

These notes outline practice for bring mindful of emotions using the acronym “ABC’S”

**A-** Awareness    **B –** Balance    **C –** Curiosity and Care    **‘S -** Support

**A. AWARENESS:** With all mindfulness practice, and particularly emotions, bringing awareness to experience is a first and essential step in learning to relate wisely to our inner life.

- a. **Recognition:** Noticing what is happening on the grossest level. *How are you feeling?*
- b. **Noting / Labeling:** Naming the emotion can bring clarity and perspective.
- c. **Scale of Intensity:** Rate the emotion on a scale of intensity from 0-10.
- d. **Track the ‘Top Five’:** What the most common emotions you experience? What’s the “inner playlist” of feelings you tend to cycle through?
- e. **Acceptance:** As we become more aware of our emotions, we also aim to accept them just as they are. This is where we begin to practice balance.

**B. BALANCE:** Relating to difficult or unpleasant experiences with balance is a second, essential step in our practice. Ideally, aim for a relationship of inner balance and acceptance.

**Principle:** We stop learning when we are overwhelmed. A good rule of thumb is: *“Don’t go in if you can’t get out,”* meaning don’t try to go into an emotion if it is overwhelming. If an emotion feels too strong or intense, first practice gaining balance by redirecting your attention. Finding balance means that we stop shooting the “second arrow,” thereby minimizing any extra pain/difficulty we add through reactivity.

- a. **How am I relating?** In this moment, how are you relating to the emotion that has arisen? Are you pulling away? Resisting? Afraid? Wallowing or feeding it? If you are balanced, you can move on to the next step below (Curiosity & Care).
  - If there is a lot of resistance, aversion, fear, or even liking, attend mindfully to *that* experience itself before being exploring the emotion.
- b. **Investigate patterns:** Notice if there are patterns around how you relate to certain emotions. Which ones do you usually reject or try avoid? Which ones do you tend to feed or sink in? Do you judge yourself for feeling certain emotions? Feel a positive or negative self-worth/value? Which ones do you consider acceptable? Get to know the biases and preconceived ideas you carry about your own emotional life.
  - *Remember: from the point of view of meditation practice, all emotions are acceptable. No emotion in and of itself is problematic or dangerous. It is acting out our emotions unconsciously that creates harm.*
- c. **Making Room:** See if you can make space internally for the emotion to be felt and experienced just as it is. Here are a few tools to make more room internally, like widening the aperture of a lens:
  - Widen your attention to include your whole body
  - Widen attention to the space around your body
  - Widen the attention to notice sounds

- d. Redirecting:** If you can’t find balance in relation to an emotion, try redirecting your attention to a neutral or pleasant experience, until you have more internal resilience. Make an inner agreement that you are “leaving” in order to “come back.” It is important to send this message to your heart/psyche so that we don’t fall into the trap of running away or trying to escape from uncomfortable emotions. With strong, repetitive emotions, it may take days or weeks of continual, patient work to gain enough balance and support (below) to be with and investigate the emotion.
- Shift your attention to your hands or your feet
  - Pay attention to sounds
  - Orient to your surroundings by looking around, noticing sights, sounds, and even textures or smells.
  - Skillful distraction: talk to a friend, or engage in another activity that will help you to feel more balanced and well-regulated. (See Support below).
- e. Wisdom:** Reflecting with wisdom can be a useful way to gain perspective and balance. Remember:
- Emotions are like the changing weather; they come and they go.
  - Consider: will this still be around 6 months from now? 5 years from now?
  - Feelings are universal human experiences. They’re completely natural, normal. Remind yourself, “It’s okay; nothing’s gone wrong here.”
- C. Curiosity & Care:** Once we are aware of what’s happening, and in a balanced relationship with it, we bring qualities of curiosity and care to feel and explore the actual experience of the emotion. The intention is to include and allow the entire experience just as it.
- a. Drop the story, feel it in the body:** Set aside the external event(s) or stimuli of your emotions and try to attend to the experience as sensations in the body.
- b. Try any of the following questions:**
- What is the experience of the emotion without its word or name?
  - How do you know you feel this emotion? Where do you feel it? What sensations do you feel there?
  - “Can I make room for this? Can I include this?”
  - “This is the human experience of ... (sadness). (Sadness)... feels like this.”
  - Let sadness be sad. Let the emotion be just as it is.
  - Ask: “Can I allow myself to feel this just for a moment? To touch it just for a few seconds?”
  - Can you breathe with it?
  - What happens to the emotion as you pay attention to it? Does it increase, decrease, stay the same, change into something else?
- c. Investigate:** Examine closely. Distinguish the components that make up an emotion.
- Thoughts, stories, or images?
  - A pleasant/unpleasant/neutral tone?
  - Bodily sensations?
  - A perception or meaning connected to it?
  - Any activity / reactivity in the heart around it?

- d. **Bring Care and Tenderness:** Try to bring an attitude of kindness and care:
- Befriending – as you would relate to a friend feeling this emotion
  - Welcoming – as a part of your own life energy and humanity
  - Keeping it company – with mindful awareness as its companion
  - Holding it – imagine embracing or holding the emotion in your arms, as you would a small child
- e. **Reflective Inquiry:** Sometimes we can investigate by asking a reflective question and then just listening inwardly for what comes:
- What’s this about for me?
  - What am I making this mean?
  - What do I need? What matters to me here?
  - Is there anything this emotion would like for me to understand? Any information it’s trying to give me?
  - Is there any action I need to take here?

**“S” . Support:** With difficult or challenging emotions, it is important to have adequate internal and external support. Below are some suggestions, intended to develop and strengthen an inner base of resilience and support.

- a. **External Support:** Seek relationships and activities that bring a sense of ease, relief, warmth, and relaxation: an experience of healthy pleasure. Examples include:
- Time with close friends / spiritual companions
  - Time in nature
  - Listening to soothing music
  - Creative activities, pastimes, or recreation
  - Exercise
  - Guidance or support of a spiritual teacher, therapist or professional
- b. **Internal Support:** Notice how these activities makes you feel. Pay particular attention to any sense of soothing, relaxation, or settling that occurs. Notice your exhalation and any sensations of ease or pleasure in the body. Allow yourself to fully receive and soak them in. This will help to calm and regulate your nervous system.
- Exhale slowly in a thin stream through the mouth 3 or 4 times.
  - Reflect on gratitude: who or what in your life do you appreciate? Do this for 5-10 minutes each day for one week.
  - Reflect on contentment: what do you have enough of in your life? Do this for 5-10 minutes each day for one week.
  - Do Mettā (lovingkindness) practice for an amount of time that feels good
  - Cultivate generosity: share time, energy, resources with others
  - Offer empathy: connect with someone else who needs support, which can bring a sense of inner strength, belonging, and contribution
  - Try practicing samatha (calming) meditation (resting the attention with the breath or any single, clear object of meditation)