Guide for Facilitating a MINDFUL EATING EXERCISE

1. Give each participant in the group three raisins. This can also be done with slices of apple or pear or seeded sections of a tangerine; raisins may be the best option in some situations because they do not spoil or darken on contact with air as do other cut fruit.

2. Explain, with a little humor, that you are now going to do a group exercise in which you all "*really* eat these raisins." (Expect some nervous laughter throughout this exercise.) Note that this may seem silly, but even the most simple acts like eating a raisin can illustrate how powerful mindfulness can be. Lead the group in your own words, using the following script as a guide:

   (if the facilitator is uncomfortable using their own words, the below script can be read verbatim to the group. This guide is not meant to be a handout.)

MINDFUL EATING SCRIPT:

Hold one of your raisins in your hand. Take several slow, deep breaths. Now look at the raisin as if you had never seen one before. What color is it? What is its surface like? What does its texture feel like between your fingers? What thoughts are you having now about raisins or about food in general? Are you having any thoughts or feelings about liking or disliking raisins? Whatever your thoughts or feelings are, simply notice them.

Be aware of your intention to begin eating. Move your other hand slowly toward the raisin. Note the action mentally by saying to yourself, "Reaching ... reaching ... reaching." Now pick up the raisin, and say to yourself, "Lifting .... lifting ... lifting." The point is to stay aware of each movement of your hand and arm by naming them.

Now move the raisin closer to your mouth and watch your hand as you do so. Smell the raisin. What does it smell like? How are you reacting to the smell? Is your mouth watering? If so, notice what it feels like to desire food.

Put the raisin on your tongue. What does it feel like? Is your mouth watering?

Now bite into the raisin. Where is the raisin in your mouth? Begin chewing slowly. What are the sensations in your teeth? Your tongue? How does your tongue move when you chew? What part of your tongue is experiencing the taste? Where is your arm? Did you notice moving it to where it is now?

When you are ready to swallow, notice the impulse to do so. Now swallow the raisin. Try to be aware of how the raisin moves in your esophagus toward your stomach. Can you feel any sensations in your stomach? Where is your stomach? What size is it? Is it empty, full, or in between? Imagine that your body is now 'one raisin heavier'.

Now take as much time as you need to eat the other two raisins with the same degree of mindfulness."

Ask the group to share their experiences with the exercise. If not brought out in the discussion, ask the following questions:

- How did this experience differ from the way you usually eat?
- Did you automatically start to eat the other raisins before you were finished with the first one?
- Were you "satisfied" eating one raisin?
- What would it be like if you ate this way most of the time? Do you think it would affect the amount and/or types of foods you eat? Your attitude toward eating? (With mindfulness, healthy eating can become more pleasurable.)

Source: The Center for Mindful Eating, www.tcme.org