

# Mind Matters<sup>2.0</sup>

*A Map for Thriving*

## TOOLKIT FOR EMPOWERMENT

By: Carolyn Curtis, Ph.D. and Charles Stolzenbach, L.M.F.T

- **Instructor's Manual** with 12 lessons
- Engaging **Participant Journal**
- Reproducible **master copies** of handouts
- **PowerPoint Slides** with guiding notes for the instructor
- **Enriching activities:** coloring, videos, music, dancing, and more
- Online **Bonus Materials**

People who have experienced trauma and toxic stress often have difficulty managing life, school, parenting, and relationships. ***Mind Matters*** offers strategies to support the healing process to help individuals understand the effects of adversity and teaches them the skills that increases their potential. As participants learn the skills and strategies in ***Mind Matters***, they say, “It’s not what is wrong with me. It’s what happened to me.”

Mind Matters’ 12, one-hour group lessons teach participants ages 12 and up skills that build resilience and increase hope. With practical, hands-on activities based on current neuroscience and psychology, people are taught methods to take charge of their emotions and improve their states of mind. They learn to address their physical, emotional, relational, and mental health needs.

The skills taught in ***Mind Matters*** are designed to be practiced over a lifetime. The curriculum is not group therapy or psychotherapy. Rather, it is for paraprofessionals to use with groups or individuals to inspire, uplift, and set people on the journey of healing as they cultivate deeper resilience.

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# Mind Matters<sup>2.0</sup>

*A Map for Thriving*

## Instructor's Kit \$395

### MM2

- Instructor's Manual with 12 lesson plans, including all handouts
- Toolkit cards with breath exercises, self-soothing skills, self-awareness skills for easy use
- PowerPoint slides for every lesson with embedded videos
- Access to online Bonus Materials to supplement the lessons
- 1 sample Participant Journal

## 10 Participant Journals \$110

### MM2-J10

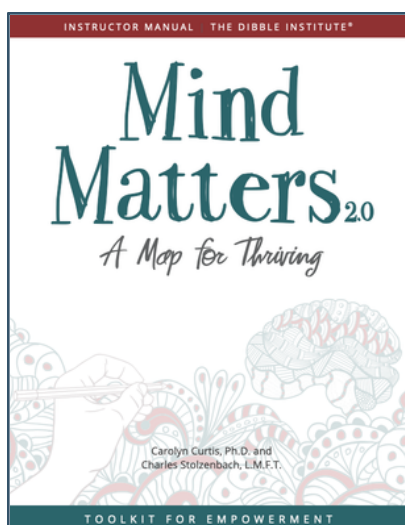
2-9 packs - \$105

10-99 packs - \$100

100 + packs - \$85

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# Introduction

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*Mind Matters 2.0* is a practical, compassionate program for people who have experienced ongoing stress or trauma and want a path toward healing, resilience, and lasting change. When stress becomes chronic, it can disrupt emotional regulation, strain relationships, and make it harder to move toward personal goals. *Mind Matters 2.0* gives participants both a map for that journey and the tools to begin taking steady steps forward.

Grounded in current neuroscience and trauma-informed care, the program teaches practical, hands-on skills for calming the nervous system, increasing self-awareness, building resilience, and developing self-compassion. This updated edition reflects what has been learned in recent years about trauma, healing, and the brain, while preserving the strengths of the original curriculum and expanding it with new evidence-based tools and approaches.

Across 12 lessons, participants learn skills they can use right away. The curriculum is intentionally gentle and skill based. Rather than asking participants to share or relive painful experiences, *Mind Matters 2.0* helps them build capacity step by step, beginning with self-soothing and self-awareness before moving into deeper reflection and growth. Each lesson centers on key concepts and equips participants with practical ways to create change in everyday life from learning how to start a relationship, to setting goals, developing a support system, acknowledging values and learning how to create a balanced lifestyle.

*Mind Matters 2.0* also recognizes that healing is not shaped only by adversity. Positive Childhood Experiences, such as feeling safe, supported, valued, and connected, can help buffer the effects of stress and strengthen long-term well-being. By helping participants build healthy relationships, develop emotional skills, and experience encouragement and connection in the learning process, the program supports the kinds of positive experiences that foster hope, resilience, and growth.

Originally developed for youth and young adults, especially those affected by trauma, *Mind Matters* has proven effective with people of all ages in a wide range of settings. It works well in traditional and alternative schools, community-based organizations, justice settings, workforce education programs, family resource centers, churches, group homes, foster care, and independent living programs.

The effects of childhood trauma and toxic stress can touch every part of a person's life. Yet healing is possible. With the right tools, supportive relationships, and meaningful practice, people can grow stronger, wiser, and more hopeful. *Mind Matters 2.0* offers a research-informed, deeply practical path forward for participants ages 12 and up.

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

## Why We Do This

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Emotional regulation is central to *Mind Matters*, as teaching self-soothing helps participants manage emotions, reduce anxiety, and navigate social challenges triggered by trauma or daily stress. Skills such as **Focused Breathing, Calming Corners**, and the **5-4-3-2-1 Skill** calm the nervous system and build mindfulness habits that strengthen problem-solving, relationships, and performance. The Marshmallow Test illustrates the value of emotional control and delayed gratification, which are linked to positive long-term outcomes, including academic success and healthier relationships. Because techniques like Focused Breathing and the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill are simple and portable, regular practice helps participants develop strong self-regulation that supports personal well-being, connection, and achievement in school, work, and life.

## Participant Objectives

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1. Explain how self-soothing calms the nervous system and supports resilience and long-term success.
2. Distinguish responding vs. reacting, using the Marshmallow Test as a touchpoint.
3. Demonstrate Focused Breathing, Calming Corners, and the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill; use coloring as an optional self-soothing method.
4. Practice mindful phone habits by delaying notification checks.
5. Apply at least two self-soothing strategies during class activities.

## Lesson 1 at a Glance (60 minutes)

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### WHAT IS MIND MATTERS?

- 1.1 Marshmallow Test and Activity (5 minutes)
- 1.2 Introduction to *Mind Matters* (15 minutes)

### SELF-SOOTHING SKILLS

- 1.3 Focused Breathing (9 minutes)
- 1.4 Calming Corners (5 minutes)
- 1.5 5-4-3-2-1 Skill (5 minutes)
- 1.6 Coloring (1 minute)
- 1.7 Cell Phone Challenge, WWW Tool, and Doomscrolling (10 minutes)

### SUMMARY, PRACTICE PLAN, AND FINAL SKILL EXERCISE (10 MINUTES)

## Materials Checklist

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### RESOURCES

- Lesson 1 PowerPoint ([DibbleInstitute.org/mm2](https://dibbleinstitute.org/mm2))
- Toolkit (found in the pocket of this Instructor's Manual)

### VIDEOS

- *The Marshmallow Test* (2:08), linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- (Optional) *Mind Matters Minutes: Focused Breathing, Calming Corners, 5-4-3-2-1 Practice*
- (Optional) *Me & My Emotions: Focused Breathing*

### MATERIALS

- (Optional) Bag of marshmallows (one marshmallow per participant)
- Flipchart/board and markers (for group values/rules)
- Crayons/coloring pencils/markers

**PARTICIPANT JOURNAL:** Lesson 1 (pgs. 3-7)

# Lesson 1 *Self-Soothing*

## Preparation

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- Read through the entire lesson.
- Review Lesson 1 PowerPoint and the Participant Journal.
- Watch *The Marshmallow Test* video, linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint.
- Identify, review, and practice the Lesson 1 self-soothing skills in the Toolkit (1.a Focused Breathing, 1.b Calming Corners, 1.c 5-4-3-2-1 Skill) so you're ready to model any of them.
- Review and print Online Material: Safety and Support Resources handout.

## 1.1 Marshmallow Test and Activity | 5 minutes

### Preparation Check

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- \_\_\_ Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ View: *The Marshmallow Test* video, linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ (Optional) Marshmallows (one for each participant)

### Rationale

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To introduce foundational tools aimed at decreasing reactivity, fostering self-regulation, and nurturing resilience, we begin with the Marshmallow Study.<sup>1</sup> This study, chosen for its humorous yet insightful nature, sets a lighthearted tone for the class while serving as a cornerstone for the curriculum. It emphasizes the importance of reducing reactivity and enhancing self-soothing abilities. The study's findings reveal that individuals who demonstrate the ability to delay gratification tend to excel in various aspects of life. They often perform better academically, enjoy healthier relationships, achieve greater financial success, and exhibit overall life satisfaction.<sup>2,3</sup>

Encouragingly, our capacity to delay gratification and address challenging tasks can be developed regardless of our starting point. This improvement aligns with the principles of a positive growth mindset.<sup>4</sup>

Creating a safe space for participants in the *Mind Matters* program is essential for fostering trust, openness, and effective learning. Research indicates that a supportive and secure environment enhances group cohesion and participation.<sup>5</sup> Establishing clear guidelines around respect, confidentiality, safety, active participation, and mandated reporting ensures that participants feel valued and protected.<sup>6</sup>

Introducing structured group norms not only promotes a positive and inclusive atmosphere but also facilitates better outcomes for participants. Studies have shown that when group members adhere to agreed-upon guidelines, there is a significant increase in perceived support and a decrease in anxiety and stress levels.<sup>7</sup> By fostering an environment in which participants can share their experiences openly and honestly, the program encourages deeper self-reflection and more meaningful connections among group members.

**Let's GO!**

### **THE MARSHMALLOW TEST VIDEO**

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*Before we start our first session, I want to show you this little clip called The Marshmallow Test. Make sure you're watching because we'll be talking about this in just a few minutes. Enjoy!*

Show *The Marshmallow Test* video linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint. Enjoy the laughter and giggles. (Optional) Pass out marshmallows so that each participant has one to hold while watching the video or until the end of class.



## 1.2 Introduction to Mind Matters | 15 minutes

### Preparation Check

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- Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- Flipchart/board and markers (for group values/rules)
- Participant Journal
- Online Material: Safety and Support Resources handout

### Safety Note

Safety is Important in *Mind Matters*. When discussing emotions and thoughts, create a safe, supportive environment, including the following:

1. **Participation should be voluntary.** Never call on anyone to share their emotions unless they are willing. Respect each person's choice to engage at their own comfort level.
2. **Acknowledge discomfort as growth.** Encourage participants to recognize that feeling uncomfortable can be a natural part of learning and growth. Reassure them that it's okay to feel uneasy and that these feelings can lead to self-improvement.
3. **Provide a supportive environment.** Offer gentle encouragement while emphasizing that sharing emotions is a personal decision. Provide alternatives—such as journaling or private reflection—for those who prefer not to share publicly.

**Important:** In this setting, personal self-disclosure of traumatic events is not encouraged. If a participant chooses to disclose, offer support without probing for details. For example, if someone mentions being molested, do not ask for further elaboration. Discussing such narratives can unintentionally re-traumatize individuals who may lack sufficient coping skills and can also trigger distressing memories for others. This educational environment focuses on skill acquisition; sharing traumatic experiences is more appropriate for therapeutic settings, not this setting. If a participant misunderstands and feels compelled to disclose personal experiences, use this three-step approach:

1. **Support:** Acknowledge their experience with empathy. For example: "You have had— or are having— a very difficult experience."
2. **Empathize:** Validate their feelings and the significance of the moment. For example: "That experience has come up for you, and I can see it has brought discomfort and distress. You want to talk about it right now."

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

3. **Time & Place:** Clarify that the current setting is not the best place to discuss it and encourage further support. For example: "This isn't the best time or place to talk about it. Please speak with me after class." Provide printed Online Material: **Safety and Support Resources** handout.

This approach helps create a space where everyone can safely explore and express their emotions and thoughts, leading to deeper self-awareness and better emotional regulation.

## Let's GO!

### INTRODUCTION TO MIND MATTERS

**Instructor Note:** Begin by introducing yourself and your co-leader (if you have one) to model the format and level of sharing you'd like participants to use. Adjust the amount of sharing based on group size and available time, but ensure that each person shares at least their name and one personal detail, such as an interest, favorite place, or hobby. Starting this way sets a positive tone, creates a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, and encourages early connection among group members.

*Throughout this class, we hope you'll enjoy the experience, learn more about yourself, and gain new insights into the people around you.*

### Class Guidelines for a Productive and Enjoyable Experience

*Before we begin, let's review a few basics to help our sessions run smoothly.* Please adjust these guidelines as needed so they best suit your implementation settings and circumstances.

- **Class Schedule:** *Our sessions will take place on [insert dates and times].*
- **Restrooms:** *Restrooms are located [insert directions].*
- **Attendance and Punctuality:** *Please arrive on time and be ready to start when class begins.*
- **Breaks and Snacks:** *We will take breaks at [insert times].* (Note whether snacks will be provided.)

*We want you to have fun, and we also need enough structure to create a great learning environment. To get everyone's attention, I'll use* (explain the attention-getting activity that you have selected. Some possible examples are in the Instructor Guidance section at the beginning of the manual.)

### Create Values for Our Group

*Before starting this class, we need to make sure our time together is a safe and supportive place for all. We want everyone to feel comfortable, respected, and able to share their thoughts and feelings without fear.*

**Ask: What are the values or rules we need to help us achieve that?**

Write their suggestions on a flipchart. Be sure the following five items are included in their brainstorm:

1. It is important to know that this is **not therapy**. We will be learning coping skills. Therefore, this is NOT the time to share negative life experiences. If you happen to get triggered or have intrusive thoughts that bother you, write down a couple of words to remind yourself of what you want to talk to me about after class.
2. **Respect:** Listen attentively when others are speaking, don't interrupt, and value each person's unique perspective and contributions.



3. **Confidentiality:** Don't share personal information or experiences discussed in the group outside of this space without explicit permission from the individual(s) involved.
4. **Safety:** Refrain from judgment, criticism, or negative language; instead, offer empathy, understanding, and encouragement.
5. **Active Participation:** Share your thoughts, feelings, and experiences openly and honestly while also respecting the comfort levels of others.

**Instructor Note:** Informally mention mandated reporting. *We acknowledge that certain situations may require mandated reporting in accordance with our program's policies and procedures. If anyone discloses information that raises concerns about their safety or the safety of others, we will follow the appropriate reporting protocols outlined by our program.*

*By following these guidelines for class, let's create an environment where we can all thrive and grow in confidence, empowered by the tools we are learning!*

## A Map for Thriving

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*So, what will we be learning in this class? Imagine a reality show where you're dropped into the wilderness.*

**Ask: Would you want training first, skills, insights, and tools, so you can thrive and not just survive?**

*Of course. Well, all of us have been dropped into the wilderness called life. The Mind Matters program is like a map for thriving: a short training that helps you navigate the terrain with more confidence and choice.*

*The practical tools in each lesson can help you navigate your life and handle challenges. That's how you move from surviving to thriving on the journey of life. To be clear though, thriving doesn't mean the journey is going to be perfect or easy. It means you're better equipped, so you can better handle the journey, even when it's hard. I'm excited to share this Map for Thriving with you, so you feel better equipped to handle what the wilderness of life has already thrown your way, and more prepared for the journey ahead.*

## Deciding to Delay

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*Okay, now let's go back to the marshmallow video that I showed you when we first started our session today.*

**Ask: What did everyone think? What did you notice or what stood out to you?**

*In the marshmallow video, waiting for a marshmallow is really hard. Studies show that being successful often comes from doing tough things and being able to wait. Think about athletes, scientists, doctors, parents, and everyday heroes—they all face challenges and work through them. Here is what the researchers found: Kids who could wait did better in school, made more money, and were more likely to have long-term, satisfying relationships.*

*Deciding to delay doing something can seem challenging but ultimately rewarding. Deciding to go for it can also be difficult and bring amazing results. In a research study, Dr. David Yaeger and his team let teens choose between doing math problems or relaxing online. Those who were taught about the value of doing hard things were more likely to do the math instead of relaxing online. And those who understood the why behind doing hard things learned better, stuck with the task longer, and earned better grades. The takeaway here is that when youth, or really anyone, has a strong WHY they are more likely to persevere through and grow from things that are hard.*

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

*“Never give up” is a phrase to hold onto during hard moments. What feels hard at first can become easier with practice—just like learning to tie your shoes. It takes persistence and the courage to work through worry. Over time, confidence grows as you do hard things one step at a time. That is why the skills in Mind Matters matter: they help you stay steady, keep trying, and move forward even when life feels challenging.*

**Ask: Can you think of people or characters in movies who choose to do difficult things? What were the long-term benefits of their hard work and sacrifices?**

## Waiting and You

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*Let’s explore the challenges of waiting and making hard choices. Waiting can be tough, especially when you’re feeling hungry, angry, lonely, or tired (HALT). These feelings can weaken self-control, making hard tasks—and patience—more difficult.*

*There are moments in life when quick decisions are made without much thought about the consequences.*

**Ask: Can you recall a time when you wished you had made a different choice or waited before acting? Conversely, can you think of a time when you waited and did the hard thing?**

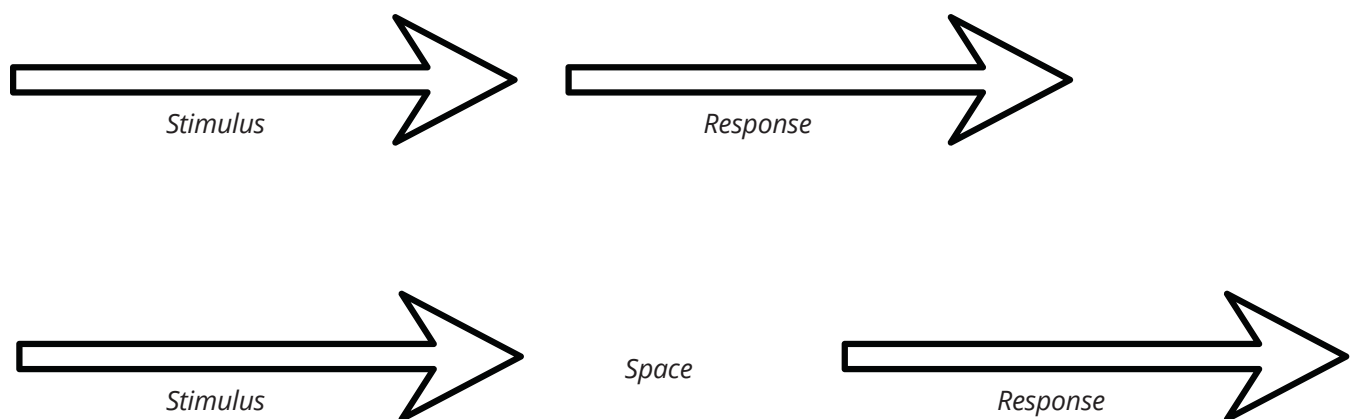
## People Can Learn to Wait and Choose to Do Hard Things

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*As we talk about doing hard things and learning to wait, it might sound like people who struggle are headed for a harder life. That is not true. The good news is that these skills can be strengthened at any time. Many of us want the life of people who wait patiently and tackle challenges. These individuals are often perceived as smarter, earn more money, have lasting relationships, and are happier.*

*As Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, said, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.” In simple terms, we all have the power to decide how we react to life’s events, and this choice can greatly affect our lives.*

*Here is an image to illustrate this idea:*



*In the space between stimulus and response, individuals can choose how to respond rather than react, leading to different outcomes.*

**Ask: So, what’s the difference between reacting and responding?**



*When we react, our emotions take over: we act hastily, without much consideration. It's like when someone pushes our buttons and suddenly our heart races, our breathing quickens, and we might even feel sick to our stomachs. Often, we end up doing or saying things we later regret. It's a common experience, but with these exercises, we can learn to pause and craft a thoughtful response instead of merely reacting. When we pause, we slow down, think things through, seek other people's opinions and ideas, and realize that we have a choice. We're more likely to act from logic rather than pure emotion. We refer to this as "making space."*

*Here is a real-life example of this lesson: Imagine your brain as a bottle of soda. When we shake it, just as when something frustrates or angers us, it gets all stirred up. Now, pretend the cap on the bottle is your mouth.*

**Ask:** *Does it seem like a good idea to open your mouth when your brain is all riled up like this? What if we give our brains some space to settle down, like letting the soda bottle sit for a couple of hours? When we do that, what comes out of our mouth is more likely to be helpful rather than making things worse.*

*So, taking a moment to pause and think before we act or speak can make a big difference. It's like giving the soda time to settle so that, instead of causing a mess, we can enjoy something positive, like a refreshing sip of soda.*

**With Mind Matters, we hope to expand that space between stimulus and response.**

*We're starting a journey to learn skills that, with practice, can help us wait and create a valuable pause so that we can respond instead of react. The goal of this class is to help you become someone who can wait, take a moment to think, and do hard things.*

## **Your Mind Matters Journal**

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*In this class, you will have a Participant Journal. This journal serves two purposes: first, it is a reminder of the skills, worksheets, and a full summary of the information from each lesson. Second, it is your space to practice the skills you are learning in class and to track your progress. It's a guide and toolkit for putting the lessons of Mind Matters into action and making them part of your everyday life.*

*At the beginning of each lesson is the **Lesson Review**. The Lesson Review is your chance to look back at the skills you tried during the week and see how they worked for you. What was easy? What was hard? How does practice affect your thoughts, feelings, or actions?*

*By writing down your experience, you can track your progress and recognize the small wins that build over time.*

*Each lesson concludes with the **Practice Plan**. Here in your journal, the Practice Plan is designed to help you actually use the skills we have been learning. Each week, you will pick one or two skills to focus on and write down how you plan to practice them. You may change what you are practicing from week to week.*

*This is a time for discovery and wonder. Try things out in your life. Do not worry about being perfect; this is about small steps that add up. The more you practice, the more these skills become a natural part of your life.*

*Mind Matters is about giving you the skills and self-control you need to go after what you want. We want you to feel confident and empowered to make the choices that matter most to you.*

**Instructor Note:** *If you plan to collect and store their journals each day, we recommend you implement the following protocol: To maintain privacy and anonymity, we won't be putting names on the journals. Instead, each of you will write the last four digits of your favorite phone number on the back of your journal. In the unlikely event that two participants end up with the same four digits, have both of them choose a different set of digits. At the end of each session, I'll collect and securely store them so they're always available when you need them. And don't worry—at the end of the program, you'll get your journal back to take home and continue using.*

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

## 1.3 Focused Breathing | 9 minutes

### Preparation Check

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- \_\_\_ Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ Participant Journal: **Focused Breathing** (pg. 3)
- \_\_\_ Toolkit Exercise: 1.a Focused Breathing
- \_\_\_ Video: *How Important is Breathing at the Plate?* (54 seconds), linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ (Optional) *Mind Matters Minutes: Focused Breathing, Me & My Emotions: Focused Breathing Exercise*

### Rationale

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This section helps participants understand the importance of staying calm during challenges, a core part of resilience, and equips them with tools to regulate their nervous system. These skills are reinforced throughout the course, with lessons beginning and ending with a self-soothing exercise when time allows. Focused Breathing is the first self-soothing technique taught, and its benefits are well documented: regular practice increases calmness, reduces reactivity, and enhances openness and empathy.<sup>9</sup> Because the human brain evolved as an “anticipation machine” focused on detecting threats, individuals with numerous adverse childhood experiences often develop an overactive threat detection system.<sup>10</sup> In modern life, this constant scanning can create chronic stress that eventually affects mental and physical health.<sup>11</sup> Focused Breathing interrupts this cycle by providing a predictable, calming rhythm that signals safety to the brain, offering a simple but powerful tool for self-soothing and emotional regulation.<sup>12</sup>

### Safety Note

At times, individuals may feel discomfort when hearing deep breathing, possibly triggering past memories or sensations. If you notice someone struggling, offer them permission to not participate. If your setting has a window, suggest they focus on watching the clouds or the rustling of the tree leaves. Alternatively, they may prefer taking a break outside the room. It’s crucial that anyone who wants to excuse themselves can do so. Later, they’ll have numerous other self-soothing methods to explore. Additionally, always ensure you have permission before touching someone.

**Instructor Note:** When introducing the *Mind Matters* exercises, participants may have questions about whether some of the exercises are forms of meditation. It’s important to address these concerns, as some individuals may have negative associations with meditation or confuse these activities with religious practices. The *Mind Matters* exercises are rooted in brain science and are not tied to any specific religion or philosophy. For instance, consider Focused Breathing. This exercise emphasizes breath control to enhance brain function. Research shows that deep breathing has a calming effect: it signals the body to slow stress-producing hormones and triggers a relaxation response.<sup>12</sup> Focused Breathing shares similarities with techniques used by athletes to improve performance. For example, basketball players often take deep breaths before shooting free throws, and public speakers use breathwork to calm nerves before going on stage. These are natural methods for self-calming before facing life’s challenges. Anyone can benefit from Focused Breathing because it is a practical exercise grounded in research and science.



Let's GO!

## FOCUSED BREATHING

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*Before we begin, please know that the skills and exercises we will be sharing are designed to enhance personal awareness. This may be a new experience for some of you. It's normal to feel a bit uncomfortable, especially when trying something new or different. If these feelings become intense, take a moment to pause, sit quietly, and use the self-soothing skills you will learn to help you relax. Rejoin the class when you are calmer. Remember, you can always talk with me after class if you need more support.*

**Instructor Note:** As an instructor, you may need to provide extra encouragement for those who are new to this activity. Walk around the room to ensure everyone is grasping the technique correctly. Since this may be an entirely new experience for many, be prepared to demonstrate it repeatedly, possibly on an individual basis, until everyone feels comfortable.

*In Mind Matters, there are several breathing exercises for you to try. The purpose of these exercises is to calm your body and quiet your mind. Consistent practice of breathwork has been shown to positively impact brain growth. This technique helps you think and evaluate situations rather than react impulsively. Focused Breathing is a powerful yet simple technique that can transform your physical and mental well-being. It's a tool used by top athletes and Navy SEALs to handle stress, stay focused, and boost performance.*

*Imagine having this special tool in your tool belt to help you manage stress, sharpen your focus, and boost your energy—all through breathing. This breathing pattern helps manage stress by regulating heart rate and calming the nervous system.*

*Most people take breathing for granted, but intentional breathing can have immediate, profound effects on your well-being. Even top athletes, like Giancarlo Stanton, a Major League Baseball player, use specific breathing techniques to maintain peak condition. Here's a quick video analyzing his breathing (the link to this video is in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint).*

*Sounds cool, right? Let's learn how to do it!*

### Lead Focused Breathing Exercise

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*Let's give Focused Breathing a try. First, we'll start by having you place your hands behind your neck and lace your fingers together. Lean back a little and take a breath. Notice your belly rising and falling with each breath. Do this a couple of times to get started.*

*Let me guide you through Focused Breathing. These instructions are on page 3 of your journal.*

**Instructor Note:** You can follow the Focused Breathing (1.a) script in the Toolkit. Feel free to copy it for ease of use. You can also use *Mind Matters Minutes: Focused Breathing Exercise*, or *Me & My Emotions: Focused Breathing Exercise*.

### Process Focused Breathing

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*Take a moment to notice how you feel, what your body sensations are, and what thoughts you have.*

**Ask:** *Now that you have tried it, what did you think of Focused Breathing? It's important to notice how you felt during your first attempt. How do you think you could benefit from doing Focused Breathing in your own life?*

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

**Instructor Note:** Research shows these benefits. Make sure they are included in your discussion:

- **Stress reduction:** Activates the body's relaxation response, lowering stress-hormone levels
- **Anxiety management:** Promotes calmness and distracts from anxious thoughts
- **Improved focus:** Enhances mindfulness and concentration
- **Physical performance:** Reduces muscle tension and enhances endurance

## Recognizing Individual Preferences

*Not all exercises work for everyone. This is just the first one. Mind Matters includes several breathing techniques, so find the one or ones that suit you best. Not all positions work for everyone. Some people find that closing their eyes helps, while others prefer to keep them open. Some feel more comfortable lying down, sitting in a chair, or even walking slowly. If you find the exercise uncomfortable, feel free to pause and sit quietly. If you still feel uneasy or anxious after stopping, talk to me after class so we can make adjustments.*

*Just as lifting weights builds muscle, practicing this activity helps build new brain pathways. Give Focused Breathing a try and see how it can make a difference for you. Your well-being is our priority, and we are here to help you find the techniques that work best for you.*

## 1.4 Calming Corners | 5 minutes

### Preparation Check

- \_\_\_ Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ Participant Journal: **Calming Corners** (pg. 3)
- \_\_\_ Toolkit Exercise: 1.b Calming Corners
- \_\_\_ (Optional) Video: *Peripheral Vision*, linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ (Optional) Video: *Mind Matters Minutes: Peripheral Vision*, linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint

### Rationale

We are going to call the peripheral vision exercise Calming Corners for easier use. It is a quick and effective way to calm down and focus. This self-soothing exercise can be performed anywhere and requires only a short period of time. The Calming Corners skill aids in calming the Vagus Nerve, which is responsible for triggering the fight-flight-freeze response. Unlike verbal methods that can sometimes increase reactivity, non-verbal techniques like Calming Corners directly engage the nervous system, promoting relaxation.<sup>13,14,15</sup>

Research supports the effectiveness of these exercises in reducing stress. Regular practice, especially for those prone to stress, can be beneficial. Learners are encouraged to practice such exercises every ten minutes for optimal results. Some educational institutions have adopted these techniques to help students de-escalate after conflicts, enabling them to discuss incidents calmly.<sup>16</sup>

### Safety Note

Some individuals may feel eye discomfort during this exercise. Limit the repetitions to a few, and hold each for ten seconds. As always, be accepting and understanding if someone finds it challenging.



Let's GO!

## CALMING CORNERS

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*The Calming Corners exercise aims to activate the calming part of the Vagus Nerve. It is a simple technique that can be used whenever you are feeling stressed or worried. Even people in Special Forces use it to improve their focus. Another example is the movie Sully, with Tom Hanks, that told the story of Captain Sullenberger, who landed his plane on the Hudson River in 2009. He used Calming Corners to help him focus during that stressful event. It is subtle, too; no one will know you are doing it. Just pay attention to what is happening at the edges of your vision.*

*Before we start the Calming Corners exercise, let me explain the Vagus Nerve and why it matters. The Vagus Nerve is like a “wanderer” in our body, running from the brain down to the abdomen. It helps control things like our heart rate, breathing, and digestion. It calms us down by sending signals to slow our heart rate and relax our body. When we use our eyes in the Calming Corners technique, it activates the Vagus Nerve, helping us relax and reduce stress. Let's go ahead and give the tool a try!*

### Lead Calming Corners

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**Instructor Note:** Read the Calming Corners (1.b) instructions in the Toolkit. You can also use the *Mind Matters Minutes: Peripheral Vision* video or the *Peripheral Vision* YouTube video linked in the Lesson 1 PowerPoint.

### Process Calming Corners

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**Ask:** *How was your experience? Were you able to maintain focus on one point while also being aware of your surroundings through your peripheral vision?*

**Regardless of your initial experience, what can enhance this ability?** *That is right—practice.*

*You can practice this skill almost anytime you are feeling stressed. Imagine using Calming Corners at work, school, on city streets, or at the mall. This technique can be employed discreetly, allowing you to use it anywhere and at any time, whether it is just before a test, during a job interview, or while waiting in line. The **Calming Corners** instructions are located on page 3 of your journal.*

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

## 15 5-4-3-2-1 Skill | 5 minutes

### Preparation Check

- \_\_\_ Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ Participant Journal: **5-4-3-2-1 Skill** (pg. 4)
- \_\_\_ Toolkit Exercise: 1.c 5-4-3-2-1 Skill
- \_\_\_ (Optional) *Mind Matters Minutes: 5-4-3-2-1 Skill*

### Rationale

The 5-4-3-2-1 Skill is a widely used sensory-based method aimed at anchoring individuals in the present moment during periods of emotional distress or dissociation. Grounding strategies such as this—involving sensory recall—have been shown to help individuals reorient to the “here and now” and step away from overwhelming internal experiences,<sup>17</sup> promoting emotional stabilization and reducing the intensity of flashbacks or intrusive memories.<sup>18</sup> This technique aligns with broader findings that sensory-based mindfulness and grounding exercises effectively support emotion regulation, reduce anxiety, and enhance attentional control.<sup>19</sup> By guiding individuals to focus sequentially on what they can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste, the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill provides a rapid and accessible strategy to restore calm and presence during overwhelming moments.

### Let's GO!

#### 5-4-3-2-1 SKILL

*The 5-4-3-2-1 Skill is a helpful way to calm yourself and stay focused. It does two things: first, it makes you more aware of the present moment by using your five senses (what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch); second, it helps when you feel your legs shaking, experience tremors, have shallow breathing from flashbacks, or feel overwhelmed, distracted, or anxious. You can use it anywhere, whether you are at school, at work, at home, or traveling.*

### Lead the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill

**Instructor Note:** Use the instructions for the 1.c 5-4-3-2-1 Skill located in the Toolkit. Feel free to copy these instructions for this lesson. You can also use the *Mind Matters Minutes: 5-4-3-2-1 Skill* video to teach this skill.

### Process the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill

**Ask:** *When you used the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill today, what did you notice? What did you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste? How did paying attention to these things affect your mood? How might you use this skill again to help manage stress in your daily life?*

*People have used the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill in many ways. Residents of a group home reported using it when conflicts arose or when the environment became disorganized. It starts when one person calls out “5,” prompting the rest of the group to follow with “4-3-2-1.” By the end, the entire group felt calmer.*

*Another use is noticing that every day has beautiful moments if you take a moment to notice them. The 5-4-3-2-1 Skill helps you do this. Whether it is sunlight through trees, a cool breeze, kids playing, or people holding hands, there is wonder all around. Pause to appreciate these moments and the feelings they bring. Doing this daily can help you handle stress better. The **5-4-3-2-1 Skill** instructions are located on page 4 of your journal.*



## 1.6 Coloring | 1 minute

### Preparation Check

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- \_\_\_ Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ Participant Journal: **Coloring** (pg. 5)
- \_\_\_ Materials: Crayons/coloring pencils/markers

### Rationale

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Coloring activities can significantly reduce stress by engaging the mind in a focused, repetitive activity, promoting relaxation akin to meditation. Structured coloring—especially of geometric patterns like mandalas—has been shown to lower anxiety.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, art-making through distraction, such as creative coloring, has been found to improve mood more effectively than expressive venting.<sup>21</sup> Beyond mood regulation, mindfulness practices that cultivate present-moment awareness have demonstrated benefits for cognitive function, including enhanced attention, working memory, and executive control.<sup>22</sup>

### Let's GO!

#### COLORING

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*Coloring can be a great way to relax and feel calm, much like listening to your favorite music or taking a deep breath. When you color, your brain gets a break from stressful thoughts, which helps reduce anxiety—it's like giving your mind a mini vacation. Coloring also helps you focus on one thing at a time, which can make it easier to remember information and manage your emotions. By spending some time coloring, you are not only having fun but also training your brain to be more focused and relaxed. You will notice that your Participant Journal has places for you to color or doodle, including page 5. There will be no specific time in class devoted to this activity. If you are feeling a bit bothered by what we are discussing, you may color.*

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

## 1.7 Cell Phone Challenge, WWW Tool, and Doomscrolling | 10 minutes

### Preparation Check

\_\_\_\_ Lesson 1 PowerPoint

\_\_\_\_ Participant Journal: **WWW Tool** (pg. 6), **6-Step Plan to Stop Doomscrolling** (pg. 6)

### Rationale

The Cell Phone Challenge addresses digital dependency and its impact on mental health, attention, and overall well-being. Constant notifications can lead to compulsive checking, disrupted focus, and increased stress, while delaying responses helps build patience and mindfulness. Research shows that reducing smartphone interruptions improves concentration and lowers stress.<sup>23</sup> Incorporating the “WWW” approach (“What For, Why Now, and What Else?”), adapted from Catherine Price’s book *How to Break Up With Your Phone*,<sup>24</sup> further strengthens the challenge by encouraging intentional, reflective phone use. Studies indicate that mindful smartphone habits reduce anxiety and increase satisfaction.<sup>25</sup> Together, the Cell Phone Challenge and WWW method help individuals develop healthier digital behaviors, improve emotional regulation, and cultivate a more balanced, engaged relationship with technology.

Let’s GO!

### CELL PHONE CHALLENGE & WWW TOOL

**Ask: Be honest—when your phone buzzes with a notification, how many of you have to check it right away? Maybe even during class?**

*Most of us do it without even thinking. Every time you look at your phone, it can take up to 15 minutes to get your full focus back on what you were doing. That’s a big chunk of time! Imagine how much that adds up over a day. This simple habit has real consequences for how much we get done and how present we are in the moment.*

*This is your opportunity to practice taking control and challenge yourself with the Cell Phone Challenge.*

**Ask: What if you could delay that urge to check your phone when you get a notification? How long do you think you could wait?**

*I challenge you to count how many seconds you can wait before checking a text or notification and see if you can gradually increase that time. Pay attention to what you are doing when you can wait versus when you cannot.*

**Ask: Does it make a difference if you are bored, tired, hungry, or feeling content, happy, or engaged in something meaningful?**



## WWW Tool

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**Ask: Have you ever planned to spend just ten minutes on your phone but then noticed that an hour has passed?**

*The truth is, app developers make their products addictive on purpose, which can lead to spending too much time on your phone and gives these companies greater income from advertising. Unfortunately, not much has been done to fix this problem, so it's up to us to take control.*

*The WWW Tool empowers you to take control of your phone use, rather than letting your smartphone and its apps control you. This tool was adapted from Catherine Price's book *How to Break Up With Your Phone*. WWW was coined to mean "What For, Why Now, and What Else?" This approach encourages users to question their smartphone usage by asking themselves:*

- **What For:** What is the purpose of using the phone right now?
- **Why Now:** Why do I feel the need to use my phone at this moment?
- **What Else:** Is there something else I could be doing instead?

*This method is designed to help you take back control of how you use your smartphone by becoming more aware of your habits. The **WWW Tool** is located on page 6 of your Participant Journal. WWW helps you break free from the habit of constantly checking your phone.*

*By recognizing common triggers, such as boredom, awkward situations, idle moments, or waiting for a message, you can break the cycle and build healthier habits. Instead of letting your phone control you, you can use it in a way that truly benefits you.*

## Doomscrolling

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**Ask: Have you ever picked up your phone for "just a minute" and suddenly it's 30 minutes later—and you feel more tense than before?**

*Doomscrolling is endlessly scrolling through heavy news or posts that ramps up stress and anxiety.*

**Ask: If you could reclaim the time you spend mindlessly scrolling or checking your phone, what would you choose to do instead to enrich your life or bring you closer to your goals?**

*The good news: you can break that loop with a few simple moves. Open your journals to page 6. You'll see a **6-Step Plan to Stop Doomscrolling**. We'll walk through it now.*

*The point is, by disconnecting with intention and being mindful of how we reconnect, we can turn our phones into tools that serve us, not just the companies behind them.*

# Lesson 1 Self-Soothing

## Summary, Practice Plan, and Final Skill Exercise | 10 minutes

### Preparation Check

- \_\_\_ Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- \_\_\_ Participant Journal: **Lesson 1 Practice Plan** (pg. 7)
- \_\_\_ Toolkit Exercises: 1.a Focused Breathing, 1.b Calming Corners, 1.c 5-4-3-2-1 Skill
- \_\_\_ Review free cell phone apps ([calm.com](http://calm.com), [smilingmind.com.au](http://smilingmind.com.au)) to track practice

Let's GO!

### SUMMARY, PRACTICE PLAN, AND FINAL SKILL EXERCISE

**Ask: Ever find yourself thinking, "I'm not good enough," or "I can't do this"?**

*It is normal to have these thoughts. Many of us try to push them away with words, but our nervous system communicates through feelings, not words. That is why self-soothing exercises like Focused Breathing and Calming Corners are so important; they speak the language of the nervous system and help us calm down effectively. Negative thinking is normal. Positive thinking is learned and comes with practice. By practicing these techniques regularly, you can build patience, resilience, and better emotional control. Just as the Marshmallow Test showed the value of waiting, these exercises help train your brain to handle stress better over time.*

**Ask: Which exercises work best for you?**

*Start a habit of calming yourself daily to build resilience. You will not see results overnight, but with consistent practice, you will get better at managing stress. Try different methods and see what fits you best, whether it is Focused Breathing, Calming Corners, or another technique, and track your progress in your Participant Journal.*

*Enjoy the journey; this is your path to a calmer, stronger life. Embrace yourself as a growing learner, exploring with curiosity and delight, and marveling at the wonders of your life. Remember, life is a marathon, not a sprint—pace yourself with manageable steps so you can sustain your efforts and reach the finish line stronger and more fulfilled.*

### Practice Plan

*In your journal on page 7 is your **Lesson 1 Practice Plan** for using the skills learned in this lesson. There are also free cell phone apps that can help you increase the quantity and quality of your exercises and track your practice (examples: [calm.com](http://calm.com), and [smilingmind.com.au](http://smilingmind.com.au)).*

**Instructor Note:** If possible, download an app on your phone and show students how it works. If time permits, ask them to share their plan with the person sitting next to them.

### Final Skill Exercise

*We think these skills are really important, so we're going to make an effort to start and finish each class with a calming exercise. Let's close our journals for a minute and join in.*

**Instructor Note:** Depending on how much time you have, you can choose from Focused Breathing (1.a), Calming Corners (1.b), or the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill (1.c).

*Thanks for being here today, and I can't wait for our next class! Remember that with practice, we can get better at waiting, be willing to do hard things, and improve our lives.*

# Toolkit 1.a Focused Breathing

## Why?

The purpose of this exercise is to calm the body and quiet the mind. Studies have shown that consistent practice of breath work changes the brain, giving you more time to think about what it is you want to do instead of immediately reacting.

## Instructions

*I will now talk you through the Focused Breathing. At times, I will talk. Other times, I'll stop talking so that you can focus on your breath.*

- 1. Sit quietly with your feet flat on the floor and your back straight. Place your hands just below your rib cage with your thumbs resting on the bottom rib. Focus your full attention on your breathing. You may find it easier to stand the first three to four times you practice.*
- 2. As you inhale, breathe in slowly through your nose with your mouth closed. Feel your hands rise as you inhale. Count backward: 5-4. Exhale slowly through your nose. Notice your hands moving inward toward the spine as you exhale. Count backward: 3-2-1.*
- 3. Observe your body breathing in, filling the lungs. Then, notice your body breathing out. Notice the subtle movements in the chest and diaphragm.*
- 4. We will continue for 4 minutes. (Pause your talking as needed.)*
- 5. Inhale slowly through your nose; don't rush or force the air; feel your belly rise.*
- 6. Exhale slowly through your mouth; feel your belly fall.*
- 7. Continue to breathe. (Pause your talking as needed.)*
- 8. Inhale and count backward: 5-4. Exhale 3-2-1*
- 9. Two minutes have passed and we have two more. (Repeat instructions as needed.)*
- 10. One minute remaining and we will be finished.*
- 11. You can now start to move out of this Focused Breathing. You can wiggle your fingers and toes. Open your eyes (if they are closed) and breathe naturally.*

# Toolkit 1.b Calming Corners

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## Why?

This quick, easy exercise calms your nervous system and can be used any time you feel worry or stress. Calming Corners helps you pay attention to what is happening at the edges of your field of vision.

## Instructions

1. *Get comfortable and find a point on the wall straight in front of you, slightly above eye level. Softly focus on that point, taking in all its details.*
2. *Place your hands about 12 inches from your face, index fingers pointing up and palms facing each other.*
3. *Keeping your gaze on the point, slowly move your hands outward. Stop when you can see your fingers wiggling but not when they're still. This is your far peripheral vision.*
4. *Continue looking at the same point without moving your eyes. Notice what's on either side of that point. Gradually widen your field of vision until you're aware of what you can see out of the corners of your eyes.*
5. *Count to 10, then lower your hands.*
6. *Repeat the exercise without using your hands.*

# Toolkit 1.c 5-4-3-2-1 Skill

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## Why?

The 5-4-3-2-1 Skill is another self-soothing method. It is particularly effective if you are overwhelmed and have lost track of the present.

## Instructions

1. **Find five objects you can see.** Relax and focus on what you see. These could be buildings, windows, pictures, or clouds. Consider their shape, colors; consider how they relate to each other; are they geometric, symmetric?
2. **Listen for four different sounds.** Now do the same with hearing. You can close your eyes if you're in a place where that would be appropriate. This might be the quiet hum of an air conditioner, the roaring wheels of a train, the distant noise of traffic, or birds chirping high above.
3. **Now focus on three body sensations.** This might be the pressure of the chair against your back, the tight fit of your shoes against your feet, the soft stream of air through your hair, or the warmth of the sun on your face.
4. **Now focus on two smells around you.** It might be the remains of the perfume you used when leaving home, a snack, or freshly cut grass.
5. **And finally focus on 1 taste in your mouth.**

# Participant Journal Lesson 1 *Self-Soothing*

## Focused Breathing

### *Why?*

The purpose of this exercise is to calm the body and quiet the mind. Studies have shown that consistent practice of breath work changes the brain, giving you more time to think about what it is you want to do instead of immediately reacting.

### *How:*

1. Sit quietly with your feet flat on the floor and your back straight. Place your hands just below your rib cage with your thumbs resting on the bottom rib. Focus your full attention on your breathing. You may find it easier to stand the first three to four times you practice.
2. As you inhale, breathe in slowly through your nose with your mouth closed. Feel your hands rise as you inhale. Count backward: 5-4. Exhale slowly through your nose. Notice your hands moving inward toward the spine as you exhale. Count backward: 3-2-1.
3. Observe your body breathing in, filling the lungs. Then, notice your body breathing out. Notice the subtle movements in the chest and diaphragm.

Practice Focused Breathing four to five times for five minutes throughout the day, or whenever you feel any stress or tension anywhere in your body.

## Calming Corners

### *Why?*

This quick, easy exercise calms your nervous system and can be used any time you feel worry or stress. Calming Corners helps you pay attention to what is happening at the edges of your field of vision.

### *How:*

1. Get comfortable and find a point on the wall straight in front of you, slightly above eye level. Softly focus on that point, taking in all its details.
2. Place your hands about 12 inches from your face, index fingers pointing up and palms facing each other.
3. Keeping your gaze on the point, slowly move your hands outward. Stop when you can see your fingers wiggling but not when they're still. This is your far peripheral vision.
4. Continue looking at the same point **without moving your eyes**. Notice what's on either side of that point. Gradually widen your field of vision until you're aware of what you can see out of the corners of your eyes.
5. Count to 10, then lower your hands.
6. Repeat the exercise without using your hands.

# Participant Journal Lesson 1 *Self-Soothing*

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## 5-4-3-2-1 Skill

### *Why?*

The 5-4-3-2-1 Skill is another self-soothing method. It is particularly effective when you feel overwhelmed or disconnected from the present moment.

### *How:*

To begin, notice **five objects** you can see. Then, listen for **four different sounds**. Next, focus on **three places** where something is touching your body. Notice **two smells** around you, and finally, focus on **one taste** you've experienced. After completing the exercise, write down what you noticed in each category.

What you see:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What you hear:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is touching your body:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What you smell:

- 1.
- 2.

What you taste:

- 1.

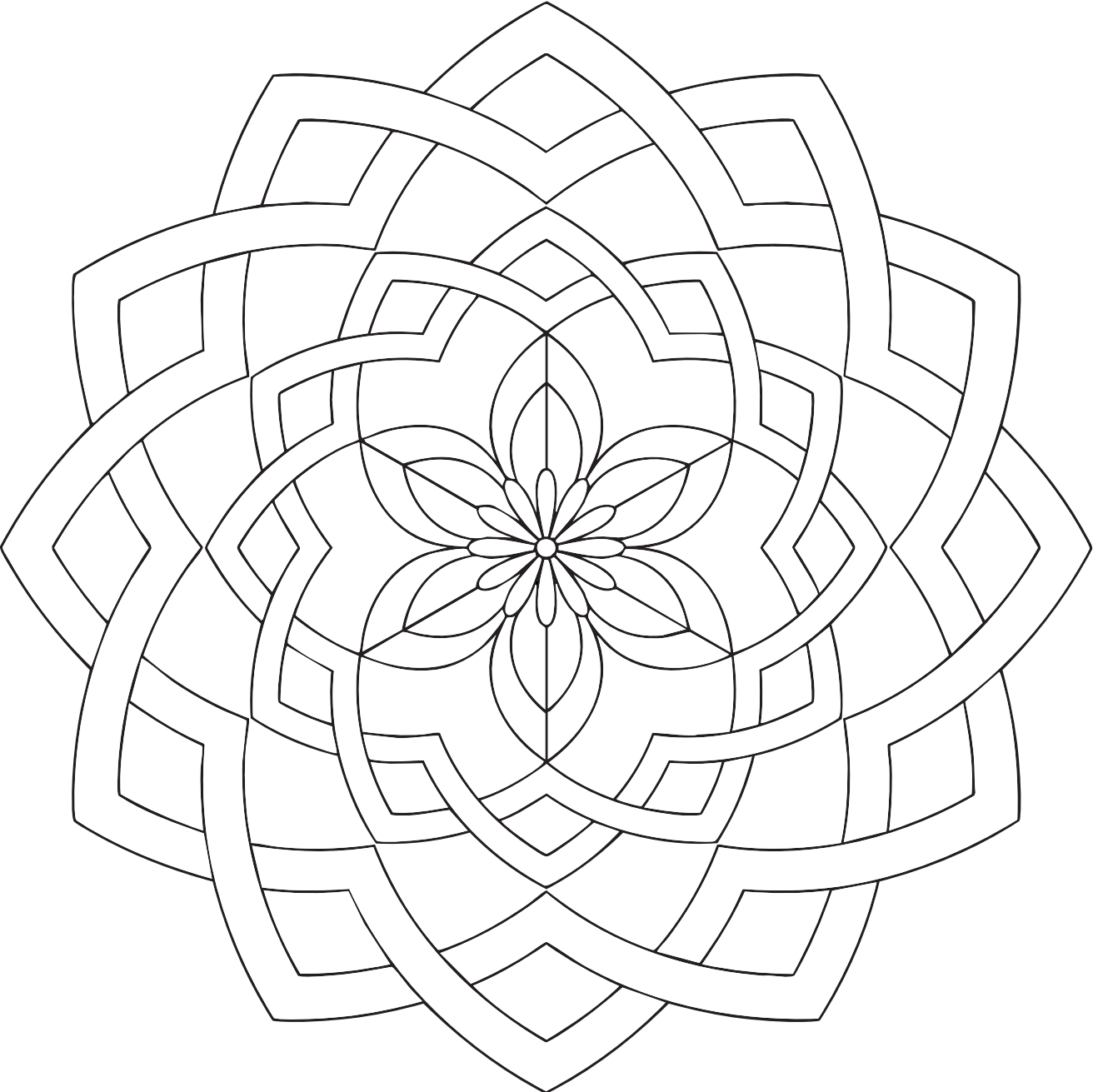
Anxiety often tells us stories about what might happen, while our senses tell us what is happening.

*Now that you have tuned in to your physical reality, what is one "what if" worry you can officially let go of for the next ten minutes because it isn't actually in the room with you?*



# Coloring

Coloring is another self-soothing method. Use colored pencils or crayons to color the image.



*Why is it important to take time for self-soothing activities?*

# Participant Journal Lesson 1 *Self-Soothing*

## WWW Tool

*How:*

Use these three questions to help you take control of your phone.

<b>What For?</b> <i>What is the purpose of using the phone right now?</i>
<b>Why Now?</b> <i>Why do I feel the need to use my phone at this moment?</i>
<b>What Else?</b> <i>Is there something else I could be doing instead?</i>

Adapted from Catherine Price's *How to Break Up With Your Phone*, © 2018. All rights reserved.

## 6-Step Plan to Stop Doomscrolling

Doomscrolling is the habit of endlessly scrolling through negative or distressing news or social media content, which often leads to increased anxiety or stress.

*How:*

1. **Name It When It Happens:** Pause and say, "I'm doomscrolling." Just noticing it helps break the habit loop.
2. **Set a Time Limit:** Use your phone's timer or screen time settings to limit social media or news apps to 10–15 minutes at a time.
3. **Change the Cue:** If you usually scroll when bored or anxious, try a different action: take a short walk, do deep breathing, or grab a book.
4. **Move Your Apps:** Make doomscrolling harder by moving social media or news apps off your home screen, or delete them altogether for a break.
5. **Create a Wind-Down Ritual:** At night, put your phone across the room and replace scrolling with something calming, such as journaling, stretching, reading, or doing breathing exercises.
6. **Ask:** *If you reclaimed time spent mindlessly scrolling, what would you do instead to enrich your life or move toward your goals?*



# Lesson 1 Practice Plan: Self-Soothing

## Why?

The Practice Plan helps you use the skills you are learning in real life. Each week, choose one or two skills to try. You can switch them as needed. Do not worry about being perfect; small steps add up. The more you practice, the more natural these skills will feel, and the more they will make a difference for you. For the full list of *Mind Matters* skills, see pages 55-56.

## How:

Today you learned self-soothing techniques to lower stress. Use the chart below to make a Practice Plan with one or more of the self-soothing skills. Decide how often you'll practice each week, when and where you'll practice, and what reminders you'll use, such as an alarm, a sticky note, or a friend.

We also discussed waiting and doing hard things by using your phone as a tool for building focus and self-control. Ask yourself how long you can wait before replying to a text. Try finishing what you're doing before opening the next text message.

New skills to practice	How many times weekly?	When/where will you practice?	How will you remember to practice?
Focused Breathing			
Calming Corners			
5-4-3-2-1 Skill			
WWW Tool			
Stop Doomscrolling			

**Cell Phone Challenge:** After a notification, I can wait \_\_\_\_ seconds/minutes before checking.

**WWW Tool:** Fill this chart out a couple of times this week.

What For?	Why Now?	What Else?

*What difference did you notice after using the WWW Tool during the week?*