

## Soften –Soothe- Allow

### WORKING WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

There are 3 components to this practice: (1) labeling emotions, (2) mindfulness of emotion in the body, and (3) soften-soothe-allow. This practice is presented below in a meditative way to develop familiarity with the components.

However, it is an informal practice that is designed to be applied on-the-spot in daily life rather than as a meditation, and the individual components can be practiced individually or in combination.

- Please find a comfortable position, sitting or lying down, close your eyes, and take three relaxing breaths.
- Place your hand over your heart, or another soothing place, for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and that you, too, are worthy of kindness.
- Let yourself recall a *mild to moderately difficult situation* that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, or a work issue. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem—please choose a situation that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it.
- Clearly visualize the problem. Who was there? What was said? What happened? Or what *might* happen?

#### Labeling Emotions

- As you relive this situation, notice if any emotions arise within you. (pause) And if so, seeing if a *label* for an emotion comes up—a *name*. For example: ○ Anger? ○ Sadness? ○ Grief? ○ Confusion? ○ Fear? ○ Longing? ○ Despair?

- If you are having many emotions, seeing if you can name the *strongest* emotion associated with the situation.
- Now, repeating the name of the emotion to yourself in a tender, understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what they were feeling: “That’s longing.” “That’s grief.”

### **Mindfulness of Emotion in the Body**

- Now expanding your awareness to your body as a whole.
- Recalling the difficult situation again, if it has begun to slip out of your mind, naming the strongest emotion you feel, and scanning your body for where you feel it most easily. In your mind’s eye, sweeping your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort. Just feel what is “feel-able” in your body right now. Nothing more.
- Now, if you can, please *choose a single location in your body* where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension in your neck, a painful feeling in your stomach, or an ache in your heart.
- In your mind, inclining gently toward that location.
- See if you can experience the sensation directly, as if from the inside. If that's too specific see if you can just feel the general sense of discomfort.

### **Soften-Soothe-Allow**

- Now begin *softening* into that location in your body. Letting the muscles soften, letting them relax, as if in warm water. Softening...softening...softening... Remember that we’re not *trying* to change the feeling—we’re just *holding* it in a tender way. If you wish, just softening a little around the edges.
- Now, *soothing* yourself *because* of this difficult situation. If you wish, placing a hand over the part of your body that feels uncomfortable and just feeling the warmth and gentle touch of your hand. Perhaps imagining warmth and

kindness flowing through your hand into your body. Maybe even thinking of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child.

Soothing...soothing...soothing.

- And are there some comforting words that you might need to hear? For instance, you might imagine if you had a friend who was struggling in the same way. What would you say to your friend? (“I’m so sorry you feel this way.” “I care deeply about you.”)
- Can you offer *yourself* a similar message? (“Oh, it’s so hard to feel this.” “May I be kind to myself.”)
- If you need, feel free to open your eyes whenever you wish, or let go of the exercise and just feel your breath.
- Finally, *allowing* the discomfort to be there. Making room for it, releasing the need to make it go away.
- And allowing *yourself* to be just as you are, just like this, if only for this moment.
- Softening...soothing...allowing. Softening...soothing...allowing. Taking some time and going through the three steps on your own. (pause)
- You may notice the feeling starts to shift or even change location, that's okay. Just stay with it. Softening...soothing...allowing.
- Now letting go of the practice and focusing on your body as a whole. Allowing yourself to feel whatever you feel, to be exactly as you are in this moment.
- Gently open your eyes.