

Mindfulness Exercise: Three Minute Breathing Space

The purpose of the 3-Minute Breathing Space (3MBS) is to help you step out of automatic pilot and access a clear state of mind that is grounded in the present moment.

This exercise can help you slow down, so you feel calmer and can respond more skillfully to stressful situations. It can also bring you into closer connection to pleasant feelings and thoughts that are present.

The goal of this exercise isn't to take away negative feelings, but rather to find a space of acceptance of whatever is here, right now. However, in this space of acceptance, negative feelings often do naturally subside.

It consists of three steps.

1. Awareness

Sit or stand upright in a comfortable but deliberately alert position and close your eyes if you can.

Start by bringing your awareness to your inner experience. Ask yourself, "What is my experience right now?"

... What bodily sensations are present?

... What kinds of thoughts are going through my mind?

... What emotions am I feeling?"

Don't try to push away negative feelings. Simply be present with what is there. If you find something that is difficult to just accept, you can say, "Ok, got it. That's how it is right now." You are simply taking inventory and noticing what is present.

2. Gathering

Next gently redirect your attention to the physical sensations of your breath. Feel the coolness at the nostrils as you breathe in and the warmer feeling as you breathe out. Feel the breath all the way in and all the way out. Do this for a few breaths, focusing as clearly as you can on the feeling of the breath.

2. Expanding

Now expand the field of your awareness so that it includes a sense of your body as a whole, from the top of the head to the soles of the feet, and the back and the front of the torso, legs, arms and both sides. Feel your whole body breathing in and out. After a few breaths, you can gently open your eyes, letting the gaze be soft and down and see if you can retain contact with yourself for just a few more breaths while you also allow some contact with the world around you. As you reconnect with the world and move into your day, you might be able to still feel this contact with self.

I recommend that you practice the 3MBS three times a day, and use the tracking document to help you stay focused. It might be helpful to schedule the three times. Then later, as you develop more skill and familiarity, you will be able to remember the 3MBS in moments of challenge or stress. If you continue to practice, eventually it will become a new beneficial habit that you can invoke any time.