

Relating to Difficulty

One way of viewing mental health is that it is a state in which the forces of acceptance, trust, and hope predominate over feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, fear, and despair. With this view, practices that strengthen positive forces and weaken negative ones foster mental health.

No matter how much we strengthen our positive sense of self, there will be moments when negative feelings arise. The question is, what do we do with these feelings? Below are some suggestions to practice in order to gain a feeling of mastery in the midst of their arising:

- Notice if there is any perfectionism. Is there a part of you not allowing yourself to be as you are? Some striving to always handle things well, be even-keeled, be unflappable? Unburden yourself of this demand. Feel the freedom that comes with letting go of self expectations.
- Increase your willingness to experience anything—including inadequacy, fear, and sadness. It is the struggle against these feelings that causes most of your distress.
- Widen the container. This is a drop of discomfort in an ocean rather than a glass. Use phrases that create spaciousness such as “and this too,” “there’s room enough for this,” “yes, and.”
- Ground yourself. Surrender to your chair. Release any bracing or holding.
- Breathe fully and deeply. Lengthen your exhale.
- Notice your external environment. Sense sounds, smells, air currents and tactile contact.
- Notice if there is any part of your body that feels neutral or good and put your awareness there.
- Draw on any relieving phrases or songs.
- Imagine yourself at the controls of this scene. Play around with reducing the volume dial for any distressing feeling and turning up the volume of pleasurable feeling.
- Experiment with making the comfortable and inviting aspects of the scene bright and clear, and making the less comfortable aspects dull and out-of-focus.
- Pull out to the bigger picture in space and time. How does this look from a distance? How will this matter in the course of time?