

Session 4 Handout 2

Summary of Session 4: Staying Present

Difficult things are part and parcel of life itself. It is how we handle those things that make the difference between whether they rule (control) our lives or whether we can relate more lightly to them. Becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations evoked by events gives us the possibility of freeing ourselves from habitual, automatic ways of reacting, so that we can instead mindfully respond in more skilful ways.

In general, we react to experience in one of three ways:

- With spacing out, or boredom, so that we switch out from the present moment and go off somewhere else "in our heads".
- With wanting to hold on to things - not allowing ourselves to let go of experiences that we are having right now, or wishing we were having experiences that we are not having right now.
- With wanting it to go away, being angry with it - wanting to get rid of experiences that we are having right now, or avoiding future experiences that we do not want.

Each of these ways of reacting can cause problems, particularly the tendency to react to unpleasant feelings with aversion. For now the main issue is to become more aware of our experience, so that we can respond mindfully rather than react automatically.

Regularly practising sitting meditation gives us many opportunities to notice when we have drifted away from awareness of the moment, to note with a friendly awareness whatever it was that took our attention away, and to gently and firmly bring our attention back to our focus, reconnecting with moment to moment awareness. At other times of the day, deliberately using the breathing space whenever we notice unpleasant feelings, or a sense of "tightening" or "holding" in the body, provides an opportunity to begin to respond rather than react.

Based on Segal, Williams and Teesdale (2002).