

Self-Advocacy

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.

☐

Heart

☐

Mind

☐

Body

☐

Breath

☐

Environment

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



PURPOSE / EFFECTS:

Self-advocacy here means treating yourself (and demanding, albeit gently and reasonably, that others treat you) as if your worth is no less than any other being.

We live in a culture that alternately promotes self-esteem and equality while promoting interests that are often destructive to individuals and groups. Women, especially, are often taught as girls not to speak up and assert themselves for fear of being “unladylike.”

We often neglect our own needs and yearnings for the benefit of others. When this becomes pathological and crippling, it inhibits our true wills, and practice in self-advocacy is needed.

METHOD:

Summary

Learn compassion, advocacy, and lovingkindness for others, then apply it to yourself.

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Long Version:

Exercise #1: Basic Advocacy:

Sit in a comfortable meditative posture, relaxed and alert. While breathing gently and calmly, begin to think about something for which you have unequivocal good feeling. It could be a parent or a child, a pet or a friend, or even a place or a concept.

Begin to wish that person or thing well. You might want to use the lovingkindness techniques detailed here. Consider fully this sensation of caring. Fill yourself with this feeling of support for something and explore it.

Examine how advocacy of this sort makes you feel, how you think about the object of your advocacy, your emotions and attitudes. Perhaps slowly try to ramp up this feeling of goodwill. Love fiercely. Care strongly. Then, center your attention on the power of your caring and your commitment to this positive feeling.

You might also try to weaken the feeling to see how your mind behaves under those circumstances. Then dial it back up. Notice how your advocacy is something you have control over, and how good it feels to be fierce and strong about love.

Enjoy it; it is beautiful. This exercise reminds us of the warmth and pleasure that come from caring, especially caring strongly. It tells us about our own strength and determination. We also find in ourselves the capacity to love completely an imperfect thing. These skills will help us to then begin to self-advocate.

Exercise #2: Self-Advocacy:

Settle into the same relaxed and alert posture as before. Now, bring to mind yourself as a child. Focus on your many qualities, how worthy of love you were and how vulnerable. Consider how, even as a child, you were imperfect but good enough.

Have compassion for that young child. Then, gradually, move that compassion to yourself now as an adult. Have compassion for your foibles and misadventures as well as for the trauma, bad luck, and hard circumstances you've had to endure by virtue of your humanity.

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Settle into this compassion, allowing it to flow into you with each inhalation. Move on to lovingkindness, feeling it for the child you once were and moving it into adulthood. Feel lovingkindness for yourself now, expressing with your inner voice well-wishes and affection for the person you are, despite your flaws.

Finally, move toward advocacy. Return to the child you were, and think about how, if you needed to, you would protect that child and would help that child just as you would any child. See if you can bring this same advocacy to your adult self, empowering you to protect and help yourself and to advocate for your own wellbeing.

Consider how you will act in your best interest in the face of illness, bad luck, mistreatment, and suffering, just as you would for the interest of a child. Fill yourself with this powerful feeling of self-advocacy and enjoy it. Allow your mind to commit itself to advocating for you.

HISTORY:

Self-advocacy has its roots in 19th-century psychological and philosophical thought that questioned the self-sacrificing ideals of Western culture. The concept of will evolved from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (who often viewed it in rather bleak terms) into something positive and empowering with the movement toward self-esteem in the late 19th century.

CAUTIONS:

Do not confuse your selfish wants with things that must be advocated for. You, as a human being, have the right to advocate for equal treatment, freedom from abuse, the ability to follow your dreams, and respect from others. Self-advocacy does not mean that petty emotions and greedy desires are okay just because you think them.

NOTES:

Self-advocacy is also a term used in the disability rights movement expressing the right that people with disabilities (especially the developmentally disabled) have to control their own lives and to self-determine. The ability to speak up for oneself is crucial for human beings in order to feel empowered about their own lives.