

GUIDING FRIENDLY FOCUSING: FINDING HELPFUL FOCUSING ANCHORS

SET UP

1. Socialisation to the practice: offering sufficient rationale to encourage a spirit of curiosity and experimentation but not unhelpful expectation.
2. Sitting in whatever way is comfortable for you, adjusting your position at any time. Cough, sneeze, swallow, scratch etc. at any time, doing whenever you need to do to be comfortable.
3. If you need to ask about anything during the exercise just speak whenever you want to, ask anything you need to. We can repeat anything that you would find helpful to do again. If you want to pause a bit longer at any point just speak or raise a hand and I will wait until you let me know to carry on to the next part.
4. I will be doing what I am inviting you to do along with you. I will pause off and on to ask you to feedback on what you are noticing as this helps me adapt what I am saying to what may be a better fit for you.
5. As we will see, the great thing about this is you can't get it wrong: you are just noticing what you are experiencing as you do the practice.
6. This will take about 10-20 minutes where we will notice how it is to direct the attention to looking, listening and sensations in the hands and feet. We will pause between each of these so you can feedback on what you are noticing. [Could check here if any sensory issues with looking or listening or pain/discomfort in hands, feet)

Note: It is usually helpful in the initial practices to encourage eyes to stay open. This is because the aim initially is to find Focusing Anchors that can be used in daily routines. When offering guidance the main general guidelines are to avoid negatives (e.g. don't do xxx); be specific (e.g. avoid vague terms like 'your mind' or 'the breath') and encourage objectivity rather than subjectivity (e.g. refer to **the** attention, **the** thoughts in **the** mind as opposed to 'your ...')

FRIENDLY FOCUSING PRACTICE: EXPLORING THE ATTENTION CYCLE & FOCUSING ANCHORS

LOOKING

1. Checking if there is any difficulty focusing on an object. Need glasses? Choose object near or far can look at comfortably. Hands in lap can be a good starting point – but more distant object may be more helpful if there is greater agitation.
2. Find a comfortable object to rest your gaze on. Ask the client what it is and if possible shift so you can look at the same object. Continue to observe the client with the peripheral vision and listen to them. If there is growing agitation bring the practice to a close and check out what they experienced. If you know what they are looking at you can name it.
3. Notice fine detail of colours, shapes, any movement
4. Normalise: Whenever we rest the gaze in one place it is normal to notice the focus comes and goes, shimmery effects can occur around patterns and objects and colours can change.
5. You may be noticing how the eyes just flick away at times. Acknowledge what

- the gaze has been taken to and then gently return the gaze to the object.
6. You may be noticing at times that the attention shifts away from what you are seeing to the sound of the words I am saying, and then when I stop speaking you can shift that attention fully back to what your eyes are looking at. Short pause.
 7. You may be noticing that the attention also shifts to thoughts or images in the mind or sensations in the body or to things happening around you. When this happens just notice the attention has been shifted, notice what the attention is now caught up in and then gently guide the attention back to the object you are looking at. I will shortly be quiet for 30 secs while you notice what it is like to go around that cycle: the attention shifts off somewhere, you notice it has been shifted, acknowledge briefly what has hooked the attention, then guide it back. So just noticing how it is to do that for 30 secs. Pause.
 8. Normalise thinking: You may be noticing that the attention gets hooked into thoughts bubbling up in the mind – ‘This is an odd thing to be doing.’, ‘I wish you would keep quiet so I can do the practice!’, ‘What am I having for tea?’, ‘Mustn’t forget to do that’. If you do find the attention has been hooked into thoughts, just acknowledge that this has happened and then bring the attention back to the object you are looking at.
 9. If you are noticing any feelings around like curiosity, irritation, amusement, frustration, boredom, relaxation you can explore just letting that feeling be along side somewhere while you continue to keep gently returning the attention to the object you are looking at. For a final 30 seconds noticing how it is to continue to return the attention to the object, noticing when the attention inevitably gets taken off somewhere, acknowledge what has caught the attention, then gently guiding it back once again.
 10. Ending: If you want a bit more time just say or raise your hand. And bringing that to an end.
 11. Feedback: Explore their experience. Be affirming – **they can’t get it wrong** and the whole point is to encourage noticing of the whole experience of how we pay attention. Explore what took the attention. Explore their experience of the Attention Cycle. If appropriate go through the diagram of the Attention Cycle. Be clear that, as ‘You can’t get Friendly Focusing wrong’, how you actually experience the Attention Cycle will vary at different times. Sometimes each phase seems available to notice, other times it may seem that a phase just slips by – however it is, just notice however it is. Often helpful to explore how they responded to your invitations – welcome whatever was present. Explore their experience of any feelings. How was that? Unpacking whether possible to return attention while feeling present.

LISTENING

1. Checking if any issues with hearing. Hopefully the room has a persistent sound – clock, traffic, air conditioning hum. You can always play a track with water sounds etc – check with client what they prefer. Offer similar guidance as above. With sound there is inherently more capacity to hear your chosen sound with awareness of other competing sounds present. This is an excellent metaphor for thoughts arising around what we are sensing. Most people have more experience of focusing on one sound while others pull at the attention. You need to pause for longer as your voice will compete. If there is tinnitus, explore how it is to allow tinnitus sound to be there: clients

- may choose to listen to their tinnitus sound; be open to feelings and thoughts that arise after practice: scope for detailed noticing.
2. Explore with client what they can hear. What sound can they use as a listening anchor? Encourage client to rest their gaze on a comfortable spot while do the practice.
 3. So using the attention in a similar way to looking, bringing the attention to your chosen sound. Pause
 4. Noticing how my voice may be shifting the attention away from your chosen sound and noticing any thoughts, images, feelings or other reactions that may arise. Pause.
 5. As before, whenever you notice that the attention has been shifted away, acknowledging what has hooked it, then notice what it is like to return the attention to your chosen sound. Doing this for the next 30 secs. Pause.
 6. Noticing if there are any reactions, thoughts or feelings present to anything you are experiencing. There may at times be feelings such like curiosity, irritation, amusement, frustration, boredom, relaxation. How is it to give room and space to whatever is happening, just letting things do what they are doing, be as they are. Letting them be along side somewhere as you gently return the attention to the chosen sound. Pause.
 7. And continuing for a final 30 secs. Pause
 8. [Option – could ask client to notice difference with eyes open or closed to how they notice their chosen sound. This allows conversation about magnifying and intensifying effect of what is foregrounded – and how closing the eyes foregrounds other senses. Can explore why this makes thoughts and images more pressing when in darkness trying to sleep.]
 9. Ending: If you want a bit more time just say or raise your hand. And bringing that to an end.
 10. Feedback. How was that compared to looking? What hooked the attention? How was it to let what hooked attention to just be there?

HANDS

1. Checking out comfortable position, sensation in one or both hands. For agitated clients can provide an object like a tennis ball – ideally something soft and that will warm with body heat. Or can do a stroking movement down arms / hands / fingers. Or can gently and slowly imagine rolling a soft ball between gently clasped hands. Or hands/ arms on/over belly or chest: this is often helpful if client feeling attacked. Aim to adopt same position as client. Also check where client will rest gaze: on hands or away.
Can use a heat pad for a strong anchor .
Can introduce labelling: when attention hooked into a thought, feeling, image or sensation can give it a simple label. 'Planning thought.' 'Critical thought', 'Loud sound', 'There's boredom' etc. Or with thoughts, memories and images we can just say: 'Thanks mind'.
2. Offer specific invitations based on how using hands/arms. Temperature (warmth, cool), contact, sense of knowing position hands. Movement – in hands, in body under hands. If the hands are warm and in contact with another body area can invite to explore how warmth seeps towards, around and into the parts body in contact.

3. Normalise: Whenever we pay close attention to the hands we will often notice tingling sensations and little twitches.'
4. Weave in 30 second pauses. Remind about attention cycle phases. Encourage to notice any reactions, thoughts, feelings, images etc. giving room and space.
5. [Option: can explore closing eyes as move hands – noticing how experience of movement in hands changes.]
6. Feedback. As before with exploration of experience of labelling if that was introduced.

FEET

1. Checking out comfortable position, sensation in one or both feet. For agitated clients can emphasise moving the feet. Aim to adopt same position as client. Also check client resting gaze somewhere.
2. Invite noting of temperature, feeling of footwear, of contact with floor under feet – perhaps gently rocking feet, really feeling the contact with the floor. Good to convey that sense of solidity of the floor.
3. Normalise: Whenever we pay close attention to the feet we will often notice tingling sensations and little twitches
4. Weave in 30 second pauses. Remind about attention cycle phases. Encourage to notice any reactions, thoughts, feelings, images etc. giving room and space.
5. Then ask client to review experience of those 4 anchors, naming each and pausing. Do any of the anchors seem particularly easy to return the attention to?
6. Feedback on feet.

REVIEW

1. Explore experience of each anchor – which seemed most inviting, made it easiest to notice each phase of the Attention Cycle. Important to emphasise that each phase is important – so aiming for an anchor can easily find but that also allows you to be shifted away from it.
2. Now have experience of anchors – perhaps explore what anchors would be available in everyday situations to weave into daily routines.
3. Also can explore anchors available in stressful situations – can initially practice getting familiar with these anchors in low-stress situations.
4. Note that combinations of anchors are fine: e.g. looking and feeling floor under feet.

REPEAT

- It is then helpful to repeat the practice with the anchor(s) the client has found most helpful. This reinforces the practice experience and identifies any practical issues that might arise.
- This could be recorded and offered as a guide to practice at home.

At some during this you may consider offering detailed guidance regarding each phase of the attention cycle. One helpful way to approach this is to offer guidance on the Focusing phase. Pause for 30-60 secs as they explore this. Then offer guidance on Noticing and pause. Then offer guidance on Acknowledging and pause. Then Returning and pause. This allows the person to notice what is available to them at each phase – sometimes a lot, sometimes a briefest blur: *remember they can't get it wrong!*