

Mood Mapping: Catch a mood before it catches you

Goal:

- **Understanding the connection between thoughts and mood**

Uncomfortable/less pleasant.....Pleasant/joyful feelings
1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10

The previous exercise is designed to calm and center your nervous system, and therefore your entire physical being. If we pair these powerful breathing practices with watching our thoughts, we start to have more control over the emotional being (the mind) that can lead to unhelpful moods. By watching our thoughts we begin to trust the simple truth that all mood states are impermanent. This is an important practice for anyone in transition, when we sometimes lose perspective and assign too much meaning to passing moods.

Exercise:

- Set a timer on your phone, computer, or watch to remind yourself to watch your thoughts three times each day, and chart their impact on mood.
- Morning mindfulness: Start every day this week with five minutes of *Breathing for Balance* or five to ten minutes of gentle movement. Keep this exercise to five minutes or less so that you stay motivated to practice. Use your centering journal to chart your mood at the beginning of the day. Take a few moments to consider the impermanence of your mood. Think about the last time your mood was slightly more positive. Chances are it was not too long ago. Create a simple scale to chart the level of pleasure or discomfort you are feeling similar to the one above. For example: This morning I'm feeling a little nervous about my commute to work – I'm closer to the bottom of the uncomfortable pleasant scale. I'd say I'm at 3.
- Mid-day break: Start with *Breathing for Balance*. Check your mood. Are you still at a 3 on the uncomfortable/pleasant scale? Or did you swing toward pleasure once you found yourself at your desk and organized your work for the day? Record your results in your journal. For example: The morning traffic was heavy, but when I got to work I had a few minutes to get some coffee and chat with my co-worker. I'm at about 6 on the uncomfortable/pleasant scale now.
- In the evening: Once again reset your nervous system with balanced breathing, and then map your mood on the uncomfortable/pleasant scale. If you find yourself on or under 5, use your journal to park any worrying thoughts for the evening. If sleep is difficult come up with a positive thought about sleep and write it in your journal. For example: It's okay for me to rest now. Rest helps me integrate my day. Over time, paying attention to my stress level will improve my sleep.

This exercise helps us recognize that our mood states are impermanent. It builds confidence in our ability to move our mood towards more episodes of contentment. With consistent practice we can turn contentment from a temporary state to a last personal trait.