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THE 3 MINUTE BREATHING SPACE

This mindfulness exercise is intended to be used whenever we start to feel discomfort or distress in the mind, (thoughts), body, (physical sensations) or emotions. It can help us change our stance to whatever is going on and gives our thinking brain, (pre-frontal cortex) chance to catch up to our emotional or limbic brain. I like to think of it like a parachute we can use to drift slowly through what might otherwise be overwhelming feelings or thoughts. It's a way to switch from auto pilot where it seems like we have little control over our thoughts, feelings and physical reactions, to being more conscious and intentional in our responses. It won't change our outer circumstances but it will help shift our perspective towards it from reactive to responsive.

**STEP 1: BECOMING AWARE**

Begin by deliberately adopting a more erect posture and if possible, close your eyes. And then, bringing awareness to your inner experience, ask yourself, "what is my experience right now?" (This helps the part of the brain that regulates our emotions to kick into gear again)

What *thoughts* are going through my mind? As best you can just think of these thoughts as no more than mental events. Or think of them as forming a stream in your mind and it's as if you can stand on the bank of the stream and simply watch them go by. Each thought is temporary.

What *feelings* are present right now? Without labelling a feeling good or bad just notice and acknowledge their presence.

What *physical sensations* are present now? Quickly scan the body to pick up any sensations of tightness or bracing. Notice temperature differences. How am I my breathing? Deep, shallow, normal? Feel where the body connects with the chair and the feet to the ground.

Notice that there is a part of you that is doing the observing – we are so much more than our thoughts, feelings and physical reactions.....

**STEP 2: GATHERING YOUR ATTENTION**

Now focus on the physical sensations of the *breath breathing itself*. Move in closer to the feeling of the rise and fall of the chest and belly with each in breath and each out breath. Feel the sensation of the chest and belly expanding on the in breath and falling on the out breath. Be aware of this rhythm and of the feeling of being anchored in the present moment that comes with this awareness. If you notice thoughts wandering, (the nature of the mind is to think so this is normal and natural) just gently guide your attention back to the sensations in the body of breathing in and out. You might have to do this many times – just go with it.....

**STEP 3: EXPANDING AWARENESS**

Now *expand the field of your awareness around your breathing* so that, in addition to the sensations of the breath it includes a sense of the body as a whole breathing in and out - posture, facial expression, shoulders, legs, feet. If you become aware of any sensations of discomfort, tension or resistance just focus more on these and let your breath move into these areas as you feel a loosening and letting go. Become aware of your whole body breathing in a gentle, effortless way. Notice if you feel a settling happening in your body and mind. Stay here as long as you like or.....

Open your eyes and take this expanded awareness and feeling of being more grounded into the next moment of your day and the next and so on.....This is what is known as "doing from being."

*Adapted by Gillian Ashley-Martz from The Mindful Way Through Depression, Williams, Teasedale, Segal and Kabat-Zin*