Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
Mindfulness Exercises

Acceptance

Sit in your chair with your back in an upright position. Imagine that your spine is the trunk of a spruce tree and that you can allow your shoulders and everything else to hang, loosely, off of that trunk. Notice your feet on the floor. Have your hands in your lap or at your sides. Allow your eyes to close if you are comfortable with that. Otherwise, focus on a spot on the floor in front of you.

Notice sounds that are inside the room, outside the room, and perhaps outside the building. (pause 30-60 seconds)
Notice that you don't have to make the sounds happen...or make them go away...or do anything else about them. (pause 30-60 seconds)
Take that same attitude of gentle allowing and apply that to noticing thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. (pause 30-60 seconds)
Allow them to show up. Notice that in this moment you don’t have to change them, or get rid of them, or do anything else about them. (pause 60-120 seconds)
OK, return to your regular state of awareness.

Mindfulness of the breath

Sit in your chair with your back in a position that is upright, but not rigid. Notice your feet on the floor. Have your hands in your lap or at your sides. Allow your eyes to close if you are comfortable with that. Otherwise, focus on a spot on the floor in front of you. (pause 30-60 seconds)
Notice that without any effort, you are already breathing. Allow yourself to continue breathing naturally. There is no special way to breathe. Just allow the breath to breathe itself. (pause 30-60 seconds)
As you attend to the breath, you are likely to notice some distracting thoughts, judgments, emotions, or body sensations. That’s OK. Minds are designed to wander and think and judge. That’s what they do. Just notice that your attention has left the breath and gently return to noticing the feel of the breath as it moves in and out. (pause 60-120 seconds)
You may notice your mind wandering off once or twice. Or perhaps you notice your mind wandering off over and over. That’s OK. The work is not in
keeping your mind from wandering off. It is in noticing *that* your mind wandered off and returning to the breath. (pause 60-120 seconds)

OK, return to your regular state of awareness.

**Attention**

Sit in your chair with your back in a position that is upright, but not rigid. Notice your feet grounded to the floor. Have your hands in your lap or at your sides. Allow your eyes to close if you are comfortable with that. Otherwise, focus on a spot on the floor in front of you.

Notice that without any effort, you are already breathing. Allow yourself to continue breathing naturally. There is no special way to breathe. Just allow the breath to breathe itself. (pause 30-60 seconds)

Now start counting the breaths. One…two…three…good. (pause 30-60 seconds)

As you attend to the breath, you are likely to notice some distracting thoughts, judgments, emotions, or body sensations. That’s OK. Minds are designed to wander and think and judge. If your thoughts, judgments, etc. distract you enough to lose count, then start over with your count. (pause 30-60 seconds)

The point isn’t to count as high as you can, it is to notice that you are distracted and return to attending to the breath. (pause 60-120 seconds)

OK, return to your regular state of awareness.

**Breath and not breath**

Sit in your chair with your back in a position that is upright, but not rigid. Notice your feet grounded to the floor. Have your hands in your lap or at your sides. Allow your eyes to close if you are comfortable with that. Otherwise, focus on a spot on the floor in front of you.

Notice that without any effort, you are already breathing. Allow yourself to continue breathing naturally. There is no special way to breathe. Just allow the breath to breathe itself. (pause 30-60 seconds)

As you attend to the breath, you are likely to notice all sorts of things that are not breath. As you pay attention to the breath, gently, silently make a note, “breath.” Any time you notice something other than breath, gently, silently make a note, “not breath.” (pause 60-120 seconds)

OK, return to your regular state of awareness.
Leaves on a stream - Defusion

Sit in your chair with your back in an upright position. Imagine that your spine is the trunk of a spruce tree and that you can allow your shoulders and everything else to hang, loosely, off of that trunk. Notice your feet on the floor. Have your hands in your lap or at your sides. Allow your eyes to close if you are comfortable with that. Otherwise, focus on a spot on the floor in front of you.

Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface of the water. Pause 10 seconds.

For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf... let it float by. Do this with each thought - pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if you have joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.

If your thoughts momentarily stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts will start up again. Pause 20 seconds.

Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Don’t try to speed it up and rush your thoughts along. You’re not trying to rush the leaves along or get rid of your thoughts. You are allowing them to come and go at their own pace.

If your mind says “This is dumb,” “I’m bored,” or “I’m not doing this right” place those thoughts on leaves, too, and let them pass. Pause 20 seconds.

If a leaf gets stuck, allow it to hang around until it’s ready to float by. If the thought comes up again, watch it float by another time. Pause 20 seconds.

If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, “I notice myself having a feeling of [boredom...impatience...frustration].” Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them float along.

From time to time, your thoughts may hook you and distract you from being fully present in this exercise. This is normal. As soon as you realize that you have become sidetracked, gently bring your attention back to the visualization exercise.

OK, return to your regular state of awareness.

Free ACT audio exercises (for ACBS members):
https://contextualscience.org/free_audio