

Title: Mindfulness Exercises**Aim:** To take time to slow down and connect with what is around us**Age:** 8+**Time:** Each activity takes approximately 15 minutes each**Materials:** Depending on the activity: Kiwis, bag/basket, Chocolate squares, copy of 'Did you know?' box

NOTE TO LEADER: **Mindfulness** means paying attention to something 'on purpose', being very aware of our thoughts and staying in the present moment. The activities below are designed to give the young people time to slow down, pay attention to what is around them and focus on the present.

EXERCISE 1: 'I haven't got a minute!'

Standing in a circle with chairs behind the knees, ask each person to close their eyes and stay silent. The task is to count to one minute and quietly sit down. The leader should time the minute. Note after how many seconds the first person sits and the last person, and also who was closest to the 60-second mark. When the last person has sat down, ask how easy/difficult it was to guess a minute? What did they notice during the time? What could they feel? What could they hear? Did other people's movements influence them?

In small groups, think about sayings or proverbs related to time (e.g. time is of the essence; there's no time like the present; killing time; time flies when you're having fun, etc). What do they tell us about time? Read the following quote: '*Time is what we want most, but what we use worst*' (William Penn). Do they agree? Do we have too much or too little time? Do we use our time well? Do they think their lives are fast-paced? Why? What affect does this have on our lives? Would this be the same for young people everywhere in the world? Why?

EXERCISE 2: Tuning In

This is a good exercise to get participants to relax and focus at the beginning or end of a session.

Ask the participants to get comfortable sitting on a chair or the floor. Have them close their eyes and imagine their sense of hearing is a radio that can tune in to different stations. First, ask them to listen to the sounds farthest away for a moment. Then, change the station and listen to the sounds in the room. Change the station again and listen to the sounds of their body – their breathing, their heartbeat, etc. Bring their attention to each part of their body, starting with the tips of their toes and up through their legs, hips, back, arms, shoulders, neck and head. Change the station again and ask them to listen just to their breathing. Then listen to the sounds in the room. Finally listen to the sounds furthest away. When they are ready, ask them to open their eyes. How do they feel now in comparison to when they started the activity? Was it easy to concentrate? What was the easiest part of the exercise? What was the most difficult? Do they often just listen to the sounds around them? Why might it be important to listen more?

EXERCISE 3: Rain Shower

Have everyone sit in a large circle facing inward. The leader will start an action which will go to the next person one at a time around the circle until everyone joins in. They should keep on doing this action until the leader starts another movement which will also pass around the circle one by one. The group must copy the leader exactly, whether the action is slow or fast, loud or soft. The leader starts off by rubbing palms of hands gently together. Next, click your fingers quietly, and then loudly. Next slap hands on your thighs. Gradually getting louder, stamp your feet on the ground. After that, go back to slapping thighs, clapping hands, clicking fingers, rubbing palms, all the time getting quieter. One by one each person is silent and the rainstorm is over.

EXERCISE 4: My cool little kiwi

Place some kiwis into a basket or bag in the middle of the group. There should be one per person. Ask each person to choose one. They should get to know their kiwi! Take care of it and don't damage it. Look closely at the kiwi, turn it, examine it for distinctive marks and feel the skin. Then the leader takes the kiwis back into the bag and mixes the kiwis up. Place the kiwis back on the ground. Ask everyone to look for their kiwi and take it. Are they sure that they claimed the right fruit? How can they tell? Did anyone give their kiwi a name?

What does this exercise tell them about the things they see every day? Think about the things they do every day – are there some things they do automatically without thinking? Are there others that they also take time over and enjoy?

EXERCISE 5: Mind your chocolate!

Part 1: Have everybody sit comfortably and show them a large bar of chocolate. Ask the group if they know where chocolate comes from? Do they know the ingredients in it? Do they know how many people were involved in the process to bring it here? Read out the 'Did You Know?' box.

 **DID YOU KNOW?** The tasty secret of the cacao tree was discovered 2,000 years ago in the tropical rainforests of Mexico and Central America. Ancient people mixed ground cacao seeds with chilli peppers and cornmeal to make a spicy, frothy drink. It wasn't until the 1500s that Europeans tasted chocolate brought back to Spain from the Americas. A cacao pod contains about 30-50 almond-sized seeds - enough to make about seven milk chocolate bars! (Source: <http://fieldmuseum.org/>)

Part 2: Ensure that everyone is comfortable, and distribute squares of chocolate. The group should hold the square in their hand, then close their eyes and listen.

Read out the following to the group: *"Feel the weight and shape of your chocolate. Bring it to your nose. Smell the chocolate. How does it smell? How does your body respond to the smell? Is your mouth watering? Now, with your eyes still closed, place the chocolate in your mouth and let it rest on your tongue. Can you taste the chocolate? If so, where can you taste it - tongue, cheeks, palate, throat?"*

As the chocolate rests in your mouth, think of the cocoa bean it was. Can you imagine what the bean looks like? What it feels like? Again notice your chocolate. Is it still on your tongue? Can you still taste it? And smell it? With your eyes closed, swallow it. Can you follow the chocolate as it travels down your throat and into your stomach? When you're ready, open your eyes."

 **DEBRIEF:** Was this different to how you normally eat chocolate? How? When you taste food, do you taste all parts of it? What did you learn from eating the chocolate 'mindfully'? What other things can we do mindfully? What difference would it make to life if we all did things mindfully?

EXERCISE 6: Sensory Walk

Take the group outdoors to a garden or area with trees and grass. Allow the group to sit down in a circle and ask what animals or plants they would expect to see in this area. As humans, how do we receive most of our information about our surroundings? (Sight) What are our other senses? Now we will try to view the world without our sight. Ask the group to close their eyes (or use scarves) and listen. Read out the following:

"We are going to rely on our hearing and so need absolute silence for this. I will ask different questions for you to think about, but don't answer until the end. Many creatures depend on sound for information about the world around them, such as bats and dolphins. Try to observe 3 sounds you can hear. If you didn't know where you were, would you be able to guess from the sounds around you? Other animals depend on smell to know more about their surroundings, such as dogs and pigs. Try to make out two smells in the air. Smell is very closely linked to memory. Do the smells trigger any memories for us? Finally, use your sense of touch. Cats have a very sensitive touch and use their whiskers when hunting. Can you find two different textures, e.g. something wet or dry, something soft, or hard? Now open your eyes".

 **DEBRIEF:** What sounds, smells, and textures did they experience? Which were natural and which were human-made? Which sense did they find it easiest to use? Which was most difficult?

Alternative Idea: Ask the group to get into pairs and ask one person to close their eyes. Have them walk slowly around the area. Their partner should stay close to them at all times to keep them safe, but without touching them. If needed, the partner can guide them by the elbow to a safe direction. Allow them to walk for 5 minutes. Then swap. Ask what sounds, smells and feelings did they experience? Were any of the senses stronger than the others?

(Adapted from activities by ECO-UNESCO and The Sanctuary)