

## **Basic Instructions for 3 Minute Breathing Space (from MBCT)**

The purpose of the 3-minute breathing space is to help you step out of automatic thinking and into the present moment so you can respond more skillfully to stressful situations. As you create more space to respond, you gain greater perspective.

### **1. Awareness**

“The first thing we do with this practice, because it’s brief and we want to come into the moment quickly, is to take a very definite posture ... relaxed, dignified, back erect, but not stiff, letting our bodies express a sense of being present and awake. “Now, closing your eyes, if that feels comfortable for you, the first step is being aware, really aware, of what is going on with you right now. Becoming aware of what is going through your mind; What thoughts are around? Here, again, as best you can, just noting the thoughts as mental events.... So we note them, and then we note the feelings that are around at the moment ... in particular, turning toward any sense of discomfort or unpleasant feelings. So rather than try to push them away or shut them out, just acknowledge them, perhaps saying, “Ah, there you are, that’s how it is right now.” And similarly with sensations in the body.... Are there sensations of tension, of holding, or whatever? And again, awareness of them, simply noting them. OK, that’s how it is right now.

**2. Gathering** Then, gently redirect full attention to breathing, to each in-breath and to each out-breath as they follow, one after the other. Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness. “So, we’ve got a sense of what is going on right now. We’ve stepped out of automatic pilot. The second step is to collect our awareness by focusing on a single object—the movements of the breath. So now we really gather ourselves, focusing attention down

there in the movements of the abdomen, the rise and fall of the breath ... spending a minute or so to focus on the movement of the abdominal wall ... moment by moment, breath by breath, as best we can. So that you know when the breath is moving in, and you know when the breath is moving out. Just binding your awareness to the pattern of movement down there ... gathering yourself, using the anchor of the breath to really be present.

3. **Expanding** “And now as a third step, having gathered ourselves to some extent, we allow our awareness to expand. As well as being aware of the breath, we also include a sense of the body as a whole. So that we get this more spacious awareness.... A sense of the body as a whole, including any tightness or sensations related to holding in the shoulders, neck, back, or face ... following the breath as if your whole body is breathing. Holding it all in this slightly softer ... more spacious awareness. And then, when you are ready, just allowing your eyes to open.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment. The key skill is to maintain awareness in the moment. Nothing else.

From Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2002)