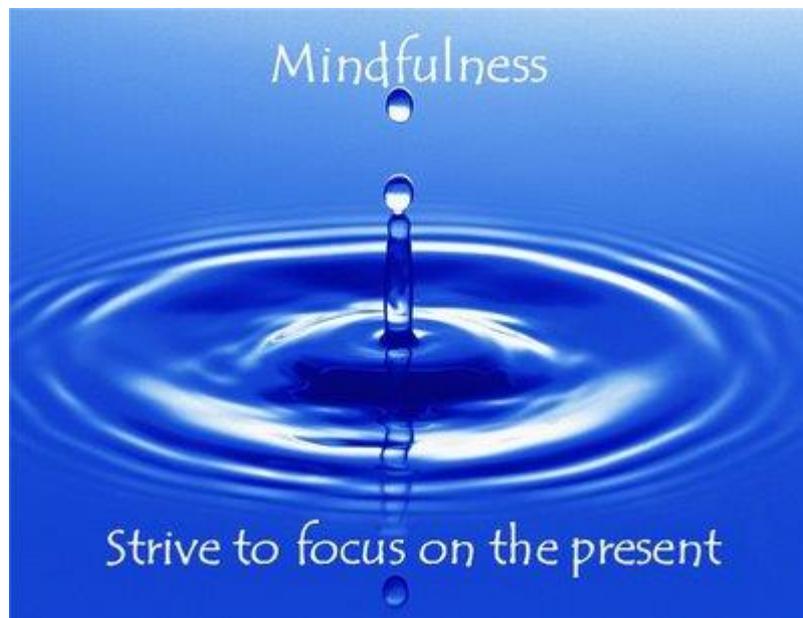


Mindfulness Approach to Beating Stress



Workshop Notes

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Aims and Objectives

Reducing stress using mindful practice.

Outline.

Aims:

The aims of this session is to raise awareness about the impact of stress. Also to introduce the practice of Mindfulness to aid stress reduction and develop a perspective of self-care.

Objectives:

- i. To understand the impact of stress on the individual
- ii. To identify personal stressors/triggers
- iii. To gain a basic introduction to mindfulness.
- iv. To apply basic mindfulness to potentially stressful events.

Group exercise.

How stressed are you?

Handout one – Situation

Instruct the group to use the handout to:-

Choose stressors that impact on you negatively, be specific with cause, don't generalise.

Things like “people or crowds stress me”, or maybe “work stresses me”, are not sufficient. Use sentences to and be specific;

i.e.

“when I go shopping to the supermarket I get stressed being in crowds of people”.

“My boss expects me to cover another tutor's class when they're off ill”.

Rate between (1-10)

One being not very stressful and 10 being extremely stressful.

When everyone has completed their form, take a straw poll of types of stressor, are there common themes?

What is stress?

We can describe stress in various terms:

- The Emotional Impact of stress
- The Physical impact of stress
- The cognitive impact of stress

Some symptoms of stress!

SWEATING

HEART RACING

AGITATED

CHEST PAINS

PANICKY

IRRITABLE

DIARRHOEA

BREATHING SHALLOW

NERVOUS

ANXIOUS

AFRAID/FEAR

AVOIDANCE

The Impact of long-Term stress.

Heart disease

High blood pressure

Irritable Bowel syndrome

Heart attack

Gastro-intestinal disease

Links with cancer

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is about being fully aware of whatever is happening in the present moment, without filters or lens of judgement.

It can be used in any situation. Put simply, mindfulness consists of cultivating awareness of the mind and body and living in the here and now.

Mindfulness as a practice is historically rooted in ancient Buddhist meditative disciplines, it is also a universal practice that anyone can benefit from.

Today, mindfulness has expanded beyond its spiritual roots and even beyond psychology and mental and emotional well-being.

Mindfulness is being prescribed to help people deal with stress, pain, and illness.

Mindfulness and well-being

By helping you begin to recognise your habitual thinking patterns and other ingrained behaviours, mindfulness can play a significant role in enhancing your psychological and physical well-being.

Individuals can find practice of mindfulness quite difficult in the beginning, as it is often difficult to sit back and watch your neurosis and problem behaviours.

It can be challenging to remain an impartial observer when you sit in a hall mirrors, face-to-face with your fear, shame, guilt, and other internal unwelcome states.

Attitudes of Mindfulness.

The attitudes of mindfulness practice is likened to cultivating a garden.

What is needed for the garden to flourish and grow, certain conditions must be present.

Mindfulness, can consist of both formal and informal practice.

Informal practice has eight such conditions that need to be present.

Informal Practice -

Bringing the eight attitudes of mindfulness:

- Beginners mind
- Non-judgement
- Acknowledgement
- Non-striving
- Equanimity
- Letting be
- Self-reliance
- Self-compassion

Beginners mind- seeing things as fresh and new, as if for the first time, with curiosity.

Non-judgement -this quality of awareness involves developing impartial observation in regards to any experience.

Acknowledgement- this quality of awareness validates and acknowledges things as they are.

Non-striving- with this quality of awareness, there is no grasping, no aversion to change, or movement away from whatever arises in the moment.

(Not trying to get anywhere other than where you are)

Equanimity- this quality of awareness involves balance and fosters wisdom.

It allows a deep understanding of the nature of change and allows you to be with change greater insight and compassion.

Letting be - with this quality of awareness, you can simply let things be as they are, with no need to try to let go of whatever is present.

Self-reliance - this quality of awareness helps you see for yourself, from your own experience, what is true or untrue.

Self-compassion - this quality of awareness cultivates love for yourself as you are, without self-blame or criticism.

Holding these qualities in mind, reflecting upon them and cultivating them accordingly, to your best understanding, will nourish, support, and strengthen your practice.

These attitudes are interdependent; each influences the other, and by cultivating one you enhance them all.

Mindfulness practice exercise.

For this exercise ensure all group members have a raisin, all other suitable edible item.

Using an appropriate script asked them to experience and then eat mindfully, their raisin.

This exercise, will take approximately 5 to 6 minutes in duration.

Script.

Early in most mindfulness-based training exercises, we introduce the practice of eating a raisin mindfully. This is to demystify the concept of meditation.

As you do this practice put aside all distractions, turn off phones and focus direct, clear awareness on each aspect and each moment of the experience.

Formal practice: mindfully eating a raisin.

Script.

Place one or two raisins in your hand.

Imagine that you have just come to Earth from a distant planet without such food.

Now, with this food in hand, you can begin to explore it with all of your senses.

Focus on one of the objects as if you've never seen anything like it before. Focus on seeing this object. Scan it, exploring every part of it, as if you've never seen such a thing before. Turn it around with your fingers and notice what colour it is.

Notice the folds and where the surface reflects light or becomes darker.

Next, explore the texture, feeling any softness, hardness, coarseness, or smoothness.

While you are doing this, if thoughts arise such as "why am I doing this weird exercise?" "How will this help me?" Or "I hate these objects," then just see if you can acknowledge these thoughts, let them be, and then bring your awareness back to the object.

Take the object beneath your nose and carefully notice the smell of it.

Bring the object to, squeeze it, roll it around, and here if there is any sound coming from it.

Begin to slowly take the object to your mouth, noticing how the arm knows exactly where to go and how becoming aware of your mouth watering.

Gently place the object in your mouth, on your tongue, without biting it. Simply explore the sensations of this object in your mouth.

When you're ready, intentionally bite down on the object, may be noticing how it automatically goes to one side of the mouth versus the other. Also notice the tastes it releases.

Slowly to this object. Being aware of the saliva in your mouth and how the object changes in consistency notice the intention to swallow, then see if you can notice the sensations of swallowing the raisin, sensing it moving down to your throat and into your oesophagus on its way to your stomach.

Take a moment to congratulate yourself for taking this time to experience mindful eating.

Informal everyday mindfulness.

Informal everyday mindfulness is a way of learning how to relate directly to you.

Informal mindfulness is something you can do as part of your normal routine.

Mindfulness in the morning routine

Pick an activity that is part of your morning routine such as;

- brushing your teeth
- having a shower
- shaving

By using your senses, experience being present and aware of what it is you are doing, notice the sensations.

By being mindful we are using a full range of our sensors.

Feelings - kinaesthetic

Taste – Gustatory

Smell - olfactory

Sound- auditory

Sight - visual

THERE IS AN OLD ZEN

SAYING:

YOU SHOULD SIT IN
MEDITATION FOR 20 MINUTES
A DAY, UNLESS YOU'RE TOO
BUSY. THEN YOU SHOULD SIT
FOR AN HOUR.

Mindfulness and well-being.

Beginning to recognise, your habitual thinking, and ingrained behaviours, you can begin to change and enhance your psychological well-being.

Learning to become an observer of self, can be a very difficult and challenging process.

Letting thoughts come and go, but remaining impartial, is something we are not familiar with.

To master this practice, it will take time and patience, and support from others.

The practice of mindfulness isn't something you have to acquire, it is already part of who you are.

FORMAL PRACTICE IS
DEFINED AS;
DELIBERATELY PAYING
ATTENTION, ON
PURPOSE, WITHOUT
JUDGEMENT.

Mind body connection.

There is the significant and substantial link between mindfulness and reduction of stress. It is centred within the mind-body connection.

Western medicine as tended to view the mind-body connection as pseudoscience or a fringe concept.

This attitude is changing as neuroscientists discover and chart the neural pathways that connect thoughts and emotions to physiology.

Neuroscience has established that thoughts and emotions or interconnected with the physical process of the body.

When you experience stress, the body produces hormones such as cortisol and neurotransmitters such as epinephrine and norepinephrine.

Physiological responses to stress has had many thousands of years to be honed, during our evolution.

Although, we do not experience the same level of threats as prehistoric man, our mind-body still reacts and behaves as we did back then.

The more the stresses are activated, the more cortisol and epinephrine and norepinephrine are pumped into our bodies and we can go into a kind of hyper-adrenaline overdrive.

Many of us are familiar with the fight, flight and freeze response when we feel we are in danger or threatened.

These are primal reactions to stressors, and the fact our thoughts, behaviours and physiology.

Stress reaction versus stress response.

Stress reactions are driven by habitual, unconscious patterns, often learned from past experiences.

These patterns also include maladaptive patterns of coping.

These maladaptive patterns of coping are unhealthy and unhelpful ways of seeing and dealing with stress.

Such behaviour is all:

- smoking
- drinking
- drugs
- avoidant behaviour
- workaholic

Stress response.

Stress responses are a more adaptive ways of dealing with stress.

Instead of avoiding our stress reaction, we can use mindfulness as a way of developing an understanding of our emotional, and physical symptoms of stress and develop tools to work with the stress response.

Mindfulness and the brain.

Studies show that there are some real benefits for those who use mindfulness.

Meditation improves and increases the electrical activity of the left hemisphere of the prefrontal cortex.

Study groups show that individuals who participated in mindfulness practice shows increase resilience to stress.

It was shown they recovered more quickly from stressful events than those not practising mindfulness meditation.

Also, those participating in mindfulness meditation, shows improved immunity to things like the common cold.

MRI Brain scans also showed thicker regions in the frontal cortex, and area responsible for reasoning and decision-making, in those who had a consistent mindfulness practice compared to those who didn't.

Additionally, it was found that those practising meditation had a thicker insula, which is involved in sensing internal sensations and thought to be a

critical structure in the perception of emotional feelings.

Exercise.

Working in pairs, with a person nearest you, have a chat about how you might encourage each other to use informal mindful practice in your daily lives!

Use handout 'ideas for informal mindful practice'.

Mindful breathing exercise.

Mindful breathing often acts as a foundation for meditation practices because your breath is always with you, wherever you are.

It can be used as an anchor to the present moment.

In essence, all you need to do is simply be mindful when you breathe in and out.

Mindful Breathing Exercise:

For one minute, we are going to experience mindful breathing.

During this exercise, sit comfortably and simply pay attention to your breathing in and out.

You can pay attention to the breath going in or out through the nose.

Pay attention to things like temperature, smells, tastes and any other sensory information you gather.

You can pay attention to the way you breathe, i.e. do you read very shallow and into your chest or do you breathe deeply into your tummy.

Body scan meditation.

This exercise will give you an opportunity to use meditation to become more aware of the self.

This and carefully follow the audio track taking you through the body scan meditation.

For this exercise you can sit on your chair, on the floor, you can lay on the floor or any position you feel comfortable. This will depend on space, but the important thing is that you're comfortable.

You can either close your eyes or keep them open, this will depend upon how comfortable you feel.

This exercise will take approximately 10 minutes.

If you feel uncomfortable you're very welcome to sit at this exercise.

Thank you to everyone that attended this workshop.

For further information about Mindfulness programmes have a look at our website.

We will be running an 8 week Mindfulness programme from spring 2014 at our centre in Mansfield.

Visit www.shirecounselling.co.uk

Informal Mindfulness Exercises

We're all busy, and many of us don't have time (or are unwilling to make time) to formally practice mindfulness skills. However, we can practice informally throughout the day. Here are a couple of examples:

1) Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, or having a shower. When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body as it gurgles down the hole. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower screen, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upwards. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2) Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick a chore that you normally try to rush through, or distract yourself from; or one for which you just 'grit your teeth' and try to 'get through it'. For example: ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, making the kids' lunches. Aim to do this chore as a mindfulness practice.

E.g., when ironing clothes: notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

Now write down some informal mindfulness exercises for yourself:

During my morning routine, I will practice mindfulness of

During my evening routine, I will practice mindfulness of

During the week, I will practice mindfulness of the following chore (s)

Now write down any other quick 'n' easy informal mindfulness exercises you can think of – e.g. while waiting in queues or at traffic lights you could practice mindfulness of your impatience; or when eating dinner, you could aim to eat the first two mouthfuls mindfully.

At the end of each week, pull this sheet out and see how well you have followed it.

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Sources and references.

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