



Developing an Action Plan for Self Care

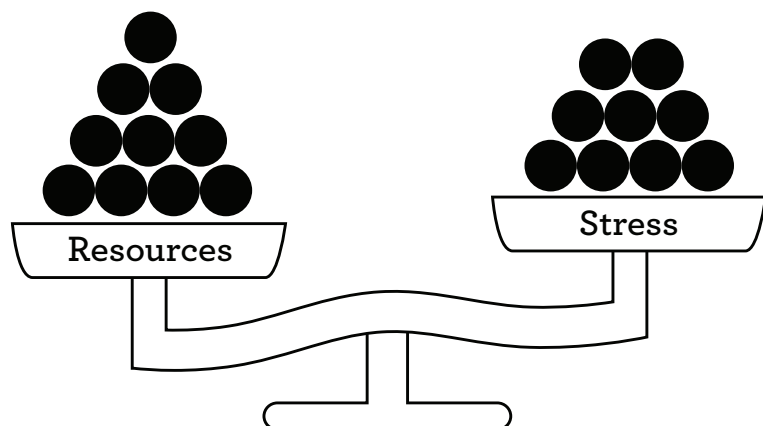
Theme: We can use mindful awareness to develop an action plan to stay well and manage our stress levels within our window of tolerance.

Mindfulness practice can support in the maintenance of our emotional well-being. Just the ability to stop and pay attention to how we are feeling enables us to see what needs to be taken care of in our lives. We can create an action plan to maintain our well-being through engaging in nourishing activities. We can also develop a safety plan for when we are feeling overwhelmed and unsafe.

Understanding and Balancing Stress

All human beings experience stress as a survival response to what is threatening. The threats can be real ones in the present environment or perceived threats, created in our own minds. Stress is beneficial when it keeps us alive in the face of danger. It can also keep us motivated and engaged with our lives. Stress becomes a problem when it is chronic and overwhelming. In these situations it can be difficult to recover from the effects of stress because there are not enough resources in our lives to maintain a healthy resilience.

In times when stress outweighs our resources, it is important to take action to bring them into balance. We can intentionally add more resources to our daily lives as a way to offset the stress we are experiencing. Resources could include mindfulness practice, grounding skills, and engaging in activities that we find nourishing.



“Stress is like spice — in the right proportion it enhances the flavor of a dish. Too little produces a bland, dull meal; too much may choke you.”

— DONALD TUBESING

What you do affects how you feel.

Taking Mindful Action in Daily Life

Think about the kinds of activities you do in a typical day. Some of those activities may feel nourishing and give you energy, whereas others may feel depleting and draining. To maintain a balanced life, we need to decrease the amount of depleting activities, as best we can, and increase the nourishing ones.

Make a list of different kinds of activities that give you energy and feel fulfilling. These may be activities that you are currently doing and would like to do more of, or new activities you would like to bring into your life. Use the categories to help you create a list:

Resources for Wellness in Daily Life

Social	
Creative	
Physical	
Material	
Intellectual	
Emotional	
Nature	
Spiritual	

Take Action, Even When you Don't Feel Like It

Consider an action plan to include at least one of the activities you listed above in your daily life – *even if you do not feel like it*. Remember that when people are suffering from depression, they lack the motivation to feel like doing something. If anxiety is the problem, then fear may get in the way. Regardless of what prevents the desire to do something, people do feel better once they engage in a nourishing activity, rather than abstain from it.

Survival Resources:

Our Life Preserver when Outside our Window of Tolerance

Other times, when stress or life challenges pull us off course, we may need to draw on other resources to help us get back to stable ground – more like a life preserver.

Make a list of strategies that you can use when you need a life preserver to feel emotionally safe. These may include grounding practices from session one or some of the formal or informal mindfulness practices you learned in the group. Use these ideas as a safety plan for when you get caught outside your window of tolerance.

Self Kindness & Compassion as a Resource

Loving kindness is the extension of compassion, caring and friendliness to all beings, including ourselves. Even though it can be most difficult to offer ourselves compassion, it is the most important. We can learn to cultivate self compassion as a resource to maintain emotional balance through meditations that focus on an opening of the heart. Practiced over time, this kind of meditation improves our sense of well being. Research shows positive changes in the body and brain, including better concentration, improved immune function, and an increase in oxytocin, the “feel good” hormone (Germer, 2009).

Thank you for participating in MAST.

May you be happy and healthy.
May you feel safe and supported.
May you live within your river of well being.”

Germer, C. (2009). *The mindful path to self compassion: Freeing yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions*. Guilford Press: New York.

“Having compassion starts and ends with having compassion for all those unwanted parts of ourselves. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.”
— PEMA CHODRON

Meditation to try:
Self Compassion Meditation
(track 7)

Web Resources:
mindfulnesscompassion.org
www.smilingmind.com.au

