

WORKSHOP PROGRAM

The silver lining, for people with burn-out or a chronic illness

Time: 10.00-13.00 o'clock

Audience: People that deal with chronic illness or burn-out

Aim: Bringing participants into motion. Bringing some hope in life. Experiencing support through sharing.

About being chronically ill

Being chronically ill has a lot of similarities to an experience of loss. After all, you feel like you've lost a part of your health. Your body seems to have abandoned you. The feelings we encounter in this are comparable to those of a mourning process. There is missing, sadness, anger, powerlessness and discouragement. This is also a lonesome journey, however many friends we might have around us. The amount of attention our surroundings offer us, decreases over time. People carry on with their lives and can't always find the understanding for the lack of energy that constantly prevails.

This often leads to well meaning advice on how to get the one who's ill out of the darkness. Come on. Go on a walk more often. Perhaps you should visit therapist x or practitioner y. However well intended, it's counterproductive. This leads to the patient no longer sharing how heavy they experience life. And they retreat quietly into their grotto.

This is painful. It's so important that emotions are acknowledged, recognised and shared. To dare to go there where the powerlessness feels greatest. And for the other to want to be there with you. Without it having to lead to anything specific. Through the relaxation that then occurs, there is more room to enjoy the little things that are also happening. The sun on your skin, the singing of the birds, the smell of a fresh mowed lawn.

This workshop is not aimed towards facilitating a healing process, but rather to invite some light on a journey that can be really challenging.

10.00-10.30 o'clock Reception with coffee at outdoor location

- Short introductory round
- What is your name and what brings you here?(approx. 2 min p.p)
- Short explanation of the day's programme
- Bathroom break. At the latest meeting 10.30 outside

10.30-11.00 Walking meditation (max 2,5 km)

Aim: Grounding. Relaxing. Connecting to the present moment.

- Narrate: We purposely walk at a **slower pace** and bring our attention only to our feet for a while. Be very aware of every step you take.
- **Remain silent for 3 minutes...**
- **When thoughts arise, that is completely fine.**
- As soon as you notice this, bring your attention back to your feet again.
- **Remain silent for 3 minutes...**
- Then **slowly and at your own pace** move your attention upwards. Via your calves, knees, thighs...
- Keep an open and curious mind. **All the sensations you encounter** in your body are welcome. Also the absence of feeling, or feeling distracted is welcome.
- **Remain silent for 3 minutes...**
- Now we bring the attention to the belly...chest.. lower back...upper back...shoulders.
- **Remain silent for 3 minutes...**
- And then your arms...hands...and finally your neck and head.
- **Remain silent for 3 minutes...**
- Then we become aware of what **sensations and emotions** we can register. This is a neutral observation. Nothing needs to go away or be different, or bigger or smaller. Everything that occurs we observe with a loving kindness. You simply let everything rest in itself.
- **Remain silent for 3 minutes...**
- Once we're able to fully embrace that which presents itself, we **bring our attention outside of ourselves**. With awareness we connect to the wind on our skin, the smells

and sounds around us and we look at our surroundings with an open and curious eye.

11.00 – 11.15 Come to a stand still and allow some time to feel:

- How are you standing here now?
- What's it like in your body right now?
- How is the connection to your surroundings?
- Once more: all feelings that surface are welcome. As well as the absence of feelings, or any feeling of restlessness.

Invite the participants to share how the walk affected them.

Note: Make sure to face the group when you offer guidance, to make sure they are able to hear you. Sometimes you'll need to wait for the group to assemble before doing this.

Experience the meditation for yourself as well to avoid giving directions too hastily and to allow yourself to slow down together with the group.

When you notice some participants going too fast, kindly invite them to be curious what would happen when they would slow down a bit more.

11.15-11.40 Work form: looking for the silver lining

When your energy is very low and you're in a lot of pain, it can be difficult to see or feel anything aside from your illness. The invitation to shift your focus to that which is still whole, can bring some lightness into the dark. We don't try to ignore the disease, but aside from a compassionate acknowledgement of the heaviness, we also look at the bright side. We do this through the following work form:

- Invite the participants to find a symbol for their illness
- **This symbol may be placed in a beautiful spot**
- Then let the participants sit down and write down how the illness affects them. What emotions does this evoke?
- Ask them to behold these feelings lovingly: Yes, I see how this affects you and this is understandable!
- Then have the participants think about **things and people that they are grateful for.**

- Let them find symbols for this. Same goes for things they find beautiful or things they can enjoy silently. These can be very simple: a child's smile, birdsong, meditation, music, a book.
- **These are to be placed in a circle around the illness. That is the silver lining.**
- Let them write down all the things they are grateful for.

11.40 – 12.00

Sharing in pairs of two, mindful listening

- Have the group form pairs of two (if uneven, 1 group of 3)
- **Each participant is allowed max 10 min (7 with group of 3) to share their story through the symbol.**
- Rule: the other one only listens and at most asks a few open curious questions. For instance: does this moss add anything to your feeling? **Emphasize that we don't want to fix anything, nor analyse, not look for recognition** (*ow yes, I have this too, is not where we want to go*).
- Explain that we probably all recognise how our surroundings often don't know what to do with our story and then offer well intentioned advice or pity, comfort, or trying to make us feel better. Or suddenly it's about the other person, that they went through something similar. **How painful this can be because often we simply need to share our story and are in need of being acknowledged in our feelings.**
- This means for the one who's listening this is also an **exercise in listening mindfully and intently.**
- Change roles after 10 minutes, or sooner if it so happens.

12.00-12.15

Sharing round

- Ask for a few spontaneous reactions based on the previous exercise Optionally respond with the following questions:
- What was it like to direct your attention to that which you're grateful for?
- In case people are a bit shaky: What is happening inside of you now? Remain calm yourself, repeat the answer they gave you. For instance. You feel a bit dizzy? Ok, can you feel your feet? Shall we stamp our feet for a moment? How do you feel now?

12.15-12.45

Silent walk back to the outside location

12.45-13.00**Closing and last sharing round**

- How are you standing here now? Answer in one word.

Practical notes

- Make sure you know the area you walk in really well. Know that most work forms take place at one spot, which means that ultimately you only walk a few miles in the course of your day. And the walking meditations are also at a slow pace. A route of about 2,5 to 3 km is more than enough.
- I advise you to first do a pilot (free or at a reduced rate) before working with 'real' participants.
- Take all weather conditions into account by wearing appropriate gear, like a rain coat. (thermo underwear during colder months for instance!) Communicate this clearly to the participants. No such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.
- Action or other outdoor shops have little sitting mats. This is a handy purchase to make for your group.
- Make sure there's water and snacks or ask your participants to bring their own.
- Choose a starting point where there's the possibility to have a coffee or go to the toilet. Especially when people come from far.