



**Center for the
Study of
Social Policy**
Ideas into Action



Mindful Leadership & Building Community Capacity

**Strategies and Lessons from Best Start
Compton-East Compton**

Kara Coleman



About CSSP

The Center for the Study of Social Policy works to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. We do this by advocating with and for children, youth, and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.

January 2019

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for assistance from the following people in the creation of this publication: principle author Kara Coleman, a Capacity Builder and a manager for the Partnership Support Team. In addition, we are grateful for the invaluable guidance and input from Best Start Community Partnership members in West Athens, East LA, Wilmington, and Compton/East Compton Finally, we thank First 5 Los Angeles Communities Department for their generous support of this work.

Introduction

How to Use This Best Practice Brief

This Best Practice Brief includes information, recommendations, reflection questions, and sample exercises that residents, collaborative partners, funders, and capacity builders can use or adapt to promote mindful leadership in community change initiatives.



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Background

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to your inner and outer experience without judgment. Specifically, it refers to the ability to focus one's attention on the situation at hand, clearly observe what is occurring with an open mind, and choose how to respond appropriately.

- Mindfulness starts with *self-awareness*. Knowing yourself enables you to make better choices about how to respond to people and situations.
- Turning our attention to what is currently going on inside us or in our surrounding environment is known as *present moment awareness*.
- We can be mindful about any aspects of our experience, including feelings, thoughts, and sensations as well as how others around you are feeling or impacted by what is occurring

“Mindfulness nurtures our ability to ask... What is my truth? What is my response to this situation? Do I have the energy to do it? Who else can help? The more mindful we are, the more we can respond in a way that is truthful and wise.”

—Claudia Horwitz, Founder, Stone Circles

WHAT DO WE GAIN FROM BEING MINDFUL?

As human beings, the wheels in our heads are constantly turning. Our minds are like conveyor belts that constantly churn out thoughts that are either reflecting on the past or anticipating the future. We then often get lost in asking ourselves why something occurred, if the best action was taken, or what is going to happen next—all of which can create stress that clouds our ability to see things clearly. To further complicate matters, we are typically unaware of the unconscious thoughts, feelings, and assumptions that skew our view of what is actually happening—including, sometimes, the true source of our discomfort.

By helping us to focus on the present while observing thoughts or feelings as they arise, the practice of mindfulness gives us the space to take a step back, unpack our thoughts, and gain needed clarity. In addition, the improved ability to see past negative assumptions helps us to better cope with difficult feelings and avoid reacting to tense situations in ways that cause even more stress.

Being mindful creates a greater capacity to deal with adverse events, which allows us to become more fully engaged in life and truly appreciate pleasurable moments. In fact, evidence-based mindfulness research has proven that it greatly benefits our mental capacity and overall well-being by:



Reducing Stress and Anxiety



Building Compassion



Enhancing Body Awareness



Increasing Patience



Improving Focus and Productivity

However, the practice of mindfulness is not simply a tool for stress reduction. It is a way of relating to our daily experience with awareness, openness, and kindness—a way of being, seeing, and knowing that helps you better understand what is happening in and around you. In turn, this allows you to make choices that enhance your peace of mind, well-being, and ability to engage others in positive ways.

MINDFULNESS MYTHS VS. REALITY

Although the practice of mindfulness has become more mainstream in Western society over the last 30 years, there are still a lot of misconceptions about it, especially regarding its connection to religion and

spirituality. The following table clarifies common mindfulness myths to help demonstrate its potential benefit to everyone, regardless of personal beliefs or background.

Myths About Mindfulness	What is True?
It's a passing New Age fad based on "magical" thinking.	Through research studies conducted in fields including health care, neuroscience, psychology, and education, mindfulness has been proven to enhance brain function, mental health, physical well-being, and behavioral responses. ¹ However, despite its rapidly growing popularity, mindfulness is not a magical quick-fix for feeling and performing better. Its benefits arise and deepen gradually with continued practice over time.
It can conflict with traditional religious beliefs.	Mindfulness is not limited to a particular belief system. Many cultures and all of the world's major religions have practices that foster self-awareness, clarity, and calm.
It's the same thing as meditation.	Mindfulness is being aware of your thoughts, feelings, environment, and everything else. It can be practiced wherever you are, at any time, just by paying attention to what's happening in the moment. While meditation can enhance mindfulness, it is usually practiced for a limited period of time.
It requires clearing the mind of thoughts, which encourages passivity and a lack of emotional engagement.	Mindfulness is about observing our thoughts and how they affect us, not eliminating them. Instead of making us more passive, it supports our ability to engage in more conscious thought and action.
If you're not feeling happy or peaceful, you're doing it wrong.	Mindfulness can increase feelings of peace and joy, but it can also bring up difficult emotions that we often attempt to avoid. The more you practice, the better you become at accepting a full range of thoughts and feelings as part of the human experience.
It takes a lot of time to practice (i.e. hours of daily meditation and reflection.)	Mindfulness can be practiced in many different ways and for different lengths of time—from seconds and minutes to an hour or more. It all depends on what helps you feel more present and in touch with yourself. For some that's meditation or deep breathing, but for others it's being in nature, family time, journaling, listening to music, or enjoying the creative arts.
It's only for serious students of religion and spirituality.	Mindfulness is not "owned" by a particular group, religion, or social class. It is simply about understanding what is true for every human being: <i>our inner thoughts and feelings greatly impact our outer experience.</i>



WHY DOES MINDFULNESS MATTER NOW MORE THAN EVER?

Given the increasingly fast pace of modern life, where we are expected to absorb and adapt to new information quickly while striving to manage ever-expanding lists of responsibilities at work and home, practicing mindfulness is more relevant today than ever before. As Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the pioneers of mindfulness practice and research in United States, describes it: “Most of our lives we are absorbed in doing: in getting things done, in going rapidly from one thing to the next, or in multitasking—attempting to juggle multiple things at the very same time....We live to check things off our to do list, then fall exhausted into bed at the end of day, only to jump up the next morning and do it all over again.”²

The stress created by long hours, hard work, and unrelenting pressure is intensified further by our reliance on technology that delivers instant feedback, including smartphones and tablets, social media platforms, and round-the-clock access to online entertainment. Though the easy communication and convenience they offer is often wonderful, our constant attachment to them has created a “new normal” where being permanently plugged in is not only accepted but expected.

Unfortunately, when we are overwhelmed by stress, overstimulation, and endless distractions, the negative physical and emotional consequences are significant. Our energy levels, decision making, and emotional stability all become compromised, which makes us more prone to memory lapses, negative thinking, reacting impulsively, and operating on autopilot (in other words, acting without thought and just going through the motions).

With practice, mindfulness helps to boost our resilience and positive mindset as we grapple with this new reality by:

- **Enabling us to set healthier expectations and boundaries** as we are able to see more clearly what does and does not work for us.
- **Supporting our ability to prioritize life demands in ways that create greater balance and satisfaction** as we let go of distractions and connect more consistently with what enhances both our peace of mind and sense of well-being.
- **Bringing deeper awareness to difficult feelings and emotions.** Instead of ignoring our anger, sadness, embarrassment, or frustration, we learn to witness what is arising, connect with our self-compassion, and welcome new insights. We become more open to exploring how we can learn and grow from difficulties.³

“We all experience periods of stress, but much evidence indicates that more and more people are suffering stress in a way that interferes with their ability to function normally over an extended period of time. The greater the stress, the larger the gap will be between how things are and how they appear to us, and the more inappropriate our reaction will be.”

—Michael Nicholas, *The Little Black Book of Decision Making: Making Complex Decisions with Confidence in a Fast-Moving World*



Mindfulness and Exemplary Leadership: Understanding the Connection

Leadership is most often defined as influencing the actions of others to achieve shared goals. Therefore, everyone acts as a leader in some capacity, whether the focus is on business, politics, education, community, or family.

Although individual leadership styles and philosophies can vary greatly, exemplary leaders who are successful in their endeavors and viewed as excellent role models typically share several of the following characteristics:

Acts with honesty and integrity

Is a creative and agile thinker

Respects and relates well to others

Facilitates collaboration

Embraces continuous learning

Balances being action-oriented and results-focused well

Has excellent communication skills

Displays heightened self-awareness

Exudes a positive outlook

Provides clear direction

Inspires and motivates others

Has strong strategic and critical thinking skills

Over the past 30 years, mindfulness has been proven to be closely aligned with the attributes that are common among exemplary leaders. As the the body of evidence linking its positive impact on brain function, high performance and well-being has grown, we have also witnessed the rapid emergence of mindfulness from “fringe movement” to a widely accepted practice in corporate, academic, and health care settings.

For example, a 2015 Journal of Management paper entitled *Contemplating Mindfulness at Work: An Integrative Review* examined 4,000 scientific studies to document the overall impact mindfulness has on workplace performance. Its findings provided empirical evidence of how mindfulness positively impacts human functioning, with specific improvements in attention, cognition, emotions, behavior, and physiology.⁴

The study also suggested that individual mindfulness practices not only can improve interpersonal behavior and relationships, but also increase emotional intelligence that promotes effective teamwork and leadership. This includes understanding how emotions impact performance and knowing when to take a “mindful” pause in response to situations that may evoke strong feelings.⁵

“Mindfulness offers the opportunity to improve the way you decide and direct, the way you engage and lead. It can be the difference between making a hasty decision that creates huge headaches or reaching a thoughtful conclusion that enables success.”

By developing the capacity to quiet their minds, sustain focus, and listen with greater openness, even the busiest leaders can achieve the clarity needed to identify and direct their energies toward what is most important. Alternatively, research also shows that low-performance leadership is strongly correlated with a reactive mindset.⁶

Figure 1. How Mindfulness Enhances Leadership Capacity

This graphic briefly summarizes research findings related to the impact of mindfulness on cognitive skills such as thinking, learning, reasoning, and remembering that are linked to exemplary leadership.

Improved Decision Making & Productivity	Increased Self Awareness	Enhanced Health & Resilience	Better Attention & Focus
<p>Mindfulness sharpens cognitive, emotional, and intuitive intelligence as well as creativity. It helps us maintain a more relaxed state of mind, which is linked to improved judgment and decision making as well as more flexible thinking and proactive problem solving.</p>	<p>Mindfulness improves self management by decreasing activity in the parts of the brain that control our “fight or flight” reactions while increasing the functions that support logical thought, impulse control, and our ability to recognize patterns of thought or behavior. We then become less prone to negative assumptions and behaviors that can undermine collaborative relationships.</p>	<p>Mindfulness helps to reduce anxiety and improve emotional regulation, which boosts resilience and performance— particularly when one is under stress. It is also linked with enhanced energy, vitality, and sleep, which help to reduce the risk of burnout.</p>	<p>Our minds have a tendency to wander about 50% of the time, not counting interruptions from phone calls, text, and emails. Studies show that mindfulness practices can help curb our tendency toward distraction, help us absorb more information, improve our ability to focus for longer periods of time, and even boost memory.</p>

Questions for Deeper Reflection

1. How would you describe the connection between mindfulness and exemplary leadership in your own words?
2. What information stood out to you as particularly helpful? Why?
3. What do you have additional questions about?
4. How will the information shared influence your own intentions and actions as a leader?

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Mindfulness and Servant Leadership: Wisdom from the Field

Servant leaders seek to create a more caring, just, and sustainable world. They promote the well-being of people and communities by sharing power, leading with compassion, and helping others realize their full potential.

Below are insights shared by respected servant leaders who view mindfulness as integral to community building and social justice.

EXPANDING AWARENESS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

"Sustaining commitment to positive change isn't easy, nor is working with others—especially across diverse groups, organizations, or even sectors that might have different value biases. A mindfulness practice can support us to meet these challenges. It helps us to build awareness of ourselves, of others, and of the systems in place around us; it is a valuable basis for navigating through the challenging emotions which arise when we open up to the state of our world; it offers us practices for dealing usefully with strong emotions and learning to harness their energy in our work; it illuminates the ways our views and biases affect the way we are in the world."

In our fast-paced, stress laden, and complex world, emotional awareness is crucial for being resilient in challenging times. It is central to mobilizing, engaging, communicating and influencing others, as well as thinking deeply, creatively and strategically. Harnessing mindfulness has never been more important in helping to bring about social change."

Paula Haddock, Co-Founder of the Mindfulness and Social Change Network

HONORING THE COMMITMENT TO DO NO HARM

"As a social worker, in the profession of helping and advocating for others, one of the lessons that I have had to learn over and over again is not to rush too quickly into solving a problem. Even with the best of intentions to be of service, if we serve without being aware of the details of the situation, if we try to be

change agents without understanding deeply and broadly what it is we are trying to change, we can actually make things worse.

Mindfulness allows us the space to create skillful, meaningful, and transformative action. It allows our actions in the world to come from a deep recognition of the causes and conditions of our lives so that change can emerge from the unencumbered goodness of our hearts and minds, rather than arising from the place of our wounds or injuries. It is this goodness that makes our paths noble."

Larry Yang, Co-Founder of the East Bay Meditation Center

Excerpt from *Awakening Together: The Spiritual Practice of Inclusivity and Community*

LEADING WITH COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING

"It is not that we do not confront those causing harm to ourselves and our communities. It is that the impetus for our confrontation must come from a place of understanding and compassion. In order to remember this sweet and sacred place we must come back to the present moment in front of us. So when I begin to feel anger, I do not speak. I breathe. This allows a space for me to see the reasons I am becoming angry and to question the perceptions I have. This spaciousness also helps me understand the perceptions that others may be acting from, giving me more understanding of the situation, and allows for a different engagement, one motivated from a place of freedom and peace, not anger. In a critical moment of engagement, this space allows clarity for decision-making rooted in a deeper principle of non-harm."

Marisela B. Gomez, PhD, MD, Community Activist and Mindfulness Practitioner

Excerpt from *Sacred Activism: Mindfulness and Racial Justice*

MINDFULNESS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

"Mindfulness is not about retreating into some bastion of heady, personal calm. Mindfulness is about courageously turning our hearts inside out so that we can actualize our deeply human ability to find solutions and stand in our universal goodness, no matter what the circumstances. Maybe, just maybe if we do this kind of work...we can usher in the kind of collective ingenuity that our world calls for."

Marina Illich, Faculty Member, New Ventures West
Excerpts from *The Heart of Mindfulness*, originally published by *The Huffington Post*

"If mindfulness is indeed a movement, I want to be part of a movement that supports people to wake up to the connection between us, that helps us see that personal stress reduction is not separate from fair wages and safe working condition, that does not hide from questions of power and privilege."

Tita Angangco, Co-Founder and Director of
Community Services Centre for Mindfulness Studies

"Being a mindful leader has myriad benefits, personal and professional. Based on what my clients tell me, a mindful leader: sees the big picture and is less reactive; effectively manages uncertainty, change, and conflict; listens better—more actively and deeply; sets priorities and focuses on what matters; brings a more creative and strategic approach to problem solving; and excels at developing, repairing, and maintaining important relationships, which leads to more influence, greater impact, and better business results."

**—Cathy Quartner Bailey, Author
*Show Up as Your Best Self: Meditation & More***

Questions for Deeper Reflection

1. What insights, feelings or questions arose as you read the wisdom that was highlighted?
 - a. For example, did you feel curious, unsure, or inspired?
 - b. Did you relate to any of the wisdom based on your own experience?
2. In what ways can this wisdom support you and your work as a servant leader?

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Capacity Building in Action

Defining Mindful Leadership

A **mindful leader** is someone who brings out the best in oneself and others by consistently “showing up,” being present, grounded, and compassionate—especially in challenging situations.⁷

EXPLORING KEY TERMS THROUGH SELF REFLECTION

Descriptions of key mindful leadership terms are provided below along with questions that are meant to encourage reflection about their relevance to your experience as a leader.

Showing up: How you relate to yourself and others,

including your presence, your body language, your tone of voice, as well as what you say and do.

- What intentions do you bring to being a leader? To being of service?
 - Are you committed to bringing out the best in others?
 - What is the quality of your relationships and communication with colleagues?
- Present:** Focused on what is happening in the moment, not the past or future
- As a leader, where is your attention usually focused?

Tips for Becoming a More Mindful Leader

Here are some practical tips to get you started on your mindful leadership journey.

Take Some Time to Learn More About

Mindfulness. Pick up a good introductory book or read a few articles about it. Watch some TedTalks. Take an introductory course (many are available online). This can help with setting realistic expectations and may also spark greater interest in the practice.

Cultivate Self-Awareness. Mindful leadership isn't a quick fix, it's a journey. The journey starts with a willingness to explore new ways of 'doing' and 'being' with an open mind. The more self-aware you are, the better able you will be to engage others effectively.

Help Yourself Before Helping Others. If you truly aspire to be a mindful leader, focus on cultivating mindfulness in yourself before seeking to support others in doing the same. It's easy to express support for the concept of mindfulness and its multiple benefits, but it's more challenging to actually practice it consistently. Commit to a

minimum of 30 days to explore mindfulness for yourself. This will help you decide on next steps for deepening your own practice and encouraging others to try it for themselves.

Remember That Practice Takes Consistency.

Seek ways to incorporate mindfulness into your everyday (or nearly every day) routine. Similar to physical exercise, you won't experience as many benefits if you only practice every once in a while.

Think Big, Think Small. After you've practiced mindfulness for yourself, you can start to consider how it can help strengthen groups, departments, or organizations as a whole. It's always good to start with the big picture in mind, but begin taking action with smaller steps that you can build on, such as piloting your ideas and identifying like-minded, influential individuals who can help champion them.

Sources: *Mindfulness for Dummies* and *Mindfulness Isn't Magic: You Have to Put in the Work* by Nick Wignall

- How much time is spent dwelling on past decisions and actions?
- How much time is spent wondering or worrying about future?
- How much do people you communicate with feel seen, heard, and understood?

Grounded: The state of being mentally and emotionally balanced, which supports one’s ability to maintain a clear and reasonable perspective.

- What helps you steady your mind in response to the highs, lows, and curveballs of life?
- How well are you able to calm yourself when stress arises?
- How well do you recognize and manage your emotional reactions?
- How aware are you of your emotional triggers and blind spots? (We can’t manage what we don’t recognize.)

Compassionate: Demonstrating concern for others’ well-being as well as your own.

- How much do you demonstrate caring and support for others as a leader?
- How much self-compassion do you offer yourself?

Laying the Groundwork

This toolkit section includes guidance, tools, and examples to support effective preparation for providing mindful leadership training and coaching for community-based partnerships.

INTRODUCING MINDFUL LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

A Look at Growth and Disparity in the Mindfulness Movement

Mindfulness and other contemplative practices such as meditation and yoga are rapidly growing in popularity, with an estimated 13% of the US

population now having participated in one or more related activities. Backed by research touting its many benefits, the practice is being embraced across many universities, hospital, corporations, and organizations that support leadership development.

However, research also shows that populations with lower levels of income and education—which disproportionately include people of color due to structural inequalities—are much less likely to be exposed to mindfulness practices or participate in them.⁸ Rhonda Magee, Professor of Law with the University of San Francisco, who is also a Mindfulness and Social Justice Teacher, observed the following:

Given the relatively privileged backgrounds of many of the original teachers and practitioners of mindfulness in the West, it is easy to see why the practices have become largely if not primarily associated with personal well-being and productivity, not social justice. For this reason, mindfulness practices are often perceived as more or less unavailable to or unhelpful for members of traditionally marginalized communities.

Professor Magee goes on to express concern that this perception within marginalized communities—including those who are subject to discrimination, racism and institutionalized oppression—is a primary reason why beneficial mindfulness practices have been largely inaccessible to people who might need them most.⁹

Understanding Community Context

Community context refers to the social, cultural, and historical characteristics of a neighborhood that influence the lives of its residents. When launching place-based initiatives centered on residents and families, it is important to first seek an understanding of both the communities they reside in and their daily lives. This will help to ensure that what is offered or requested is beneficial, but also relevant to their everyday experiences and aligned with their priorities.

While mindfulness provides many benefits that are appealing to people of all backgrounds, it is also

important to lead with a commitment to trauma-sensitive practice when engaging marginalized communities (e.g. people of color, those who identify as LGBTQ+, women, individuals earning a low income, and individuals with disabilities). These populations are more likely to experience interpersonal trauma and high stress as a part of their daily lives due to various socioeconomic factors. Thus, the recognition that inner exploration has the potential to evoke strong feelings such as remorse, shame, or fear—especially if trainers lack proper respect for personal boundaries or an understanding of contributing factors—is crucial. Additionally, it is imperative to be not only transparent but also proactive in communicating the need for sensitivity, and allowing people the freedom to opt out of mindfulness activities if they feel any unease.¹⁰

Suggested Talking Points and Discussion Prompts

It may be helpful to acknowledge that community change work is rewarding but also incredibly demanding—especially for resident leaders who wear multiple hats as family members, community stakeholders, and advocates. Invite group members to consider how stress and being overwhelmed affect their decision making, relationships, and ability to be an effective, energized leader. Ask group members for their input about how mindfulness could support their work; this provides an opportunity to link potential benefits with their chosen goals and strategies.

Preparation for Engaging Best Start Compton-East Compton (BSCEC)

For the Best Start Compton-East Compton (BSCEC) Community Partnership, a Mindful Leadership training was offered as part of a series of capacity building

sessions designed for elected leaders and work group members that also addressed topics such as: Understanding and Working with Different Leadership Styles, Conflict Resolution, Critical Thinking, Strategic Decision Making, and Power Dynamics.

Although the practice of mindfulness was fairly new to most partnership members, many were eager to explore how it enhances leadership skills. This receptivity among members had been cultivated over time via BSCEC trainings that regularly incorporated personal and group reflection about: 1) effective ways to engage others; 2) the impact of personal attitudes and behaviors on group dynamics; and 3) constructive approaches to resolve tensions that arise in community work.

As a result, member comfort with reflective exploration to support ongoing learning was well established within the group by the time a Mindful Leadership training was proposed. Just as importantly, a reliable relationship of trust had been built with the capacity building team over a two-year period. This strong connection provided added reassurance for community members who may have been hesitant to engage in inner exploration or skeptical about its benefits.

Strategies to Promote Buy-in

The majority of Best Start Compton-East Compton (BSCEC) leaders and work group members were new to mindfulness practice, but even for those who had some previous exposure, it was important to first begin by addressing questions about what mindful leadership is, offering a clear explanation of its relevance to community work, and seeking community input regarding proposed training activities.

Based on the approach taken with BSCEC, the following steps can help increase community stakeholder receptivity to Mindful Leadership training:

1. **Start with an introductory overview** that includes time to address questions and seek input regarding desired mindfulness training outcomes, including how they align with existing learning priorities and planned capacity building strategies.

BSCEC began with a brief presentation led by the capacity builder that defined what mindfulness is, outlined its primary benefits, and uplifted its connection to strengthened leadership skills. Key talking points included:

- The importance of self-care and stress management for community volunteers who juggle multiple demands.
- How mindfulness can help to improve group communication and decision making.
- How leading with mindfulness supports effective and respectful conflict management.

2. **Discuss key mindfulness concepts using relatable, community friendly language.** Take time to clearly define key terms and connect them to regular life or work experiences.
3. **Address common mindfulness myths** (see Page 4) early on with transparency, understanding, and an even sense of humor, where appropriate.
 - Acknowledge that mindfulness is a new concept for many people, so it is not unusual to have questions about what it means or involves.
 - Be honest and open about what may give people pause, including concerns about incompatibility with religious beliefs or misconceptions that equate mindfulness with being passive.
4. Where applicable, **tie the benefits of mindfulness to stated group values, group agreements, and codes of conduct.** This helps to frame the practice as honoring and supporting what the group has already identified as an optimal way of work.

5. **Let people know that it is ok to be skeptical or unsure**, especially if they are new to mindfulness. Emphasize that the training and coaching offered are meant to provide opportunities to explore the practice and discover what resonates most with them. Assure group members that they are free to participate without feeling pressured to adopt every suggestion or exercise.
6. **Encourage personal reflection and sharing** regarding the benefits of mindfulness to increase initial receptivity.
7. **Speak from your own experience** about how mindfulness has helped you personally as a leader or in other areas of life, and ask others group members who are familiar with its benefits to do the same. This may be especially helpful when asking people to devote their time to training and hands-on practice because it speaks to “What’s in it for them?”.
8. **Provide opportunities for group members to participate in one or two brief mindfulness exercises.** This allows for a direct experience of mindful practice and the valuable insights it often leads to, which can help to spark interest in additional exploration.

Suggested Introductory Exercises

See Mindful Leadership References, CSSP Resource Compendium available at <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/best-start-la/#compendium>.

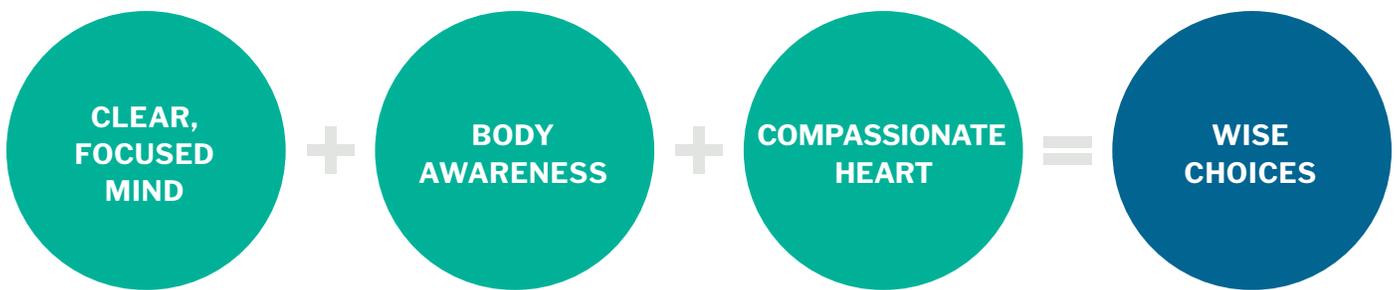
- **Mindful Moments**
- **Thinking vs. Mindful Awareness**

Mindful Leadership Training: The BSCEC Approach

Please keep in mind that there is no right or wrong way to become more a mindful leader. The main goal is to experiment with different practices that encourage reflection as part of your daily life and work. The sample exercises described below are appropriate for those who are new to mindfulness, but also beneficial to experienced practitioners.

STRATEGY #1: EXPLORE PRACTICES THAT STRENGTHEN MINDFUL LEADERSHIP CAPACITIES

BSCEC training activities and experiential exercises were based on what came to be known as **The Mindful Leadership Formula**, which was adapted from sources including the definition of mindful leadership provided on Page 11; the Institute for Mindful Leadership’s description of capabilities that strengthen decision making (e.g. clear minds, warm hearts);¹¹ and a variety of mindfulness exercises that connect us to our physical bodies as a source of wisdom.



This newly constructed “formula” served as a guide for designing experiential training opportunities that helped BSCEC members not only better understand why it is important to engage in practices that foster clear minds and compassionate hearts, but also what it feels like to nurture those qualities and directly benefit from them.

Experiential mindful leadership exercises were then combined with facilitated group reflection and commitments to action, which were all related to key learnings and takeaways. For example, participants were asked to share feedback in response to the following questions:

- Which mindful leadership practices resonated with you most? Why?
- Based on what you learned, in what ways do you want to become a more mindful leader? In your family life? In the community? Or elsewhere?
- How can BSCEC incorporate mindful leadership practices to strengthen itself as a community partnership?

- What commitments will you make to become a more mindful leader in the next week? Next month?
- For each commitment you make, how will you measure your success? What will be different?

Please see Appendix A for sample exercises for maintaining a clear, focused mind.

“When leaders make choices that are harmful to an organization, its employees, or the community, it’s not due to a lack of IQ: most often, it’s a result of an overtaxed schedule and an autopilot existence that leads to careless or reactive decisions.”

—Janice Marturano, *Finding the Space to Lead: A Practical Guide to Mindful Leading*

Please see Appendix B for sample exercises for cultivating body awareness.

Other Effective Ways to Tune into Your Body

- For five to 10 minutes in the morning and/or evening, sit quietly and simply observe the physical sensations in your body. Label them as you notice them e.g., “Warm,” “Aching,” “Tingling,” or “Tight.”
- During the day, whenever you can, try to be aware of the physical sensations in the body that are present when happy or stressful events occur. As you pause and pay attention to what you are feeling physically, be open to insights about the messages your body is sending you.
- Set your watch or cell phone so that an alarm goes off every two to three hours to remind you to be mindful of the physical sensation in that moment.

Please see Appendix C for sample exercises for cultivating a compassionate heart.

STRATEGY #2: SUPPORTING INTEGRATION OF MINDFUL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN BSCEC ACTIVITIES

Based on the training provided, BSCEC integrated mindful leadership practices into their ongoing operations in four significant ways:

Defining Core Values That Reflect Mindful Leadership Capacities

Core values are the fundamental beliefs of a person or organization that guide decisions and actions. For organizations, they help determine if they are on the right path and fulfilling stated goals.

As part of its continuing development of bylaws that outline BSCEC governance and decision-making

policies, the Governance Committee and Leadership Group developed a draft of a core values statement for full Partnership review and approval. The drafting process included an exploration of members’ core personal values and the gathering of community input regarding values that are essential to achieving BSCEC goals.

For each value that was identified as a BSCEC priority, the following questions were considered:

- How can the Partnership practice, promote, and live this value?
- What is challenging about practicing, promoting, and living this value?
- What support will be helpful to members in practicing this value?

Guided by member input, their experience with community engagement, and a growing understanding of what it means to be a mindful leader, BSCEC went on to develop a core values statement that uplifts the importance of:

- Acknowledging and supporting everyone’s strengths and potential to serve as empowered leaders.
- Working collaboratively to promote common good within and beyond the Compton-East Compton community.
- Being a welcoming and inclusive organization that treats everyone not just fairly, but like family.
- Serving as positive role models in their communication and interaction with others.

Encouraging and Supporting Regular Reflection

Reflection involves looking back on our attitudes, values, and behavior and thinking through our

experiences honestly. In group settings, members can also reflect on processes of interaction, the sharing of opinions, the quality of communication, and the strength of decision making.

Both individual and group reflection are integral to the continuing learning, growth, and effectiveness of organizations. Within BSCEC, the importance of regular reflection was embraced even more fully across Partnership activities after Mindful Leadership practices were introduced. While goal achievement and the completion of related tasks remained a priority, members began to incorporate time for opening and closing meetings with check-ins. These “touch points” include reflective sharing that invites feedback about the experience of working together, observed strengths and growth, and opportunities for improvement. As a result, members were also able to acknowledge the need to occasionally step back from work activity in order to rest, recharge or tend to other life priorities with more openness and flexibility.

Creating a Workplace Culture of Caring and Respect

BSCEC members often refer to each other as family and embrace the broader community with the same spirit. Examples of their dedication to serving as compassionate, mindful leaders include:

- The addition of core values that articulate a commitment to engaging others with kindness, appreciation, and mutual support.
- Their willingness to honor and celebrate each other’s contributions and successes and the care, consideration, and empathy exhibited toward members who experienced personal challenges.
- Routine discussions about how to schedule and balance partnership commitments with the need for self-care so that they can be at their best as leaders. As cited above, this included regularly incorporating time for personal check-ins and shares during BSCEC gatherings.
- The newly developed BSCEC Code of Conduct, which outlines clear member expectations for leading with respect and consideration for others.

Embracing Conflict as an Opportunity for Learning and Growth

Prior to participating in trainings on differing leadership styles, conflict resolution, and mindful leadership, there was often visible discomfort among most members when group tensions and disagreements arose. Aside from a few more vocal leaders, people often seemed hesitant to speak freely about issues or concerns that might lead to verbal conflict.

However, this dynamic changed significantly after members learned more about the link between mindfulness and exemplary leadership practices—particularly skills related to mindful communication and conflict resolution. BSCEC members soon began to exhibit more comfort and confidence in their ability to not only address conflict well, but also learn from it in ways that strengthened the partnership and increased self-awareness. Specific areas of observed growth cited by community members themselves include:

- The willingness to acknowledge and talk through disagreements instead of remaining silent and letting issues fester.
- The ability to avoid becoming too emotionally involved in your beliefs and opinions, which allowed members discuss difficult issues without taking them so personally or becoming defensive.
- The ability to recognize the good intentions of others as partners in community work—even when opinions differ.
- The willingness to consider and admit to their own biases, blind spots, and role in contributing to tensions or challenges.

Mindful attention to how we make sense of the facts around us lets us make better judgments about what is truth, what is perception, and what is somewhere in between.

Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee,
Resonant Leadership

MEASURING SUCCESS

Recommendations for assessing the effect of training and practice on individual understanding and demonstration of mindful leadership:

1. The following questions can be used to gather evaluative feedback from training participants or as a basis for assessing impact through observation:
 - Is there increased understanding of what mindfulness is and its benefits? (Can leaders comfortably describe mindful leadership and why it matters in their own words?)
 - Is there an observable increase in mindful behaviors among leaders? This includes how people show up and engage with others with calm presence, compassion, and the ability to listen well.
 - Are leaders engaging in mindfulness practices on a regular or more frequent basis?
 - Are leaders displaying more vitality, energy, and creativity in their approach to work?
 - Are leaders exhibiting more open-minded, flexible, and patient attitudes?
2. Develop customized pre- and post-training evaluations based on the competencies outlined in the definition of mindful leadership (Page 10) and The Mindful Leadership Formula (Page 14).
3. Utilize surveys and self-assessment tools that evaluate different aspects of mindfulness, including:
 - The Mindfulness Quiz: greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take_quiz/mindfulness
 - The Mindfulness Test: londonmindful.com
 - Body Awareness Questionnaire: <http://www.yorku.ca/rokada/psyctest/baware.pdf>
 - Self-Compassion Test: self-compassion.org/test-how-self-compassionate-you-are

Recommendations for assessing the effect of mindful leadership training and practice on the overall functioning of groups and organizations:

Key Questions

1. Are mindful leadership practices reflected in core values, meetings agreements, and/or codes of conduct?
2. Are mindful leadership practices demonstrated during group discussions and the performance of joint work activities?
 - Do all group members feel respected, empowered, and heard when working together?
 - Does the group seek to engage others with compassion and support?
 - Does the group incorporate regular time for reflection?
 - Is communication among group members typically open and respectful?
 - Are conflicts resolved in a direct, constructive manner? (Are tensions ignored or dealt with openly? Are conflicts viewed as a learning opportunity? Are underlying root issues addressed?)
 - Does group decision-making and action reflect clarity of thought, creativity, and flexibility?
 - Are mindful leadership practices integrated into strategies for achieving shared goals?

Note: Focus groups and interviews are also recommended to document participant observations regarding both the individual and group impact of mindful leadership training.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Supporting Mindful Leadership: Key Considerations and Lessons Learned

GETTING STARTED

- Be clear from the outset about the relevance of mindfulness to the work being undertaken and how it will help further community goals. What difference will it make? What needed changes or improvements will be supported by mindful leadership? What evidence will be used to track impact or outcomes?
- Building relationships of trust, the use of community friendly language, and taking time to address questions or common misconceptions are all critical steps when introducing mindful leadership to audiences that may be new to the practice. Even in instances where relationships are well established, trainers/coaches should take special care to create a safe space for personal reflection and inner exploration by maintaining an open-minded, nonjudgmental stance.
- Welcome and encourage honesty about skepticism or discomfort that may arise, allowing people to discuss their feelings without judgment or opt out of exercises as needed (before, during or after practice). Remember that uncertainty and skepticism are a natural part of stepping outside one's comfort zone. Also, it is OK if some mindfulness practices do not resonate with some training participants because there is no one right way to practice mindfulness.

CO-DESIGNING CUSTOMIZED TRAININGS

- Mindfulness is often thought of as a calm and soothing practice, but there are many different ways to incorporate training activities that are engaging, fun, and interactive. It all depends on community preference.
- When working with parents, seek opportunities to share information and exercises that can be explored further at home with their families.

Incorporate activities that appeal to both adults and children who are preschool age or older.

- Make sure practice exercises are appropriate for training participants' level of experience and comfort with inner exploration. Be transparent about any potential for strong emotions to arise and offer opportunities for participants to provide input about planned exercises.

ENCOURAGING REFLECTION TO SUPPORT LEARNING

- Scheduling ample time for individual and group reflection after sharing background information and facilitating practice exercises allows participants to more fully connect with insights that arise or ask clarifying questions. The goal is to support others in identifying how they might apply what they are learning in beneficial ways, both personally and in relation to collaborative work.

PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH

- Those who provide mindfulness training should not only possess a strong technical understanding of the practice and its benefits, but also be experienced practitioners who are genuinely committed to living and leading mindfully. Otherwise, the impact of guidance shared will be diminished by a trainer's inability to draw from a direct understanding of the benefits and challenges of being mindful.
- A trainer's ability to model mindful leadership is critical to creating a safe space for inner exploration. It is also key to fostering an environment where others can experience for themselves how self-awareness, compassion, openness, and deep listening can powerfully enhance group communication, connection and learning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Strengthening Leadership. Too often, the importance of nurturing inner resources necessary for acting wisely and compassionately is overlooked. Typically, it is considered less of a priority than skill building that supports strategic action, resource management, and evaluation. Yet mindfulness is integral to not only leading others well and avoiding the various pitfalls of high-pressure roles, but also serving in ways that are aligned with one's core values and highest intentions. For this reason alone, it deserves our recognition and consistent attention as a foundational building block for exemplary leadership and collective action.

Uplifting the Transformative Impact of Mindful Community Building. Through BSCEC and many other examples, we have learned that mindful leadership strengthens community change efforts. However, in comparison to the extensive study of individual mindfulness benefits, there is relatively little research that documents its impact on community and social change initiatives. Key areas for further exploration include mindful leadership's role in:

- **Increasing compassion, empathy, patience, and humility that strengthens and deepens relationships.** Through mindful leadership practice, community members create opportunities to know and support one another more fully. The more people feel heard and seen in a group, the more likely that a genuine sense of caring, connection, and mutual support will develop—which strengthens the group's ability to work in unity toward common goals.
- **Promoting inclusiveness.** This includes engaging everyone with a welcoming and open attitude, “meeting people where they are” based on a genuine desire to understand their experience, goals, and gifts, addressing and overcoming unconscious bias, and taking action to ensure diverse community representation.
- **Strengthening resilience,** which includes the ability to learn and grow through challenging experiences, adapt well to changing circumstances, and work effectively with others to resolve problems in constructive, creative ways.

There is a connection between the inner life...and the outer life of action and service...They are not divided away from each other—the two are in full relationship for good or bad.

We are learning that we cannot adequately address the exterior side of life without becoming aware of the interior side of life.

When we act to right a wrong, to heal an injury, or even to love a child, our inner motivations, both conscious and unconscious, will be the hidden part of our actions influencing their effectiveness... More and more, our science is finding evidence of these correlations.

Excerpts from *The Heart of Philanthropy*, By Rob Lehman

*Remarks delivered at the Council on Foundations' 12th Annual Family Foundations Conference

Source: Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Promoting Equity and Diversity. Minority and low-income communities are currently under-represented in the “mindfulness movement.” With all that we know about the link between psychological stress and poor health outcomes in minority communities—and given that stress is exacerbated by the effects of institutionalized racism and discrimination—the question of who gets to benefit from mindfulness practices is very much a matter of social justice. As observed by Sheryl Petty in *Waking Up to All of Ourselves: Inner Work, Social Justice & Systems Change*, this is an urgent call to action that requires “our intentional, deliberate, deep, and sustained learning and growth” across the human and social services sector.¹²

Beyond increasing access to mindfulness training among marginalized communities, incorporating cultural understanding into curricula, providing affordable learning opportunities, and engaging instructors who represent minorities requires our

urgent attention as well. Thus, this work must include integrating diverse voices, experiences, and wisdom in emerging mindfulness research, teaching and practice.

“While attending trainings and seminars on contemplative practices—including mindfulness—through the years, I’ve often found myself in settings where I’m one of less than a handful of people of color, and I could not help but think about how others who can relate to my daily experience as an African-American woman were not present. Beyond that, I was troubled by the fact that my community and the people from the neighborhoods I work in were missing out on what I believed to be beneficial, life-changing information.

So the opportunity to offer bilingual Mindful Leadership trainings to support Best Start Compton-East Compton was the realization of a long-held desire to help make ‘mindfulness’ more accessible. In fact, engaging a group of Latino and African-American residents in exploring mindful practices in their own community felt like my Latina co-facilitator and I were breaking down barriers that shouldn’t exist.”

Kara Coleman, CSSP Capacity Building Team Member

Embracing Sustainable Servant Leadership. Burnout is becoming more prevalent across all professions due to our rapidly increasing pace of life and work demands. However, it is particularly rampant among servant leaders—both professionals and volunteers—who seek to promote the well-being of others.

This troubling trend can be traced back to widely accepted “social service” norms that contribute to:

1. **A Culture of Overwork.** There is always more to accomplish than there are hours in the day and dedication “to the cause” is often measured by how hard you push yourself
2. **Continual Self-Sacrifice.** It is widely assumed that servant leaders can easily sustain themselves with the sense of fulfillment they get from “doing good” and following their passions. Thus, sacrificing one’s time, finances, and health in service of a cause is viewed as normal—even admirable—because the expectation is to keep going no matter what, fueled by one’s passion and purpose. In contrast, prioritizing self-care is often viewed as something that gets in the way of helping others as much as possible. Yet attempts to live up to these unrealistic expectations inevitably lead to compassion fatigue over time.
3. **Emotional Stressors.** Servant leadership requires an emotional investment, particularly when taking on daunting social challenges or working with the most vulnerable among us. Just the mere fact of knowing that the well-being of others depends on your efforts can create significant stress.
4. **Persistent Uncertainty.** Human and social service organizations typically operate with limited budgets that often fluctuate, which leads to lower employee compensation and the constant challenge of figuring out how to do more with less.

The combined effect of these accepted norms takes a significant toll on servant leaders as a workforce. For example, a survey conducted by the Young Nonprofit Professionals network found that more than 45% of respondents predicted that their next job will not be at a charity, but in government or business due to burnout and low pay.¹³ Overwork not only undermines retention, it also compromises one’s ability to perform at a high level and engage others effectively, which can undermine an organization’s overall effectiveness and credibility.

“Leaders, especially those who are involved in social change movement, are often put on a pedestal for giving up everything, even their health and well-being, for the cause. They work long hours, neglect their personal lives, ignore their physical and mental health, and even keep themselves from experiencing joy because of the emotionally tough work they’re doing.”

From *Doing Good Requires Happier, Healthier Works*, by Beth Kanter and Aliza Sherman

What will it take to shift this culture and create healthier, more effective approaches to social change?

- Acknowledgement that change is urgently needed; servant leaders are doing unintentional harm to themselves and their work by continuing on a path of constant exertion. Just as importantly, those who are involved in community building and social justice initiatives have an ethical responsibility to avoid promoting leadership and advocacy practices that perpetuate burnout among resident volunteers who may already be greatly impacted by community or family stressors.
- The urgency of this needed shift is reflected in the words of a Best Start Leadership Group member, who said: “I love this work. I’ve learned a lot and I’m deeply committed to bettering myself and my community. So we work very, very hard. We show up to all the meetings and give a lot of ourselves to this effort, but it’s not easy doing this work and dealing with everything we have to deal with as part of this community and in our families every day...so when do we get to talk about how to take care of ourselves?”

- A large-scale commitment to promoting and integrating mindful practices that allow servant leaders to reconnect with what inspires and energizes them. As described by Claudia Horwitz, founder of stone circles, “Going out into the world every day takes energy, focus, and commitment... Turning inward allows us to develop our strength and power from within, the power that makes real change possible.”¹⁴

Recommended actions include:

- Expanded investment in conducting field-based research to learn more about the connection between mindfulness practices, building inner leadership resources, and effective community capacity building.
- The adaptation and creation of mindful leadership guidance and tools that are specifically designed to strengthen human service organizations and community change initiatives. This includes promoting a culture of wellness along with improving alignment between our stated values with our attitudes and action.
- The engagement of thought leaders, funders, and skilled capacity builders to devise a coordinated strategy for providing mindful leadership technical assistance and training within the human service field. This includes exploring opportunities to integrate practices for building inner leadership resources as part of existing professional education curricula.

Recommended Resources

Books

Coming to Our Sense: Healing the Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Leading Well from Within: A Neuroscience and Mindfulness-Based Framework for Conscious Leadership, Daniel Friedland, MD

Mindful Leadership for Dummies, Juliet Adams, FCIPD and Marina Grazier, MBPcS

Real Happiness at Work: Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement and Peace, Sharon Salzberg

Real World Mindfulness for Beginners: Navigate Daily Life One Practice at a Time, Brenda Salgado, et al.

Online

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society:
www.contemplativemind.org

Garrison Institute:
www.garrisoninstitute.org

Greater Good Science Center:
www.greatergood.berkeley.edu

Hidden Leaf Foundation:
www.hiddenleaf.org

Mindful Leader:
www.mindfullleader.org

Mindful Magazine:
www.mindful.org

Mindfulness for the People:
www.mindfulnessforthepeople.org

Apps

Calm

Headspace: Meditation

Insight Timer

Daily Mindfulness Reminder

CSSP Resource Compendium

(<https://cssp.org/our-work/project/best-start-la/#compendium>)

Body Awareness Questionnaire

How Mindful Are You? Quiz

Mindful Moments Exercise

Daily Mindfulness Practices

Preparing for Difficult Conversations Guide

Quieting the Mind Worksheet



Appendix A: Sample Exercises for Maintaining a Clear, Focused Mind

Mindful Breathing

- Mindful breathing in particular is helpful because it gives people an anchor--their breath--on which they can focus when they find themselves carried away by a stressful thought. It helps people stay “present” in the moment, rather than being distracted by past regrets or worries about the future.

HOW TO DO IT

- The most basic way to do mindful breathing is simply to focus your attention on your breath, observing each inhale and exhale without trying to adjust anything. You can do this while standing up but sitting down with your back supported or lying in a comfortable position is ideal. Your eyes may be open or closed, but you may find it easier to maintain your focus if you close your eyes.

PRACTICE TIPS

- It can help to set aside a designated time for this exercise or to practice it when you are feeling particularly stressed or anxious. Experts believe a regular practice of mindful breathing can make it easier to do in difficult situations.
- It may help to focus on feeling your chest rise and fall or your belly expanding and contracting as you breathe, especially with a hand placed on each area.
- While breathing mindfully, you may find that your mind wanders, distracted by thoughts or bodily sensations. That is okay. Just notice that this is happening and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

- Sometimes, especially when trying to calm yourself in a stressful moment, it might help to start by taking an exaggerated breath: a deep inhale through your nose (three seconds), hold your breath (two seconds), and a long exhale through your mouth (four seconds).

TIME COMMITMENT

Ten to 15 minutes daily for at least a week and during stressful moments, as needed.

Source: *Greater Good in Action* (ggia.berkeley.edu)

Intention Setting

An intention is a guiding principle for how you want to be, live, and show up in the world—during meditation, at work, with your family, or any other area of your life.

HOW TO DO IT

Ask yourself: What matters most to you? What would you like to build, create, or nurture in your life? What would you like to let go of? Your answers could form a powerful intention that guides your actions as you move through your day.

Intentions can be a clear and specific wish, or as simple as a positive word or phrase to use as a guide for how you show up, like “lead with an open mind and heart,” “slow down to enjoy each moment,” “loving kindness,” “strength,” “compassion for myself and others,” “stay calm and focused,” “peace,” or “freedom.”

PRACTICE TIPS

- An intention shouldn't be confused with a goal because it's not something you attach an expectation or evaluation to. It's an aim, a purpose, or attitude that guides how you engage with yourself, others, and life.
- Revisit your intention often and when needed with brief mindful pauses, especially when you feel stressed. This can help you stay grounded and reconnect with what matters most.

TIME COMMITMENT

Two minutes to set your intention; one minute for each mindful pause.

Source: Adapted from Mindful Minutes (mindfulminutes.com)

“Although we do not choose our thoughts, we can choose how to respond to them. A first step to letting go of negative beliefs and assumptions is recognizing and observing how our feelings, thoughts, and experiences are connected.”

Recognizing Thoughts for What They Are

Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are constantly influencing each other. Often, it is the stories we tell ourselves about our unpleasant experiences that feed our negative feelings and leave us feeling even worse. For example, “It never works out” or “I shouldn't be feeling this way” or “I'm not good at this.” Because we often relate to our thoughts and feeling as reality, this tendency can give rise to impulsive reactions and behaviors that have real negative impacts on ourselves or others.

This mindfulness exercise is designed to help individuals compare their thinking and assumptions to what is factual as a way to interrupt our tendency to jump to conclusions or misinterpret what is occurring when difficult emotions arise. It helps us see the full picture behind our thoughts and feelings. This includes understanding how our moods and feelings directly influence our frame of mind and the meaning we make of our experiences, as well as how our feelings contribute to patterns of thought that reinforce how we feel.



HOW TO DO IT

Bring to mind a persistent negative thought you have about yourself—but not TOO negative. On a scale of 1-10, keep it in the low to medium range of bringing up negative or anxious feelings. (Example: I always struggle with getting things done.)

In numeric order, answer each of the following questions about your negative thought. Take time to reflect on your responses and jot down notes about what stands out as you proceed.

After completing the questions, ask yourself the following: What did you notice as you were doing to exercise? Did anything shift or change?

TIME COMMITMENT

Fifteen minutes

For more practice exercise suggestions, please explore the recommended resources in CSSP's **Best Start Compendium** of Mindful Leadership exercises and reference materials at <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/best-start-la/#compendium>.

1

Is it true?

Often the answer is “Well, yes.” This is the brain initially reacting—the autopilot you live with and believe is you.

2

Is it *absolutely* true?

Is this thought 100% accurate? Can you see the thought in a different way?

3

How does this thought make me feel?

Notice any storylines you're holding onto, and name your feelings: *sad, angry, jealous, hurt*.

4

What would things be like if I didn't hold this belief?

Imagine possible benefits to your relationships, energy levels, and motivation.

Source: Mindful Magazine, Thoughts Are Not Facts, Elisha Goldstein (mindful.org)

Appendix B: Sample Exercises for Cultivating a Body Awareness

It is often assumed that **mindfulness** only involves mental activity that happens from the neck up. However, reconnecting with our bodies and instincts is an integral part of developing self-awareness.

Paying attention to physical sensations gets us out of our heads and into our bodies, which has a grounding effect that helps us connect with our feelings and experiences more fully. It also serves as an effective way to offset our overactive minds, which are constantly racing from one thought to the next.

Body Scan

The purpose of this exercise is to bring awareness and focus to what is currently happening in the body. Regularly practicing the body scan can help you:

1. Enhance your ability to bring your full attention to real-time experiences happening in the present moment—helpful when emotions or thoughts feel wild.
2. Train to explore and be with pleasant and unpleasant sensations, learning to notice what happens when we simply hang in there and feel what’s going on in “body-land” without trying to fix or change anything.

HOW TO DO IT

Be seated in a chair with back support or lay on the floor, with eyes closed (if that is comfortable) or gazing at the ceiling above.

For each of the following prompts, take 10 to 20 seconds to notice what arises in response.

Bring awareness to the body breathing in and out, noticing touch and pressure where it makes contact with the seat or floor.

- Be aware of contact. Is all or part of that body part touching the floor? What does that feel like?
- What is the texture and temperature where you notice contact with the floor, chair, clothes, or the air around you?
- What internal sensations, such as tightening, relaxing, pressure, fatigue, heat, cold, aching, etc., are you noticing?

When you’re ready (no rush), intentionally breathe in, and move your attention to whatever part of the body you want to investigate. You might choose to do a systematic body scan beginning at the feet and working your way up to the head. Or, you might choose to explore sensations randomly.

If you notice tightness in any area of the body, imagine breathing the stress out as your take deep breath and then exhale slowly.

TIME COMMITMENT

Twenty to 30 minutes for a full body scan, but you can do a shortened version focused on one or two areas of the body for as little as one to two minutes if time is limited.

Source: Adapted from *Body Scan Meditation* (www.mindful.org/beginners-body-scan-meditation/)



Mindful Walking

Mindful walking simply means walking while being aware of each step and of our breath, while keeping steps slow, relaxed, and calm. It can be practiced anywhere, whether you are alone in nature, in a crowded city, or shopping in a supermarket.

HOW TO DO IT

As you walk, notice how your body feels as you take each step. Pay attention to how your legs, feet, and arms feel with each step you take. Use your sense of sight to look around and take in the details of what you see. Use your sense of smell to notice any aromas or scents in the air. Are you able to notice any tastes as you walk? Can you taste the air? Use your sense of touch to feel the contact of your foot as it touches the ground. Notice the solidity of the earth beneath your feet.

With openness and curiosity, notice any other sensations, thoughts, or feelings that arise without lingering on anything in particular.

TIME COMMITMENT

Five to 10 minutes

For more practice exercise suggestions, please explore the recommended resources in CSSP's **Best Start Compendium** of Mindful Leadership exercises and reference materials at <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/best-start-la/#compendium>.



Appendix C: Sample Exercises for Cultivating a Compassionate Heart

Self-Compassion Break

Difficult situations become even harder when we beat ourselves up over them, interpreting them as a sign that we are less capable or worthy than other people. In fact, we often judge ourselves more harshly than we judge others, especially when we make a mistake or feel stressed out—but this makes us feel isolated, unhappy, and even more stressed. During such times, taking a self-compassion break and being kind to yourself can be a great help.

The practice of self-compassion has three main elements:

- **Mindfulness:** The ability to recognize and acknowledge when we are having a hard time without judging ourselves.
- **Self-Kindness:** Treating yourself like you would treat a good friend who is having a hard time—with understanding, loving care, and support.
- **Connectedness:** Recognizing that you are not alone; everyone has challenges and difficulties sometimes.

HOW TO DO IT

Think of a situation in your life that is difficult and is causing you stress. Call the situation to mind and see if you can actually feel the stress and emotional discomfort in your body. Now say to yourself, “This is stressful,” “This hurts,” or whatever statement feels most natural to you. This acknowledgment is a form of mindfulness—of simply noticing what is going on for you emotionally in the present moment.

Next, say to yourself, “Stress is a part of life.” This is a recognition that all people have trying experiences and these experiences give you something in common

with everyone else. Other options for this statement include “Other people feel this way,” “I’m not alone,” or “We all struggle in our lives.”

Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch on your chest, and say, “May I be kind to myself.” This is a way to express self-kindness. You can also consider whether there is another specific phrase that would speak to you in that particular situation. Some examples: “May I give myself the compassion that I need,” “May I accept myself as I am,” “May I learn to accept myself as I am,” “May I forgive myself,” “May I be strong,” and “May I be patient.”

PRACTICE TIPS

- This practice can be used any time of day or night. If you practice it in moments of relative calm, it might become easier for you to experience of self-compassion when you need it most.
- While it may be challenging to do this practice every time you face a stressful situation, an initial goal could be to try it at least once per week.

TIME COMMITMENT

Five minutes

Source: *Greater Good in Action* (ggia.berkeley.edu)

Mindful Conflict Resolution

Much conflict within groups can be attributed to a lack of understanding, an unwillingness to listen to others, or the need to be right. During disagreements, we also tend to focus on what we want to say rather than being present and listening to others for understanding. Or we become stuck in blaming others instead of

working to solve problems together. However, mindful leadership practice helps us to communicate with others more effectively—particularly when emotions and tensions are running high.

HOW TO DO IT

Recognize a strong emotional charge in yourself or another. This could be in the form of anger, frustration, judgment, defensiveness, or another feeling that fuels confrontation. Pause and take three slow breaths. Go within and notice, with curiosity, if there is something that upset you—perhaps a fear, a wound, an assumption, attachment/aversion, etc. Respond wisely and consciously, guided by a commitment to listen deeply and communicate respectfully.

PRACTICE TIPS

- Listening to another’s point of view does not mean you agree with them or their actions. It gives that person space to explain their perspective and feelings, which may help to create more shared understanding and empathy.

- The more that you practice this process, the less slow and awkward it will feel, and the more quickly you will be able to scan your own intentions and develop a wise response. Controlling our own urge to react will eliminate half the conflict.

TIME COMMITMENT

Varies depending on the nature of the conflict and resulting exchange.

Source: *Toolkit for Conscious Social Change* by Gretchen Ki Steidle

For more practice exercise suggestions, please explore the recommended resources in CSSP’s **Best Start Compendium** of Mindful Leadership exercises and reference materials at <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/best-start-la/#compendium>.

¹ “Benefits of Mindfulness: Practices for Improving Emotional and Physical Well-Being.” HelpGuide.org, <www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm>

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³ Salzberg, Sharon. *Real Happiness at Work: Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement and Peace*. New York, NY: Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 2014.

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