

AWARENESS EXERCISE 17.1

Mourning and Forgiveness

AIM OF EXERCISE:

To free up the energy we use to protect ourselves from painful past events so that it becomes available to meet present needs

PREPARATION FOR AWARENESS EXERCISE:

1. Before beginning the guided awareness exercise, ask participants to recall a painful past event.

I'd like to ask you to bring to mind a past event that continues to trigger anxiety, shame, or an urge to protect or defend yourself. The incident may consist of something you did or something that happened to you. Please take 5 minutes for this. You may find it helpful to write it down.

2. Explain that the object of this exercise is not to cultivate forgiveness towards others, but to reclaim our power to serve our own needs.
3. Offer participants some centering strategies.

During the course of this guided awareness exercise, if you experience an overwhelm of memories and emotions, try one of the following strategies to re-center:

- a. You can return and connect with your breath, noticing breathing in and breathing out, receiving and letting go of each breath.*
- b. You can focus on some details of your memory that carry no emotional significance.*
- c. As we move through the exercise, you will be summoning the presence of a being who, for you, is non-judgmental and capable of keeping you safe today. If you become overwhelmed, you can simply pause, notice what you are experiencing, and in your*

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mind's eye, speak to this being, telling them what you are feeling in this moment — either emotionally or physically in your body.

Confirm that participants are clear on how to use these centering strategies.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GUIDING AWARENESS EXERCISE:

Read the following slowly, leaving space between each statement for the participant to engage in the guided process.

- 1. Sit comfortably. Straighten your spine. Make any necessary adjustments.*
- 2. Focus your attention inward by closing your eyes or gently dropping your gaze to the floor in front of you.*
- 3. Focus your attention on your breathing. Simply experience yourself receiving breath and letting go of breath.*
- 4. Now imagine yourself in a place where you feel safe and free.*
- 5. Take time to make yourself comfortable there and to notice your surroundings.*
- 6. Return to your breath, noticing yourself breathing in and breathing out, receiving breath and letting go of breath.*
- 7. If at any time during this exercise you notice any resistance to the process, try to give space to that. Honor your experience as it is with a gentle awareness.*
- 8. Now bring to mind a being in whose presence you feel completely safe. This being is powerful and will protect you. They welcome you with unconditional love, fully accepting you just as you are. Invite this being to join you in the safe place you chose earlier.*
- 9. When you are ready, tell the loving being about the event*

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you recalled and jotted down. Describe what happened.

10. *Remember, if you begin to feel overwhelmed, you can pause and use one of the following centering strategies:*
 - a. *Go back to your breathing, receiving breath and letting go of breath.*
 - b. *Or focus on a detail that has no emotional significance.*
 - c. *Or you can center your attention on the here and now, on what you are feeling and on the sensations in your body. Tell the protective being what is happening for you right now, right here.*

You may either continue with these centering strategies or, if you feel ready, you may return to the story you were describing to the compassionate being.

11. *When you have completed your sharing, take a moment to notice what it feels like to be empathically received by the compassionate being.*
12. *Now, as you recall the incident, tell the compassionate being what you were needing during that time. What universal needs and values were prominent for you in the situation you described? Notice the deep appreciation with which the compassionate being is receiving the needs you just named. Imagine them embracing the needs with tenderness and respect. Stay here together, recognizing the preciousness of the needs. (Allow 15 seconds of silence.)*
13. *Now you are being asked whether you would like to receive this need into your heart where it will be treasured. If you say “yes,” notice yourself receiving this valuable quality — allowing either yourself or the compassionate*

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being to place it carefully into your heart. If you are not ready to receive it, watch the compassionate being bring it into their own heart where it will be kept safe for you.

- 14. Now check in with yourself. What do you feel and need right now in this moment, having had this experience with the loving being? If you wish, share your feelings and needs with this friendly presence who has accompanied you in this exercise. Notice how gently this being receives each of your needs, regarding each with great care. If you are able, join them by taking a moment to cherish the needs you just identified. Otherwise, simply notice how they are being valued. (15 seconds)*
- 15. Now the being is asking you whether you wish to place the needs you just named in your own heart. If you say “yes,” place them in your heart with care. Otherwise, watch the compassionate being put your needs lovingly into their heart where they will be carried for you.*
- 16. As you prepare to take leave, tell the loving being how you have experienced your time together. Let them know if you wish to connect again.*
- 17. Now bid goodbye to the being whom you have invited for this journey.*
- 18. Recall the two sets of needs you identified during this exercise: the needs you had during the incident and the needs you have now. Can you imagine yourself holding both sets of needs with equal care?*
- 19. When you are ready, come back to the circle and open your eyes. Look around. Welcome those in the circle with you, knowing that we each are holding cherished needs and values.*

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SHARING CIRCLE:

- My name is _____ .
- One thing I would like to share is_____. (Encourage participants to use only one sentence or phrase. If deeper sharing is desired, either limit the number of speakers or divide group into twos and threes.)

REFERENCE: Chapter 9