



# How to Lead a Mindfulness Practice Group

## Why Start a Mindfulness Practice Group?

Maybe you've heard the saying, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Mindfulness practice groups can help you go far. There are many reasons why you might enjoy starting a practice group, here are some of the benefits we often hear from others:

- Having a group provides structure & accountability, which helps build a habit of practice
- Practicing with others can foster the experience of a deeper practice
- Sharing insights and/or challenges with others helps gain more perspective about the practice
- Building a mindful community supports the sustainment of practice

Whatever the reasons are for you, this guide will offer ideas on how to start and maintain a practice group.

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## I. Starting a Group

The following is a list of details and logistics you might consider before your first meeting. Each of these may evolve once you start meeting with the group.

- Time and Location - Pick a time and location that is consistent (if possible) and that is convenient for your group. An ideal space is quiet, free from distractions, and can accommodate people's preferred seating (chairs, cushions, floor, etc.). It is also a nice touch if you can adjust the lighting and temperature to be comfortable for all. If you are playing guided meditations, also consider how you will amplify the sound.
- Group Norms - Create a list of norms that describe the intentions for the group. Here are a few suggested norms for yourself as a group leader and to share with your group:
  - **Beginner's Mind:** see what it would be like to meet each moment with fresh eyes.
  - **Be Present:** take a break from email, snacking, rumination, and other distractions. If you need to come or go early, support the group by doing so quietly.
  - **Kindness & Curiosity:** invite these attitudes towards yourself and others.
- Meditations - If you do not plan on leading the meditations yourself, build a collection of guided meditations you can play for the group. Guided meditations are readily available via various websites and apps. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

**SIYLI.org:** <https://siyli.org/resources/category/guided-meditation>

**Apps:**      Headspace                      Insight Timer                      Simple Habit                      Calm

- Communication - How you communicate with others about the group can influence people's interest in joining. Choose language that you believe will be most attractive to your potential audience (e.g. if people in your area tend to have resistance to the terms "mindfulness" or "meditation," try phrases like "focus and attention practices").

## Sample Invitation Template

Dear friends,

Would you like support in developing or maintaining a mindfulness practice? I'm starting a mindfulness practice group for anyone who would like to join.

We'll meet (**Tuesday mornings**) at (**9am**) in the (**Fillmore room**) for (**30 minutes**). Each week, we'll take a few minutes to check-in, then meditate for 15 minutes followed by 5-10 minutes of discussion for anyone who would like to talk about their practice experience. We may also try different types of mindful listening and partner practices during this time.

I'm excited to form a group because [**include something personal about why are you excited to create this**].

Interested? Let me know by [**date**] if you want to join me in practicing mindfulness and discovering how it can support each of us. Also, please let me know if you know anyone else who might want to join!

## II. First Group Meeting

Your first group meeting is an opportunity to establish the structure and norms for the group, and to begin forming the community. We recommend scheduling some extra time for your first session so the group has time to meet one another and discuss formation topics.

### Suggested First Meeting Agenda

Opening (3-5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Introduce yourself, say a few words about what the group is and your hopes for it</li></ul>
Introductions (~1 minute each)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What brings you here?</li><li>- What experience do you have with mindfulness practice?</li><li>- Anything else you'd like to share.</li></ul>
Review Norms (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Share any sample norms you prepared. Discuss if these work for everyone and/or if anyone would like to add to or change norms.</li></ul>
Review Group Structure and Requests (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Review the schedule for meetings and the weekly agenda. Make adjustments as needed.</li><li>- Answer any questions others have about the group or structure</li></ul>
Meditate (10-15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Encourage people to lightly move around or stretch to loosen up and raise their energy level a little before sitting.</li><li>- Lead a meditation or play a guided meditation for the group.</li></ul>
Debrief (10 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ask the group if they have any comments or questions to share about what came up for them in the practice.</li></ul>
Closing (2 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Thank the group for coming, share any logistics about future sessions.</li><li>- Optionally, you can invite the group to each share in one or two words how they are feeling at the end of the meeting.</li></ul>

### III. Between Groups

As the facilitator, you may suggest that people continue their own daily mindfulness practice between meetings or some other form of mindfulness practice (walking meditation, journaling, etc.). You can share some of the guided meditation resources you've collected to support others in their individual practice.

You may also choose to create an email group (or equivalent) that members can use to check-in about various questions or share ideas or insights they have between sessions.

### IV. Standard Group Meeting Agenda (after the first session)

Check-ins (1-2 minutes each)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- How are you doing?</li><li>- Is there anything getting in the way of you being present today?</li><li>- Intention for today's group?</li></ul>
Review Norms (1 minute)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Review the norms the group agreed to in the first session (this is helpful for the first few meetings, but is not necessary every meeting).</li></ul>
Meditate (10-20 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Lead a meditation or play a guided meditation for the group</li><li>- If playing a guided meditation, say what the practice is and where it's from.</li><li>- If the recording is shorter than the total practice time, tell participants that after the recording ends, there will be a few minutes of silent time to either continue the practice in the recording, or to rest the mind in awareness of the breath.</li></ul>
Debrief (10 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ask the group if they have any comments or questions to share about what came up for them in the practice.</li></ul>
Closing (2 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Thank the group for coming, share any logistics about future sessions.</li><li>- Optionally, you can invite the group to each share in one or two words how they are feeling at the end of the meeting.</li></ul>

### V. Additional Options

Your group may try some alternative exercises during the debrief portion of the schedule. For this, you might, on occasion, try 1:1 partner conversations or journaling.

#### 1:1 Partner Conversations

Suggested prompts: How are you doing? What did you notice in this practice? Or, anything else you want to talk about. Setting norms is good here - most importantly: don't give advice unless the other person asks for it. Also suggest timing for these conversations (e.g. each person speaks for 3 minutes followed by 3 minutes of back-and-forth conversation).

#### Journaling

You may offer participants prompts to respond to or simply allow time for people to write about what feels most relevant in their personal and professional lives.

