

# MINDFULNESS IS...

## My 'Ahh-llowing' Observer Self



## Mindfulness—The Corner Stone for MEMMC Training & Development

You may have noticed by now how often the words “mindful” or “mindfulness” are used to describe one dimension of the optimal caring response we are looking for.

### **Mindfulness – It’s not what you think!**

**Last night you slept and this morning you woke up to the sound of an alarm. You came from being unconscious to being conscious. This you will agree is a significant improvement in being able to know what you are doing, that you are doing it and being able to control your actions, thoughts and feelings. Right now you won’t believe it when I tell you, but you are only really about 50% awake to knowing what you are doing, that you are doing it and having control over your actions, thoughts and feelings. Let’s therefore call this daytime sleeping.**

**Mindfulness, proven by millions of people can be your alarm to awaken the other 50% of your consciousness/awareness. This more complete experience is as significant an improvement for ‘knowing’ as is coming from nighttime sleep to daytime sleep. Imagine for a moment what your personal and work life would be like if you could double (or more) knowing what you are doing when you are doing it and have twice the control over your actions, thoughts and feelings, including stress management and compassion.**

Welcome to the world of millions of average folks who are learning and practicing this skill for 15 minutes per day.

The term “mindfulness” means different things to different people. When I was a child, my dad would often say to me, “Mind what you are doing now, son”. After three decades of near-daily, one-hour practice sessions, for me mindfulness at one vitally important level still means “mind what you are doing - NOW”! “Mind” (or “pay attention” or “be mindful”) is, of course, a relative term. Think about the word “looking”: there is a great difference between looking at something with the naked eye and looking with a 10, 100, or 1000-powered microscope. It’s all looking, but what is seen and experienced is radically different. Mindfulness is the same. As a result of looking through the mindfulness microscope, a more complete experience of one’s senses, perceptions and misperceptions is realized.

So why is this important? Why bother to learn mindfulness anyway? You’ve been okay so far in your life, so really, why should you bother? Let’s start by helping you understand a little better what being mindful in daily life means.

## Reflection #1: A Mindfulness Self-Assessment

Perhaps the easiest way of defining mindfulness is for you to examine what you are aware of on an average day. The following self-assessment is intended to stimulate your critical thinking about your mindfulness skills—not to accurately quantify them.

Instructions:

The chart below presents a number of statements about your everyday experiences. Using the 1-5 scale below, circle the number that reflects how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Most of the Time    Frequently    Occasionally    Infrequently    Almost never

I drive to places on “automatic pilot.” I put the key in the ignition, and then I realize I’ve driven some place once I get there.	1	2	3	4	5
I could be experiencing an important emotion (positive or negative) and not be conscious that I am having it until some time later.	1	2	3	4	5
I eat without being conscious of what I am eating (and therefore miss much of the pleasure of the experience).	1	2	3	4	5
When I am involved in a special activity with a loved one such as bathing a child, feeding an elderly parent, or playing a favourite sport, my mind wanders to other things like what’s next or a memory of the past or an irrelevant thought or distraction.	1	2	3	4	5
It seems I am running on autopilot when I am offering care and support to others. I have little awareness of what I’m doing at the moment.	1	2	3	4	5
When I get anxious about or angry with someone, it takes me some time—an hour or more—to actually catch myself feeling this way so as to start to improve the situation.	1	2	3	4	5
I do mundane tasks or boring things mainly just to get them done.	1	2	3	4	5
When I can’t fall asleep, I have a stream of unnecessary thoughts and feelings that continue to keep me awake.	1	2	3	4	5

When I am caring for or supporting someone, I don't consciously intend for them to have an optimal experience: that is, to feel safe, to heal, to feel good	1	2	3	4	5
To keep having happiness in my daily life I need more and more, compared to finding that having less and experiencing it more fully can actually be more fulfilling.	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring: Add the number you circled for each of the 10 statements and multiply the total by 2. This number will give you a rough percentage of the time each day that you are mindful. Don't be discouraged by a relatively low score. Our sampling suggests that average adults are mindful 30-45 percent of the time. The great news is that even scoring 45-60 percent (which is highly attainable through mindfulness practice) suggests a satisfactory level of insight and skill to make a significant difference in many of life's meaningful moments, and to help others do the same. Mindfulness, however, does not happen on its own.

## Reflection #2: Considering our Human Predicament

For leaders and caregivers, the critical importance of developing this competency becomes clear when we consider our predicament as humans. We human folks have evolved with some exceptional gifts, like the potential to develop a values system that treats others with respect and fairness. This gift and many more help us make the best possible choices to enable ourselves and others to live useful, moral and fulfilling lives.

However, our ancestors also passed on a few nasty habits that I'll define simply as **EGO: Enslavement to greedy Gratification and Obsessive self-centeredness**. Take note of the difference between this definition and the more usual use of "ego" to describe simple vanity or arrogance, as in "She's got such a big ego!" I will capitalize the word to remind you of my definition, which describes the human predicament that we all face as a result of EGO when it is unchecked by mindfulness.

## Feelings—The Ego's Fuel

Wisdom teachers throughout the ages agree that personal suffering is in great part directly proportionate to the individual's EGO dependencies. The gas in the EGO vehicle is the natural human resource that we call feelings. Too much of this fuel and we crash and burn; with poorly

mixed fuel, we stall out. Our human predicament is that feelings, often unconscious at the time, generally dominate our intentions, beliefs and behaviours. Our ability to relate naturally to others is virtually one-hundred percent dependent on feelings that often flow from body sensations and thoughts of which we are unaware. Good feelings draw us closer to others. Resistant feelings move us away. As well as being constructive motivators, feelings can also be barriers to unconditional kindness and openness when we live in our normal (not necessarily optimal) unaware EGO identity. Anger, for instance, is sometimes used by our nervous system without our knowing to protect us from experiencing and constructively processing deeper pain like fear or grief. This often creates even deeper suffering for our self and others.

Most feelings are the result of hormones our species needed at one time to survive and brain-programming that was conditioned in us as children. More about that later. When we remain mindlessly unaware of these feelings, they can be really dangerous because of the influence they have on our behaviours and reactions. I see these unaware moments as being locked up in **hormego** prison (that is, hormones and ego).

For those of us who work with individuals who need our help in some way, this being mindlessly unaware puts both the caregiver and the care recipient at risk of having a much less than optimal interaction.

## Seeing and Being More

One of the ways that mindfulness helps us break out of this misperceiving and fearful hormego prison is by developing our ability to be aware of what is happening as it is happening—to be **present**. For example, how often have you had the experience of driving down the same road you have travelled for years and then one day noticing a large building that you have obviously looked at many times before but have never seen? Most people have also had the experience of not seeing many cars of a particular make, model and color until they are thinking of buying one: then suddenly red Honda Fits are everywhere! Similarly, we often don't feel any pain from a minor cut or bruise sustained while we are working hard on a project until we are in the shower or in bed that night—and then we can't even remember how it happened. Scientists call this normal problem of missing much of what we experience *inattentional blindness*. To the degree that we miss important things happening around us we lack presence. In this same way, most mindless, untrained minds are unaware of their own hormego body sensations, feeling states and thoughts that are driving and distorting their response to a challenging situation, such as a care recipient who is being difficult.

At the beginning of this section, I compared mindfulness to the experience of viewing something with a microscope rather than the naked eye. As we develop our mindfulness microscope we start to see many more “large buildings” that we had previously overlooked in our roles and relationships. We can consciously connect with others far beyond the influence of conditioned hormego reactions. Furthermore, as we experience others



mindfully with less judgmentalness, they are freer to respond to us in non-defensive ways because of the well-being and openness that we have helped them in this moment to achieve.

Consider this example. As you are helping an elderly woman get dressed, she snaps at you for being too rushed. Frustrated, you snap back that you don't have all the time in the world. She now becomes highly agitated, and before you know it the two of you are in heated conflict. Now, imagine the same person snapping at you, but this time you respond mindfully by first catching yourself at the very start of the emotional hijack and calming yourself before responding. This pause helps you respond mindfully by seeing the real source of her bad mood-the movement required to get her arms in her sleeves causes her pain. You also see that your immediate reaction of annoyance was not really about this woman at all; it was really about a quarrel you had before you left the house that morning. You lower your own voice, and take extra care to ask after the woman's well-being and make meaningful contact. The woman responds in kind, grateful for this simple but authentic connection.

If you as a leader have a worker who only supports a resident or a patient similar to the first scenario, with this training you will now be aware of the problem yourself and be better able to guide your worker to learn the necessary mindful new insights and skills.

This process of mindfully helping or **entraining** another to be their best self, regardless of how we feel about them in a difficult moment, is an authentic conscious connection. Entraining is helping another to manifest their natural human goodness just by being positive and open ourselves. This critical relating potential is based in part on what scientists are calling mirror neurons that appear in the brains of many primates, including humans. MRI brain scans can consistently identify identical brain neurons firing in two individuals when one person's emotional state has activated a similar state in another. For example, my fear causes fear in you, and my calm causes calm in you. Just like when you pluck a 'C' string on one guitar it vibrates the 'C' string on another, so too we can help others have a positive "vibe". Therefore, the more mindful and subjectively **allowing** the experience that we have in an interpersonal exchange, the less something like someone else's anger or challenging behaviour can drive and distort our thoughts, feelings, physical reactions and behaviours.

This kind of response is, however, not accessible to us in our normal mindless way of interacting with others. **It can no more be willed into existence than someone with pneumonia can will themselves to stop coughing.** However, once learned it has the added benefit of putting us in the absolute best state of mind to problem solve and respond appropriately in extreme situations. Caregivers are constantly confronted with crises, anything from a distraught care recipient who needs to be calmed to a life-threatening fall or challenging behaviour. Mindfulness training prepares us to meet any and all emergencies as successfully as we possibly can.

With practice to develop mindfulness, we can learn to relate to others authentically and compassionately regardless of how we feel or think about them or the situation.

### **Mindfulness Research - Why is Mindfulness So Important?**

Credible institutes and universities around the world have been conducting mindfulness research projects for over thirty years. Their results indicate that even beginner practitioners of mindfulness improve in many critically important aspects of their life and their role as a caregiver. The following is a small sample of result findings:

1. Mindfulness significantly lowers workers' job stress. Workers in high-stress jobs, after eight weeks (three hours/week) of mindfulness training rewired their brain's emotional set point so that their normal brain functioning had significantly more activity in the area of the brain that creates positive feelings like calm, caring and concentration.<sup>1</sup>
2. A 2010 University of Massachusetts study found that non-meditators who had eight weeks of Mindfulness training were more likely than a control group to access the brain region of the "here and now" as opposed to the region associated with worry. In other research, brain scans of mindfulness participants with no previous meditation experience showed increased grey-matter density in regions involved in learning and memory, emotional regulation, self-awareness and perspective.
3. Individuals with Mental Illness can Control their Aggressive Behavior through Mindfulness Training. Behavior Modification Volume 31, Number 3, May 2007 313-328
4. Mindful Staff Increase Learning and Reduce Aggression in Adult with Developmental Disabilities Science Direct Research in Developmental Disabilities 27 (2006) 545-558

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<sup>1</sup> "Attentions in Brain and Immune Functions Produced Mindfulness." *Psychosomatic Medicine*. 2003. 65:564-570.

## 5. Health Benefits Research Summarized

- Increases Flu Antibodies
  - Lowers Blood Pressure
  - Reduces Cholesterol
  - Strengthens Immune Function
  - Relieves Insomnia
  - Decreases the Production of Stress Hormones e.g. cortisol & glucagon
  - Makes it Easier to Reduce Weight
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- Restores Body and Mind Natural Balance
  - Chronic Pain Relief

*Dr. Deepak Chopra*

*University of Wisconsin-Madison*

*University of Massachusetts' Stress Reduction Clinic*

For me, mindfulness practice is an essential part of the journey to emotional maturity and best practices 'readiness'. In the absence of such consciousness, caregivers and human services workers can quickly become burnt out or unauthentic and uncaring in their support. This inevitably leads to mistakes, health and safety risks and a lowering of effective service that also impacts other team members. Mindfulness will help provide the energy and health to stay consciously connected.

People who are mindful are positive role models not so much because they are admired by others but because the skill of mindfulness makes it possible for them to admire everyone else.

*Father Thomas Merton*



## B-FIT Mindfulness

There are different ways to develop the qualities of mindfulness. The essential competency I am presenting here to meet the needs of leaders and caregivers is a specific process for developing this skill that I have modified over years of practice, teaching and care-giving: **B-FIT Mindfulness**. The rest of this chapter is devoted to the practice and development of this particular approach. Each step of the CCS is supported by specific B-FIT Mindfulness exercises that will allow you to practice the skills of mindfulness so that you are able to draw upon them automatically when you most need them.

**B = BODY** sensations  
**F = FEELING** states  
**I = IMAGE** thinking  
**T = TALK** thinking

For our purposes here, of course, the primary outcome of mastering B-FIT mindfulness is to give you the inner resources to apply the CCS process consistently in your ordinary working life and in times of crisis. In this chapter, we will focus specifically on how it will help you achieve the ability to stop and catch your unconscious reaction to the situation you are facing as a human services leader or worker.

Whenever I refer to “mindfulness,” I am referring to the specific strategy and tools that I term *B-FIT Mindfulness*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Body: (B)**

Body Sensations are sensations of internal pressure or external exertion like pain or physically soothing pleasure. The sensation could be experienced any place in or on the body, including muscles, bones, or skin. Body (B) includes every sensation except body sensations that are the result of emotions. For example, your dentist is drilling a tooth and it hurts. When you turn your attention to that hurt, you are being aware of (B) in the jaw. Simultaneously, your hands are white-knuckled to the chair. This tension in the hands and arms is not a Body sensation as defined here; it is actually sensation felt in the body but related to a feeling, like fear. Similarly, in receiving a massage, the sensation of this external pressure on your skin and muscle would be awareness of Body. However, the ripple effect of feeling calm and relaxed in adjacent muscles would be awareness of Feeling (F) in the Body.

### **Feeling: (F)**

In addition to feeling as described above, that is a ripple effect from the ‘splash’ of a physical body sensation, Feeling could also be body reactions to an emotional event. For example, when we are sad often a Feeling sensation is experienced as tightness in the throat.

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<sup>2</sup> Seeing and Hearing are also a part of this mindfulness approach and are fully described in Exercise E – Full Field Focus.

In addition, there are a range of emotions like anger, pleasure, fear, excitement, sadness, happiness, embarrassment or impatience that may not resonate in the body (or at least can not be detected). Regardless of whether you can detect a related body sensation, these subjective experiences are identified as Feeling (F).

### **Image: (I)**

Most people are not aware that they think primarily in two different forms. One form of thinking is using internal images, pictures and mind movies. Stop reading for a moment. Look at an object in the room. Now close your eyes and intentionally recall a picture of what you were just looking at. This same effect is constantly happening without your deliberate effort—the images just appear in your mind, seemingly out of nowhere. This is called Image (I) thinking when it just happens without effort when you are recalling, fantasizing, planning, analyzing, dreaming etc.

### **Talk: (T)**

The second form of thinking is internal talk. Stop reading, close your eyes and say a sentence to yourself, like “This is interesting”. Be aware that you are saying these words to yourself; do it until you become aware of saying the words. Now stop intentionally saying the words and just sit like a cat at the mouse-hole waiting for something—a word or phrase—to appear. That is a Talk thought.

B-FIT are the main internal reactions and senses that all humans use to perceive and experience people and situations. Later on I will explain where these mindless reactions come from and how we developed them. For now, it is most important to know that the process of B-FIT Mindfulness does not mean using our thinking mind at a given time to understand, reject, fix, or challenge irrational, extreme, negative thoughts and feelings about a situation or person. Instead, when mindful, our goal is simply to be aware of B-FIT experiences (i.e. the form or process vs. the meaning or content) in the moment and subjectively or internally **ahh-llow** them to stay or go. **Remember that B-FIT Mindfulness is only recognizing that you are having an Image or Talk Thought, not focusing on the content or meaning of what the thought is about.**

## **B-FIT as a Spectator Sport**

The first and possibly most long-lasting insight that will result from just an initial twenty-minute practice session of B-FIT Mindfulness is a new awareness that our concept of “who I think I am” is quite incomplete. Most folks would say, “I am a doer, relater, thinker and feeler”. But doing, relating, thinking and feeling without mindfulness also creates subconscious identifications that tend to drive and distort our actions and perceptions. For example, if I am subconsciously driven by an identity of being a good helper, then I unintentionally may define you as

being a vulnerable helpee—not as an “unbroken” individual just needing some assistance (as we all do). This incomplete and harmful identity is developed and reinforced by mindless B-FIT messages. As another example, if I am mindlessly identified with fear of being criticized, I may relate to you primarily as a threat—my judge and jury—not as a friend just trying to help me change a bad habit.

So then, when mindful we realize that much more is actually going on. B-FIT Mindfulness radically changes the way we relate to body sensations, feelings, image or talk thought messages that arise moment by moment in response to life experiences. When we just watch them as if we are watching a sporting event and observe—“there is” a worry feeling, or “there is” angry self talk—these reactions have less gripping power over us because we don’t make the mistake of saying they are us; they’re just happening to us. This process of “there is” vs. “I am” reprograms our sense of self in that we start to realize that the feeling is not me—just a sense message. The activity becomes more like a spectator sport than actually playing the game of EGO (reactive thinking and feelings of **E**nslavement to greedy **G**ratification and **O**bsessive self-centeredness.) As a result, we are significantly less attached to or driven by the meanings of the negative messages we give ourselves.

In order to understand B-FIT Mindfulness, it is essential to be able to clearly observe these four B-FIT “sense doors” (Body sensations, Feelings, Image thought messages and Talk thought messages). Deepening this awareness enables us to observe accurately what is happening internally; it helps us not to lock onto or be gripped by the content of image and talk thoughts or feelings, or be driven by body reactions of which we are unaware. Like a spectator, we watch them coming and going without getting affected by them. During this B-FIT mindful process we see and experience first-hand how our unaware, and therefore reactive, mind and body often unnecessarily create unsatisfying and even painful emotions such as indifference, anger or fear.

When we relate as B-FIT observers, reactions are still present, but we experience them just like any other message from our other senses. For example, when smelling, we say, “There is the smell of smoke” not “I am smoke.” Similarly, when mindfully relating to (that is, watching) our Body Sensations, Feeling and Image messages, we say, “There is anger” not “I am angry”. By identifying these reactions as “there is” instead of “I am” we are much freer to choose whether to respond to these body, feeling and thinking messages or not!

This shift from being the ‘player’ who unknowingly, thinks he ‘is’ the reactions, to being the objective, matter-of-fact spectator who just observes each internal B-FIT movement and message significantly lessens the intensity of our unconscious body sensations, feelings and image and talk thoughts that normally have very strong power over us. As a result we are less resistant to what happens around us or to us, and more likely to connect positively and consciously support others, regardless of our thoughts or feelings about them. This less resistant and non-attached way of being brings relative peace and an open heart especially when we catch our self being in a leadership or care/support situation. It also puts us into optimal and problem solving and decision making mode!

## Deep and Lasting Happiness—Beyond Fixing Conditions and Chaos

All of us—especially those in the helping professions—know that life is full of unexpected challenges and chaotic conditions that make it very difficult to stay calm: remember that “calm” is the second critical step of the CCS Process. The B-FIT mindfulness approach is not dependent on fixing conditions; it is not based on developing new strategies to change or more positive ways to think about things (I deal with these valuable skills in other essential competencies). Instead, the B-FIT mindfulness process develops the **basic mindfulness tools** of concentration, enhanced sensory clarity, subjective ahh-llowing (equanimity) and the final tool of “Here Now” (I, Peter, am aware that I am reading this sentence). These four tools allow us to get our EGO out of the way so that our natural human goodness and connectedness can spontaneously show itself—even, and especially, during difficult conditions and chaos.

### The Four Tools of B-FIT Mindfulness

Each B-FIT tool and exercise in this manual will help you understand how to integrate both the practice and the tools into your daily life. B-FIT is a way of being, moment by moment, not a way of doing at isolated times. This is a real-time practice.

Mankind has evolved physically, mentally and socially as a result of physical tools. The first tool accurately carbon dated by archeologists was invented by our ancestors about 250,000 years ago. Not surprising it was a cutting tool—a chopper knife. A tool designed to cut up food supplies, to divide and separate meat in smaller more manageable pieces. Knives are such an elegant and perfect analogy to introduce the tools of B-FIT mindfulness which are also used to “divide” B-FIT into manageable pieces so that they do not overwhelm us and can be more easily digested.

As our skill with each of the following tools increases over time, our overall capacity to be mindful will increase as well. The benefit works both ways. The deeper our mindfulness becomes, the more proficient we become in using the tools.

#### Tool # 1 : Concentration

Possibly the most important of all human faculties to enable us to have a meaningful and socially responsible life is **concentration**. Concentration is simply the ability to pay continuous attention to what you feel is relevant and important at the time. It is not hard to see the importance of this ability in leadership and care-giving. How often does the well-being of one person depend on another’s ability to pay attention to physical changes and symptoms or nonverbal cues of emotional distress? Without the ability to concentrate—to focus and pay

attention—our ability and motivation to be in the world in the best possible way, and to be the best possible leader or caregiver, will be seriously compromised.

However, every day we are confronted with a battalion of new electronic devices that limit our ability to concentrate. The brain cells required for this vital, life-saving faculty are assaulted by the deadly microwave energy emitted from these devices. Even more important to our concerns, however, is the fact that much of this electronic, multi-sensory, stimulation gadgetry, being operated by the average person for many hours each day, focuses the mind so well that the mind's natural ability to concentrate atrophies. Just as having your leg in a cast for eight weeks makes the muscles become incredibly weak from lack of use, so too does the mind's capacity to concentrate on its own becomes weak when it is constantly "being concentrated" without any effort by these devices and our multi-sensory life style.

Being unable to concentrate with another unless we find them co-operative, appreciative, or interesting is one of the most challenging barriers of leader-staff or caregiver-recipient relationships. Using B-FIT mindfulness concentration skills to focus on the needs of the staff or the care recipient will do much to eliminate this barrier.

The B-FIT mindfulness tool of concentration is a proven and powerful way to develop and maintain this all-important ability. This, in turn, significantly improves our ability to know and understand the needs of others. Being able to concentrate on the subtle but important messages from those we are leading and from those we are giving care to are the foundation of offering fully compassionate personal support and care.

## **Tool # 2 Deconstructive Sensory Clarity (DSC)**

**DSC** is the ability to fully and skillfully get clear about what is happening in each of the B-FIT senses (Body Sensations, Feelings, Image and Talk thinking), one by one. It is unbundling these entangled senses that normally clump together so we don't know what is happening or why we are reacting the way we are. We need to "deconstruct," or take apart, this bundle of driven senses. As we become more aware of how the B-FIT senses are inter-reacting, we become less driven by the EGO as it tries to control situations and others in order to regain emotional and physical security.

In B-FIT sensory clarity we are not focused on the content of the thoughts or meaning of the feelings because in this moment our reactions and the reasons for them are secondary. Of course, as we are skillfully processing B-FIT internally, we are also taking appropriate and measured action to change anything that should be changed, such as giving the care that is needed. We experience all situations in this simultaneous way. We just need to be fully aware of our B-FIT subjective reactions so they no longer control us.

Deconstructing the B-FIT senses through sensory clarity requires the following specific steps:

1. Watch closely and observe each separate sensory strand on its own. What are your **B**ody sensations? What are your **F**eelings? What **I**mages are going through your head? What internal **T**alk messages are you hearing?
2. Become aware that one or more of these senses has been activated: for example, there are sweaty palms, or there is the feeling of frustration or there is self talk about being frustrated.
3. Observe the ever-changing, intensity of body sensations, feelings and thoughts (e.g. stronger, weaker, same);
4. Fill this clarifying experience with intentional ahh-llowing (equanimity, let it be-ness etc.).

**Tool # 3: Ahh-llowing (Equanimity) – This is Step 2 of the CCS process i.e. calm)**

As sure and as powerful as gravity holds the most inconsequential of objects to the earth's surface, so too do Resistance and Attachments control every life event no matter how mundane or magnificent – until that is, they come into Awareness and are Ahh-llowed.

**Ahh-llowing** simply means letting go of all the resistance or attachments that have developed against or for those B-FIT sensations that you are now aware of. Remember that this means focusing on the forms and process of B-FIT not the content. For example, the forms of thinking are **I**mage and internal **T**alk—not the meaning or content of a thought like “this is awful”. The process you become aware of is the “changefulness,” like an image becoming stronger, weaker or simply gone. You see these forms and intend a mindful “ahh-llow”. That is, you intend for them to be just what they are, without you trying to change or get rid of them. There is no judgment or action. Ahh-llowing is just being with the ever-changing forms.

At any given moment, objective reality is taking place outside of you. Someone is criticizing you, or yelling at you, or complimenting you. Simultaneously you have subjective, internal reactions to this situation: embarrassment, anger, joy. Ahh-llowing begins with intentionally

responding to your awareness of your subjective reactions with an attitude of “let it be.” Ahh, there is embarrassment: let it be. We call this matter-of-fact, nonjudgmental, internal letting go of your physical, mental and emotional response, non-attachment or ahh-llowing.

It is very important to remember that ahh-llowing does not mean that you accept any harmful or negative situation with a sense that “It’s all good” or “This too will pass:” it always includes working passionately to improve the real, objective situation. Ahh-llowing also does not mean creating a place where there is no pain, challenge or problem. It is in the very definition of leadership or care-giving for example to be constantly confronted with all of these things. The by-product of ahh-llowing means to be surrounded by the chaos and still be calm, connected, compassionate, capable and cheerful. This mindfulness tool just asks you to let go of your driven B-FIT sensory reactions in the moment, so you can respond fully to what is happening. When you are non-attached and ahh-llowing to specific external actions and outcomes, you will be able to find the most appropriate words and actions. Because you are mindful, you will be calm and conscious as well, so your heart will remain open. Your words will be useful, truthful, kind and timely.

The benefits from this new attitude of ahh-llowing will be huge. You will experience much less emotional and physical pain because you will not have resistance or reaction to it. You will also be much less vulnerable to **emotional hijacks**, those situations in which your emotional reaction to a negative or difficult event quickly takes you somewhere you didn’t want to go. When you do experience a hijack, you will recover much more quickly, resulting in significantly improved management of your feelings and behaviours. Another wonderful benefit from developing this quality is increased fulfillment from the things that bring you pleasure, simply because you are more consciously aware of and non-attached to the pleasure.

Being a non-attached/ahh-llowing leader or caregiver/supporter has been compared to being an excellent bookkeeper. The bookkeeper meticulously enters all numbers on the balance sheet, adds them perfectly and effectively prepares the financial reports. He/She does not become anxious, defensive or even excited about profit and loss—he/she just does his/her best and rests with the rest. Similarly, you as a non-attached caregiver compassionately manage and optimally respond to all of the details around someone’s feelings, behaviour, nutrition, personal care, medication and therapy without any need to control the outcome.

## How To Develop Ahh-llowing/Equanimity

**NOTE:** Although useful, equanimity skills and capacity building requires more than mindfulness practice alone. This tool has its own set of optimal training conditions and strategies during formal B-FIT Mindfulness practice sessions and in the marketplace.

### Examples of excellent training conditions are:

1. Intend Ahh-llowing of B-FIT with deliberately generated or naturally occurring physical and emotion discomfort.
2. Intend Ahh-llowing of Image and Thought thoughts that naturally occur during practice. Also focus on Image and Talk rest states of Clear and Quiet in formal practice.
3. Continue some mindfulness sessions for approximately 10 minutes after you want/need to stop the session.
4. Monthly, view a movie showing the horrendous suffering of man's inhumanity to man e.g. Hotel Rwanda, Sometime in April, Shindler's List, and The Patriot. View as a formal equanimity practice by tracking and Ahh-llowing B-FIT by applying the skills listed below.
5. Most times that you view a television commercial; there is subconscious B-FIT irritability due to the interruption in the satisfied mindless drivenness of B-FIT. Track and label every new scene, 'pan' or zoom in or out. Label change and intend Ahh-llow. Level 2 opportunity is to view commercials and programing using Full Field Focus and Ahh-llow.
6. As a formal practice, apply these strategies to marketplace generated difficult emotions as well e.g. waiting in line, receiving poor or disrespectful service, being late for an appointment, embarrassed, worried, criticized, out of control, betrayal, filters hijacks, financial or job crisis, a serious medical diagnosis, grief and anxiety.

### Examples of Skills and Capacity Building 'How To...s are:

1. **B-FIT Intending to** – let it be, Ahh-llow it to expand and contract, come and go – label, Ahh-llow.
2. **Focus on B-FIT Changingness** e.g. stronger, weaker, same, faster, slower, and same.
3. Review Pain Clinic protocol (Chapter 5).

**NOTE:** Remember this is all at the subjective level. Objectively, we always work passionately to change what should be changed!



As Pema Chödrön said:

We can put our whole heart into whatever we do; but if we freeze our attitude into for or against, we're setting ourselves up for stress. Instead, we could just go forward with curiosity, wondering where this experiment will lead. This kind of open-ended inquisitiveness captures the spirit of enthusiasm, or heroic perseverance.

Or, as I say:

Do my best—and rest with the rest!

Or, as Jesus said:

We must be [fully] in the world, but not of it.

#### Tool # 4 : HERE (NOW!)

“Here” is simply being aware **that** you are experiencing this present moment--“I Peter, am aware that I am writing this sentence”. I am focused on the task and simultaneously—“dual processing” so to speak—being aware that I am Here Now! It is the opposite of how you typically

drive your car. As a tool of B-FIT mindfulness we simply say to our self, “here!” An excellent way to practise this tool is to each time your mind automatically reads a sign along the highway; say to yourself “talk, here”. With these two words you are first becoming aware of the B-FIT talk process and then bringing your awareness fully back to the present moment. With practice this awareness becomes second nature. This is the “catching” that is the first step of the CCS process.

From a mindful centre we can respond instead of react. Unconscious reactions create problems. Mindful responses bring peace. Whatever happens can be met with wisdom and compassion.

*Jack Kornfield*

### **Summary of the Four Tools of B-FIT Mindfulness**

Take a moment to try the following exercise:

1. Write your signature.
2. Now write it with your non-dominant hand and stay aware of feelings of frustration and/or maybe a body sensation associated with frustration or maybe an image or talk thought etc. as you do it.
3. Write your signature again with your non-dominant hand and be aware that you are doing it - say to yourself “here, writing”.

The first step is generally how most people go through life. You just auto-piloted your signature like you do most things you know how to do. Think of how many daily tasks and routines there are in your daily work, and think of how easy it is to fall into auto-pilot. I’m sure you can give your care-recipient a bath or feed him his dinner without giving it any more thought than you gave to writing your signature the first time—and that is exactly what we need to avoid doing.

The second step was a forced mindful experience because your lack of competence and the newness of the situation forced you to be mindful. If you observed any feelings or thoughts of frustration, then you were somewhat B-FIT Mindful.

In the third step, if you could hold a similar awareness of “HERE,” along with paying attention to what you were doing and also being aware of some B-FIT reactions, and you allowed those reactions to just be, congratulations—you just experienced all four tools in action. Once

you have developed these four B-FIT mindfulness tools of Concentration, Sensory Clarity, Ahh-llowingness and Here, now you will find that you can more wisely, intuitively, effectively and kindly respond to the needs of others.

### **B-FIT Mindfulness and Conscious Care and Support**

Our goal in developing the essential competency of B-FIT Mindfulness is to develop your emotional maturity and level of compassion as a caregiver or supporter sufficiently to allow you to activate the CCS process. B-FIT mindfulness contributes to the CCS process in the following ways:

- This mindful way of responding—not reacting—is similar to how we naturally and calmly open our heart and be our most compassionate self when we are caring for a sick child or a loved one who is dying. Regardless of our preferences, thoughts and personal filters, we just don't emotionally experience the other as difficult and demanding. The situation is no big deal for us: we just calmly connect with the supported individual unconditionally, no matter what subjective internal messages are being given. Similarly with B-FIT mindfulness we can now respond to even difficult care recipients or staff in this optimal fashion because we are no longer driven by mindless indifference or fears.
- Having the skill to be aware or mindful of these B-FIT senses, moment by moment as they are happening, significantly lessens their gripping power to drive and control our feelings, thoughts and behavioural reactions to negative situations and difficult staff or care recipients.
- Being mindful also enables us to experience positive situations and likeable staff members or care recipients more completely, and therefore we have more happiness and fulfillment.

### **Waking up to Unconditional Kindness**

As people in a leadership or caregiver role, we want to learn how to be fulfilled and happy by accessing our inherent natural gifts of goodness, wisdom and compassion that lay hidden just below our awareness. Take a moment to consider the outcomes of B-FIT mindfulness that I have just outlined. You will see that the gifts of B-FIT mindfulness are multi-faceted. Almost everyone who grows with B-FIT mindfulness experiences the gift of unconditional kindness—the qualities of conscious connecting and being love.

Although this is not a spiritual text, there is spirit at its heart. The many quotations I have included about our natural human ability to “love our enemies” (or friends, family, work colleagues, care recipients)—even when we have difficult times with them or need to prevent them from causing further harm—are not just some ancient sage's sound bites. Once our unaware attachments and resistances to body sensations, feelings (anger, fear, grief, shame, impatience and guilt etc.) and thoughts are brought to awareness and subjective ah-llowingness, they lose their gripping power to drive and distort our perceptions, behaviours and feelings.

At this readily accessible level of our human experience, it turns out that we are not broken after all and don't need fixing. Instead, we just need to replace difficult "I am" messages with B-FIT "there is" messages: "there is anger," not "I am angry". In this radically less ego-driven way of relating, we respond very differently to conditions that normally would cause emotional fear, fight, flight or freeze reactions. Instead, natural reactions of kindness and connection are automatically activated in the moment by applying the tools of B-FIT mindfulness, and we develop more natural intuitive ability to do this every time we apply the skills.

By being aware and allowing of (non-attached to) B-FIT experiences, we automatically, without even trying it seems, become unconditionally, authentically kind. When a mindfulness strategy is applied to each component of B-FIT, we no longer experience others as separate, and we are no longer loaded with moralistic judgments of good and bad, or right and wrong. Therefore if I am expected to care for and support you, but I do not feel like it either because of your behaviour or my own issues, unconditional kindness and support will still happen to the extent that there is sufficient B-FIT Mindfulness. Experiencing B-FIT mindfully softens our subjective identification with "I." My aware and non-attached experience of "you" is now beyond my driven, attached "I" B-FIT senses. In this aware state, situations and people are experienced with significantly less subjective judgment.

Note that in this state, we still absolutely continue to take care of objective reality. For example, if an individual receiving our help is behaving in a way that could threaten her or our own physical well-being; we must enforce appropriate boundaries or redirect these inappropriate behaviours. In fact, this state of mindfulness is the optimal space to change what should be changed.

**The B-FIT mindfulness process places intense focus on the tool of enhanced sensory awareness and clarity. Spending fifteen to twenty minutes a day, on most days, is all that is required to become quite proficient. In return for this commitment of time, you will experience significantly fewer emotional hijacks like fear, anger, shame or sadness in response to difficult situations. When these responses do happen, they will be less intense and the recovery time will be much shorter. This also means that there will be many more occasions spent in authentic fulfillment (deep happiness), compassion and service without the need to be motivated by positive feelings about the individual supported. These moments become more intense, and they last longer.**

### **The Nervous System's Door to the Heart of Compassion**

Unconditional kindness can be better understood and experienced to the extent that we mindfully explore and examine our nervous system's survival instincts at two levels. It seems to go something like this.

In a relatively short period of time in getting to know a little more about who we really are through practising B-FIT Mindfulness, we receive direct experience of a life-giving insight. This critical insight is that we are driven by survival instincts wired into the human nervous system and existing at a minimum at two levels. The first level is mostly concerned about safety and security—the limbic brain’s fear, flight, freeze or fight emotional and physical reactions.

At a second level, however, survival instincts are manifested as deep, deep empathy, altruism and kindness. This response comes, in part, from activation of another part of our nervous system associated with our vagus nervous system, which mindfulness practice seems to stimulate. These Level Two reactions are as real and potentially as spontaneous as Level One’s instant reactions of anger or fear. Understanding this neural set-up and learning how to stimulate it and mindfully work with it, not against it, is fundamental to being authentically and unconditionally kind and connected—regardless of how we are feeling at the time.

Love and compassion appear as selfless service.  
Yet in mindful caregiving we do not serve the other, we serve us.

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Let’s get a little more concrete by drawing on Western science. Let me share just a glimpse of how our human nervous system has evolved to help us ‘love enemies’ or anyone we support or lead without needing to be motivated or compensated by good feelings.

The human nervous system is indeed very complex and far beyond my understanding except to summarize conclusions from reliable studies. For example, studies show how even simple touch, regardless of one’s feelings, makes people trust, increases body weight in premature babies, reduces depression in adults in nursing homes and builds stronger immune systems. Individuals participating in controlled experiments can communicate compassion, love and gratitude to a stranger with a one-second touch to the forearm. One of the essential building blocks for our immune system associated with the vagus nerve is a substance called oxytocin. Once again, just simple touch (regardless of feelings) between two strangers produces significant quantities of this life-giving substance.

Dacher Keltner provides a good overview:

The vagus nerve is directly connected to rich networks of oxytocin receptors throughout the body. These neuropeptides are intimately involved in the experience of trust and love. As the vagus nerve fires, it stimulates affiliative vocalizations and calmer

cardiovascular physiology which triggers the release of oxytocin, sending signals of warmth, trust and devotion throughout the brain and body and ultimately to other people.<sup>3</sup>

**Therefore unconditional compassionate connecting does not have to be willed, felt, developed, learned or believed in—only activated.**

### **B-FIT Mindfulness as an Effective Activation Tool**

Thus it is vitally important for us to learn how to activate our Level Two neural response system. The following describes how I feel B-FIT Mindfulness can be used as a highly effective tool for activation. As soon as the slightest hint of physical or emotional trouble or threat is perceived, blood immediately starts to flow from the thinking (logical) brain centres to the limbic freeze, flight or fight brain centres. This limbic reaction is linked to billions of cells throughout our entire body. For example, Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging demonstrates that just hearing the name of the political party that promotes positions contrary to one's beliefs starts blood flow and activation away from the thinking cortex to the limbic brain. To be effective and efficient at this protective, Level One survival response, however, we humans have needed to evolve a kind of optical illusion of seeing others (especially different, unknown or difficult people or situations) and self as separate: that is, them vs. me, or me here, you there!

A human being ... experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us.... Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.... The striving for such achievement is, in itself, a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.

Albert Einstein

Mindless Survival Level One B-FIT reactions to unknown, different, difficult people or situations keep us indifferent, uncaring, resistant, defensive, agitated, angry or even aggressive. If we don't mindfully experience these B-FIT reactions as they happen over and over, our

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<sup>3</sup> Dacher Keltner, *Born To Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009. Print.

perceived separate “I” (optical delusion) is continuously fed and therefore lives on. These B-FIT senses, experienced mindlessly, control our perspectives and produce indifferent, uncaring feelings and judgments and the illusion of alienation (me vs. you). However, as the tools of B-FIT Mindfulness sculpt away our resistance, they activate this natural Level Two system of vagus nerves, hormones and “Heart”.

The following story provides a personal example of what implementing these four tools of B-FIT mindfulness might look like:

### **The Four Tools In Action**

For a time in my career I did community development work with First Nations Aboriginal Communities in Northern Ontario. Throughout this time I developed many deeply meaningful relationships and received numerous valuable teachings from highly evolved healers and elders. Through my twenty years of living in First Nation Communities with families and friends, I was honoured to be entrusted with many ground-breaking social and healthcare projects.

One major contract was to help a violently divided community come to terms with distribution of millions of dollars of revenue from a large land-claim settlement recently negotiated with the federal government. The money was for reimbursement of land that was to be used for a highway to be built through the reserve community of approximately five hundred members. I was retained by the Band Council to help mediate a dispute between two groups in the community. The settlement was to be divided equally among all band members: a small group (fifty or so), however, did not want to include older members (and their children) who had many years before been included but lost their status because they had married a non-native.

One evening I facilitated a large community meeting. Because I was contracted by the Band Council who had been elected by the majority of members who supported the rights of these disenfranchised members, I was seen as the enemy by a minority of members who did not support them. I had intentionally chosen this work because of my deep sadness for the tragic devastation from assimilation that Europeans had inflicted (mostly mindlessly) on the “first Americans,” so I was deeply sensitive and appreciative of their frustration with my role as an outsider. Nonetheless, when the community meeting decided to include the disenfranchised members, the minority group focused their anger on me, the non-native outsider.

As I left the community centre after most members had gone home, I was met by about twenty-five very, very angry band members who yelled and threatened me. My body reacted to their threats with the force of billions of cells programmed through hundreds of thousands of years of evolution to fight, flee or freeze. Thoughts and feelings shot in and out of my mind and body like high-speed freight trains – What are my options, How do I de-escalate this, How do I get help? These questions were half of my mind’s response. I applied the other fifty percent of my conscious energy to observe and intentionally, subjectively ahh-llow what was happening. I started to respond. As I made some neutral, empathetic comments, I mindfully, silently intended calm and peace for the band members and me. I stayed aware of the changing intensity in my chest and my dominant arm and infused those sites with awareness and ahh-llowing – I kept focused on my feelings of fear and anger and just kept labeling - there is . . . ahh-llow.

Meanwhile, as the shouting and yelling continued, I met these people with internal labeling, openness and external empathy. Awareness kept me communicating with non-powerful yet assertive and concerned statements. Although I did not really know these men and women, I assumed their goodness and treated them with respect and caring. This situation could have gone either way.

I kept checking my options to change or leave the situation, but nothing came to mind. All I could do was what I was doing—staying aware and ahh-llowing of B-FIT, intending something positive, keeping an authentic open heart and communicating usefully, kindly and truthfully. This clarifying process was not a guarantee, but solid research put the odds on my side as I bet on others’ human goodness to ultimately influence their behaviour.

In about half an hour, the group started to break up. The most vocal were the last to leave. I could have gotten seriously hurt that night, but in truth, when anger had taken over otherwise good people, I knew that time was on my side. These four B-FIT mindfulness tools ensured that I didn’t make the situation worse by meeting their power with my power or out-of-control fear. Either reaction would have been disastrous.

Since then I have used the four B-FIT mindfulness tools and CCS process to calm many individuals with dementia, mental health disorders and developmental disabilities. Although I have had to block punches at times, until I could entrain to calm with CCS, the vast majority of situations were de-escalated without any violence within minutes. As a result, vulnerable individuals were not traumatized with restraints and violence, but were calmed and re-directed to peacefully go about their everyday life with self-respect and dignity. At the same time, caregivers’ roles become significantly safer. The awareness-based calming and de-escalation strategies offered in Chapter #2 (Calm) describes this specific CCS application.

If you are reading this text, I expect that you have already or soon may be in a situation not that different from the one I described above, a situation with great potential for physical or verbal violence with the outcome of peace for both of you, totally dependent on your own mindful



emotional self control response, to be skillfull with your fear or anger. As Martin Luther King so beautifully reminds us in his model of non-violent interventions, “we shall overcome—means all of us”.

Our more compassionate self is what is left after each strand of B-FIT is mindfully unwrapped from around our true being. This clearing away is a natural by-product of the four tools of skillfully being with what B-FIT is doing, moment-by-moment. That’s all!

Through this process we realize that it is not necessary or natural to separate people into good guys and bad guys; in fact, that separation is just an illusion created by our survival-conditioned hormones and ego--(hormego)—not a fundamental truth. With this understanding, we are freer to act from a place of sincere kindness and compassion for others and ourselves. This response is no longer dependent on the content of our sensory feelings, thoughts or body sensations. As a result of skillfully clarifying our sensory reactions by deconstructing them strand-by-strand, our mind and heart open beyond our EGO’s fear, indifference, mindlessness, anger etc. We now have an accurate perception of the needs of the moment. From this place we don’t have to “think” of the best response because it just comes to us, as naturally as when someone is falling and we automatically reach out to help them.

No ray of sunshine is ever lost. But the green which it awakens into existence needs time to sprout, and it is not always granted for the sower to see the complete harvest. Most work that is worth anything is started in faith.

This B-FIT process also, and equally as important, puts us in an optimal place to choose our response: to move closer or farther away, to take action or be passive, to speak or to be silent, to direct or be directed, to be gentle or firm. By learning how to be this aware and repeatedly applying these tools, we come to understand that we do not have to be driven by our sensory reactions—body sensations, thoughts and feelings—based on the false identity we have built up through our life time. Rather, at our core, we all share a common connection beyond our driven senses.

Once you achieve this real clarity about yourself, you will stop responding inappropriately to the challenging feelings and behaviours you are sometimes confronted with as a leader or caregiver. You will still, of course, implement best practices to manage the reality of the situation as you objectively see it. You will do what needs to be done! Subjectively (inside), however, you will now be able to respond appropriately to the individual who may be overly-demanding, depressed, frightened or angry. In this way you will also help them be their best by not reinforcing their difficult feelings and challenging behaviours. This B-FIT mindful response is the best way to ensure optimal respect for everyone involved. In connecting beyond the subconscious, entangled B-FIT senses, you will see and believe in all possibilities for another’s and your own goodness.

You will respond to the person, not the behaviour!

The motivation for learning and practising these tools, however, will not be sustained by mythical stories of miracles and magic. To maintain a strong consistent practice, we must stay focused on the subtle but significant improvements to one's life, relationships and care for others that increasingly happen every day in simple acts of mindful kindness and the ordinary miracles like your forgiveness of a hurt from a family member or your conscious connecting while helping the homeless.

As my practice has matured, more and more, even in situations when I become aware that my heart is not completely open or that I am not fully present, my B-FIT process at least keeps me consciously connected beyond my ego's misperceptions of good guys and bad guys and its desire to be appreciated, cooperated with and kept interested. At these times I at least *catch* and calm myself so that I can make a choice not to be fully taken over by my fears and prejudices, which is B-FIT's natural and normal mindless ways of being in our world.

Remember, **Catching** is being aware in the moment and realizing that my heart is somewhat closed and I am not able to be sufficiently mindful to open it at this time. This "knowing what we don't know or can't do" in the moment is a Big Deal! At these times, my response to the individual becomes the practice.

Ring the bell that still can ring.  
Forget your perfect offering.  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
And that is how the light gets in.

*L. Cohen*

### **Being Present – Fully Present**

Being present to anyone in any relationship is so essential to really experience that authentic, unconditional connecting that nature stores deep in our hearts and souls. Regrettably however, many never experience this connecting much beyond their family or circle of close friends and even then for many it is fleeting and incomplete. I would suggest that for many leaders, caregivers and supporters, even those who want it otherwise, this authentic experience is seldom fully realized because you lack the skill of Presence. What do you mean skill? – Isn't presence all about will power, intentions and values? I would say only somewhat because will power, intentions and values require consciousness to

be fully activated. As just discussed, looking is not the same with the naked eye compared to also using a 10, 100 or 1,000 powered microscope. Because of our natural human predicament of experiencing all of reality through reactive and survival oriented 6 senses, the experience of Presence based only on will power, intentions and even values in the absence Conscious Mindful Connecting is naturally relatively limited. With B-FIT Mindfulness as described and taught in this resource, we can be fully Present in every relationship that is experienced as described and taught in all of the Wisdom Traditions. We can authentically connect and even ‘love enemies’ when we bring conscious mindfulness to each awe or ‘awful’ moment of care and support. **This is the ‘Presence’ that transcends the mind’s survival thoughts that fuel the illusion of our separateness and our preoccupation with differences that is at the core of exclusion and prejudice.**

With a final word of caution, I invite you to explore expanding your ability to be consciously present and unconditionally authentically kind and connected to everyone. My caution is for you to know that the Way requires you to practice this Presence for just 15-20 minutes most days but your natural ‘non-present’ mind will want to fiercely hold on to its habit of Past and Future Fearful Non-Presence.

## **B-FIT Mindfulness Practice**

(For use with enclosed CD of Tech Talk and Guided Practice Session)

We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us so that they may see their own image and stillness, and so live for a moment more peacefully and clear, perhaps even having a more kind and courageous life because of our quiet.

*W.B. Yeats*

I end this chapter with specific exercises to help you develop your capacity for this first step, “catch”. However, the principles of B-FIT Mindfulness apply to the whole of the CCS process and to the exercises for each of its steps. I strongly recommend that you review these pages whenever you are learning a new exercise.

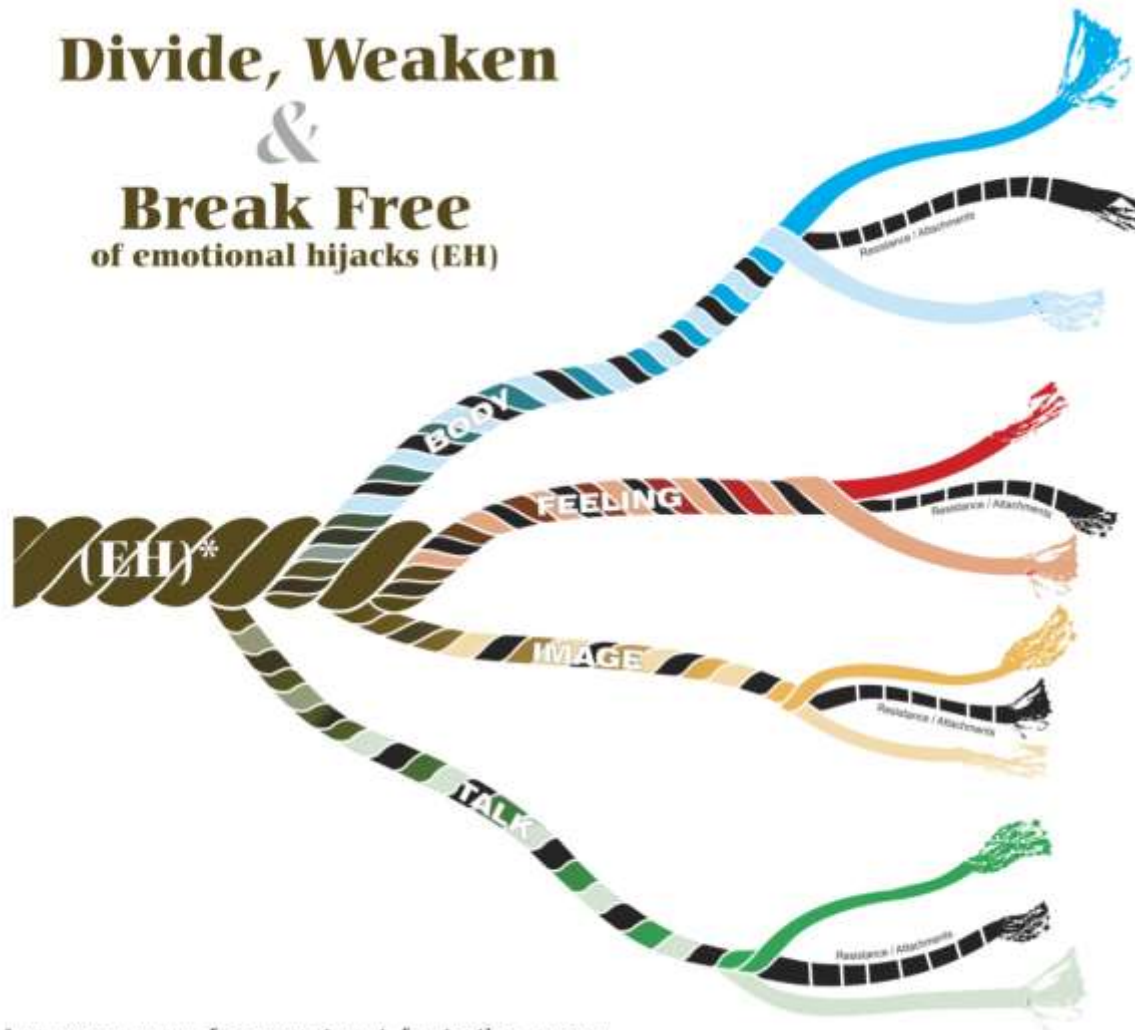
## Divide and Conquer

The general principle that applies to all B-FIT mindfulness strategies is “divide and conquer”. Through concentration, sensory clarity, ah-hallowingness and being Here Now, our mind observes our specific B-FIT responses and EGO-based, survival-oriented, sensory reactions are diminished. This dividing and clarifying of our sensory reactions actually conquers our subjective resistance to the bad stuff (like criticism) and our attachment to the good stuff (like praise).

The following comparison will help describe what happens when we apply the skills of B-FIT mindfulness to these hard-wired and conditioned reactions. We all experience **emotional hijacks** when our reactions are literally hijacked by our emotions and taken someplace we didn't intend to go. We all can remember situations in which we had the best possible intentions to be kind, but then something happened to trigger our anger or to embarrass us, and we behaved badly instead. That's an emotional hijack.

Think about a typical emotional hijack as like a strong, thickly braided rope that ties you up and keeps you from responding in the way you would choose. The following illustration shows how we can use the strategy of “divide and conquer” to break free. By dividing the braided rope into its four parts (B-FIT) we are able to weaken the strength of the rope. If we go another step and unbraid each of the four strands into three strings each, we now have weaker pieces of string that we can quite easily break.

# Divide, Weaken & Break Free of emotional hijacks (EH)



\* eg. worry, anger, fear, resentment, frustration, sorrow

Similarly, if we use the skills of mindfulness to divide an emotional hijack into the various body responses, feelings, image thoughts and talk thoughts that are hijacking our reaction, we can weaken them and so conquer them. This dividing and separating is achieved through the skills of applying the tools that you are about to learn: concentration, deconstructive sensory clarity, allowingness and Here Now. Within just one hour of B-FIT Mindfulness practice, you will experience the significant power of this divide and conquer approach to any stressful life situation or care-giving experience.

## Settling In and General Instructions:

The following practices are incremental; that is, they build on each other and strengthen each other as you grow more adept. In order to gain this incremental benefit, create this practice as a daily ritual: same time, same special place in your home. The instructions below will help you avoid some of the common pitfalls in this practice; all the techniques mentioned are described more fully within the actual exercises. Come back to this list often to refresh your practice.

1. **Decide** what skills and process you will apply in the session and for how long, and stick to it.
2. **Posture** - assume a relaxed but alert posture. Avoid lying down (unless necessary) as this makes it very difficult to stay highly alert. Alertness of the mind is essential.
3. **Manage Mindfulness Menaces – Doz’n, Froz’n, and Poz’n**

Doz’n (pre-sleep) - If you find yourself falling asleep during an exercise, open your eyes for a minute and only focus on the extreme peripheral vision in both eyes. Standing up is also very helpful. Continue with the mindful process. If doz’n persists, do a mindful walking exercise.

Froz’n (in a day-dream) - **label**, label out-loud or scroll (see Exercise A below)

Poz’n (acting as if you are committed, when you really are not) - mindfully commit to your best effort.
4. **Label your experiences** - say to yourself or out-loud a word that describes what you are experiencing: for example, “talk”.
5. **Initially scroll** down and up your body in order to deliberately inventory your experiences: scroll your attention from belly to chest to nostrils to chest and back to belly. This minimizes the risk of spacing out (froz’n). Use one breath cycle to prompt moving on to the next area in your scroll. Experiment with “The Mindfulness Labyrinth” (see Exercise A below). Initially it is helpful to ‘rest for 3-4 seconds after you exhale. This is an optimal focusing exercise that can gently ‘tug’ the mind to focus.
6. **Commit to time** periods for practice that are challenging but not overwhelming. For beginners, a 10-20 minute session is typical. We encourage initially setting aside 20 minutes. If you lose your focus, just sit quietly and stay aware of “doing nothing” for the balance of the time.
7. When image and/or talk thinking are particularly active, take this opportunity to deliberately **pay attention** to and label: Image - changing or clear; Talk - changing or quiet. Just let your attention be drawn to one of these states of thinking (see graphic below).
8. **Practise ahh-llowing** throughout each session. Give your inner self over to whatever is being experienced: be subjectively ahh-llowing, yield to it, surrender to it, let it be. In the rush and busyness of your everyday life, while working passionately to change what should be changed, Do your Best, and Rest with the Rest.

9. Complete every practice session with the following intentions:

- Mindfully intend well-being for others;
- Recite a sincere statement of gratitude;
- Mindfully review your day and state positive expectations for yourself, and all others you meet.

A Most Essential Daily Ritual: Intentions, Expectations, Gratitude, Renewed Vision

Today may I

- Be more present and aware than ever before;
- Be more happy and fulfilled than ever before;
- Be more caring, compassionate and peacemaking than ever before;
- Be more helpful to my family, friends and strangers;
- Be more conscious of direct contact with the Source than ever before.

Today I absolutely expect the very best from all others, the universe and myself.

Today I am deeply grateful for

- My emotional and physical wellbeing;
- My insights, skills and fulfillment in helping others;
- My past and present family and friends who support and nurture me;
- The consciousness that connects us all.

Today I renew my desire and commitment to fulfill my life's purpose and meaning to help all others to also *be here*: healthy, happy, humble, and hopeful.

10. Every couple of minutes, become aware of “being here”: label “here.” Commit to “being here” and label “here” at least once each hour of each day. Reading a highway sign, whether you realize it or not, a talk thought is activated. See if you can catch it. Label “Talk - Here”.

### **B-FIT Active and Rest Sample Experiences and Labels**

By now I'm sure that you understand that this entire approach to mindfulness depends on your awareness of the B-FIT senses that arise constantly in response to your situation. The sample exercises below are meant to sensitize you to a B-FIT experience. They will be particularly

important if you have not had any previous mindfulness or meditation experience to make you aware of how much is happening in your body and your mind, even when you believe you are still.

Once you have completed this sample experience you will be ready to use the exercises that follow to bring B-FIT mindfulness to naturally occurring situations.

B-FIT SENSATION	SAMPLE EXPERIENCE	LABEL
<p><b>BODY</b></p> <p>Could be located anywhere in your body, inside or outside, where pressure or exertion is felt.</p>	<p>Pick up any fairly heavy object and then raise that arm straight in front of you. Hold that pose for several minutes, paying attention to the muscle fatigue.</p> <p>Bring your arm to a rest position. Pay attention to that sensation.</p>	<p>(<i>active</i>) name the location and sensation: “arm weak”.</p> <p>(<i>rest</i>) “relaxed”</p>
<p><b>FEELING</b></p> <p>An emotion, such as happy or sad, and any body sensations associated with that feeling, not caused by pressure or exertion.</p>	<p>Deliberately recall something that makes you feel happy, sad or anxious (or any other emotion); pay close attention to the feeling.</p> <p>Create a space where no active feeling is present and you feel calm or neutral.</p>	<p>(<i>active</i>) name the feeling: for example, “happy”</p> <p>(<i>rest</i>) “calm”</p>
<p><b>IMAGE THINKING</b></p> <p>For example, a mental image, a picture, a mind movie.</p>	<p>Deliberately recall an image of a person, object or place. Pay attention to this image as if it was projected onto an internal screen and you are watching like TV.</p> <p>Notice a moment when no internal image appears, or when an image leaves or fades away.</p>	<p>(<i>active</i>) “image”</p> <p>(<i>rest</i>) “clear”</p>
<p><b>TALK THINKING</b></p> <p>For example, internally talking to yourself with words and phrases</p>	<p>Deliberately say words or sentences in your head about a person, object or place, such as “Why did I do that?” Pay attention to yourself saying those words.</p> <p>Notice when no internal talk is happening, or when it leaves or fades away</p>	<p>(<i>active</i>) “talk”</p> <p>(<i>rest</i>) “quiet”</p>



### A Note on the Importance of Labeling:

As you have already noticed, the importance of labeling extends well beyond the specific B-FIT sensations: it is part of almost every mindfulness practice. Whenever you stop and deliberately label a sensation or an experience, you become the self who is applying the label, not the label: you are labeling ‘There is fear’, not identifying with or resisting the fear which is the normal way that the brain processes this message. Normally the mindless brain says “I am afraid”.

As an important option during practice sessions, speaking labels out-loud will stabilize your focus. Once your focus has momentum, you can drop the labels and just be aware! Here are three more labeling experiences to try:

PROCESS	SAMPLE EXPERIENCE	LABEL
Being here now	Deliberately become aware that <u>right now</u> you are <u>here</u> - reading this sentence. This awareness is “being here now,” or being in the moment. That is, paying acute attention to whatever you are doing as you are doing it.	“here”
Non-attachment	The next time you are in a line up or in traffic bring a deliberate attitude of “let it be” or “It’s all good” to what you are experiencing.	“ahh-llow”
Changing	Often you will experience a B-FIT sensation or reaction that is changing, like growing more or less intense as you observe it.	“changing”

Through the course of this text I will lead you through 7 B-FIT Mindfulness exercises that use all four tools:

Concentrating and Focusing - The Mindful Labyrinth, Exercise #1

Awareness and Allowing of the Four Main Senses (B-FIT), Exercise #2

Full Field Focus, Exercise #3

Opening Your Heart Under Stress, Exercise #4

Your Intention Program, Exercise #5

Preventing and Managing Physical and Emotional Suffering, Exercise #6

B-FIT Healing, Exercise #7

Once you learn these exercises, you can do any exercise at any time - in any sequence. However, while you are learning the exercises it will be most helpful to do them in the sequence in which they are presented. Remember to review the Settling In instructions as often as necessary. As you move through these exercises, it will also be helpful to listen to the guided instruction on the enclosed CD to more fully understand this text if you (as a reader) are not participating in a study group process.

Our focus in this first chapter is to help you to understand the concept of “catching” and to be able to apply it as the first step of the CCS Process. The following B-FIT practice exercises will allow you to achieve these goals.

## **Concentrating and Focusing – B-FIT Exercise #1**

### **The Mindfulness Labyrinth**

One of the earliest and most familiar labyrinths is the one from Greek mythology, designed to hold the minotaur inside it. In order to conquer the minotaur, Theseus had to go to the centre of the labyrinth that held it and then come safely out again. Since then, the labyrinth has been a metaphor for the journey to the centre of our deepest self and back out into the world. This journey broadens our understanding of who we really are and develops in us a stronger commitment to the well being of all others.

In mindfulness practice, the key is to walk a circular path to the centre of a number of concentric circles and back out again. As we walk the path, our attention is held and focused on staying present to and aware of the mystery of living and loving.

For our practice, I have developed an inner labyrinth to help travelers stay focused and present as we practise B-FIT mindfulness. Again, this inner labyrinth is meant to help keep the mind from wandering. The steps are as follows:

1. Settle into a relaxed but alert posture on a chair or the floor.
2. Intend that this process will somehow enrich the well being of self and others: for example, “May *Peter* be *well, happy and peaceful*.”
3. Mindfully scroll up and down the three body locations—belly, chest, nostrils - using one complete in-out breath cycle to prompt moving on. Give your complete attention to each body sensation.
  - Label each location by saying its name to your self: “belly,” “chest,” “nostrils.” You may also label the sensation in that location: “Rise, fall” or “in, out.”
  - Select one location, belly, chest or nostril that calls to you the ‘loudest’. This we call breath home base. Focus here for a period of time.
  - To help to get started, pause for 3-4 seconds after each exhalation before inhaling. Note the subtle discomfort then inhale and continue to the next breath cycle. Repeat as useful.
4. Add more locations: left arm, right leg, left leg and right arm (see graphic below).

To help with focusing for the first few complete “walks” around the labyrinth, touch each body location with your hand and experience both the internal sensation of breathing and the outer pressure from your hand.
5. Infuse your focused attention with ahh-llowing: what you sense, just let it be.
6. If you notice that your mind’s eye is actually seeing a body sensation, label this thought as “image” and gently but firmly return to the body sensation.
7. If you forget where to go next, just stay put until you remember. If this forgetting brings you feelings of confusion, label those feelings and return to the location. Skipping a location, ‘standing’ in place and back-tracking are perfect mindfulness practices so long as you stay aware of what you are doing. Awareness is the key—getting it right absolutely doesn’t matter.
8. Optionally, as your awareness is drawn to Feel, Talk or Image, label that space (for example, “talk”) or just feel calm and fully experience the sensation. When it diminishes, gently but firmly return to any place to continue mindfully walking the labyrinth path.

**Option:** after two or three up and down walks around the labyrinth, settle back into one location (a body sensation caressed by breathing) that calls to you the loudest - your breath home base.

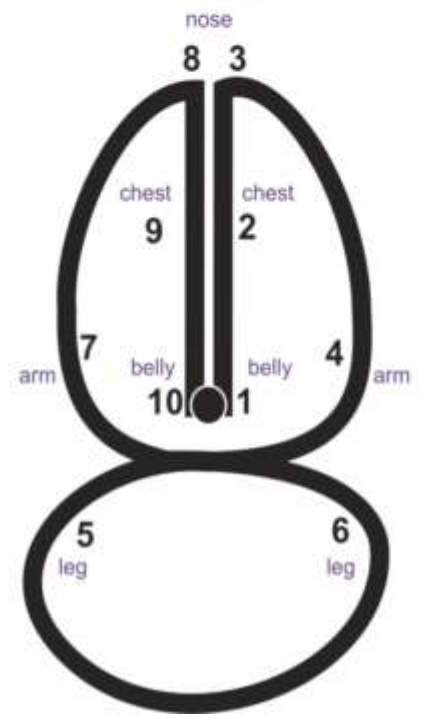
9. Once focusing is relatively stable, you may leave the labyrinth process and deliberately explore another B-FIT process

### **Potential Uses of the Mindfulness Labyrinth**

1. To increase concentration and focus, before starting an important task or any time when concentrating becomes problematic.
2. To offer a systematic strategy to explore many of the body locations that hold **resistance** and to provide practice in applying non-attachment to these locations.
3. To give the practitioner a practical and necessary experience of each location in its non-resistant state, so they will be able to recognize and work with resistance or distress at other times when they do arise.
4. Add more locations: left arm, right leg, left leg, right arm (see graphic below).



*The  
Mindfulness  
Labyrinth*



## Awareness and Ahh-llowing of The Four B-FIT Senses – B-FIT Exercise #2

**B**ody Sensations—**F**eelings—**I**mage Way of Thinking—**T**alk Way of Thinking. This should be the exercise you turn to most frequently in your practice. You need not do all steps every time;

### STEP ONE: SETTLE IN

- ✚ Review the labels
- ✚ Select the practice
- ✚ Take an alert posture, stretch the spine
- ✚ Set your intention to heal, mature and transform
- ✚ Bring attention to being here, now—label “here”
- ✚ Complete 1-3 circuits of the Mindfulness Labyrinth to check Body sensations
- ✚ Ahh-llow each sensation

### STEP TWO: IMAGE OR TALK THINKING

- ✚ Move attention away from body sensations
- ✚ Let attention be drawn to thinking: that is, “image—changing, clear” or “talk—changing, quiet
- ✚ Label what you observe
- ✚ Ahh-llow

### STEP THREE: FEELING

- ✚ Leave pressure and tension body sensations, images and talk behind
- ✚ Focus on and label every feeling and ahh-llow. This includes Feeling body sensations
- ✚ Let the feeling of calm spread
- ✚ Once stable, label “here, calm”

### STEP FOUR: B-FIT SCROLLING

- ✚ Deliberately name and pay attention to each B-FIT sensation
- ✚ Scroll, using one complete breath cycle to prompt moving to the next sense e.g. Body - breath, Feel - breath etc.
- ✚ Label the “active” or “rest” experience e.g. quiet
- ✚ Ahh-llow each experience
- ✚ Drop scrolling and let awareness be pulled to one or more B-FIT sense. Label as appropriate

### STEP FIVE: WRAP-UP

- ✚ Set intentions for others’ well-being: “May\_\_\_be\_\_\_”
- ✚ Set intentions for self: expectations, gratitude, vision renewal
- ✚ Return awareness to “here”
- ✚ Mindfully open your eyes and continue your day, being “here” where you are
- ✚ Throughout the day, label “here, ahh-llow”.
- ✚ Any step on its own will give you an excellent practice.