Relationship Mindfulness Skills

CREATING A MORE VALIDATING FAMILY ENVIRONMENT FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES

What is a VALIDATING FAMILY ENVIRONMENT?

▲ Legitimizes family members’ experiences, especially private ones (emotions, wants and desires, thoughts, beliefs, sensations)
▲ Validates those experiences EVEN when they are quite discrepant from other people’s experiences
▲ Accepts: tolerates/appreciates differences; does not try to change or control for arbitrary reasons, or for conformity, or for its own sake
▲ Does not use aversive control strategies (or, very rarely)
▲ Communicates acceptance and caring. It is not enough to care. You need to communicate that caring
▲ Facilitates problem solving, problem management, and coping
▲ De-escalates invalidating behavior

Exercise #1
List how many characteristics of a validating environment fit your family.

Relationship Mindfulness

Relationship Mindfulness is being mindful of another person, or your current conversation (or transaction) with that other person. This means paying attention to him or her, getting and staying balanced, keeping in mind your relationship and that anything you do will have an effect on him or her and on your relationship. Relationship Mindfulness is being present in the relationship with awareness, empathy, and without judgments.

Finding Balance in Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Me</th>
<th>You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My needs/wants</td>
<td>Your needs/wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic/Emotion</td>
<td>Emotion/Logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My goals</td>
<td>Your goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My values</td>
<td>Your values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My problems</td>
<td>Your problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My happiness</td>
<td>Your happiness</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The key to Relationship Mindfulness is to be **nonjudgmental**. This means to see things just as they are, descriptively and without inference, interpretation, or judgment. No blame. No adjectives. Judgments toward others, or ourselves, are toxic to our own well-being and toxic to our relationships. They get us more escalated. Try not to judge the situation, event, and/or person, or assess things as good or bad. No judgments, no blame, “Just the facts.”

**Healthy Ways to Reduce Judgments**

**Relationship Mindfulness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>How</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observe:</strong> pay attention, just notice other person.</td>
<td><strong>Non-judgmentally:</strong> let go of the “shoulds,” right/wrong, good/bad</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Describe:</strong> Attach words to the experience</td>
<td><strong>One-mindfully:</strong> pay attention to the other person or to the relationship in the here and now</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participate:</strong> Involve yourself in the moment, in your experience.</td>
<td><strong>Effectively:</strong> Remember that you love this person even if you don’t like what he or she is doing</td>
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**Exercise #2**

*Using Relationship Mindfulness Skills: pick one interaction to monitor how the skills help you to reduce judgments. Notice if there is any change when you maintain a nonjudgmental attitude during the interaction.*

**Emotion Management**

1. Be aware of rising emotional arousal (using mindfulness)
2. Recognize and label the PRIMAR Y emotion accurately (Anger is often *not* the primary emotion. More typically sadness and fear are the primary ones.)
3. “Treat” the primary emotion:
   - ✓ by acceptance of the situation or other person, or
   - ✓ change the situation, or your reaction to it
4. Open your mind before you open your mouth: Either avoid saying anything, go on with other activities, or engage the other person constructively on a different topic.
Steps in Identifying Emotions

1. **Events**: a) external: other people, events; b) internal: thoughts, feelings
2. Note your **vulnerabilities** to emotion dysregulation in the moment (If I am tired, sick, hungry, this will amplify my emotional reaction).
3. **Interpretation** (judgment?) of the event {You can either make malignant or benign interpretations. Try to give the benefit of the doubt. Make no interpretations if you can manage that.}
4. Prior experiences/history {Is this the first time this has happened?}
5. **Brain** reactions
6. **Facial expressions**
7. **Body posture** {Relaxed and leaning forward shows attentive listening}
8. Emotion labeling (accurate or inaccurate)

*Exercise #3. During the week go through the steps of Identifying Emotions when you are experiencing something that is emotional. Bring in an example.*

Primary and Secondary Emotions

▲ **Primary emotion**: initial response to a particular event; is normative, typically adaptive, effective.
▲ **Secondary emotion(s)**: emotional response to a primary emotion. It is an emotional response to another emotion. This is usually problematic.
▲ Fear → anger, or guilt → anger (or other primary/secondary reactions)
▲ Goal or strategy: identify and manage (honor) the primary emotion; refocus away from secondary emotions, manage as needed.

Secondary emotions happen in two ways

1. Repeated conditioning:

   ![Primary](Trigger) → (triggers) **Secondary**

2. Mediated by judgments:

   - Fear
   - Sadness
   - Frustration
   - Shame
   - Anger
   - Judgment
   - Jealousy

*Exercise #4a Practice observing increasing anger and interrupting it.
Exercise #4b. What emotion you were missing when focusing on anger?
Decrease Emotional Vulnerability

1. Take care of physical illness
2. Eat well
3. Get enough sleep
4. Exercise
5. Build a sense of competency, coping, mastery

If you are healthier (physically and emotionally), you will react better.
Give yourself the oxygen first.

Decrease Emotional Reactivity

▲ Let go of strong anger (& judgments) in important relationships
▲ Use relationship mindfulness to sort out emotions, needs, wants and
to interrupt your negative reactions, anger and toxic responses.
▲ Be mindful of your relationship and your goals, what’s in your heart
▲ Be mindful of appropriate and effective timing of discussions
▲ When tired, sick, hungry or upset, remember that emotional
vulnerabilities are high (could be for you or your BPD loved one)
▲ Increase mindfulness of pleasant things that your family member
has done for you, you have done for your family member, or
you do together.

Exercise #5
Come up with the best strategy for you to decrease your emotional
reactivity, and identify any underlying judgments, anger, or resentment.
Don’t be the “self-righteous martyr” because underlying this kind of
response are judgments, anger and resentment.

States of Mind:

➢ Emotion Mind: our emotions determine our behaviors; we react,
often trying to escape emotional pain, regardless of logical long term
implications or consequences

➢ Rational Mind: logic prevails, regardless of our emotions/wants, and
we may appear cool or dispassionate; we employ logic even to our
detriment; “shoulds” (and even judgments) dominate.

Continued
Wise Mind: This is the goal, a synthesis of reason and emotion, a balance of Emotion Mind with Rational Mind, excluding neither. This balanced state can provide you with a feeling of peace and a place of relative control. You CAN be rational and emotional at the same time. These do not have to be opposites.

What is the right mix: think of bath water...you know what you like, a combination of logic and emotion.

You can get to “Wise Mind” by following the steps of mindfulness: observe, describe, and participate; do so non-judgmentally, do one thing at a time, while focusing on being effective.

Exercise #6 What State of Mind do you function in primarily? What particular situations bring you there?
Exercise #7 Be aware of when you are in Wise Mind. What helps you get there?

Opposite Action (Linehan) (can show Linehan’s video)

1. When we feel angry, we can act opposite to our action urge (attacking) by being genuinely kind (or gently avoiding the other).
2. When we feel afraid of something, and we can approach what we fear (rather than running away), which typically decreases the fear.
3. When we feel ashamed about something, and we are open about what we did in a matter-of-fact way (rather than hiding), the shame lessens.
4. When we feel sad (shut down), we can get active, engage.

Summary
Relationship Mindfulness identifies the need to consider the following:

1. Be aware of longer-term relationship goals and desires (e.g., as a parent, partner, child). Try to avoid focusing on the short term
2. Experience yourself in the context of the other and the other in the context of you...be part of the relationship; engage
3. Act from this context effectively (rather than judgments, anger, etc.)

Exercise #8
a) Observe your Relationship Mindfulness with a non-family member: observe, describe and be non-judgmental
b) Practice Relationship Mindfulness once with your family member during the week using observe, describe, participate, non-judgmentally, one-mindedly, and effectively. Report on how it went.
In both exercises, notice your own reactions and describe them.
c) Practice noticing when you disagree with another person. d) Note what happens when you let go of judgments and notice your new reaction.
### Practice Exercises

1. List how many characteristics of a validating environment fit your family.

2. Using the Relationship Mindfulness Skills, pick one interaction and use the “How” skills to help to reduce judgments.

3. During the week go through the Steps of Identifying Emotions when you are experiencing something that is emotional. a) Practice observing increasing anger and interrupting it. b) Look for what emotion you were missing when focusing on anger.

4. Come up with the best strategy for you to decrease your emotional reactivity.

5. What State of Mind do you function in primarily? What particular situations bring you there?

6. Be aware of when you are in Wise Mind. What helps you get there?

7. a) Observe your Relationship Mindfulness with a non family member: observe, describe, and participate - non-judgmentally.

   b) Practice Relationship Mindfulness at least once during the week with your family member using observe, describe, participate, non-judgmentally, one-mindfully, and effectively.

   In both exercises, notice your own reactions and describe them:

   c) Practice noticing when you disagree with another person.

   d) Note what happens when you let go of judgments and notice your new reaction.