



**Saint Catherine's**  
Caring for you at Hospice and Home



## **Meditation Toolbox for difficult times**

### **Toolbox for everyone, 'anytime, anywhere'**

This 'Meditation Toolbox' is designed as a 'go-to' toolbox for difficult times. The meditations can be drawn on at times when our emotions, thoughts or physical sensations may feel particularly distressing, painful, or overwhelming, as well as 'at the start of the day', or any other time. The collection of meditations are suited to meditators and those with no previous meditation experience. The meditations are adapted to be short and succinct so that they can be memorised or printed out, and can be completed in less than ten minutes. Hence they can be used as an 'on the go' tool, for times we feel stressed or under pressure, and most can be shortened to as little as a minute or two when needed. They can also be used for more formalised practice, where we assign time in the day to sit/lie and meditate. In the current very challenging climate of Covid-19, these meditations can help us to calm ourselves and also others. They are good to pass on! Audio versions will accompany shortly.

### **The Science**

Put simply, the brains of human beings, like animals, have a 'radar' system designed to detect potential threat or danger. This radar system is unable to distinguish between an *actual* threat (a tiger outside) or a *visualised* threat (our mind worrying a tiger may come). When threat is perceived, the radar fires up our 'threat response', and the body is prepared for 'fight, flight or freeze' to evade the perceived danger. Cortisol and adrenaline are released and we may experience raised heart-beat, rapid shallow breathing, nausea, shakiness, sweating, alongside anxiety, fear and compromised thinking ability. This state can be very uncomfortable.

The 'threat response' involves the body's 'sympathetic nervous system'. In contrast, the body's 'parasympathetic nervous system' has a calming, soothing effect and helps us to feel relaxed and safe, and to think clearly. Mindfulness and self-compassion meditation practices are proven to be very effective in evoking and building up this 'soothing system'.

*In mindfulness meditation practices, our intention is to be as aware as possible of the present moment. By deliberately bringing our attention to the 'here and now', we loosen the mind's strong habits to dwell negatively on the past or future, the cause of much of our mental and emotional suffering. Research strongly demonstrates that being more aware or mindful, and developing more self-compassion, is highly beneficial for our mental and physical well-being.*

## **The Toolbox**

### **How to use.**

- There are 8 meditations in the toolbox, using a variety of approaches. Each stands alone, and becoming familiar with just one meditation can be very helpful. You may like to start by glancing through the summaries or scripts for all eight meditations, and then select what most appeals to you. Use whatever tool feels best for you at any particular time.
- The first three meditations can usually be quickly learnt and combine well to give you a choice of 'on the go' resources to use in your day at any time you feel stressed or simply need to pause and ground yourself. The other meditations provide further alternatives.
- If at any time you find engaging with a meditation seems to heighten distress, please discern whether you need to stop, and do something different to take care of yourself (e.g. make a drink). If feeling very anxious, 7:11 breathing can be very useful (described in 'Mindfulness in everyday life').
- If you choose to schedule daily time to sit/lie and meditate more formally, you may like to use the audio recordings, which will shortly be available for all the meditations.

### **The meditations**

**Breathing meditation.** Uses the focus of breathing to bring us back to awareness of the 'here and now'. Helps us feel calmer, more balanced and focussed. Particularly useful as a sitting practice but a short version (even three breaths!) can be used anywhere, anytime.

**Three-minute breathing space.** Brings our focus back to our internal experience in the 'here and now'. Can help us feel calmer, more balanced and focussed. Particularly useful as a 'pause' when 'on the go' or overly busy or stressed. Recommended to use several times a day.

**Self-compassion break.** Helps restore a feeling of well-being in difficult moments. A compassionate practice, involving recognising our difficulty, acknowledging our connection to others, and bringing kindness to ourselves.

**Compassionate body awareness meditation.** Brings our focus to the body, helps to let go of tension, relax, and bring kindness and appreciation. Very useful to help relax at bed-time.

**'RAIN' meditation.** A compassionate practice to work more deeply with difficult emotions. 'RAIN' is an acronym for recognise, allow, investigate and nurture. Emphasis is placed on accepting the nature of our experience, whatever it is, and developing kindness towards ourselves.

**'Taking and Sending' meditation.** A compassionate practice, involving a visualisation of suffering being dissipated and transformed. Can help instil a sense of alleviating suffering (of our own or of others).

**'Compassionate light' meditation.** A compassionate practice, involving a visualisation of our internal experience transforming into compassionate light, which then travels to ourselves, others, the world to alleviate struggle and suffering.

**Mindfulness in everyday life.** Bringing full awareness to our experience of everyday activities where we might usually be 'lost in thought'. We can use everyday mindfulness to help ground/balance ourselves in stressful moments and to help cultivate calmness.

### **Common difficulties in meditation**

**Distraction.** *It is common for our minds to become distracted and get caught up in thinking while doing the meditations – we are not getting anything ‘wrong’ when this happens- it is a normal part of meditation. Whenever we find our mind has wandered (e.g. to thinking about what’s for tea!), we simply guide our attention gently back to focus again on the meditation. If our mind is particularly busy and keeps wandering off this is fine too. With a kind attitude just simply guide it back whenever you notice.*

**Resistance.** *The meditations explicitly or implicitly introduce us to self-kindness and self-compassion. The mind sometimes finds this challenging as we are usually more familiar with directing kindness to others than to ourselves. We may then encounter our mind resisting the meditation, and find ourselves stirred in some way, perhaps with negative thoughts, or uncomfortable emotions. Again, nothing is ‘wrong’ if this happens; we need to decide whether to gently carry on with the meditation and simply recognise our resistance with kindness and understanding **or** whether to choose to do a different meditation, perhaps one we are already familiar with, such as being aware of breathing, **or** whether to stop our meditation and do something different to be kind to ourselves (please also see ‘Mindfulness in everyday life’).*

## Meditation Toolbox

### Breathing Meditation

*In mindfulness meditation practices, our intention is to be as aware as possible of the present moment. By deliberately bringing our attention to the 'here and now', we loosen the mind's strong habits to dwell negatively on the past or future, the cause of much of our mental and emotional suffering. Here we use breathing as our focus. The meditation below assumes we are setting aside time to sit and meditate. However, a short version can be very helpful in daily life, to help us settle when feeling stressed. Hence at any point in our day, it can be very effective to pause, and focus attention on our breath, even for as little as one to three breaths.*

1. Choose a comfortable quiet space where you can sit undisturbed. Feel the contact of your body with the chair... and of your feet with the floor... allowing your weight to drop down into the support of the chair/floor...
2. Allow your body to relax. 'Soften' your face, shoulders, belly, hands. Aim to have the spine as upright as possible....while at the same time relaxed and comfortable. Place both feet parallel on the floor...rest the hands on the lap or knees...lightly close the eyes...or if you prefer leave the eyes open with a soft gaze ahead of you. Adjust these instructions as needed to be comfortable.
3. Start by taking three breaths where you extend the out-breath...breathing in normally and breathing out long and slow. This helps the body release tension and relax further.
4. With a sense of kind attention...become aware of your breathing in...and breathing out... noticing the soothing natural rhythm... perhaps naming 'breathing in'... 'breathing out'...
5. If it helps, you can count the breathing cycles...breathing in...breathing out...*one*...breathing in...breathing out...*two*...etc. Return to *one* if you lose count. Leave out the counting if it doesn't feel helpful.
6. If your mind becomes distracted by thought (as is likely at times), you are not 'getting it wrong'! When you notice your mind has wandered, calmly guide your awareness gently back to following your breathing again... just as many times as you need... knowing this is fully part of the meditation...
7. Continue for up to ten minutes...or shorter/ longer if you want to. As you finish, take a moment to notice how you feel... perhaps notably calmer...but this is not the 'aim' of the meditation...so whatever your experience... be kind to yourself ... thankful that you have given yourself time to meditate... knowing that meditation is beneficial...

*N.B. If for any reason you find it difficult/uncomfortable to focus on breathing, you can choose any part of the body, e.g. 'palm of the right hand', to focus your awareness on throughout the meditation, just noticing the changing sensations or lack of sensation in each moment...and returning awareness to this area when the mind wanders...*

## Meditation Toolbox

### The 3- minute breathing space

*The 3-minute breathing space is an extremely useful meditation when we find ourselves anxious or stressed. When time is limited, and we feel under pressure or off-balance, it can be used as 'an emergency' on-the-go meditation. It can be done anywhere at any time of the day. It helps us ground ourselves in the present moment, feel calmer about our situation, regain perspective and be kinder to ourselves. It can be very helpful to revisit it two or more times daily, whether on-the-go or as a sitting meditation.*

*The 3-minute breathing space involves pausing in what we are doing, and bringing our focus to the present moment and our current internal experience. We become aware of three aspects: our emotions; feelings and body sensations; thoughts (including images). We simply notice them, without getting lost in them. The 3-minute breathing space has three steps.*

We give approximately a minute to each of the three steps of this meditation. To remember the steps, it can be helpful to visualise the meditation like an 'hour glass,' where the focus starts wide, narrows in the middle, and then widens again, or we can use the acronym AGE as detailed below.

1. (Awareness of our experience). Pause in any activity (mental or physical)... whether sitting or standing...bring your attention to your internal experience...to your felt sense of your body...let yourself become aware of any emotions present ... perhaps uncomfortable...simply noticing them without trying to change them...and notice any parts of the body where sensations are present...perhaps tension... again not trying to change...and notice the thoughts going through your mind...simply acknowledging they are there...while not trying to change anything...
2. (Gathering attention). Now focus your attention on your breathing...simply noticing when you are breathing in...and breathing out...noticing the physical sensations of breathing... the rise and fall of the chest...or belly...following your breathing in this way is a way of being 'present' in each moment...
3. (Expanding attention). Now expand and open up your awareness from your breathing...to be aware of your body as a whole... allowing a felt sense of your whole body...noticing any sensations... emotions ...thoughts... gaining a sense of the body as a whole...in this place... at this time...and then opening up your awareness of your surroundings too...

*We spend approximately three minutes in this practice but the timing is a rough guide – one minute can be helpful! As with any meditation, our mind can become distracted and wander off during the meditation...we are not getting anything wrong if this happens, we simply notice, and with kindness bring our awareness back to the meditation.*

## Meditation Toolbox

### 'Self-Compassion Break'

*This is a meditation for us to use at times when we are having a difficult experience. It may be that something difficult has happened in our external world, or it may be that our internal world feels distressed in some way. In this practice we pause in whatever we are doing, and bring our focus to how we are feeling, noticing emotions, thoughts and body sensations, and bring kindness to ourselves.*

We use a tender voice towards ourselves, internally or out loud, and if it helps use kind physical touch (e.g. stroke hand). Change the wording below if other phrases work better for you.

We follow three steps:

1. Acknowledge your difficulty by naming it to yourself. Be fully aware of your experience and how you are feeling. Use phrase such as:  
**"This is a moment of difficulty"** or  
**"I am having a really hard time right now"**
2. Become aware of being a part of common humanity with similar difficulties. Many other people are having similar experiences. Sense your compassion for other's hardship as well as your own. Use a phrase such as:  
**"Many other people are having similar experiences at this time"** or  
**"Difficulties are part of everybody's life"**
3. Bring compassion, kindness and nurturing to your present moment experience. Use a phrase such as:  
**"May I be kind to myself in this moment"**

*We can then ask "what do I need right now?" We can choose to do something kind for ourselves such as make ourselves a cup of tea, go outside and pay attention to the flowers/trees/sky, go for a walk, put on some uplifting music etc. We may like to imagine we are giving ourselves the love, tenderness and compassion we would give as a loving parent to a hurt child. If it helps we can imagine receiving such care from someone who for us embodies unconditional love and compassion, or from any other source (e.g. the sun, a pet). Even just a few moments of caring for ourselves in the 'here and now', can help us feel calmer and better resourced to deal with our difficulty. Being kind to ourselves may involve taking some action, which will be more effective if we have grounded ourselves.*

*Generally, we are not used to showing ourselves kindness and compassion. By practicing this self-compassion break, we can start to build up a gentler, more understanding way of being with ourselves, learn how to be with difficulties, and help build resilience for challenging times.*

## Meditation Toolbox

### Compassionate Body Awareness Meditation

*In daily life, our attention is often so focused on the mind's activities, that we are hardly aware of our bodies. In this meditation we are bringing warm-hearted compassionate attention to all parts of our body, working gently with each part in turn. This helps us to let go of tension, allowing the body to relax and enhancing our sense of well-being.*

*As we encounter the sensations in each part of our body, pleasant or unpleasant, we are bringing kindness, appreciation and gratitude. This meditation can be particularly beneficial at bed-time. A brief version for everyday life involves simply pausing in what we are doing and becoming aware of any sensations in the body.*

Prepare by making yourself very comfortable wherever you choose to do this meditation. Many people enjoy lying down but sitting is fine too. You may like to cover yourself with a light blanket. Notice the support from the area where you are lying or sitting...being aware of the points of contact with the bed or chair or sofa ... and just allow the weight of the body to sink down into this support.

1. Bring your attention to the in-breath for a few moments... feeling that each breath is looking after you... imagine it bringing you kindness and tenderness and compassion.
2. Starting with the head ...gradually move your awareness downwards to different parts of the area in turn...paying attention to each part in detail...e.g. paying attention first to the crown of the head...then the forehead...eyes ...ears...nose...cheeks...mouth, chin and jaw...neck etc.
3. Taking your time...for each area notice any feeling or sensation that is present...you may notice whether this feels pleasant or unpleasant or neutral...and then draw in a kind compassionate breath to care for that area...perhaps then sensing it relaxing...
4. From time to time you can choose to offer gratitude to the area of the body you are focused on ...e.g. to your eyes for all that they do for you ... allowing yourself to sense how thankful you are.
5. In this way gradually work your way through the whole body...e.g. head, neck, shoulders, upper arms, elbows, lower arms, hands, upper back, lower back etc. ...through all the different parts of the body... finishing with the feet and toes... bringing care... compassion...gratitude... kindness... warmth. If for some reason you wish to avoid focussing on a particular area of the body, simply bypass it... and take your attention to another area of the body... or back to your breath... with the aim of keeping the meditation as comfortable as possible.
6. As you end the meditation, take all the time you need to slowly start to move the body...perhaps starting by wiggling the toes and fingers...gently stretching... taking a sense of warm compassionate care for your body into your day... (or into your sleep if doing as a bed-time practice).

*As with any meditation, it is likely that the mind will become distracted at times...there is nothing wrong when this happens...it is a normal part of the meditation... when you notice just gently and kindly bring your awareness back to the area of the body you had reached.*

## Meditation Toolbox

### 'Taking and Sending' meditation

*When we notice suffering in ourselves or others, we frequently feel at a loss as to how to respond. This 'taking and sending' meditation can be used at such times. Engaging in this meditation can help soothe the distress we naturally feel in response to suffering in ourselves and others. We visualise transforming the experience of suffering, due to difficulties and pain, into positive experiences such as peace, comfort and calm.*

1. Start by bringing your attention to your breathing, taking three extended outbreaths, breathing in normally and breathing out long and slow... this helps your body let go of tension.
2. Bring your awareness to your 'heart space'. Try and sense the kindness, tenderness and caring feelings within the heart space...warm feelings... don't worry if you can't feel these loving compassionate qualities right now... these natural qualities of the human heart are present at the core of each of us...even when we are not aware of them...and connect beyond us to 'all the love in the universe'...
3. Now sense into the difficulty you wish to transform...it could be your own difficulty...or that of a loved one...or that of any other person/people or animal in difficulty. If it helps you can name it...e.g. 'pain' ...'fear' ...'grief'...
4. Imagine now...that on an in-breath...you receive and draw in the difficulty...breathing it into the warmth and tenderness of your heart space... and as it reaches the heart space imagine the power of the heart instantaneously dissolving it ...such that the difficulty fades away... and is simultaneously transformed...
5. Imagine now...that on an out-breath...you send out the positive transformed energy from your heart space to yourself/the person/animal concerned...qualities such as warmth, tenderness and kindness... safety and calm...comfort... if it helps you may visualise sending light...
6. Maintain your natural rhythm of breathing, and space the 'taking' and 'sending' breaths to suit you... and whenever you want a rest ... simply pause the taking and sending...and rest your attention on the gentle rhythm of your breathing in and breathing out...
7. When you finish, take a moment to appreciate yourself having taken time for the meditation, and imagine the benefits rippling out...



## Meditation Toolbox

### 'RAIN' meditation

'RAIN' meditation. A compassionate practice to work more deeply with difficult emotions. 'RAIN' is an acronym for recognise, allow, investigate and nurture. Emphasis is placed on accepting the nature of our experience, whatever it is, and developing kindness towards ourselves.

*When we experience difficult emotions, we are generally unused to simply allowing them to come and go in a natural way. We commonly try to push them away, or overly identify with them and get lost in them, or try to distance ourselves by turning to familiar 'comfort' behaviours (e.g. over-drinking, eating). Learning to recognise and respond kindly to our difficult emotions, instead of automatically reacting to them in such ways, helps strengthen our sense of calm, compassion, well-being and resilience.*

*'RAIN' is an in-depth meditation that can be used when difficult emotions, thoughts or experiences arise. 'RAIN' is an acronym for **recognise, allow, investigate, nurture**. We can practice 'RAIN' briefly 'on the spot' when difficult emotions arise, or we can bring the experience back to mind later and use 'RAIN' as a sitting meditation at a time of our choice.*

**Prepare** by bringing your attention to your breathing, breathing in as normal and taking extended outbreaths...three times... this helps your body relax and let go of tension. Bring to mind/be aware of the difficult/'charged' situation, perhaps one in which you experience fear, anger, shame, hopelessness or anything else you find difficult. Notice the details of the situation.

1. **Recognise** the difficult emotions/thoughts/body sensations, and name them to yourself e.g. 'I am feeling frightened right now'.  
*[In this way you are stepping aside to observe whatever you are experiencing, and are no longer on auto-pilot and completely 'lost' in the experience].*
2. **Allow.** Bring a sense of gentle acceptance to the acknowledgement that 'my experience (feelings, thoughts, sensations) right now is my experience', 'what is happening, is happening'. Allowing involves letting whatever is there in our internal experience to be there just as it is.  
*[We aim to bring a sense of tenderness and self-acceptance to this step as we often want to push our feelings away. Allowing our inner experience to be as it is does not imply we find the external situation acceptable, nor mean we shouldn't take action if required.]*
3. **Investigate.** With a gentle curiosity, look more closely at what is happening during this experience. You may notice how your body feels (e.g. tight, shaky, agitated); how you feel emotionally (e.g. vulnerable, hurt, frightened); what kind of thoughts or negative beliefs are there (e.g. 'I should be feeling stronger'; 'I always get things wrong'; 'No one understands me').
4. **Nurture.** Offer yourself tender inward care, imagining feeling safe and loved and cared for by a wise, warm, compassionate part of yourself (e.g. as a parent to our own 'inner child'), or by someone/something else ( e.g. spiritual figure; friend/family figure; aspect of nature; pet). As much as possible, sense the feeling of 'being held' as you receive such love and compassion, caring for you in your difficult time.

*[N.B. Some people find it helpful here to use touch e.g. a hand on the heart; a self-hug]*

## Meditation Toolbox

### 'Compassionate light' meditation

*Similar to the 'Taking and Sending meditation', the "Compassionate Light' meditation is a guided meditation that focuses on the transformation of our internal experience into compassion, which we then visualise travelling out and alleviating suffering in ourselves &/or others. We can utilise this meditation at any time, whatever nature of experience we are having (positive, negative or neutral), either as a sitting practice, or in brief form in daily life. Again, it can bring a sense of comfort and nourishment as we imagine ourselves helping transform difficult situations.*

1. Start by bringing your attention to your breathing, taking three elongated outbreaths, to help your body let go of tension...
2. Become aware of your current experience... emotions, thoughts, body sensations... ..they may be difficult or uncomfortable...or perhaps calm or enjoyable ... whatever they are...just be aware...
3. Now imagine the wide open deep blue sky in front of you ... spacious...infinite... and in the sky in front of you is a gate... this is no ordinary gate...it has extraordinary properties...
4. Imagine that whatever you are experiencing flows out on your outbreath...and travels unaided to the sky and through the gate....and as it passes through the gate it is immediately transformed...into wonderful compassionate golden light... imbued with warmth... caring... healing...
5. Sense/visualise this compassionate golden light then travelling out to the world...to wherever it is needed...including yourself.....immediately transforming struggle and suffering into something more peaceful and at ease...
6. You may rest your focus on the compassionate golden light being received... either by yourself or another individual or group...human &/or animal... but the light will do its transformational work without any effort from you ... you don't need to do anything...it is fine to just 'be'...
7. Know that your initial intention to engage with the meditation is in itself enough...in this way whatever is in your experience becomes the raw material for the compassionate golden light ... which flows out and helps alleviate difficulties in yourself and others.

## Meditation Toolbox

### Mindfulness in everyday life

*In daily life we are often caught up in our thoughts and 'lost' to noticing our experience of the present moment or 'here and now'. The human mind has developed strong habitual patterns which result in us going about much of our day as if on automatic pilot, to the extent that we can go about our activities without really noticing our experience of them. We can find ourselves thinking about the past, or worrying/feeling anxious about the future, with little awareness of the present. In contrast, when we choose to be mindful, we deliberately focus our attention on what is happening as it is happening, and this can help in two ways:*

- a) *as an immediate method to help ground/balance ourselves in difficult moments e.g. when we are feeling stressed, overwhelmed, tense, agitated or anxious. (see below)*
- b) *in the longer term, to help cultivate calmness and open up our choices in how we respond to life situations.*

Whether we are looking for a method to calm ourselves in the moment, or practicing mindfulness in order to build up longer term benefits, daily life presents us with endless opportunities to 'be mindful'. We simply pause in whatever we are involved in, and consciously choose to pay full attention to our 'here and now' experience. In any moment, we can be mindful/aware of four different aspects of our experience, allowing ourselves time to 'tune in' and fully notice one or more of these:

- *body sensations and feelings*  
e.g. notice the feeling of our breathing in and out, our feet in contact with the ground; our body in contact with the chair/bed; any particular sensations (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral) in the body.
- *emotions*  
e.g. notice whether we are feeling sadness, joy, anger, fear, neutral.
- *thoughts*  
e.g. notice whether we are daydreaming, planning, dwelling on a (future, past) event.
- *experience through our senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch)*  
e.g. notice the look of a beautiful flower, sound of birdsong, smell of grass, taste of coffee, feel of warm sun.

Daily life activities such as washing hands, brushing teeth, taking a shower, chopping vegetables, preparing a drink, washing up, walking, all offer opportunities to be mindful. For example, when washing our hands mindfully, we become aware of the sight and sound of running water, the smell of the soap, the feel of warm water, the feel of rubbing our hands together. Our mind is likely to wander but we are not 'getting it wrong' when this happens, we simply guide our attention gently back to noticing our experience of the activity.

N.B. Many people find that tuning in to the rhythm of our breathing, or to the feel of our feet on the ground, or to anything our senses are picking up, are particular useful strategies to help **ground / balance ourselves in difficult moments**. For example, when feeling fearful or anxious, we can pause, and then either:

- pay attention to the natural rhythm of our breathing, simply noticing sensations as we breathe in and out **or**
- alter our breathing to a fixed pattern, such as 7:11 breathing, where we count to 7 as we breathe in, and 11 as we breathe out i.e. we elongate the out-breath. An alternative method is to simply focus on the out-breath, and breathe out long and slow, as if blowing gently through a straw.