

Pause - Relax - Open (PRO) - Adapted from Gregory Kramer

Pause

This practice of taking a moment to notice the breath, and the physical sensations in the body, can help us develop the ability to notice whatever is happening “right now” and not to judge it. We can become aware of this moment, as it is. When we are in a state of awareness, it is as though our habitual reactivity is on **pause**, at least for the one moment. In creating that space, we can then begin to develop the *possibility of choosing new responses* to whatever we are experiencing in that moment. Rather than having an automatic reactivity to a particular situation, we can have an *expansion of options for our responses* and therefore experience an expansion of “self.”

To practice this, take one moment to **pause**, breathe in and out, and just notice: (1) where is my mind, past/present; (2) what do I notice in my physical body; and (3) what are the feelings I am having right now

What we are beginning to cultivate in this exercise is what I call the “**pause muscle**.” As “it” gets stronger, the potential for a reduction in reactivity and an increase in new possibilities arises. The **pause** is a way for us to slow down and create some space between what we hear, what we see, what we think and even what we say. In that moment, we can step out of that stream of reactivity that we may have been swimming in for a long time and never realized how far it was getting us away from where we really wanted to go.

Relax

The next step is to offer ourselves the opportunity to **relax**, or release our grip on reactive thoughts and tensed up muscles. It’s a chance to “settle down” and to just be present with the experience. We give up battling what is already here. Instead of feeding the reactivity, with **relax** we meet the experience of whatever we find with acceptance, just as it is.

Open

Once we step out of the reactivity into mindfulness through **pause**, and allow whatever we find to be met with acceptance through **relax**, we can extend our awareness and acceptance beyond our own experience. By **opening** up awareness to encompass what is outside this thing called “me”, we can make space for other people and the environment to be met with mindfulness. The same acceptance we are learning to extend to ourselves and our internal experiences, when opened to others, can create mutuality.

Remember to **pause**, **relax** and **open** to whatever is arising. **Use this as an opportunity to offer compassion to yourself.**