

What's an Anchor & How do you use it?

Skill 1: Engage an “anchor” or any regulation strategy when you notice reactivity

What's an Anchor & How do you use it?

<p>Definition: An anchor is something you turn your attention toward in order to interrupt reactivity and access a non-reactive expansive perspective.</p>	<p>It is specific, doable, has aliveness or meaning, is simple, and can be done any time and anywhere. It could be physical, verbal, energetic, visual, or any combination.</p>
<p>Essentially, an anchor wakes up the parts of you that can access a bigger perspective, begin to calm your physiology, engage mindfulness, and use your skills.</p>	<p>When you use an anchor, you take your attention away from the situation at hand with the intention to come back to that situation with more groundedness, skill, and compassion. The intention to return to the situation is what makes anchoring different from distraction.</p>
<p>An anchor is helping you to get even a little bit bigger than the reactivity you are experiencing. This doesn't mean that reactivity goes away. It means you have the choice to not behave from reactivity.</p>	<p>Anchors are strengthened when you practice them while things are going well. It is particularly effective to practice an anchor during meditation. Commit to engaging an anchor everyday or even several times a day.</p>
<p>Ideally, you have several anchors. Anchors are most effective when they match the challenge you are facing. For example, fear or doubt about others liking or accepting you could be met with an anchor that helps you access a sense of your own lovability. One student's anchor for lovability is a memory of walking into her Grandmother's house and seeing her Grandma's face light up with love for her. As you identify and become familiar with patterns of reactivity in yourself, you can begin to connect anchors to each pattern.</p>	<p>For an anchor to be useful, you have to maintain your attention on it until you feel an expansive shift and your attention has stabilized in that larger perspective. The signs that this has happened include: a decrease in overall body tension, curiosity or desire to understand what's happening, the ability to notice and name body sensations, emotions, and needs, an impulse to try something different in the situation like a new skill or step towards connection, sadness that you are in reactivity again, and words or thoughts of acceptance like “Okay, I am going to be okay.” or “We're disconnected now, but we can work this out.”</p>
<p>While it is ideal that an anchor already has the required power to light up the expansive perspective, you can also cultivate an anchor. This is like creating a positive habit of mind. For example, every time you make a mistake, you could commit to relaxing your shoulders and face and saying “That's okay. Everyone makes mistakes.”</p>	

Start with Expansive Experiences: Sit in mindfulness until you are settled. Ask yourself to bring up an experience, no matter the duration or time in life, in which you were exceptionally grounded in or connected to any of the following: love, expansiveness, peace, communion or unity with life, compassion, meaning, equanimity, solidness, flow; or any experience of deep nourishment around a particular need.

Start with Reactivity: Using your feelings and needs list or the feelings and needs cards, identify all the feelings and needs alive for you in a particular moment or type of reactivity. Typically it's helpful to bring some of that reactivity up by recalling a specific instance. Identify the need that is really at the core of this reactivity. That is, the need that you feel the most fear, pain, or grief around. Shake off the reactivity by literally shaking your body or engaging in some form or exercise. Enter mindfulness. Once you are settled, put your attention on the need you identified and ask yourself to recall a peak experience in which that need was met.

Whichever of these two methods you use to access an expansive experience, use the worksheet provided on the next page to write down every aspect of that experience.

Then circle the most powerful and concrete elements in that experience. Use those elements to create an anchor. **The anchor will be mutually exclusive with reactivity in a direct way.**

Test your anchor by imagining the situation that brings up that reactivity and then engaging your anchor. Refine your anchor if needed, and test again.

Expansive Perspective

Body-sensations, posture	Feelings	Energy
Thoughts / Words	Needs met	Behaviors/Context
Beliefs	Memories / Images / Metaphors	Impulses