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**Mindfulness-Based Gratitude:
Curriculum Guide for an Online Six-Week Course**

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Abstract

This is a two-part paper. The first part of the paper presents research on how both mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) and gratitude interventions (GIs) offer a promising way to help mitigate the physiological and psychological effects caused by chronic stress by increasing one's overall sense of well-being (Keng et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2010). Individually, mindfulness and gratitude practices may enhance positive effect and well-being, which suggest that combining both practices may further increase positive outcomes (Hicks et al., 2017) due to their complementary nature. However, research should be approached with caution as there are many methodological limitations that need to be addressed to provide more accurate results in future study (Wood et al., 2010). The second part of this paper presents a *Curriculum Guide for Facilitators: An Online Six-Week Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Course* which was developed for participants to learn how to integrate mindfulness-based gratitude practices into their daily lives as a means to potentially decrease stress while increasing one's overall sense of well-being.

Keywords: mindfulness, mindfulness-based interventions, mindfulness-based programs, gratitude, gratitude interventions, mindfulness-based gratitude programs, well-being, stress

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Mindfulness-Based Gratitude: Curriculum Guide for an Online Six-Week Course

Over the last few years, the world has experienced some Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) times (Jah, 2020). With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, threats of nuclear war and cyber-attacks, terrorism, mass shootings, rising inflation, supply chain disruptions, political and socioeconomical polarization, racial and social injustice, violence and crime, natural disasters, and climate change to name a few, these VUCA times have increased individual and collective stress in the lives of Americans (American Psychological Association [APA], 2022b).

According to the 2022 Harris Poll Stress in America™ survey conducted for the American Psychological Association (APA, 2022b), the top three causes for stress in adults living in the United States were the increase in daily living costs due to inflation (87%), supply chain disruptions (81%), and global uncertainty (81%). 76% of the surveyed population reported having physiological and psychological symptoms related to stress which included headache and fatigue as well as signs of nervousness, anxiety, depression, and sadness. These VUCA times have been mentally, physically, and emotionally strenuous for a large population of Americans and many have become accustomed to living in a chronic state of stress (APA, 2022b).

Both mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) (Keng et al., 2011; Ballantyne et al., 2021; Querstret et al., 2020) and gratitude interventions (GIs) (Wood et al., 2010) offer a promising way to help mitigate the physiological and psychological effects caused by chronic stress by increasing one's overall sense of well-being. Although MBIs and GIs show reductions in stress and increases in well-being (Keng et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2010), there are few programs which combine both approaches. This Literature Review will discuss how combining both approaches as a mindfulness-based gratitude program may further enhance a person's overall sense of well-being and thus decrease symptoms associated with chronic stress. The following sections in this paper will discuss the physiological and psychological symptoms of stress; the individual characterizations of

mindfulness and gratitude; an individual exploration of MBIs and GIs as well as a discussion of their current research; limitations and potential biases of gratitude research; the relationship between MBIs and GIs and its current research; and the rationale for developing a mindfulness-based curriculum guide. Finally, the second part of the paper will provide a curriculum guide for facilitators to present a six-week online mindfulness-based gratitude course.

Literature Review

The Literature Review will comprise of the following sections: Stress; Mindfulness; Mindfulness-Based Interventions/Programs and Research Outcomes; Gratitude; Gratitude Interventions and Research Outcomes; Gratitude Research Limitations and Potential Biases; Mindfulness-Based Gratitude; Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Interventions and Research Outcomes; Cultivating Mindfulness-Based Gratitude through Neuroplasticity; and “Internalizing the Positive” (Hanson, 2009, p. 68).

Stress

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, stress is defined as, “the physiological or psychological response to internal or external stressors” which impact individual and collective thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (APA, 2022a). The body is equipped to handle small doses of acute stress, and in certain circumstances stress may be necessary and seen as a motivating force for humans to grow, develop, evolve, and protect themselves as a species (Lupien et al., 2018). However, long-term or chronic stress can lead to physiological and psychological health problems such as high blood pressure, migraines, chronic fatigue, decreased immune function, increased cholesterol, asthma, panic attacks, diabetes, digestive issues, decreased sexual drive, anxiety, depression, addiction as well as increases for heart attack and stroke (APA, 2018). Furthermore, chronic stress negatively impacts cognitive functioning, which may impair a person’s memory, decision making skills, quality of attention, and emotional regulation (McEwen, 2017). Although chronic stress may lead to physiological and psychological health problems, there are several ways

a person might cope with stress to help mitigate the symptoms of chronic stress, and these include the practices of mindfulness and gratitude. Individually the practices have shown reductions in stress and increases in well-being (Keng et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2010). However, the outcomes of their combined efforts are undetermined because there are few programs which blend both approaches. The following sections will characterize both types of practices individually as well as discuss and examine the significant outcomes of their associative interventions (i.e., MBIs and GIs).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a broad term that encompasses a wide array of teachings, practices, and methodologies (Van Dam et al., 2018) “nested within a larger conceptual and practice-based ethical framework oriented towards non-harming” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 146). Stemming from Buddhist traditions, definitions vary and have become more westernized with its integration into dominant American culture (Van Gordon et al., 2015). A commonly referenced definition of mindfulness is by Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of one of the first mainstream mindfulness-based programs in the United States called the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. In one of his earlier books, he defined mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. xxvii). Non-judgmentally refers to “an affectionate, compassionate quality... a sense of openhearted, friendly presence and interest” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Although mindfulness is rooted in Buddhism, Kabat-Zinn has argued that in its essence mindfulness is not Buddhist, but is present as an “inherent human capacity” determined by an individual’s inclination and level of discipline to be mindful (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 146). By paying close attention to one’s thoughts, emotions, and body sensations, a person may become more aware of and familiar with their unconscious habits and patterns of behavior – some of which may or may not be beneficial and supportive of one’s well-being or the well-being of others. In becoming more aware, it allows a person to become more responsive in making decisions rather than reactive (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Mindfulness may be classified as both a state and a trait. As a state, one's daily mindfulness capacity may be temporarily influenced by a multitude of internal and external factors. However, regular mindfulness practice is associated with increased trait mindfulness, which is exhibited in an individual's more mindful attitude and behavior over time (Hölzel et al., 2011). In this case, mindfulness is seen more as a skill that can be cultivated and developed through daily mindfulness practice, much like how the muscles in the body can be strengthened through daily physical exercise. Some of the characteristics of trait mindfulness include “the capacity to remain nonreactive to and accepting of distressing thoughts and emotions; observe interoceptive and exteroceptive experience; discriminate emotional states; and be aware of automaticity” (Garland & Howard, 2018, p. 2). As a person increases trait mindfulness, this quality of mind and body is hypothesized to aid in reducing stress and stress reactivity while increasing attention, self-awareness, self-regulation (Tang et al., 2015), and overall well-being (Keng et al., 2011). One way trait mindfulness may be cultivated is through the participation in a mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) or mindfulness-based program (MBP). The following sections will discuss MBIs/MBPs and their current research findings.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions and Programs

One way to intentionally cultivate mindfulness is through participation in an MBI/MBP. The first generation of MBIs began with MBSR (Van Gordon et al., 2015) which was founded by Kabat-Zinn in 1979 (Mindful Leader, 2022). Although inspired by Buddhist traditions, MBSR was developed as a secularized 8-week program where participants learn the basics of mindfulness to aid in the treatment of chronic pain (Querstret et al., 2020). Participants attend one class per week (2.5 hours), one all-day class (7.5 hours), and engage in formal and informal home practices (45-60 minutes/day, 6 days/week) as guided by a trained MBSR facilitator within a group setting. Formal home practices consist of mindful breathing, body scans, walking meditations, sitting meditations, gentle yoga, and mindful movement (Mindful Leader, 2022). Informal practices are ways in which

mindfulness may be brought into daily activities such as brushing one's teeth or driving to work (Querstret et al., 2020).

Modeled after MBSR, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) was founded in 2002 to aid in the treatment of depression (Querstret et al., 2020). Both MBSR and MBCT are two main interventions that paved the way for the emergence of second generation MBIs (Van Gordon et al., 2015) such as Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP), Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement (MORE), and Mindfulness Training for Smokers (MTS). Although MBRP, MORE, and MTS are modeled after MBSR, the teachings and practices of these interventions are specifically tailored to address addiction (Priddy et al., 2018). Other MBIs/MPBs include Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Yoga (Garland & Howard, 2018), Mindfulness Training (MT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), (Sancho et al., 2018), Vipassana Meditation, Mindful Awareness in Body-Oriented Therapy (Li et al., 2017) as well as Mindful Self-Compassion developed by Christopher Germer, PhD and Kristin Neff, PhD (Self-Compassion, 2022). Although these various interventions and programs share common core principles which are firmly established in mindfulness (Chiesa & Serretti, 2014), it should be noted that there is no definitive definition of the term mindfulness. As previously stated, it encompasses a diverse range of practices, teachings, and methodologies. (Van Dam et al., 2018). These MBIs/MBPs teach a variety of mindfulness-based practices and teachings to participants which include focused attention and open monitoring (Garland et al., 2016; Priddy et al., 2018), metacognitive awareness, savoring (Garland & Howard, 2018) and urge-surfing (Priddy et al., 2018; Witkiewitz et al., 2014). Although MBIs/MBPs are presented in a variety of approaches, there are no renowned programs which focus on the mindful cultivation of gratitude.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions/Programs Research Outcomes

According to research, MBIs/MBPs may help mitigate the physiological and psychological effects caused by chronic stress by increasing one's overall sense of well-being (Keng et al., 2011;

Ballantyne et al., 2021; Querstret et al., 2020). According to a systematic review and metaanalysis of MBSR and MBCT programs which examined the outcomes of 49 non-clinical studies (Querstret et al., 2020), the MBIs proved to be effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, rumination, worry, and stress, while increasing mindfulness, improving the quality of one's life as well as their physiological and psychological well-being. Similarly, a review (Zhang et al., 2021) of MBIs determined that in addition to reducing these symptoms as well as symptoms associated with cancer, they also improved insomnia, addiction, weight management, mental illness, pain, and prosocial behavior. It was noted that MBCT proved to be more effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety than MBSR, which may be attributed to MBCT's focus on becoming more aware of negative thought patterns and developing more adaptive responses to these patterns (Querstret et al., 2020). Furthermore, research also indicates that consistent engagement with mindfulness practices in an MBI/MBP is associated with improved emotional regulation, executive function, cognitive function (Witkiewitz et al., 2014), hedonic regulation, as well as reduced craving and reactivity (Li et al., 2017). Although MBIs/MBPs offer a promising treatment, further research needs to study their effects on PTSD, ADHD, eating disorders, diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions to name a few (Zhang et al., 2021).

Gratitude

Over the course of the last few decades, research studies have defined gratitude in various ways (Freitas et al., 2022). A commonly used definition (Davis et al., 2016; Freitas et al., 2022) states that gratitude can be defined “as a generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people's benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains” (McCullough et al., 2002, p. 112). This definition classified gratitude as an emotion, which is how Emmons & McCullough (2003) have classified gratitude when they defined it as the result of “recognizing that one has obtained a positive outcome [and] recognizing

that there is an external source for this positive outcome” (p. 378). Although both of these definitions classified gratitude as an emotion, Emmons & McCullough (2003), have also stated that gratitude may be classified as not only an emotion, but also as “an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait, or a coping response” (p. 377). However, most studies tend to focus on gratitude as an emotion (Wood et al., 2010). Based on this classification, gratitude is essentially a feeling of appreciation, thankfulness, or recognition of the good or positive aspects of one's life.

Some researchers would argue that these definitions of gratitude are incomplete if they do not acknowledge the necessity for moral virtue (Freitas et al., 2022; Navarro & Tudge, 2020; Wood et al., 2010). As stated by Navarro & Tudge (2020), it is “the willingness to take on an obligation to reciprocate to our benefactors, without thinking that we will gain something as a result, which is the essence of gratitude as a moral virtue” (p. 83). Freitas et al. (2022) more specifically considered gratitude to meet the following criteria: “a benefactor who intentionally, willingly, and for morally appropriate reasons provides, or attempts to provide, a benefit to a beneficiary; (b) the beneficiary’s recognition of the benefactor’s intentionality; (c) a consequent positive feeling about the benefactor, the benefit, or both; and (d) the desire to reciprocate with something of benefit to the benefactor, should a suitable opportunity arise” (p. 2). Following these criteria implies the importance of recognizing one’s intentions for giving during an exchange and whether the circumstance warrants genuine emotions of gratitude from the receiver. Overall, gratitude seems to refer to a feeling of being grateful for something that someone has done or for something someone has received. It seems to be associated with a sense of indebtedness or obligation to the benefactor.

Researchers argue that the innate sense of moral obligation to reciprocate is what distinguishes a beneficiary who exhibits gratitude versus ingratitude (Freitas et al., 2022; Navarro & Tudge, 2020; Wood et al., 2010) or gratitude versus appreciation (Freitas et al., 2022). Freitas et al. (2022) states that this distinction between gratitude and appreciation has not been acknowledged in other studies but has been used interchangeably, without the acknowledgment that in certain

instances gratitude, unlike appreciation, requires moral virtue. According to Fagley (2016), gratitude is a specific type of appreciation of which there are eight qualities. Unlike gratitude, appreciation in general does not necessarily involve a sense of obligation or indebtedness towards a benefactor (Fagley, 2016), but it perhaps does include valuing or recognizing the good of something or someone which may naturally arise from one's experience.

Studies have more broadly considered gratitude as a state and a trait (McCullough et al., 2002). State gratitude is “context-based, experienced during specific events or short periods of time (e.g., day, week) and influenced by situational factors” (McGuire et al., 2020, p. 2250). Therefore, state gratitude consists of brief thoughts, feelings, and emotions based on temporary internal and external circumstances. On the other hand, trait gratitude is obtained through consistent practice which is thought as a “life orientation toward noticing and appreciating the positive in life” (Wood et al., 2010, p. 891). As an individual increases their trait gratitude, these qualities are hypothesized to aid in increasing physical and psychological well-being over time (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). However, it should be noted that gratitude is not a cure-all to life's challenges and difficult situations. In difficult situations it is unhealthy to use gratitude as a means of avoidance, denial, or suppression of feeling negative emotion as well as to minimize a challenge or hardship which may lead to toxic positivity, or dismissing negative emotion to maintain a positive mindset (Upadhyay et al., 2022). Suppressing negative emotion in favor of gratitude is not supportive of a person's well-being (Troy et al., 2013). The following section will discuss Gratitude Interventions and Research Outcomes.

Gratitude Interventions and Research Outcomes

Participating in a GI is a practical way to practice and cultivate gratitude. Over the last few decades, much attention has surrounded GIs to decrease stress and enhance well-being (Davis et al., 2016; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Studies have focused on several types of GIs, which consist of writing a daily or weekly list of reasons to feel gratitude (Emmons et. al, 2003, Davis et al.,

2016), gratitude journaling (Lambert et al., 2012), writing gratitude letters (Dickens, 2017), and/or expressing gratitude directly to a person (Davis et. al, 2016). Cultivating gratitude and other positive emotions through these various interventions promotes coping strategies and resilience for situations of stress which ultimately lead to further enhanced physical and psychological well-being (Fredrickson, 2004). According to Fredrickson's (1998, p. 1) "broaden-and-build model," cultivating positive emotions such as gratitude expands one's perspective and enhances cognitive and psychological resources for coping with stress (e.g., acceptance and positive reframing), which reduce distress and enhance the quality of one's life (Fredrickson, 1998; Lambert et al. 2012; Wood et al. 2007).

According to the findings of recent and previous studies, GIs may increase positive affect (Dickens, 2017; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al., 2009), happiness (Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012), resilience (Fredrickson, 2001), altruism and prosocial behavior (Algoe et al., 2008; McCullough et al., 2008), life satisfaction (Manthey et al., 2016) and an overall sense of physical (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) and psychological well-being (Cregg & Cheavens, 2020); improved sleep (Wood et al., 2009), and relationship satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2008; Bohlmeijer et. al, 2021); as well as decreased negative affect, depressive symptoms (Dickens, 2017), and stress (Kerr et al., 2015). Although scientific evidence suggests that GIs offer promising outcomes, the research concluded that findings should be interpreted with extreme caution due to methodological limitations (Wood et al., 2010), which will be discussed in the section, Gratitude Research Limitations and Potential Biases.

According to a recent meta-analysis, Dickens (2017) determined that there were no significant findings in terms of one's physical health, sleep, prosocial behavior, or self-esteem, which is contrary to the findings of several studies as listed above (Algoe et al., 2008; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2008; Wood et al., 2009). However, the scientific evidence did suggest that GIs improve one's well-being, life satisfaction, and positive affect while reducing

depression (Dickens, 2017) which is in alignment with the findings of the studies listed above (Cregg & Cheavens, 2020; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al., 2009; Manthey et al., 2016). Dickens's (2017) further reported that GIs have comparable outcomes to other positive interventions, which suggest no real benefit in choosing gratitude as a specific practice. Another meta-analysis (Davis et. al., 2016) which supports Dicken's findings, suggest that is unclear if the results of the studies were influenced by the participants' predetermined belief in the positive benefits of engaging in acts that would promote psychological well-being, as opposed to gratitude practice itself. Participants who engaged in the acts of psychological well-being significantly increased psychological well-being, especially in those experiencing depression and anxiety, more than those who participated in a gratitude intervention. Similarly, Cregg & Cheavens (2020) did not find a strong correlation between the GIs and decreased levels of depression and anxiety. Although there were some changes, it was not enough to recommend GIs as a form of treatment for depression and anxiety (Cregg & Cheavens, 2020). Overall, the majority of research has focused on healthy populations rather than people seeking GIs as a form of treatment (Davis et al., 2016) which may have potentially minimized the positive effects as well as account for the lack of significant outcomes. Further investigation should focus on larger more diverse sample sizes as the lack of statistical evidence may lead to inaccurate or misleading conclusions.

According to another study (Khanna & Singh, 2021), which measured the outcomes of gratitude journaling and stress management training for seventh to ninth graders in India, suggested there were no beneficial outcomes in terms of decreased stress or increased engagement, life satisfaction, or meaningfulness. According to the reserachers, this outcome could be attributed to the participants' dislike towards the writing activities and also the reliance on self-reported measures (Khanna & Singh, 2021). One study found that interventions with multiple gratitude exercises versus other home assignments (Davis et al., 2016) may have led to an increase in engagement (Bohlmeijer et al., 2021). Different practices will appeal to a variety of people so it is

important for participants to choose an intervention that suits their specific needs and interests which may increase their motivation and interest to participate fully in an intervention (Davis et al., 2016). Dickens (2017) highlighted the importance of analyzing other various factors that may impact an individual's response to mindfulness practices such as trait gratitude, positive emotionality, depression, etc.

Gratitude Research Limitations and Potential Biases

Although GIs prove to be promising contributors to well-being, future research will need to address methodological limitations of past and current studies (Wood et al., 2010). Future research should consider: larger and more diverse samples, interventions of longer duration and frequency (Bohlmeijer et al, 2020; Davis et al., 2016; Dickens, 2017) more suitable comparators (Dickens, 2017; Wood et al., 2010), and potential negative side effects (Boggiss, et al., 2020).

One limitation of the current research on gratitude interventions (GIs) is that it has mainly focused on healthy college students from North America and Europe, which limits the generalizability of the findings (Davis et al., 2016). Moreover, there has been less attention given to the effectiveness of GIs among children, adolescents, the elderly (Dickens, 2017), and individuals seeking GIs as a form of treatment for mental health issues (Davis et al., 2016). Additionally, the outcomes of studies with healthy populations may be overestimated, as they may already demonstrate a high level of well-being. Therefore, future investigations should emphasize the need for larger and more diverse sample sizes to ensure accurate and valid conclusions. Aside from seeking diversity in age, geographical location, level of education, studies should also seek diversity in race and ethnicity, gender, health status, physical ability or disability, socioeconomic status, etc. It is also important to consider the cultural context and potential limitations of gratitude practice. Cultural differences in values, beliefs, and practices may affect how individuals approach and respond to gratitude practice, and future research should include more culturally diverse samples while considering how the definition and conceptual understanding of gratitude changes as it

extends cross-cultural boundaries (Freitas et al., 2022) when designing and implementing interventions.

The optimal duration and frequency of gratitude practice are not well understood (Bohlmeijer et al, 2020). Most of the studies included interventions of short-duration, such as one to two weeks, with short-term follow-up (Davis et al., 2016; Dickens, 2017). Although findings indicate that extending GIs to six weeks and beyond may have more significant outcomes (Bohlmeijer et al, 2020), further research is needed to determine not only the optimal duration of gratitude practice for different populations and for more significant outcomes, but also the optimal dosage. Most studies in the meta-analysis used a limited dosage, such as a few minutes to a few days, as prescribed to the participants for engaging in gratitude activities (Davis et al., 2016; Fraser, 2022). According to Davis et al. (2016), dosage needs to be increased to potentially see more significant outcomes. Future studies will need to include interventions of longer-duration and frequency which not only investigate the long-term effects of GIs, but also investigate different types of GI activities (Davis et al., 2016; Dickens, 2017) across a multitude of populations.

Most studies on gratitude interventions (GIs) have focused on their positive outcomes while neglecting any potential negative side effects. This approach can lead to bias on the part of the researchers, who only highlight the benefits of GIs (Boggiss et al., 2020). However, some studies have shown that GIs can be counterproductive and increase levels of stress (Khanna & Singh, 2020). Hence, it is crucial for future research to investigate the negative impact of GIs and their potential to harm individuals and undermine their well-being (Davis et al., 2016). Negative side effects may include increased anxiety, depression, frustration, and stress, particularly when individuals have difficulty experiencing gratitude (Davis et al., 2016).

According to the findings of a recent meta-analysis (Dickens, 2017), the significance of outcomes was dependent on the type of control (e.g., negative, neutral, or positive) used in a study. If the control was negative (e.g., focusing on and listing negative daily events/hassles) the outcomes

were found to be more significant versus if they were compared with a neutral control (e.g., listing daily events) (Dickens, 2017). Furthermore, the reason researchers found more significant results when compared with the negative control group was because the focus on negative daily events and hassles seemed to induce more stress within this comparator group (Wood et al., 2010). No significant outcomes were reported when GIs were compared with a positive control (e.g., listing positive daily events) (Dickens, 2017). Since most of the participants exhibited an already high level of mental well-being prior to the studies, this might account for the lack of significant outcomes that might otherwise have been found in populations where mental illness was prevalent (Bohlmeijer et al., 2021). The following section will discuss Mindfulness-Based Gratitude.

Mindfulness-Based Gratitude

Although mindfulness and gratitude are different concepts, they appear to be complementary practices and support the development of each other. According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), gratitude is one of the “Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness Practice” (p. 31) which focuses on what is already present rather than what is lacking. He stated that gratitude, along with eight other Attitudinal Foundations, is a “qualit[y] of mind and heart that also contribute[s] to the broadening as well as deepening the embodiment of mindfulness in our lives” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, pp. 31-32). Gratitude is meant to be practiced alongside the other eight factors which complement and enhance each other's growth. While practicing mindfulness brings more awareness to one's thoughts, feelings, and emotions, gratitude helps focus one's attention on the more positive aspects of life to cultivate a greater sense of appreciation and well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Wood et al., 2010). When mindfulness and gratitude are practiced in unision, they may cultivate a deeper sense of awareness and appreciation for the present moment. Therefore, gratitude is also thought to support the development of one's mindfulness practice and vice versa.

However, there are few interventions and programs which include both mindfulness and gratitude practice. Practiced individually, gratitude often involves focusing on one specific aspect of

experience (i.e., positive) whereas mindfulness emphasizes non-judgmental awareness of all experiences (i.e., negative, positive, neutral). With mindfulness, there is a quality of non-judgement, non-striving, and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) whereas in cultivating gratitude independently, judgement is present to distinguish experiences as negative, positive, and/or neutral. With gratitude, there is a sense of striving to recognize and internalize the positive experience which may be overly focused on a particular outcome. Hyper focusing on positive experiences may lead individuals to suppress, ignore, and/or deny difficult emotions or experiences which may lead to toxic positivity (Upadhyay et al., 2022). This can be seen as contradictory to the central principle of mindfulness, which encourages us to be fully present and aware of all of our experiences, without judgment or suppression (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Finally, mindfulness focuses on the acceptance of the present moment as it is, even if it is not the way one would like it to be and gratitude looks for the positive and does not give much attention to negative or neutral experiences. Ultimately, the tension between gratitude and mindfulness practices may depend on how they are taught and experienced together. When mindfulness and gratitude practices are integrated in a balanced way, they can complement and enhance each other's effects. The following section will discuss Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Interventions and Research Outcomes.

Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Interventions and Research Outcomes

Although some research has included components of both mindfulness and gratitude practices, it remains undetermined if combining both practices is mutually beneficial as few studies have been conducted on the efficacy of mindfulness-based gratitude interventions. However, there is reason to believe that MBIs/MBPs may benefit from the inclusion of gratitude practices as well as GIs benefiting from the inclusion of mindfulness practices (Hicks et al., 2017). Mindfulness and gratitude practices individually enhance positive effect and well-being, which suggests that combining both practices further increase positive outcomes (Hicks et al., 2017).

O'Leary & Dockray (2015) studied the efficacy of a mindfulness-based intervention versus a gratitude-based intervention and discovered that although both enhanced well-being, the mindfulness-based intervention proved to be more effective. This may be attributed to a few factors. First, mindfulness helps individuals become more aware of their thoughts and emotions in the present moment so they can learn to identify negative thought patterns and develop strategies to manage them (Querstret et al., 2020). On the other hand, although gratitude practice can help individuals focus on the positive aspects of their life, it may not necessarily address negative thought patterns or provide strategies for coping with difficult thoughts or emotions like an MBI/MBP (Querstret et al., 2020). Second, each of the interventions in the study included varying activities which may not have been comparable: the GI consisted of writing in a gratitude journal and reflecting on a gratitude evoking experience which is very conceptual while the MBI consisted of writing in a journal and engaging in a body scan which is very experiential. Furthermore, the effectiveness of each intervention may have depended on individual preferences and needs as different individuals may have responded differently to the activities in each intervention.

Fuller-Tyszkiewicz et al. (2019) studied the efficacy of brief mindfulness and gratitude practices, or 'micro-interventions,' in enhancing one's body image. The findings concluded that the practices were effective in temporarily relieving symptoms. However, these findings should be taken with caution as they are based on interventions of brief-duration. Future studies will need to include interventions of longer-duration which investigate the long-term effects as well as long-term follow-up. In another study (Jain, 2020), participants were asked to engage in specific mindfulness practices and gratitude journal writing for about 30 minutes every day for four weeks. The findings concluded that for this small sample of ninth to twelfth graders, levels of stress and anxiety produced by an exam seemed to decrease.

There are even fewer studies which recognize the relationship between mindfulness and gratitude practice within an intervention. Two studies (Fraser et al., 2022; Strohmaier et al., 2022)

found that a brief 10-minute mindfulness-based gratitude meditation increased state gratitude and mindfulness compared with the control group. Findings in other studies were mixed: three studies determined there was a significant association between mindfulness and increased gratitude measurements (Hicks et al., 2017; Hicks et al., 2018; Loo et al., 2014); and two studies determined that there was no significant association between mindfulness and gratitude (Chen et al., 2016; O’Leary & Dockray, 2016). Future research should focus on the relationship between mindfulness and gratitude practices as well as whether combining both practices may further increase well-being.

Cultivating Mindfulness-Based Gratitude

This section will discuss how mindfulness-based gratitude may be cultivated through Neuroplasticity and “Internalizing the Positive” (Hanson, 2009, p. 68).

Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity aids in the cultivation of mindfulness-based gratitude by developing it from a state into a trait (McCullough et al., 2002). “When we focus repeatedly on specific skills, moment-to-moment neural activity can gradually become an established trait through the power of neuroplasticity” (Siegel, 2010, p. 110) which is the “capacity for creating new neural connections and growing new neurons in response to experience” (Siegel, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, the more a person practices thoughts and feelings of gratitude, the more the person strengthens and grows neurological pathways in the brain— laying the groundwork for developing trait gratitude. Trait gratitude emerges when the practice has become a habit or unconscious competence (Dispenza, 2012), build[ing] new, positive structures in your brain” (Hanson, 2009, p. 75). As the practice becomes an unconscious competence through consistent gratitude practice, a person establishes and cultivates new habits and patterns of behavior (Hanson, 2009) which ultimately shape and influence one’s choices and overall life experiences. One way a person might cultivate gratitude is by participating in a mindfulness-based gratitude intervention. The following section will discuss one

way in which a person might cultivate gratitude by becoming aware of the good in one's life and savoring the experience.

“Internalizing the Positive”

One way to mindfully cultivate gratitude is through the practice of “internalizing the positive” (p. 68). In Rick Hanson's (2009) book Buddha's Brain he discussed ways in which a person might cultivate positive emotions, such as gratitude, by focusing on positive experiences. He named three steps for “internalizing the positive.” However, this practice should not be used to avoid, deny, or suppress negative thoughts, feelings, or emotions (Hanson, 2009). The practice is about inclining the mind to notice and relish in the positive moments that naturally arises in one's life. At times these moments arise without notice, which is why mindfulness is an essential complement to this practice. It is a practice for embodying positive emotions and may be adapted to specifically cultivate gratitude by focusing on the positive in one's life.

The first step is to become aware of a positive aspect and give it attention. By actively drawing attention to the positive, it creates more neural networks to see the positive or the good in one's life. The second step is to savor and mindfully relish in the positive experience. Hanson (2009) explained the importance of this type of attention when he stated, “Focusing on these rewards increases dopamine release, which makes it easier to keep giving the experience your attention and strengthens its neural associations in implicit memory” (p. 69). Therefore, the more gratitude a person thinks and feels the more gratitude they may cultivate and grow.

The final step is to internalize the positive by “relaxing your body and absorbing the emotions, sensations, and thoughts of the experience” (Hanson, 2009, p. 70). This practice conditions and programs the body and mind to experience positive feeling emotions such as gratitude. Hanson (2009) shared some of the benefits of focusing on positive experiences:

Focusing on what is wholesome and then taking in naturally increases the positive emotions flowing through your mind each day. Emotions have global effects since they organize the

brain as a whole. Consequently, positive feelings have far-reaching benefits, including a stronger immune system and cardiovascular system that is less reactive to stress. They lift your mood; increase optimism, resilience, and resourcefulness; and help counteract the effects of painful experiences, including trauma. It's a positive cycle; good feelings today increase the likelihood of good feelings tomorrow. (p. 75)

Gratitude, as an elevated emotion, opens a person to becoming more aware of new possibilities and choices when deciding how to respond to the circumstances of life.

Discussion: Rationale for Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Curriculum Guide

The main purpose of developing the Mindfulness-Based Gratitude (MBG) course was to provide individuals with a means of mindfully shifting their focus towards the positive aspects of their lives, particularly in a world where negativity can easily consume one's attention, leading to increased levels of physiological and psychological stress. Separately practiced, mindfulness and gratitude are associated with enhanced positive affect (Cregg & Cheavens, 2020), resilience (Fredrickson, 2001), and well-being, as well as decreased negative affect (Dickens, 2017) and stress (Kerr et al., 2015). Although extensive research has been conducted to support the efficacy of mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions over the last few decades, and moderate research on the outcomes of gratitude and gratitude-based interventions, there are even fewer studies which focus on the combined associations and outcomes of incorporating both mindfulness-based and gratitude-based practices. Therefore, the following curriculum has the potential to make a significant contribution to an evolving field by offering a program in which to study the outcomes of mindfulness-based gratitude practice.

The main format of the curriculum guide for the MBG course was inspired by the book, [A Clinician's Guide to Teaching Mindfulness: The Comprehensive Session-by-Session Program for Mental Health Professionals and Health Care Providers](#), written by Christiane Wolf, M.D., Ph.D., and J. Greg Serpa, Ph.D. Within the guide, Wolf and Serpa offer their expertise by providing a full

curriculum guide to teach a six-week introductory mindfulness course which includes a training guide, in-depth session outlines, and scripts to facilitate mindfulness meditation and practice. This comprehensive guide for teaching an introductory mindfulness course was adapted to suit the needs for the MBG course.

The main structure of MBG is based off Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff's (2019) Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) and Jon Kabat-Zinn's MBSR (Santorelli et al., 2017), which are both well-renowned programs in the field of mindfulness. Some of the major themes for MBG were adapted from MSC which focuses on mindfully cultivating a particular quality of mind and heart (self-compassion) much like MBG (gratitude). MSC laid out a strong framework in which to create a mindfulness-based gratitude course. The MBG course covers six themes which include: Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Practice; Mind-Body Connection: Thoughts, Feelings, & Body Sensations; Mindful Self-Gratitude; Gratitude in the Midst of Challenging Relationships; Feeling Gratitude in a VUCA World; and The Art of Savoring Gratitude.

According to the research, most studies include GIs of one to two weeks, which appears to be too short of a duration to see lasting effects (Bohlmeijer et al, 2020). Bohlmeijer et al. (2020) suggests that GIs extending beyond six weeks may see more significant outcomes, although the optimal dosage is undetermined. Planning an eight-week course was considered which would mimic the eight-week MBSR and MBCT programs, but there may not be any significant difference in outcomes with a six-week versus an eight-week program. The requirements for MBG are not as strenuous as an MBSR or MBCT, but more closely related to MSC, which is a six-week program with 90-minute sessions each week (Germer & Neff, 2019). MBG consists of 75-minute sessions once a week for six weeks, except for the first session which is 90 minutes. Each session includes facilitator-led mindfulness-based gratitude practices, guided meditations, themed presentations, and small and large group discussions. Finally, the MBG course consists of a variety of mindfulness-based gratitude practices. According to a study, one factor that influenced participant outcomes was

the inclusion of multiple gratitude exercises which may have led to an increase in motivation and interest for continued participation (Bohlmeijer et al., 2021). Therefore, MBG includes a variety of gratitude exercises.

Conclusion

At the heart of mindfulness lies a simple and yet profound idea: to be fully present and engaged with life's experiences, without judgment. In cultivating this awareness, it opens an individual to its many benefits such as reduced stress and negative emotion, increased resilience and a greater sense of well-being and overall life satisfaction. Gratitude, on the other hand, is a positive outlook on life which focuses on the more favorable aspects of one's experience and surrounding environment - discovering ways to become more aware of and savor present moment experiences. Similar to mindfulness, practicing gratitude can boost positive emotions, reduce stress and negative affect, improve physical and mental health, promote stronger relationships as well as a greater sense of well-being. When combined, mindfulness-based gratitude can help us to see the beauty in even the most ordinary. - allowing us to experience life with greater depth and meaning while cultivating a deeper sense of connection with ourselves and the world around us to live with greater purpose, compassion, and gratitude.

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Curriculum Guide for Facilitators:

Six-Week Online Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Course

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The curriculum for the Mindfulness-Based Gratitude (MBG) course is a suggested guide for facilitators to present an online course for adults. As with all mindfulness-based programs, the curriculum guide should be personalized and tailored to suit the needs of the participants. MBG is a six-week online course delivered through Zoom which will be held on the same day and time each week as determined by the facilitator. Each week consists of a 75-minute session (except for the first session which is 90 minutes). Each session includes mindfulness-based gratitude teachings, practices, guided meditations, themed presentations related to cultivating gratitude through mindfulness practice, as well as small and large group discussions. Furthermore, participants have an opportunity to extend their learning outside of the course through independent exploration practices and engagement with an optional study partner to discuss course material. As with any mindfulness-based program, it is essential for the facilitator to have a consistent daily mindfulness practice and highly encouraged that the facilitator engage in the same independent explorations as the participants throughout the course.

MBG is an introductory course for mindfulness-based gratitude practice which was adapted from MBSR (Santorelli et al., 2017), MSC (Germer & Neff, 2019), and A Clinician's Guide to Teaching Mindfulness (Wolf & Serpa, 2015). MBG teaches participants how to attend to the present moment with greater awareness of the more positive aspects of one's daily life (Hanson, 2009). The practice is not to deny, suppress, or ignore the negative aspects that may be present in one's life, but to reorient one's focus to becoming more aware of, embodying, and savoring the good that is already present (Hanson, 2009). Cultivating mindfulness-based gratitude may strengthen our relationships (Algoe et al, 2008) as well as deepen our resilience and sturdiness (Fredrickson, 2001) while living in a world that at times may feel Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) (Jah, 2020). Ultimately, mindfulness-based gratitude practice involves becoming aware of the positive aspects of one's life and cultivating a sense of gratitude for them.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Define mindfulness and gratitude and their relationship as mindfulness-based gratitude practice.
- Cultivate a greater sense of well-being.
- Learn various mindfulness-based gratitude meditations (e.g., sitting, walking, the body scan, loving-kindness, and the art of savoring).
- Develop a regular mindfulness-based gratitude practice (e.g., writing in a gratitude journal, expressing gratitude before a meal, savoring the good in one's life, etc.).
- Build stronger relationships with others and cultivate a greater sense of resilience amid adversity.

COURSE LOGISTICS

Materials: Participants need an electronic device (e.g., a laptop, desktop, cell phone, tablet, etc.) with speakers, a microphone, camera, and internet access to Zoom. Participants are asked to bring specific materials to each session as outlined in the session overview and on the session handouts. Prior to meeting each week, the facilitator will email participants the session handouts. After the first session, the facilitator will email participants the prerecorded mindfulness-based gratitude meditation for formal independent exploration. The facilitator should arrive to each session with all necessary handouts, notes, and materials as outlined in each session overview.

Attendance: Participants are encouraged to attend the entire MBG course with their cameras on to fully participate and engage with others in the course. All sessions are recorded (except breakout rooms) for participants who are unable to attend a session or for participants who would like to review course material for further study. All recordings are provided in view only mode and are strictly confidential amongst the registered participants. Recordings will only be accessible six months after the final session of the course.

Attendance Tracker: Facilitators are encouraged to track attendance. If a participant has been absent for a couple of sessions, it might be helpful to reach out and offer support if/when appropriate. Participants are required to attend at least five of the six classes to receive a Certificate of Completion.

Attendance Tracker						
	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
Participant Name						
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						
8.						
9.						
10.						

Independent Exploration: Independent exploration offers participants an opportunity to engage with the learnings and material outside of the course. The independent exploration is an important part of the course as participants are asked to commit to at least 45 minutes per day of formal and informal practices. Formal exploration is time specifically set aside to practice (e.g., listening to a guided gratitude meditation, writing in a gratitude journal, etc.) and informal exploration are practices we integrate into our daily activities (e.g., giving gratitude before a meal, listing reasons to feel grateful while waiting in line at the bank or grocery store, etc.).

Optional Study Partners: Participants have the option to be randomly paired with a study partner each week. This opportunity allows for partners to discuss the course material; share any learnings, observations, experiences, and/or inquiries; as well as provide support for one another. These discussions are self-guided.

Scripts: Prior to the start of the course, the facilitator will record a mindfulness-based gratitude meditation for participants as part of their daily formal independent exploration. The facilitator may also consider recording the other guided meditations as additional resources for the participants. As with all suggested scripts provided in this curriculum guide, facilitators are encouraged to tailor these scripts to suit the needs of their participants. Additionally, it should be noted that a script is from the author's past present moment experience. Therefore, as with all mindfulness-based programs, facilitators are encouraged to guide practices from their own present moment experience (Wolf and Serpa, 2015).

Prerecorded Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Meditation:

Suggested Script

In this meditation, we will be using our breath as an anchor to hold our attention to the present moment. When we notice that our minds have wandered, which is completely normal, we will return to our breath again and again. If focusing on the breath doesn't feel possible for you, then you are more than welcome to choose a different anchor such as the soles of your feet, a sound you hear, or even focusing your attention at a specific spot on the floor in front of you. Returning to the anchor time and time again will help to strengthen our mindfulness muscle.

[Pause]

One thing to note is that meditation is not about stopping or controlling our thoughts, emotions, and/or body sensations as it's completely normal for thoughts, emotions, and/or body sensations to arise during your meditation. Meditation allows us an opportunity to observe what is happening in our minds and bodies and perhaps take an inventory on what kinds of thoughts we are thinking and what kinds of emotions and body sensations are present. This practice helps us to learn how to watch our thoughts and emotions without becoming attached to them. We practice letting the thoughts and emotions in and letting the thoughts and emotions go without becoming absorbed in their content or attaching to them.

[Pause]

I'm going to guide you through this meditation which will last about 20 minutes. This meditation is typically done from a seated posture, but you may choose a different posture. You may choose to lay down with your legs and arms extended or if you are feeling a bit sleepy or restless, you are more than welcome to stand if that feels right for you. The idea is to find a posture that works for you in this moment - a posture that helps you to feel comfortable, supported, and yet alert so please feel free to make any adjustments.

[Pause]

It is also important to set this time aside for yourself so it might be helpful to choose a time when you can be with yourself fully and uninterrupted.

[Pause]

After finding a posture that works best for you, let's begin by settling in. Settling into a posture that again feels comfortable, supported, and yet alert. Allowing your eyes to close if that feels comfortable for you or keeping your eyes opened in a softened downward gaze.

[Pause]

Allowing your body to soften a bit as it settles into the chair, the floor, the mat, or wherever you have chosen to settle yourself. Softening the body in any way that feels possible. Perhaps it might not feel possible to relax or soften any part of your body in this moment and that's okay too.

[Pause]

Now, gently bringing your attention to noticing your breath or your chosen anchor. Take a few deep breaths in, filling your lungs with air, and exhale slowly. Noticing the sensations of the air moving in and out of your nostrils or noticing the sensations in the rising and falling of your chest and belly.

[Pause]

No need to try to change your breath in any way, just observing it as it is.

[Pause]

As your body and mind begin to settle, perhaps you are noticing that you are having many thoughts. There is no need to stop the thoughts or change them, but just being aware of them and allowing them to be here as best you can without resisting them. It is completely normal to notice that you might be thinking many thoughts in this moment. Sometimes we attach to a thought and off our minds go. This may happen and it is completely normal for this to happen. Once we realize our mind has attached to a thought and has wandered, we just gently bring our attention back to our breath or to our anchor.

[Long Pause]

Noticing when your mind has wandered and just gently and redirecting your attention back to the breath or your chosen anchor. Settling again and again into this moment, into this breath. Beginning again and again.

[Long Pause]

Now, I invite you to bring into your mind someone or something you feel grateful for in your life. This could be your partner, your pet, your job, your warm bed, anything you might feel grateful for in this moment. Now bringing this image of someone or something into your mind.

[Pause]

What is it that you are grateful about in this someone or something? How does it make you feel thinking about them or it?

[Pause]

Now, perhaps extending that sense of gratitude towards that someone or something if you can. How does that feel in your body to feel gratitude towards this person or this something?

[Pause]

Perhaps, whispering to ourselves why we are grateful for this someone or something. Not getting too specific. Thank you Amelia for caring. Thank you for your affection. Thank you for... Thank you for...

[Pause]

Thank you for noticing. Thank you for being there. Thank you for... Thank you for...

[Pause]

Now taking a moment to tune into the body. Noticing any body sensations or feelings that might be present. Just taking a moment to tune into the body and notice what is happening and where it is happening in the body.

[Pause]

Now, I invite you to bring into your mind another someone or something you feel gratitude towards in your life.

[Repeat 3 times tuning into the body after each time]

[Ring bell 3 times]

Now, as we close this meditation, you may want to bring some movement into your fingers and into your toes. Allowing your body to stretch in any way that feels needed. And when you are ready, allowing your eyes to open if they have been closed.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Session 1: Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Practice In the first session of the MBG course, participants begin to develop a sense of community amongst the group as they offer brief introductions and become familiar with the logistics, expectations, and Brave Space Agreements (Copper Beech Institute [CBI], n.d.) for skillful engagement. In this session, the facilitator discusses the relationship between mindfulness and gratitude as mindfulness-based gratitude. Finally, the facilitator explains the importance of engaging in independent exploration practices to cultivate mindfulness-based gratitude throughout the course.

Session 2: Mind-Body Connection: Thoughts, Feelings, & Body Sensations This week, the facilitator explores how the mind and body are connected and may influence each other. The facilitator discusses how mindfulness helps us become more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations so that we might choose a more skillful response rather than react out of habit to circumstance (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Participants learn the STOP practice to help support skillful

response (Wolf & Serpa, 2015, p. 128) and engage in a gratitude writing practice. Finally, the facilitator considers toxic positivity and how it can be harmful to avoid, deny, or suppress negative emotions with positivity or gratitude (Upadhyay et al., 2022).

Session 3: Mindful Self-Gratitude This session focuses on mindful self-gratitude, which is a term adapted from Germer and Neff's Mindful Self-Compassion (Germer & Neff, 2019) course. In this session, the facilitator explores the inner-critic and negative self-talk and how it hinders one's ability to see themselves and others clearly (Sofer, 2018). Additionally, the facilitator discusses neuroplasticity and how it aids in habit formation (Siegel, 2010). The group is introduced to two practices: Notice, Soften, and Reframe for working with the inner critic (Self-Compassion: Dr. Kristin Neff, n.d.) as well as the RAIN practice which cultivates more awareness around the relationship we have with our feelings, thoughts, and emotions (Brach, 2019; Salzberg, 2018). Participants are guided through a self-gratitude body scan meditation.

Session 4: Gratitude in the Midst of Challenging Relationships In this session, participants learn about mindful versus unmindful communication as well as Gregory Kramer's (2007) steps to practice mindful dialogue which include Pause-Relax-Open, Trust Emergence, Listen Deeply-Speak the Truth. The group practices shifting perspectives from feeling separation (I/me versus you/them) to feeling more connection (we/us) with a practice by Sharon Salzberg (2014). Finally, the facilitator guides a loving-kindness gratitude meditation.

Session 5: Feeling Gratitude in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) World This week, the facilitator explores individual and collective stress and how it shows up in our lives. This session discusses how gratitude may help cultivate resilience and sturdiness amid hardship and adversity. The group investigates ways to show oneself self-care. Finally, the facilitator guides a gratitude walking meditation.

Session 6: The Art of Savoring Gratitude The last session of the MBG course discusses The Art of Savoring Gratitude. This session introduces Rick Hanson's (2009, pp. 68-70) three steps for

“Internalizing the Positive” and Oren Jay Sofer’s (2017, p. 1) three steps for “Nourishing Gratitude.” The facilitator provides support and encouragement for participants to continue the mindfulness-based gratitude practices they learned throughout the course. Finally, the facilitator offers participants suggestions on how they might investigate and explore other mindfulness-based programs as well as become more involved in their local or online mindfulness communities.

Session 1: Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Practice

OBJECTIVES

- Welcome all participants and begin establishing a sense of community amongst the group.
- Discuss logistics and expectations as well as introduce the Brave Space Agreements.
- Define mindfulness and gratitude and their relationship as mindfulness-based gratitude practice.
- Introduce a mindfulness-based gratitude practice, eating a raisin.
- Explain independent exploration as well as formal and informal practices.

OVERVIEW

Activity	Time (in minutes)	Cumulative Time (in minutes)
Welcome	5	5
Arrival Meditation Practice	5	10
Session Overview: Logistics and Expectations	4	14
Read Brave Space Agreements	6	20
Participant and Facilitator Introductions	10	30
Guided Practice: Setting an Intention Meditation	5	35
Group Share	5	40
Presentation: Intro to Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Practice	15	55
Group Process	10	65
Mindful Gratitude Practice: Eating a Raisin	5	70
Group Discussion	10	80
Independent Exploration and Closing	10	90

MATERIALS

Facilitator: Attendance Tracker, Bell, Session 1 Outline, Session 1 Handout (See Below), Raisins or small food substitute

Participants: Raisins or small food substitute, Session 1 Handout (see below), notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

****SESSION 1 HANDOUT****

Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Practice

Please bring: Raisins or small food substitute, Session 1 Handout, notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)



Invitation to Brave Space By Micky ScottBey Jones (Jones, 2023)

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing as a "safe space"
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused
wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside
world,

We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and continue
to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we
think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But, it will be our brave space together,
And
We will work on it side by side.

The Journey
By Mary Oliver
(Oliver, 2015)

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice —
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy

was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voice behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly

recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do —
determined to save
the only life that you could save.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION

Formal Exploration

- ❖ Listen to the prerecorded gratitude meditation once every day (preferably at the same time).
- ❖ Say or think about five things you are grateful for and why. You could also do this while you are drinking your morning coffee, while you are driving to work, etc. Before you go to bed, say or think about five things you are grateful for and why. Suggest a prompt for the participants such as: “I am grateful for... because...”

Informal Exploration

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Give gratitude before a few meals this week.
- ❖ Eat a few mindful bites each day or even a whole meal.

****END OF SESSION 1 HANDOUT****

SESSION OUTLINE (90 minutes)**WELCOME** (5 minutes)

The facilitator will greet everyone as they log on and express gratitude for everyone's presence. Once everyone seems to have logged on, the facilitator will give a brief introduction about themselves, and let the participants know they will be doing an arrival meditation practice. If the facilitator chooses to use a bell, they should consider explaining that the bell signifies the beginning and the ending of the meditation period. The facilitator will sound the bell 3 times at the beginning and 3 times at the end.

ARRIVAL MEDITATION PRACTICE (5 minutes)***Suggested Script***

Let's begin this session with a short meditation practice to help settle ourselves into the present moment and to help settle us in from arriving. This meditation will be about 5 minutes.

[Ring bell 3 times]

Let's begin by settling into the chair, or into the cushion, or wherever you may find yourself sitting. Finding a comfortable posture that feels supported and yet alert. Perhaps with your feet flat on the floor if you are sitting in a chair or with your legs touching the floor or mat. Sensing into the lower body feeling grounded in your posture, with your spine upright and yet not rigid.

[Pause]

Allowing your eyes to close if that feels comfortable for you or keeping your eyes opened in a softened downward gaze. Allowing your face and shoulders to soften if that feels possible.

[Pause]

Now, gently bringing your attention to noticing your body breathing. Noticing the natural rhythm of the body breathing.

[Pause]

Not trying to manipulate or control the breath, but noticing how the breath expands the chest on each inhale and contracts on each exhale.

[Pause]

Noticing when the mind has wandered, which is completely natural, we gently redirect our attention back to the noticing the body breathing time and time again.

[Long Pause]

Now, let's bring to mind something we are thankful for from today, yesterday, or this past week. It could be something small such as being thankful for having a warm bed and a soft pillow, a pet or a loved one, perhaps someone helped us when we were in need, perhaps it was a smile. Think of one thing. How did it make you feel in the moment? How does it make you feel now thinking about it?

[Long Pause]

Let's offer some gratitude to this person, place, thing, or circumstance by saying a gentle thank you in an almost whispered voice such as thank you warm bed and thank you soft pillow.

[Pause]

[Ring bell 3 times]

Now, bringing some movement into your fingers and into your toes. Allowing your body to stretch in any way that feels needed. Allowing your eyes to open if they have been closed.

[Pause]

Let's take a moment to transition as we move into the course overview where we will discuss logistics and expectations as well as the Brave Space Agreements. [For Session 2 and the remainder of the course, the participants may take a moment to transition as the group moves into reviewing the Brave Space Agreements]

COURSE OVERVIEW (10 minutes)

Logistics and Expectations

The MBG course is 6 weeks. Each week everyone will meet on the same day and at the same time for 75 minutes except for the first session which is 90 minutes. All sessions are recorded (except breakout rooms) for participants who are unable to attend a session or for participants who would like to review course material for further study. However, it is encouraged that participants attend all live sessions with their cameras on to fully participate. Participants are asked to commit to at least 45 minutes of independent exploration each day which includes formal and informal exploration practices. Session handouts containing independent exploration activities as well as other relevant course content will be emailed prior to each session. Independent exploration practices will be discussed at the end of this session.

Each session will typically follow the same format. Here is an example of a typical session:

Activity	Time (in minutes)	Cumulative Time (in minutes)
Welcome and Check-ins	5	5
Arrival Meditation Practice	5	10
Read Brave Space Agreements	3	13
Small Group Shares	7	20
Presentation: Different Theme for Each Session	15	35
Group Process	10	45
Mindful Gratitude Practice	10	55
Group Process	10	65
Independent Exploration and Closing	10	75

READ BRAVE SPACE AGREEMENTS

Brave Space Agreements are the basic rules for the group (CBI, n.d.). The facilitator should post the Brave Space Agreements image in the chat box. – See Session 1 Handout. The facilitator may ask participants to read each of the Brave Space Agreements:

- **Breathe:** Let participants know that the invitation is to take care of themselves and their needs. If they need to use the bathroom, get a drink of water, stand up and stretch, they are more than welcome to do so.

- **Intent vs Impact:** Be mindful of one’s speech and actions. Be aware of what one’s intentions or motivations are for speaking or acting.
- **Respect:** It is important for everyone to speak from the “I” perspective and to only share from their own personal lived experience rather than making assumptions or speaking for others.
- **Confidentiality:** Participants are welcome to share what they learn and their experience but not to share another’s experience. This includes not sharing session recordings with those outside of the course.
- **Right to Pass:** Participation in all activities is optional but encouraged. Sharing makes the learning experience more interesting, collaborative, and expansive.
- **Ouch and Oops:** It is important to be aware of how our words might impact another. If we have harmed or been harmed by another, we should acknowledge our error and seek to repair.

After reading the Brave Space Agreements, ask if everyone understands and approves of the agreements, has any questions, or would like to offer a suggestion or make an adjustment.

After reading the Brave Space Agreements, the facilitator may mention Micky ScottBey Jones who is attributed for the term brave space. The facilitator may read the poem Invitation to Brave Space by Micky ScottBey Jones. – See Session 1 Handout

PARTICIPANT AND FACILITATOR INTRODUCTIONS (10 minutes)

The facilitator may begin introductions by offering an example. Participants are encouraged to share only what they feel comfortable sharing. Participants are asked to give their name, location, and acknowledge one person who made it possible for them to take the course (e.g., a partner taking on more responsibility, someone who inspired them or gave them encouragement, etc.)

GUIDED PRACTICE: SETTING AN INTENTION MEDITATION (5 minutes)

Suggested Script

We are going to do another brief guided meditation directed towards setting an intention which is adapted from the MBSR Authorized Curriculum Guide (Santorelli et al., 2017, p. 13). Let’s begin by

settling into your chairs, or into your cushions, or wherever you may find yourself seated. Settling into a posture that feels comfortable, supported, and yet alert. Allowing your eyes to close if that feels comfortable for you or keeping your eyes opened in a softened downward gaze.

[Pause]

Now, allowing yourself to ask the questions: why am I here? Just allowing your responses to arise and pass. Not holding onto a particular response.

[Pause]

Now, asking yourselves the question again, why am I here?

[Pause]

What are my intentions for being here? Just allowing this question to fall deeply within much like a pebbled sinking to the bottom.

[Pause]

What are my intentions for being here?

[Pause]

[Ring bell 3 times]

Now, bringing some movement into your hands and into your feet. Allowing your eyes to open if they have been closed as we transition into sharing our reflections.

GROUP SHARE (5 minutes)

Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator may choose to use breakout rooms for larger groups.

Participants are asked to share their reflections as a group or use breakout rooms for larger groups.

- **Prompts:** What came up for you? Why are you here? What are your intentions for being here?

PRESENTATION: INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS-BASED GRATITUDE

PRACTICE (15 minutes)

Suggested Script

As I mentioned earlier, for each session I will present a different theme or topic for us to discuss. The presentations will be about 15 minutes followed by 10 minutes of discussion and processing. The first topic I will present for this course is an introduction to mindfulness-based gratitude practice.

Mindfulness-based gratitude begins with mindfulness. The most common definition is by Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program in 1979 (Mindful Leader, 2022). [Post definition in chat box] He defined mindfulness as “the awareness that arises from paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, moment-by-moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. xxxv). Essentially, mindfulness is about fully being with whatever experience you are having in the present moment. If you are sitting, then you are aware that you are sitting and fully involved in the experience of sitting. Kabat-Zinn mentions that we should not only be “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, moment-by-moment,” but also non-judgmentally. This encourages us to nourish an attitude of kindness and curiosity as we attend to the present moment (Sofer, 2018).

However, we are not always mindful. At times, we may find ourselves living on autopilot – lost in thoughts, ruminating about the past or worrying about the future. How many of you have ever arrived to work, only to realize you don’t remember driving there? How many of you have taken a shower and couldn’t remember if you shampooed your hair or not? Or eaten something and you can’t remember tasting it? We all do it. These moments may seem small and insignificant, but our lives are just a string of small moments. If we are uninterested in being present for the small moments, then how can we practice being present for the big moments?

Mindfulness is about training our attention to be more present as opposed to being on autopilot where we find ourselves lost in our thoughts or in patterns of reactivity (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). We can think of mindfulness as a muscle that can be developed over time much like the muscles in our bodies that develop with regularly exercise. You wouldn’t work out once and expect to be strong. It

takes repeated practice to develop our mindfulness muscle. Practicing mindfulness allows us to live each moment more fully and thus live our lives more fully (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

What we practice grows stronger. Studies suggest that repeated experiences or repeated practice strengthen neurological networks and connections which is called neuroplasticity. The more we repeat an experience the more ingrained it becomes in our brain (Siegel, 2009). For example, taxi drivers have stronger visual mapping parts of their brain because they practice driving around the streets all day (Maguire et al., 2000). We are always practicing and reinforcing habits and behaviors, so what habits and behaviors do we want to practice and reinforce? This course is about practicing mindfulness-based gratitude where we will practice becoming more aware of, savoring, and feeling gratitude for the positive aspects of our lives. This will be our practice for the next six weeks and mindfulness is the soil from which we will grow our gratitude practice.

Before we continue, it is important to mention that mindfulness is not a cure-all. It's not meant to replace physiological or psychological treatments and should be considered with great care to determine if this is the best practice for people with mental illness, PTSD, or trauma. However, mindfulness may complement traditional treatments (Van Dam et al., 2018). Therefore, great care and caution should be considered in determining if this course is right for you because it is not meant for everyone.

Although mindfulness is not a cure-all, it does offer some benefits. Mindfulness may not eliminate your stress, but it may help you become more skilled at managing your stress or at least helping you to return to your baseline faster. Mindfulness may also help to calm your thoughts and emotions, but it's important to note that it doesn't stop your thoughts or emotions, nor is it meant to stop them. It is meant to help us become more aware of our thoughts and emotions and help us to establish a more kind and curious relationship with them (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

As I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, mindfulness not only focuses on purposefully paying attention, but it focuses on the quality of mind or our attitude while we are

practicing. According to Kabat-Zinn (The Mindful Leader Team, 2021), there are 9 Attitudinal Factors we want to cultivate when we are practicing mindfulness which include: non-judging, acceptance, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, letting go, generosity, and gratitude. These factors are not separate, but closely interwoven together and supportive of one another. Therefore, in mindfully cultivating non-judging, acceptance, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, letting go, and generosity we also fertilizing the soil for gratitude (The Mindful Leader Team, 2021).

Gratitude has many definitions, but for the sake of this course, we are going to define gratitude as a "life orientation toward noticing and appreciating the positive in life" (Wood et al., 2010, p. 891). By practicing gratitude, we reorient our focus from what is lacking in our lives to what is already present. As humans, we tend to focus on the negative which is part of our survival instinct to keep us safe (Wolf & Serpa, 2015). However, with mindfulness practice we become aware of not only the negative, but aware of the positive, even perhaps amid negative circumstance. This course is not about getting rid of the negative, but about becoming more mindfully aware that there are also positive aspects in our lives that might be going unnoticed (Hanson, 2009).

Studies indicate that practicing gratitude may enhance resilience (Fredrickson, 2001), relationship satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2008; Bohlmeijer et. al., 2021), altruism and prosocial behavior (Algoe et al., 2008; McCullough et al., 2008), life satisfaction (Manthey et al., 2016) and an overall sense of physical (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) and psychological well-being (Cregg & Cheavens, 2020). It may also improve one's sleep (Wood et al., 2009) as well as decrease negative affect, depressive symptoms (Dickens, 2017), and stress (Kerr et al., 2015). Practicing gratitude is also correlated with an increased sense of happiness (Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012). As Brother David Steindl-Rast said, "The root of joy is gratefulness...It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful" (Steindl-Rast, n.d., p. 1).

This course is about mindfully becoming more aware of the good in our lives, orienting our attention towards the good, and practicing gratitude for the good. Brené Brown, an author who

focuses on the study of shame, once said, “I don’t have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness – it’s right in front of me if I’m paying attention and practicing gratitude” (Rubin, 2011, p. 1). Throughout this course, we will go over some ways in which we can become more aware of the good and practice gratitude in our daily lives.

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss the presentation, Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Gratitude Practice. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the presentation.

- **Prompts:** What are some of your questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the presentation? What are some ways we might practice gratitude in our daily lives? What are some ways you are already noticing the good or practicing gratitude?

MINDFUL GRATITUDE PRACTICE: EATING A RAISIN (5 minutes)

Suggested Script

This meditation was adapted from various mindful eating meditations (Wolf & Serpa, 2015, pp. 95-99; Santorelli et al., 2017, pp. 13-14). For this segment, I will guide us through a mindful gratitude practice where we will mindfully eat a raisin. If you don’t have a raisin, then using another small piece of food will work just fine. [The facilitator may inquire into what foods participants brought.] However, for the sake of simplicity, I’m going to use the word raisin for this practice even though we might all have a different variety of foods.

Let’s begin by you picking up the raisin and placing it in your hand. While looking at the raisin, think about what needed to happen for this tiny, dried fruit to arrive here in your hand.

[Pause]

How many of you bought your raisin at the grocery store? [Acknowledge how many people raise their hands.] Think about all the people who were involved in the process of growing the grape which would then become a raisin. Who took care of the grape on the grapevine? How many ancestors were

involved in the process of growing that one vine? Where in the world did the grape come from? Who picked the grape and helped in the process of drying it out so that it could become a raisin? Who was involved in packaging and shipping the raisin? Who was involved in creating the packaging so that it could be shipped and placed on the grocery store shelf?

[Pause]

Think about all the people and all the relationships that were involved in the process for this tiny raisin to be here in your hand.

[Pause]

To think that all of this had to happen, all these relationships and all this individual and collective effort and energy needed to happen so that you could be holding this tiny raisin.

[Pause]

Am I able to feel gratitude for everything that needed to happen so that I could be holding this tiny raisin. I didn't have to grow and take care of that grape. Someone else did. I didn't have to pick the grape and wait for it to dry up into a raisin. Someone else did. I didn't have to travel a great distance to buy this raisin. Someone else brought it to my local grocery store. I have access to food from all over the world at the grocery store and someone brought it there for me so that I could buy it. What convenience! What a gift!

[Pause]

Before continuing with this practice, let's just take a moment to pause and give thanks for the raisin or small piece of food we are about to eat. Let's give thanks for all the people who made it possible for this piece of food to be here in our hands and to provide us with a bit of nourishment.

[Pause]

Thank you.

[Pause]

Now, let's pretend we have never seen a raisin before. Let's explore it with all our senses as if we are seeing this object for the first time. What does it look like? Examine the object, noticing its ridges, color, shape, and size.

[Pause]

What does it sound like? Does it make a sound if you squeeze it or move it around between your fingers?

[Pause]

What does it smell like? Does it have a smell? Does it smell like something you are familiar with?

[Pause]

What does it feel like? Does it have a certain texture? Is it soft, hard, squishy?

[Pause]

Also, notice any thoughts that might be arising as we are exploring this unknown object. Perhaps you are thinking, why am I doing this practice? Perhaps you are noticing an aversion to the object or even a desire for the object. Just notice these thoughts and return to exploring the object with a sense of kindness and curiosity.

[Pause]

Now, begin to bring the object to your mouth. Notice what is happening in your body as you bring it to your mouth. Is your mouth starting to salivate? Notice how quickly your hand moves to bring it to your mouth.

[Pause]

When you are ready and without biting it or swallowing it right away, place the object in your mouth. What does it taste like? What does it feel like on your tongue as you move it around? Then, allowing yourself to bite down on the object and notice what flavors come out. What is the texture like on the inside of the object? Notice what happens in your mouth as you begin to chew the object.

[Pause]

Whenever you are ready and have consciously decided, you may swallow the object. Notice what it feels like to swallow the object and what it feels like as it moves down your throat and esophagus into your stomach.

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss their experience with the mindful gratitude practice of eating a raisin. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the practice.

- **Prompts:** How was that practice for you? What were some of the experiences you had with this mindful gratitude practice of eating a raisin? In thinking about where the raisin came from, did that change your relationship with the food? If so, how? What does it feel like to be one raisin heavier? Is this how you would normally eat? Was there anything that surprised you about this practice? What did you notice about yourself through the process? What did you notice happening in your mind and thoughts? What did you notice about your attention? Was anyone's experience different? What are you taking away from this practice?

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION AND CLOSING (10 minutes)

Independent Exploration

The facilitator will explain that independent exploration is daily home practices for the participants to engage in throughout the week. The independent exploration is an important part of the course as participants are asked to *commit* to at least 45 minutes each day of formal and informal practices. Formal exploration is time we specifically set aside in the day to practice and informal exploration are practices we can do throughout the day and integrate into our daily activities. As discussed in the presentation, these practices are like going to the gym. To strengthen the mindful gratitude muscle, a person needs consistent daily practice for it to grow stronger and become a habit. There will be times when a person doesn't want to practice, and this is normal, but it is to remember that these practices are only beneficial with consistent practice.

- The facilitator will go over the formal and informal explorations on the Session 1 Handout. Ask if the participants have any questions or need any clarifications.

Closing

- Ask participants to bring a gratitude journal and a writing utensil for the next session.
- The facilitator may close the session by reading the poem *The Journey* by Mary Oliver. – See Session 1 Handout.
- Mindful Minute – Take a few breaths together before thanking the participants for their presence.

FACILITATOR REFLECTION (15-20 minutes)

In this reflection, you will consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of Session 1. You may consider offering both appreciative and constructive feedback, with a sense of kindness and curiosity, to celebrate and also fine tune your capabilities as a facilitator.

- **Prompts:** What worked and didn't work? What would you do differently for next time, how would you do it differently, and why?

Session 2: Mind-Body Connection: Thoughts, Feelings, and Body Sensations

OBJECTIVES

- Discuss how the mind and body influence each other.
- Introduce the STOP practice to become more aware and respond more skillfully.
- Understand toxic positivity and how it can be harmful to avoid, deny, or suppress negative emotions with positivity or gratitude.
- Discuss some suggestions on how we might cultivate gratitude by noticing the good in our lives.
- Introduce the gratitude writing practice.

OVERVIEW

Activity	Time (in minutes)	Cumulative Time (in minutes)
Welcome and Check-ins	5	5
Arrival Meditation Practice	5	10
Read Brave Space Agreements	3	13
Small Group Shares	7	20
Presentation: Mind-Body Connection: Thoughts, Feelings, and Body Sensations	15	35
Group Process	10	45
Gratitude Writing Practice	15	60
Group Process	10	70
Independent Exploration and Closing	5	75

MATERIALS

Facilitator: Attendance Tracker, Bell, Session 1 and 2 Outlines

Participants: Gratitude journal and writing utensil, Session 2 Handout (see below), Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

****SESSION 2 HANDOUT******Mind-Body Connection: Thoughts, Feelings, and Body Sensations**

Please bring: Gratitude journal and writing utensil, Session 2 Handout, Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

STOP Practice (Wolf & Serpa, 2015, p. 128)

- **Stop** what you are doing (if it is safe to do so) and become aware of the moment.
- **Take a [slow mindful] Breath.** By taking a shorter breath in and exhaling a longer breath, it helps to calm our nervous system which in turn helps to calm our mind.

- **Observe** what is happening in your mind (thoughts), body (feelings/emotions), and surrounding environment in that moment (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch).
- **Proceed** with your day.

Enough
By David Whyte
 (Whyte, 1990)

Enough. These few words are enough.
 If not these words, this breath.
 If not this breath, this sitting here.
 This opening to life
 we have refused
 again and again
 until now.

Until now.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION

Formal Exploration

- ❖ Listen to the prerecorded gratitude meditation once every day (preferably at the same time).
- ❖ In a gratitude journal, write for ten minutes (preferably after the meditation) about the people, places, things, or experiences you are grateful for and why. It is best to set a timer. Be specific and offer as much detail as possible. The idea is to keep your pen/pencil moving for the entire ten minutes which means that if you are unsure of what to write then you can write, “I don’t know what to write.” Some prompts you might use are: “I’m grateful for... because...; I’m appreciative of... because...; Thank you for... because...”
- ❖ Optional: Before you go to bed, say or think about five things you are grateful for and why. Suggest a prompt for the participants such as: “I am grateful for... because...”

Informal Exploration:

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Think about all the reasons to feel grateful in situations where you find yourself waiting this week (e.g., waiting in line at the grocery store or bank, sitting in your car waiting to pick up your kids, waiting to speak with someone at work, etc.)
- ❖ Practice STOP.
- ❖ Give gratitude before a few meals this week.

****END OF SESSION 2 HANDOUT****

SESSION OUTLINE (75 minutes)

WELCOME AND CHECK-INS (5 minutes)

The facilitator will greet everyone as they log on and express gratitude for everyone's presence. Once everyone seems to have logged on, the facilitator will ask the participants to write how they are feeling by relating it to the weather in the chat box.

ARRIVAL MEDITATION PRACTICE (5 minutes) – See Session 1

READ BRAVE SPACE AGREEMENTS (3 minutes) – See Session 1

SMALL GROUP SHARES (7 minutes)

Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator may choose to use breakout rooms for larger groups. Explain to the participants that during small group shares, they will be practicing mindful speaking and mindful listening. Each participant will have two to three minutes to share their experience with the prerecorded gratitude meditation, the daily lists of reasons to feel gratitude, and/or the informal exploration (e.g., give gratitude before a meal, eat a few mindful bites). They will finish by briefly sharing one thing they are grateful for this past week.

- **Prompts:** Did you find anything challenging, easy, and/or surprising?

PRESENTATION: MIND-BODY CONNECTION: THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, BODY

SENSATIONS (15 minutes)

Suggested Script

In this presentation, we will discuss the mind-body connection as it relates to our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. To begin this presentation, I want everyone to think about a stressful event or experience that recently occurred in your life. Choose an event or experience you feel comfortable thinking about for a couple of minutes. In bringing this event or experience to the forefront of your mind, take a moment to think about what happened. How did you feel in that moment? Do you remember some of the thoughts you were thinking? As you are thinking about this event or experience, what is happening in your body right now? Just take a moment to notice any feelings or body sensations that you are feeling right now as you are thinking about this stressful event or experience. Are you noticing anything about your thoughts?

Now, I want everyone to think about something that recently occurred in your life that evoked a positive emotion. Take a minute to think about what happened. How did you feel in this moment? If you can recall, what were some of the thoughts you were thinking? As you are thinking about this event or experience, what is happening in your body right now? Just take a moment to notice any feelings or body sensations that you are feeling right now as you are thinking about this positive event or experience. Are you noticing anything about your thoughts? Would anyone like to briefly share any observations about what they noticed from this practice?

The thought of a stressful event or experience from the past can cause stress in our bodies right here and now. However, the thoughts of a positive experience from the past can cause us to feel positive emotions in our bodies. Therefore, from this brief practice, we noticed that our thoughts influence the feelings and emotions in our bodies in the present moment. How often do we find ourselves unaware of the thoughts we are thinking and how they may be impacting the body? When we are not aware of what is happening in the mind (thoughts) and body (feelings/emotions), this impacts our perceptions, the decisions we make, and how we engage with ourselves, others, and the world at large. [The facilitator may provide a personal example of how a lack of awareness of thoughts, feelings, and body sensations may cause others pain]. Mindfulness helps us to become more

aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations so we might choose to respond rather than react out of habit to circumstances (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

There is a quote attributed to Viktor Frankl who was an Austrian, psychiatrist, philosopher, author, as well as Holocaust survivor (Britannica, 2023). However, the exact source is unknown. He is attributed as saying [Add quote in chat box], “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 our freedom” (Goodreads, n.d.) As we practice mindfulness, we gain valuable insight and discover that we have the freedom to choose how to respond rather than be immersed in unconscious programs of reactivity (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). With mindfulness, we practice creating the space that Frankl mentioned. One of the ways we can practice creating this space is by using the STOP practice (Wolf & Serpa, 2015, p. 128).

S-T-O-P is an acronym for Stop, Take a Breath, Observe, and Proceed.

- **Stop** what you are doing (if it is safe to do so) and become aware of the moment.
- **Take a [slow mindful] Breath.** By taking a shorter breath in and exhaling a longer breath, it helps to calm our nervous system which in turn helps to calm our mind.
- **Observe** what is happening in your mind (thoughts), body (feelings/emotions), and surrounding environment in that moment (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch).
- **Proceed** with your day.

STOP helps us become more aware of the present moment, especially if we are running on autopilot. When we are more present, we respond more skillfully rather than react (Wolf & Serpa, 2015).

Not only does mindfulness help us become aware of what is happening in our minds and bodies, but it also helps us to become more aware of how we are in relationship with the people, places, things, and circumstances in our lives. Kabat-Zinn (2013) stated, “mindfulness is essentially about relationality - in other words, how we are in relationship to everything, including our own

minds and bodies, our thoughts and emotions, our past and what transpired to bring us, still breathing, into this moment-and how we can learn to live our way into every aspect of life with integrity, with kindness toward ourselves and others, and with wisdom (p. xxxvii).”

Mindfulness practice is supportive of gratitude practice. In opening to the present moment with a sense of kindness and curiosity, we open to recognizing and becoming more aware of the ‘good’ or rather the positive aspects of our lives no matter how small (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Much like exercising regularly to strengthen our muscles, we can retrain our minds and strengthen our ability to notice the good in our lives. As we noticed with the practice at the start of this presentation, the mind affects the body, and the body affects the mind. Therefore, the more we mindfully focus on the good in our lives, the more these thoughts, feelings, and sensations will appear in the mind and body (Hanson, 2009).

However, how do we feel gratitude when we are feeling stressed and overwhelmed? First, it is important to note that it can be harmful to use gratitude or positivity to avoid, deny, or suppress any negative emotion we might be feeling if we are going through a difficult, challenging, or painful time. This is called toxic positivity, or dismissing negative emotion to maintain a positive mindset (Upadhyay et al., 2022). We are all familiar with some of these phrases that our culture uses such as: Look on the bright side; Everything happens for a reason; It could be worse; or Think positive. A person may judge themselves for feeling negative emotion because they believe that they should be feeling grateful all the time. It is impossible to feel grateful all the time. When someone is faced with difficult, challenging, or painful situation, it is normal and valid to feel negative emotion or even strong negative emotion. We are human. We feel the whole spectrum of emotion. However, we don’t want to avoid, deny, or suppress these negative emotions with a smile on our face when we are really suffering. This will cause us further pain and suffering (Troy et al., 2013). In these moments, it is important for us to take care of ourselves and tune into what our needs are and how we might feel

more supported such as reaching out for help from those we trust - a friend, partner, family member, coworker, or licensed professional.

However, when we are faced with adversity, having a mindful-based gratitude practice is helpful as studies have shown that gratitude practice may enhance resilience (Fredrickson, 2001), happiness (Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012) and an overall sense of physical (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) and psychological well-being (Cregg & Cheavens, 2020). All these help us to better cope with stress from life's difficulties and challenges.

What are some other ways we might practice gratitude? For example, we might practice gratitude by writing a daily or weekly list of reasons to feel gratitude (Emmons et. al, 2003, Davis et al., 2016), gratitude journaling (Lambert et al., 2012), writing gratitude letters (Dickens, 2017), and expressing gratitude directly to the person (Davis et. al, 2016).

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss the presentation, Mind-Body Connection: Thoughts, Feelings, & Body Sensations. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the presentation.

- **Prompts:** What are some of your questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the presentation? What are some other suggestions in how we can practice gratitude in our daily lives? What are some ways you already practice gratitude?

GRATITUDE WRITING PRACTICE (10 minutes)

Suggested Script

For this practice, we are going to do some gratitude writing. Does everyone have a notebook or some paper they can write on as well as a writing utensil? If there is anyone who is unable to write with a writing utensil or anyone who would rather type, then that is also an option as well.

We are going to write for ten minutes. In your notebook, on a piece of paper, or on your computer, you are going to write about the people, places, things, or experiences you are grateful for

and why [Post these instructions in the chat box]. I will also be doing this activity with you. I encourage you to go into as much detail as you can in thinking about how these people, places, things, or experiences make you feel or made you feel in the moment. This will help to engrain the experience and train yourself what it is to think and feel gratitude. No one will be reading your writing unless you choose to share it during our group process segment. As I mentioned, we will be writing for ten minutes. The idea is to keep your pen/pencil moving for the entire ten minutes which means that if you are unsure of what to write then you can write, "I don't know what to write." Some prompts you might use are [Post in the chat box]: "I'm grateful for... because...; I'm appreciative of... because...; Thank you for... because..." Does anyone have any questions about the activity? I'm going to set a timer for ten minutes and let's begin.

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

Reiterate to the participants that it is entirely up to them in terms of what and how much they would like to share about their experience with the writing practice. It is not necessary to go into specific detail.

- **Prompts:** How was this practice for all of you? What was your initial reaction towards the practice? Did anything surprise you about this practice or about yourself? What did you learn if anything? What did you observe in terms of your thoughts, feelings, or body sensations? Did you notice any changes in your mind and/or body between when you began the activity and when you finished the activity?

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION AND CLOSING (10 minutes)

Independent Exploration

- The facilitator will go over the formal and informal explorations on the Session 2 Handout. Ask if the participants have any questions or need any clarifications.

Closing

- The facilitator may close the session by reading the poem Enough by David Whyte. – See Session 2 Handout
- Mindful Minute - Take a few breaths together and then thank the participants for their presence.

FACILITATOR REFLECTION (15-20 minutes)

In this reflection, you will consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of Session 2. You may consider offering both appreciative and constructive feedback, with a sense of kindness and curiosity, to celebrate and fine tune your capabilities as a facilitator.

- **Prompts:** What worked and didn't work? What would you do differently for next time, how would you do it differently, and why?

Session 3: Self-Gratitude

OBJECTIVES

- Explore the inner-critic and negative self-talk.
- Introduce Notice, Soften, and Reframe practice for working with the inner-critic.
- Understand neuroplasticity and how it aids in habit formation.
- Introduce RAIN practice.
- Practice self-gratitude with a body scan meditation.

OVERVIEW

Activity	Time (in minutes)	Cumulative Time (in minutes)
Welcome and Check-ins	5	5
Arrival Meditation Practice	5	10
Read Brave Space Agreements	3	13
Small Group Shares	7	20

Presentation: Mindful Self-Gratitude	15	35
Group Process	10	45
Self-Gratitude Body Scan Meditation	15	55
Group Process	10	65
Independent Exploration and Closing	5	75

MATERIALS

Facilitator: Attendance Tracker, Bell, Session 1 and 3 Outlines

Participants: Session 3 Handout (see below), Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

****SESSION 3 HANDOUT****

Self- Gratitude

Please bring: Session 3 Handout, Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

“Changing Your Critical Self-Talk”

On Self-Compassion: Dr. Kristin Neff’s (n.d.) website, there are 3 steps:

- 1) Notice - “notice when you are being self-critical.”
- 2) Soften – “make an active effort to soften the self-critical voice, but do so with compassion rather than self-judgment.”
- 3) Reframe - “reframe the observations made by your inner critic in a friendly, positive way.”

RAIN Practice (Brach, 2020; Salzberg, 2018)

- **Recognize** - notice the feeling, thought, or emotion that is present.
- **Acknowledge** (Salzberg, 2018) **or** **Allow** (Brach, 2020) - experience the feeling, thought or emotion that has arisen.
- **Investigate** - explore the feeling, thought, or emotion from a place of curiosity and openness.
- **Non-attachment, Non-identify** (Salzberg, 2018), **or** **Nourish** (Brach, 2020) – recognize that the feeling, thought, or emotion is not defining of oneself and to offer self-compassion.

A Love Note To My Body
By Cleo Wade
 (Wade, 2018, p. 165)

A love note to my body:
 First of all,
 I want to say
 thank you
 for the heart you kept beating

even when it was broken
 for every answer you gave me in my gut
 for loving me back
 even when
 I didn't know how to love you
 for every time you recovered when I pushed
 you past your limits
 for today,
 for waking up.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION

Formal Exploration

- ❖ Listen to the prerecorded gratitude meditation once every day (preferably at the same time).
- ❖ In a gratitude journal, write for ten minutes (preferably after the meditation) about the people, places, things, or experiences you are grateful for and why. It is best to set a timer. Be specific and offer as much detail as possible. The idea is to keep your pen/pencil moving for the entire ten minutes which means that if you are unsure of what to write then you can write, "I don't know what to write." Some prompts you might use are: "I'm grateful for... because...; I'm appreciative of... because...; Thank you for... because..."
- ❖ Optional: Before you go to bed, say or think about five things you are grateful for and why. Suggest a prompt for the participants such as: "I am grateful for... because..."

Informal Exploration

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Practice Notice, Soften, and Refrain or RAIN when the inner-critic or judgmental mind arises.
- ❖ Think about all the reasons to feel grateful in situations where you find yourself waiting this week. This could be waiting in line at the grocery store or bank, sitting in your car waiting to pick up your kids, waiting to speak with someone at work, etc.
- ❖ Give gratitude before a few meals this week.

****END OF SESSION 3 HANDOUT****

SESSION OUTLINE (75 minutes)**WELCOME AND CHECK-INS** (5 minutes)

The facilitator will greet everyone as they log on and express gratitude for everyone's presence. Once everyone seems to have logged on, the facilitator will ask the participants to check-in using the Rose, Bud, and Thorn practice (Gonzalez, n.d.). The participants will share one success or positive aspect in their life (rose), one opportunity for learning and growth or something you are interested in understanding (bud) and one challenge or source of stress (thorn).

ARRIVAL MEDITATION PRACTICE (5 minutes) – See Session 1**READ BRAVE SPACE AGREEMENTS** (3 minutes) – See Session 1**SMALL GROUP SHARES** (7 minutes)

Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator may choose to use breakout rooms for larger groups. Remind the participants that during small group shares, they will be practicing mindful speaking and mindful listening. Each participant will have two to three minutes to share their experience with the prerecorded gratitude meditation, the gratitude writing practice, the daily list of reasons to feel gratitude, and/or informal exploration (e.g., Gratitude list while waiting, STOP, give gratitude before a meal). They will finish by briefly sharing one thing they are grateful for this past week.

- **Prompts:** Did you find anything challenging, easy, and/or surprising?

PRESENTATION: SELF-GRATITUDE (15 minutes)***Suggested Script***

For today's presentation, I would like to talk about mindful self-gratitude or giving mindful gratitude towards oneself. What is arising for you when I mention self-gratitude or giving gratitude towards yourself?

Perhaps some of you notice the presence of the inner-critic or judgmental mind, the voice inside saying that there isn't enough or that you are not enough. Gratitude is not about noticing the lack or what's not enough, but about noticing the good that is already present (Wolf & Serpa, 2015).

It is about noticing our gifts, talents, skills, abilities, qualities, characteristics that are already present within and not focusing on what may be lacking. At times, our inner-critic hinders our ability to see who we really are and all the wonderful gifts we have to offer ourselves and to others. To see these gifts, we may need to soften our inner-critic and judgmental mind (“Exercise 5,” n.d.). One way we can soften this critical voice is by looking at our thoughts with kindness, curiosity. When we bring curiosity to the process, judgment can no longer be present (Sofer, 2018). As we cultivate this type of attitude of mind, it creates space to offer ourselves some mindful self-gratitude. By practicing self-gratitude, it counteracts the inner-critic and helps to retrain ourselves to think, believe, and trust that we are enough and that we are worthy (Sofer, 2018; Wolf & Serpa, 2015).

Practicing gratitude isn’t a cure-all to life’s problems, but it may give us the strength and resilience to face difficulties and challenges (Fredrickson, 2001). Our Mindfulness practice is supportive of this practice and is often referred to as heartfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) because we practice being in the present moment with a sense of kindness and compassion (Sofer, 2018). Compassion and gratitude are qualities that support the cultivation of each other while countering the self-critical mind (Sofer, 2018).

On Dr. Kristin Neff’s Self-Compassion website, there is an exercise to work with the inner-critic called “Changing your critical self-talk” (“Exercise 5,” n.d.). There are three steps:

- 1) “**Notice** when you are being self-critical.” The inner voice that tells us we aren’t good enough or that we aren’t worthy. We want to notice and become familiar with the words and tone we use when speaking with ourselves. We want to take an inventory of our negative self-talk (“Exercise 5,” n.d.). What do you typically judge or criticize yourself about? What are the types of words or the tone of voice you use when you make a mistake? This self-reflection is not to judge the words or tone, but to become aware of them.*
- 2) “Make an active effort to **soften** the self-critical voice, but do so with compassion rather than self-judgment.” We often believe our thoughts and feelings to be true or factual, but what if we*

challenged our thoughts and feelings? In doing so, we may discover that just because we think a thought or repeatedly tell ourselves a story, it doesn't make it true. This is an opportunity to self-soothe and speak to ourselves with a sense of compassion ("Exercise 5," n.d.).

- 3) *"Reframe the observations made by your inner critic in a friendly, positive way." After examining our thoughts, we may discover that they are simply not true. In this instance, we may 'reframe the observation' in a way that is supportive, kind, understanding, and equanimous ("Exercise 5," n.d.).*

These are practices we can do to rewire our brain to be more compassionate, loving, and understanding towards ourselves. When we are more compassionate, loving, and understanding, this provides fertile soil for gratitude to blossom. Self-compassion nourishes self-gratitude because it softens our judgmental and self-critical mind so that we can notice the good we have within rather than the lack.

When we talk about rewiring our brain, we are talking about neuroplasticity. "When we focus repeatedly on specific skills, moment-to-moment neural activity can gradually become an established trait through the power of neuroplasticity" (Siegel, 2010, p. 110) which is the "capacity for creating new neural connections and growing new neurons in response to experience" (Siegel, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, the more a person practices thoughts and feelings of gratitude, the more the person strengthens and grows neurological pathways in the brain—laying the groundwork for developing an attitude of gratitude. Once the brain and body begin to automatize what it is to think and feel gratitude, the practice becomes a habit. In this instance, we are more easily able to notice the good in our lives and we are more prone to think and feel gratitude (Dispenza, 2012; Hanson, 2009).

Another practice we might use is RAIN (Brach, 2020; Salzberg, 2018). RAIN is an acronym for Recognize, Acknowledge (Salzberg, 2018) or Allow (Brach, 2020), Investigate, and Non-Attachment, Non-identify (Salzberg, 2018), or Nourish (Brach, 2020). Essentially, RAIN, much like the STOP practice from last week's session, is a practice which focuses on the relationship we have

with our feelings, thoughts, and emotions as they are held in the space of awareness. This is a helpful practice when we are faced with a strong emotion (Brach, 2020; Salzberg, 2018).

- **Recognize** - notice the feeling, thought, or emotion that is present.
- **Acknowledge or Allow** – experience and accept the feeling, thought or emotion that has arisen.
- **Investigate** - explore the feeling, thought, or emotion from a place of curiosity and openness.
- **Non-attachment, Non-identify, or Nourish** – recognize that the feeling, thought, or emotion is not self-defining and offer self-compassion.

Salzberg (2018) stated, “By allowing ourselves this simple recognition, we begin to accept that we will never be able to control our experiences, but that we can transform our relationship to them. This changes everything” (p. 3). Acceptance involves fully acknowledging and accepting a situation as it is, without judgment or resistance. This can be particularly challenging in difficult situations, but can be a powerful practice for cultivating inner peace and resilience.

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss the presentation, Self-Gratitude. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the presentation.

- **Prompts:** What are some of your questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the presentation? How does a lack of self-gratitude affect how you are engaging with yourself and with others? How does self-compassion play a role in cultivating your self-gratitude? What are some ways we might show ourselves some self-compassion?

SELF-GRATITUDE BODY SCAN MEDITATION (15 minutes)

We are going to be doing a meditation focused on extending the body some self-compassion and self-gratitude which was adapted from A Clinician’s Guide to Teaching Mindfulness (Wolf & Serpa, 2015, pp. 95-97). This is a body scan meditation which will last about 15 minutes. We are going to start with the feet and move our way up to the head. This type of meditation helps us to become

more familiar with what is happening in the body. Noticing any feelings and sensations that are present or even if there is a lack of feeling or sensation. This practice is not about making something happen or to feel relaxed, although feeling relaxed might be your experience. Instead, this practice is simply about noticing whatever is arising with a sense of kindness and curiosity to what is already present. No need to push the feeling away or grasp onto it. Instead, perhaps allowing it and giving it space to just be. However, if at any point you feel strong discomfort, please feel free to take care of your needs. This might mean a small shift in the position of your body, reorienting your focus onto a different anchor such as a sight or a sound. In certain instances, it might mean you need to take a break. What is asked from this practice is to sit with whatever is arising in the body as best you can and to be sure you are also taking care of your needs in the best way you can. – honoring your own inner wisdom and guidance.

[Ring bell 3 times]

Let's begin by finding a comfortable posture. For this meditation, it is common to choose a lying down posture, facing upward with legs either extended or bent and with arms extended or resting on the abdomen. Or you may choose to remain seated or stand.

[Pause]

As we settle into our chosen posture, let's bring our attention to the body breathing. Noticing how the chest expands on the inhale and contracts on the exhale.

[Pause]

Noticing the rhythm of your breathing as you breath in and breath out. No need to manipulate your breath in anyway, but just allowing its natural rhythm to take the lead.

[Pause]

Let's move our attention down to the toes of the feet. Feeling into the toes of feet. Considering their importance in helping you maintain your balance while you are standing and moving your body forward when you walk or run. Now, feeling into the entirety of the feet. Noticing any sensations of

tingling, pressure, moisture, perhaps warmth, or the feeling of contact with your socks or shoes or perhaps noticing that you don't feel any sensations in your feet and that's okay too. Acknowledging their importance in allowing you to move about this earth and engage with others. Acknowledging how they might help you with your profession or provide service for others.

[Pause]

Now moving into the lower legs of the body. This is an area of the body we don't often think about, but also helps with balance. Noticing any sensations in the lower leg as we feel into this part of the body. There is no right way to feel. Your experience right now is simply your experience. No need to change it or want something to be different.

[Pause]

Moving into the knees. Feeling deep into the tissue of the knees and acknowledging their importance. I think about how my knees help me to sit in this chair or sit on the floor so that I might pet and play with my dogs. Just noticing how this one part of the body influences so many aspects of our lives.

[Pause]

Now, feeling into the thighs and noticing any sensations here or lack of sensations. Awareness is awareness - without feeling a need to judge the experience. This is an area of the body that helps support our weight especially when we are squatting down to pick something up.

[Pause]

Letting go of the thighs as we move onto the pelvic area. Noticing any feelings or sensations in this area - feelings of tension or tightness or perhaps a different sensation. Recognizing the importance of this area for reproduction or for getting rid of waste – helping to support our overall health. Just feeling into this area of the body and letting it go as we move into the abdomen. Feeling into the abdomen which houses some of our important organs which we use for digestion and breathing. Perhaps acknowledging all the functions that are occurring right now without your notice and

without you having to manually control them. We don't need to think about digesting our food because our body naturally does it for us. Think of all the free time we have because our bodies are automatically taking care of our basic functions. Perhaps you can offer a gentle silent thank you to your body for taking care of all these functions that help keep you alive. Thank you. Thank you.

[Pause]

Now, moving into the lower and upper back. Feeling into the muscles and into the tissue. Noticing any sensations or lack of sensations that might be present. Acknowledging the spine and the bones and tissue that hold your body upright.

[Pause]

Now, moving into the shoulders and the neck. Noticing any sensations in these areas, any tightness or pain. Your experience is your experience in this moment. No need to change it, but simply to notice it with a sense of kindness and curiosity if that feels possible. If at any point you feel strong discomfort, feel free to make a gentle adjustment to your posture or focus your attention on a different anchor if that is helpful and perhaps returning when you feel ready.

[Pause]

Let's move to feeling the entirety of the head. Feeling into the jaw, mouth, and the teeth which help us to eat and chew our food to provide the body nourishment. Feeling into the tongue which allows us to taste food and all the delicious meals we have ever eaten and will ever eat. It helps us to distinguish different flavors. Just tuning into these areas of the body.

[Pause]

Feeling into the scalp and into the skull which houses the brain. Thinking about all the functions of the brain as it is the control center for the body. Translating our worldly experiences with our senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and feel as well as our ability to process language and conscious thought. And if it feels possible, extending a gentle silent thank you. Thank you brain for all that you do for me so that I might experience my body and experience my body in this world.

[Pause]

Let's move our attention to our eyes which help us to see and take in information as we move about this earth. They help us to connect our internal and external worlds. - helping us to identify people's faces, places, objects, colors. Our eyes help to keep us safe from harm.

[Pause]

Moving on into the nose which helps us to breath. Noticing what's here and if there are any sensations coming into your awareness. Now letting go of the nose and focusing on the ears. Tuning into your ears and into the tissue and the cartilage. Noticing any sounds that you might hear as you use your ears to translate sound. Thank you ears. Thank you.

[Pause]

Noticing the entirety of your body. Acknowledging your body that nourishes you, that connects our internal experience with the external environment, that connects us with others and with the world. Just taking a moment to be with yourself here in this moment and if it feels possible, to extend some gratitude for all that your body does for you that you are aware of an unaware of.

[Pause]

Now, let's finish this practice by placing our hands over our hearts. Feeling into the heart in your chest repeat the following phrases to yourselves: "May my body be happy. May my body be happy and at ease" (Wolf & Serpa, p. 173). [Repeat slowly and gently 3x] Thank you body. Thank you.

[Long Pause]

[Ring bell 3 times]

Now, bringing some movement into your fingers and into your toes. Allowing your body to stretch in any way that feels needed. Allowing your eyes to open if they have been closed.

[Pause]

I would like to end this meditation with the poem A Love Note To My Body by Cleo Wade. – See Session 3 Handout

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process will offer the participants an opportunity to ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the meditation practice.

- **Prompts:** Would anyone like to share? – offering any questions, observations, reflections, or comments about your experience with the practice.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION AND CLOSING (10 minutes)*Independent Exploration*

- The facilitator will go over the formal and informal explorations on the Session 3 Handout. Ask if the participants have any questions or need any clarifications.

Closing

- Mindful Minute – Take a few breaths together before thanking the participants for their presence.

FACILITATOR REFLECTION (15-20 minutes)

In this reflection, you will consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of Session 3. You may consider offering both appreciative and constructive feedback, with a sense of kindness and curiosity, to celebrate and fine tune your capabilities as a facilitator.

- **Prompts:** What worked and didn't work? What would you do differently for next time, how would you do it differently, and why?

Session 4: Gratitude in the Midst of Challenging Relationships

OBJECTIVES

- Understand mindful versus unmindful communication.
- Introduce the mindful dialogue practice, Pause-Relax-Open, Trust Emergence, Listen Deeply-Speak the Truth.

- Practice shifting perspective from feeling separate (I/me versus you/them) to feeling more connected (we/us) with a practice by Sharon Salzberg.
- Introduce the loving-kindness gratitude meditation.

OVERVIEW

Activity	Time (in minutes)	Cumulative Time (in minutes)
Welcome and Check-ins	5	5
Arrival Meditation Practice	5	10
Read Brave Space Agreements	3	13
Small Group Shares	7	20
Presentation: Gratitude in the Midst of Challenging Relationships	15	35
Group Process	10	45
Loving-Kindness Gratitude Meditation	10	55
Group Process	10	65
Independent Exploration and Closing	10	75

MATERIALS

- **Facilitator:** Attendance Tracker, Bell, Session 1 and 4 Outlines
- **Participants:** Session 4 Handout (see below), Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

****SESSION 4 HANDOUT****

Gratitude in the Midst of Challenging Relationships

Please bring: Session 4 Handout, Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

Gregory Kramer's Insight Dialogue Instructions (2007)

- 1) Pause-Relax-Open
- 2) Trust Emergence
- 3) Listen Deeply-Speak the Truth

Words Are Windows (or They're Walls)
By Ruth Bebermeyer
 (Bebermeyer, 1987)

I feel so sentenced by your words,
 I feel so judged and sent away,
 Before I go I've got to know,
 Is that what you mean to say?
 Before I rise to my defense,
 Before I speak in hurt or fear,
 Before I build that wall of words,
 Tell me, did I really hear?

Words are windows, or they're walls,
 They sentence us, or set us free.
 When I speak and when I hear,
 Let the love light shine through me.
 There are things I need to say,
 Things that mean so much to me,
 If my words don't make me clear,
 Will you help me to be free?
 If I seemed to put you down,
 If you felt I didn't care,
 Try to listen through my words,
 To the feelings that we share.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION

Formal Exploration

- ❖ Listen to the prerecorded gratitude meditation once every day (preferably at the same time).
- ❖ In a gratitude journal, write for ten minutes (preferably after the meditation) about the people, places, things, or experiences you are grateful for and why. It is best to set a timer. Be specific and offer as much detail as possible. The idea is to keep your pen/pencil moving for the entire ten minutes which means that if you are unsure of what to write then you can write, "I don't know what to write." Some prompts you might use are: "I'm grateful for... because...; I'm appreciative of... because...; Thank you for... because..."
- ❖ Optional: Before you go to bed, say or think about five things you are grateful for and why. Suggest a prompt for the participants such as: "I am grateful for... because..."

Informal Exploration

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Practice mindful communication with Pause-Relax-Open, Trust Emergence, Listen Deeply-Speak the Truth (Kamer, 2007).
- ❖ Think about all the reasons to feel grateful in situations where you find yourself waiting this week. This could be waiting in line at the grocery store or bank, sitting in your car waiting to pick up your kids, waiting to speak with someone at work, etc.

- ❖ Give gratitude before a few meals this week.
- ❖ Choose your own informal exploration practice.

****END OF SESSION 4 HANDOUT****

SESSION OUTLINE (75 minutes)

WELCOME AND CHECK-INS (5 minutes)

The facilitator will greet everyone as they log on and express gratitude for everyone's presence. Once everyone seems to have logged on, the facilitator will ask the participants to write three things they are grateful for in the chat box.

ARRIVAL MEDITATION PRACTICE (5 minutes) – See Session 1

READ BRAVE SPACE AGREEMENTS (3 minutes) – See Session 1

SMALL GROUP SHARES (7 minutes)

Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator may choose to use breakout rooms for larger groups. Remind the participants that during small group shares, they will be practicing mindful speaking and mindful listening. Each participant will have two to three minutes to share their experience with the prerecorded gratitude meditation, the gratitude writing practice, the daily list of reasons to feel gratitude, and/or informal exploration (e.g., Notice, Soften, Refrain (“*Exercise 5*,” *n.d.*); RAIN (Brach, 2020; Salzberg, 2018); gratitude list while waiting; give gratitude before a meal). They will finish by briefly sharing one thing they are grateful for this past week.

- **Prompts:** Did you find anything challenging, easy, and/or surprising?

PRESENTATION: MINDFULNESS-BASED GRATITUDE IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIPS (15 minutes)

Suggested Script

For today's presentation, we will discuss mindfulness-based gratitude in the midst of challenging relationships. Relationships can be a great source of love, encouragement, and support,

but they can also be a great source of pain, suffering, and heartbreak. Simply put, relationships can be challenging. In the midst of a challenging relationship, being mindful is helpful in navigating the, at times, turbulent waters. When we are unaware of the presence of strong negative emotions within ourselves during a difficult communication or situation, we may unintentionally transmit our pain and suffering onto another – thus causing them or escalating their pain and suffering. As Sofer (2018) wrote, “hurt people hurt people” (p. 88). Our interactions have the power to help or to hurt others, but the decision is ours in how we want to communicate. Hanh (2013) wrote, “Every time we communicate, we either produce more compassion, love, and harmony or we produce more suffering and violence” (p. 139).

We want to use communication to establish shared meaning and understanding. However, the quality of communication is dependent on one’s level of awareness. According to Sofer (2018), “If communication is about creating understanding, mindful communication is about creating understanding through awareness. We could say that the opposite is mindless communication—we’re either running on automatic or we’re consumed by an inner narrative of judgments, criticism, planning, and mind wandering” (p. 16). Essentially, with mindful communication, there is a greater quality of communication and understanding. On the other hand, unmindful communication has a poor quality of communication which leads to misunderstanding and suffering (Kramer, 2007; Sofer, 2018).

Listening is not about hearing the words that are spoken but the meaning behind the words. According to Rosenberg (2012), we communicate with the intention to fulfill needs. People use different strategies to acquire their needs and some of those strategies are skillful and some not skillful. However, it is to look beyond the words and strategies and focus on what a person’s underlying needs are and how they may be met (Rosenberg, 2012). In an emotionally charged moment, a person might be operating from their own unconscious habits and behaviors and not conveying their needs in a clear and beneficial way. They might be threatening the other person,

insulting them, or calling them names. When a person becomes angry, it is because their needs are not being met. If we listen with compassion and with the intention to understand, we might be able to recognize and acknowledge another person's needs which will allow us to become more of a supporting ally rather than the opposition (Rosenberg, 2012).

How can we more mindfully communicate? As Sofer (2018) stated, mindful communication first begins with our own awareness. As we bring more awareness to the inner workings of the mind, body, and heart and take a closer look at what is under the surface, we begin to see things more clearly as they are rather than through the lens of our own perceptions (Kramer, 2007). We cultivate an ability to sit with our discomfort and allow it to be without grasping or pushing away which opens the door for investigation. Through this process of recognizing, allowing, and investigating, we can learn to create and nurture healthier habits and behaviors (Brach, 2020). When we can take a closer look at the causes of our suffering, we become more able to understand the suffering of another (Hanh, 2013).

Despite being in the midst of a difficult communication, we can always bring more awareness to our bodies, minds, and hearts. "When tensions run high, presence grounds us. The more familiar we are with how it feels to be present, the more easily we detect the signs of being activated" (Sofer, 2018, p. 31). Heightened with emotion, we can train our bodies to move more deeply into the present moment through mindfulness practice.

At times, we may find ourselves in conflict with another. In those situations, it may be helpful to be reminded of our shared humanness. Sharon Salzberg (2014) discusses shifting our perspective from I to we by acknowledging shared commonality. While bringing this person to mind, Salzberg (2014) instructs the reader to quietly say any of these phrases:

- *This person has a body and a mind, just like me.*
- *This person has feelings, emotions, and thoughts, just like me.*
- *This person has, in his or her life, experienced physical and emotional pain and suffering, just like me.*
- *This person has at some point been sad, disappointed, angry, or hurt, just like me.*

- *This person has felt unworthy or inadequate, just like me.*
- *This person worries and is frightened sometimes, just like me.*
- *This person has longed for friendship, just like me.*
- *This person is learning about life, just like me.*
- *This person wants to be caring and kind to others, just like me.*
- *This person wants to be content with life, just like me.*
- *This person wishes to be free from pain and suffering, and to be safe and healthy, just like me.*
- *This person wishes to be happy and loved, just like me. (pp. 100-101)*

After repeating some of these phrases, Salzberg (2014) instructs the reader to send the person well-wishes with the following statements:

- *I wish for this person to have the strength, resources, and social support to navigate the difficulties in life with ease.*
- *I wish for this person to be free from pain and suffering.*
- *I wish for this person to be peaceful and happy and loved.*
- *Because this person is a fellow human being, just like me. (p. 101)*

This practice helps us to see our common humanity. It shifts a perspective from I/me versus you/them to we/us.

Another way we can more mindfully communicate in challenging relationships is by using Gregory Kramer's (2007) instructions for Insight Dialogue which is a meditative form of dialogue. Kramer's instructions have 3 parts (p. 107):

- ***Pause-Relax-Open:*** *The mindful pause is the wedge that allows us to respond rather than react to our unconscious habits and patterns of behavior. It creates a space to step outside the attachments and therefore the emotional reactions to defend our perceptions (Kramer, 2007). In practicing mindfulness, we no longer become swept up in patterns of reactivity but create new habits for compassion and understanding. The second instruction is to Relax both the body and mind. This instruction cultivates both "tranquility and acceptance" (p. 107). This guideline reinforces the idea of a mind-body connection in that the body affects the mind and the mind affects the body. Kramer's (2007) third guideline is Open which cultivates "relational availability and spaciousness" (p. 107). In opening, we open ourselves to the vulnerabilities of being seen by the other person as well as opening to their potential pain and suffering. When we open, we open*

to mutuality (Kramer, 2007). Kramer (2007) wrote, “Focused internally, mindfulness emphasizes sensing his body, these thoughts, these emotions. Expanded externally, mindfulness includes the world that is sensed and reacted to: the physical world and the appearance, words, and actions of others” (p. 129).

- **Trust Emergence:** “Resting in the flux of experience. We meet the impermanence of things and experience both the delight and insecurity of change and not knowing. We attend to what the next moment will bring” (p. 163). As Kramer wrote, “Invite yourself to drop the burden of attempting to control things” (p. 140). In opening to Trust Emergence, we enter into the unknown and become open to new choices and new possibilities unbound by our habits. There is a sense of aliveness and growth in these moments. “Let all plans fall away. Ride the moment” (p. 143).
- **Listen Deeply-Speak the Truth:** “Listen Deeply opens the sense, heart, and mind to receive this moment fully. To listen deeply is to listen with mindfulness, surrendering fully to the unfolding words and presence of our co-meditators and others in our lives” (p. 150). Deep listening is followed by speaking the truth. Words are powerful and it is important to acknowledge the soil from which they have sprouted. “At a very basic level, Speak the Truth is Right Speech that will do no harm” (p. 164). Kramer warns of harmful speech or speech without mindfulness when he wrote: “Such conditioned speech actually leads us into reactions, interactions with others, and tremendous confusion and pain. Our hungers get in the way of speaking the truth, either the objection or subjective truth, as they drive us toward speaking for entertainment, to get what we want, or to protect ourselves.” (p. 169). Words can be harming to ourselves and to others, but they can also have a positive impact. Kramer points out the positive power of words when he stated, “The wholesome potential of words is multifaceted. With words we communicate care, offer love, and express joy.... Words can convey simple interest, embody kindness, point to wisdom, or share presence” (p. 171). The choice is always ours.

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss the presentation, Mindfulness-Based Gratitude in the Midst of Challenging Relationships. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the presentation.

- **Prompts:** What are some of your questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the presentation? Think about some of the relationships you are grateful for. What are some ways you might express or extend gratitude to someone?

LOVING-KINDNESS GRATITUDE MEDITATION (10 minutes)*Suggested Script*

This Loving-Kindness Gratitude Meditation is adapted from Sharon Salzberg's meditations, "Loving-Kindness" (p. 94) and "Seeing the Good." (p. 95). I'm going to guide you through this gratitude meditation which will last about 10 minutes where we will repeat phrases quietly to ourselves. In showing ourselves and others loving attention, we extend an offering of gratitude for ourselves and for others.

[Ring bells 3 times]

Let's begin by settling into our chairs, or into our cushions, or wherever you may find yourself seated. Settling into a posture that feels comfortable, supported, and yet alert. Allowing your eyes to close if that feels comfortable for you or keeping your eyes opened in a softened downward gaze.

[Pause]

Feeling into your body breathing. Noticing how your chest expands and contracts on the inbreath and on the outbreath.

[Pause]

Now, bring to mind something within yourself that you appreciate. Perhaps it is a talent, skill, ability, quality, characteristic or perhaps it is something you recently did 'right.' Sit with this experience for a moment.

[Pause]

In a whispered voice, I want you to repeat these phrases [The facilitator should pause between saying each phrase so the participants may repeat]: “May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I live with ease.” We are going to repeat these phrases to ourselves a few more times together. [The facilitator may repeat the phrases three more times for participants at a slow gentle pace.]

[Pause]

Now, we may inwardly repeat these phrases to ourselves and at our own pace.

[Pause]

If you notice that your mind has wander, it’s simply a moment of mindfulness. We bring our attention back to repeating the phrases.

[Pause]

You may find yourself thinking thoughts. Just allowing the thoughts to be here without resisting them or holding onto them.

[Pause]

Now, bringing to mind someone or some animal you feel gratitude towards who has offered you aid or support in some way. Bringing to mind their positive qualities and the good they did for you.

[Pause]

In a whispered voice, we are going to repeat the phrases: “May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you live with ease.” Perhaps including their name at the end of each phrase as you repeat them or perhaps changing the phrases to offer loving-kindness in another way. [The facilitator should repeat the phrases three more times at a slow pace.]

[Pause]

If we aren’t feeling loving-kindness as we are saying the words, the saying of the words helps to prime the pump for loving-kindness. Sometimes we just need a place to start and this is the place.

[Pause]

Now, bringing to mind someone who is going through a challenging time. Bringing to mind their positive qualities and the good they do for others.

[Pause]

In a whispered voice, we are going to repeat the phrases: “May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you live with ease.” Perhaps including their name at the end of each phrase as you repeat them or perhaps changing the phrases to offer loving-kindness in another way.

[The facilitator should repeat the phrases three more times at a slow pace.]

[Pause]

Now, bringing to mind someone who you may have a little bit of a challenging relationship. If you are finding it too difficult, then you may focus on yourself. Seeing if you can bring to mind some of their positive qualities and the good they perhaps have done for others. Perhaps as you are thinking of them you might offer phrases like, “This person has feelings, emotions, and thoughts, just like me; This person is learning about life, just like me; This person wishes to be happy and loved, just like me” (p. 101)

[Pause]

In a whispered voice, we are going to repeat the phrases: “May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you live with ease.” Perhaps including their name at the end of each phrase as you repeat them or perhaps changing the phrases to offer loving-kindness in another way.

[The facilitator should repeat the phrases three more times at a slow pace.]

[Pause]

Finally, we will offer loving-kindness and gratitude to all beings by repeating the phrases: “May all beings be safe. May all beings be happy. May all beings be healthy. May all beings live with ease.”

[Long Pause]

[Ring bell 3 times]

Now, bringing some movement into your fingers and into your toes. Allowing your body to stretch in any way that feels needed. Allowing your eyes to open if they have been closed.

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

- **Prompts:** Would anyone like to share their experience? – offering any questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the practice. How might loving-kindness play a role on your gratitude journey?

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION AND CLOSING (10 minutes)

Independent Exploration

- The facilitator will go over the formal and informal explorations on the Session 4 Handout. Ask if the participants have any questions or need any clarifications.

Closing

- The facilitator may close the session by reading the poem Words Are Windows (or They're Walls) by Ruth Bebermeyer. – See Session 4 Handout
- Mindful Minute – Take a few breaths together before thanking the participants for their presence.

FACILITATOR REFLECTION (15-20 minutes)

In this reflection, you will consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of Session 4. You may consider offering both appreciative and constructive feedback, with a sense of kindness and curiosity, to celebrate and also fine tune your capabilities as a facilitator.

- **Prompts:** What worked and didn't work? What would you do differently for next time, how would you do it differently, and why?

Session 5: Feeling Gratitude in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) World

OBJECTIVES

- Explore stress and how it shows up in our lives as well as how gratitude may help us cultivate resilience and sturdiness amid hardship and adversity.
- Discuss ways we can show ourselves self-care.
- Practice gratitude with a walking meditation.

OVERVIEW

Activity	Time (in minutes)	Cumulative Time (in minutes)
Welcome and Check-ins	5	5
Arrival Meditation Practice	5	10
Read Brave Space Agreements	3	13
Small Group Shares	7	20
Presentation: Feeling Gratitude in a VUCA World	15	35
Group Process	10	45
Guided Gratitude Walking Meditation Practice	10	55
Group Process	10	65
Independent Exploration and Closing	10	75

MATERIALS

Facilitator: Attendance Tracker, Bell, Session 1 and 5 Outlines

Participants: Session 5 Handout (see below), Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

****SESSION 5 HANDOUT****

Feeling Gratitude in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) World

Please bring: Session 5 Handout, Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes (Optional)

The Guest House

By Rumi

(Rumi, n.d.)

This being human is a guest house.
 Every morning a new arrival.
 A joy, a depression, a meanness,
 some momentary awareness comes
 as an unexpected visitor.
 Welcome and entertain them all!
 Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
 who violently sweep your house
 empty of its furniture,
 still, treat each guest honorably.
 He may be clearing you out
 for some new delight.
 The dark thought, the shame, the malice,

meet them at the door laughing,
 and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
 because each has been sent
 as a guide from beyond.

By Mi Sun

(Donahue, n.d.)

I could hear the sound of the
 Ocean and see the different sizes of beautiful
 waves.
 They were coming in and out as I was
 walking,
 feeling the wind in my face.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION

Formal Exploration

- ❖ Listen to the prerecorded gratitude meditation once every day (preferably at the same time).
- ❖ In a gratitude journal, write for ten minutes (preferably after the meditation) about the people, places, things, or experiences you are grateful for and why. It is best to set a timer. Be specific and offer as much detail as possible. The idea is to keep your pen/pencil moving for the entire ten minutes which means that if you are unsure of what to write then you can write, “I don’t know what to write.” Some prompts you might use are: “I’m grateful for... because...; I’m appreciative of... because...; Thank you for... because...”
- ❖ Optional: Before you go to bed, say or think about five things you are grateful for and why. Suggest a prompt for the participants such as: “I am grateful for... because...”

Informal Exploration

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Take a mindfulness-based gratitude walk this week.

- ❖ Think about all the reasons to feel grateful in situations where you find yourself waiting this week.
This could be waiting in line at the grocery store or bank, sitting in your car waiting to pick up your kids, waiting to speak with someone at work, etc.
- ❖ Give gratitude before a few meals this week.
- ❖ Choose your own informal exploration practice.

****END OF SESSION 5 HANDOUT****

SESSION OUTLINE (75 minutes)

WELCOME AND CHECK-INS (5 minutes)

The facilitator will greet everyone as they log on and express gratitude for everyone's presence. Once everyone seems to have logged on, the facilitator will provide a link to a word art generator, such as AhaSlides Word Cloud Generator, where participants can add a word or phrase about something they feel grateful for in this moment or the past week. After all participants have entered their words or phrases, the facilitator will show the group the word art that was created from their combined participation.

ARRIVAL MEDITATION PRACTICE (5 minutes) – See Session 1

READ BRAVE SPACE AGREEMENTS (3 minutes) – See Session 1

SMALL GROUP SHARES (7 minutes)

Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator may choose to use breakout rooms for larger groups. Remind the participants that during small group shares, they will be practicing mindful speaking and mindful listening. Each participant will have two to three minutes to share their experience with the prerecorded gratitude meditation, the gratitude writing practice, the daily lists of reasons to feel gratitude, and/or informal exploration (e.g., Pause-Relax-Open, Trust Emergence, Listen Deeply-Speak the Truth (Kamer, 2007); gratitude lists while waiting; give gratitude before a meal. They will finish by briefly sharing one thing they are grateful for this past week.

- **Prompts:** Did you find anything challenging, easy, and/or surprising?

PRESENTATION: FEELING GRATITUDE IN A VUCA WORLD (15 minutes)

Suggested Script

Today's presentation is about feeling gratitude in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous world (Jah, 2020). [Discuss and acknowledge the participant responses about how stress may be felt at both a personal and global scale using the following prompts:] How many of you are experiencing stress in your lives? What are some of the reasons we experience stress in our personal lives? How about on a global scale? What are some of the stressors we feel on a global scale? Even though these stressors are on a global scale, they affect our stress levels on a personal level. In what ways do these global stressors personally impact our lives? In what ways does our personal stress potentially impact our community and collectively as a world?

Living in a VUCA world, there are a lot of reasons we have individual and collective stress as we mentioned. However, there are also a lot of reasons to feel gratitude in this VUCA world. As humans, we tend to notice the negative more easily than the positive. This is called a negativity bias which stems from our primitive ancestors who needed to be aware of threats in their environment for survival purposes (Hanson, 2009; Wolf & Serpa, 2015). We are so good at noticing the negative, but how good are we at noticing the positive?

Part of being human is that we all experience difficulties, challenges, struggles, and pain at some point. How can we feel gratitude when there is so much pain, suffering, injustice, and hardship in this world? How do we feel gratitude when perhaps we ourselves are experiencing pain, suffering, injustice, and hardship? The truth is there is no silver bullet. However, practicing gratitude helps to reorient and broaden our perspective as we build and strengthen resilience in the face of pain, suffering, injustice, and/or hardship (Fredrickson, 2001).

However, it is important to note that it can be harmful to use gratitude or positivity to avoid, deny, or suppress strong negative emotion that we might be feeling if we are going through a difficult,

challenging, or painful time. This is called toxic positivity which we discussed in Session 3 (Upadhyay et al., 2022). There is nothing wrong with focusing on the positive, but when a person is faced with adversity, it is normal and valid to feel negative emotion or even strong negative emotion. In these situations, we want to meet our negative emotions and not avoid, deny, or suppress these emotions by trying to tell ourselves to look on the bright side. Sometimes hardship helps us to become more aware of what we have and what we are grateful for. Sometimes it helps us to become more aware of what we may have taken for granted. Darlene Mininni, PhD, a health psychologist, said in an interview (Slade, n.d.):

It can be difficult to move forward and manage the stressors in our lives if we don't validate where we are to begin with — maybe in pain, experiencing relationship or financial problems, whatever we're going through. It's helpful to acknowledge that first, before gratitude or appreciation or what we could even call 'noticing' begins. When it does begin, what we're really asking you to do is not to dismiss your pain, but to notice that in the middle of your pain, there is goodness, too; that pain and goodness can exist at the same time" (p. 3).

Noticing the good in situations of adversity can give people hope. For example, noticing that someone has support from friends and family, or noticing one's own strength and resilience. These are small noticings that can give a person the strength to keep moving forward.

For those who already practice gratitude in their daily lives and feel gratitude for the good they receive, they may be faced with the pain and suffering they see in the world. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, threats of nuclear war and cyber-attacks, terrorism, mass shootings, rising inflation, supply chain disruptions, political and socioeconomical polarization, racial and social injustice, violence and crime, natural disasters, and climate change to name a few, these VUCA times have significantly increased individual and collective stress (American Psychological Association [APA], 2022b). I want to share an article from Tricycle magazine which interviewed Oren Jay Sofer. In the article Softer (2022) mentioned that a person asked him, "how do

we hold the dissonance between gratitude for the blessings in life, and grief over the suffering and pain in our world” (p. 3). Sofer (2022) responded:

Both are true, and living in the tension and discomfort of this question invites the heart to open more fully... I believe there’s no easy way forward, no simple answer to these questions. The road to freedom is long and though we may feel helpless individually, we are not powerless. We can bring more goodness and love into the world through our words, actions, and choices. We can speak out against violence and oppression, and work together to pressure elected officials to make policy changes for more equity, dignity, and safety in our communities. We don’t act if we’re lulled asleep by comfort or convenience, nor can we act if we’re overwhelmed with grief. This is why we need to stretch the heart to include all of it. This is why we need both the immense beauty and gratitude for blessings in life to keep us afloat, and the deep sadness and grief to urge us to action (p. 3).

There is a famous quote by Mr. Rogers (2003, p. 21), “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’ To this day, especially in times of ‘disaster,’ I remember my mother’s words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers – so many caring people in this world.” When tragedy happens or we are faced with difficulty, we can reorient our focus on the good that may be happening despite the circumstance. Perhaps when we are noticing the pain of the world, we can extend some gratitude to the ones who are helping. We could extend this gratitude by writing them a letter or email, or by acknowledging your gratitude for the good that they are doing in some way.

Finally, in moments of difficulty, it is important to remember to take care of ourselves and honoring our needs (Sofer, 2018). Sometimes taking care of ourselves means reaching out to someone we trust for support such as friend, loved one, or a professional. There is a proverb that states “a burden shared is half the burden.” What are some ways we might show ourselves some self-care?

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss the presentation, Feeling Gratitude in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) World. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the presentation.

- **Prompts:** What are some of your questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the presentation?

GUIDED GRATITUDE WALKING MEDITATION PRACTICE (15 minutes)*Suggested Script*

This gratitude walking meditation practice was adapted from Wolf & Serpa's (2015, pp. 122-123) Mindful Walking Meditation. Mindfulness is typically practiced in four different postures: sitting (most common), lying down, standing up, and walking. For our practice today, we will be doing a guided gratitude walking meditation. This meditation will take about 10 minutes. I'm going to provide a demonstration for the gratitude walking meditation and then we will have time and space to practice on our own. [Demonstrate for the participants and provide modifications for those unable to walk such as exploring movement in whatever way possible].

We want to find a space where we can walk about 15 to 20 feet and then turn around and walk back. This could be in a room or hallway. It could also be outside if that feels possible and comfortable for you to explore. If 15 to 20 feet isn't possible, then you can adjust to whatever sized area at your disposal. For this demonstration, I will use a much smaller area.

To begin, I am going to come to a standing position with my feet on the floor with a sense of them being planted in the grounded as though my feet have roots growing in the earth. I'm going to have my back straight, but not rigid, allowing my spine to offer support so I can soften my posture a bit. Allowing my shoulders to relax. My eyes will be focused a few feet in front of me in a soften downward

gaze. I'm going to begin to slowly walk. As I am taking each step, I want to become aware of each and every tiny movement as I lift my foot off the ground and move into the next step.

For each pass, I want you to focus on one of your senses and what you are noticing. This could be what you are feeling in your body as you are moving along your path, what you see, what you hear, and what you smell. When your mind wanders, which is completely normal, return your focus on your chosen sense. This is a time for you to explore and to also play or experiment with your movement or steps as well as the speed. Speeding up if you are feeling a bit sleepy or restless or perhaps you might want to really slow your steps. However, you don't want to slow them down so much that you lose your balance.

As I said, this walking gratitude meditation will be about 10 minutes. Feel free to explore a different environment for this practice but be sure it is a space in which you will feel supported and comfortable. I will ring the bell when it is time to rejoin as a group. If you decide to go to a different location where you might not hear the bell, it might be helpful to set a timer.

[Ring bell 3 times]

[Allow participants to explore on their own.]

[Ring bell 3 times]

[Pause to allow participants time to rejoin the group]

The facilitator may close the meditation by reading a poem by Mi Sun. – See Session 5 Handout

It's the little moments. It's the little moments that bring us sometimes the greatest feelings of gratitude and joy.

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

- **Prompts:** Would anyone like to share their experience? – offering any questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the practice.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION AND CLOSING (5 minutes)

Independent Exploration

- The facilitator will go over the formal and informal explorations on the Session 5 Handout. Ask if the participants have any questions or need any clarifications.

Closing

- The facilitator may close the session by reading the poem The Guest House by Rumi. – See Session 5 Handout
- Mindful Minute – Take a few breaths together before thanking the participants for their presence.

FACILITATOR REFLECTION (15-20 minutes)

In this reflection, you will consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of Session 5. You may consider offering both appreciative and constructive feedback, with a sense of kindness and curiosity, to celebrate and also fine tune your capabilities as a facilitator.

- **Prompts:** What worked and didn't work? What would you do differently for next time, how would you do it differently, and why?

Session 6: Art of Savoring Gratitude

OBJECTIVES

- Introduce Rick Hanson's (2009, pp. 68-70) three steps for "Internalizing the Positive" and Oren Jay Sofer's (2017, p. 3) three steps for "Nourishing Gratitude."
- Provide support and encouragement for participants to continue their mindfulness-based gratitude practices.
- Offer suggestions for participants to investigate and explore other mindfulness-based programs and communities.

- End the course with a closing activity to acknowledge the learning process and strengthen the sense of community amongst the group with a closing ritual.

OVERVIEW

Activity	Time (in minutes)	Cumulative Time (in minutes)
Welcome and Check-ins	5	5
Arrival Meditation Practice	5	10
Read Brave Space Agreements	3	13
Small Group Shares	7	20
Presentation: The Art of Savoring Gratitude	15	35
Group Process	10	45
The Art of Savoring Meditation	8	53
Group Process	7	60
Next Steps and Farewell	15	75

MATERIALS

Facilitator: Attendance Tracker, Bell, Session 1 and 6 Outlines

Participants: Session 6 Handout (see below), Notebook and writing utensil for taking notes
(Optional)

****SESSION 6 HANDOUT****

The Art of Savoring Gratitude

Rick Hanson's Steps for "Internalizing the Positive:" (2009, pp.68-70)

- 1) Actively look for the positive within our lives and give it attention.
- 2) Savor and mindfully relish in the positive experience.
- 3) "Internalize the positive" by "relaxing your body and absorbing the emotions, sensations, and thoughts of the experience" (Hanson, 2009, p. 70).

Oren Jay Sofer's Steps to "Nourish Gratitude:" (2017, p. 3)

- 1) "**Settle** your body and mind; collect your attention in the present moment."
- 2) **Recall** something specific that you appreciate.

3) “**Enjoy** the feelings and sensations that arise; let them spread through your body.”

****END OF SESSION 6 HANDOUT****

SESSION OUTLINE (75 minutes)

WELCOME AND CHECK-INS (5 minutes)

The facilitator will greet everyone as they log on and express gratitude for everyone’s presence. Once everyone seems to have logged on, the facilitator will mention that today is the sixth and final session of the course. In ‘popcorn style,’ the facilitator may ask participants to say a word or two about how they are feeling.

ARRIVAL MEDITATION PRACTICE (5 minutes) – See Session 1

READ BRAVE SPACE AGREEMENTS (3 minutes) – See Session 1

SMALL GROUP SHARES (7 minutes)

Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator may choose to use breakout rooms for larger groups. Remind the participants that during small group shares, they will be practicing mindful speaking and mindful listening. Each participant will have two to three minutes to share their experience with the teachings and practices over the duration of the course. They will finish by briefly sharing one thing they are grateful for this past week.

- **Prompts:** Did you find anything challenging, easy, and/or surprising?

PRESENTATION: ART OF SAVORING GRATITUDE (15 minutes)

Suggested Script

This is our final presentation for the MBG course, we will discuss the art of savoring gratitude. Rick Hanson (2009), who is a renowned psychologist and Senior Fellow of the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, discusses ways in which we may cultivate positive emotions, such as gratitude, by focusing on positive experiences. He highlights and explains three steps that may be used for “internalizing the positive” (p.68) However, this should not be seen as a practice to avoid, deny, or

suppress negative thoughts, feelings, or emotions caused by a negative experience nor to reinforce our sense of grasping onto the rewards received from this practice. Instead, this practice should help to reorient our focus on relishing positive thoughts, feelings, and emotions that arise from positive experiences and internalize them. Here are Hanson's 3 steps:

- 1) *Actively look for the positive within your life and give it attention. By actively drawing attention to the positive, it creates more neural networks to see and notice the positive.*
- 2) *Savor and mindfully relish in the positive experience. Although Hanson doesn't specifically discuss gratitude, this is a step where we can mindfully relish in the positive and offer some gratitude for the positive experience. Hanson wrote, "Focusing on these rewards increases dopamine release, which makes it easier to keep giving the experience your attention and strengthens its neural associations in implicit memory" (p. 69). Therefore, the more gratitude a person thinks and feels, the more gratitude a person may cultivate and grow.*
- 3) *"Internalize the positive" by "relaxing your body and absorbing the emotions, sensations, and thoughts of the experience" (p. 70). This is a practice which conditions and programs our bodies and minds for positive feeling emotions including gratitude (Hanson, 2009). Since the body reacts to thoughts, then there is the possibility to create and grow new neural connections, or neuroplasticity (discussed in Session 3) (Siegel, 2010).*

Hanson (2009) wrote that, "It takes an active effort to internalize positive experiences... But over time, you really can build new, positive structures in your brain" (p. 75). Through consistent mindful gratitude practice, a person can establish and cultivate new habits and patterns of behavior. Some of the benefits of focusing on positive experiences are "a stronger immune system and cardiovascular system that is less reactive to stress. They lift your mood; increase optimism, resilience, and resourcefulness; and help counteract the effects of painful experiences, including trauma. It's a positive cycle; good feelings today increase the likelihood of good feelings tomorrow" (Hanson, 2009, p. 75).

Another practice to help us cultivate and savor gratitude is Oren Jay Sofer's (2017, p. 3) three steps to "Nourish Gratitude:"

- 1) *"Settle your body and mind; collect your attention in the present moment" (p. 3).*
- 2) *"Recall something specific that you appreciate—the more concrete and tangible, the better. Instead of 'having food,' consider something delicious you ate recently, or any food that's in your cupboard" (p. 3).*
- 3) *"Enjoy the feelings and sensations that arise; let them spread through your body" (p. 3).*

Sofer's three steps may be practiced by themselves or also be added to a meditation which is what we will do after our group process. When we cultivate gratitude, it provides fertile ground for sharing gratitude with others. Gratitude helps us to feel more deeply connected to one another (Algoe et al, 2008).

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss the presentation, The Art of Savoring Gratitude. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the presentation.

- **Prompts:** What are some of your questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the presentation?

SAVORING GRATITUDE MEDITATION PRACTICE (8 minutes)

Suggested Script

This practice was adapted from Sofer's (2017) meditation, "Nourish Gratitude" (p. 1). In this meditation, we will follow Sofer's three steps to cultivate gratitude. This meditation will feel familiar as it is a skill and attitude of mind we have been developing throughout the course. This meditation will only be about eight minutes.

[Ring bell 3 times]

Let's begin by settling into our chairs, or into our cushions, or wherever you may find yourself sitting. Finding a comfortable posture that feels supported and yet alert. Sensing into the lower body feeling grounded in your chair or where you are feeling contact with the floor, with your spine upright and yet not rigid.

[Pause]

Allowing your eyes to close if that feels comfortable for you or keeping your eyes opened in a softened downward gaze.

[Pause]

As we are settling in, noticing the body breathing. Noticing the sensations of the breathing.

[Pause]

No need to lean forward for the next breath or remember the one that's just past. Just resting our attention in this moment, in this breath.

[Pause]

Now, I invite you to imagine someone in your mind that you feel gratitude towards. Bringing their image clearly into your mind. Perhaps thinking about the last time you connected with this person. How does it feel to bring this person into your mind?

[Pause]

Allowing yourself to share some feelings of gratitude towards this person for perhaps something they did or said or who they are as a person. How does it feel in your body to feel gratitude towards this person? Where in your body do you feel the gratitude for this person?

[Pause]

Now, bringing to mind something you feel grateful for. Bringing an image of this something clearly into your mind. Perhaps thinking about the last time you were in contact with it. How does it feel to bring this something into your mind?

[Pause]

Allowing yourself to share some feelings of gratitude towards this something. How does it feel in your body to feel gratitude towards it? Where in your body do you feel the gratitude for this something?

[Pause]

Finally, bringing your attention here to this moment and see if you can offer this moment some gratitude.

[Pause]

As the meditation comes to an end and when you feel ready, I invite you to gently and slowly open your eyes after you hear the bells.

[Ring bells 3 times]

GROUP PROCESS (10 minutes)

This group process segment will offer the participants an opportunity to discuss the savoring gratitude meditation practice. Participants may ask any questions as well as offer any observations, reflections, and/or comments about the meditation.

- **Prompts:** Would anyone like to share their experience? – offering any questions, observations, reflections, or comments about the practice.

NEXT STEPS AND FAREWELL (20 minutes)

Next Steps

Suggested Script

We are nearing the end of this journey that we have traveled together for the past six weeks. This is an opportunity to take what you have learned and to really make it your own. I encourage you to continue practicing because what you practice grows stronger. One way you might continue practicing is by listening to the mindfulness-based gratitude meditation recording you have been listening to for the past six weeks or by continuing to integrate the various gratitude practices into your daily lives.

As mindfulness is very supportive of gratitude practice, you may want to consider taking an introduction to mindfulness course such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). These courses will help to deepening your understanding and practice of mindfulness. Taking a Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) course is also another great option. As we learned in session 3, self-compassion is very supportive of gratitude practice in helping us to become more aware of the inner-critic and responding with kindness, curiosity, and understanding. If you are looking to dive more deeply into practice, there are day, weekend, and week-long retreats you may want to attend. There are several renown retreat centers located throughout the United States including the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts and Spirit Rock in Woodacre, California. However, both meditation centers also offer programs and retreats online.

You may also want to consider joining a local mindfulness community or an online mindfulness community. Many of these communities offer daily or weekly group meditations as well as presentations from experienced teacher (depending on the organization).

Farewell

Thank all the participants for taking time out of their schedules to participate in the MBG course. Applaud the participants for taking this time for themselves as an act of courage to look within themselves and within their lives and also an act of love in wanting to be in relationship with themselves and with the world in a more positive way.

To close the course, ask each participant to share two learnings they are taking with them and two misconceptions, perceptions, or opinions they are leaving behind. Give participants a few moments to reflect and begin by sharing with two of your learnings and two of your misconceptions, perceptions, or opinions.

The facilitator may close the session by setting an intention: May our hearts be filled with such gratitude and joy that we may go forth and share that gratitude and joy with others.

- Last Mindful Minute - Take a few breaths together and thank the participants again for their presence before saying good-bye.

FACILITATOR REFLECTION (30-45 minutes)

In this reflection, you will consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of Session 6 as well as the MBG course in its entirety. You may consider offering both appreciative and constructive feedback, with a sense of kindness and curiosity, to celebrate and also fine tune your capabilities as a facilitator.

- **Prompts:** What worked and didn't work? What would you do differently for next time, how would you do it differently, and why?

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