

Session 2. Finding a Seat

This is the week to make sure you have a regular time and place for Sitting Practice. Humans are creatures of habit, so when you establish a daily routine, it becomes easier to practice each time. You may want to experiment with different times of day and spaces to find what works for you. It may be helpful to record what you've tried in your journal so that you can reflect on what has worked best for you over time.

Times to Practice

Many people like to practice either first thing in the morning or last thing at night before they go to bed. Both times have their benefits. When you practice first thing in the morning, you get the benefit of preparing for your day. You may find it is easier to bring your practice into your life if you have started the morning that way. For those who have stressful jobs and lives, practicing in the morning is essential. By starting out the day in a peaceful and centered way, it is possible to use the practice to rise above the stresses and tensions in our lives. If mornings are already a busy time, you may need to start your day a half-hour earlier. You might have to go to bed a bit earlier so you are well rested for practice.

Practicing in the evening also has great benefits. It is much like erasing the board after a long class. Evening practice offers a chance to release all the tensions of the day and go to sleep with a peaceful mind and heart. Many people find that they sleep much better if they practice in the evening, because the practice helps quiet down all the thoughts, plans, tensions, and emotions that have accumulated throughout the day. You can also try to bring your practice right into your sleep by using the techniques to stay in touch with that peaceful place you found in meditation.

Place to Practice

A small corner is adequate for practice. Many people like to place objects that they have positive associations with in their practice space, such as a flower, rock, or candle in addition to the listening device for the practice audio tracks. You will get the best results if you do not place anything in your meditation area that has strong emotions or memories associated with it, such as a photo. You might find that distracting during the practice.

It is important that you create a practice place that is not associated with sleep, so you won't fall asleep or rest when you are trying to practice. The recliner where you like to nap in the afternoon would not be a good choice. Likewise, meditating while lying down or even sitting on the bed may make you too drowsy to get the full benefit of your Sitting Meditation practice.

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Mindfulness and Sleep

If you have trouble sleeping, you can use the practice audio tracks or any of the meditation techniques to help you sleep. First, make sure you have a time to practice during the day when you will not fall asleep. These practices really work best when you have had a chance to practice them while you are awake. If you only practice in order to fall asleep, soon you will train yourself to fall asleep every time you try to meditate.

Once you have established a daytime practice, you can use the practice audio tracks or any of the meditation techniques when you are lying in bed to go to sleep. For example, you can practice mindful breathing by watching your breath as you inhale and exhale. You can use the Letting Go practice to let go of all the tensions, thoughts, plans, and feelings that have come up during your day. You may wish to watch yourself fall asleep by noticing as different parts of your body and mind relax. If you awaken during the night, you can watch your breathing and let go of all remaining tensions. Then enjoy a peaceful night's sleep.

Falling Asleep during Meditation

It is not uncommon to feel sleepy during meditation. A quick solution is to raise your chin a bit and take a full refreshing breath. Opening your eyes to practice can also be helpful.

There are a number of reasons why people fall asleep during meditation. If your mind becomes quieter during meditation, it may seem like what happens right before you fall asleep, and it may be easy to drift off to sleep. In addition, people can fall asleep when they don't intend to because they are not getting enough sleep, have poor sleep quality, or have other medical issues. Becoming drowsy during the day and falling asleep unexpectedly can be signs of a sleep problem, so it is recommended that you go see your doctor to rule out a sleep disorder or other medical problem if this is happening.

How to Sit for Meditation

Choose a firm chair with good back support. Place both your feet flat on the floor and adjust your posture as described above for sitting cross-legged. If your lower back bothers you in this position, fold up a blanket or place some other support under your feet. You may even be more comfortable if your heels are a little lower than your toes on the blanket. You will get the best results if you sit with a relatively straight spine, with your shoulders directly over your hips. If you are not sure if your back is straight enough, try rolling your shoulders forward as though you are reading something on a low table. Observe how this posture changes your breathing. Then slowly straighten up until your breathing flows more deeply and effortlessly. You can place your hands on your thighs or simply fold your hands in your lap. Your head should be centered over your shoulders. Try tipping your head forward and backward and from side to side

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until you find that centered spot. You should be as comfortable as possible so you can sustain your practice.

You might also like to try sitting in an easy cross-legged position on the floor on a meditation cushion or folded up blanket. Your feet and ankles can rest on the floor or a rug. You might try folding the blanket to different heights to find the most comfortable thickness for you to sit on. Be sure that the cushion is tall enough so you are not hunched over. If your knees are higher than your hips, you may wish to raise the height of your seat. If one leg is uncomfortable, you may place a cushion or rolled up blanket under it to support your thigh. It's important to choose a posture that is comfortable to maintain over the period of meditation practice. The best posture is the one that fits your body.

Using the Practice Audio Tracks

For the first few weeks of this program, you will use the practice tracks, which are audio recordings to help guide your meditation (available at <http://www.guilford.com/waelde-materials>). The guided practice on the practice tracks is just like the kind of guided practice you would get in a meditation class of this type. Some people like to use headphones, especially if they want privacy. Others like to play the tracks aloud and practice with their families. You might want to experiment with different ways of playing the tracks to see what works best for you.

FAQs for Session 2

What should I do if I don't have time to meditate?

No one seems to have enough spare time. This guide contains many helpful suggestions for carving out a short period every day for yourself. A meditation teacher once responded to this issue by asking: Do you have time to wash and eat every day? If so, then you should also have time to practice. Make it a part of your daily routine, like brushing your teeth. This program involves only a short (30-minute) practice time every day. The practice audio tracks make the guided practice easy. We also know from experience that the more practice a person does, the more benefits they receive. Most people don't start with lots of practice, but build up the amount over time. Slow and steady changes are usually the most lasting. Do as much as you can each day.

What should I do if I'm not at home or do not have privacy at home?

This IR Participant Guide can be used wherever you go. It may be helpful for you to have access to the practice audio tracks and the IR Participant Guide if you will be traveling or want privacy when others are around. You can use earbuds to listen to the practice tracks. You can bring your practice with you wherever you go: whether it is to a beach or to a hospital bedside.

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Can I practice while driving my car?

Of course, you can practice if you keep your eyes open and stay alert. People often think of meditation and sitting quietly with eyes closed, with less awareness of one's surroundings. In IR, the emphasis is on bringing the practice into your everyday life. There are many practices that you can use, in your day-to-day life, with your eyes open. Meditation practice should help you become more aware of, not less aware of, the present moment.

Can I practice while listening to music or in a noisy place?

Sometimes people want to listen to music in order to create a feeling of relaxation or to distract from the process of mindful attention. Those are good reasons to listen to music, but they are not the same as meditating. Likewise, there are concerns that it is impossible to meditate in a noisy place. Mindfulness includes paying attention to the present moment and nonjudgmentally noting your reactions, so simply notice the noise and reaction and you will be meditating.

Can I use a different practice audio track than the one assigned for that week?

Yes. Many techniques are offered in this program, and we expect that different people will gravitate to different practices based on their experience and inclinations.

Try the audio practices and see how they work.

What about not using the practice audio track at all?

Over the course of the program, we will move from using the practice audio tracks on a daily basis to practice without the audio recordings, as you begin to use your meditation skills.

What about just using the bonus audio tracks?

Bonus audio tracks are great for quick practice periods and for getting acquainted with the practices, but if you want all the content, and enough practice time to learn the skills, try the regular practices as assigned.

Session 2 Practice

Tasks for the Next Week

This is a week for you to make sure you have a space where you can practice quietly for 30 minutes a day. If there's enough room, place objects there that will be pleasing but not emotionally evocative or distracting. Even a small space is useful, as long as the space is free of distractions and conducive to staying awake. For example, a desk or table that contains unfinished work or bills might be distracting. Lying down may be conducive to going to sleep, rather than staying

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engaged in the practice. Try to find a time and place to practice that are feasible and sustainable. You can try out different settings and see how each works.

Practice in Daily Life

Watch your breathing throughout the day. Take one conscious breath during a stressful moment and notice what happens. Also try watching your breathing throughout the day. Breath-focused attention is helpful when you are going to sleep or relaxing.

Sitting Practice

Make sure your meditation space is clean and orderly and that you can practice quietly there for 30 minutes. Place objects that will be pleasing to you but do not have emotional associations. Make sure there is room for your audio player. Try to sit with your back relatively straight so you can breathe easily. If you get sleepy, you can raise your chin a little bit. Your body may relax, but keep your mind awake for the best results.

Use both Track 1, “Guided Body Tour,” and Track 2, “Complete Breath,” at least 6 days this week. You can listen to “Guided Body Tour” on one day and then “Complete Breath” on the next.

Daily Practice Log

Write down the number of minutes you have spent each day on each practice. You may not do all the listed practices every week. You can record comments about your experiences of the practices and/or reflections on your daily life and how they affect your practice. You might also reflect on how your practice has changed your responses to stressful or challenging life situations.

● Session 2 Journal ●

What times of the day did you try to meditate this week? Which times worked best? Which times of day did not seem to work?

Where did you meditate this week? What else would you like to do to arrange a space to meditate? Were there any distractions in your environment, and how did you deal with them?

Is there anything interfering with practicing on a daily basis? Think about what may have kept you from doing as much as you wanted and consider ways you might deal with these obstacles.

Debriefing the Practice: How did the practice go this week? What parts of it were easy or difficult? What did you feel when you were practicing, that is, how did your mind, body, and emotions feel? Did you remember to watch your breathing this week, especially during stressful moments? Did it change the way you felt, and acted, or the ways others reacted to you?

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