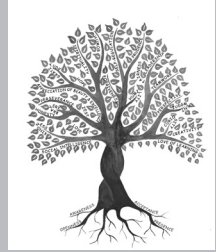


MBSR Handout 1.5

Session 1:

Mindfulness – General Description



What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment without judgment. Much of our life is spent in “autopilot” or in states of mindlessness in which we are going through the motions of life, barely present. This leads to distraction, forgetfulness, and suffering. When we are mindful, we are “tuned in” to our present experience; we are “alive.” This is also referred to as “being” mode rather than “doing” mode.

What Is the Scientific Definition of Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is (1) the *self-regulation* of attention to immediate experience, with (2) an orientation of *curiosity*, openness, and acceptance. This means that when we are being mindful we are taking control of what we focus on – we are controlling our attention. As we attend to our present moment – whether this be to an emotion, a thought, a belief, an impulse, a sensation, or to something in our surrounding environment – we need to approach that “thing” with a curious, open, and accepting attitude.

What Is the Purpose of Mindfulness?

The purpose is NOT relaxation, inner oneness, or relief of symptoms, although these are all possible “side effects” of mindfulness practice. The purpose of mindfulness is *awareness* of the “here and now” and the changing moment-to-moment experience of our minds and bodies. This is how mindfulness is different from many other types of meditations and mind-body therapies that seek to produce a specific outcome.

Why Is Mindfulness Important?

When we are “mindless” (in auto pilot) and caught up in our thinking, we are less aware of what is going on in our internal and external environment. Two things often result: (1) we miss the details (often positives) of life and (2) we miss opportunities to grow or challenge ourselves. Mindfulness opens the door of opportunity to these potentials. In addition, mindfulness practice has been associated with a large number of benefits ranging from greater well-being, better management of medical and psychological problems, and increases in particular character strengths.

How Is Mindfulness Practiced?

Anytime you bring your attention to the present moment with curiosity, openness, and/or acceptance, you are practicing mindfulness. This can occur “any” time, whether you bring your attention to how you are sitting, your movement as you walk, your breathing as you work, the road and landscape while you are driving, the food you are eating, the smile on the person’s face you are talking with, etc. Here are three ways to practice:

Formal

Some people practice mindfulness meditation for a certain amount of time each day. It is a “formal” practice when you carve out part of your daily living to practice mindfulness, for example, 2×/day for 10–15 minutes each or every morning from 9:00–9:30 a. m. The most common form is concentrating on following your breathing while you sit.

Informal

Informal practice means to “use it when you need it.” When you are feeling stressed, anxious, depressed, overwhelmed, or helpless, take a moment to slow down, pause, and “just be.” Breathe. Become aware of your body, your thoughts, your emotions (feelings), your behavior, and your environment. What is your body saying to you right now? What are you thinking about? What emotions are you present to right now? What do you need? What would “self-care” look like for you in this moment?

In-the-Moment

1. Practice returning to the present moment whenever your mind wanders off.
2. Whenever possible, do one thing at a time (multi-tasking can lead to mindlessness).
3. Pay full attention (all five senses, when possible) to what you are doing right now.
4. Practice “being” while you are ... eating, driving, talking, listening, working, praying.

Mindfulness Resources

Books

Mindfulness and Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing by Ryan Niemiec (2013)
The Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh (1979)
Full Catastrophe Living; and *Wherever You Go, There You Are*; and *Coming to Our Senses* by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990; 1994; 2005)
The Mindful Way Through Depression by Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn (2007)
Mindfulness; and *The Power of Mindful Learning* by Ellen Langer (1989; 1997)
Eating Mindfully by Susan Albers (2003)
Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think by Brian Wansink (2006)
The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Wellbeing by Daniel Siegel (2007)
Loving-kindness: The revolutionary art of happiness by Sharon Salzberg (1995)

Websites

www.viacharacter.org/mindfulness (Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice; MBSP)
www.mindfulnessstapes.com or www.umassmed.edu/CFM/index.aspx (Jon Kabat-Zinn)
www.iamhome.org (Thich Nhat Hanh & The Mindfulness Bell)
www.tcme.org or www.savorthebook.com (Mindful eating)
www.mbct.com (for depression)