MINDFUL FLINT

MINDFUL ME TOOLKIT:
Tips & Tools to Support Your Personal Mindfulness Practice

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CRIM FITNESS FOUNDATION MISSION:
The Crim Fitness Foundation cultivates accessible, vibrant communities in Flint and Genesee County that encourage people to lead healthy lifestyles by integrating physical activity, healthy eating, and mindfulness into their daily lives.

The most visible branch of the Crim Fitness Foundation is the Crim Festival of Races. The Crim has evolved from hosting this amazing annual community event offering an abundance of health initiatives within the schools, community organizations, and businesses all year round.

MINDFUL ME WORKSHOP AND TOOLKIT OBJECTIVE:
To build a basic understanding of mindfulness and support participants to learn strategies to create and sustain a personal mindfulness practice. From this experiential workshop, participants emerge with the tools necessary to begin or strengthen personal mindfulness practices to help navigate stress in healthy, productive ways. This toolkit is a follow up resource designed to support participants to apply what they learn.
"Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally - with a spirit of kindness and compassion."
- Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is shifting from autopilot to aware. People are often expected to pay attention, but it is rare that the skills to pay attention are formally taught or explained. It is important to exercise the brain in a way that will make "paying attention" more assessable. Mindfulness is like doing mental push-ups. The more one practices being in the present moment, the easier it may become.

WHAT MINDFULNESS IS NOT

- Not about having a blank mind - this would be impossible to do! Mindfulness is about recognizing our thoughts and bringing them back over and over again to a focal point of awareness.
- Not about being happy (although it can lead to more happiness) – we can be mindful and sad, or mindful and angry. Mindfulness creates space between a stimulus and a response so that we can choose a response, rather than reacting immediately based on an emotion.
- Not about being complacent - We take action to change situations when appropriate - for our well-being and the wellbeing of others - but we do so out of compassion and understanding versus reaction and frustration. (Mindful Schools, Bonnie Mioduchoski)
- Not a religion: Mindfulness practices are useful for all people, regardless of their spiritual or religious beliefs. It’s a human experience that utilizes awareness and compassion that is within us all.
Why Mindfulness?

1) Improved self-regulation
2) Compassionate attitudes
3) Better focus and concentration
4) Decreased stress, anxiety, and depression

How does Mindfulness Work?

The way mindfulness works is rooted in neuroscience. Mindfulness practices can help the body relax, which engages the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). Our PNS helps our body return to normal states after heightened stress responses. When our brain detects danger, our heart rate goes up and our muscles tense as our body gets ready to protect itself. The chemicals-- cortisol and adrenaline-- that cause these reactions are meant to be present for about 20 minutes at a time, enough to respond to the danger. The challenging aspect is that the part of our brain that detects danger often cannot distinguish between actual danger or a stressful situation, such as getting caught in traffic and being late. Therefore, even when the body is not in danger, our brain can still release the stress hormones. Over production of these stress hormones creates physical and mental wear and tear on bodies and minds.

Mindfulness can help strengthen that part of the brain that helps quiet the stress response when we have incorrectly perceived life-threatening danger. Mindfulness is associated with reducing physical symptoms of stress, which if persistent enough, can cause a host of serious illnesses and diseases such as heart irregularities, digestive disorders, high blood pressure, inflammation, and mental health issues.
BEFORE YOU BEGIN A MINDFULNESS PRACTICE:

- Turn off and put aside your devices
- Invite a beginner’s mind
- Be curious and explore what works best for you
- In a safe space, come to a mindful posture
  - Sitting or standing tall, but not rigid
  - Hands resting gently in your lap or at your sides
  - Eyes closed or soft downward gaze
- All of these practices are just guides; feel free to change them to meet your needs
- Aim to let go of judgments and be open to whatever arises with a spirit of kindness and compassion

PRACTICE - MOMENT TO ARRIVE:

Please find a comfortable standing posture. Standing up nice and tall with feet about hip distance apart. If standing isn’t comfortable or accessible to you in this moment, that’s fine; please do what is best for you.

Feel the weight of your feet pressing into the floor, whether you’re standing or sitting. Allow the mind to draw its attention there. Allow your mind to arrive in this room with your body.

If it’s comfortable for you, try and count out in your head three breaths. You might even say, in your mind, “in” and “out” as the breath travels. If you get distracted, invite your attention back to your breath or your feet.

Good, and if your eyes were closed, go ahead and open your eyes or bring your gaze back to the room.
PRACTICE – JUST LIKE ME MEDITATION

For a recording of this practice, please visit us at crim.org/mindfulness.

BREATHING INTENTIONALLY

Some benefits of breathing intentionally may be:
- Improved digestion
- Improved focus
- Reduced stress

Additional resources for mindful breathing can be found at the end of the toolkit.

BREATHING INTENTIONALLY PRACTICE:

For a practice, we’re going to take time to notice breathing intentionally. We’re not aware of our breath all the time because the breath comes naturally, thankfully. However, the breath can be a really great teacher. Our breath can help some become aware of who and how they are being or how we feel in any given moment. Notice throughout this practice if the breath does not feel like a safe space for you; perhaps you would prefer to take this time to draw your attention to your feet on the ground or the placement of your hands, something to rest your mind on.

Let’s start by sitting up nice and tall, placing your palm on your belly and breathe in deeply through the nose, really filling up with air, expanding the diaphragm. Leaving your palm where your belly meets it, exhale and draw the belly back in. Noticing the space now between the hand and the belly, try to take another inhale to reach your belly back to your hand. Notice how it feels to take a deep breath as you breathe in and breathe out. Try to notice where you feel your breath? *Repeat 3 times*
MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

Mindful Phone Usage: Every time you reach for your device, ask yourself:

What purpose is my phone serving in the moment?

PRACTICE - BEING MINDFUL WITH YOUR PHONE

(adapted from Mindful Magazine March 14, 2016)

For a recording of this practice, please visit us at crim.org/mindfulness.
THE POWER OF THE PAUSE

T: Is it TRUE
H: Is it HELPFUL
I: Is it INTENTIONAL
N: Is it NECESSARY
K: Is it KIND
PRACTICE - BRINGING CALM BACK TO THE BODY AND MIND

If there’s a moment of stress or alarm, this is a way to come back into the body and try to help calm the body. Doing this throughout your day, without stressors initiating this exercise, helps create a mental habit in the mind; the brain gets use to this pathway and can find it more easily when there is stress. There is instant communication between the heart and the brain. When we breathe deeply into the heart center, we’re activating the parasympathetic nervous center, the calming part. When we remember this moment of feeling safe, our brain releases the oxytocin hormone (safe, feeling loved and cherished), which counteracts the cortisol hormone (stressors).”

Let’s go ahead and begin a practice or go to crim.org/mindfulness. You’re welcome to close your eyes or find a soft gaze. Place your hand on your heart, and notice if you feel your heartbeat. Feel the warm touch on your heart. Begin to breathe a little more slowly and deeply into the heart center. Think of a moment in a relationship where you felt safe, loved, and cherished. This doesn’t have to be the entire relationship, it’s just a moment. This could be anyone that you’re close to, like a spouse, a family member, a friend, or even a pet. Any moment where you felt loved. If this is not accessible, just think of a time when you felt content, at ease.

Now, picturing this moment and letting yourself sit with these feelings of feeling content, safety, and love. Notice, what does it feel like to visit these feelings again? Feel free to just breathe with these feelings of contentment and warmth, or perhaps, if you prefer, you can just focus on your breath [pause 30 seconds].

Take a moment to reflect and notice any shifts in the mind after this exercise. Consider the next action that you do or words that you say will come from the heart space, with love and compassion. You may open your eyes now if they were closed.
MINDFUL TASTING

Mindful eating is a fun activity to do alone or along with the whole family! It also promotes gratitude for food and can help some make healthier food choices by bringing awareness to where the food comes from and what ingredients are used, not to mention can help find more enjoyment in snacks and meals.

WHAT IS A MINDFUL MEAL?

A mindful meal can be as simple as being aware of the food that you’re eating and noticing how it makes you feel. Again, taking ourselves off autopilot and becoming aware.

For example, when someone is snacking while watching a movie, and all of a sudden they look down and the popcorn bowl is close to empty... and the movie is just beginning... this is a common occurrence for many, and is the opposite of mindful eating.

Many healthy eating programs utilize the tool of mindful eating as well.

WHAT DOES A MINDFUL BITE LOOK LIKE?

Tasting and savoring can be a way to mindfully experience food. You use all five senses to experience and stay present with your food.
In order to have empathy for others, you need to have it for yourself, which involves having understanding and self-compassion. You can’t fill other people’s cups without having a full cup for yourself first.

**PRACTICE: EXPERIENCE MINDFUL BITES WITH CHOCOLATE/CANDY**

(you can substitute in any food you would like for this practice.)

- Notice the packaging/wrapping, any words, texture, colors
- Take a moment to smell the chocolate before unwrapping it
- Unwrap the chocolate and then smell it again
- Notice the texture and color of the chocolate
- Take a small bite and let it sit in your mouth for a moment before you chew
- Slowly begin to chew and eat the chocolate
- You may continue savoring the entire piece of chocolate after the first mindful bite.

**EMPATHY AND COMPASSION**
“Self compassion is described as being composed of three main components – self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.”
- Dr. Kristen Neff

There are four dimensions of compassion (Trauma Sensitive Classroom, Patricia Jennings):
1) We can accept compassion or recall when someone was compassionate to us
2) We can offer ourselves compassion
3) We can offer compassion to another
4) We can observe another showing compassion
Feeling Overwhelmed? Remember “RAIN”

Four steps to stop being so hard on ourselves.

**R**
Recognize what’s going on

**A**
Allow the experience to be there, just as it is

**I**
Investigate with kindness

**N**
Natural awareness, which comes from not identifying with the experience

Graphic image from Mindful Magazine, "Feeling Overwhelmed? Remember Rain" February 7, 2019
GRACE

The acronym GRACE can help you respond with self compassion and compassion for others.

G: gather your attention
R: recall your intention
A: tune yourself with other
C: consider what will serve
E: engage, enact, end

Practice: GRACE
For a recording of this practice, please visit us at crim.org/mindfulness.

Practice - Loving Kindness Meditation:
For a recording of this practice, please visit us at crim.org/mindfulness.
Practice Mindful Walking:
Pick a lane to walk in where you can take 5-8 steps out and back. Walk back and forth in this “lane” bringing your awareness to the present moment of walking. Again, take yourself off autopilot and become of just walking.

See if you can allow your gaze to be soft or down, so you’re not distracted by others around you. What do you notice? Maybe you feel the way your shoes or your feet touch the ground. Maybe you notice the swing of your arms. Maybe you focus on your breath. Just bring your awareness to simply moving in this space. You may move about the space however you feel like you need to for the next few minutes.

Practice - Body Scan:
For a recording of this practice, please visit us at crim.org/mindfulness.
Practicing gratitude, or being thankful, is a form of mindfulness that can help us notice positive feelings in the present moment. Since our brains are designed for survival first, often our minds are quick to dwell on stressors. When we pull ourselves away from those thoughts and focus on gratitude, we can retrain our brain to jump to the positive more often rather than dwelling with the negative. Scientists have shown that practicing gratitude can help us sleep better, develop healthier relationships, and get sick less often!

Practicing gratitude can be done in many ways. Here are some examples:

- **Gratitude Journal** - every day, taking a minute to jot down some things, people, or places you are thankful for.

- **Gratitude Jar** - this could be an old vase or jar that you leave on your counter. Every day write down a few things you are thankful for on a slip of paper. Drop them in the jar. Have your family or household members do the same if they would like to join. Periodically, reach in and read the gratitude notes.

- Take time to share, verbally or by writing a letter to someone, what you are grateful for.

- Gratitude can be done through silent reflection, meditation, or prayer.

- **Gratitude trees** are a fun and colorful activity for children. Draw a tree on a large piece of paper. Stick the tree to the wall. Use post-it notes, or leaf shaped paper to write or draw the things you are feeling grateful for and add them to the tree. You can do this on a draw erase board too at work or at home.

**Practice: GRACE**

Please visit [crim.org/mindfulness](http://crim.org/mindfulness) for a guided practice on gratitude
HOW TO LEAD A MINDFUL MOMENT

- To lead a mindful moment, invite participants to stand or sit mindfully.

- Invitational language is always encouraged as a trauma-informed approach. Inviting others to close their eyes, but giving them options to leave them open.

- Sitting Mindfully - sit with your spine straight, but not rigid. Your feet or your sit bones are planted against the floor or chair. Your hands are resting comfortably in your lap or on your knees. Eyes may be closed or just a soft gaze looking down at your hands.

- Standing Mindfully - Feet are planted flat on the floor about hip width apart. Knees are soft, not locked. Spine is tall, but not rigid. Arms hang down to your sides. Eyes may be closed or just a “soft gaze” looking down.

Sample Script:

“I invite you to join me in taking a mindful moment.

Let’s start by taking a mindful breath together.

I invite you sit in a way that feels comfortable, yet alert.

You’re welcome to close your eyes or soften your gaze or look down at your hands in your lap.

Allow a moment for everyone to settle.

Let’s take a deep breath in through our nose, filling up our chest.

Then exhale slowly.

As you breathe in, focus on your inhale and as you exhale, focus on the exhale.

Insert specific breaths here, or just continue on with inhaling and exhaling 3-4 times.

When you are ready, go ahead and open your eyes if they were closed, and bring your attention back to everyone here together in the room.
There is being mindful, and then there are mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness exercises are what we use to strengthen our attention and compassion.

We use our breath as a home base of attention that we turn to again and again, limiting our distractibility . . . The qualities that everyone wants to see their children develop such as kindness, attention, and emotional balance, can be exercised like muscles.

We can isolate a particular quality, such as attention, and use a focusing practice repeatedly so that mindful attention becomes a habitual attitude.

The practice of mindfulness helps us build up the percentage of moments in which we are present rather than lost in thought.” (Rechtschaffen, D, The Mindful Education Workbook p. 4)
MINDFUL BREATHS

These are examples of different mindful breathing techniques. Some are calming, some are energizing:

Guide to utilizing breathing techniques as a “Mindful Moment”:

- Mindful moments can be helpful at any point during the day. Mindful breaths are great to help during transition times, or in order to help yourself or a group you lead find calm or energize.

**Energizing Breath**

**Peace Breath**

- **How to:**
  In a standing position, arms are at your side. Inhale arms all the way up, exhale, arms halfway out in front of you. Inhale arms open to the side, exhale arms back together in the middle. Inhale arms all the way up to the sky, and exhale arms to the ground as you bend forward at the hips.

**Calming Breath**

**Acceptance Breath**

- **How to:**
  “Breathing in, I do my best… Breathing out, I let go of the rest….”

**Counting Breath**

- **How to:**
  Inhale through nose for 3 counts
  Exhale out through for 5 counts
  Hint: Count the breaths down (ie: 3, 2, 1)

**Hand on Your Heart**

- **How to:**
  Place one hand on your heart center
  Feel your heartbeat
  Begin to take deep breaths
RESOURCES REFERENCED IN THE MINDFUL ME WORKSHOP:

Books for Adults:
- Books and resources by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Play by Stuart Brown
- The Deepest Well by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
- What the Eyes Don’t See by Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha

Books for Educators:
- The Mindful School Leader by Valerie Brown
- The Way of Mindful Education by Daniel Rechtscaffen

Books for Parents or those who Support Youth:
- The Mindful Child by Susan Keiser-Greenland
- The Whole-Brain Child by Daniel Siegel

Family books:
- Alphabreaths: The ABCs of Mindful Breathing by Christopher Willard PsyD and Daniel Rechtschaffen MA
- Be Kind by Pat Zietlow Miller
- Breathe Like a Bear by Kira Willey
- Glad Monster Sad Monster by Ed Emberly
- Good People Everywhere by Leyna Gillan
- I Am Peace and I am Human by Susan Verde
- Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda by Lauren Alderfer
- No Ordinary Apple by Sara Marlowe
- The Thankful Book by Todd Parr
- What Does It Mean to Be Present by Ran Diorio
- Yoga Bunny by Brian Russo
GRATITUDE

This toolkit is made possible with funding support from the Community Foundation of Greater Flint and was created by the Crim Mindfulness Team at the Crim Fitness Foundation.

Many of the practices included in this toolkit have been adapted by the Crim Mindfulness Team from ancient wisdom practices. Crim shares mindfulness in a secular way that is relevant and accessible to our community to support the development of basic human capacities like focus, kindness, and compassion.

With gratitude, our team has gained knowledge and shares resources publicly available from many national organizations including the Foundation for a Mindful Society, Mindful Education, Mindful Schools, and the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute. Whenever possible, we have cited the individuals or organizations directly for the resources they have made available.