# Mindfulness for mental health carers

## 3: Mindfulness for 'keeping your cool' and working with strong emotions

### How Mindfulness can help us manage emotions and self-regulate

When things are hard you may have feelings you think you're not supposed to have. Instead of rejecting them or judging ourselves for having them, with mindfulness we open to them and acknowledge them. Then, we can work skilfully with them rather than suppressing or ignoring them. Suppressing emotions doesn't work and can result in somatisation (the emotions may manifest over time as physical symptoms, pain, health issues) or a more complex and tangled emotional reactivity.

### What if I don't like or approve of the emotion?

Acknowledging an emotion you're experiencing doesn't mean that you want it, agree with it or like it. It just means that you're willing to be honest with yourself that this is how you are feeling right now. Emotions are like messengers knocking on the door. They give us valuable information about how we're experiencing something in that moment. If we acknowledge and become curious about the message, they tend to move on quickly. Acknowledging emotions also helps us bear the upset of the situation a little more easily. Mindfulness helps us to: firstly not to shoot the messenger, secondly to maintain an open curiosity and receive the message and thirdly to hold ourselves steady and soothe (regulate) the emotion.

### 3 steps for mindfulness with strong emotions

1. Acknowledge the emotion
2. Turn towards the emotion, sensations, thoughts and behaviours with a kind, curiosity rather than rejecting or judging them
3. Meet the emotion with an inner resource such as:
   - Understanding, warmth, care
   - Kind reassuring words
   - Kind soothing gestures or movements

> **Why acknowledge unwanted emotions?**
> So we can soothe the emotions, receive the information they bring us, move through them and move on.

## Keeping your cool = your 'window of tolerance'

When we are starting to lose our cool, we feel uncomfortable and feel either:

- Agitated, irritable, anxious, edgy
- numbing, shutting down, becoming sluggish, disconnecting, losing track of time

Mindfulness can help us to pick up on signs and physical sensations that tell us we're starting to 'lose our cool'. Then we can do something to help ourselves come back into the 'window of tolerance' where we operate at our best. In the window of tolerance we feel calm and alert and able to cope with the challenges life brings.

## Reflection

What kinds of things help to bring you back into your window of tolerance?

TIP: Try the 2 mindfulness exercises below, or take a walk, a shower, pat the dog, spend some time in the garden or talking with a friend.

### S.T.O.P - The Breathing Pause Practice

S top what you are doing

T ake a few deep slow breaths

O pen and become curious about present moment:

- Sensations
- Emotions
- Thoughts
- Behaviours and Impulses to act

P roceed: having check in and gathered this information, CHOOSE how you want to approach this moment or situation.

### Soothing and Settling Emotions Practice

- Settle into the body and the breath
- Take a few deeper slower breaths
- Tune into your body and as you do, repeat the suggested phrases in words that are meaningful to you:

*'I notice right now that I'm feeling _____'*
*(name the emotions eg: stressed, upset)*

*'It feels like _____'*
*(describe the sensations that go with this, eg: tightness in my chest, heaviness in the pit of my stomach)*

*'It's OK to be feeling like this'*

*'Other people feel like this too'*

*Your words of reassurance'*

**Words of reassurance**
What is it that you most need to hear?
What does the kindest wisest part of you say?
What would the you in a year's time want the current you to know?
Eg: 'This will pass'
'You're doing the best you can'
'May I have a sense of ease or calm'
'May I be a good friend to myself'

**TIP**  Do one of these exercises every day for the next week.

**WHY?** Whatever we practice we get good at! Practicing regularly now will mean you're more likely to remember it when you need it!