

## SESSION TWO: Insight

Welcome to session 2 of the Mind Over Mood Workshop. I'm Keara and I'm Alexa and we are with UMKC Counseling Services.

Last session we introduced the idea of psychological pain as a normal part of being human. We noted that our go-to responses for psychological pain tend to be geared toward *avoiding, minimizing or controlling* the internal experience and that these efforts often lead to further distress. We introduced the concepts of recognition and mindfulness and focused on skills for learning how to **recognize** where you are in the moment. Specifically, we focused on recognizing unwanted or uncomfortable internal experiences and our reactions to them without judgment.

Today we will start by quickly reviewing last session practices, then shift to focus on **Insight**, or finding a deeper understanding of our experiences. We introduce skills that will allow you to build **Insight** and help you feel less stuck in responding to your unwanted internal experiences.

Let's return to the example of the trail map. Using recognition skills provides us the "You are here" marker on the map. **Insight** is like when you've taken a turn and the GPS needs to re-route. Insight tells us that we may want to consider going a different direction. As with last session's seminar, we will focus on a variety of strategies to foster insight.

### Review Practices

So to review, did you practice any of the Recognition exercises or reflect on anything from last session? For example, did you:

- think about the finger trap and getting stuck in your go-to responses?
- practice focusing on your breathing?
- practice viewing your thoughts as trains passing by a train station?
- use the language tip of labeling your thoughts as thoughts and feelings as feelings?

What did you notice? If you weren't able to practice any skills or reflect on the concepts, what do you think got in the way? Please pause the video now and take a few moments to think about these questions.

### **Leaves in a River**

Before we dive into Insight, let's practice another mindfulness skill that facilitates **recognition**. We often go through life on autopilot and frequently get hooked on the chatter in our mind without even realizing it. This is problematic because sometimes our mind says stuff that is not helpful. Our mind compares us harshly to others, criticizes our efforts, dredges up unpleasant memories, drags us into future scary scenarios, and warns us about all the possible things that could go wrong. Getting stuck in the unhelpful chatter of our minds can fuel our unwanted internal experiences.

Right now, we'll take time to observe the constant flow of thoughts, images, feelings, and other chatter coming up in our minds. We will practice merely recognizing the chatter and letting it go. This mindfulness exercise is called "Leaves in a River." Like the exercises last session, this exercise focuses on noticing thoughts and sensations without judgment and with more space and flexibility. In this exercise, we will incorporate more guided imagery that may be a bit more challenging. *Remember, be patient with yourself. If it feels like too much, feel free to stop doing the exercise and sit quietly until everyone else is finished.*

If you are willing, get into a comfortable position where you are sitting, perhaps upright with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, and your hands resting in your lap or on your thighs, whatever is more comfortable. Allow your eyes to gently close. If you would prefer to keep your eyes open, soften your gaze and gently focus on a spot a few feet in front of you. *(Pause)*

Take a few moments to **Arrive** by getting 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, being aware of your feet, your body being supported by the chair, how your hands feel with how they are making contact with your body. *(Pause)*

Now, **Gather** your attention by simply focusing on your breathing. Slowly breathing in...slowly breathing out....breathing in....breathing out. Notice the

rise and fall of your belly and chest as you breathe in...out...in... out... It's okay for your mind to wander away to thoughts, sensations, or feelings. Simply observe that your mind has wandered, observe your thoughts and feelings, acknowledging their presence, and then return your attention back to the breath. Passively observe the flow of your thoughts, one after another, without trying to figure out their meaning or their relationship to one another.

As best you can, bringing an attitude of gentle acceptance to all of your experiences. There is nothing to fix or work on at this time. Simply allow your experiences to be your experiences, without needing it to be other than what it is, as you find it, in this moment. *(Pause)* You might even catch a glimpse that part of you noticing what you are noticing. *(Pause)*

Now, allowing yourself to imagine a beautiful, slow-moving river...the water flowing along... Notice how wide or narrow it is...Noticing the color of the water *(Pause)*. Imagine the day – Is it sunny or overcast? Warm or cool? What season is it...? *(Pause)* Imagining you are sitting underneath a tree on the bank of the river. Perhaps your back is resting against the trunk, gently supported.

Take a deep breath. See if you can you smell the richness of the earth beneath you or scent of the land around you. *(Pause)*

Take a moment to look up into the tree. Notice the leaves rustling in the gentle breeze. What color are the leaves? What shape do they have? Listen to the sound of the gentle stirring of the leaves, noticing that once in a while you observe a leaf dropping onto the river and flowing away. *(Pause)* Now gazing at the river... notice leaves floating by on the surface of the water. Looking at the leaves and watching them...slowly drifting along downriver. *(Pause)*

As you sit beneath the tree on the bank of this river, become aware of the thoughts passing by in your mind. You might notice planning for something later today, reminding yourself not to forget something, remembering something that has already happened, or even judging or evaluating this exercise. Whatever you notice, each time you become aware of a thought, imagine yourself placing the thought on one of those leaves. If you think in words, putting them on a leaf in words. If you think in images, putting them on a leaf as an image.

Whenever a new thought enters into your mind, putting each one on a leaf...observing each thought as it is on the leaf...passing in front of you...and then watching it moving away from you... eventually drifting out of sight...down the river.... Allowing the river to move along at its own speed...

Returning to gazing at the river, waiting for the next leaf to float by with a new thought on it. *(Pause)* When one comes along, again watching it passing in front of you and then letting it drift out of sight. The river is ever flowing...carrying each leaf along. The river is doing what is natural for rivers to do and that is to carry along whatever is floating on the surface. Thinking whatever thoughts you think, observing them, placing them on a leaf, and allowing them to flow freely along downriver, one by one. *(Pause)*

Now, when you are ready, allowing yourself to take a different perspective. Allowing yourself to become the riverbed. Imagining yourself as the riverbed, holding the river and each of the leaves on the surface of the river, and even the thoughts that each leaf carries as it flows by.

As the riverbed, be aware that you are the container for the river... the leaves... and the thoughts. Perhaps even becoming aware that you do not begin or end at the banks of the river...that you extend beyond the banks of the river into the earth itself...

Imagine what the riverbed must see, experiencing the river, the leaves, and thoughts floating along. Wondering what it is like for the riverbed when the river is rushing by or when it is barely trickling, wondering if the riverbed even cares since it merely sets the context for everything to happen. Without the riverbed, there would be no river and no river to carry along the leaves and thoughts. Wondering if the riverbed cares if it is autumn with lots of leaves on the river, or spring with very few leaves. *(Pause)*

Now, letting go of those thoughts and images and gradually widening your attention to take in the sounds around you in the room...the feeling of the chair beneath you...the feeling of the breath in your lungs. *(Pause)*

Take a deeper breath and slowly exhale, taking a moment to make the intention to bring this sense of gentle-allowing and self-acceptance into the present moment ... When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

Take a moment to reflect on your experience. Pause the video here and take a few minutes to jot down your reactions on **page 12** in your workbook.

### **Struggle Switch**

Before we shift to today's content, let's first think about common ways people try to deal with their unwanted internal experiences. For most of us, in our effort to avoid, change, or control our unwanted internal experiences, we end up struggling and two things can happen:

- we make our situations even worse and/or
- we give up pursuing what's actually important to us.

I'd like to show a video demonstrating this concept. See what you notice as you watch. **(Show video).**

As the video showed, we may struggle with our unwanted or painful experiences, trying to control or eliminate them by trying hard enough or struggling long enough. An alternative is to disengage from the struggle, and instead observe our painful thoughts and feelings with an attitude of curiosity and non-judgment, to see what they might be telling us. The goal isn't to struggle hard enough and gain control, because you can't. The goal is turning off the struggle switch.

Many times when we feel really stuck, it might be that we are too busy struggling or fighting to notice the "You are here" sign. Perhaps if we stop and look deeply into the nature of our painful experience, we can begin to understand what that experience means to us.

Pain is a signal that we need to pay attention to something. By paying attention to our painful experiences, we will begin to understand what those painful experiences are trying to tell us.

### **Acceptance for Understanding**

We are now going to practice this idea turning off the struggle switch and looking at our experiences. Another term for this is **Acceptance**. Acceptance means we are agreeing to turn off the switch so that we can really focus on what's important. We will use this next exercise to learn how to use this powerful tool.

I'd like you to reflect back on the painful internal experience(s) that brought you to this workshop. It could be anxiety, loneliness, sadness, or others. In a moment you will have the opportunity to approach this unwanted internal experience, recognize it without judgment, and begin to explore what this painful experience might mean to you.

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

Begin by getting comfortable where you are sitting, settling into a position that supports you feeling solid and grounded. Slowly close your eyes or gaze softly in front of you, whatever is most comfortable for you...Take a deeper than normal breath and slowly breath out, allowing yourself to relax a little as you exhale...breathing in...breathing out....relaxing...bit by bit....as you breathe  
*(Pause)*

**Start by Arriving at this moment...** Bringing awareness to being here in this room...the sounds...feeling your body where it touches your seat... maybe being aware that there is nobody on earth that fully knows how it feels to sit where you sit, with the experiences you are having in this moment. *(Pause)*

**Slowly shift into Gathering...** Focusing on your breath...breathing in...breathing out...noticing the different sensations in your chest and belly between the in-breath and the out-breath...breathing in....breathing out....feeling the air fill your lungs, slowly expanding...feeling the air leaving as you exhale...in...out...focusing only on the breath...*(Pause)*

And now **Expanding**... Allowing yourself to become aware of your body as a whole. The sensations you might become aware of...your heart beat, your stomach, the feel of your face...briefly scanning for any signs of

tension...releasing these areas...noticing your whole body...continuing to notice your breathing....

Now, reflect upon what brought you into Counseling and taking a moment to gently invite this experience into your awareness...acknowledge it for the painful experience it is and, like a curious scientist, allowing yourself to study your experience as it enters into your awareness...imagining that unwanted experience as being present with you... just being present in your awareness as you observe it. *(Pause)*

While holding it in your awareness, picturing it in your mind's eye and thinking about the following questions: If you were to locate the experience **within your body**, where would it reside? *(Pause)* How does it feel to have this experience as a **physical sensation**? Would you describe it as big or small? Heavy or light? Moving or still? Smooth or rough? *(Pause)* What color would it be? Does it have sharp edges or is it more fuzzy...? *(Pause)* What does this experience say about what's **important to you**, about your life, about yourself? Maybe something that is missing from your life? *(Pause)*

Now, take a moment to feel gratitude for the information this painful experience gave to you, then gently allow it to recede, letting it go from your mind's eye and bringing your attention back to your body, your heart beat, the feeling of your lungs breathing in and out...in and out...Taking another breath...deeper than normal, breathing in...and, slowly exhaling, becoming more in touch with the room, the sounds around you, and slowly opening your eyes and reacquainting yourself with being here. *(Pause)*

Take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. Pause the video here and jot down your reactions on **page 13** in your workbook.

Keep in mind that your internal experiences can give you an idea of what is important to you. For example, imagine someone feels upset after an argument with their best friend. The internal experience of feeling upset is highlighting that this person values the relationship, and re-orienting that person towards what is important to them.

### **Language Tip**

Before we end, let me introduce another language tip to practice between seminars. Try to **replace the word “but” with “and.”** For example, instead of saying, “I want to do well in school but I have anxiety so I can’t,” try saying, “I can feel anxiety **and** go to class.” You can have both at the same time. The purpose of utilizing this tool is to increase flexibility in your thinking and to allow you to do the things you want or need to do without getting stuck in your unwanted internal experiences.

### **Summary and Practice:**

In summary: last session we learned about **Recognizing** where we are in the moment, including unwanted or uncomfortable internal experiences. It was the “You are here” marker on the trail map. This session we learned about **Insight**, or what those experiences might say is important to us. This session was the “GPS re-routing itself function” or the “consider taking a different course to your destination arrow.” Next session we are going to talk about **Openness** to change, to moving towards our values and creating a more fulfilling life. Our values are like the destination marker on the trail map; our values tell us where we want to arrive.

### **Between now and when you watch the video for the next session:**

We encourage you to continue implementing these practices, including using the language tips of the “I am having the thought/emotion” and using “and, instead of but”. We also encourage you to continue using the mindfulness activities. Remember to write down your experiences on pages 14 and 15 of your workbook.

See you next session!