



ACTIVITY: Turning Towards

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to introduce participants to a mindfulness process for sitting with difficult emotions.

ESTIMATED TIME

10 minutes

MATERIALS

None required

Background

Avoiding negative emotions is a common human behavior. We naturally seek to avoid pain in all its forms. Unfortunately, emotional avoidance often leads to greater pain and suffering.

Avoiding negative thoughts and feelings can cause us to:

- Avoid new or uncomfortable situations which could lead to growth and greater happiness down the road
- Deny the reality of situations, which prevents us from making positive changes or seeing solutions
- Turn to unhealthy and/or addictive behaviors
- Stay "stuck" in communication and behavior patterns which inhibit and harm relationships

When we learn how to face negative emotions and sit with our discomfort, we actually open our lives up to more happiness, life satisfaction, and new possibilities. We learn that discomfort is temporary. More importantly, we learn that we are stronger than any negative emotion that comes our way.

We can use the practice of mindfulness to help us "turn towards" painful thoughts and feelings. Mindfulness teaches us to observe our current situation with judgment. Author and meditation teacher Tara Brach uses a four step mindfulness process – called RAIN – for working with difficult emotions.

Activity

Share the steps of this activity with your group. Provide information for further reading or a print-out of the steps to participants. Leave it up to the participants to practice this at home if they choose to.

R.A.I.N.

It may be helpful to try this practice initially in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. As you become more familiar with the practice you may be able to walk through the steps whenever negative feelings or thoughts arise.

R – Recognize what is happening

What are the thoughts, emotions, feelings, or sensations you are experiencing right now? Ask yourself “What is happening inside me right now?” Listen to yourself in a kind, open, and non-judgmental way

A – Allow life to be just as it is

Let the thoughts, emotions, feelings and sensations “just be” – don’t try to change them or turn them off. It can be helpful to support yourself with a whispered word or phrase, such as “Yes”, “This too”, or “I consent”.

I – Investigate inner experience with kindness

Sometimes working on the first two steps is enough, other times you need to go further. For strong persistent feelings that may be triggered frequently, you can investigate further. You can ask yourself questions such as “What most needs my attention?” or “What am I believing now?” The key to this step is kindness. There is no judgment to the questions or answers that arise.

N – Non-Identification

Non-identification is the reminder that we are not our emotions, thoughts, feelings, or sensations. These things are limited. Our identity is not defined by any passing thought or emotion.

Discussion Questions/ Key Points

- Do you agree that we tend to run from negative emotions and thoughts?
- How has emotional avoidance affected you?
- Has anyone tried mindfulness or an activity like this before? If so, how did (does) it work?
- Is this an activity you would be willing to try at home?

Working with difficulties. Tara Brach.

<https://www.tarabrach.com/articles-interviews/rain-workingwithdifficulties/>

Emotional Acceptance: Why Feeling Bad is Good. Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/insight-therapy/201009/emotional-acceptance-why-feeling-bad-is-good>