

Internal Weather

Objective: Emotions play a significant role in our lives, and there are a lot of myths and mistaken assumptions. Detecting emotions in the body is a helpful way of being able to accurately identify what they are. Finding healthy ways to meet our emotions without denying or pushing them away, while not letting them take over, is a useful skill.

Preparation

- The whole group sits in a circle.
- During the mindfulness practice, focus will be inward, not on others.
- It might be helpful to have pictures of different kinds of weather printed out.
- Please have some (unlined, if possible) paper and crayons or colored pencils.

Facts

- Emotions manifest in and are felt in the body.
- It's helpful to be able to feel and identify emotions in the body, then name them.
- There are many myths about emotions.

Intro Practice & Discussion (10 minutes)

1. Today we're looking at what mindfulness can teach us about emotions. Please find your "mindful posture" for just a few minutes to begin. Close your eyes or use a soft gaze, hands comfortably in your lap. Take a few deep breaths to settle in. Feel your grounding anchor points in the body (points of contact with the chair or floor) or in the breath. (*let students sit for about a minute to settle*)...
2. You're going to hear a list of emotions or scenarios. For each one, try to remember how it feels. Take a moment to consider whether or not you've felt this emotion in the past few days, weeks, or ever. Try your best to connect with each emotion and **see if you can actually feel the sensation of the emotions in your body**. *Facilitator slowly reads list below while pausing between each one. for 15-30 seconds:*
 - Fearful, Happy, Sad, Alone, Bored, Arguing with a parent, Peaceful, Excited, Laughing with friends, Frustrated, Angry, Sleepy, Curious, Loving, Ashamed, Disappointed, Restless, Jealous, Worried, Embarrassed, Eager, Depressed, Hateful, Doubtful, Mischievous, Grateful, Strong, Serious, Guilty, Silly, Calm, Open-minded, Misunderstood. etc...
3. How many of you felt at least one of these emotions in the past week? (*raise of hands*) Two-three of these in the past week? Four or more of these? And are the emotions all still here or did they go somewhere? So, where did the emotions go? (*Allow students to answer*)...

Discussion (continued)

4. Did you ever notice the word at the root of “EMOTION”? Yes, it’s “MOTION.” Have you ever heard the expression, “Emotional roller coaster?” Right – emotions *MOVE* through us... they sometimes move right through our bodies in a ways that we can feel them very fast like a roller coaster! Sometimes they hang around longer and sometimes they’re very subtle and hard to detect. When I was reading the list of emotions were any of you able to connect with the feeling of the emotions in your body? (*Show of hands.*) Do any of you mind sharing which emotions were easiest to feel? Where did you feel them? *Most students will probably answer that they felt challenging emotions most easily in the body. Use this as an opportunity to remind them of Rick Hanson’s Negativity Bias.*
5. Emotions are compelling because most of the time we want to feel certain ways, right? And there are other emotions we don’t want to feel. Who wants to feel sadness, loneliness or fear, right? But these are part of life, and even though we don’t enjoy these difficult emotions, they’re part of what makes us all human. A man named Paul Ekman traveled the world and discovered that emotions are the same everywhere, for all people. All human beings cry when they feel deep sadness, laugh when they’re joyful, and grit their teeth and clench their fists when they’re angry. Often we feel alone when we’re facing difficult emotions, but that’s actually when we’re at our most human – our emotions *connect us* with other people.
6. Here are **TWO MYTHS** about feelings:
 - **You’re supposed to feel happy all of the time.** How often do you answer. “Good,” when someone asks how you’re doing? No one alive can engineer a perfect life where they’re happy all the time, and yet in our culture we tend to feel it’s important to show a happy face, even if that’s not how we’re feeling.
 - **Emotions are your fault.** Have you ever apologized for crying or feeling down? Have you ever blamed yourself for feeling the way you did? We attach so much meaning to our feelings that we often believe our emotions say something about who we are. But your emotions are not a commentary about who you are – they’re simply a pattern of feelings arising in the moment and then passing away, kind of like cloud patterns in the sky. To take the metaphor further, we can see that there are rainy days and sunny days in our emotional lives, just like there are outside. We don’t tend to blame the weather on anyone, so nor should we blame feelings on ourselves.
7. We’re going to move to a mindful drawing exercise now, and then we’ll look at some other myths afterwards...

Drawing Exercise (10 minutes)

1. Take a moment to find your mindful posture. (*Ring bell...*) Notice if you're feeling any emotions right now. If your feelings were like the weather, what would your weather report be? Or, you can think back to the list I read earlier and choose an emotion you have felt in the past week or so. Take a few moments to connect with the emotion and how it feels inside your body...
2. Now, imagine you have a miniature weather reporter inside you... they're going to put your weather report on paper. When I ring the bell, you'll open your eyes at your own pace and then grab the piece of paper and draw the weather of your emotion. You can feel free to use words too, if you like. You can use colors that reflect the weather or the emotions, or both. Just get it all out on the paper. However it comes out is fine and you don't have to share it if you don't want to! (*Ring bell and allow 10 minutes to draw.*)

Discussion / Wrap up (10 minutes)

1. How was that for you? How many found it pretty easy to feel the emotion in the body?
2. **Other Major MYTHS** about emotions:
 - **Emotions are someone else's fault.** It's easy to claim that someone else "made us feel" a certain way, but if we look closer it's more complicated. I mean, can anyone else actually MAKE you feel a certain way? While we may have been affected by another's actions, there are often a lot of other factors that also play a role, including our mood, how much sleep we had, if we're hungry, and the stories we tell ourselves about what something means. (*Perhaps share a story here of a time when you were upset by something you believed that caused you distress, but that later turned out to be inaccurate, and your feelings changed.*)
 - **You can't change your emotional patterns.** Remember the S.T.O.P. techniques and what we learned about negativity bias? Remember "Name it to tame it?" With mindfulness practice it's possible to have a different relationship with our emotions. Using our "Happy Place" and mindfulness, we can start to feel more safe inside, even when we're having strong or difficult emotions. It's also helpful to remember that our emotions don't define who we are forever.
3. Feeling our feelings may not always be easy, but feeling them in the body, naming them, and if possible sharing them by writing about or drawing them like we did today, or talking to a trusted friend, family member, teacher or mentor can help you feel better – remember our emotions can actually connect us to other people!
4. Finally, emotions are information from our bodies and minds that try to get us to react or do something. Mindfulness is about paying attention to anything that comes up, including emotions, but not necessarily immediately reacting or doing anything about them. First we try to sit quietly and listen with friendly curiosity to what our feelings and emotions are trying to tell us, without trying to change them, as if our emotions are like friends who are trying to tell us something. After we listen carefully and with an open, friendly attitude, we get to decide how important the information is and whether or not or how we need to respond.

5. Maybe see if you can use mindfulness a few times in the coming week to tune into how you're feeling. See if you can connect with the direct, felt sense of any emotion, pleasant or unpleasant, as it manifests in the body. If you want, you can write about it or just name the emotions you notice and where and how you feel them.