breathing. It also lengthens the out-breath more than the in-breath, forcing you to release more carbon dioxide, slowing your heart rate, calming you down and restoring emotional equilibrium.

Make sure you fit the numbers to your breath and not the other way around. If 6 and 10 don't work for you, find another ratio that does, as long as the out-breath is at least two counts longer than the in-breath. If it's too hard to continue breathing while counting, count for one full breath, then take one normal breath and count the next one.

If you feel very panicked and can't manage the counting, say "in" to your self as you breath in, and "out" as you breathe out fully, trying to elongate the out-breath. Then again, say "in" on the in breath etc. Keep going for at least one minute but go for as long as you need. I

have used this technique very successfully myself to ward off impending panic attacks in the middle of the night.

### **3. Finger breathing**

Finger breathing is another version of breath counting. Hold one hand in front of you, palm facing towards you. With the index finger of your other hand, trace up the outside length of your thumb while you breath in, pausing at the top of your thumb and then trace it down the other side while you breath out. That's one breath. Trace up the side of the next finger while you breathe in, pause at the top, and then trace down the other side of that finger while you breathe out. That's two breaths. Keep going, tracing along each finger as you count each breath. When you get the end of the last finger, come back up that finger and do it in reverse.

This practice gives you something visual to focus on and something kinaesthetic to do with your hands as well as focusing on counting and your breathing. Its very useful when there is a lot going around you and its hard to just close your eyes and focus inwards. It's also a very easy technique to teach teenagers and kids.

These mindfulness techniques are not new. Many psychologists and counsellors have been using these tools for years. What's new is the acknowledgement that we can all benefit from mindfulness – these techniques are useful not only for clinical anxiety or panic but are just as effective for everyday experiences. Try them and notice what happens.

*Retrieved from: [www.wellbeing.com.au/blog/3-mindfulness-practices-to-overcome-worry-anxiety-and-panic/](http://www.wellbeing.com.au/blog/3-mindfulness-practices-to-overcome-worry-anxiety-and-panic/)*



## Session 8 – Loving Kindness

### **Session 8 Reading: Loving-kindness**

In a previous session we discussed and practiced the concept of self-compassion; how being kind to yourself, finding a sense of common humanity in your suffering, and being mindful nurtures and enhances your well-being. Today's session will explore the possibility of extending those attitudes and practices to other people. Research in psychology has found that feeling and practicing compassion towards others actually tends to make us feel good, and it may have all sorts of benefits for our health and relationships. But before we delve into this topic, I'd like to ask the group: Have you noticed any changes in how you see and behave around other people since beginning this training? Has practicing mindfulness had any effect on your personal relationships or how you view other people in general?

When we become mindful of our interactions with other people, we usually notice that there's often a lot of judgment happening. Much of it tends to happen outside of our awareness; automatic reactions that occur when people don't act the way we want or need them to. Sometimes our responses are justified; after all, people are imperfect beings. But careful reflection can show that much of the judging and criticism we engage in, whether in our heads or in real life, is probably unnecessary and unjustified. Moreover, judging others can make us feel bad—especially if we set ourselves up as victims. Being in the victim role does not feel good.

Instead of reacting automatically or feeling like a victim, perceiving and treating other people with compassion can help us feel stronger, more resilient, and more empowered. Take the example of getting cut off in traffic. There are various ways to interpret this. One is to think that the person cutting you off is a bad driver or a jerk, getting angry, and feeling like you ought to be treated with more respect and consideration. Another possibility is that the person is having a bad day, feels stressed, and got distracted, and so their behaviour has nothing to do with you personally. In the first scenario, the reaction is to judge, which makes you feel frustrated and victimized. In the second scenario, the reaction is not to judge; you may still feel angry about what happened (after all, cutting off can be dangerous and annoying), but this won't make you feel victimized. In this case you interpret the other person's behaviour within the context of their experience, instead of your own. Which is a form of empathy.

You could even take this approach a step further by, for instance, forgiving the person who cut you off. Perhaps even wishing them a better day so they don't feel so stressed out and get distracted in traffic. In this scenario, instead of judging and feeling bad, you are actually injecting positivity into the world and tapping into your inner strength and compassion. So here we have a specific illustration of the beneficial effects of mindfulness on your interpersonal functioning: It shows that observing your judgment of other people can lead you toward a positive action. Similarly, being kind toward yourself can also prompt you to be kind to others.

Buddhists refer to this compassionate attitude toward other people as *loving-kindness*. For many Buddhists, loving-kindness is at the core of their spiritual practice, and many meditations are designed to cultivate loving-kindness. Similar to compassion, it involves recognizing that all living beings suffer and wishing to ease their suffering. Although the terms are related, loving-kindness involves a somewhat more active stance than compassion; one might say that loving-kindness

means acting on one's compassion. Similar concepts and values can be found in most religions, and many recognize the beneficial effects of loving-kindness not only on other people and the world, but on oneself. In addition, much scientific research has been done to investigate the benefits of loving-kindness. These include:

- Increasing positive emotions and decreasing negative emotions and stress
- Decreasing pain, migraines, and psychological symptoms of trauma
- Strengthening empathy and emotional intelligence
- Improving relationships and social connectedness
- And even slowing down the aging process

In the West, the most common explanation for what loving-kindness actually is, is caring for the well-being of another living being, independent of approving or disapproving of them, or expecting anything in return. In other words, you don't need to like someone or approve of their actions in order to show them loving-kindness. When someone cuts you off in traffic, it is possible to disapprove of their behaviour while still showing them compassion.. It starts with the assumption that everyone is deserving of kindness including people that we don't like. In fact, people who have received kindness are usually happier, so there is the potential to transform unlikable people by practicing loving-kindness. Note that practicing loving-kindness towards another does not mean we endorse or encourage behaviors that are harmful to us or to others. Rather, it means that we focus on considering the person without judgment and offering him or her goodwill.

## Session 8 Mindfulness exercise: Loving-kindness meditation

### Instructions

In this exercise we'll begin by becoming mindful of our experience in the present moment. Then I will introduce a phrase or mantra that embodies loving-kindness, which we will practice repeating with different people in mind. You may participate or not participate in any way you feel comfortable with.

### Guided meditation

Start by getting into a comfortable position and allowing your eyes to close gently. And becoming aware of the body and mind and whatever is being carried within—perhaps feelings or thoughts from the day's events or whatever has been going on within you recently.

Simply allowing and acknowledging whatever is within and letting it be without evaluation, judgement or any form of analysis.

Gradually, shift the focus of awareness to the breath, breathing normally and naturally. As you breathe in, be aware of breathing in, and as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out. Just being aware of breathing.

Now bring awareness into your chest and heart area, feeling any sensations within. Allowing sensations to go wherever they need to go.

Now gently bring awareness to your beating heart and reflect upon how fragile and precious life is. The heart is the gateway into deeper compassion and love for yourself and for all beings. All of us live with certain realities that cannot be escaped. From the moment we were born we began the irreversible process of aging and subsequent illness, separation and death. These are powerful reflections to meditate upon, for they open the heart to what is important.

Now feeling into your own precious life with compassion and kindness, recognizing and accepting the imperfectly perfect being that you are. And silently repeating to yourself the following three phrases, letting them sink into your being:

*May I be safe. May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace.*

Next, bringing to mind someone you care about, a friend, family member, or other loved one, perhaps even a beloved pet. With a vivid picture in mind, repeating to yourself:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Now bringing to mind someone who is going through a difficult time; is perhaps ill or struggling with another problem. Expanding the field of loving-kindness to this person by repeating to yourself:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Next, bringing to mind a neutral person, perhaps an acquaintance, someone you may know from work, or who lives in your neighbourhood, someone you don't know very well and don't have strong feelings about. Thinking to yourself:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Next, thinking of someone who you don't like, perhaps someone who has wronged you in some way, or a politician or other well-known person whom you dislike for other reasons. Trying not to get caught up in the reasons for disliking the person you brought to mind, extending compassion to this person as well:

*May he/she be safe. May he/she be free from suffering. May he/she be at peace.*

Now, bringing to mind everyone you have extended loving-kindness to in this exercise: yourself, the person you care about, the person who is struggling, the neutral person, and the person you don't like.

*May they be safe. May they be free from suffering. May they be at peace.*

Now, opening up to include everyone in your life and saying to yourself:

*May they be safe. May they be free from suffering. May they be at peace.*

And now, opening up even more to include all living beings. Repeating to yourself:

*May they be safe. May they be free from suffering. May they be at peace.*

And now coming back to the breath, and sensing and feeling into the whole body as you breathe in and out. Feeling the body as a single, complete organism, connected and whole.

And acknowledging that by practicing this meditation, it is contributing to your health and wellbeing. May you know that this is an act of loving-kindness.

BELL

### **Inquiry**

What was this experience like?

What did you notice?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Did you enjoy the experience or not? Why or why not?

Other observations?

## Session 8 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### 1. **Everyday Mindfulness.**

2. **Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without trying to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Considering using the A.W.A.K.E. model to recognize and mindfully negotiate your cravings. Make sure to record your observations in the log.

3. **Becoming A.W.A.K.E.** Over the course of the coming week, practice becoming and staying AWAKE in various situations. The emphasis should be on situations that may be triggering, especially those you listed in your top threes. See if you can keep an awareness of those triggers in mind throughout the week, so that you can be Alert to triggers and cravings as they happen in the moment. Then practice Watching your experience, Accepting what comes up, being Kind to yourself, and mindfully Expanding your options for responding. You may also apply the AWAKE strategy to other situations just to practice. Make sure to record your exercises in the log.

4. **Loving-Kindness meditation.** Practice the Loving-Kindness meditation each day this week. If you don't feel comfortable wishing loving-kindness to certain people or beings, then you may skip those sections. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

### Worksheets

1. **80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party exercise.** For this exercise you will imagine that you are attending your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party. You have managed to live your life in a way that really matters to you. How would you want your life to be characterized? What would you want your friends and family to say about you in a speech?

2. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)** (see **Appendix II and III**). Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

#### 1. **Session 8 readings**



## Session 8: Your 80th Birthday

Imagine that it is your 80th birthday and on this day you are looking back on your life, the choices you have made and what they were about. Your memories, the people around you, the way your body feels, and the place where you are all reflect these choices.

Take a moment to connect with your desires in the here and now: who and what would you really hope would be there, as you look back on your life?

For example, there may be memories of acting in a loving way, or connecting with others, or making a contribution with work. You might have memories of consistently striving toward something, courageous moments where you took some bold actions, or simply taking the time to switch from being on autopilot to living your life more deliberately and purposefully. If you could imagine that you had acted boldly, and made your actions be about something important in your life, then what would you be able to look back on as an older person? For a few moments stay with that...

Let that scene dissolve in your mind. Now let's imagine that instead, on your 80th birthday, that you have lived a life where you did not act on what's important to you, that instead you were guided by avoiding feeling uncomfortable, trying very hard not to have unwanted feelings or doubts.

From this honest perspective, now that you have lived a long life, what would do you fear has made up your life, if you did not act on your values?

Now let that scene dissolve, and come back to here and now. From these perspectives - imagining a life of purpose and a life ruled by your fear, what would your choices be now? What would you use to guide your choices and actions?

NOTE: BLANK PAGES ARE PROVIDED BELOW, BUT YOU MAY ALSO WRITE YOUR WORK ON A COMPUTER OR USE SEPARATE PAGES

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]



## **Session 9 – Mindful of Values**

### **Session 9 reading: Mindful of Values**

This mindfulness program has introduced a number of values as part of its theoretical and practical framework, including mindfulness, self-compassion, and loving-kindness. These values are included in the training because (a) they are part and parcel of the spiritual tradition of mindfulness, and (b) there is good science to back up their positive effects on well-being.

That being said, the most important values—the ones worth striving for in life—are probably the ones we choose ourselves. Values are about the quality of our actions. They guide our hopes, dreams, and goals. They often serve as a standard by which we judge our actions. And we may not always act according to our values; we might even do things that go against our values. Sometimes we fail to realize that the goals we set for ourselves are not compatible with our values. And sometimes we aren't even fully aware of what our values actually are.

We briefly mentioned becoming aware of values a few times in our previous meetings; for instance, when considering alternative options for skillful responding in the AWAKE model. In today's session we will try to focus in on our own values and how they relate to goals. The purpose will be to heighten our awareness of our values in order to provide a clear direction in life; to serve as a compass for our actions, especially when we find ourselves in challenging situations that can trigger the automatic pilot and result in gambling behaviour.

People who want to change their habits, whether it's dieting, quitting smoking or gambling, often begin by setting goals for themselves. "This year I won't eat any whole bars of chocolate. I will quit smoking by Christmas. Starting next week, I will never gamble again." But in this program we've hardly talked about goals at all. In fact, I actually emphasized some of the risks associated with setting goals. So what happens when we focus too much on goals? When we become too invested in them?

The great thing about values is that, instead of looking toward some hoped for future goal, we can live out our values in the here and now. Values are like a compass you use to navigate your daily life. As long as you know your direction, you can also know when you are moving in that direction regardless of how fast or slow you proceed. From this perspective your values provide a reference point to guide you in the right direction without necessarily prescribing a specific goal. Can we think of some examples of life values and directions, and how one can facilitate the other?



*Illustration: Values serve as an internal compass in life.*

## Session 9 Mindfulness exercise: Mountain Meditation

### 1. Instructions

Now that we've become more aware of our values, I'd like to introduce a new exercise that will allow us to practice being mindful of our values in the moment, including under challenging circumstances. In this exercise we will visualize ourselves as a mountain. The mountain represents the stable, present, and grounded aspect of ourselves—which includes our values. No matter what happens to the mountain, its core remains present and stable.

### 2. Guided meditation

Get into a comfortable position and allow your eyes to close gently. Start by taking a few moments to connect with your breathing, noticing each full in-breath and each full out-breath.

And as you focus on the breath, you may become aware of thoughts—perhaps about things that happened today or during the week, or thoughts about tonight's session or your plans for after the session—whatever thoughts show up, simply acknowledge them and gently return your focus back to the breath.

Now, bring to mind the image of a mountain, perhaps a mountain you have visited or seen in photographs, or one of your own imagination. Bring into focus as many details of this mountain as possible. Imagine its size and shape. Perhaps it has a snow-covered peak with trees and meadows on its lower slopes. Notice that your mountain, like all mountains, has a solid, unmoving base.

However the mountain appears, just sitting and breathing with the image of this mountain, observing it and noting its qualities. And when you feel ready, see if you can bring the mountain into your own body, so that your body and the mountain become one. Perhaps your head is the mountain's peak, your shoulders and arms are the sides of the mountain, and your bottom and legs are its solid base. Your personal values lay deep inside the mountain, an inseparable part of the whole. And with each breath you become a little more the mountain—solid, still, and centered and a little more in tune with your values.

And, as you connect with the solid core of your mountain, can you also observe its surface, noticing the multitude of changes that take place on it, from day to day, and season to season? As day turns to night, perhaps noticing how the temperature drops, and the light gradually fades. In spring, perhaps you can feel a gentle rain, or notice dense fog obscuring the view from your mountain. In summer, meadows may be filled with wildflowers, mountain goats graze in the warmth of the sun, or forest fires may ravage the surface. In winter, you may watch as snow falls softly on stately evergreens, or avalanches destroy everything in their paths.

You may also notice people on your mountain voicing their differing opinions of it—it is the best or worst mountain they have seen, or it is too easy or too difficult to climb. And, as you observe all of these changes on the surface of your mountain, can you also realize that its solid base remains unchanged?

Perhaps at times, in your own day-to-day life, you can connect with your inner mountain, embodying its strength and stability, observing your thoughts and feelings as you would the ever-changing surface of a mountain. And realize, as you notice thoughts, feelings, as well as unwanted experiences like cravings come and go, that your essential self—your core awareness and your

values—remains unchanged. Notice that the experiences we find so compelling when we are ungrounded lose their power when we connect with our grounded core beliefs and values – our essential selves – quiet and steadfast regardless of the superficial comings and goings on the surface. And so, in the remaining moments, continuing to sit with your observing mountain, until the sound of the bell.

### **3. Inquiry**

What was that like?

What did you notice?

What was difficult or challenging?

What went well?

Other observations?

Do your values feel like a part of you, of your mountain, or as something separate?

What are some ways to become aware of your values in challenging or triggering situations?



## Session 9 Homework

### Mindfulness practice

Record all mindfulness practice in the **Mindfulness Log** (see **Appendix I**).

#### 1. **Everyday Mindfulness.**

2. **Urge surfing.** If at any point during the coming week you notice yourself experiencing cravings or the urge to gamble, then first congratulate yourself on noticing the urge. Then try to mindfully pay attention to this urge; what it looks like and feels like in the present moment. Is it associated with any bodily sensations? Emotions? Thoughts? Practice accepting this experience of wanting to gamble without judging it, and without trying to do anything to change it. Practice surfing your urges with self-compassion. The urge may pass, and it may come back later. You can even rate your urges while you are meditating – and in this way you may notice that the strength of the urge declines as you continue to observe it. Be patient – as it may intensify first before it subsides – just stay with it and describe it to yourself – is it hot or cold, for example? The urge may lead you to go gambling. If that happens, see if you can experiment with practicing your mindful self-compassion skills while you are gambling, or afterwards. Considering using the A.W.A.K.E. model to recognize and mindfully negotiate your cravings. Make sure to record your observations in the log.

3. **Becoming A.W.A.K.E.** Over the course of the coming week, practice becoming and staying AWAKE in various situations. The emphasis should be on situations that may be triggering, especially those you listed in your top threes. See if you can keep an awareness of those triggers in mind throughout the week, so that you can be Alert to triggers and cravings as they happen in the moment. Then practice Watching your experience, Accepting what comes up, being Kind to yourself, and mindfully Expanding your options for responding. You may also apply the AWAKE strategy to other situations just to practice. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

4. **Mountain exercise.** Practice the Mountain exercise each this week. Refer to your completed *Choosing Values* worksheet to remind yourself of the values you wish to keep in mind. Those values can live inside the core of your mountain. Practice imagining different kinds of things happening on and around your mountain. Maybe one day a lot of unpleasant things, like avalanches, forest fires, and thunderstorms might happen; and another day could see pleasant things like sunshine, beautiful waterfalls, flowers, and dancing children. Make sure to record your exercises and observations in the mindfulness log.

### Worksheet

2. **Gambling Craving Scale (GCS) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)** (see **Appendix II & III**). Complete these two questionnaires every day, except on days that we meet (we will fill them out at the start of our session). It's best if you do this at a set time each day, for example after your evening meal or before bed. Bring your completed GCS and PANAS forms with you to our next meeting.

### Readings

#### 1. **Session 9 reading**

## Session 9: Choosing Values Exercise (in-class)

1. For each of the domains write a brief description of your values (e.g. to be a caring partner [marriage], never stop learning [personal growth], deepen my relationship with God [spirituality]).
2. For each domain, rate how important it is to you (0 = not important, 10 = very important).
3. Finally, give each domain a rating according to how successfully you have lived your life in accordance with this value in the past month (0 = not at all well, 10 = very well).

	Description of your values	Importance	Success
<b>Family</b>			
<b>Marriage/Couple/ Intimacy</b>			
<b>Parenting</b>			
<b>Friendships/ Social Life</b>			
<b>Career/ Employment</b>			
<b>Education/ Personal Growth</b>			
<b>Recreation/Fun</b>			
<b>Spirituality</b>			
<b>Citizenship/ Environment/ Community</b>			
<b>Health/ Physical Wellbeing</b>			



# **Session 10 – Mindful Future**

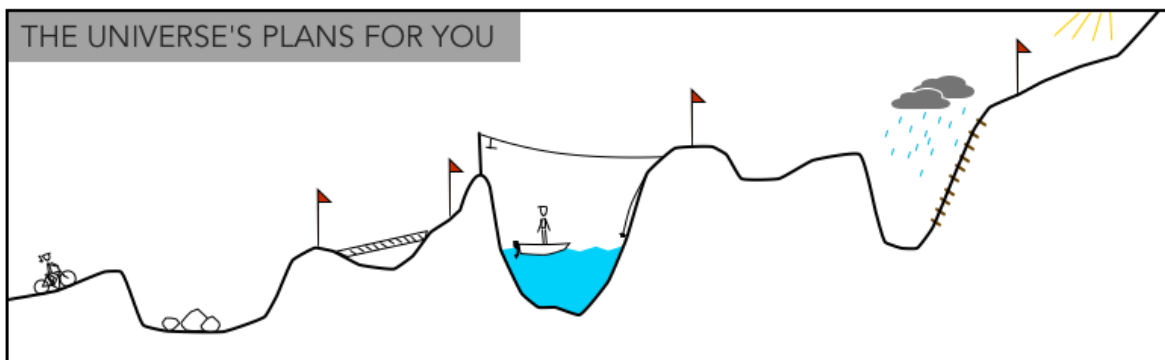
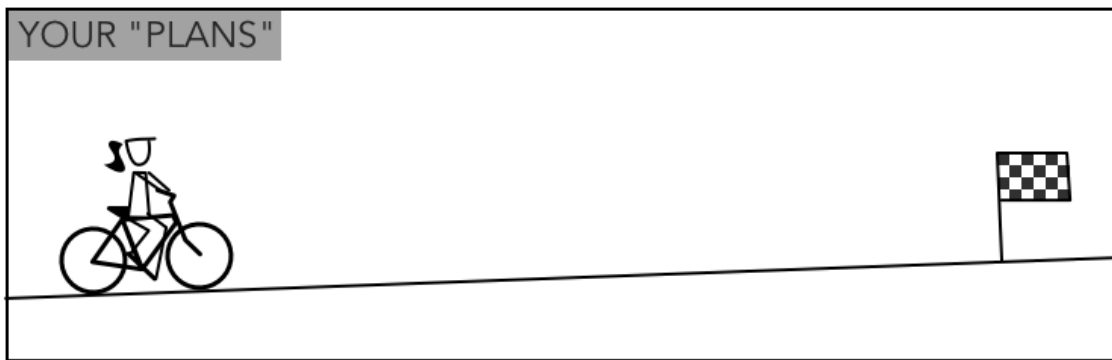
## **Session 10 Reading: Mindful Future**

### **Review**

We will use today's session both to look back at the last 10 weeks, and to explore ways of staying connected to mindfulness in the future. First I'd like to remind you of the many subjects and skills we've covered over the course of this training. We began with a general introduction to the concept of the automatic pilot, learning that many of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours happen without being fully aware of them. We then discussed the role of avoidance; how the autopilot tends to activate during experiences we prefer not to deal with. We explored how the practice of mindful acceptance, instead of avoidance, can help us tolerate those challenging experiences and prevent the autopilot from leading us into problematic situations and behaviour. We learned about urge surfing, which allows us to ride out cravings by mindfully observing and accepting our experiences in the here and now. After that we explored some specific external situations, such as relationship issues, work stress, and family tensions, that are linked to emotions which tend to trigger the urge to gamble. We practiced being mindful during those situations in order to monitor our feelings and gambling cravings. In the next session we took a closer look at emotions, stress, and memories, identifying which experiences are most likely to trigger avoidance, automatic behaviour, and gambling urges. This allowed us to discern one of the main patterns underlying the gambling addiction cycle:

Unpleasant event → Undesired emotion or stress → Craving or urge to gamble → Gambling

We recognized that positive events and emotions can also lead us toward gambling. In the next session we discussed our relationship to thoughts; how mindfulness and other cognitive defusion skills allow us to take distance from unhelpful thoughts, so that we don't need to buy into them and react with emotions and behaviours that don't really work for us. We also explored some specific thoughts involved in gambling, such as mistaken beliefs about probability, luck, skill, and chance, and discussed ways to mindfully recognize such thoughts in order to lessen their influence on our behaviour. Finally, last week we focused on self-compassion; how self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, mindfulness, and self-care can support our well-being and help us skillfully respond to those cycles of gambling, self-criticism, and guilt or shame. In session 7 we checked in with the group to discuss our progress to date, learned about the A.W.A.K.E. shortcut for remembering mindfulness skills, and practiced being mindful of triggering situations and visualizing skillful responses. In session 8 we learned about loving-kindness, how to extend compassion toward others and the whole world as a way to enhance our well-being and nurture our relationships. Finally, in last week's session we explored our personal values and goals, discussing and practicing ways to incorporate those values in our mindfulness-based skillful responding to triggering situations and elsewhere in life. All along we've been doing homework and practicing these concepts during our meetings and at home.



DOGHOUSEDIARIES

## Planning the Future

Now that we have taken some time to review our experiences in this group, I'd like to turn your attention to your experiences in the future. We found that a number of the goals that were set at the beginning of this training remain works in progress. This is ok. In fact, it is to be expected if we view life as a process rather than as a series of outcomes. Fully tuning into our minds and bodies should enrich the experience of our "down-time" between events – and hopefully shift the excessive emphasis on outcomes toward an appreciation of all moments and all aspects of our experience.

As was mentioned in previous sessions, mindfulness practice may not be enough on its own to help bring about the changes you'd like to see in your life. However, hopefully this training has shown you that mindfulness can have a significant positive influence on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, especially as a way to cope with and skilfully respond to cravings and challenging experiences. Then again, many of you have also experienced that there are various barriers and challenges that can make it difficult to stay connected to mindfulness and keep up the practice. So if you would like to continue using and developing your mindfulness skills in the future, whether formally and informally, what are some things you could do to help realize that goal?

Besides the strategies and resources we just discussed, some of you might find it helpful to continue working on mindfulness in a group setting. Mindfulness meditation has become very popular in recent years and there are many groups, schools, and other kinds of resources available. A growing number of employers now also offer meditation groups. Do some research (e.g., Google search) to find out about opportunities near your home or work.

## Session 10 Exercise: Stone Meditation

### Instructions

As a way to bring our final session to a close, I'd like to introduce a new twist on an older meditation. You will remember the Raisin Exercise from our very first meeting. This time I'd like you to use a stone as the object of your attention. Please pick a stone.

### Guided Meditation

Settle into a comfortable sitting position and place your stone in the palm of one hand.

Bring your awareness to the breath, to the inbreath and the outbreath – no need to control breathing in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can simply allow your experience to be your experience without trying to change it.

Now look at the stone in your hand. Focus on seeing the stone as if you've never seen one before. Notice the shape of the stone. Any interesting or irregular features of its shape. Then noticing the stone's colour. Is it solid or mixed? Are there different shades? And now mindfully observing the texture of the stone. Any visible patterns, or lack of patterns? Notice where the stone's surface reflects light. Bringing an attitude of curiosity to seeing all aspects of the stone.

Whenever you notice thoughts about the stone, such as *It's so dull* or *I wish I had a different one*, or you notice yourself thinking about anything other than the stone, gently redirect your attention to seeing the stone, allowing your experience to be, exactly as it is in this moment... without judging it in any way. That is, perceive the stone fully without worrying whether it is good or bad.

Next, focus on feeling the texture of the stone between your fingers. Noticing any softness, hardness, coarseness, smoothness, stickiness, or any other aspect of texture. Any patterns you can detect. And simply being with your experience of feeling this stone. If you find your mind wandering, you can turn your attention to the breath to come back to the here and now. Then gently redirect your attention to the stone.

Now, holding the stone below your nose, pay attention to smelling it, noticing the qualities of its aroma. Is it earthy, metallic, dusty? Is the aroma intense or faint, or is there no scent at all? If you notice your mind judging the smell, simply note the mind judging and return your focus to the pure sensation of smell.

Now, taking the stone to one ear and rolling it between your fingers, notice any sound the stone makes. Notice any thoughts about doing this: *This is crazy, stones don't make sounds. Wow, I can hear the stone.* Redirect your attention to simply hearing the stone.

Now, shift your attention to your inner experience. Begin to pay attention to what kinds of thoughts, feelings, or memories come up as you sense your stone. Does the stone remind you of anything? Does it make you feel a certain way? And whenever you lose your focus, gently turning your attention back to the inner experience of holding your stone. Using your breath as an anchor if that is helpful. Just noticing whatever your mind comes up with in relation to your stone. Not judging, simply observing.

And now coming back to the breath. Paying attention to the sensation of inhaling and exhaling; to the rise and fall of your chest and belly along with your breath. Getting ready to bring this exercise to a close at the sound of the bell. Taking care to carry this mindful state of awareness with you into whatever happens next.

## SOUND OF BELL

### **Inquiry**

What was that like?

What did you notice?

How was this different from your normal way of experiencing a stone?

What was difficult?

What went well?

Other observations?

APPENDIX I: MINDFULNESS LOG

Day	Exercise	Duration (min.)	Urges (rate 0 – 5) 0= no craving 5= extreme cravings		Other Changes (i.e. mood, body sensations)	Barriers to Practice	Other Observations
			Before	After			
Monday Date: _____							
Tuesday Date: _____							
Wednesday Date: _____							
Thursday Date: _____							
Friday Date: _____							
Saturday Date: _____							
Sunday Date: _____							



## APPENDIX II: Gambling Craving Scale (GCS)

1. On the scale below, please circle the number that best describes how strong on the average your craving or urge to gamble has been during the past 24 hours, with "1" representing no cravings at all and "9" extremely strong cravings.

no cravings		mild		moderate		strong		extremely strong
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

2. Please circle the number that best describes how strong your worst craving or strongest urge to gamble has been during the past 24 hours.

no cravings		mild		moderate		strong		extremely strong
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

3. How many times have you experienced an urge or craving to gamble during the past 24 hours.

☐ 0            ☐ 1            ☐ 2            ☐ 3-5            ☐ 6-10  
☐ 11-14    ☐ 15-19    ☐ 20-25    ☐ more than 25

4. On the average, how long has each craving or urge to gamble lasted during the past 24 hours?

☐ 0-5 min.                      ☐ 6-15 min.                      ☐ 16-20 min.  
☐ 21-30 min.                      ☐ 30-45 min.                      ☐ 45-60 min.  
☐ 1-2hours                      ☐ 2-3 hours                      ☐ more than 3 hours

5. Overall, do you feel your cravings or urges to gamble are:

significantly decreasing		somewhat decreasing		somewhat the same		significantly increasing		increasing
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

### APPENDIX III

#### Positive And Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then list the number from the scale below next to each word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at **the present moment OR indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week (circle the instructions you followed when taking this measure)**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Very Slightly or Not at All	A Little	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
_____ 1. Interested			_____ 11. Irritable	
_____ 2. Distressed			_____ 12. Alert	
_____ 3. Excited			_____ 13. Ashamed	
_____ 4. Upset			_____ 14. Inspired	
_____ 5. Strong			_____ 15. Nervous	
_____ 6. Guilty			_____ 16. Determined	
_____ 7. Scared			_____ 17. Attentive	
_____ 8. Hostile			_____ 18. Jittery	
_____ 9. Enthusiastic			_____ 19. Active	
_____ 10. Proud			_____ 20. Afraid	

## **APPENDIX IV: Toronto Resources For Mindfulness-Oriented Training And Psychotherapy**

### **The Mindfulness Centre**

<http://www.mindful.ca/>  
Oakville

*Offers individual and group training mindfulness training sessions targeted toward stress management, dealing with emotional hardship, coping with physical disease. Program has a unique outlook that combines spirituality and modern medicine and science.*

### **Mindfulness Everyday**

<http://www.mindfulnesseveryday.org/>  
Scarborough

*Offers group mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) workshops and retreats, as well as specialized training for parents, children, and educators.*

### **The Mindfulness Clinic**

<http://www.themindfulnessclinic.ca/>  
Downtown Toronto and multiple locations in the GTA

*Offers mindfulness-based psychotherapy (individual, couples, and group format) for a wide range of issues*

### **The Centre for Mindfulness Studies**

<http://www.mindfulnessstudies.com/>  
Downtown Toronto

*Offers mindfulness training and various forms of mindfulness-based therapy for groups and individuals, for a range of issues including anxiety, depression, stress, and addiction.*

### **Mindfulness Toronto**

<http://www.mindfulnessstoronto.net/>

*Website that lists many mindfulness-oriented training and therapy resources through the Greater Toronto Area.*