

From UCSD Center For Mindfulness

Loving-Kindness Meditation for Beginners

Please set aside 20-40 minutes for the purpose of bringing warmth and good will into your life. Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Close your eyes fully or partially. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment.

- Put your hands over your heart to remind yourself that you are bringing not only attention, but *loving* attention, to your experience. Feel the warmth of your hands, the gentle pressure of your hands, and feel how your chest rises and falls beneath your hands with every breath.
- Now, bring to mind a person or other living being who naturally makes you smile. This could be a child, your grandmother, your cat or dog—whomever naturally brings happiness to your heart. Perhaps it's a bird outside your window. Let yourself feel what it's like to be in that being's presence. Allow yourself to enjoy the good company.
- Now, recognize how vulnerable this loved one is--just like you, subject to sickness, aging, and death. Also, this being wishes to be happy and free from suffering, just like you and every other living being. Repeat softly and gently, feeling the importance of your words:

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

- When you notice that your mind has wandered, return to the words and the image of the loved one you have in mind. Savor any warm feelings that may arise. Go slow.
- Now add *yourself* to your circle of good will. Put your hand over your heart and feel the warmth and gentle pressure of your hand (for just a moment or for the rest of the meditation), saying:

*May you and I be safe.
May you and I be peaceful.
May you and I be healthy.
May you and I live with ease.*

- Visualize your whole body in your mind's eye, notice any stress or uneasiness that may be lingering within you, and offer kindness to yourself.

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

- Now take a few breaths and just rest sit quietly in your own body, savoring the good will and compassion that flows naturally from your own heart. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.
- Gently open your eyes.

Loving-Kindness Meditation is NOT...

- *Selfish.* The first step toward loving others is to love ourselves. The fault we find with ourselves will also be found in others. Loving-kindness meditation (LKM) teaches us to be kind to ourselves no matter what happens, even as we shape our behavior for the better.
- *Complacent.* Loving-kindness and compassion is a *force of will*—good will—that can override the instinctive tendencies of fear and anger. It frees us from old habits. It allows us to learn from pain and respond skillfully.
- *Positive affirmation.* Affirmations are an effort to encourage ourselves by saying things we may not believe, like “I’m getting stronger every day!” LKM isn’t fooling ourselves that our situation is better than it is. The phrases must be intellectually credible to work smoothly.
- *Just a mantra.* Although the loving-kindness phrases are repeated like a mantra, there’s more to it than that. In addition to using the power of *attention*, LKM works with *connection, intention, and emotion*. We’re doing whatever it takes to cultivate a loving attitude.
- *Sugarcoating.* We’re not trying to make the reality of our lives less harsh by learning to think or speak in a sweet way. Rather, we want to open to the depth of human experience, including the tragedy of it, more fully. This is possible only if we have a compassionate response to pain.
- *Self-pity.* Opening to pain is not self-indulgent. We’re not wallowing in discomfort, complaining, or whining excessively. On the contrary, opening to pain through compassion allows us to unhook from the familiar story lines of our lives.
- *Good feelings.* LKM is primarily cultivation of good will rather than good feelings. Feelings come and go, but the ground of our being is the universal wish to be happy and free from suffering. That’s where we put our trust.
- *Exhausting.* Exhaustion is the result of expectation—wanting things to be one way and not the other. Loving-kindness and compassion stay away from the business of controlling reality so it’s more of a relief than a struggle.
- *Demanding.* LKM is always on the *wishing* side of the equation rather than the outcome side. Good feelings come as a byproduct of LKM, but we’re primarily learning to cultivate a kind attitude no matter what happens to us or to others. Sticking with the wish and remaining unattached to the outcome is unconditional love.

From UCS D Center For Mindfulness

Compassionate Body Scan

To begin, it's best to lie down on a bed or the floor unless you will fall asleep. Lie flat on your back and gently rest your arms about six inches away from your sides and hold your legs around shoulder-width apart. Place a hand on your heart as a reminder to be kind to yourself. Feel the warmth of your hand and take 3 deep, relaxing breaths. Then place your arm by your side again.

- Start with your feet. Notice what your feet feel like. Are they warm or cool, dry or moist? Then notice if there's any discomfort there. If so, mentally soften the area as if you were placing a warm towel on it. If you wish, bring some compassion to the area with words like "there's a little pain there, it's okay."
- Just feel the sensations of your body—pleasure, pain, or nothing at all—and let every sensation be just as it is. (You can take action to help your body feel better after the meditation.)
- Now bring a measure of *gratitude* to your feet. Your feet have such a small surface area yet they hold up your entire body all day long. They work hard for us although we rarely pay any attention to them. If your feet feel good today, you can also extend gratitude for the discomfort that you *don't* have.
- If you have a lot of time, carefully move your loving attention from one toe to the next, or from one part of each foot to another, first one foot and then the next. Make sure that your awareness is saturated with tenderness, gratitude, and respect for each area of your body.
- When you notice your mind has wandered, as it will after a few seconds, just return to the sensations in your body. If you are flooded with judgment or associations to a particular body part, put your hand on your heart again and breathe gently, and then return to the simple body sensations. If an area of your body is very difficult to stay with, then move to another body part for now. Let this exercise be gentle and peaceful.
- After you have given compassionate awareness to the sensations in your feet, move slowly to other parts of your body, right up to the crown of your head:
 - Feet
 - Ankles
 - Calves and shins
- etc
- As you move from one part of your body to another, return your awareness again and again to whatever sensations are present at the moment, making sure to bring gratitude, kindness, and respect to each body part. For example, remind yourself how hard your stomach works to digest your food, the effort of your neck holding up your head, and the way your eyes and ears guide, inform, and delight you all day long.
- When you have paid loving attention to each individual body part, put your hand on your heart again and give your entire body a final shower of affection.
- Then gently open your eyes.

Centering Meditation

Centering meditation is a technique for discovering a compassionate word or phrase that applies particularly to you and your current situation. Beginning practitioners of loving-kindness meditation can use centering meditation to discover their own, personalized loving-kindness phrases.

- Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take a few deep, relaxing breaths.
- Notice your posture—sitting, not lying down, not standing—and feel the sensations in your body. If you have any physical discomfort, gently touch it with your awareness. If you have emotional distress, notice it and let it be there.
- Place one or two hands on your chest as a reminder to give yourself loving attention. Feel the warmth of your hands, the gentle pressure, and the rhythmic rising and falling of your chest as you breathe.
- Keep paying attention to your breathing. As you breathe, let your awareness move deeply into the experience of breathing.
- Just continue to breathe and open your awareness to the space between your outbreath and your inbreath. Feel that space. Let your awareness drop into the space between your outbreath and the next inbreath.
- The breath comes seemingly out of nowhere—it's actually breathing *you*, keeping you healthy even when you're fast asleep. Go deeply into the deep, empty space from which breathing emerges, from which the faintest movement originates. This is a field of great peace and freedom.
- Just as your inbreath originates out of seemingly nowhere, your thoughts also emerge out of a deep, quiet invisible space. When you're ready, listen for any words that may bubble up. Open yourself up to a word or a phrase that might be *just what you need to hear right now*. If a word or phrase were to appear from the bottom of your heart, what would it be?
- Take a few minutes to do this. Breathe, relax, and open yourself to words that might bubble up from deep inside. If no words arise, just stay with your breath. If a few words arise, roll them over in your mind and select one that's perfect for you at this time in your life. Some possibilities might be "love," "let it be," "I love you," "yes," "trust," "peace" or "mercy."
- When you have a word or phrase, allow yourself to savor it, rolling it over and over in your mind. If you notice that your mind wanders, bring it ever so gently back to the word or words.
- After a while, let go of what you're doing and simply be with your inner experience, letting yourself be just as you are.
- Slowly open your eyes.

Mindfulness of Emotion in the Body

This exercise takes 10 minutes and is best practiced when you're having a difficult emotion. If you're feeling content, pick an emotion that generally bothers you, such as anger, fear, or guilt. The first time you do this exercise, choose a *mildly* difficult emotion. Start by finding a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three relaxing breaths.

- Note your posture on the chair as if you were seeing yourself from the outside. Feel your body humming with sensation. Enter into your body and into the world of sensations occurring in this very moment.
- Now bring attention to your heart region. Place your hand over your heart to remind yourself to bring loving attention to your experience.
- Find your breath in the heart region and begin to practice mindfulness of breathing. Feel your chest move as you breathe. When your mind wanders, bring it back to the sensation of breathing.
- After a few minutes, release your attention to your breath and let yourself recall the difficult emotion. If you wish, remember the *situation* in which you felt the emotion.
- Now expand your awareness to your body as a whole. While you recall the emotion, scan your body for where you feel it the most. In your mind's eye, sweep your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.
- Now choose a single location in your body where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension or an achy feeling, like a headache. In your mind, incline gently toward that spot. Continue to breathe naturally, allowing the sensation to be there, just as it is. If you wish, place your hand over your heart as you continue to breathe. Allow the gentle, rhythmic motion of the breath to soothe your body.
- If you feel overwhelmed by an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better and then return to the emotion.
- You may or may not want to add the "soften-soothe-allow" practice (given later).
- Gently open your eyes.

Labeling Emotions

Find a comfortable, quiet place and sit in a dignified posture, relaxed but upright. Close your eyes or leave them partially open. Take a few deep breaths to relax your body.

- Bring your awareness to your body by noticing your posture and the world of sensation occurring within the body.
- Place your hand on your heart and begin mindful awareness of your breathing. Breathe through your heart. Do this for 5 minutes. Whenever you wish, you can place your hand back in your lap.
- Now release the breath, keeping your attention in the heart region, and ask yourself, "What am I feeling?" Let your attention be drawn to the *strongest* emotion in your body, even if it's only a whisper of a feeling. Use your body like an antenna.
- Give your strongest feeling a name. If you sat down for this exercise without any strong emotions percolating, you might be feeling "contentment." Perhaps you're just "curious." Eventually you'll probably find another emotion, such as "longing," "sadness," "worry," "urgency," "loneliness," "pride," "joy," "lust," or "envy."
- Repeat the label two or three times, *in a kind, gentle voice*, and then return to your breath.
- If you wish, you can find where the emotion is located in your body, practice "soften, soothe, and allow," and then return to your breath.
- Go back and forth between your breath and your emotions in a relaxed way. Let your attention be drawn from your breath by an emotion, label it, and then return to your breath. There is no need to find an emotion if there isn't one. Then just be open to the possibility of emotions as you breathe. If you feel overwhelmed by an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better.
- When about 20 minutes have elapsed, gently open your eyes.

Soften, Soothe and Allow

Please find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three relaxing breaths. Place your hand on your heart for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and to bring kindness to yourself.

Labeling

- Now let yourself recall a mild-moderately difficult situation that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, or a loved one in pain. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem—choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it. Now clearly visualize the situation. Who was there? What was said? What happened?
- Now see if you can *name* the strongest emotion—a difficult emotion—associated with that situation: anger? sadness? grief? confusion? fear? longing? despair? Repeat the name of the emotion to yourself in a gentle, understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what he or she is feeling: “That’s longing.” “That’s grief.”

Mindfulness of Emotion in the Body

- Now expand your awareness to your body as a whole.
- Recall the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it the most. In your mind’s eye, sweep your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.
- Now *choose a single location in your body* where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension or an achy feeling, like a headache.
- In your mind, incline gently toward that spot.

Soften, Soothe, and Allow

- *Soften* into that location in your body. *Let* the muscles be soft without a requirement that they *become* soft, like simply applying heat to sore muscles. You can say, “soft...soft...soft...” quietly to yourself, to enhance the process. Remember that you are not trying to make the sensation go away—you are just being with them with loving awareness.
- If you wish, let yourself just soften around the edges, like around the edges of a pancake. No need to go all the way in.
- *Soothe* yourself for struggling in this way. Put your hand over your heart and feel your body breathe. Perhaps kind words arise in our mind, such as, “Oh my dear, this is such a painful experience. May I grow in ease and well-being.”
- If you wish, you can also direct kindness to the part of your body that is under stress by placing your hand in that place. It may help to think of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. You can say kind words to yourself, or just repeat, “soothe...soothe...soothe.”
- *Allow* the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go as it pleases, like a guest in your own home. You can repeat, “allow...allow...allow.”
- “Soften, soothe and allow.” “Soften, soothe and allow.” You can use these three words like a mantra, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness toward your suffering.
- If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better.
- Slowly open your eyes when you’re ready.

COMPASSIONATE FRIEND

(adapted from Gilbert, 2009; Kornfield, 2011)

Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Gently close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body. Put one or two hands over your heart for a moment to remind yourself to give yourself *loving* attention.

- Now imagine yourself in a room that is safe, cozy, and comfortable—a perfect room, just the way you'd like it. The lighting is perfect, the furniture is just right. Make yourself comfortable in your room.
- You'll soon receive a visitor in your room, a light being who embodies the qualities of wisdom, strength, warmth and unconditional acceptance. This being may be a known figure like Christ or Buddha, it can be a compassionate person from your past like a grandparent who passed away, or it could just be a warm, loving presence without any particular form. This being of light would like to visit you for a little while.
- Your room has a door that you can open. Please go to the door and open it for your compassionate friend who is coming to visit. Invite him or her in.
- Place yourself at just the right distance from your compassionate friend—not too close and not too far. Just enjoy the company of this loving being. See your compassionate friend in your mind's eye and enjoy his or her good company. There is nothing special you need to do except savor the moment.
- Your compassionate friend would like to tell you something now, something that is *just what you need to hear right now* in your life. Listen carefully to what your compassionate friend has come to say. If no words come, that's okay, too—just share his or her good company. That's a blessing in itself. Just be with your friend, listening if there is anything you should hear.
- Soon your friend will be leaving again, but before that happens, your friend would like to give you something—a material object. As you place your hands together, your friend reaches out and puts an object in your hands, or an object simply appears in your hands—something that has special meaning for you. What is it? What did you receive from your compassionate friend? Look it over carefully.
- Soon it's time for your friend to leave, but he or she can return anytime. Open the door, enjoy his or her good company for a last moment, and then bid your friend farewell.
- You are now alone in your room again. Let yourself savor what just happened, enjoying the words and the object that was given to you. Know that you can invite your friend back anytime you wish.
- And when you're ready, slowly open your eyes.

Breathing Compassion In and Out

This meditation is derived from the Tibetan practice of “giving and taking” (*tonglen*). In that meditation, the practitioner inhales the pain and suffering of another individual and exhales kindness and compassion. This process subtly reverses our instinctive tendency to resist or avoid emotional discomfort which usually leads to greater suffering. Compassionate breathing in and out adds the medicine of compassion to each inhalation. This meditation can be practiced formally or informally throughout the day for any length of time.

- Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take a few relaxing breaths.
- Scan your body for physical stress, noting the location and quality of the discomfort. Also allow yourself to become aware of any stressful emotions that you may be holding in your field of awareness. If a challenging person comes to mind, let yourself be aware of the stress associated with that person. If you are experiencing the suffering of another person through empathy, let yourself be aware of that discomfort as well.
- Now, aware of the stress you are carrying in your body, inhale fully and deeply, drawing compassion inside your body and filling every cell in your body with compassion. Let yourself be soothed by inhaling deeply, and by giving yourself the compassion you deserve when you experience discomfort.
- As you exhale, send out compassion to the person who is associated with your discomfort, or exhale compassion to living beings in general.
- Continue breathing compassion in and out. Occasionally scan your inner landscape for any distress and respond by inhaling compassion for yourself and exhaling compassion for those who need it.
- Gently open your eyes.

Loving-Kindness Meditation with the Challenging Person

This meditation takes about 20 minutes. Prepare for meditation in the usual manner and begin repeating the loving-kindness phrases for yourself and/or your benefactor for about 5 minutes. Remember to put one or two hands on your heart as a reminder to bring loving attention to yourself.

- Now bring an image of your "difficult person" to mind. Remind yourself that the difficult person is struggling to find his or her way through life and, in so doing, is causing you pain. Say to yourself, "Just as I wish to be peaceful and free from suffering, may you, too, find inner peace."
- Repeat the phrases softly, keeping the image of the difficult person in your mind while sensing the value of your words:

May you be safe.

May you be peaceful.

May you be healthy.

May you live with ease.

- Feelings of aversion, disgust, anger, guilt, shame, or sadness will immediately arise. The phrases may sound hollow alongside these emotions. Give a label to the emotion you're feeling ("sadness," "anger") and practice compassion for yourself ("May I be safe..."). When you feel better, try again with your difficult person. 99% of loving-kindness meditation for the difficult person may actually be compassion meditation for oneself.
- Feel free to use self-compassion phrases like:

May I be kind to myself

May I accept myself as I am

- Go back and forth between yourself (or your benefactor) and the difficult person. Make sure the energy of good will pervades your meditation session.
- Before you end, release the difficult person and say:

May I and all beings be safe.

May I and all beings be peaceful.

May I and all beings be healthy.

May I and all beings live with ease.

Gently open your eyes.

Mindful Self-Compassion

Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three, deep, relaxing breaths. Put your hands over your heart and feel the warmth of your hands, the gentle touch of your hands on your chest, and feel the rhythmic rising and falling of your chest as you breathe.

- Open your awareness to the sounds in your environment. Come into the present moment by simply listening to whatever presents itself to your ears.
- Now find yourself in the room. Form an image of yourself sitting in the chair. Note your posture as if you were seeing yourself from the outside.
- Next, bring your awareness *inside* your body. Note the world of sensation occurring there in this very moment—the pulsation and vibration of your body—just as you sat in the midst of the world of sound.
- Now feel your breathing wherever it's most apparent to you. Use a different anchor for your attention, such as the sensation of your hands in your lap, if that feels more comfortable.
- Now replace the focus on your anchor with loving-kindness or self-compassion phrases. Slowly repeat the phrases, returning again and again to the phrases, or to an image of yourself sitting in the chair as you repeat the phrases.
- Gently open your eyes.

Compassionate Walking Meditation

Plan to walk for 10 minutes or longer, anywhere you like. Dedicate the time specifically to cultivating loving-kindness and compassion.

- Stand still for a moment and anchor your attention in your body. Be aware of yourself in the standing posture. Feel your body.
- Recall that every living being wants to live peacefully and happily. Connect with that deep wish: "Just as all beings wish to be happy and free from suffering, may I be happy and free from suffering."
- Begin walking. Note yourself moving through space in the upright position. Feel the sensations of your body, perhaps noting the sensations in the soles of your feet or the wind in your face. Keep your eyes softly focused and walk at a normal pace.
- After walking for a few minutes, repeat the loving-kindness phrases to yourself:

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

- The phrases will keep your attention anchored in your body and start to evoke the attitude of loving-kindness. Try to synchronize the phrases with each step or with each breath. It may help to shorten the phrases to a single word: "safe, happy, healthy, ease" or "love, love, love, love."
- When your mind wanders, gently return to the phrases. If you find yourself hastening to your destination, slow down and refocus on your purpose.
- Do this with kindness, especially a feeling of gratitude toward your feet for supporting your entire body. Appreciate the marvel of walking.
- After a few minutes, expand loving-kindness to others. When someone catches your attention, say to yourself:

May you and I be safe. □ May you and I be happy. □

May you and I be healthy. □ May you and I live with ease.

- You may also say "May you be safe..." or just "safe...happy... healthy...ease" or "love...love... love...love." Don't try to include everyone; just do it one person at a time, keeping the attitude of loving-kindness alive.
- Eventually include all forms of life in the circle of your loving-kindness, e.g., dogs, birds, insects, and plants.
- Allow yourself to *receive* any expressions of kindness that may come your way.
- At the end of the walking period, stand still for a moment and repeat "May all beings be happy and free from suffering" before you go on to your next activity.