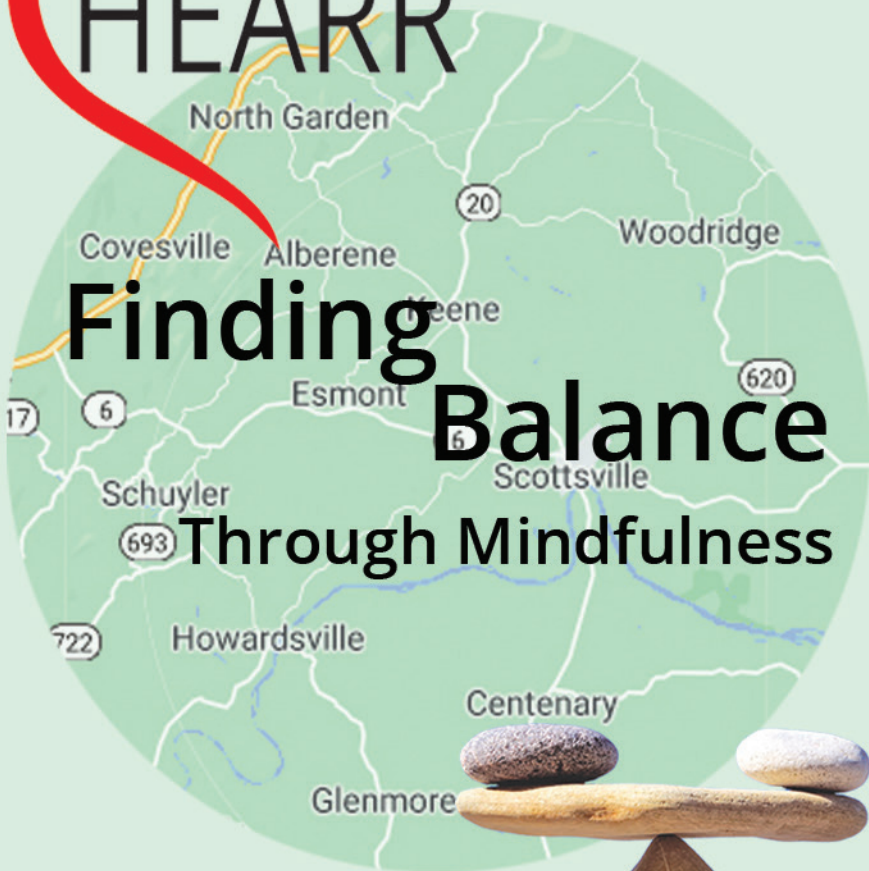




HEARR



Finding Balance Through Mindfulness



A Guide Developed by Maya Balassa

INTRODUCTION

It is an ongoing battle for communities, states, and countries to meet the health-related needs of their residents. Access and wealth are just two of the factors that go into determining health outcomes [1]. In many states, including Virginia, the trend shows that rural communities are seeing worse health outcomes than their urban neighbor. Alongside government initiatives, local groups and nonprofits are having to step up to address issues of community health. One of those groups is a small organization called Health Equity and Access in Rural Regions, HEARR, that works out of Scottsville, VA into the surrounding area, about 10 miles in each direction. Since Scottsville lies at the bottom of Albemarle County, HEARR works in the counties of Albemarle, Fluvanna, Nelson, and Buckingham.

HEARR works to address gaps in health access and equity through education and advocacy. Among the many health issues that are present in the region, there are gaps in mental health resources and access.

Mindfulness could be one tool for the region to combat the mental health issues. The benefits of mindfulness can be substantial, especially when done habitually. Some of the benefits include stress reduction, community correction and overall wellbeing.

Mindfulness is a practice of being present. Presence allows people to be in tune with their thought patterns, feelings, and needs. Those introspective skills can have positive effects not only for mental health, but for prosocial behaviors. Encouraging and offering mindfulness in public spaces compounds the mental benefits of nature and benefits of being exposed to the community at large. --Maya Balassa

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FOUR PARKS

For this booklet, four parks were chosen. All are located in Southern Albemarle. Dorrier Park and the Van Clief Nature Area (VCNA) are in the Town of Scottsville. Simpson Park is on Porters Road in Esmont. And, Totier Creek Park is on Totier Creek Road off James River Road. With the exception of VCNA, parks are maintained by Albemarle Parks and Rec.



For more information visit: www.albemarle.org/government/parks-recreation/parks and www.scottsville.org/about/scottsville_lake/

SENDING LOVE TO OTHERS

Find a comfortable position, whether that be seated, standing, or lying down.

Take two breaths with your eyes softly closed to settle into the present. Think of one person you love; imagine them in your mind's eye. Take three breaths here. With each one, imagine sending love to that person.

Next, imagine someone you have passed in your day today, a stranger. Take three breaths, sending love to that person with each breath.

Now, turn inwards and take three breaths sending love to yourself. With each inhale, expanding the chest and stomach, filling up with love. With each exhale, releasing any tension being held in the body.

Bring gentle movements back into your body. Then, when you are ready, reenter your day.



TOTIER CREEK PARK



THE SENSATION OF BREATHING

Find a comfortable position, whether that be seated, standing, or lying down.

Take one deep breath to settle yourself into the present moment. Taking any small stretches or movements before coming to stillness.

Softly close your eyes, bring your lips together, and place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach. Begin taking slow, deep breaths, focusing on the sensation of your body rising and falling. Stay here for five breaths.

Keeping your body as it is, turn your focus to the sensation of air coming in and out of your nose. Stay here for five breaths.

Gently open your eyes, take any movements your body needs, and continue your day.

SMILING

Find a comfortable position, whether that be seated, standing, or lying down.

Begin by taking three deep, slow breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Return to breathing naturally. Tune in to how you are feeling right now, avoiding making judgements on or attachments to those feelings.

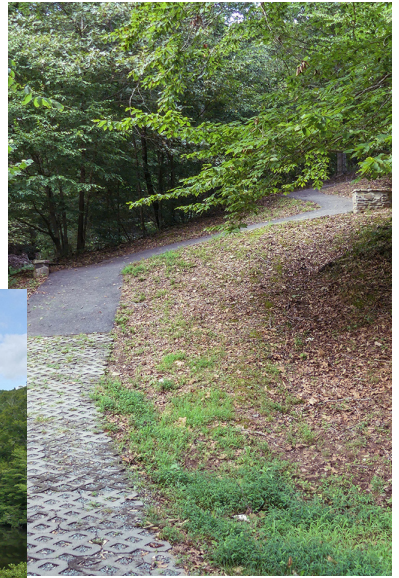
Softly close your eyes if they aren't already. On your next inhale, bring a soft smile to your face. Take five breaths, holding the smile. Focusing on how the smile feels; how the corners of your mouth feel; how your eyes feel.

After these breaths, release the smile and tune in once again to how you are feeling right now. Still avoiding judgements and attachments. Just noticing the emotions and sensations that arise as you rest and breath

When you are ready, bring gentle movement into your fingers, hands, and maybe do some stretches that you think will feel good. Then reenter your day.



VAN CLIEF NATURE AREA



CONNECTING BREATH TO MOVEMENT

Begin in mountain pose- standing tall, feet hip width apart, shoulders back, hips tucked, palms face forward, top of the head reaching for the sky. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through the nose and out through the mouth to settle into this moment. This place where all you must do is be. Letting go of whatever your day has already brought, stepping into the now.

Start by deepening your breaths, with our lips softly closed, inhaling, and exhaling through the nose. Begin slowly creating circles with the shoulders, lifting the shoulders on the inhale, and rolling them down the back on the exhale. Matching the movement to breath. Once you have done this for a minute, switch directions, bringing the shoulders up on the inhale and the rolling them to the front on the exhale. Making sure to keep the movement slow and go with our breathing. If the mind wanders, acknowledge the thought, and then come back to the breath and the movement.

Once you are ready, bring small movements back into your body, and reenter your day.

FOCUSING ON SOUNDS, SMELLS, AND FEELINGS

Find a comfortable position, either sitting or standing.

Take one deep breath to settle yourself here, in this moment. Letting go of what has happened in your day so far and what is coming in your day next.

Start by focusing on what you can see. Acknowledging without judgment. Take three breaths here.

Then begin to focus on what you can hear. Listen to each sound. Take three breaths here.

Then begin to focus on what you can smell. Take three breaths here.

Then begin to focus on what you can feel. What can you touch without reach? What does the ground feel like beneath you? Take three breaths here.

When you are ready, take one deep breath to close your practice, and continue your day.



DORRIER PARK



CALMING THE BODY

Find a comfortable seat and place your hands down, possibly the ground beside you or on your lap.

Bring your attention to your breath, lengthening the inhales and exhales. Making any small adjustments you need to feel comfortable.

Begin scanning your body. With each inhale, bringing attention to a new spot in your body. With each exhale, releasing any tension. Start at your head and make your way down to your toes.

Turn your attention to the parts of your body that are touching the ground or supporting you. Spend a few breaths here.

When you are ready, take one final deep, slow breath. And reenter your day.

OBSERVING YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Find a comfortable position, either sitting or standing.

Take one deep breath to settle yourself here, in this moment. Letting go of what has happened in your day so far and what is coming in your day next.

Take a moment to look around and observe your surroundings. Bring in curiosity as your eyes wander; try to look as if you have not seen those things before. Bring your attention to their details, to their movement, to their color. Try to not bring any judgments or attachments.

Spend ten slow breaths here, really focusing on each image before shifting your gaze.

When you are ready, close your eyes for the final deep breath. Then reopen your eyes and continue with your day.



SIMPSON PARK



VISUALIZING AFFIRMATIONS

Find a comfortable position, either sitting, standing, or lying down.

Softly close your eyes and take two easy breaths in rest.

As you breath naturally, spend a moment finding an affirmation you need to hear today. Maybe you need to be reminded that you are kind, or smart, or beautiful or creative.

Begin visualizing someone important in your life, someone you trust. And visualize them telling you this affirmation. Feel the message fill you up with each inhale.

Next find someone else you trust and love in your life. Visualize them telling you the same affirmation. Letting the message continue to sink in.

Now, say the affirmation to yourself. Beginning with the words, "I am..." And then take three slow breaths here. If doubts arise, view them as clouds moving across the sky. Acknowledging them as you let them move out of sight.

When you are ready, open your eyes, give your body one big stretch, and reenter your day, knowing you are enough.

A photograph of a forest path with a green overlay containing text. The path is made of gravel and leads through a dense forest of green trees. The text is centered on the path.

WALK SLOWLY

It only takes a reminder to breathe, a moment to be still, and just like that, something in me settles, softens, makes space for imperfection. The harsh voice of judgment drops to a whisper and I remember again that life isn't a relay race; that we will all cross the finish line; that waking up to life is what we were born for. As many times as I forget, catch myself charging forward without even knowing where I'm going, that many times I can make the choice to stop, to breathe, and be, and walk slowly into the mystery.

Danna Faulds