

Mindfulness & Mindful Eating
Developed by The Center for Mind-Body Medicine

I. Nutrition and Healthy Eating

Eating has a profound effect on our health. Every time we put food in our mouths, we have an opportunity to either enhance or diminish our lives. Making good food choices is perhaps the single most important way we can care for our bodies.

Many people have chronic health problems to which diet can contribute such as: obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, anxiety and depression. Diets high in sugar, refined carbohydrates and high fructose corn syrup can lead to chronic high blood sugar or high insulin which increases the risk of developing diabetes. Diets high in saturated fats may increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Also, processed foods, animal fats, sugar, white flour and pasta all increase inflammation in the body which leads to a variety of chronic illnesses.

Stress has an impact on eating and nutrition; it inhibits digestion and absorption and can lead to deficiencies. In order to counter the effects of stress and create a lifestyle that does not contribute to chronic disease, it is important to drink 7-8 glasses of water daily, avoid processed foods, and eat nutritious foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, unprocessed fish, chicken & other meats. Processed foods are always deficient in essential nutrients and are also full of unwanted chemicals.

We can benefit by becoming aware of our patterns, feelings, and thoughts about food. Once you increase your awareness, your food choices will change. Also, each of us is biochemically unique, so we need to discover how foods effects us all differently, and experimentation is a very good way to figure this out.

II. Experiential Exercise: Mindful Eating

Mindful Meditative Eating means giving your full attention to your experience of food. No TV, reading, driving, arguing or walking down the street. Mindful eating can also provide you with information about which foods make you feel energetic and happy and which make you feel tired, anxious, depressed or uncomfortable.

People eat for many different reasons. Though most animals eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full, human beings often eat to fulfill emotional needs and don't stop when their physical hunger is satisfied.

The exercise we will do involves eating slowly and meditatively. It is to help you become more fully aware of how, why and what you are choosing to eat, as well as, what food actually smells and tastes like. Practicing meditative eating may change what and how you eat; you may even

develop a new appreciation of healthy foods, and crave a big bowl of vegetables sautéed in olive oil and garlic, rather than a plate full of french fries.

III. Questions for reflection writing and group discussion

- What was your experience like eating mindfully?
- Were there particular thoughts, feelings or sensations during this meditation that surprised you?
- Does this bring up any past experiences or teachings about food?
- Does this bring up any childhood memories with your family?

IV. Suggested Home Practice

In creating a new relationship with food, it is important to not only rely on your common sense but to remember a few basic principles of good nutrition such as the following:

1. Eat real food: food that has to be refrigerated and that you have to prepare.
2. Eat more whole plant foods: fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains like brown rice, nuts and seeds.
3. Eat more fish and chicken and less red meat.
4. Eat a rainbow diet: a wide variety of fruits and vegetables of different colors.
5. Avoid processed foods which contain unhealthy additives.
6. Notice when you are full
7. Be aware of how food makes you feel, physically and emotionally.

V. Possible ways to experiment with nutrition and eating at home:

- ❖ Try eating a variety of foods meditatively, including your favorite snacks, as well as those foods you don't often eat. Follow the same basic steps as you did with the exercise.
- ❖ Eat an entire meal meditatively. Write down your observations every time you do this exercise. The more often you eat meditatively, the more you'll learn about your relationship to food.
- ❖ Each time you're about to eat something, notice if you're really hungry. If not, ask yourself: "Why am I eating this food." Is it out of boredom? Loneliness? Anxiety? Just notice your answers.
- ❖ When you go shopping or to a restaurant, ask your Wise Guide what to eat.

VI. Additional Homework

Pick any of the above food experiments to do meditatively for 7 days. Notice the effects of specific foods on your energy and mood. Because each of us is biochemically unique and no one diet is right for everyone, we need to discover which foods give us energy and which foods seem to cause problems. Experimentation is a very good way to start figuring this out. You may want to begin by making a list of all of your symptoms. Then pick the experiment that appeals to you and try it for two to three weeks. Sometimes you will notice that you feel better within days. Sometimes it takes several weeks. You can refer back to your list of symptoms to determine if there has been an improvement.

Group 8 & 9: Genograms

Goals

- ☐ Discover in the family tree the challenges and strengths that link you to previous and future generations
- ☐ Learn to make practical use of the wisdom you gain from considering your family story
- ☐ Nurture a deeper connection among group members as they share their own histories and that of their families.

Outline for Group 8 & 9 (time: 2 hours for each group) I. Opening Meditation II. Check In

III. Mini-Talk on Genograms

IV. Experiential Exercise: Drawing a Genogram

V. Suggestions for Homework VI. Closing Meditation

I. Opening Meditation Open the group session with any short centering meditation.

II. Check In

Allow time for a full check in, as issues and concerns may have arisen since the last session. **III.**

Mini-Talk on Genograms

You will give a short talk about the use of genograms as a mind-body technique. Cover the following topics:

- What is a genogram?
- Why do we use genograms in our groups
- What is the value of knowing your family patterns?

Here is an example of a short talk about genograms:

Self-awareness is a cornerstone of the mind-body skills group, so it is no surprise that we explore our families of origin in working with ourselves. The patterns of behavior you learned growing up can have a profound impact on your physical and emotional well-being. Because so much of who you are comes from what you observed or were taught as a child, creating and examining your genogram provides you with the opportunity to identify your vulnerabilities and draw on your strengths to make new and different life choices.

Most of the techniques you've learned so far, like meditation and guided imagery have focused on experiencing the present moment as a way to gather information about yourself. Working with the genogram brings this meditative approach to the process of looking at your history. In working with genograms, we ask you to be aware of your present feelings and thoughts as you contemplate the web of relationships that constitute your family.

You come from somewhere and your personal identity is linked to the family. The genogram unfolds a legacy. When you work with the genogram you become a witness. You are able to see the forces that have shaped you. Then, you can then decide what behaviors or patterns you wish to continue and what parts of the family legacy you would like to leave behind. You may see a personal issue with new eyes or be able to clarify family patterns and messages. Sometimes working with a picture of your family unblocks the energy in the family emotional system. You may be able to connect with your family in a new way.

You can use the genogram....your family tree....to tell the story of your life through the lens of your family of origin and to deepen your awareness of how your story has shaped who you are today. From this vantage point, you can see both the richness of your family heritage and the limiting patterns you may no longer want to perpetuate in your life or in the lives of your children.

When you have created your genogram, we will ask you to share it in the group. Sharing your history out loud is not only freeing but it connects everyone in the group. It helps us realize we are not alone with our family histories and that we share common threads.

Acknowledge that creating a genogram can bring up strong emotions or troubling memories. Encourage them to continue with the exercise focusing on themes as much as possible knowing they can take a break at anytime should they feel the need to do so.

IV. Experiential: Drawing a Genogram This exercise has two steps. Group members create a genogram and then use the picture of their family to ask questions and consider family themes and patterns. Have sheets of paper explaining the symbols used on genograms available for group members to refer to. Give instructions for creating a genogram using words such as these: **Step One:** *Take a blank piece of paper, and fold it in half, from top to bottom and then in half again. Opening the paper out again, you see you have created 4 sections.*

Using the symbols shown in the chart, put your grandparents in the top section; your parents and their siblings in the second section; you, your siblings, spouses partners in the third section; and your children, nieces and nephews in the bottom section.

Note that in the 2nd section (your parents' generation) that the symbols for your mother and father are placed lower than the symbols for your aunts and uncles. This makes it easier to connect them with a marriage line.

As you see, circles represent females and squares represent males. If someone has died, put an X through the circle or square. Join partners with a line - solid for marriage, dotted for living together. Slashes indicate separation; double slashes indicate divorce. Second or third marriages can be added along the same line. The double circle or square represents you.

Each line down from a partnership line represents a child, with the children arranged from left to right from the oldest to the youngest. Note the symbols for adopted children, twins, pregnancies, stillbirths, abortions, and miscarriages.

After you get the basic relational diagram of your family member on paper, you can draw a clean copy.

Add anyone outside your family who was or is important to you, such as godparents, family friends, teachers, or pastors. Feel free to include important pets as well.

As you draw, you may realize that families can become quite complicated, with divorces, remarriages, and blended families. If you get stuck and can't figure out how to represent a complicated relationship, create a symbol that makes sense to you.

Add as much detailed information as you want, such as occupations, dates of births, marriages and deaths, and lines that describe the nature of relationships, from close to conflicted.

Step Two: *Now you can begin to look at your genogram to get information about yourself and your family. You may want to write about the relationships in your family and how they have influenced your life. As you consider themes and patterns, you might want to ask some of these questions and look to your genogram for answers.:*

What are the challenges that I face in my life and what are my strengths? Have other members of your family faced the same difficulties? How have they dealt with them?

Are there patterns, connections or conflicts across the generations that have shaped who you are today?

Depending on the kind of information that is important to you, consider using colored markers to highlight family patterns. For example, you might note who went to college, who has alcohol problems, who participates in a particular religious tradition, or who suffers from depression.

Are there any patterns of being that are a part of you that you also see as a pattern in your family that you no longer need or are in the process of changing?

Is there someone whose strength and creativity has inspired you?

Sharing the Experience When group members have completed their genograms, you will invite each person to share the story of her or his family by describing the genogram. Because there is a temptation for group members to go into great detail about the people and stories on their family tree, it may be helpful for you, the group leader, to share your genogram first. This also helps to model how to share most profitably...describing relationships or patterns or themes that struck you...rather than telling lengthy stories and describing each person on the family tree. Group members

need not go in turn; whoever wants to share first can volunteer.

Sharing genograms takes time; that is why two full group sessions are allotted for sharing. Depending on the number of group members, estimate the approximate time needed for each person to share. Let group members know how much approximate time each has. Then, keep track of the time.

Have each person place his or her genogram where all can see it. Give the person the freedom to share as he or she sees fit, but use questions to help focus her or his inquiry. Here are questions you might use to direct the sharing process.

What was it like to draw and share your genogram?

What themes or questions did you look at in your genogram?

What patterns do you see?

What strengths do you see in your family?

What strengths did you develop out of necessity or was learned?

Is there anything that surprised you?

Are there any forgotten people?

Possible Challenges

☐ **Handling the emotions.**

Genograms can bring up strong emotions or troubling memories so it useful to be prepared to deal with this. Some participants may go so deeply into the emotions that other group members become uncomfortable or begin to offer advice. Your strong guidance can be a help here...both in directing the one sharing to focus on themes and in encouraging those listening to withhold advice and notice "what comes up" for them as they hear another's family story. Our society does not generally encourage public displays of emotion so it can be uncomfortable to witness strong emotions in others. And, the act of "being with" others while they are experiencing emotions can be very healing for everyone.

V. Suggestions for Homework

Assure group members that those who have not shared their genograms, will have plenty of time the following week. You might say to the group:

Continue to take your time to accumulate information about your family. This part of the process can take weeks to complete and may eventually lead to more meaningful communication with family members throughout your life. As you go through this process, you may begin to remember stories and reflect on the relationships between family members.

If you have questions, get in touch with family members and learn as much as you can from them. There may be people in your family you've never met or significant events that no one ever talks about that you would like to understand. Be curious and see if you can get your questions answered.

If you find yourself overwhelmed by the impact of your history, you might want to see a counselor who can support you in learning about, understanding and telling your story.

VI. Closing Meditation

End the group with a short meditation.

Group 11: Spirituality

Goals

- To experience a connection with something or someone greater than oneself
- To use that connection to explore the possibility for forgiveness and healing

Outline for Group 11 (time: 2 hours)

I. Opening Meditation II. Check In III. Mini-Talk on Spirituality IV: Experiential

Exercise: Tonglen Meditation or Forgiveness Meditation

III. Suggestions for Homework

VII. Closing Meditation

I. Opening Meditation

Gather the group with any short mindfulness meditation.

II. Check In This is the second to the last session. It is important to point this out as people may start to have feelings come up about leaving. Groups often become a powerful anchor in people's lives and they come to depend on it as a place where they can truly be themselves. There may be some fear about their ability to continue to practice the skills without group support. They may have formed some special connections with people in the group and are feeling the pending loss of relationships. Other experiences of loss may be triggered by the ending of the group.

It is also a good time to ask them to begin to reflect on what their time has been like in the group...to notice if there are ways they are changing, places where they are stuck, if they are feeling more hopeful, more empowered.

III. Mini-Talk on Spirituality

You will give a short talk on spirituality as it applies to mind-body medicine and to health and well-being. Here is an example of a short talk:

Spirituality is your connection with a power greater than yourself. Though spirituality is the living, breathing heart of every religion, you can certainly be spiritual without being religious. No matter how you connect with it, the spiritual dimension is what energizes and "inspires" your life and gives it meaning. The spiritual is not separate from but is intrinsic to who we are. There is a distinction between spirituality and religion. Religion is the name that we give to the ways we organize our spiritual practices and our beliefs about the spiritual. This is why we use the term "organized religion. When religion is alive and vital it's "spirit" or "spirituality", which enlivens it. This is an important distinction to make....that one can be religious in a very dogmatic way and not be spiritual, and of course one can be religious and spiritual, and one can also be spiritual without belonging to a particular religion.

Spirituality is intimately connected with healing in most religious traditions. It is understood that the spirit is the giver of and that it renews life. Spirituality and the spirit are not separate from the rest of our lives, it's not simply something we do or experience in a church or a mosque or a

synagogue, or during a particular kind of ritual, every aspect of our life can be spiritual. And, every aspect of our work is spiritual....how we are with ourselves and others, and with nature. Throughout the world, spirituality is intimately connected with breathing and healing. In many languages, the word for spirit is the same as the word for breath, reflecting the insight that the breath is the link between the physical and the spiritual realms. For example, in French, the word for breath and spirit is “esprit”, in Hebrew “ruach”, in Greek “pneuma”, in Sanskrit “prana”, in Chinese “qi.” In all these traditions it is understood that there is a fundamental connection between spirit, breath and physical functioning and physical illness. On a very basic physical biological basis, breath and the oxygen that travels with it are what give us life. Breath also opens the door to the spirit. According to many healing traditions, when we breathe in an easy and relaxed way, we create the balance that promotes healing. From the Western scientific perspective we know that breathing deeply and slowly balances sympathetic nervous system excitation with the relaxation response of the parasympathetic system, calming down the “fight or flight” response.

In traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, breathing is said to be the vehicle for bringing energy into our bodies and for balancing the body. In both of these traditions breath is used together with imagery to create a state of balance in the body, in the mind and in the spirit. In recent years, Western science has begun to investigate the connection between spirituality and healing. Studies have shown that people who have faith in any religion, or participate regularly in any spiritual practice, tend to be healthier than those who don’t. The effectiveness of placebos, “sugar pills”, that people think are real medicine that will help them, reveals the healing power of hope. Numerous studies have demonstrated the healing power of love. And, some studies have suggested there is a healing power in prayer.

IV: Experiential Exercise: Tonglen Meditation Explain the exercise with words such as these: *The spiritual dimension helps us recognize our spiritual connection to others as well as a force greater than ourselves. Some of the world’s great traditions including Christianity and Buddhism regard love and compassion as central to their doctrine and practice. In experiencing the compassion of Christ or the Buddha we are inspired to be with and to act toward others in a similar way.*

Tonglen is an ancient Tibetan technique which mobilizes the power of love for another and uses it to contribute to the other’s healing as well as your own. Through the use of simple imagery and deep relaxed breathing, the practice allows you to experience, and bring healing to your connection with others, anytime you like. When you pray for the healing of others you’re directing your energy exclusively to others and removing yourself from the equation. By contrast, Tonglen practice recognizes the mutuality of the process. Tonglen suggests that when you intend the healing of others, you can also heal yourself. Tonglen reminds, and helps show us that we are more alike than different from those we intend to help and heal, that our healing and theirs are inextricably connected.

This technique can be taught to people with serious chronic illnesses, to those who have been traumatized by war, and to medical students, to help them develop compassion not only for others, but for themselves as well. The practice can reveal and help heal our own vulnerability.

Script for the Meditation

Sit comfortably, relax, and allow your breathing to deepen. Now imagine someone you would like to help or heal (someone close to you or someone you don't know so well). Imagine yourself sitting next to this person as he or she lies in front of you on a couch or bed.

Breathing deeply and relaxing, invite compassionate spiritual figures from your own religious tradition, such as saints, angels, or deities, into the room with you. You can also invite living human beings you've met, heard, or read about who exemplify compassion. Experience them surrounding you and your friend with the light of love and healing. Enjoy their presence. Feel them around you.

Now focus your attention back on your friend. Become aware of his/her physical, emotional, and/or spiritual suffering, imagine all the hurt and all the pain and all the anger, all the distress, physical, emotional, spiritual, social, economic, whatever it may be that is in this person and imagine this distress as dark sooty smoke..... visualize it as inky dark smoke. Notice every place where it's located in his/her body, perhaps the belly, fingers, hands, head, even around the body. As you breathe in, inhale this dark smoke, understanding that inhaling the hurt and suffering of another can help you heal as well. Imagine it is caustic, that it is something scratchy and cleansing that will clean a dark place in your own heart, cleaning your own hurts and angers and resentment and envy and jealousy.

You might imagine a dark, inky, smoky ball in your own chest, representing all your own pain and suffering. As you breathe in the thick dark smoke of the other, it begins to wear away the dark ball in your own chest. In the process you may become aware of some of your own hurt and pain, the anger and resentment that are being rubbed away and some of the ways in which you are actually similar to the person you are trying to help.

As your darkness is rubbed away, you may become aware of the light present within your own chest, the light in your heart. When this light of compassion and love grows stronger and brighter, send it back to your friend, letting it stream out from your chest to his/her body. Let it fill all the places where before there was darkness, hurt, suffering and pain. At the same time, let the light the compassionate beings that surround you fill your friend and perhaps the whole room, with light.

Enjoy the healing that has come and will continue to come.

Now open your eyes, come back to the room, and you may want to write about your experience.

Share the Experience

Invite group members to share their experience with the Tonglen meditation. Use questions such as these to help guide participants' reflections:

- *What compassionate beings appeared?*
- *Who did you select to heal? Why?*
- *How did you feel during the practice?*
- *Did any fear come up?*
- *What kind of darkness was in your friend?*
- *What kind of darkness did you find in yourself?*
- *Were yours and your friend's darkness and "issues" related or similar?*

VI. Suggestions for Homework

- *Practice this exercise when someone you know or care for seems in pain or distress.*
- *Pick someone in your life who is struggling or in pain and practice Tonglen daily for a week, or more for about 10-20 minutes each day. If a different person spontaneously appears to you that is all right as well.*
- *You might also try Tonglen practice toward someone who has hurt or angered you. It can be quite helpful for developing understanding and compassion and for seeing the similarities between ourselves and those who may have hurt or irritated you. How might they work with this practice at home?*

Remind group members that the next session is the last and there will be a closing ritual. During the next week they may want to reflect on the group and what it has meant to you.

VII. Closing Meditation

Use any short, quiet meditation to close the group.

Group 12: Drawings and Closing Ritual

Goals

- To bring the 12-session group to a satisfying and heartfelt closing
- Give participants a way to use imagery to set the course for the next steps on the journey

Outline for Group 12 (time: 2 hours)

I. Opening Meditation

II. Experiential Exercise: Drawings

III. Mini-Talk on the Use of Ritual

IV. Experiential Exercise: Closing Ritual

V. Suggestion for Homework

VI. Closing Meditation

VII. Evaluations

I. Opening Meditation Begin the group with any short centering meditation.

II. Check In This is the group's last check-in. It is important to acknowledge that termination may bring up feelings of loss, as well as excitement about what has been accomplished and what lies ahead. Questions such as these can help direct participants thoughts and encourage sharing of feelings:

How does it feel to have been a member of this group?

What is different about you now? What surprises you?

Is there something in your way of being in the world...a behavior or a way of responding...that you no longer need and are in the process of changing or shifting?

What have you become aware of or learned during our time together in this group that you either want to continue to develop within yourself, explore further, or manifest more fully in your life?

How will you continue on your path of self-care?

III. Experiential Exercise: Drawings

During the last session, the group will create a set of drawings, similar to but not quite the same as the drawings created in the first session. In describing the exercise cover these topics:

- Drawings as a form of self-expression and a way of accessing the unconscious
- The importance of being in a relaxed state and trusting what comes from the unconscious
- How and when drawings can be helpful
- The process for sharing drawings—without analysis or interpretation by other group members

Pass out three pieces of paper to each group member and have crayons or markers within reach for all.

Begin the exercise using these words:

We use drawings again, as we did at the first group, as a vehicle for self-discovery. The drawings are designed to help you prepare for the next steps in the self-care process you have begun in the group.

As you did in the first group, close their eyes, and take a few moments to breathe deeply and move into that relaxed state where you have easiest access to your unconscious wisdom. Continue relaxing, trusting that you'll receive exactly what's right for you at this moment.

Drawing 1: Yourself as You Are Now Instruct group members to open their eyes when they are ready to draw “yourself as you are now”. You can coach them along with words such as these: *Just let the drawing take whatever shape it needs to take. Allow your hand to move to pick the colors and form the shapes that want to be formed, trusting the process.*

After about 10 minutes, or when it seems that most group members have completed the first drawing, move on with instructions for the second.

Drawing 2: How and Where You Would Like to Be Use these instructions:

Now take a few minutes to draw yourself how and where you would like to be. You can interpret this any way you like—where you'd like to be in your work, your relationship, your health, or your spiritual life or how you would like to be as a person, as a parent, in your self-care process. Whatever comes, let it express itself on the page.

After about 10 minutes, or when it seems that most group members have completed the second drawing, move on with instructions for the third.

Drawing 3: How You're Going to Get There Use these instructions:

Now draw how you're going to get from where you are now to where you want to be. Just let it come from deep inside and emerge on the page.

After all of the drawings are complete, ask participants to come to a close.

We will stop now, knowing that the drawings are always unfinished, and you can always work with them further or come back another time and do others.

Share the Experience

Return the drawings from the first group. Invite each group member to share his or her drawings...either by holding them up or by placing them where everyone can view them. Then invite each member to share any observations they have about the first drawings compared to the second set of

drawings. Ask them for insights that come to them when looking at the two sets of drawings either about yourself or about your growth in the group.

Use questions such as these to invite discussion:

- *How do you appear in each drawing? Are you bigger or smaller? Are other people there?*
- *Is one drawing more concrete and the other more abstract? Did you use different colors?*
- *How do you feel when you look at them? Do they bring up different feelings or the same ones?*
- *What difference/similarities do you see between today's representation of yourself and your first set of drawings?*
- *Remind them that sometimes it takes time to understand what the drawing is revealing. Sometimes the meaning may not be so obvious. That is okay. Just write down what you think and feel.*
- *Notice what lessons the drawing reveals over time?*

VI. Mini-Talk about the Use of Rituals In preparation for the closing ritual, you may want to give a short talk about the use of rituals in life and in group processes. Here is an example of short talk on ritual:

Rituals are repeated patterns of meaningful acts. They are often performed on special occasions as a means to separate the ordinary from the extraordinary. They give order to our lives and provide a sense of security and control. They help to add meaning and value to our lives. Rituals are a part of all cultures.

Rituals can be used to transform individuals into members of communities or to help comprehend life transitions. There are many kinds of rituals: Daily Rituals: like brushing our teeth or removing our shoes when we enter a house. Family Rituals: like eating meals together and saying blessings over our food. Holiday Rituals: special foods, special prayers. Lifecycle Rituals: birth, initiation, marriage, death, rites of passage Special, Planned Rituals: serving tea with attentiveness

Ritual is one of the oldest ways to mobilize the power of the community for healing. It makes the caring of the community visible, tangible, and real. When we feel the support of others, many of us can face the unknown with greater strength. Creating a ritual can be a spiritual act because it helps to connect us to ourselves, to each other and to the divine. Our group ritual offers us a way to acknowledge the time we have spent together. It gives us the opportunity to celebrate the changes in awareness and transformations we have undergone. And, it marks the transition from being a group member back to being an individual thus marking the end of the group as a time of new beginning in our lives.

With ritual we try to create a meditative way to notice what the group has meant to us. We acknowledge the connections made as important and we celebrate them. Ritual provides a way to savor the experience and incorporate and integrate all aspects of it, before moving on to the next stage in our lives.

We have created this circle as a place for us to work on ourselves. And now in our closing, we also want to engage the support of our community for healing. As we have to say goodbye, ritual becomes the container for the full expression of loss and letting go and of joy and holding on. It is like a bridge. Our ritual marks the transition from focused group back to normal life. The ritual will help to anchor our shared experience and when recalled, it will help trigger our memory of the group.

VIII. Experiential Exercise: Closing Ritual As group leader, you will lead group members in a ritual that honors the group experience and marks its ending. The ritual should help group members express what the group experience has meant to them and /or the ways in which they have appreciated one another in the group. You may engage group members' ideas in creating the ritual or use a ritual of your own creation.

As you create a ritual for your group, be aware of who your members are. They may have particular spiritual or religious practices or preferences that would influence what type of ritual you create. You want your ritual to be appropriate and symbolic, not dictating a particular belief system. Remember to keep it simple and include everyone.

You may want to consider acknowledging what has happened in the sessions. You can look for symbols or themes that are particular to the group and consider using them in the ritual. Make the ritual an opportunity to explore the meaning of this time spent together and provide a transition from this experience.

Sometimes closing rituals may evoke deep emotion. It is important for you as a facilitator to be comfortable sitting with strong emotion. As a facilitator you need to be able to sit with the sadness and grief and feelings of loss within yourself. It is important to always realize you are holding the space or container for people to become aware of their emotions and to discover what is true for them.

Some Examples of Rituals

- Sharing of poems or songs
- Groups members write on cards or paper comments about what each person has meant to them or what they have learned from them. Then each member takes these cards home with them.
- Symbolic expression of what members want to “let go of” or “leave behind” and what they “would like to take with them”—something they have learned or want to remember from the experience
- Using stones or hearts or another object that can be passed around the circle for each person to hold
- Using water or fire to cleanse or burn something to be left behind, such as an old behavior that no longer serves them
- Creating silence together where everyone focuses on one person at a time
- Stringing a ribbon to show how everyone is connected and then cutting it so everyone has a piece of it to take home
- Having each group member stand in the middle of the circle in turn as other members and say one word to them about what they have appreciated about them

VIII. Suggestions for Ongoing Homework If there is time, you may recap some of the main themes of the 12-week group experience. For example you might say:

Meditation and relaxation form the foundation for the other techniques you've learned in the group: biofeedback and autogenic training, guided imagery, drawings, expressive movement, meditative eating, Tonglen and work with the genogram. By bringing you into the present moment, into a relaxed, meditative awareness helps to quiet the sympathetic nervous system and create a safe space inside where you can explore issues of concern to you, come to greater self-understanding, and plan for the future.

Slow, deep breathing provides an antidote to the shallow breathing that accompanies the stress response. Slow, deep breathing balances out the over activity of the sympathetic nervous system and sets in motion the relaxation response mediated by the parasympathetic nervous system. You can also come to the state of quiet, relaxed awareness through activity such as physical exercise, fast, deep breathing, or shaking and dancing.

Once you're in this state, you're ideally positioned to work with some of the techniques of self-expression and self-exploration provided in this work, such as drawings, journaling, dialoguing with symptoms or problems, and making a genogram. The cycle of relaxation, awareness, exploration and expression is important in all of these approaches. Relaxation promotes awareness, which creates the opportunity for exploration, which in turn allows you to express what you've seen and felt.

Relaxation, awareness, exploration and expression can be brought to every activity. For example if you begin each meal by relaxing, you create the optimal conditions for efficient digestion and you taste and enjoy your food in a way that you don't when you're in a hurry, which adds to your feelings of well-being. And you can journal about your experience or share it with someone.

Offer group members ideas for how to develop their own mind-body practice:

- *In daily practice, you'll probably want to be working with one active technique, such as yoga, walking, or shaking and dancing and one quiet technique, such as Soft Belly meditation or Safe Place imagery or Tonglen practice. When you are doing them in sequence, begin with the active and conclude with the quiet.*

- *Tonglen practice can be used regularly for awhile. For example, when you wish to heal a particular person who is ill or to deal with someone with whom you have a conflicted relationship. It also can be whenever the need arises. Sometimes it's very useful to do this healing work with the same person for many days or weeks.*

- *Exploratory techniques like Wise Guide, drawings or genograms can be used any time you come up against an issue or problem that you want to understand better and deal with more effectively. You may want to ask your guide to give you advice about what to do, how to interpret what's going on, or how to understand your feelings. Or you can use the dialogue with a symptom, issue or problem to gain insight into the situation.*

- *You can work with your genogram and explore how this issue fits into your family history. How did others cope with similar issues? Why is it so important to you, based on your childhood experience? What do your ancestors have to tell you about how you might deal with it differently or better?*

- *You can work with drawings to help you solve a problem and discover more about yourself.*

VIV. Closing Meditation The closing ritual may serve as the closing meditation. If not, simply use a short, quiet meditation for the final closing of the group.

IX. Evaluations: Have group members fill out evaluations at the end so you can collect them before they leave if you wish.

APPENDIX:

☐ **Next Step Packet & Scripts**

☐ **CMBM Forms**

- ☐ Initial Phone Interview Form
- ☐ Center for Mind-Body Medicine Intake Forms
- ☐ In-Person Interview Questionnaire
- ☐ Mind-Body Skills Group Registration and Payment Forms
- ☐ Small Group Evaluation Forms

☐ **Eating Experiments** (do for 1-2 weeks and notice how you feel):

a. Keep a diary of all foods and liquids consumed; note energy levels and symptoms before and after eating. This will increase awareness of how foods affect you physically and emotionally.

b. Eat a meditative meal in a quiet environment. Chew each bite until liquid. Notice your choice of foods...junk versus whole foods. This will increase your awareness of how food actually tastes.

c. Cut back gradually on coffee, black tea or soda everyday. Begin drinking decaffeinated beverages over a period of one week. Then stop all caffeine (soda, chocolate, coffee, tea). This will give you an experience of the effect of caffeine on your nervous system.

d. Eliminate refined sugar, bread and pasta from diet. Eat a high protein breakfast. This will help you to become aware of how energy is affected by sugar and of how addictive sugar is for some people.

e. If you have sinus problems: eliminate all dairy products and see if that makes a difference.

f. If you have chronic constipation: drink 10 glasses of water a day starting before breakfast; eat vegetables and fruits for lunch and dinner half cooked, half raw; cut back on bread and cheese. This will give you a chance to experience how a change in diet can effect a chronic condition.

g. Eat whole foods for one week (nothing in cans, boxes, or precooked). This will give you an awareness of how much your food choices affect how you feel.

h. Eliminate or cut back on meat and increase vegetables, fruits and whole grains. This will give you an awareness of how meat affects how you feel.

i. If you are used to eating sweet breakfasts, eat a high protein breakfast: eggs, salmon, unsweetened whole grain cooked cereals with fruit. This will help you become aware of how sugar affects energy levels.

j. If you tend to be irritable between meals, snack every 3 hours on hummus and carrot sticks or nuts and seeds. This will help you to determine if you have a tendency toward low blood sugar.

k. If you don't like to drink water, drink 1 - 2 quarts of filtered or bottled water a day. This will give you an awareness of if you are dehydrated, which decreases your sense of well being.