

The RAIN method

A trauma informed method for building regulation, awareness and wellbeing

This handout is designed to help you develop skills to regulate your emotions and nervous system as well as to build clarity about what is going on for you so that you can take action from a more regulated place.

The method that this handout suggests is based on the skills and capacities of self-regulation, awareness and mindfulness. **Self regulation** is the ability to notice what you are experiencing, and then to modify it with a strategy that comforts and soothes you. **Mindfulness** *is the ability to observe, notice and welcome your experience without trying to fix it, judge, change or get rid of it through habitual avoidance strategies.* **Mindful inquiry** helps undo the distressing stories you tell yourself that generate more distress e.g. shame or anxiety, and replaces judgement towards your experience with a mindset of openness and curiosity, thus supporting a deeper awareness, clarity and truth to emerge. The more you can mindfully stay with your experience, rather than control or resist it, the more you will naturally develop the capacity to let it release, deactivate, unfold into greater clarity and truth or tell you about what you need – it allows your experience to naturally change, complete and transform. With practice you can also learn to identify, understand and eventually choose to process unexpressed feelings and the patterns of thoughts, beliefs and behaviours that perpetuate suffering and block your potential.

A trauma informed RAIN method includes 4 parts:

1. **Resource and regulate**
2. **Practice RAIN - Recognize, Allow, Inquire, Nurture** (Adapted from Tara Brach, 2004)
3. **Notice shifts, take action**
4. **Cultivate presence**

Part 1:

Resource – when you notice your feeling activated or off balance, the first and most helpful thing to do is to stop and simply briefly observe how you know your off balance-what body sensations, feelings, thoughts and images tell you this? Then, take a moment to shift your attention to something that helps regulate your nervous system. E.g. take some time to ‘**Orient**’ your sense perceptions (*sight, sound, touch, smell*) attention into the environment (e.g. to pleasant sounds, sights, or things to touch) that soothes you and really notice what it is that feels pleasurable. It might involve **remembering a time when you felt more like the self you like to feel** e.g. *safe, calm, connected, competent, peaceful*, and **remembering** where you were, what you were doing and feeling and sensing in your body. This may include putting your attention on the good things that are working in your life (despite the difficulties). As you take the time to do this, notice what do you feel in your body now? See if you can locate where this is and any signs of settling!

Resourcing may also include simple stabilizing skills such as slowing down and bringing your attention to your **out-breath** for 5 minutes, or **grounding** yourself by bringing your attention to the periphery of your body and where you feel the sensations of your feet touching the ground and your sit-bones connecting to the chair. It may include offering yourself soothing **self-touch**, time out, or **kind words towards the part of you that is suffering**. Once you've taken sometime to resource yourself you may find you feel more settled, less triggered and more able to respond and act from a place of calm and regulation. You'll most likely have more awareness and choice to come back to your distressed feelings with a wider window of tolerance. If the timing is right, practice RAIN again, allowing a bit more of your uncomfortable feelings to be recognized and allowed each time.

Part 2: The RAIN method – recognize, allow, inquire and nurture

Recognize: As soon as you know your 'off balance', activated or triggered, first take some time to find some quiet space to yourself – press the internal *pause button* and just **notice** what's happening for you right now. Take a few breaths. Please remember, if the experience that your recognizing is turning out to be too intense and intolerable, taking you to a place of overwhelm or shutdown, then instead of recognizing and allowing, first it may be helpful to resource yourself (see above). Recognizing involves the essential step of learning to pause and *recognize exactly what you are experiencing in this moment*.

What is the trigger or situation evoking your distress? Then do a you-turn and ask yourself – what is this situation evoking in me? What sensations am I noticing in my body (*trembly, tight, wobbly, heavy, adrenalized*), what feelings are here (e.g fear, sadness, anger, shame or distress), what am I thinking and believing (e.g worrying), what am I imagining right now– as it is happening in the moment? Notice your impulses - to perhaps behave in a particular way? See if you can gently name your experience *and most importantly sense the corresponding physical sensations or impulses in your body*. Scan your body from head to toe and notice *what is most capturing your attention?* Breathe deeply and slowly into the sensations to support deeper awareness and to let them move and expand. Notice if it changes. Notice what is its *temperature, location, quality, shape and intensity of the sensations?* Practice the technique of “**noticing and naming**” your experience while observing it and then coming back to the present moment or your breath– e.g. *I notice the sensation of butterflies in my stomach right now. I'm noticing I'm feeling scared right now. I'm noticing the thought 'I can't handle this'.* All this builds awareness and allows you to be more present in the moment – and when you can name it you can begin to tame it!

Allowing: Can you cultivate the attitude of allowing, welcoming and being curious about whatever you are experiencing right now without judging, controlling, fixing or trying to change it? Initially this may just be for a moment (titrating into one drop at a time = touch into it for 10 seconds then pendulate your attention back to resourcing), until over time you can tolerate more and more without being overwhelmed or dissociating. This allowing attitude is a form of self-compassion and helps you overcome the human tendency to avoid, numb or distract yourself from unpleasant sensations and feelings e.g with intellectualizing, comfort eating, binging on T.V, gambling, hyperactivity, drugs and alcohol. Generally speaking, *the more we resist*

whatever we are experiencing, the more it persists, the more you disconnect from yourself and unconsciously perpetuate your own suffering. There is a formula that seems to capture how we suffer. It goes like this; Suffering = Pain x resistance + an unhelpful story – resources, and Happiness = pain x acceptance – an unhelpful story + new resources (e.g. kind friends, mindfulness, self-compassion, curiosity). If we always fight, struggle with, and avoid our uncomfortable experience, it tends to worsen and become more symptomatic over time.

See if you can practice allowing your experience to be as it is without trying to change it. To make this more tolerable when it's really intense, you can also **Pendulate** by breathing into and around whatever uncomfortable feelings and sensations you are having in your body for just a moment, and then on the outbreath breathe out into the space around you, imagining an opposite image of your suffering, or accessing one of your resources e.g. being in your favourite place in nature.

In allowing, we see what happens if you don't fight or marinate in the feeling with more thoughts, memories and stories about it (e.g. a story). Acceptance does not mean that you have to like your experience, or be resigned to it. It simply means putting out the welcoming mat and see what happens if you stop struggling with it. Often the most profound changes come from a place of kindness and acceptance of your internal experience first. It's only when we accept our experience as it is, can we then choose to change. From this place of allowing, you can take action to change the things you can influence. Follow the wisdom of the *Serenity Prayer* ... *"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference"*.

Inquiry – Once you have learnt to recognize and name what you're experiencing, sense it in your body, and allow it to be as it is, then you are in a much better position to **find out what it is about**? This involves asking yourself simple questions that help you deepen and clarify your current experience and situation. Begin by asking the following questions?

1. *What is this difficult situation evoking in me and what is this feeling about?*
2. *What am I believing about myself and others right now?*
3. *Is this really true? How is this belief affecting me? What would be different, and who would I be if I didn't buy into this belief? What would I like to believe instead?*
4. *What is this experience (My body sensation and feelings) communicating to me about what I need and what matters? How is it useful information to guide me? What does this fear, sadness, agitation, hurt etc need from me?*

Question 1 helps you identify what your feelings might be connected too. Questions 2 and 3 can help you question, understand and let go of the things you say to yourself that weaken you, and replace this inner dialogue with a more compassionate, accurate and supportive voice. Question 4 can help you find out what you really need or desire, and what your feelings are communicating and needing from you. See if you can have an attitude of openness and receptivity to what unfolds from your questions. Let the answers come from your heart and body rather than going into your head to analyse or figure out. They will come in their own time. Practice being patient. Don't expect to know straight away.

Nurturing - The very important skill of nurturing continues to support more unblending from your pain, and connection to a wise, compassionate adult self that can relate too and hopefully support the suffering parts of us. Nurturing involves turning towards the suffering part of you and offering it compassion and kindness. Reducing emotional suffering is not about getting rid of your unpleasant experience but relating to it differently. This may involve asking the suffering part “What do you need that would help you feel more supported” and then listening for its answer. Almost always, the parts of us that are feeling scared, ashamed, fragile, vulnerable, needy, helpless, disappointed, alone, sad or angry really need to be acknowledged, accepted and understood. The amazing thing is that we can learn to give this to ourselves. Often the best way to do this is to put one hand over your heart and one over your belly and to say to the suffering part – *“I’m here for you”, “It’s Ok to be struggling”, “I see how hard it is for you right now”, and “I love and accept you just as you are”, “This suffering is just part of being human – your not alone”*. You may find your own unique statements that communicate understanding, acceptance and kindness to your suffering. When we can offer ourselves this kind of self-compassion often the suffering part feels seen and soothed, which allows it to relax and settle. Because we are relating to our suffering rather than being lost within it, we also begin to step back and un-blend from these parts, which allows more equanimity, choice and the ability to respond more wisely to any challenging situations befalling us.

Part 3:

Notice shifts and new perspectives– Once you have learnt to stay present with your difficult experience, find out what it is calling attention too, inquire into it and nurture it, you may notice a significant or subtle shift in your nervous system, perspective and experience. Notice this and let it land in your body. Then, from this more settled place, you are in a better position to widen your perspective and see things in a fresh way. New insights may emerge that help you see things differently with more objectivity, insight, compassion and clear seeing.

Action – from this place you are in a better position to act from a place of awareness, choice and true response-ability for what you truly value and need, rather than resistance or avoidance. This **action** may involve ***expressing yourself more fully and authentically***, saying no, or asking for support and help rather than ‘toughing it out’ it alone, for example. Or it may be about simply stopping, slowing and listening to yourself. Practice being mindful while you are sitting, doing tasks, and in relationship with others.

Part 4:

Cultivate presence: learning to not turn your experience into an identify– When you know you’re the ocean the waves are less scary! This last step can also help you learn to step back into ‘being mode’, so that you are more present and can see your experience as ‘just clouds in the sky’ or waves on the ocean, reminding yourself that your awareness (the sky or ocean) is far greater than sensations, feelings and the content of your mind (the clouds). They come and go just like the weather.

So ‘Who’ is aware of these feelings and thoughts? What do your feelings and thoughts appear in? This observing ‘aware’ self (*some call this presence*) is the part of you that

can perceive the contents of the mind without getting hijacked by them AND doing this with compassion, grounded-ness and equanimity. Have you ever considered that - You 'have' thoughts, sensations and feelings, but they don't actually define who you are? They can be useful information AND they change. What doesn't change is the larger more spacious open awareness that can hold and notice your ever-changing experience. You can feel sad, AND that doesn't mean you're a sad person! If you can observe your thoughts and emotions, then you must be bigger than them? Who is the observer and knower of the contents of your mind and body? Consider this - Thought's rarely capture the whole truth, are relative to your mood, ever changing, impermanent and often conditioned evaluations from your history? They are not the gospel on reality! Normally we turn to our mind to find out who we are. However, paradoxically we most often find the peace we are searching for when we stop believing our thoughts, allow our feelings to be as they are and to guide us, and to find a place inside that is aware, still, open, mysterious and spacious – independent of thought all together. In my view, this is where true and lasting happiness and peace comes from!