

MOM SESSION THREE: Openness

Welcome to the third and final session of the Mind Over Mood Workshop. I'm Keara and I'm Alexa and we are with UMKC Counseling Services.

In the first session, we focused on **Recognition**. You began learning how to recognize where you are in the moment, including becoming aware of your unwanted or uncomfortable internal experiences and your reactions to them. We highlighted the importance recognizing your internal experiences as a curious scientist and without judgment.

Last session, we introduced the idea of **Insight**, or what those experiences might say about what is important to us. We discussed how direct attempts to avoid or change internal experiences don't always work and highlighted that those control attempts can actually make the experiences worse, or can create new problems for us. Remember the struggle?

Today we will start with a quick review and then turn our attention towards **Openness to change** and a more fulfilling life. This means asking the question: In a world where you could choose to have your life be about something, what would you choose? *(Pause)*

As with last session's seminar, we will focus on a variety of strategies to foster recognition, insight and openness.

Review Practices

So to review, did you practice any of the exercises or reflect on anything from last session? For example, did you practice the language tip of using "and" not "but" or practice dropping the rope? How about any of the skills from the first session, like focusing on your breathing or the language tip of labeling your thoughts as thoughts and feelings as feelings? Which ones did you practice? If you weren't able to, what got in the way?

Acceptance of Pain & Struggling

Once again, we are going to work specifically with the internal experiences that you struggle with. In this exercise, you will be asked to actively and openly invite into your awareness your unwanted experiences so that you may approach them with acceptance and compassion. By approaching your

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unpleasant experiences in this manner, you become open to receiving the information communicated to you through them. This exercise encourages you to make space for what you are struggling with, rather than fighting it.

If it ever feels like too much, feel free to stop doing the exercise and sit quietly until everyone is ready.

Go ahead and get into a comfortable position where you are sitting. Maybe sitting upright in a grounded and stable posture, your arms and legs resting comfortably, and your hands resting in your lap or on your legs, whichever is most comfortable for you...allowing your eyes to gently close or softly gaze at an object near the floor.

Allowing yourself to **Arrive**. Taking a few moments to get in touch with the physical sensations in your body, especially the sensations of touch or pressure where your body makes contact with where you are sitting. *(Pause)* Becoming aware of what you are noticing as you sit here, being aware of this moment.

Gathering yourself by noticing the gentle rising and falling of your breath in your chest and belly. Not needing to control your breathing in any way, simply letting yourself breathe naturally. *(Pause)* Allowing whatever it is you're aware of to just be, without needing it to be other than what it is... as you find it...in this moment. *(Pause)*

Expanding your awareness to take in your body as a whole. Any signs of tension? Of calm relaxation? Just taking note of what there is to observe and notice. Being aware that there is a part of you noticing what you are noticing. Now, bringing to your mind's attention what you are struggling with, the uncomfortable internal experiences that brought you to Counseling.

Allowing the internal experiences to emerge into your awareness, allowing space for the discomfort...for the pain. Allowing yourself to be present with that experience. *(Pause)*

Bringing to mind the tug-of-war exercise... Noticing any doubts, fears, worries or resistance you might be having about allowing the uncomfortable feelings to be present. *(Pause)* Bringing those experiences to your awareness with a sense of curiosity and compassion. Just noticing them, acknowledging their presence

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just as a curious scientist might acknowledge the presence of the information that comes from observing their experiment....just noticing your experiences without working on them, believing them, or trying to get rid of them... *(Pause)*

As you remain in the presence of what you are struggling with, ask yourself... What has it been like for me to struggle with this experience? *(Pause)* What have I done to control or get rid of this experience? *(Pause)* Have my attempts to control my experience caused more distress or problems? *(Pause)* What have I given up or put off in the service of trying to reduce or control my pain? *(Pause)* In my struggle to get rid of, reduce, or control my unwanted experience or pain, what have I given up in my life that is valuable? *(Pause)*

Allowing yourself to gently open up to your painful experience...to your struggles that have been in the service of trying to make the pain go away...and the struggling that has resulted from not living your life. Bringing a sense of compassion to any sensations of discomfort that might show up. *(Pause)*

Simply being a witness to whatever comes up...recognizing what you observe without judgment. Asking yourself: can I make room for the discomfort, for the pain? *(Pause)* Thinking about the tug-of-war exercise and asking: can I drop the struggle of trying to make the pain go away? Can I turn myself towards that which gives my life value, meaning, and purpose? Is this something I must struggle with? Or can I, like the finger trap exercise, openly lean into the discomfort...in the service of not being trapped by my thoughts and feelings and living my life more fully? *(Pause)*

Now, allowing the discomfort to recede a bit from your attention. *(Pause)* Not necessarily trying to push it away, but not keeping it in the forefront of your attention either. Just letting it fade into the background of your awareness on its own accord. *(Pause)*

Returning your attention to your breathing...slowly breathing in and slowly breathing out. *(Pause)* Attending to the rhythm of your breath, the coolness of the air as you breathe in, and the warmth of the air as you breathe out...

Now, as we get ready to end this exercise, beginning to gradually widen your

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attention to take in the sounds around you...both inside and outside the room. *(Pause)* Bringing yourself back to the room in which you're sitting. Taking a moment to intentionally bring this sense of self-acceptance into the present moment. *(Pause)* When you are ready, slowly opening your eyes. *(Pause)*

Please pause the video and on **page 16** in your workbook there is space to jot down your reflections. You can also write own your responses to the **Seminar 3 Worksheet: Acceptance of Pain and Struggling** on **page 17** in your workbook.

Change and Openness

Now let's focus on **Openness**. I want to highlight that being open does **not mean allowing others to abuse us** or giving up wanting to improve situations, events, or behaviors that are readily changeable. Instead, openness means accepting yourself and your internal experience **as it is now**, and allowing yourself space to move forward.

Let's take a moment to look at two strategies for helping ourselves: One is change and another is openness.

- **Change** is an excellent strategy when we need to address or change something **outside of ourselves**, something that is not us.
- **Openness** is an excellent strategy when we are experiencing unwanted or uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or sensations inside ourselves.

Selecting a Strategy

Let's think about when you might select each of these strategies. For instance, a situation that might call for change might be if we are struggling **academically**. This is a situation that we do not just have to accept as it is something that is subject to change. In this case of academic struggles, there may be external factors that are readily changeable. For example, we can revise our study habits, get a study partner in class or a tutor or consult the professor.

Some changes we are capable of making are often more difficult because they require us to use **both Change and Openness** to experience change. For example, if we are **anxious** around people, and we value relationships and

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belonging, we might need to be **open** to feeling anxious in order to be around people.

Being open means **completely accepting, in the moment, without fighting or judging** whatever internal experience shows up; we do this in the service of doing what is important to us. Additionally, being open means being committed to a course of action- even when we experience discomfort- because that action is valuable to us.

Values and Choices:

Sometimes it's hard to commit to an action, especially when discomfort is involved, because we don't really know what is important to us. So let's talk about what is important to us. We can begin by having the conversation about that which gives our life value, meaning, and purpose. These are our values.

Values can be defined as our ethics, principles, ideals, standards or morals. They are the ideas, concepts and actions that fill your life with worth and importance. In contrast to setting goals, identifying values is not specifically about achieving something in the future. Rather, **values are about living in the moment and doing the things that embody our personal vision.**

Heading West Metaphor

Let's talk about this using another metaphor. Essentially this is like **Heading West**. Let's say heading west is a choice you make, it's something you value. You pick up your GPS and start heading west from campus. Imagine that you head west around the entire world and find yourself back at UMKC. Have you arrived at West or can you still continue to head west? *(Pause)*

Values are like heading west. It's a series of multiple journeys. You can always keep heading west.

So for example, imagine that having a loving, caring, respectful relationship is your "heading west," your personal value. Will you ever get there or can you always engage in behaviors that move you more in that direction? *(Pause)*

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Keep in mind that there are milestones to let you know you are heading in your chosen direction. They are like the trail markers on a trail. These markers are important because they can help to motivate us, to let us know we are on the preferred course.

What would be examples of milestones that you are heading in the valued direction if your value is to have a loving, caring, respectful relationship?

Values Compass

Let's spend some time really beginning to refine your values and how important each of them are to you. Turn to pages 18 and 19 in your workbook. You will find the Values Compass worksheet.

On page 18, you will see some questions that will help you think through your values. You can use **page 19** to write them down. As you complete this worksheet, you may find that some of the values aren't applicable to your life or aren't very important. That's ok. You are the person that gets to decide what is and isn't important to you. Now pause the video and complete p. 19.

Reflecting on Values and Avoidance

It may be helpful for you to take some time to look at your responses as you continue working towards living your life more fully. Now turn to **page 20** of your workbook. Consider these questions as you think about your values. Feel free to refer back to pages 18 and 19 of your workbook if that would be helpful.

Think about the following questions, then, pause the video and write down your responses:

- If you continue to avoid your unpleasant internal experiences, how long are you willing to wait to live your life?
- In waiting for the unpleasant internal experiences to go away, how much are you giving up in the mean time?
- What do you think would happen if, instead of waiting for an unwanted internal experience to go away before you started living your life to the fullest, you just started living your life and openly accepting your experiences?

Tying It Together

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Before we wrap up the seminar, let's return to our trail map metaphor and tie it all together.

In the first session, the Recognition session, we focused on recognizing our internal experiences with the "You are Here" marker on the map. We emphasized the importance of getting a sense of your present moment experiences, including your unpleasant/unwanted internal experiences, without judgement.

In session two, the Insight session, we focused on building your **Insight** to figure out what those experiences are trying to tell you. The insight you gain for paying attention to your unwanted internal experiences is like your GPS re-routing function.

This session, the Openness session, we focused on moving towards our values. Your values ARE your trail map. Without a map, you can't look for the "You Are Here marker." Without knowing where the "You Are Here" marker is in relation to where you want to be, it's hard to know which direction you need to head in.

Just like your values determine what is important to have or strive for in your life, recognizing your internal experiences and what they are telling you helps you better reach for the life you desire. Recognition, Insight and Openness are related in helping you live a fuller life.

Finishing Up

And that concludes the Mind Over Mood Workshop! We hope that you make a commitment to continue practicing the skills of Recognition, Insight, and Openness. Take some time to use the resources in your workbook to practice. We also encourage you to remember that, even when using these skills, you will have moments when you experience unwanted internal experiences; this is normal part of life. Our hope is that, with continued practice, the MOM skills will help you get unstuck in these experiences and to put your energy towards the things that you value.

Remember that you can always come back to MOM and re-watch these videos, which will provide you with more opportunities to continue practicing these exercises and skills. Thank you for joining us!