

**Mindfulness-Based Substance Abuse Treatment
(MBSAT) 12-Session Curriculum**



Session 1 Free PDF Download



Hi there,

I'm Dr. Sam Himmelstein and I'm the co-creator of the Mindfulness-Based Substance Abuse Treatment (MBSAT) 12-Session Curriculum and the founder of the Center for Adolescent Studies. I'm passionate about working with youth and teaching professionals how to work with youth in effective ways.

I hope you enjoy this free PDF of the first session of the curriculum.

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SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

Session Summary

As the introduction to the entire program, the first session serves the purpose of orienting participants to the structure of the curriculum, setting agreements and expectations for behavior and effort, and answering any logistical or structural questions youth may have. The majority of this session is spent building the groundwork for a therapeutic culture that has the potential to result in trust, receptivity, and disclosure. Introductory mindfulness concepts and meditations are presented and youth are asked what they want to learn from the program.

Materials Needed

- Meditation bell
- Session 1 Handouts (Optional)

Formal Meditation (Time)

- Mindfulness of Deep Breathing (5 minutes)

Learning Objectives

- Review the structure and logistics of the program
- Set group agreements
- Define and practice mindfulness
- Discuss what youth may want to learn from the program

Session Agenda (Chair Configuration)

1. Informal Greeting (N/A)
2. Introduction to the Program (Circle)
3. Group Agreements and Expectations (Circle)
4. Defining Mindfulness (Circle)
5. Meditation: Mindfulness of Deep Breathing (Circle)
6. Group Poll: Learning Interests of the Youth (Circle)
7. Homework and Closing (Circle)

1. Informal Greeting

The introduction to the first group may be the first time you meet the youth you'll be working with. It's important that the youth feel welcomed into the program and that you *distinguish* this program from status-quo treatment or education. The first introduction doesn't actually happen once everyone is sitting down in a circle, but rather upon the first greeting as the youth enter your treatment room or classroom. You (or you and your cofacilitator) are the introduction to the program. If you are the only facilitator, wait by the entrance of the space where the program will take place and introduce yourself as the youth enter the space. If you have a cofacilitator, he or she can wait by the circle of chairs and do the same.

[Note: Make sure that you have the circle of chairs already set up prior to the youth entering the space.]

2. Introduction to the Program

Once all the youth are sitting in the circle, begin to formally introduce the program. Use the talking points and example script below as guidelines for introducing the program.

[Important Note: Remember! Simply use the talking points and example scripts as guidelines. We highly urge you not to read the script word for word, but rather develop your own voice.]

Talking Points

- Formally re-introduce yourself
- Curriculum's philosophy on change (e.g., not there to change them, are there to build self-awareness and real relationship)
- Review the content, activities, and logistics of the program

Example Script

***Facilitator:** Welcome. As I said before, I'm Sam, and this is my partner Stephen. We just want to take a few moments and give you a little information about this program. We'll have time for questions throughout the session. I do this work because I'm passionate about serving young people, and really believe that youth can make a difference in this world. I BELIEVE that, with training, you can take control of your lives and be successful, whatever that means to you. [At this point Stephen would introduce himself and disclose a similar mission statement]. We just want to tell you a little about this program. The first thing is that we know there are a lot of programs that just tell you drugs are bad and you shouldn't do them. This isn't one of those programs. We're not here to tell you what to do. We're not here to try and change you. We believe you have the ability to change yourself if you choose to do that. What we're here to do is connect and build REAL relationships. We're also here to offer information and some transformational practices that have changed our lives. So our focus isn't on changing you or telling you to stop doing drugs, that could be too presumptive of your experience and reasoning, we're just here to connect, offer information that you might be interested in, and help you develop a higher self-awareness so that you can live as consciously as possible. Any questions about that piece? . . . Just to give you a sense of what this group is going to be like, sometimes we're going to sit in a circle like this, sometimes we'll sit in a half circle, and sometimes we might even sit classroom style. Over the years we've found that switching it up can be a good thing, so we don't want to do one thing for too long. Each of the groups will have a different theme: learning about drugs, drugs in the community, how to deal with drug cravings,*

emotional regulation, and more. One of the most important things is that, over time, our goal is to come together and connect as a group. We want you all to eventually feel comfortable enough talking about serious and deep things. Sometimes it will be playful in here, and sometimes it will get deep. On those group sessions that generally get deep, we'll let you know ahead of time that they are coming, but we really want to encourage you to fully participate. Any questions about the logistics of the program? . . .

Oftentimes, when we'd state this at the start of a group we see signs of an actual sense of a relief from the youth. Most youth (especially those who are mandated to treatment), do not want to change their behaviors. Furthermore, the youth will appreciate your reviewing a brief, "lay of the land" and answering any questions related to the logistics of the program.

3. Group Agreements

Reviewing the group agreements and actually getting the youth to *agree* to them is the most important aspect of this first session. It gives the youth an expectation of what's okay and not okay in regard to behavior and sets the stage to develop a therapeutic culture in which trust and disclosure can result. What's most critical is to have an actual dialogue and not simply "list off" the agreements as though you're reviewing a checklist. The first step in this process is to discuss what agreements are and how they're distinguished from "rules" that are based on a model of punishment (e.g., when a rule is broken, the rule-breaker gets punished). Alternatively, agreements are "agreed upon" by everyone in the group (i.e., not set in a top-down fashion), and, when agreements are fragmented by behaviors contrary to them, a conversation occurs. Presenting the agreements has two steps: 1) distinguishing rules vs. agreements, and 2) presenting and agreeing to specific behaviors.

Step 1: Distinguishing Rules vs. Agreements

Use the following talking points and example script as a guide when facilitating step one.

Talking Points

- Ask the group, "What's the difference between rules and agreements?"
- Ask, "What happens when you break a rule?"
- A conversation occurs when an agreement is broken

Example Script

Facilitator: *Okay, so one of the most important things in getting this group to work is what we call group agreements. Before we get into the specifics, who can tell me what the difference between an agreement and a rule is? . . . That's right, an agreement is something we all agree to and a rule is oftentimes created by the teacher or facilitator without first talking with the participants . . . What happens when a rule is broken? . . . Right! When you break a rule, you usually get punished. That's why we want to stay away from rules. With an agreement, if you step outside the bounds of the agreement, it's just more like a conversation will happen, like, "I thought we agreed to this. Are you still okay with that agreement?" It's like a reminder conversation. Does that make sense? . . . That's what we want to do in this group, agree to a set of statements rather than call out rules. Let's discuss some specific agreements that might be good for this group.*

Step 2: Presenting and Agreeing to the Preferred Group Behaviors

After the distinguishing between agreements and rules, you can then begin the process of presenting the agreements. Below is a list of agreements regarding behavior principles that are suggested for use in this curriculum.

- Confidentiality
- Respect
- One Mic' Agreement
- Skillful Speech
- Skillful Listening
- Authenticity
- No Violence
- Group Refocus

The above, in our experience, have generally been the most important agreements to be made in order for cohesiveness and trust to develop. You might ask the youth if they can think of any other agreements, as it can be powerful to involve them in decision-making processes in regard to such major aspects of the group experience.

Agreement 1: Confidentiality. It is important to inform youth of the limits of confidentiality to which the facilitators can be bound in these agreements and that it be explained immediately after circling up and discussing the logistics of the program. Youth must be informed that, if they discuss material related to their hurting themselves or others, or, for instance, physical/mental/emotional abuse toward minors or elders, that such material can be reported to the appropriate authorities. Use the talking points and example script below to guide this conversation.

Talking Points

- Limits of confidentiality include hurting self, hurting others, and abuse
- Other than comments in that category, all information is confidential

Example Script

***Facilitator:** Who knows what the word confidentiality means? . . . Anybody ever heard of the Vegas rule? "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas?" That's sort of how confidentiality works here, as well. It means that the information that we share in here will stay confidential. Now, before we say anything else, we have to let you know that there are only a few instances where we'd have to break confidentiality. Has anyone ever been in therapy in which this is the case or think they know when those instances are? That's right! If you plan to hurt yourself, hurt someone else, or if you report child or elder abuse, we'd have to let someone know. Now, it's important to clarify a few things about these instances. Just because we'd have to report these instances doesn't mean you're not allowed to state them. Some people may want to report child abuse in their house to get help so it can stop. Some may want to report that they're feeling as if they want to hurt themselves because they really need help. It's okay when that happens; just know that we're obligated to report those instances to the appropriate authorities. We'll let you*

know when you're talking about something that sounds like a report, so we can deal with it together. As for hurting others, this only has to do with the future. So if you came in here and said that you beat someone up yesterday, we wouldn't report on that. It is only if you had a concrete plan to beat someone up in the future that we'd have to report that. Does that make sense? . . . Other than in these instances, everything in here is confidential. Here's a test question: If you come to the next group and state that you got really high the past week, would we have to report that? Does it fall within those three main instances I just spoke about? Right! It doesn't. Now, we're probably going to speak with you about getting really high and use it to deepen our treatment, but we wouldn't break confidentiality. Does that make sense to everyone? . . . Another aspect of confidentiality is concerning our own personal information as individuals in a group. So, just as we said we only have to report on those three instances above, that means we won't report on anything else. We'll respect your confidentiality. But another important aspect of the group is that we respect each other's confidentiality, as well as being able to have our own respected. There are going to be times during the group when we share things about our lives and we don't want anyone going around talking about other peoples' business. As a general agreement, we ask that, if someone asks you about your experience in the group, you just talk about your own experience and not anyone else's or any information someone else has said that is personal. If we keep to this confidentiality agreement, our group cohesiveness will grow and the group will be better. Does that make sense to everyone? . . . Can we all agree to this first agreement of confidentiality?

Make sure you get actual acknowledgements from the youth after presenting the agreement of confidentiality. Don't simply "talk at" the youth.

Agreement 2: Respect. This agreement is disseminated to the group via a discussion concerning each one's personal definition of *respect*. The purpose is to get everyone's voice in the room and to define respect as a group. Again, simply listing "respect" as an agreement and not fully discussing it only glosses over this agreement and takes away from the essence of the activity. Remember that you're not only discussing respect as a concept, but also discussing *how* everyone will respect each other in the group, which is an important component necessary for therapeutic culture to develop.

Ask for a volunteer to start and share his or her personal definition of respect. After he or she is finished, choose in which direction the circle will go. Make sure to share your personal definition of respect, as well, but only after all the youth have shared. Once everyone has shared their definitions, briefly summarize what everyone said and get actual agreement that everyone will abide by this agreement.

What if? A group member shares a definition of respect that will not contribute to a therapeutic environment and/or that perpetuates violence? Honor the youth's personal definition and ask to alter it solely for the purposes of the group and nothing more. Refer to "Dealing with Definitions of Respect" at the end of this session's chapter for a specific example.

Agreement 3: One Mic.' The one mic' (short for microphone) agreement gives the group an expectation for how each will be expected, by agreement, to speak and listen to each other. The agreement essentially gets youth to agree to the practice of one group member speaking at a time, while everyone else listens. Use the talking points and example script to present and discuss this agreement.

Talking Points

- One mic' means that one person speaks at a time, while everyone else listens.

Example Script

Facilitator: Anyone ever heard of the “one mic” concept? . . . It’s like the person who’s talking has a metaphorical microphone, and that when whoever’s talking, everyone else listens. We do this so that that person can feel he or she will be fully heard and listened to, so that when you or you are talking [point to a few people in the group], you feel listened to and heard, as well. Does that make sense? . . . Can we all agree to the agreement of one mic? When one person’s talking, everyone else listens and doesn’t talk over him or her?

Make sure to get acknowledgment and agreement from the group.

Agreement 4: Skillful Speech. The next agreement, skillful speech, is closely linked to the one mic' agreement. It's the agreement that group participants will mindfully speak and not simply blurt out whatever comes to them. Use the talking points and example script below as a guide from which to present and discuss this agreement.

Talking Points

- Skillful speech is thinking about what you want to say prior to saying it
- Skillful speech is not simply blurting out what's on your mind
- Skillful speech can be facilitated by taking a breath prior to speaking

Example Script

Facilitator: When we're in this group, one of the main practices we want to push is how we actually talk with each other. This agreement is called “skillful speech.” What do you all think that means? . . . The conventional definition of skillful speech is to be aware of what you want to say prior to saying it, and then say it. Sometimes we all blurt words out because of reaction or we're triggered, and that's not skillful speech. Skillful speech is when we think about what we want to say before saying it; that's what makes it skillful. If you're ever in a situation where you do get triggered and need to still practice skillful speech, take a deep breath and collect yourself prior to talking and it will help you speak skillfully. Can we all agree to this? To practice skillful speech?

Agreement 5: Skillful Listening. Skillful listening is also closely linked to skillful speech and the one mic' agreement. It is the agreement that group participants will practice giving their undivided attention when other youth are speaking. Use the talking points and example script below as a guide when presenting this agreement.

Talking Points

- Skillful listening includes present moment awareness
- Skillful listening includes presence with body language
- You can refocus your mind on your breath if it wanders to help stay present to the speaker

Example Script

Facilitator: *And what do you all think skillful listening is? . . . Skillful listening is listening in a specific way so that the person talking actually feels more heard than if the listening was unskillful. We can practice this in a number of ways, and I want to encourage you all to practice this in a few specific ways. First, is that we engage in actual listening. When we're listening skillfully, we're actually listening to the person talking, not daydreaming or thinking about something that's not happening in the here and now. To do that you need to keep your attention in the present moment and focused on the person talking. If you're someone who has trouble focusing, and your mind wanders, just take a deep breath or two and that will ground your attention back into the here and now. Now, what if my attention is on the speaker but I'm sitting like this [model body language that suggests disinterest]? How do you think that plays into listening?*

. . . It can come off as disrespectful at times. Sure, sometimes people are tired and we don't want to read too far into their body language, but it is also good to practice attentive listening with our bodies, as well. And the way to do that is to orient our bodies and eyes toward the speaker. Those components, the listening to the speaker, keeping your awareness in the present moment with attentive body language, comprise skillful listening. Can we all agree to practice skillful listening while in this group?

Agreement 6: Authenticity. The next agreement is simple but profound: we ask the group participants to practice authenticity. Authenticity begets authenticity and an explicit goal of the curriculum is to create an authentic atmosphere. Use the talking points and example script below to present this agreement.

Talking Points

- Authenticity invites support from the group

Example Script

Facilitator: *The next agreement we like to practice is simple. Be authentic when you're in here. Like a lot of us like to say, "Keep it real." That means when you feel a certain way, like angry or hurt, you own it. You are real about it and don't try to hide from it. When we do that, we learn to communicate and support each other in a whole different way. And that's what this group is about. Can everyone agree to that?*

Agreement 7: Nonviolence. The agreement of keeping an attitude of nonviolence, both physically and verbally, is especially important to get the group to agree to. Whether you're working in correctional settings with rival gang members or young people who perpetrate relational aggression, it's important to present this agreement explicitly. Use the talking points and example script below to discuss this agreement.

Talking Points

- The group couldn't remain confidential and without the presence of extra staff (from correctional or other treatment settings) if violence were to occur in the group
- The violence we are talking about refers to both physical and verbal aggression

Example Script

***Facilitator:** One of the last agreements we want to present is really, really important. That is, when we're in this circle, for this hour and a half each week, it is extremely important that we all commit to practice nonviolence. That's the main reason we can conduct this group confidentially without extra staff in here. Because there's no fights. If you ever feel the need to fight, if you're ever that angry, just pull me or my cofacilitator to the side and ask us to take you on a walk outside. One of the things we'd hate is if you got into more trouble, from being in a fight, as a result of being in this group. So, that's why it's so important to practice nonviolence, so that we can maintain the safety of the group. If there were to be fights here, we wouldn't be able to conduct this group without an extra staff person in here. Does that make sense? . . . Does violence happen only on the physical level? . . . We can be really nasty with our words. And the agreement of nonviolence goes beyond just physical violence for this group time, as well. This agreement means that we want to practice nonviolence, or peacefulness, while talking to each other, like in skillful speech, and how we interact with each other at any time. Does that make sense? . . . Can we all agree to this? . . .*

Agreement 8: Refocusing. The refocusing technique is a process-based group- management skill to help both refocus discussions/activities and re-activate the agreements when necessary. If you add other agreements to your list for your group, it is highly encouraged to still present this agreement last, as it presents the fact that the youth will at some point step out of bounds of the agreements, and this is the method you as the facilitator will use to either reactivate the agreements or get back on track. The basis of this technique, when the group is off-track, for example, and talking over one another, is to gently remind the group to "please refocus and take a breath." This MUST be done in a nonjudgmental, nonaggressive tone, and, therefore, rests on the facilitator's ability to be mindful to his or her own internal experience with nonreactivity. One can easily get decentered and announce "PLEASE REFOCUS AND TAKE A BREATH" in a harsh tone that conveys a command rather than a gentle request. Use the talking points and example script to present and discuss this agreement, and remember to practice mindful speech when employing this technique throughout the program.

Talking Points

- We'll get off-track at times as a group, and that's normal
- The refocusing technique is a way to respectfully get back on track
- When we're off-track, I'll just simply ask everyone to settle in and take a breath
- I will never raise my voice or have a harsh tone
- I will always speak to you respectfully

Example Script

***Facilitator:** Okay, the final agreement is one of the most important ones. We all know that, even though we agreed to these agreements, we will at times step outside their bounds. Sometimes we'll talk over each other and not speak skillfully. Sometimes we'll be off-track laughing when we're supposed to be doing something else. That's just normal because we're human beings.*

What's important that is that we have a built in method that is respectful of everyone for getting back on track and for re-activating the agreements when we step out of their bounds. We like to call it the "refocusing" technique. That is, when we're all laughing and off-track, or if everyone is talking over each other, I'll gently say, "let's refocus and take a breath." Or "can we all settle in and take a breath." I will NEVER raise my voice. I will ALWAYS speak with skillfulness and dignity to you. This is just the way we'll get back on track when we're off-track. Is that okay with everyone? It's important we all agree.

What makes this practice actually work is the ability of the facilitator to employ it without raising her or his voice. If you as facilitator get agitated or frustrated, it is not the end of the world. However, this is where your mindfulness practice is VERY important. Bring your awareness to your breath and body, take a few breaths, think of what you're about to say, and then mindfully and with intention ask the group to refocus as described above. Think of this as its own mindfulness practice that you will employ over and over again as needed.

[Note: Your agreements with your group may vary depending on setting. For example, in school- and/or community-based settings, you might have an agreement to not use cell phones or other technologies while in session. You can also ask the youth to come up with their own agreements they'd like to add.]

Wrapping Up the Agreements

At this point you will have reviewed and discussed all of the agreements with your group members. Although you will inevitably need to re-activate the agreements throughout the program (whenever a member violates an agreement), you have laid the groundwork for a therapeutic group atmosphere. It can be skillful to summarize the agreements to solidify their purpose. Use the talking points and example script below as a guide.

Talking Points

- The agreements service the purpose of building a therapeutic atmosphere
- We'll probably need to re-activate the agreements at times

Example Script

Facilitator: *So, as we have talked about for this last portion of time, the agreements serve the purpose of helping the group become cohesive, so we can be authentic and really build together. We want this hour and a half to be different from a regular class. We want it to be a place where you will eventually feel comfortable coming to because you know it will be a place to learn, to practice, and to discuss things you might not feel comfortable discussing elsewhere. Does that make sense to everyone? . . . This is why we have agreements, and not rules. It's also important to know that we'll probably bring these up throughout the program. We're all only human, so sometimes we might make mistakes and violate the agreements. And, because they're not rules, we aren't going to punish anyone for that, but we will send out a gentle reminder to stay within the bounds of the agreements for the sake of the group. Is that okay with everyone? .*

. . .

If you prefer, you can have all the youth in your group sign and date the agreement page that can be found in the handouts at the end of this session's chapter. This helps some groups stay more accountable.

[Important Note: It's imperative to understand that the agreements will need to be re-activated whenever a group participant steps outside their bounds. Thus, think of the agreements as something that could be discussed at any time throughout the curriculum, not just at the first session.]

4. Defining Mindfulness

Once you've presented and discussed the agreements, define the term *mindfulness* with the group, as it is the foundational practice of the program. We define mindfulness in a two-step process: 1) the lion mind vs. dog mind metaphor, and 2) a standard, simple definition.

Step 1: Lion Mind Vs. Dog Mind Metaphor

The lion mind vs. dog mind metaphor is an adapted metaphor from Larry Rosenberg's (1998) book, *Breath by Breath*. The metaphor compares the state of mind between a dog and a lion in relation to how a bone is perceived when waved in each of their faces. Make sure you have a meditation bell striker, pen, or pencil to mimic the holding of a bone. Use the talking points and example script below as a guide to presenting this metaphor.

Talking Points

- Ask the group what a dog would do if you waved a bone in his face and threw it 5 yards away
- Ask the group what a lion would do in the same situation
- Explain that the dog's reality is consumed by the bone, and that it, therefore, has little to no autonomy
- Explain that the lion's reality is the opposite. The lion has more choice and autonomy because the bone is viewed as a small part of reality, not the whole of reality
- Make an analogy of the bone with strong emotions
- Close by relating the *king of the jungle* metaphor with regulating the *inner jungle* of the mind and heart

Example Script

Facilitator: *Who knows what the word mindfulness means? . . . We like to start by defining mindfulness with a metaphor. This one's called the lion vs. dog mind metaphor and it will exemplify what the state of mindfulness is. Let's say that this is a bone [wave the meditation stick or pen around briefly] and let's say I'm standing in front of a dog. If I wave the bone from left to right, what do you think the dog will do? . . . Right, probably the dog's eyes will follow the bone. And let's say I threw the bone 5 yards over there to the right. What do you think the dog will do? . . . Right. 9 times out of 10, the dog is going to go after that bone. That's what dogs do. Now, let's say that, for some reason—I have no idea why I'd ever be in this situation—but let's say that, for some reason, I'm standing in front of a lion. And I wave this bone from left to right and then I throw it over there 5 yards to the right. What do you all think will happen? . . . Right. The lion could eat me. The lion might eat me. The point is that there's a fundamental difference between the states of mind of the dog and of the lion. When I wave this*

bone in the dog's face, the dog can't see anything besides the bone. When I wave it to the right, the dog's eyes go to the right. When I wave it to the left, the dog's eyes go left. When I throw it over there, the dog goes after it. The bone is the whole of the dog's reality. So if I control the bone, I control the dog's reality. But, with the lion, it's different. When I wave the bone to the left and to the right, the lion's eyes don't track the bone. They stay glued right on me. When I throw the bone 5 yards to the right, the lion doesn't move, and his or her eyes stay glued on me. I imagine that if the lion thought like a human being, he would think, "Doesn't this stupid person know that I can just eat him?" The point is that the lion isn't fooled by the bone. He can see that the bone is being held by a hand that's connected to a person. The bone isn't the whole of the lion's reality! It's just a small object within the lion's reality. And because of that, the lion has much more choice in how to respond. He could go after the bone, he could go after me, but it's his choice. That's the difference between him and the dog. The dog just reacts and has no choice. So, if you think of the bone as a metaphor for something like anger, or stress, or any strong emotion, when the bone, anger, is tossed into your reality, if you react with the dog mind, all of your reality is consumed by the anger. All you know is anger and, in turn, you become its puppet. It controls you, rather than you controlling it. But with the lion mind, you'd become aware of the anger as it arises, and your attitude would be much different. You might think, "Oh, this is anger," or, "this is what it feels like to be angry," knowing that this bone will not last forever and that you have a choice in how to respond to it. That's the lion mind, and that's why there's so much power in the practice of mindfulness. Does that make sense? . . . Good. One last question. Who is the king of the jungle? . . . That's right, the lion's the king of the jungle. So think of this group being about learning about the inner jungle of our minds and our hearts. To walk the path of mindfulness and transformation is to be the king or queen of our own inner jungles of the mind and heart. This will be the main underlying theme of this group: learning and practicing mindfulness, learning and practicing the lion mind.

Step 2: Standard Definition of Mindfulness

After presenting the lion mind metaphor, follow up with the standard definition of mindfulness with the group. We define **mindfulness** as being aware of any mental, emotional, or physical phenomena in the present moment with an attitude of acceptance. You can also use Jon Kabat Zinn's (1990) standard definition: paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, with an attitude of nonjudgment. Make sure to also discuss the differences between mindfulness meditation and informal mindfulness. Use the talking points and example script below for presenting the standard definition of mindfulness.

Talking Points

- Present conventional mindfulness definition
- Differentiate between formal mindfulness (meditation) and informal mindfulness (daily mindfulness)
- Use the weight-lifting metaphor

Example Script

***Facilitator:** Okay, good. I'm glad you all understand the lion vs. dog mind metaphor. That metaphor exemplifies the practice of mindfulness, which, as we said, is what this whole program is about. I just want to give you a more standard definition so that you can think of it*

another way, if you like. Mindfulness is the practice of being present to your mental, emotional, and physical activity. So for example we all have thoughts, experience emotions, and feel sensations. Mindfulness is about being present to those experiences—not really judging or trying to avoid them, just being present to them and watching them, sort of like you watch a TV in a somewhat dis-identified manner. That’s the practice of mindfulness. By practicing with our thoughts, emotions, and sensations like this, it gives us more choice, so we’re not reactful to them. Now, there’s a difference between mindfulness and meditation. Meditation is when you formally close your eyes and focus your awareness on a mental object, which we’ll try out in a little bit. But you don’t need to do all that to be mindful. You could be employing those concepts, being present to what arises in you without judgment, right now as you listen to these words come out of my mouth. That’s called informal or daily mindfulness, it’s where we can bring mindfulness into anything we do. Think of it like working out for your mind. When you go to the gym, you lift weights right? Oftentimes people do this to get strong. But when you do something that relies on strength, let’s say picking up a box of books and carrying them to another room, you don’t think, “let me lift some weights right now.” You just pick up the box and carry it. So mindfulness meditation is like going to the gym and lifting weights, while informal mindfulness is like utilizing that strength in our daily activities, like moving boxes. Does this make sense? . . . Does anyone have any questions about this? . . .

If anyone in the group has any questions about the definition of mindfulness, spend a few minutes in discussion prior to moving on to the next activity.

5. Meditation: Mindfulness of Deep Breathing

After defining mindfulness, facilitate the first formal meditation. This curriculum starts with mindfulness of deep breathing because it often provides youth with a here-and-now positive result of feeling calm and relaxed (Himmelstein et al., 2014). This is a simple meditation and should be taught for 3-5 minutes. This exercise is composed of two steps: 1) mindfulness of deep breathing, and 2) processing the meditation.

Step 1: Mindfulness of Deep Breathing

Use the talking points and example script below as a guide to facilitating this meditation.

Talking Points

- Instruct the youth to sit in a comfortable position
- Have the youth place one of their hands on their stomachs
- Briefly educate them on the difference between a breath into the stomach and a breath into the chest
- Invite youth to close their eyes (but don’t demand it)
- Instruct youth in the mindfulness-of-deep-breathing exercise
 - Keep awareness on breath
 - Focus on the breath filling up the stomach
 - Feel the stomach expand and contract with the hand
 - Whenever the mind wanders, bring it back to the stomach and breath

Example Script

Facilitator: *Okay, now it's time to practice some formal meditation. We've been talking about mindfulness all during the session and now we're going to formally practice it. This exercise is going to be short, only 5 minutes or so, and I'll guide you through it the whole way. I want to invite everyone to put one of their hands on their belly like this [place your hand on your belly]. Does everyone know the difference between breathing into your belly and breathing into your chest? When you breathe into your belly you fill it up like this on the inhale [show example], and when you breathe into your chest you fill your chest up with air like this [show example]. For this meditation, we're going to practice breathing into our bellies. Keep your hand on your belly for the whole meditation. It's good to sit in an upright position, so you can breathe naturally, and it's also good to close your eyes during meditation so you don't get distracted. However, if you don't feel comfortable closing your eyes, just keep them open and focused on the floor a couple feet in front of you. When I ring the bell, take a deep breath into your belly and a deep breath out and wait for further instructions.*

[Ring bell]

Breathing in, and breathing out . . . Take slow, deep breaths in, and take slow, deep breaths out . . . Feel your belly slowly filling up with air as you breathe in and slowly deflating as you breathe out . . . If your mind starts to wander off, and think of something else other than the breath, just gently redirect it back to your breathing, taking slow and deep breaths in and slow and deep breaths out . . . This is the practice: just breathing in slow and deep, and breathing out slow and deep . . . Feel the movement of your belly with your hand . . . Breathing in deep, and breathing out deep . . . The breath is like an anchor on a ship. Just as the anchor keeps the ship in place in the ocean, the breath anchors our awareness to our body, to this present moment. Breathing in deep, and breathing out deep . . . And if the mind wanders, again there's no need to get frustrated, or annoyed, or to think you're doing anything wrong. It's the nature of the mind to wander. Just gently redirect your mind back to your breathing, taking deep breaths in and deep breaths out . . . In a moment I'm going to ring the bell, and when I do I want to invite you to shift your awareness from your breathing to your ears and your hearing sense, and see if you can listen to the bell until you can't hear it any longer . . .

[Ring bell]

When you feel comfortable you can slowly open your eyes, and come out of the formal meditation, expanding your awareness from your inner world to encompass the rest of the group.

Step 2: Processing the Meditation

Once the meditation is complete process the experience for a few minutes, using the following discussion questions:

- What was it like for you during that meditation?
- How do you feel after it?
- Was it easy or hard? Why?
- Other questions?

During the above discussion present the idea that, as a group, you'll practice formally meditating for a longer period during each successive group session. That is, at every group session, you'll add an extra minute or two on until the last group, where you'll be meditating for approximately 15-20 minutes. Present this to the group and have them agree to it as the "meditation agreement" of the program. ***[IMPORTANT NOTE: Some groups will gravitate more toward formal meditation and others won't. If you feel it's appropriate to add more time to formal meditation earlier than this curriculum suggests, simply use your best judgment.]***

6. Group Poll: Learning Interests of the Youth

The final activity of the first module is to take a brief poll on what the youth may want to learn about during the course of the curriculum. It's a good way to get a pulse on where youth are in regard to the idea of recovery and drug use. Simply ask youth in the group if there's anything they'd like to learn about or take away from the program. This could include learning the effects of a specific drug on the body, drug policies, or how to combat the urge to use drugs. We've heard everything from "I want to learn how to control my urge to use drugs," to "I want to know exactly what happens in my brain when I'm high off weed," to "I want to know more about why there's more people of color who get locked up for drug use." As the participants disclose what they'd like to learn, pay close attention, because this will influence your presentation of how drugs impact brain physiology during group 6.

7. Homework and Close-Out

To finish the first group session, ask the group if anyone thinks they'd ever be comfortable teaching the meditation they have just learned. Prime the group with the idea that, at about half-way through the program, you want to start teaching them how to actually teach meditation, as a way to practice leadership but also so that they can develop skills that could be useful to down the road. Encourage the youth to practice mindfulness of deep breathing at least 2-3 times before the next session. Thank the group for their participation and end the first session.

Session 1 Handouts

Dealing with Definitions of Respect

When dealing with a youth's personal definition of respect that doesn't fall within the bounds of a therapeutic environment, it is extremely important to both honor the youth's definition and also to ask to alter it for the sake of the group. Consider the example below of (a real experience in one of our groups) a youth defining her personal definition of respect after other participants shared generally conventional definitions:

Youth Participant: *For me, respect is about fear. I gain respect by showing you that I'm stronger, better, and not to be messed with. That's how you gain respect where I'm from. That's what respect is for me.*

What should you do when a group member responds like this? How do you honor her personal definition but circumvent the fact that that particular attitude of respect probably won't contribute to a therapeutic and trusting atmosphere? What's most important in a situation like this is to honor the youth's definition but then to ask if it is okay to alter the definition solely for the purposes of the group. The example below exemplifies this:

Youth Participant: *For me, respect is about fear. I gain respect by showing you that I'm stronger, better, and not to be messed with. That's how you gain respect where I'm from. That's what respect is for me.*

Facilitator: *It really seems like you learned that way of respect based on where you're from. Is that right?*

Youth Participant: *Yeah, that's just how it is where I'm from.*

Facilitator: *Yes, and it makes sense that you learned respect that way. I'm sure it would've been dangerous to think of it any other way.*

Youth Participant: *Exactly. That's how you gotta survive where I'm from.*

Facilitator: *Thanks so much for sharing that. It seems like you've been through a lot and that definition has served in your favor. One question I have for you is, is there any reason that you feel the need to employ that definition in this circle, with the particular youth right here and now?*

Youth Participant: *What do you mean?*

Facilitator: *Well, do you feel like you need to show that your stronger and not to be messed with right here with us in this circle?*

Youth Participant: *Well, I don't know. No not really, I guess that's just what I'm used to thinking.*

Facilitator: *Yes, of course. That makes a lot of sense. And I want to be clear in that I'm not asking you to forget about your personal definition of respect; it has obviously served a necessary role for you. What I am wondering is for this 1.5 hours, just once a week, would you be willing to alter your definition, again just for this short time, to one that is more conducive to a therapeutic group like this? (NOTE: I would at this point summarize some of the other definitions from other youth)*

Youth Participant: *Yeah, I didn't think about it like that. I'll give it a try, for sure.*

What transpired in the above transcript was an interaction we had with one of our group members that turned out to be very therapeutic for her and the group. We defined respect, honored the definition she grew up with, and then asked to simply alter it ONLY for the purpose and time frame of the group. This was very feasible for her and made for the start of a relationally corrective experience (in that she was starting to learn new models of respect).

Group Agreements

I, _____ agree to the following practices while participating in this program:

- Respect
- One mic' (to not talk while others are talking)
- Skillful Speech
- Skillful Listening
- Authenticity
- Nonviolence (both physical and verbal)
- To refocus when asked to

- Other group-developed agreement: _____

Name (Print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Example Script

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[Ring bell]

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[Ring bell]

When you feel comfortable you can slowly open your eyes, and come out of the formal meditation, expanding your awareness from your inner world to encompass the rest of the group.

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