

# Sample opening or closing exercises

## MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

Mindfulness exercises help people to focus on the “here and now,” and become more aware of themselves, their behaviour and their environment. There are many good resources on mindfulness, such as these books and CDs by Jon Kabat-Zinn:

*Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness.* (1990). New York: Dell Publishing.

*Wherever You Go, There You Are.* (2005). New York: Hyperion.

*Guided Mindfulness Meditation.* (2005). Louisville, CO: Sounds True.

*Mindfulness for Beginners.* (2006). Louisville, CO: Sounds True.

Below we provide a few examples of mindfulness exercises that you could use, but we strongly recommend that you learn about mindfulness through reading, training and personal experience before facilitating these exercises.

### Breathing mindfulness

Ask the participants to get comfortable. Then direct their attention to their breathing—to the breath entering and leaving their bodies. Encourage them not to change their breathing, but to let it continue effortlessly. Have them return their focus to their breath if they notice themselves getting distracted.

### Listening mindfulness

Direct the participants to get comfortable and to begin by focusing on their breath. Ask them to notice any sounds they hear in the room, including the sounds of their body. Alternatively, you could have them listen to a piece of music, an instrument or anything that makes sound. It is not what they are listening to that matters, but rather that they practise actively listening. Encourage participants to return their focus to the sounds in the room (or the chosen auditory stimulus) whenever their mind wanders. Ask them to note what they notice during the exercise. After they finish this exercise, invite them to use this kind of focused attention when listening to others.

## Body mindfulness

Tell the participants to get comfortable and to begin by focusing on their breath. Pass around a bottle of hand cream (or two bottles, for a larger group) and ask them to squeeze some onto their hands. Once everyone has done so, instruct them to rub the cream into their hands for about two minutes. Encourage them to focus closely on this experience, noticing how it feels physically and emotionally. Suggest that they return their focus to the cream and their hands if they notice themselves getting distracted.

## RELAXATION EXERCISES

Relaxation exercises are particularly helpful for family members, who are often stressed, tense and anxious. There are many books that provide relaxation exercises, including the following:

Bourne, E.J. (2005). *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (4th ed.). Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Schiraldi, G.R. (1997). *Conquer Anxiety, Worry and Nervous Fatigue: A Guide to Greater Peace*. Ellicott City, MD: Chevron Publishing.

Below we provide some examples of relaxation exercises that you could use. Again, you should obtain knowledge of relaxation through reading, training and personal experience before using these exercises with the group.

### Breathing relaxation

Tell the participants to get comfortable, and then ask them to put their hands on their abdomen. Guide them to notice their breathing and to try to allow their abdomen to expand with every inhalation, rather than their shoulders raising. Suggest that they gradually slow down their breathing. You may wish to guide them to count silently as they breathe (particularly as they exhale), or to focus on a calming word as they exhale.

### Progressive muscle relaxation

Tell the participants to get comfortable. Ask them to tense the muscles in their toes on an in-breath and to hold the tension for a breath. Then, on an out-breath, have them relax these muscles. Encourage them to notice the tension leaving their toes. Continue this systematically through the various parts of the body (feet, calves and thighs up to shoulders, neck and face).

## Guided imagery relaxation

Tell the participants to get comfortable, and then ask them to focus on their breathing. Guide them on a visual mental journey or help them visualize a relaxing scene. For instance, you could ask them to take a trip in which they are gently floating with the breeze or to picture themselves relaxing on a beach. Encourage them to use their imagination to experience the sensations of the place (e.g., the sound of the waves, the heat of the sun, the coolness of the breeze).

## CHECK-INS AND CHECK-OUTS

Check-ins and check-outs at the start and end of sessions may be time-consuming. To avoid going over time, we suggest you stick to one of the following options:

- Ask the participants to share one thing that they did differently during the week.
- Ask them to share one thing that they learned about themselves during the week or during the session.
- Ask them to share in a few words how they are currently feeling.
- Ask them to indicate something that they want to learn more about.
- Ask them to state their reaction to something that occurred during the week or in the session.
- Ask them to share any questions or confusions that they have about material that was presented.

## SPIRITUAL OR COGNITIVE EXERCISES

There are many spiritual or cognitive exercises that can help to encourage and guide family members. Participants themselves may suggest possible exercises, and you may accumulate examples from your own work. Below are two examples.

### Serenity Prayer

Read aloud (or read together with the participants) the following portion of the Serenity Prayer. Give the participants a couple of minutes to think about the words and how the words relate to them.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know  
the difference.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

NOTE: The Serenity Prayer is often associated with Alcoholics Anonymous, and for some people it may be associated with the Christian faith. If participants are uncomfortable with this prayer, you may wish not to use it, or to encourage participants to focus on its message rather than its origin.

## The seven Cs

Read the “seven Cs,” listed below. Give the participants a couple of minutes to think about the words and how the words relate to them.

I didn't *cause* it.

I can't *cure* it.

I can't *control* it.

I can take *care* of myself.

I can *communicate* my feelings.

I can make healthy *choices*.

I can *celebrate* being me.

—National Association for Children of Alcoholics  
(NACoA)

## Inspirational quotations

We have included several helpful quotations in Module 17: Finding Hope. You can also find inspirational sayings in many books and on the Internet. Here are some examples.

Cook, J. (1993). *The Book of Positive Quotations*. Minneapolis, MN: Fairview Press.

Reader's Digest editors. (1997). *Quotable Quotes: Wit and Wisdom for All Occasions from America's Most Popular Magazine*. Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest.

Warner, C. (1992). *The Last Word: A Treasury of Women's Quotes*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

[www.heartsandminds.org](http://www.heartsandminds.org)

[www.motivationalquotes.com](http://www.motivationalquotes.com)

Here are some examples of quotations you might use to open or close a session:

“The only way round is through.” (Robert Frost)

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”  
(Helen Keller)

“One doesn’t discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.” (André Gide)

“In the choice between changing one’s mind and proving there’s no need to do so, most people get busy on the proof.” (John Kenneth Galbraith)

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most responsive to change.” (Charles Darwin)