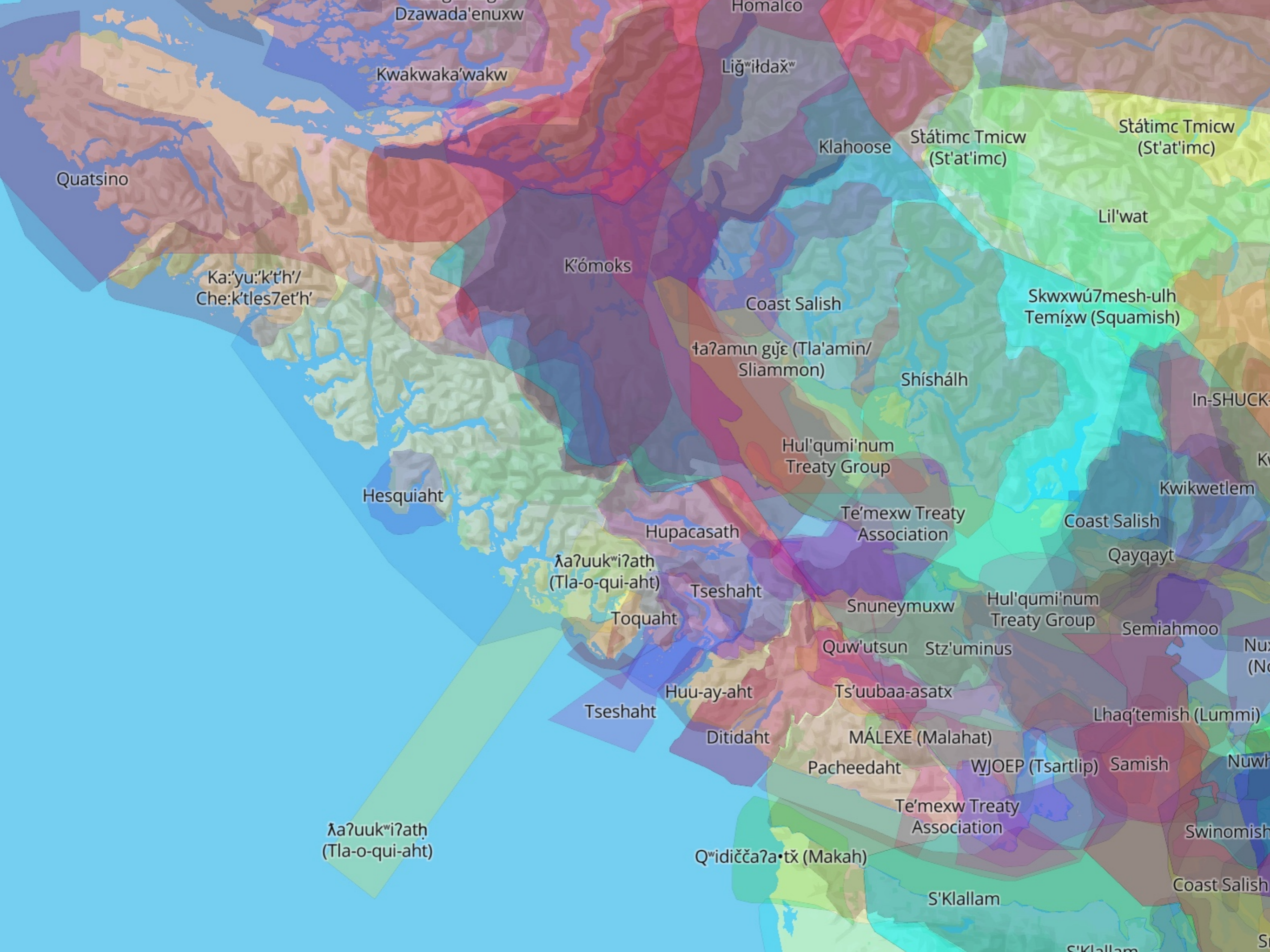


Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Chronic Pain

Session 3: The Breath as an Anchor



Agenda Session 3

- Hearing and Seeing Exercise
- Sitting Meditation
- Home Practice Discussion
- Pleasant Experiences Diary
- 3 Minute Breathing Space
- Awareness of Stressful Experiences
- Home Practice Suggestions
- Check out

Theme

Stepping out of striving, goal-oriented, problem solving tendencies, to find a **balance between calmness and wakefulness**

With a **greater awareness of the patterns of mind** and its tendencies, **learning to focus on one thing—**
an anchor like the breath—supports a sense of **feeling grounded and more focused**

Problem Solving Mind

- **Mind automatically parses the world** into "good/bad, "right/wrong,"pleasant/unpleasant," "dangerous/safe," etc.
- **Thinking, making judgments, and problem solving is valuable**
- **Natural to believe thinking can solve pain and unhappiness** — "If I could just find the right doctor..." or another solution-focused thought— then will obtain a "pain-free" body and a lasting, unwavering sense of happiness
- Drive to be "pain-free" and escape unhappiness can **put the mind into over-drive** where it is constantly thinking ... and **creates more unhelpful feelings and behaviors**

A different mode of mind

- Skills provide option of going beyond automatic, problem solving approach and to experience **a different mode of mind - staying with the pain**
- **Letting go of judgment or need to urgently want to control or fix the pain, letting go of immediately wanting the pain to be other than it is**
- **Bringing space to the situation by breathing with the tendency to want solutions to the "problem" of pain**

From Aversion to Allowing

- Much of what we do, how we feel, and what we think is **motivated by a deep-seated need to avoid unpleasantness, and a strong desire to hold on to that which is pleasant**
- Bringing these powerful, automatic tendencies into conscious awareness, and are **learning to gently pause, choosing to breathe with the difficulty**
- Over time and with patient practice, we find this **opens up space and choice, giving options for how to respond wisely**



The "no" of contraction of aversion
and resistance to what is here



Allowing what is already here and softening towards
the experience

Willing to say "yes, it's already here"



Opening Practice
Seeing/Hearing Meditation

- What did you notice with that practice?
- How was this brief exercise different from how you might normally experience hearing?
- In what ways do you think this exercise relates to living with chronic pain?

Bringing Mindfulness to Breathing

- Noticing changes in breathing gives information on feelings
- What happens to the breath when tense and in pain?
 - Short and shallow, perhaps almost disappearing
- When relaxed and happy?
 - Slower and full
- Mindfulness helps **become more in tune with how breath mirrors mind, body, and mood**
- Usually not aware of breathing (or hearing). Tuning into **breath can create stability in mind, emotions, and body**
- **Breath can anchor to the present moment**

How to Breathe Mindfully

- **No need to control**, slow down, deepen, or force the breath in any way - **just paying bare attention**
- Practice bringing awareness to the movements of the breath, **the feeling of the breath moving into the body on each in breath, and moving back out on each out breath**
- Practice focusing on the movements of the breath, and letting any arising distractions— thoughts, feelings, sensations-just come and go, **without grasping or holding on to them**
- **Return your attention to the movements of breath thousands and thousands of times**

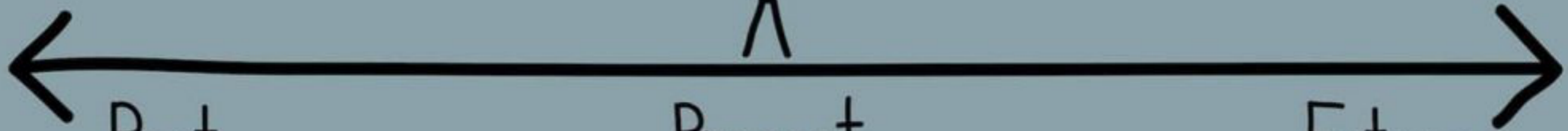
Benefits of the Breath as an Anchor

- 1) Breathing is **always in the present**
- 2) Breath is **always with us**, always available as a **window into emotions, physical sensations, and thoughts**
- 3) If mental resources devoted to the breath, fewer mental resources devoted to processing pain - "**closes the gates**"
- 4) The breath breathes itself - helps to **let go of striving, problem solving, "fixing" or controlling**. Observing the breath helps to step back and respond more skillfully to difficulty
- 5) **Easier to catch drifting into unhelpful mind patterns early**, and flexibly shift focus thus reducing amount of pain signals to the brain and therefore amount felt pain

Your body is present.



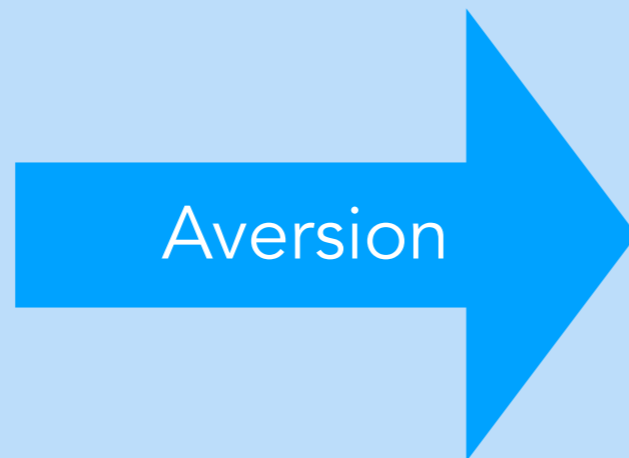
Is your mind?

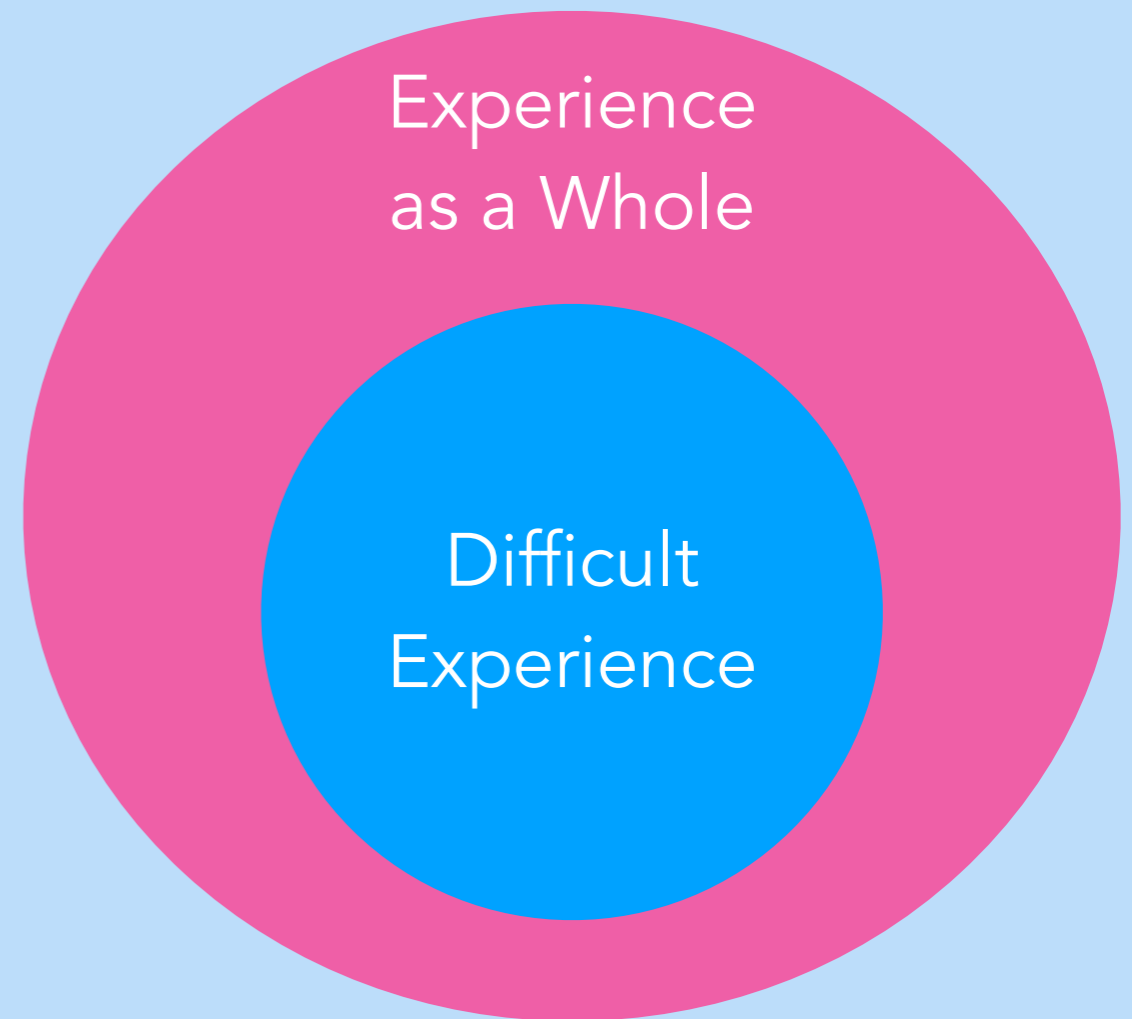
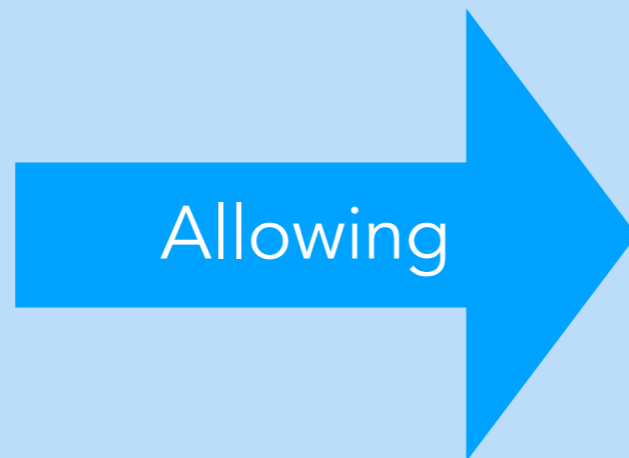


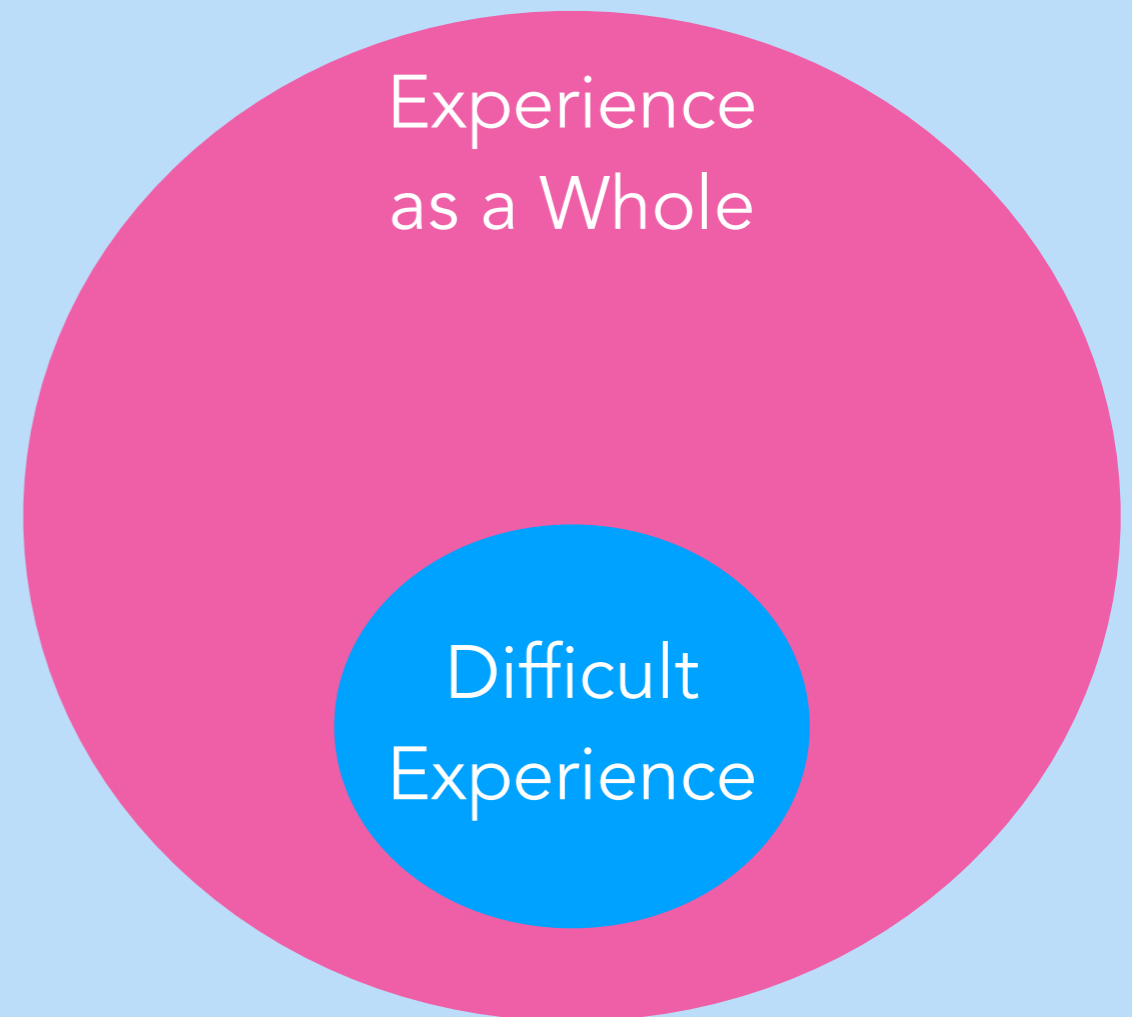
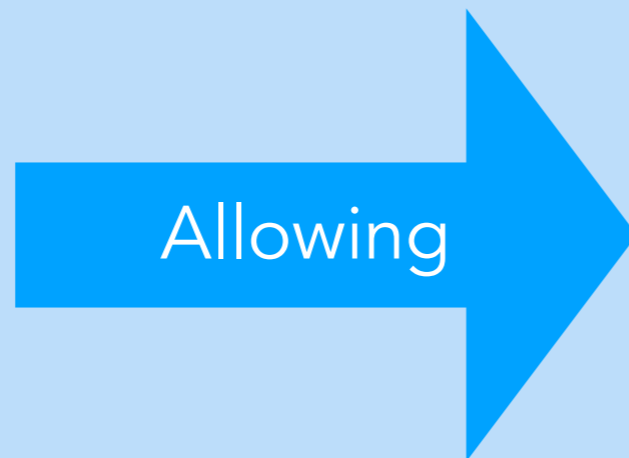
Past

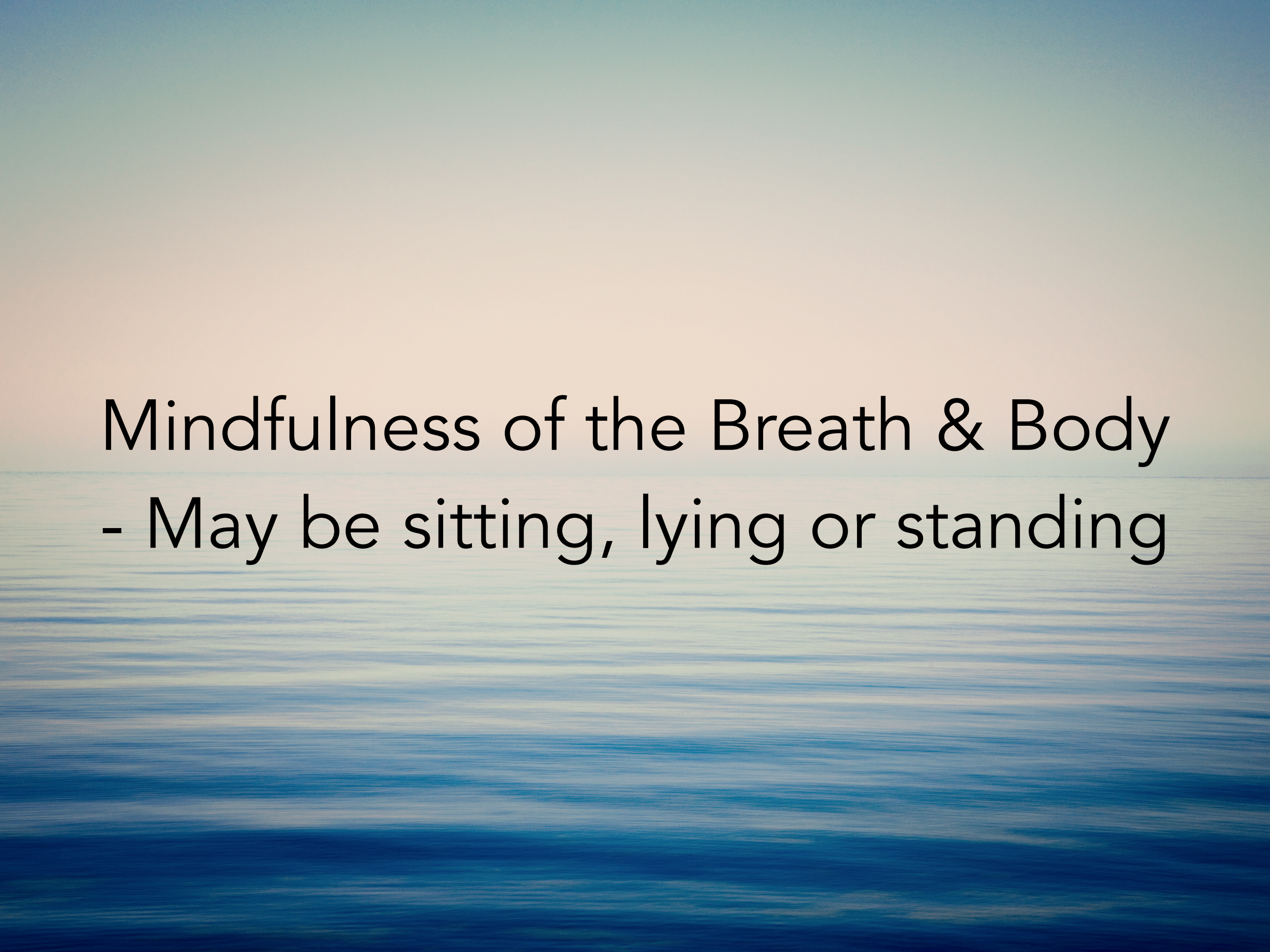
Present

Future







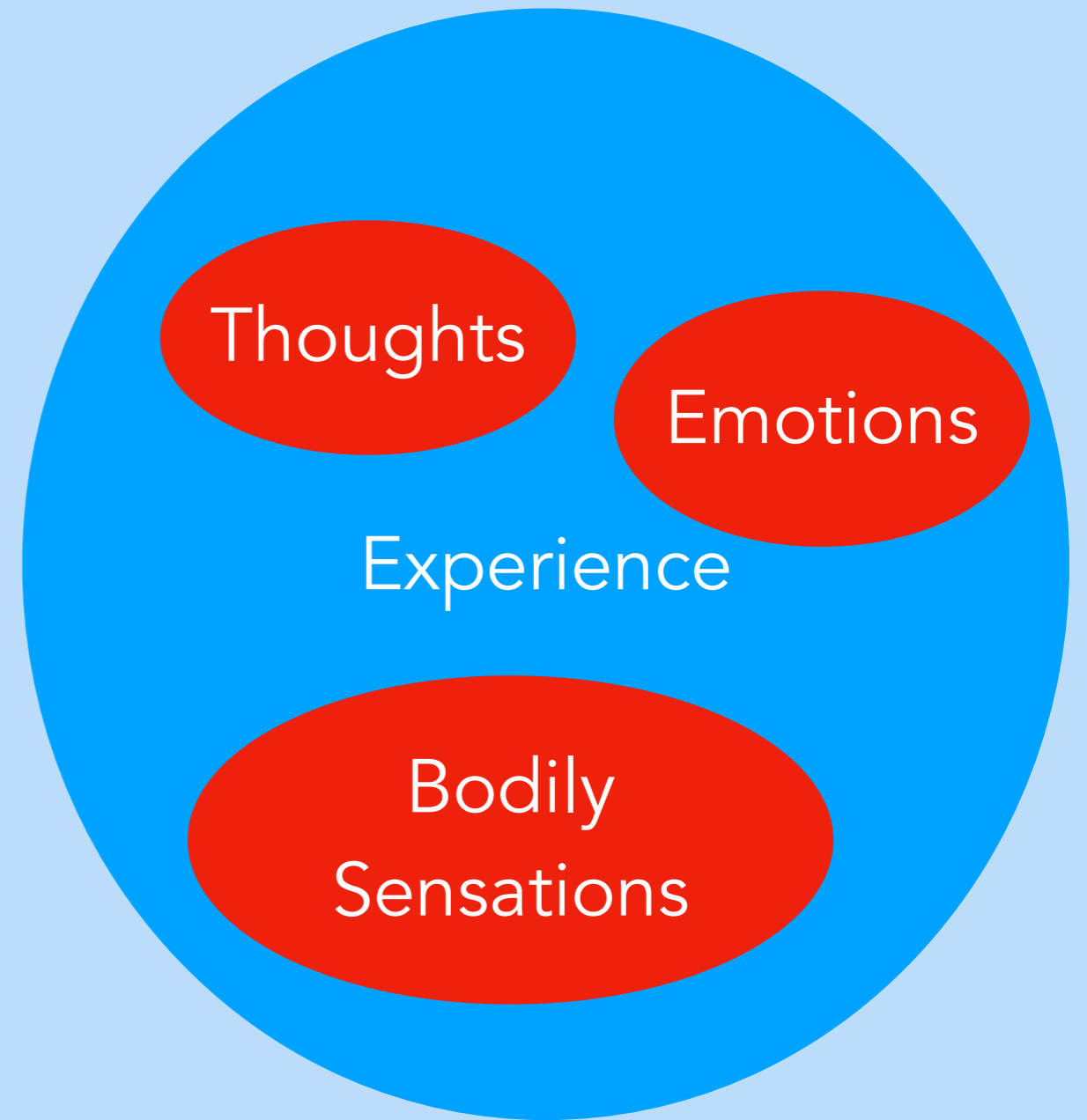
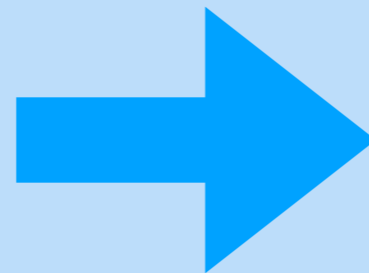


Mindfulness of the Breath & Body
- May be sitting, lying or standing

De-blobbing



Knowing by Thinking



Knowing by Experience

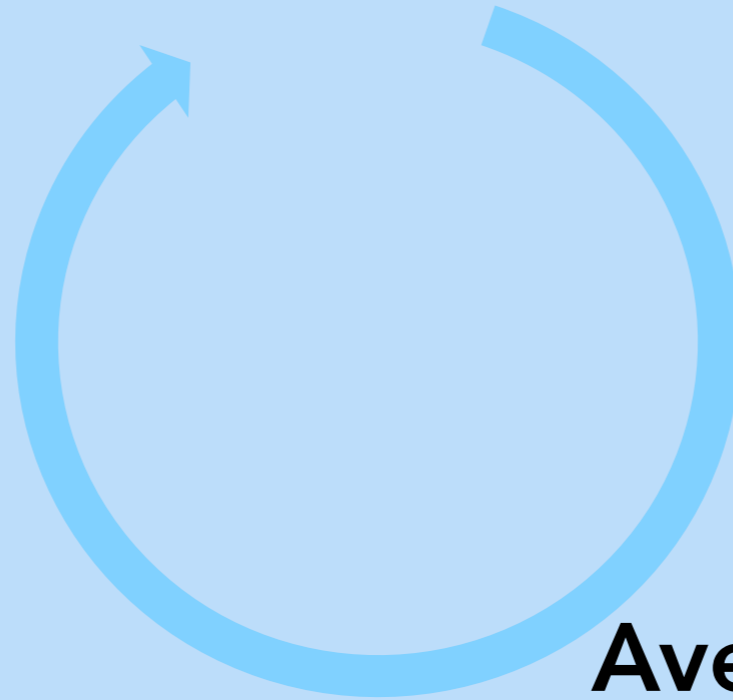
Pleasant Experiences

- Pain, stress and depressed or irritable mood take over and can't see past the pain, and **pleasant moments go over-looked**—unregistered in the pain landscape
- May also experiment with paying attention when the pleasant event may be finishing:
 - *Do you have a sense of "attachment" to the pleasant thoughts, feelings and sensations? Wanting them to last? Stay the same?*

Unwise reactivity

**Clinging/Attachment
to Pleasant/Wanted
experience**

Suffering increases



Aversion to *Present*

**Aversion to unpleasant,
or to the wanted
experience passing**

Key to stepping out of this cycle is awareness

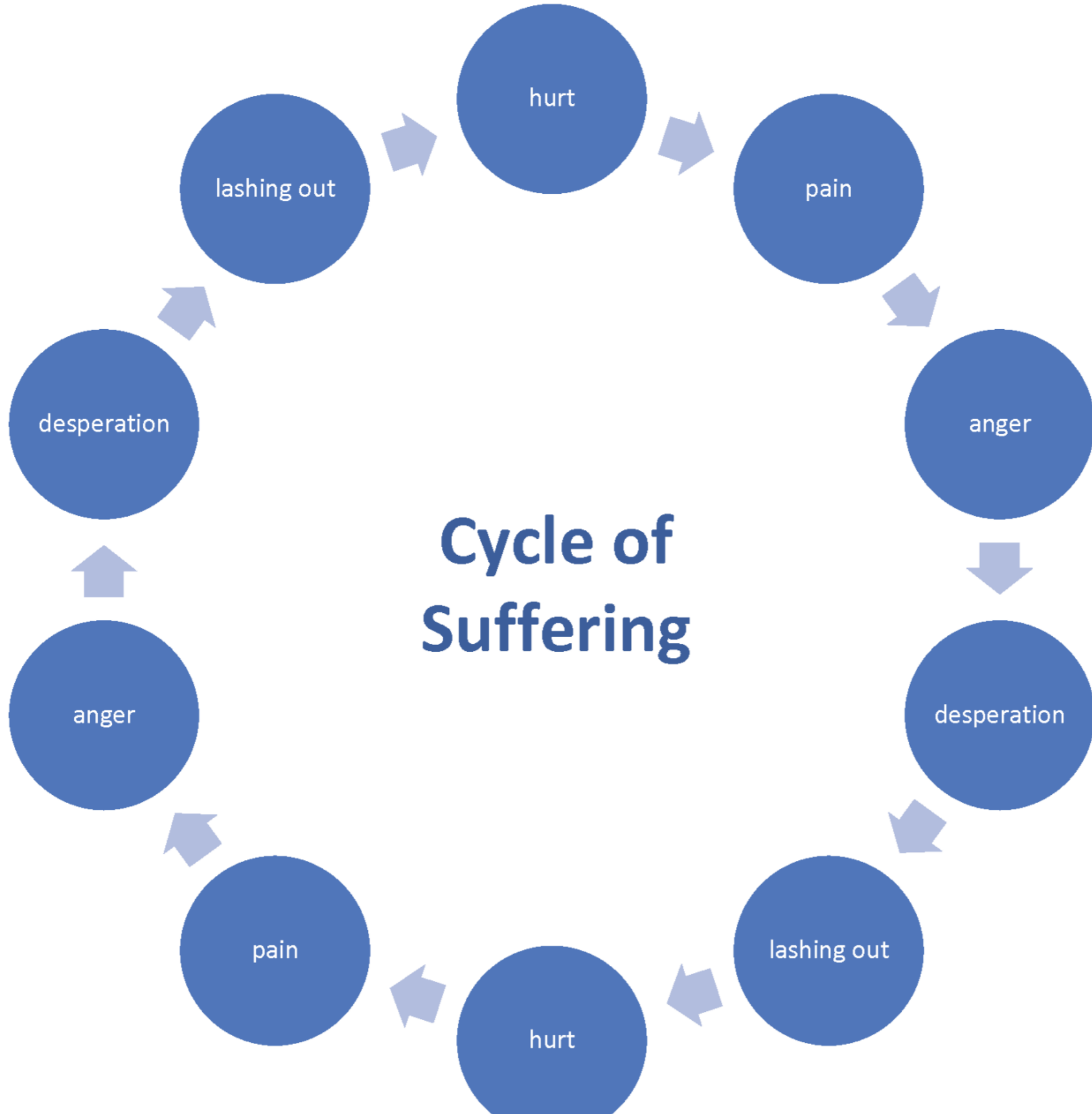
Breakout room

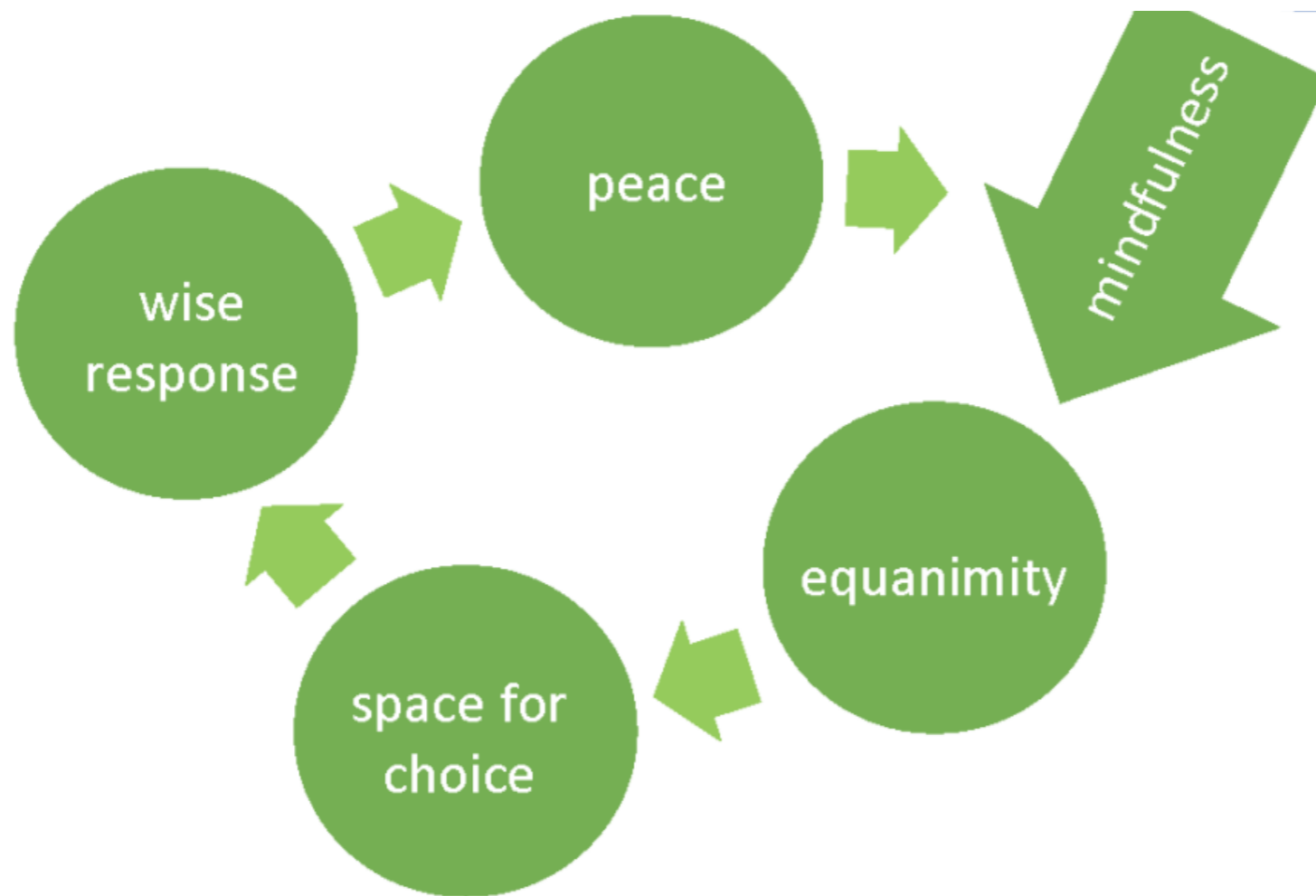
- Do you have a sense of "attachment" to the pleasant thoughts, feelings, and sensations? Wanting them to last? Stay the same?
- Do you overlook pleasant events in your life?
- How might you remind yourself to pay more attention to pleasant experiences?

How Awareness Helps

- **Not automatically swept away** thoughts and emotions that follow initial judgments of "pleasant/unpleasant," **and ensuing attachment and aversion**
- Simply present with judgments, holding them in awareness, and then mindfully choosing **response**
- Learn to **savour pleasant experiences** as they are happening without feeling an overwhelming sadness when they shift
- When **unpleasant experiences arise, won't get swallowed up in them, knowing those too, shall pass**

Cycle of Suffering





“Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of the present experience.

It isn't more complicated than that.

It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is, without either clinging to it or rejecting it.”

— Sylvia Boorstein

We use mindfulness to observe the way we cling to pleasant experiences & push away unpleasant ones.

Sharon Salzberg



3 Minute Breathing Space

Steps for the 3 min Breathing Space

1. **Awareness** - Stop, switch from "doing" to "being" mode, notice and acknowledge what is present
2. **Anchoring** - Use the breath as an anchor to the present moment
3. **Opening** - Expand awareness to include breath and body, holding it all in open, spacious awareness

Awareness of Stressful Experiences

Goal to increase awareness of what might trigger the stress response, and raise the stress–pain thermometer

Increase awareness of connection between stress, thoughts, feelings, and body sensations

Helpful to make entries as close to the experience as possible and record reactions in detail

Awareness of Stressful Experiences

Experience?	Body sensations	Emotions?	What thoughts were present?	What thoughts now, while writing?
Waiting for doctor to call with the results of a scan	Neck and shoulders tense, spasms in back, tightness in chest, butterflies in stomach	Anxious, hopeless	"This is going to show that my spine is crumbling" "Soon I won't be able to walk"	"Now that I have the results, I hope that no structural changes since the last scan means I will soon be able to pickup and hold my grandkids"

Suggested Home Practice

- 1) Practice with the Seated Meditation (Mindfulness of Breath), and the Body Scan guided meditation audios, alternating each day
- 2) At least three short 3-Minute Breathing Spaces every day at set times that you have decided in advance
- 3) Complete one entry each day in Stressful Experiences Diary

Summary

The breath reconnects with the *here and now*, a **portable tool** to stabilize the mind, and bring a sense of **spaciousness to experience**, so can view things from a **wider perspective**

Practicing meditation like learning any **new skill**: it takes **patient persistence and kindness**

May not see quick "results". Unlike some medication, when practicing meditation, **may not feel "immediate symptom relief"**

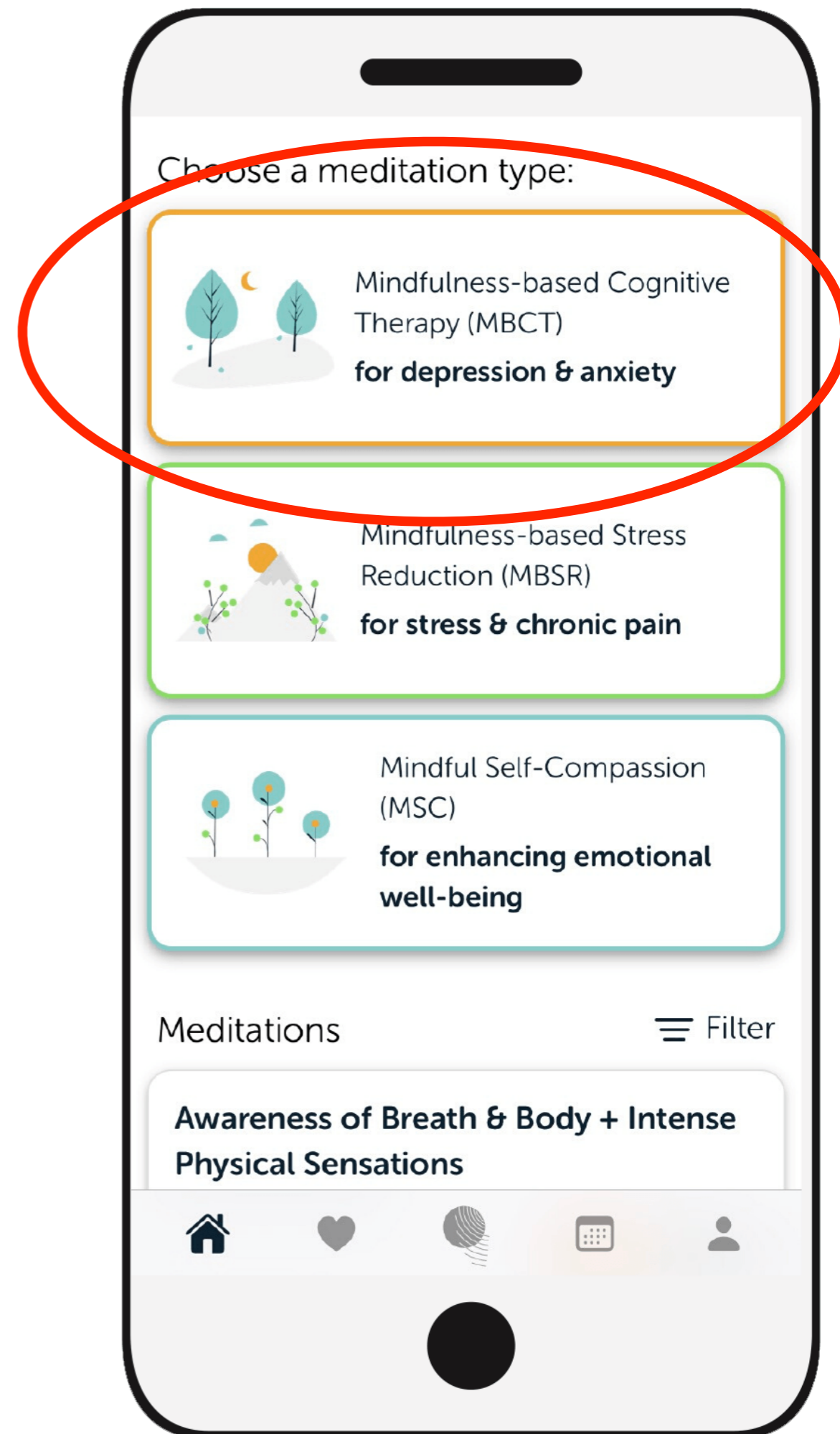
Need to *take* medication for benefit, similarly **need to *practice* meditation for it to work**





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