

EXERCISE: Opening Up to Emotions

Let's deliberately practice a different way of being with emotion that you usually end up struggling with. Think for a moment about a painful emotion or feeling that you often struggle with. It could be sadness, anxiety, loneliness or anger, or any other feeling that you get unhelpfully caught up with. Now, think back to a time when you felt that feeling. As this may be your first practice, we'd suggest starting easy. Begin with a time when the feeling was present but not overwhelming. Read the following instructions and then go back and practice the exercise:

Sitting in a comfortable position, close your eyes or focus them on the ground on a point in front of you. Then, picture yourself in the situation in which you felt that difficult feeling. Imagine looking out from your own eyes, remembering what the situation was like. Where were you? What time of day was it? Who was there with you? Just spend a few moments really getting absorbed in the situation.

Now, we're going to ask you to do something that perhaps, ordinarily, you wouldn't do. See if you can direct your attention inwards and notice how you are feeling. Spend some time observing this feeling, with a sense of curiosity. If and when judgements about this feeling arise, see if for now, you can set them aside. Notice urges to change this feeling, and see if you can set those aside too – just for now.

Notice exactly where in your body this feeling is located. It may be in just one place or it may be in several. See if you can imagine now this feeling as an object. How big is it? What kind of texture does it have? Is it smooth or rough? Heavy or light? Does it have a colour? Does it have an edge or is it diffuse? Notice if it moves or fluctuates. If it had a sound, what would it be? Spend a few moments imagining this feeling as an object. See if you can imagine it in as much detail as possible.

Now, imagine that this object moves outside of your body and sits hovering in front of you. Get a sense of it. Examine it with curiosity as it floats there. See if you can rotate it around to view it from another perspective. Keep in mind that your job is not to get rid of it or change this object. Just for now, all you need to do is bring a sense of awareness to it and allow it to be there.

Lastly now, bring the object back inside you, where it belongs. See if you can welcome it back into your body – perhaps as you would an old friend – with a sense of openness and acceptance. Allow this part of your experience to be in your body, just for this moment.