

3-S Group #7: Flexing Spiritual muscles in high risk situations

Materials Required

1. Meditative Video Segment, and the equipment required for playing the video.
2. “Tardiness” door sign to be placed on the door at the end of the video: “Entrance to the group room is not be permitted once the video has finished. The video has finished. Please join us next week.”
3. Wall Posters prominently displayed – In large letters ...
 - a. Commitment: “Today I renew my commitment to my Spiritual path.”
 - b. The Ten Spiritual Qualities (the *Paramis*) – the Spiritual Self’s Muscles: “generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, tolerance, truth, strong determination, loving kindness, and equanimity”.
4. Timer (for meditation and other timed exercises).
5. Pencils and notepaper for each participant.
6. Tape (to adhere poster paper to the walls, as needed).
7. Paper and easel board with marker for recorder.
8. Two signs: “Addict Self Corner” and “Spiritual Self Corner”.
9. The 10 *paramis* (see 3b above) written separately on 10 different pieces of paper (i.e., one parami per piece of paper), folded and placed together in a container.

Therapeutic Goals

1. To provide a therapeutic context for a cognitive shift from habitual activation of the addict self-schema to increased activation of a Spiritual self-schema that has as its focus doing no harm to self and others
2. To increase awareness of the automaticity of schematic processes, such as the addict self-schema.
3. To provide an opportunity for the creation of new cognitive scripts and behavioral action sequences that are consistent with the individual’s Spiritual/religious faith.
This session provides the opportunity for ...
 - a. the practice of meditation on the in-and-out breath (to increase the ability to focus the attention and still the mind)
 - a. the practice of mindfulness in role-play exercises;
 - b. the practice of shifting between cognitive self-schemas (specifically from addict self to Spiritual self);
 - c. the practice of enacting Spiritual qualities in high risk situations.

Begin Group

1. Video

A commercially available meditation video of tranquil nature scenes is played to mark the beginning of each 3-S group session. The purpose of playing a meditative video at this time is to provide a buffer, or transition period, during which group members can begin to detach from their often chaotic lives, in readiness for the activation of their Spiritual selves through the practices of meditation and mindfulness. The video also

provides a “tardiness window.” Out of respect for the group, punctuality is expected of group members. However, if group members are unavoidably detained, they will be permitted to enter the group room late only during the playing of the video. Once the video has finished, the group room door is closed, the tardiness sign is placed on the door (see list of required group materials) and any late members will not be permitted to enter. They will, of course, be encouraged to return, on time, the following week. Repeated lateness should be discussed with the client during individual sessions.

Manual Imam, “Slow Gypsy,” *Eversound Expressions*, Eversound (2002) (2.56 minutes)

2. Welcome

At the end of the video the therapist places the “tardiness sign” on the outside of the group room door and welcomes all members to the 3-S group [Note: ground rules for the group, if any, (e.g., time management strategies used, policy regarding eating/drinking during group, etc.) may be reviewed at this time.]

Therapist script:

Welcome to Spirituality Group Therapy.

3. Introductions

Immediately following the welcome, the therapist asks group members to introduce themselves, by standing and saying their first names. [Note: as new group members may be added each week, it is important to have all group members introduce themselves every week.]

Therapist script:

Let’s begin by introducing ourselves. One at a time, please stand and say your first name; then remain standing. [Therapist begins]. Hello, my name is

4. Commitment

Following the introductions, while group members are still standing, they are asked to renew their commitment to their Spiritual path by reading aloud the words on the Commitment Statement Poster [“Today I renew my commitment to my Spiritual path”] that is displayed prominently on the front of the group room (see list of required group materials). Group members are then seated.

Therapist script:

While we are still standing, let’s renew our commitment to our Spiritual path by together reading the Commitment Statement aloud. [Therapist points to Commitment Poster]. All together ... Today I renew my commitment to my Spiritual path.

5. Overview of 3-S development program philosophy: The therapist provides the following overview each week:

Therapist script:

Each of you are here today because you have made a commitment to abandon the addict self that has caused such suffering in your lives, and to develop instead your Spiritual self which will provide you with access to the peace and happiness of your true Spiritual nature. I know I don't have to tell you that although the addict self promises you relief from suffering, it is actually taking you on a path that leads to unending physical, emotional, and Spiritual suffering. You all know that once it takes over – once it goes on automatic pilot – your welfare and the welfare of loved ones is of no importance to the addict self: it can easily convince you that absolutely nothing else matters except getting high. The goal of this program is to help you to see the addict self for what it is – a habit pattern of the mind that causes tremendous suffering. You will learn how to interrupt its habitual scripts – those “tapes” that play over and over in your head that urge you to use drugs just one more time, or to engage in other behaviors that can cause harm to you or others. These include sharing drug paraphernalia and having unsafe sex both of which can transmit HIV and other infections that can cause even greater suffering in your lives. In this program you will learn how to recognize the voice of the addict self and to stop it before it can harm you or others. You will do this by seeking refuge and strength in your true Spiritual nature. In this program, we view you as your Spiritual nature. That's the real you, not the addict self. Over the years of addiction, you may have come to doubt that you even have a Spiritual nature, or you may feel that it is now inaccessible to you. At this point, just have faith that it is still there; that it is always there. Your true Spiritual nature may be temporarily hidden from view, but trust that it is there. All you need is a way to access it – a path – that's your Spiritual path. However, in order to develop or strengthen this Spiritual path you will need a Spiritual self that has strong Spiritual muscles – [therapist points to the parami poster – see list of required materials] – your Spiritual self's muscles are these 10 Spiritual qualities that the addict self has tried to destroy. Together we will help you strengthen those Spiritual muscles so that your Spiritual self stays strong and so that access to your Spiritual nature is available to you in every moment of every day. Just like strengthening physical muscles, strengthening your Spiritual muscles takes training and practice. Each week we will practice meditation and do mindfulness exercises together that will help you to stay on your Spiritual path and access your Spiritual nature, but

you also need to practice between groups. To get the most out of these group sessions, you will need to make the effort to quiet your mind, to focus your attention, and to listen carefully to what I and the other group members are saying.

6. Agenda: The therapist provides group members with the agenda for the session. Providing an agenda aids in keeping the group focused and facilitates time management.

Therapist script:

Today we are going to begin as we always do by practicing meditation on the in and out breath. We will do this for five minutes. We will then work on some new material for about 30 minutes. After this we will end as we always do with a discussion and review, and our Spiritual stretch.

7. Meditation Practice

Each group session provides an opportunity to practice meditation on the in- and out-breath (*anapanasati*). This brief 5-minute practice session is primarily for the purpose of reviewing the technique, for providing rationale for its use as a means by which the automaticity of the addict self is reduced and the Spiritual self is accessed, and for encouraging daily practice. Group members are encouraged to practice daily for longer periods (e.g., 30-60 minutes daily).

Meditation on the in- and out-breath (*anapanasati*) with rationale and step-by-step instructions:

Meditation Rationale:

Therapist Script:

- *Our minds have a center or resting place – a peaceful stillness that is available to each of us where we can go to experience our true Spiritual nature. Some people may experience this stillness as their Spirit, or God or their Higher Power. Whatever way you experience it, just know that it is always there within you.*
- *Habit patterns of the mind (like the addict self) cause the mind to wander away from its center – this stillness. In fact, the addict self thrives in the wandering mind. When we don't have mastery of the mind – when we let the mind jump here and there out of control, it can very easily get carried away by the addict self.*
- *We begin each group with meditation practice because it is through meditation that we begin to take back control from the addict self and give it to the Spiritual self.*

- *Meditation trains the mind to return to its center – it provides an **anchor**. Just like an anchor on a boat stops the boat from drifting away on the tide, your meditation anchor prevents your mind from being swept away by emotional storms and strong currents of craving and aversion. In other words, it prevents the addict self from taking control of your mind..*
- *When you practice meditation **every day** you are creating a new habit pattern of the mind so that whenever your mind tries to wander away from its Spiritual home, for example towards addict thoughts, you are quickly able to pull it back before the addict self takes over.*
- *In our meditation practice we focus on the in and out breath because as long as we live, the breath is always there. When you meditate on the breath, it might help you to think of what you are doing as connecting with your Spirit. In fact, the Latin derivation of the word ‘spirit’ is breath. So you can think of your meditation on the breath as your connection with your spirit which is your anchor in all of life’s storms.*

Meditation Instructions:

Therapist script:

When you practice meditation at home, you will need to choose a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. If you wish you may sit crossed legged on a cushion on the floor, you may kneel, or you may sit in a chair with your back straight. You should feel comfortable, but not so comfortable that you fall asleep. While meditating, it is important to remain alert.

Let’s do this now:

[In a slow, calm voice, the therapist narrates the first 1-2 minutes of the 5 minute practice]

- *Remain seated in your chairs. Sit with your back straight, feet flat against the floor, hands on your lap.*
- *Now close your eyes [Therapist checks that client is comfortable doing this in session. Clients who are uncomfortable closing their eyes are instructed to close their eyes half-way and to focus on an object within their vision. As clients’ comfort levels increase over the course of treatment, clients are encouraged to close their eyes more and more, and to do their daily at-home practice with their eyes closed.]*
- *Just breathe normally through your nose.*
- *As you continue breathing normally through your nose, begin to focus your attention on the sensations in and around your nostrils, and on your upper lip just below your nostrils, that are caused by the breath passing in and out. You may feel a slight tickle, or a feeling of warmth or coolness, or heaviness or lightness.*

- *Just keep your concentration fixed there – **this area is your anchor** – the place you will always return to -- observe the changing sensations you experience in that area as the breath passes over your ‘anchor.’*
- *At the beginning of every breath, commit yourself to noticing everything you can about the sensations caused by just that one breath. Then do the same for the next breath -- committing yourself to your practice, just one breath at a time.*
- *If thoughts arise, gently, but firmly, bring your awareness back to your anchor, and again commit yourself to remaining focused on the in and out breath, one breath at a time.*
- *...Pause briefly (e.g., 5 seconds) to give group members opportunity to experience the breath...*
- *Again, focus all your attention on the changing sensations around your nose and upper lip that are caused by the breath as it goes in and out. Notice whether the breath is long or short? Does the air pass through one or both nostrils? Is the air cool or warm?*
- *If your mind wanders again, just note ‘mind wandered away’, and immediately return it to your anchor. No need to get discouraged, it is the mind’s nature to wander, and your job to train it, so just keep bringing it back. Gently, but firmly bring it back. Just as you would train a young child not to stray away from home, you patiently train your mind to stay close to its Spiritual home.*
- *If you are having difficulty bringing your mind back, you can try counting your breaths, just up to 10, but don’t get caught up in counting. The goal is to stay focused on your ‘anchor’ not on numbers.*

We’ll continue meditating on the in- and out-breath in silence for another 4 minutes. I will let you know when the time is up.

At end of 4 minutes, therapist asks client to open their eyes.

Meditation practice feedback

Therapist ensures that each group member has understood the technique. The following are examples of questions to pose to the group in the event that group members are having difficulty with their practice:

Therapist script:

Open your eyes.

How was that for you today?

Were you able to keep your attention focused on your anchor?

Could you experience your breath? Where did you feel it?

Did you notice if the air moved through one nostril more than the other; or if the breath was long or short, or if it was warm or cool? What sensations did you feel (e.g., tickle, tingle, pressure, perspiration, etc.)?

[Note: If any group member is not experiencing any sensations, expand the area of concentration to include the entire nose as well as the area between the nostrils and the upper lip.]

Therapist script continued:

Did you experience the monkey mind? It is very persistent, isn't it? Can you see how it could get you in trouble if you are not aware of where it has wandering off to? Were you able to bring your attention back to your anchor each time it wandered away? It takes a lot of practice, doesn't it?

[Note: As needed, therapist explains that it is not uncommon for individuals to have difficulty returning the mind to the anchor, and that continued effort to bring the mind back to the anchor has lasting benefits even if the mind wanders away again.]

8. Presentation of new material with experiential exercise:

New material is provided experientially each week for the purpose of helping group members to increase mindfulness and to practice activation of the Spiritual self-schema. The therapist uses a technique that requires group members to attend carefully to the instructions as they are being provided. Instructions for all exercises are provided slowly and clearly, just once. After the instructions are given, group members are permitted one question in the event further clarification is necessary. If a group member still does not understand the instructions, he or she may ask another group member to repeat the instructions aloud to the entire group. This technique fosters mindfulness and group cohesion and cooperation.

New Material: Flexing Spiritual muscles in high risk situations

The purpose of this segment is to provide group members with the opportunity to experience a shift in self-schema activation from addict self to Spiritual self, and to help them understand the connection between the expression of specific personal qualities (i.e., spiritual muscles or *'paramis'*) and the occurrence of this shift.

One corner of the room is designated the "Addict self corner" and the other is designated the "Spiritual self corner". These designations represent the internal self constructs as aspects of the shared physical space that group members can "go to" or "inhabit" to activate one or the other of their self-schemas. In this way, group members come to realize that they can exercise control over which "self" they inhabit at any given time -- that they can volitionally make a shift from the addict self to the Spiritual self even in high risk situations.

Therapist script:

Today we're going to do an exercise that will help you realize that you have a great deal of control over whether you are expressing your addict self or your Spiritual self. This is very important because until we believe we can control who we are being at any given time, we will continue to think that this is either beyond our control or is a function of things and events outside of ourselves, such as stressful situations. So, today, I'm going to present you with a stressful situation, and I want you to imagine responding to it first from your addict self and second from your Spiritual self.

We'll do this as follows. This corner [therapist points to corner on therapist's left] we're going to call the "addict self corner". Anyone who stands there will be in their addict self. This other corner [therapist points to corner on therapist's right], we'll call the "Spiritual self corner". Similarly, anyone who stands there will be in their Spiritual self and will be able to fully express their true Spiritual nature. In the middle will be a container with 10 pieces of paper inside. On each piece of paper is written one of the 10 Spiritual qualities of someone on a Spiritual path. These are your Spiritual muscles. They are also written on the poster on the wall [Therapist points to the paramis poster].

When I call your name, you will go first to the addict corner, and you will do a brief role play with me. I'll present you with a high risk situation, like using drugs, and you will respond to me as an addict might, for example, by showing a lot of interest in using with me. We will do this for about 30 seconds.

Next, you will take one piece of paper from the container, and go to the Spiritual corner. After you have read (silently) what is written on the paper, we will do another role play. This time you will interact with me from your Spiritual self, and you will refuse to do anything that would harm yourself or others. Your task will be to express the Spiritual quality written on your piece of paper throughout the role play. It is possible that you will express many different Spiritual qualities while refusing me, but I want you to emphasize particularly the one that is written on the paper. We will do this for approximately 2 minutes.

The rest of the group will need to listen and observe the interaction very closely because once the role-play is finished, they will have just 30 seconds to guess which Spiritual quality was written on your piece of paper.

I will try to time these exercises so that everyone will have a turn, but we may run out of time. Everyone will have an opportunity to participate in the group discussions, however.

NB -- timing of each segment. This will depend upon how many group members there are. If there are 10 group members, allow approximately 30 seconds for the addict self role play, 2 minutes for the Spiritual self role play, and 30 seconds for group discussion; if there are 7 group members, allow approximately 30 seconds for the addict self role play, 3 ½ minutes for the Spiritual self role play, and 30 seconds for group discussion; if there are 5 group members, allow approximately 30 seconds for the addict self role play, 5 minutes for the Spiritual self role play, and 30 seconds for group discussion. Therapist should be flexible: some group members may need more time to express their addict or Spiritual qualities than others, or may require longer group discussion afterward. However, therapist should compute approximate times for each of the three segments beforehand based upon the number of group members anticipated to attend. It is possible that time limitations will preclude all group members role-playing their addict and Spiritual selves.

Exercise: Role play Part I: Addict self

Therapist calls upon group members, one at a time, and role plays a situation in which the therapist is offering, and trying to get the group member to use, drugs. Therapist should vary the content of the role-play somewhat for each group member, depending upon their living situation, drug of choice, who and where they typically use, etc.

Therapist script:

OK, let's begin. I will select the first person to come up, but when we are finished, that person will select the next person, and so forth.

[Therapist selects first group member.]

Please go to the addict corner.

Hi _____. How're you doing? How've you been? I'm feeling really good -- got some really great stuff and feel like celebrating. I'd like some company, how about I treat you?

Therapist continues role-play with group member for time allotted (i.e., 30 seconds) with group member acting as addict self.

Exercise: Role play Part II: Spiritual self

Now therapist directs the group member to take a piece of paper from the container and go to the Spiritual Self Corner. Therapist instructs group member to read (silently) what is written on the paper and to interact with the therapist using that quality (i.e., refuse to do anything that will harm self or others). Again, therapist role plays a situation in which she or he is offering, and trying to get the group member to use, drugs. Therapist should

vary the content of the role-play somewhat for each group member, depending upon their living situation, drug of choice, who and where they typically use, etc.

Therapist script:

Okay, now take one piece of paper from the container and go to the Spiritual self corner.

Silently read what Spiritual quality is written on your paper.

*In our next role-play, your task will be to **express this Spiritual quality** and to **refuse** to do anything that will harm yourself or others.*

Everyone else, listen and watch carefully, and see if you can guess which Spiritual muscle is being exercised here.

Let's begin.

Hi _____. How're you doing? How've you been? I'm feeling really good -- got some really great stuff and feel like celebrating. I'd like some company, how about I treat you? Etc. [Therapist, with persistence, attempts to convince the group member to use drugs.]

Therapist continues role-play with group member for time allotted (2+ minutes) with group member acting as Spiritual self flexing the appropriate Spiritual muscle.

Exercise: Role play Part III: Group participation

Therapist script:

OK, group members which of the 10 Spiritual qualities was being expressed in that last role play? You can look at the wall chart to remind yourselves of the 10 qualities to select from.

Therapist may participate if group members need help identifying the Spiritual quality expressed. The strip of paper is then returned to the container and reshuffled.

Therapist script:

Well done. Now return your piece of paper to the container and select another group member to go next.

The exercise continues until all group members have participated in the exercise or until a total of 25 minutes has elapsed. When all group members have completed their role plays, therapist uses the remaining 5 minutes of the 30-minute segment to summarize the exercise.

Therapist script:

In this exercise you were able to make the switch to your Spiritual self simply by moving from one corner of the room to the other and making a determined effort to speak from your Spiritual self. Try this in your own

*home. Set aside a portion of your environment (such as in your apartment or house) which is designated as your “Spiritual space”—that part of your house in which you go to strengthen your Spiritual muscles and rehearse being in your Spiritual nature. Remember, with mindfulness, **you have control** of which ‘self’ you inhabit at any given time, even in stressful situations that might otherwise lead to drug use. And, with continued practice, others in your environment will also notice your Spiritual qualities, just as they did here today. These Spiritual qualities are very powerful, even when expressed for a brief time period. Others can pick up on them very readily, and this contributes to their well-being as well as your own.*

9. Questions and Answer Period:

Following the experiential presentation of new material, the therapist poses questions for group discussion in order to determine how well group members have understood the relevance of the new material to their daily lives, specifically, to the prevention of harm to self and others, and whether group members can identify the Spiritual qualities that they demonstrated during the session.

Therapist script:

- A. How can what you learned today help you remain abstinent during the coming week?*
- B. How can what you learned today prevent the transmission of infections such as HIV?*
- C. Which Spiritual muscles did you exercise today? [Therapist points to the poster].*

10. Summary:

Therapist provides a brief review of the entire session

Therapist script:

Today,

- *We practiced meditation on the in- and out-breath and mindfulness in order to begin taking back control from the addict self and to strengthen the Spiritual self.*
- *We learned that this takes strong Spiritual muscles and that a rigorous training program with daily practice is needed to keep them strong.*
- *We learned that you can control which self – the addict self or the Spiritual self – is active at any given time, even in high risk situations.*

- *We learned that it is possible to act in a way that people around us are aware of, and can benefit from, our special Spiritual qualities.*

In a few minutes the group will be over. Until we meet again next week, keep reminding yourself of your true nature. Once you are back into the routine of daily life, it can be easy to lose sight of who you really are. Just remember, you are not your addict self – the addict self is that habit pattern of mind that lies to you over and over again promising you relief from your suffering when in fact it just causes more and more suffering. Don't forget that. Remind yourself of your Spiritual nature and its capacity for love and compassion, and enact it in your daily life. I know you can do it. Just keep practicing your meditation daily and try to be more mindful in everything that you do. When you practice, you are strengthening your Spiritual muscles and making your Spiritual self stronger and your addict self weaker. Each step you take on your Spiritual path, no matter how small, takes you closer to your goal. You have taken several steps today. Well done. Let's end as we always do with our Spiritual stretch.

11. The Spiritual Stretch.

The Spiritual Stretch is shown in the Appendix. Its purpose is for group members to renew their commitment to staying on their Spiritual path throughout the day in their thoughts, words, deeds, and perceptions, and to be open to the experience and expression of their Spiritual nature in all their daily activities. Group members stand and, in while in various postures, recite the following the affirmations

Therapist script:

Please stand, and repeat after me:

- 1. Today I take my Spiritual path (hands raised above the head, palms together).*
- 2. May my thoughts reflect my Spiritual nature (hands in front of forehead, palms together);*
- 3. May my words reflect my Spiritual nature (hands in front of mouth, palms together);*
- 4. May my emotions reflect my Spiritual nature (hands in front of chest/heart, palms together);*
- 5. May my actions reflect my Spiritual nature (hands in front of abdomen, palms together);*
- 6. May my perceptions reflect my Spiritual nature (hands outstretched to side, fingers pointing towards the ground);*

7. *May I be open and receptive to my Spiritual nature (hands outstretched to side, fingers pointing towards the sky);*
8. *I am my Spiritual nature (back to starting position with hands raised above the head, palms together).*

12. End.

Therapist script:

It was good to see you all today. See you next week.