

# Introduction to Mindfulness: Practice Guide & Journal

*to establish a robust consistent daily practice*

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## Getting Started

### Daily Practice Guidelines

Throughout the course:

- **Sit daily if possible**
- Feel good about what you do
- Notice throughout the day when you are here. Be aware of the moments you are here and how good it feels when you are

### Pre-Course Assignments (<1 hour)

[Ollie's meditation Success Factor Survey](#) (3 mins)

Quantify seven key meditation success factors and receive a report with top tips for each.

This helps me to tailor the course to your needs.

[Join EA Meditation Friends Slack community](#) (1-10 mins)

Connect with your EA meditator peers to support your ongoing practice.

## Reading

[Agreements for multicultural interactions](#) (5 mins), developed by East Bay Meditation Centre. They set the tone for how to orient ourselves to each other and the course material. We will review them in our first session together, with the opportunity to explore and honour any resistance we feel around them.

[How to start a meditation practice that actually sticks](#) (5 mins), Rob Dube. Important non-obvious recommendations to establish a robust consistent long-term practice.

[How to Meditate](#) (10 mins), Sam Harris. A helpful intro for rationally-inclined folk.

[Meditation FAQs](#) (20 mins), Tara Brach. Nuanced answers to the most common questions about meditation practice.

## Mindfulness & Meditation Apps

There are a range of excellent apps to choose from to help support, guide and motivate you to practise mindfulness effectively. [Comparison of 7 Meditation Apps](#).

[Waking Up](#) - With a smart rational approach, this app may be the best fit for many EAs learning to meditate. “Learn the fundamentals of mindfulness from Sam Harris... he also guides you into the deep end of meditation”. Includes a library of insightful expert conversations.

[Headspace](#) - “user-friendly interface with hundreds of guided meditations for beginners to experts.”

[Calm](#) - “flexible app with less structured programs and exercises that help manage anxiety”

[Insight Timer](#) - “giant library of free meditations which you can filter by what you’re looking for.”

[10% Happier](#) - “offers beginner guides for people who aren’t sure about meditation”

## Week 1: Introduction to Mindfulness Practices

### Week 1 Guided Meditations: Mindfulness of Breath & Body

[Mindfulness of body and breath](#) (8m 10s)

[Mindfulness body scan meditation](#) (14m 47s)

Guided meditations from Prof. Mark Williams.

*Prof Williams is Founding Director and Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Oxford Mindfulness Centre.*

[Selection of short guided mindfulness meditations](#) (3-19 mins) from Diana Winston, Director of Mindfulness Education, Mindful Awareness Research Center, UCLA.

[Attending to breath](#) (20m 00) Guided meditation from Adyashanti

*Adyashanti is a renowned contemporary American spiritual teacher and author from the San Francisco Bay Area who offers talks, online study courses, and retreats in the United States and abroad.*

## **Week 2: Welcoming Difficult Emotions Practices**

Make a list of skillful strategies when it is hard to be with emotions. Notice your emotions and begin to work with skillful strategies. If you are not able to stay with the emotion, then ask yourself, “What do I need right now to be with this emotion?” Or “How can I take care of myself if I can’t be with it?”

See this [article on emotional regulation](#) for more guidance and examples of skillful responses to strong difficult emotions.

### **Week 2 Guided Meditations: Welcoming Difficult Emotions**

Practise the RAIN meditation at least two times this week, and continue with the sincere intention to meditate every day.

[RAIN self-compassion](#) (11m 31s), guided meditation from Tara Brach.

[RAIN self-compassion](#) (20m 15s), guided meditation from Tara Brach.

*Tara is an American psychologist, author, and proponent of Buddhist meditation. She is a guiding teacher and founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, D.C. (IMCW).*

[RAIN self-compassion](#), written guidelines from Tara Brach, with which you can do this practice at your own pace.

[Selection of self-compassion guided meditations and exercises](#) from Kristin Neff.

*Kristin Neff is an associate professor in the University of Texas at Austin's department of educational psychology. She is a pioneer in the field of self-compassion research, and conducted the first empirical studies on self-compassion.*

## **Week 3: Cultivating Pleasant and Healthy Emotions Practices**

Notice your connection with your loved ones, and send metta to people you encounter throughout your week.

### **Week 3 Guided Meditations: Cultivating Pleasant and Healthy Emotions**

[Loving-Kindness \(Metta\) guided meditation](#) (8m 09s) with Sharon Salzberg.

*Sharon Salzberg is a New York Times bestselling author and a renowned teacher of Buddhist meditation practices in the West. In 1974, she co-founded the Insight Meditation Society at Barre, Massachusetts, with Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein.*

[Embodied Metta](#) (20m 05s) Guided meditation from Tara Brach

[Selection of heart-opening meditations](#) (~30 mins) from Jack Kornfield.

*Jack Kornfield (born 1945) is a American author and teacher in the Vipassana movement in American Theravada Buddhism. He has taught meditation worldwide since 1974 and is one of the key teachers to introduce Buddhist mindfulness practices to the West. In 1975, he co-founded the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, with Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein, and subsequently in 1987, Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California. Jack is the senior teacher in Ollie's teacher training course.*

## Week 4: Taking Your Practice Into The World

Continue your daily formal practice, choosing whatever meditations you feel most drawn to. Review and reflect on your journal answers. Prioritise the actions you will take to sustain and deepen your practice. Consider booking a retreat. Please also complete the [end of course evaluation form](#).

## Week 1: Journal - (Re)starting a Daily Meditation Practice

### Practice Planning

To (re)start a daily practice it's important to make a concrete plan and take action to implement it.

### Set an attainable formal practice goal

E.g. 6 months from now, I intend to sit for at least \_\_\_\_\_ minutes each day.

Have a clear intention, and hold it lightly. Your practice is a gift to yourself and the world, not an obligation.

### When

#### At what time of day will you meditate?

Nobody has spare time to meditate. To establish and maintain a daily meditation practice you have to *make* the time to meditate, and protect that time in your daily schedule. The majority of people find it most natural and effective to build a meditation practice into their morning routine. Some people build meditation into their evening routine, or at other times.

**What behaviour/event will you use as a trigger for your meditation practice?**

To effectively establish a habit, it's important to have a trigger for your new behaviour. Choose a trigger that already happens every day consistently (e.g. When you have put your toothbrush away after cleaning your teeth in the morning, when you have poured yourself a glass of water in the morning, or when you have tucked your children into bed in the evening).

### **For how long will you meditate?**

Set a low bar (e.g. minimum 30 second sit per day) to gain traction with your practice. Initially, it's much more important to establish a daily habit than to sit for longer periods. If you consistently sit for 30 seconds a day, there's a good chance you'll often stay sitting for 5 minutes or longer.

## **Where**

### **Where will you meditate?**

To support a deep and consistent practice, it can be helpful to meditate in the same physical space each day. If possible, prepare the space in advance (e.g. clean and tidy, with a cushion or chair and a blanket to hand).

## **What**

### **What meditation practice(s) will you do?**

What is the current focus of your practice? What are you most motivated to practice?

Typically, I recommend a combination of:

- Heart-centred practice, e.g.
  - Metta/loving-kindness - to cultivate a kinder and more loving attitude
  - RAIN of self-compassion - when experiencing challenging emotions
- Concentration practice e.g.
  - Observation of breathing sensations, stabilising attention on your anchor
- Insight practice e.g.
  - Non-judgmental observation of bodily sensations & how they change

If experiences in meditation often feel overwhelming, try doing only metta/loving-kindness practice for several months. Metta practice can serve as a balm, and will develop your capacity to be with difficult emotions when they arise.

### **What app/website will you use, or will you guide yourself?**

For beginner meditators, it tends to be easier and more effective to follow guided meditations from experienced teachers rather than trying to guide oneself. Know what meditation(s) you intend to follow in advance, and have these readily accessible. If using your phone, consider turning on sleep mode, turning off notification, and not using any other apps until after your meditation.

### **Set expectations with the people around you**

“As you get started with your practice, be open, honest, and vulnerable. Talk to important people in your life, such as your significant other, spouse, kids, roommates, or coworkers, about your goal. Share why you’re starting your practice (it will benefit them as much as you!) and let them know that you’ll be sitting silently somewhere in your home or office for a set duration of time each day. Having the support of those around you helps keep you accountable and comfortable”. [How to Start a Meditation Practice That Actually Sticks](#)

**What actions will you take this week to help establish your daily meditation practice?**

## **Week 2: Journal - Motivation, Intention & Obstacles**

Why are you choosing to meditate? What is your motivation and intention?

Mindfulness is all about how we pay attention and relate to the world. Our attitude is integral to our practice. We can practise formally, in dedicated periods of meditation, and informally, in every other moment of our lives.

Nurture an attitude of sincerity, eagerness and diligence towards your practice of loving presence and kind attention.

### **Motivation**

**What are your motivations to practise?**

- a) **For your own personal benefit**
- b) **For the benefit of people close to you**
- c) **For the benefit of the wider world**
- d) **Other motivations**

**List as many motivations as you can think of above, then highlight the ones that are most important to you.**

### **Intention**

Motivations are what actually drive your behaviour.

Intentions are what you would like to drive your behaviour.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the correct and most powerful intention is [bodhicitta](#), which roughly means *to awaken in order to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings*. Bodhicitta entails total selflessness.

### **Discover your deepest intention**

Bring to mind an idealised future version of yourself, which embodies profound wisdom and compassion. Take a few breaths, resting in their loving presence. Now, ask them what their deepest intentions are, and write their answer below.

**What is your wisest most compassionate intention for your practice and your life?**

### **Informal practice intention examples:**

*“I live with increasing grace, love, surrender and equanimity.”*

*“I am enough, I have enough, I do enough.”*

*“I am, and have always been, surrounded by love.”*

*“I am an increasingly loving presence for those around me.”*

*“May I hold all that arises with mindfulness and compassion.”*

*“May I awaken, to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings”*

### **Formal practice intention examples:**

*“I am the kind of person who always comes back to their meditation practice.”*

*“May I be the kind of person who never misses a daily sit.”*

## **Obstacles to Practice**

What are the main obstacles to your meditation practice, and how do you intend to respond to them? See [this article](#), and [this one](#), for common meditation obstacles & effective responses.

**Obstacle 1:**

**Your intended response:**

**Obstacle 2:**

**Your intended response:**

**Obstacle 3:**

**Your intended response:**

**Obstacle 4:**

**Your intended response:**

**Obstacle 5:**

**Your intended response:**

**What action steps will you take this week to help overcome these obstacles?**

## **Week 3: Journal - Sustaining Your Practice**

### **Community**

#### **Practice Communities/Groups**

It's very helpful to be part of a mindfulness practice community, and meet regularly with other mindfulness practitioners to intentionally nurture your practice, and support each other to cultivate the qualities of mindfulness and compassion in your lives.

I recommend (Googling and) connecting with one or more mindfulness/insight/vipassana meditation practice communities in your area, and making a long term commitment to meet weekly or monthly with one or more dedicated practice groups and/or individual practitioners. If possible, join a *local in-person* practice community, and make friends.

More generally, to become a more mindful, wise, loving person, aim to spend time in the presence of other people who embody these qualities deeply.

Here are some very high calibre local and online practice group options:

- [Plum Village Tradition local practice groups](#) & [local groups for 18-35 year olds](#), founded by Thich Nhất Hạnh, the 'father of mindfulness'.
- [Sangha.Live](#) is the world's biggest online dharma (Buddhist) practice group, with many world-class meditation teachers, open for anyone to join.



## **Establish relationships with a diversity of [admirable friends](#)**

Arrange to meet regularly with other meditators to discuss your practice and provide mutual support.

Aim for a diversity of age, life experience, worldview, racial, cultural, class & socio-economic backgrounds. Who do you know with a meditation practice? Who do you want to know?

## **Keep a note of teachers you resonate with, and engage deeply**

It's wise to have a diversity of teachers to learn from, and to explore which teachers and teachings resonate with you.

If you feel a strong connection with a specific teacher, get curious. Who is their teacher? Are they part of a specific tradition? What opportunities are there to train with them? Do they offer classes, retreats, 1:1s, or other support for students?

## **Resilience & Contingency Planning**

**What is most likely to derail your practice in the future? e.g.**

- Seasonal change in schedule/routine
- Dips in motivation to practice
- Going on holiday

**What would be the most challenging combination of things that could happen to derail your practice?**

**What will you do to ensure you maintain your practice, in the face of the above?**

**Would you be surprised if this plan fails?**

**How can you rework your plan so that you would be surprised if it fails?**

**What actions are you going to take to maintain a long-term consistent daily practice?**

## **Week 4: Journal - Deepening Your Practice**

### **Retreat**

Intensive meditation retreat allows you to become deeply present. Taking regular time for retreat is all but essential to master mindfulness and meditation.

The following retreats are widely regarded as some of the best in the world to practise mindfulness:

[Plum Village](#), France & worldwide. Known as the "father of mindfulness", Thich Nhất Hạnh coined the word 'interbeing', established [Engaged Buddhism](#) and founded the Plum Village Tradition, with the main monastery in France. Dozens of other monasteries and practice centres are blossoming in this tradition around the world.

[Gaia House](#), Devon, UK. Gaia House retreats are predominantly based in the Buddhist practices of Insight (Vipassana), Loving-kindness (Metta) and Zen meditation.

[Vipassana \(10 day\) retreats. Goenka tradition](#), with retreat centres worldwide, their *dana* policy means you pay what you feel, as a gift of gratitude (these retreats book out very fast, so apply as soon as registration opens). Note that these retreats are pretty intense, the main guidance is through pre-recorded video teachings, and the supporting retreat teachers may not be adequately trained to offer the right support if things go sour.

[Insight Meditation Society](#), retreat centre, MA, USA (just north of New York).

[Spirit Rock](#), insight meditation centre, CA, USA (Just north of San Francisco).

**Action: Book a retreat.**

## Strengthen the Pillars of Your Practice

Review and repeat this journal to:

- Refine your practice plan
- Reflect on your motivations & intentions to practice
- Review your current obstacles to practise and how to overcome them
- Strengthen your practice community and supportive relationships
- Update your resilience & contingency plans for your practice
- Book subsequent retreats

## High Quality Long-Term Practice

Over the long term, to continue to deepen your practice and avoid unnecessary stagnation, at least once per year:

- Do a 7+ day intensive meditation retreat
- Have a 1:1 conversation about your practice with a senior teacher

## Additional Resources to deepen your practice & insight

### Short-form articles

[16 Types of Meditation](#) (10 mins) article from Headspace meditation app

[History of Meditation](#) infographic

[Meditation for Stress](#) - (10 mins) article from Headspace meditation app.

[5 Myths of Self-Compassion](#) (20 mins) article from Kristen Neff.

[Mettā: What It Is, What It Isn't](#), interview transcript with Shaila Catherine  
*Shaila is founder of Insight Meditation South Bay, a meditation group in Silicon Valley.*

### Selected Books

[Key Books by Thich Nhat Hanh](#), the 'father of mindfulness'.

[The Power of Now](#), Eckhart Tolle

A guide to spiritual enlightenment. For many, reading this simple book induces the meditative experience directly, while explaining how.

[The Wise Heart](#), Jack Kornfield

A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology.

[Radical Friendship](#), Kate Johnson

A case for friendship as a radical practice of love, courage and trust, and a path that paves the way for profound social change.

[The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible](#), Charles Eisenstein

A guide from the ubiquitous contemporary story of separation to the essential story of interbeing. Essential reading for sincere activists, idealists and change-makers.

[Wiser](#), Dilip Jeste, MD

From the field's pioneer, an exploration of the neurobiology and psychology of wisdom: what science says it is and how to nurture it within yourself—at any stage of your life.

*Thank you for your practice.*