

ACTIVITY: PRACTICING BODY SCANS¹

Materials: Mats and/or blankets for lying on the floor as well as throws or blankets for warmth

Directions and Preparation: Take time to prepare the group members for this mindfulness practice. You might demonstrate positions for sitting or lying down. The “Body Scan” is easiest to do while lying down, if possible. If this is not possible for space reasons, a seated position is fine. When lying down, adolescents should have mats (for carpeted floors) or both mats and blankets (for hard floors). Something to cover up with for warmth is helpful. Allow for space between each member to limit distractions. Try to set a relaxed, contemplative mood by considering the choice of room (lighting, noise, and so on) and logistics. Adolescents may feel comfortable in a circle during discussion but may feel self-conscious during practice.

Using a soft bell or chime to signal silence is very helpful. If possible beforehand, remind the students to dress comfortably for the classes. Light blankets or throws are very useful to keep warm during practice and are highly recommended.

Allow the group to move into the lying or seated position for the “Body Scan” practice. Lead students in this guided body scan practice slowly and reflectively. Allow time for silent periods between instructions. This scan is a complete body scan, moving from the feet to the head area. If time is limited, instructions may limit the focus to a few areas (such as feet, lower back, shoulders, and head). Let’s begin!

This “Body Scan” is designed to help you relax and pay attention to how your body feels and what it might be telling you. It’s a time to listen to your body and to be in your body as fully as possible.

If students will be lying down: So now, lie on your back, on the mat or blanket, with your feet about hip-width apart and falling away from one another, and your arms at your sides.

If students will be seated: Sit with your back straight but not stiff, with both feet on the floor, and your hands comfortably in your lap.

Close your eyes if that’s comfortable for you. Listen to and follow my instructions as best you can. Try to stay awake and alert. Remember to breathe completely and let the breath flow freely into and out of the body. When you notice your mind wandering, as it will, gently bring it back to focus on the instructions.

Now become aware of your belly rising as the breath moves into your body and falling as the breath moves out of your body, ...not controlling the breath in anyway, just letting it find its own rhythm, ...feeling your body sink deeper into the mat or your chair on each out breath. (pause) And now on the next in breath, direct your attention all the way down through your body to the soles of both feet, ...becoming aware of your toes, the arches of your feet, the place where the heels meet the floor, ...noticing any feelings in your feet, any warmth of coolness, pressure, tingling or tightness.

And now, direct your breath to your feet, imagining that you can breathe right into your feet: first into your right foot and now breathing into your left foot, ...and on each out breath letting go of any tiredness, any tension, right from the soles of both feet.

¹Broderick, Patricia C. “Theme B: Body.” *Learning to Breathe A Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents to Cultivate Emotion Regulation, Attention, and Performance*, by Patricia C. Broderick, New Harbinger Publications, 2013, pp. 38–43.



(pause) Now gathering up your attention, moving it away from the feet, and focusing your attention on your legs, ...notice any feelings in your legs, being aware of the skin, the bones, the muscles, ...perhaps the pulsation of circulation, ...perhaps warmth or coolness.

Now, notice the contact your legs make with the mat or the chair, allowing your attention to explore any feelings in this part of your body. And on the next in breath, use your attention to direct your breath all the way down your entire left leg, and next, breath down your entire right leg. Now, direct the breath down both legs, breathing in relaxation and breathing out any tiredness, any tension. Remember, whenever you find your mind wandering, just let go of the thoughts as gently as you can, and come back to focus your attention once again on your body. (pause)

So now move your full attention to your lower back, ...just observing any feelings in this part of the body, ...perhaps tightness, ...perhaps tingling, ...aching, ...any feelings at all. And allow your attention to move slowly up your back, ...all the way up to your spine, ...so that you are aware of each vertebra, ...aware of the muscles, ...aware of the skin of your back, ...aware of your contact with the chair or the mat. And on the next breath, breathing into the whole back area, ...allow the muscles to ease and release with each breath, ...letting go of any tiredness or fatigue, ...and breathing openness and relaxation into the entire back. (pause)

Moving your attention now to the belly, ...feel the movement of the abdomen as it rises and falls with each breath, ...and take a deep breath in, ... allowing the abdomen to really expand on the in breath, ...and then release, breathing out, and noticing the feeling of the abdomen deflating. (pause)

Moving the attention up to the chest area, be aware of the heart, the lungs, ...aware of the movement of the chest, ...perhaps aware of the heart beating. Breathe into the chest and abdomen, breathing in new energy and letting go of any tiredness or tension. (pause)

Now gathering our attention again and focusing it on both arms and hands, let your attention come to rest of the fingertips of both hands, ...aware of sensations of tingling and air touching the fingertips, ...possibly feeling moisture or dryness; ...aware of the sides of the fingers, ...the knuckles, ...the palms of the hands, ...the top of the hands. (pause)

Now move your attention up your arms, allowing it to settle on your shoulders. Notice the muscles here, really exploring any sensations in the shoulders: ...perhaps burning, ...tightness, ...tension, ...heaviness, ...or lightness. Just breathe deeply into the shoulders, releasing any concerns and allowing your shoulders to completely soften. (pause)

Next draw your attention to your head area. Notice any feelings at the top of your head, ...your forehead, ...your eyes, ...your nose, ...your cheeks and mouth, ...your jaw, ...your neck. As best as you can, notice any and all feelings in this area of your face and head. Then, letting the next breath fill this entire region of your body, ...breathe in new energy and relaxation; ...breathe out any tightness, ...any tension, ...any fatigue. (pause)

Now opening up your awareness, ...see if you can feel your breath moving easily through your whole body as you lie here, ...noticing the movement of the breath from your head to your feet. Notice how the breath moves freely and easily from your feet to the top of your head. (pause) As we conclude this practice, be fully aware of your body as a whole: complete, strong, at ease. (ring bell)

End of body scan.

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Allow group members to share some of their experiences with the “body scan” if time permits. Adolescents often fall asleep during this practice, which is a good time to point out the benefits of non-judgement. It’s the experience that is important, whatever that may be, not any particular achievement. You may point out that this is an example of the body trying to tell us something, that we are fatigued and need to care for ourselves.

At the conclusion of the first session, note that mindfulness can be practiced in every moment of the day. A way to encourage mindfulness practice outside of breathing sessions is to use “Mindful Dots” (with permission from Diane Reibel, Jefferson University). Give each participant three simple stickers, and ask them to put each of the stickers someplace where they will see them frequently, such as on a computer screen, locker door, notebook cover, and so forth. Each time they notice the sticker, ask them to take a mindful breath.

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