

Mindfulness

“Paying attention in a particular way: in the present moment, on purpose and non-judgementally” (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

- “Mindfulness is non-judgmental observation ... That ability of the mind to observe without criticism ... In order to observe our own fear, we must accept the fact that we are afraid. We can’t examine our depression without accepting it fully”
- “Mindfulness is non-conceptual awareness ... It is the direct and immediate experiencing of whatever is happening, without the medium of thought.”
- “Mindfulness is present time awareness. It takes place in the here and now.”
- “Mindfulness is non-egotistic alertness. It takes place without reference to self.”
- “Mindfulness is goal-less awareness. In mindfulness, one does not strain for results.”
- Teasdale (2004)
- Not a belief, an ideology or a philosophy
- More akin to an art form that develops over time and is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice, both formally and informally, on a daily basis.
- Increased ability to regulate attention
- Change in whole mode of processing

What might explain benefits?

- Exposure and desensitisation
- Recognition of thoughts as thoughts, not reality
- Increased awareness of cognitive processes
- Disengagement from rumination
- Kinder, more accepting awareness of self
- Reduced avoidance of negative experience
- Not persistently trying to solve the insoluble
- More effective self-management

- Relaxation

(Baer, 2003; Smith, 2004a; Teasdale et al, 2000)

Evidence

- MBSR v waiting list decreases rumination, even controlling for reduced affective symptoms and dysfunctional beliefs (Ramel et al, 2004)
- Decrease also significant compared to relaxation control (Jain et al, 2007)
- Reduction in brooding and increase in mindfulness independently and uniquely (accounting for other mediators) mediated effects of MBCT on depressive symptoms (Shahar et al, 2010)

History of MBSR and MBCT

- MBSR first developed by Jon Kabat Zinn in 1979 at University of Massachusetts at Worcester, Massachusetts
- By 2002, over 13000 patients had been treated in the clinic
- Nowadays about 240 clinics all over the US offering MBSR
- Mainly chronic pain, but variety of medical problems, including cancer and cardiovascular disease

Format of MBSR

- Large groups
- 8 weekly 2 hour sessions
- 1 full day at six weeks
- Homework meditation of 45 minutes 6 days a week with tapes
- Sitting and walking meditations, “body scan”, yoga and mindfulness of everyday activity

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

- Developed by John Teasdale, Mark Williams, and Zindel Segal as group intervention for relapse prevention of depression
- Underlying theory: Relapse prevention is primarily mediated through meta-cognitive awareness or insight
- Core skill to be developed is the ability to step out of negative thinking process by being mindful in the moment and let go of constant striving to escape unhappiness

Mindfulness for ourselves and our colleagues

- MBCT facilitators require personal practice (as well as CBT and group skills)
- Need skill and experience in mindfulness to deal with difficult questions and situations which arise
- e.g. to reduce risk of increased sense of failure related to belief not able to meditate “properly”.
- Also provide a model of being mindful
- See, e.g. Segal et al (2002)
- Experiencing MBCT course as participant is foundation

Potential benefits

- Greater capacity to learn from experience
- Refining sensitivity to others’ experience and our own emotional responses to others
- Less likely to project own feelings if more aware of them (Shapiro and Izett, 2008)
- Less likely to jump to conclusions if more aware of own thinking processes
- May help us to see more clearly how our moods affect our thinking
- Describing what is happening for us may help us regulate our own emotions
- Recognising and understanding own feelings can help us support others to do the same

Next steps

- Takes time and commitment
- Need clinical, group, teaching and mindfulness-specific skills and qualities
- Repeating the programme (perhaps with a book)
- Building links
- Forum to discuss issues
- Exploring evidence and relevant theory in your clinical area

Books

- Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Mark Williams and Danny Penman
- The Mindful Way Through depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Zindel V. Segal, J. Mark G. Williams and John D. Teasdale
- Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (CBT Distinctive Features) by Rebecca Crane