

# PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS OR GROUPS

## Mindful Meeting Opener (3-5 Minutes)

Facilitator can read this script or adapt to your own words. Speak slowly and clearly.

- Let's take a moment to set an intention for today's meeting.
- Find a comfortable and upright seat. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable or soften your gaze.
- Take a moment to settle - sitting with your shoulders over your hips and your head centered between your shoulders.
- Begin by noticing your breath, gently following your inhale and exhale. (Pause)
- Stay with your breath, paying attention to where you feel your breath most strongly in your body. You may feel the sensation of air moving in and out of your nostrils, or the rise and fall of your chest, or the expansion of your belly. (Pause)
- When your mind wanders, which it probably will, just gently bring your attention back to sensations of breath. (Pause)
- Now ask yourself "Why am I here today?" "What intentions do I have for today's meeting?" (Pause, repeat questions and pause again)
- As you connect with your intention, notice how your body feels. Do any emotions arise?
- When you notice you've become distracted at any point in the meeting you might use your intention to bring back your focus.
- Gently end the practice and open your eyes.

## Hand-to-Heart (4-5 Minutes)

*This is a meditation practice co-developed by Dr. Hackbert with Drs. Fitzgerald and Shipman at the Center for Resilience and Well-being at CU Boulder. It is part of a larger program called Let's Connect.*

Tune in - by placing one hand over your heart to recognize your emotional state and tap into the quality of your presence. This is a gesture of self-care and self-compassion. Close your eyes or adopt a soft gaze. Notice what you are feeling right now. Ask yourself: "What am I feeling?" and "What do I need?"

Pause to connect to the feelings and needs arising in this moment.

Reach out - with both hands extended palms facing out and up. This is a gesture of receptivity to the people around you. This is an opportunity to become aware of the feelings and needs of others. With soft eyes looking outward at the people in your circle, ask yourself: "What might others be feeling? What do others need? What perspectives do they bring to this experience?"

Pause and become aware of the feelings, needs and perspectives of others arising in this moment.

Connect - your two hands together interlocking them and bringing them into your chest just below our ribs. This is a gesture for successful connection. Take this opportunity to feel confident that you have the resources you need to care for yourself. With eyes soft or eyes closed, feel confident that you have resources to offer to the people around you now and in the future. You can deepen and strengthen your connection to yourself and others.

Pause and notice the sensations, feelings and thoughts emerging through this practice.

Take a few moments to share a thought, feeling or observation from this practice. If you are alone, you can write this down, and if you are in a group take this time so each person can share.

*Every successful connection now builds our resilience for the future.*

## How to Use a Talking Piece: Making Space for All Voices

Any handheld object that is easy to pass between people can be used as a talking piece. You might select something that has meaning to your group or organization, or represents the trust, openness and compassion you are seeking to build. Ideas include objects from nature, a heart-shaped object, or a small doll that brings to mind the children and families being served.

- **The person with the talking piece has the floor**
- **This piece reminds us to be intentional with what we share**
- **The talking piece provides an opportunity to focus on listening**
- **Some practice stepping back and sharing their voice less**
- **Some practice stepping forward to contribute their voice more**
- **When the piece comes to you, you can pass**
- **If you do pass, you will be given a second opportunity to share**

Although it can take time to develop comfort and ease with this practice of using a talking piece, you may be surprised by the depth of the collective wisdom that emerges through this process.

## Reflective Partnerships

What is a Reflective Partnership?

A Reflective Partnership is an intentional relationship when two individuals commit to a cooperative effort to:

- **observe and listen to each other**
- **discuss experiences and observations**
- **honor these reflections, interpretations and observations**
- **gain compassion, insight and wisdom**
- **use insight gained to develop and extend each person's sphere of influence**

What are the benefits?

On a practical level, reflective partnerships help us to see ourselves more clearly, identify habitual patterns, approach our challenges and create action plans for change. Reflective partnerships acknowledge that we all have blind spots, defense mechanisms, personal biases and cognitive distortions that impact how we see ourselves and others and influence our actions.

On a deeper level, reflective partnerships can help to satisfy our psychological and emotional needs to be seen and valued. They can also help to generate truth and satisfy our needs for deep experiences such as a sense of purpose and meaning derived from our life work.

What is different about this approach?

Reflective partnerships are non-hierarchical. They require trust and transparent communication and result in a co-creation of knowledge that challenges authoritarian systems of external control.

How to get started:

- Find a partner to work with and discuss the opportunity to formalize this intention.
- Decide on the length of time you will commit to for your reflective partnership.
- Agree on the parameters including the focus of your reflections, how you will transition between roles of observer and speaker and where and when you will meet.
- Create written guidelines that reference what outcomes you are seeking to achieve and agree to these.
- Get started with your meetings.
- Be open to conversations about modifying the parameters as needed. Remain committed to the terms that you outlined initially.

## Just Like Me (5 -7 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

This exercise can be done in pairs or in a circle where individuals can all see each other and feel connected as a group. Depending on group size and space limitations it can be done in two lines facing each other, or with participants seated at tables or in classroom style seating. Adjust cues as need for different group size and seating arrangements.

An important part of well-being is connectedness. Recognizing that we are all part of the human race, that we all experience human emotions and similar experiences across our lifetimes can help us find resilience and compassion when we need it. This exercise aims to help us connect with our common humanity.

Take a moment to look around at your partner/everyone in the room.

During this exercise, feel free to close your eyes or look at your partner/peers, whatever feels comfortable for you. I am going to say a series of phrases and you can repeat them silently to yourself.

First, bring to mind the person who is standing to your right. Say to yourself:

- **They want to be happy, just like me.**
- **This person has suffered with illness or injury, just like me.**
- **Just like me, they have regrets.**
- **This person has hopes and wishes for the future, just like me.**

Now, bring to mind the person to your left. Say to yourself:

- **They have responsibilities and sometimes feels pressure and stress just like me.**
- **This person has beliefs, perspectives and opinions just like me.**
- **They want their loved ones to be safe and healthy, just like me.**
- **Just like me, they have vulnerabilities and have made mistakes.**
- **Sometimes, they feel afraid of letting people down, just like me.**
- **And, just like me, they feel gratitude and joy.**

Now, bring to mind the person standing across from you. Say to yourself:

- They have experienced grief and loss, just like me.
- They want to feel secure and cared for, just like me.
- This person wants to find ease and well-being in their life, just like me.
- Just like me, they are growing older and will die one day.

Now, bring to mind everyone in the room. Say to yourself:

- They feel lonely at times, just like me.
- They want to feel respected, appreciated and competent, just like me.
- Just like me, they want to do their best.
- Just like me, this person wants to feel loved.

Now, open your eyes if they are closed and look again at the people in the room.

## Sharing Feelings (20 minutes)

*Adapted from Linda Graham, MFT: [Reading and Conveying Emotions Fluently](#)*

Emotions are universal, meaning all humans experience emotions. But how emotions are experienced, and the expression of emotion is influenced by many factors including culture. Cultural and other differences in emotion expression can create barriers to attunement with others or even lead to misunderstandings. This practice helps increase understanding of how you express your own emotions and builds your capacity to recognize others' emotional states.

Most emotional communication happens through non-verbal means like facial expressions and body language. So, this exercise is performed without words to strengthen your ability to perceive and interpret non-verbal expressions as communicative signals without the assistance of the language processing centers of the brain. Practicing with core emotions (anger, joy, sadness, fear, surprise) builds your capacity for attunement, which you can then refine in order to read more nuanced emotions such as disappointment, jealousy, guilt, and curiosity.

1. Find a partner to participate in this exercise with you.
2. Decide which person will take the role of "emotion expresser." The other person will be the "emotion interpreter."
3. If you are the "emotion expresser":
  - o Without telling your partner, select three of the following basic emotions: anger, joy, sadness, fear, surprise.
  - o Decide the order in which you will evoke the three selected emotions.
  - o Tune in to your own experience of your first chosen emotion; recalling a previous experience of the emotion is a quick and easy way for you to experience the emotion again internally.
  - o Let your body wordlessly display the chosen emotion for ten seconds. You can use gestures, facial expressions, and sounds—just not words. You may find yourself exaggerating your expressions at first, that's okay.
  - o Notice what happens inside of you—your self-attunement—as you communicate your feelings to someone else.
  - o Notice during this interaction if your felt sense of the emotion increases, decreases, or changes into something else.

If you are the "emotion interpreter":

- o Observe your partner.
  - o Notice which emotion can be interpreted from your partner's expression but don't disclose it yet.
  - o Notice what signals you pay attention to in order to distinguish one emotion from another.
  - o Notice what happens inside of you—your self-attunement—as you pay attention to someone else's feelings.
  - o Notice if your own emotions shift during this interaction.
4. Next, if you are the "emotion expresser," display the second selected emotion:
    - o Without discussion, turn your attention inward.
    - o Release the emotion you've been expressing with a few gentle, deep breaths.
    - o Pause to regain balance.
    - o Now, evoke the next emotion on your list.
    - o Display that second emotion to your partner for ten seconds.
    - o Notice what happens inside of you—your self-attunement—as you communicate your feelings to someone else.
    - o Notice during this interaction if your felt sense of the emotion increases, decreases, or changes into something else.

If you are the “emotion interpreter”:

- Again, observe your partner and notice your internal experience.
  - Notice which emotion can be interpreted from your partner’s expression but don’t disclose it yet.
5. Repeat this process with the third selected emotion.
  6. Before the first “emotion interpreter” shares his best guesses at the emotions expressed, switch roles and repeat steps 3 through 5.
  7. Once each partner has displayed three emotions in sequence, share your best guesses at the emotions the other one was trying to convey and reveal how you each identified each emotion.
  8. If all of the guesses were accurate, congratulations to both of you! You’re building your emotional competence skills. If there were discrepancies, take the opportunity to discuss what you perceived in each other’s expression of emotion that led you to a different interpretation. Doing so creates a foundation for building more competence in communicating what you need, developing skills you need to get those needs met, and for responding with empathy to the needs of others.



## Moving Meditation: Felt Sense of Resilience (10 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

The term “felt sense” arose out of the work of psychologist and researcher, Eugene Gendlin, PhD. In his work as a clinician, he noticed that clients who were able to attend to their internal experience and then articulate this awareness were more successful in therapy. He then developed The Focusing Process to teach people how to attend to their “felt sense” and then use this skill to deepen their experience of personal meaning and create more satisfying relationships. Gendlin argued that our capacity to access intuition is an innate human birthright, although this competence can be developed through practice and nurtured by others. Building individual resilience begins by accessing what we are experiencing, knowing what we need and communicating our needs effectively to access appropriate resources. Focusing is a practice of checking in. The self-knowledge that comes through focusing helps develop an inner compass.

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### THIS MOVING MEDITATION PRACTICE WILL INVOLVE TWO MOVEMENT GESTURES IN A CIRCLE FOLLOWED BY QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION:

The first movement gesture is simply walking in and out in the circle: very slowly approach the center of the circle. When you get close to others pause without touching. Stand still for a moment with eyes closed or hold a soft gaze. Tune into the felt sense of the experience.

The second movement gesture is to open the circle to more spontaneous movement: begin to walk very slowly around the room and become aware of how your felt sense changes as you approach, come closer and then move away from each person in the circle. Notice the felt sense that arises through eye contact and closer proximity.

- Begin by standing. If you are with a group, please stand in a circle.
- As you stand still and listen to my voice, turn your focus inward. Notice the sensations that are present for you right now. Let’s start with a focus on your abdomen. Say hello to what you are sensing right now. How it is for you right now in this moment? In silence, offer yourself words, image, gesture or sound to captures the felt sense in your abdomen. Shifting your attention inward in this way, you may be aware that the “felt sense” in your abdomen right now is fuzzy, unclear, or even mixed up with other feelings and thoughts that you are having. Place a hand onto your abdomen to see what feelings arise as you connect with touch. This process of tuning into your body may be unfamiliar. There is no right or wrong felt sense.
- Try rocking a bit side to side or bring in some other comforting rhythmic movement. Gentle, repetitive movement may help you feel your way into what is present for you right now. Hold your focus on the abdomen, feeling your way into the felt sense and being patient with the process.
- Begin with the first movement gesture. Walk slowly toward the center of the circle and then pause before you touch anyone. Please move slowly inward toward the center of the circle. Move slowly as if you are moving through water and pay attention to your inner landscape (abdomen, torso, heart, throat). Notice the shifts that occur as you come closer to another person. What is your felt sense and does it shift or change as you move closer?
- Proceed to the second movement gesture. Open the circle to freer movement as you slowly walk through the space of the room. Become aware of how your felt sense changes as you approach, come closer, and then move away from each person in the space. Notice the felt sense that arises through eye contact and closer proximity.
- Pause and return to the simple practice of just focusing your awareness on your abdomen.

FINAL QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION AS YOU MOVE THROUGH  
THE COMMUNAL SPACE:

- Is it okay for me stay with the felt sense as it arises?
- Can I turn toward the variety of sensations that I am noticing?
- Can I cultivate curiosity and compassion toward my inner experience?
- Am I aware of resistance, contraction or tension in my body?

## Active Listening and Response (15-20 minutes)

A few notes about this practice: Active listening can benefit team communication, support conflict resolution, and produce similar benefits for work with families. When we practice actively listening with children, parents, or colleagues—we build the capacity to listen closely and carefully, paying attention to the feelings that are being expressed as well as the words. We also practice listening openly—not interjecting, judging, or resisting what we are hearing. Capacity for this takes effort and practice.

1. Find a partner to participate in this exercise with you. Decide who will be the first speaker. The other partner will be the first listener.
2. Both the speaker and listener should pay attention to how they are doing internally throughout this exercise. Notice any thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations that arise.
3. The first speaker will spend two minutes responding to a question or describing an experience. (Develop a question or topic relevant to the gathering.)
4. The first listener will pay careful attention, without interrupting. The listener can offer gestures of actively listening with non-verbal cues, but may not speak.
5. At the end of the 2 minutes, the listener should share a summary of what they heard from the speaker. This reflection should just paraphrase what was shared, without including any judgments, analysis, or responses to what was shared. The listener should ask if their summary is accurate, if they covered everything, for clarification if something was not clear or ask if the speaker has more to share. The speaker can politely clarify or amend as necessary at this point.
6. To conclude the summary, the listener will now validate the speaker, using phrases like, *"What you shared makes sense to me because..."* or *"I can see how you think..."* This is a cognitive validation.
7. The final step is for the listener to empathize with the speaker, with phrases like, *"Based on what you shared, I can imagine you might feel..."* Or *"I can see how you would feel ...about this."* And then check in with the speaker, *"Am I getting this right?"* or *"Am I understanding correctly?"* to determine if you got the feelings right. This is an emotional or empathetic validation.
8. Switch roles and repeat the exercise.
9. Even though this was a staged exercise, how we experience being heard when we share something of importance has an impact on our internal state. If we feel misunderstood, we might choose to repress feelings or express them too strongly. This exercise can assist with finding the correct balance in a shared way. Talk with your partner about the experience:
  - Was it difficult to pay close attention for 2 minutes, did your mind wander at all? What helped you stay engaged?
  - Were there any times that your internal thoughts or feelings made listening difficult? How so?
  - At what points did you feel particularly attuned to the speaker while you were listening? What helped you feel this way?
  - As the speaker, did you feel heard and understood? What helped or hindered this?