

The Side-by-Side Experience™ Curriculum

What is the Side-by-Side Experience™?

The Side-by-Side Experience™ is a skillful, compassionate, and curiosity-driven approach to cultivating mental and emotional well-being. The curriculum incorporates research proven practices including mindfulness, self-compassion, emotional intelligence and positive neuroplasticity training.

We all want to feel good. Oftentimes in daily life, we say “yes” to those experiences that help us to feel happy, joyful, and successful, and we resist those experiences and mental states that lead to us feeling afraid, irritated or overwhelmed.

Through the Side-by-Side Experience, we come to appreciate that difficult experiences and emotions are part of being fully human. We learn to be with our challenging experiences and emotions in a way that will enhance our well-being and help us feel connected to self and others.

The Side-by-Side Experience also encourages us to cultivate and open more fully to positive and beneficial emotions. We are invited to notice, grow, and internalize positive experiences so that we can enjoy life and develop internal strengths and resources that lead to ongoing resilience.

The Side-by-Side Experience is about both saying “yes” to creating and internalizing beneficial states, and also “yes” to dealing skillfully with difficult experiences and emotions. Through the Side-by-Side Experience, we learn to embrace the whole of our life experience, and to allow the beautiful and the challenging to coexist side-by-side.

What is the progression of lessons in the Side-by-Side Experience? *Note: In the curriculum for classroom teachers, each session is broken down into 4-6 lessons.

Sessions 1, 3 & 4

The Side-by-Side experience begins by inviting us to notice and be present with the emotions, thoughts, body sensations, and senses that are part of our present moment experience. We learn that all humans experience both pleasant and challenging emotions, and we practice mindfulness and curiosity to help our minds learn to rest in the present moment. The Side-by-Side

Experience encourages us to recognize that while there are threats and challenges in daily life, the present moment also contains aspects of being already alright right now.

Session 2 & interwoven in sessions 3-8

Through the Side-by-Side Experience we expand our experience beyond the binary and come to know that pleasant experiences and emotions often exist side-by-side with the unpleasant. We learn to create space for and embrace the wholeness of our life experience and emotions. Over time we also learn to intentionally “side-by-side” emotions, thoughts, and aspects of our present moment experience to enhance well-being.

Session 5 & 6

As we progress through the lessons of the Side-by-Side Experience, we become curious about the architecture of our mind. We become observers of our habitual internal response to stressful thoughts and emotions, and we learn to relate to challenging thoughts and emotions more skillfully—to “side-by-side” them with self-compassion, mindfulness and inquiry. We grow self-compassion as an internal resource of kindness that leads to resiliency and well-being.

Session 7

In the Side-by-Side Experience, we learn how to cultivate positive mental and emotional states and how to internalize beneficial experiences. We do this to complement or “side-by-side” our negativity bias, which naturally inclines our mind toward the difficult and the problematic. Deliberately noticing and staying with positive experiences helps our mind over time to develop beneficial internal resources so that we can enjoy the good in our lives and are also better equipped to deal with life’s inevitable challenges.

Session 8

As we near the end of formal training, we learn to extend our helpful practices beyond ourselves to wish well-being for others, including people toward whom we sometimes feel challenging emotions. We are invited to remember why it is important to respond compassionately and skillfully to difficult thoughts and emotions and to commit ourselves to cultivating a whole and healthy mind. We identify those practices that are most beneficial for us as we continue forward on this side-by-side experience—the rest of our lives!!