How Mindfulness and Compassion Can Free You from Anxiety, Fear, and Panic

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In Praise of Social Work!

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.
--Tagore

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.
--Mahatma Gandhi

Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.
--Muhammad Ali

Main Themes of This Talk

• We live in the present moment and life happens in this moment
• Anxiety and fear are not an identity, but only impermanent conditions arising in this moment
• Using inner technologies of mindfulness and meditation, we can train ourselves to see the true nature of the experience of anxiety and fear, and to establish a more effective and liberated relationship with these intense feelings

You already have what you need for taking a view of your inner life and lived experience, moment-by-moment, that is wiser and that leads to profound transformation and more effective action

What is Mindfulness?

• Awareness that is reflective, non-judging and accepting
• Natural human capacity
• Cultivated by meditation
• Effective way to reduce stress & anxiety
• Powerful means for connecting with our deepest and best qualities as human beings

Each breath, each moment of lived experience, is your opportunity….

...to drop into mindful awareness simply by:

Paying attention, on purpose, not trying to fix or judge anything, and being friendly, including, and allowing of what is happening—here and now.

A Closer Look at…

Fear, Anxiety, and Stress

Anxiety Disorders Are Common

- Approximately 40 million Americans 18 years old and older have an anxiety disorder.
- Specific phobias and social phobia are the most common anxiety disorders.
- PTSD is more common than Panic Disorder
- Agoraphobia is the least common anxiety disorder.

Archives of General Psychiatry, 2005, June; 62 (6)

The Problem

- The nature and impact of fear, anxiety, and stress.....
  --on individuals
  --on health care
  --on society and our world

IS HUGE!

And......

Anyone can experience fear or anxiety without the condition being a “disorder”!

And, when that happens..... Fear and anxiety are widely known to cause trouble!
For example:

*Nothing is so much to be feared as fear.*
  -- Henry David Thoreau

*The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.*
  -- Franklin Delano Roosevelt

*There is perhaps nothing so bad and so dangerous in life as fear.*
  -- Jawaharlal Nehru

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**Fear & Anxiety**

- Definition of fear: the reaction in mind and body to a threat or danger
- Definition of anxiety (and panic): the fear reaction in mind and body that is out of proportion to the threat, or is happening in the absence of a true threat

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**The Psychobiological Nature of Fear and Anxiety**

The psychobiological experience of fear occurs concomitantly with a pattern of stress-related physiological activation designed to promote survival by avoiding danger through fight-flight-or freeze behavior.


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**The Power of Fear and Anxiety to Distort Our Thinking and Behavior**

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**Mind-Body Circuits and Feedback Loops**

Mind

Body

Brain

Within the Individual:

Sensory input leads to...

"freeze, fight, or flight" response, then...
Perception/cognition and "inner narrative" arise, then....EMOTIONAL REACTION.
(this all happens VERY, VERY Fast!)
Then,
*Why does the reaction become anger? (what can anger teach you?)*
Beneath Anger (is) Fear...
Beneath Fear (is) a Fixed Belief...
An (oversimplified) summary:

Sensory input occurs and….
activates a perception/cognition process that…
involves mobilizing memory and ideas/beliefs and that….  
gives rise to, and sustain, emotions and behaviors.

Judgments About Others Affects Brain Empathic Response

- How we judge others affects empathic brain responses.
- Lack of empathy-related brain activation in the anterior insula when a person in pain was perceived as unfair in their social behavior.

The Power and Danger of Fixed Beliefs

*Man is what he believes.* --Anton Chekhov (1860 - 1904)

*Reading made Don Quixote a gentleman, but believing made him mad.* --George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950)

*Every man prefers belief to the exercise of judgment.*
--Seneca (4 B.C. - AD 65)

*Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.* --Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900)

The mind-body connections are the means by which you experience the intensities of stress reactions and strong or destructive emotions.
In any moment…

In the course of your personal life…

In the flow of your work life…

In any place your life takes you…

What perceptions are arising, and
What beliefs are operating?
What is happening in your body and mind?
What choices are you making as a result?

"Man is not disturbed by events, but by the view he takes of them."
- Epictetus
Greek Philosopher

The Nature of Stress

The Power of……

Your “Inner Narrative”

- what you are telling yourself, moment-by-moment, about what is happening and why

Types of Thoughts That Can Activate the Stress Response

--imagined scenarios of threat or failure
--self-criticism or judgment
--recall of disturbing events
--rumination about a negative event
--perceived stress
--hostility
--denial or avoidance
--comparison to an imagined ideal

Effects of Stress and the Stress Reaction on the Mind and Body

The Fear Reaction in Mind and Body:
the critical role of thoughts

Fear and negative affects stimulate widespread sympathetic nervous system activation.
(Thayer & Brosschot, 2005)

Fearful cognitions and interpretations can manifest in somatic symptoms, and the same physiological responses arise for either real or imagined threats.
(Brosschot, et al., 2005; 2006; Thayer & Brosschot, 2005)

Example of how “depressogenic thinking” can transform momentary emotional distress into longer-lasting mood disturbance
(Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002)
Effects of Stress on Health

- Stress
- Worry
- Anticipatory anxiety
- Rumination
- Catastrophizing
- Distress

Biological Pathways...
- Brain & ANS
- Endocrine
- Metabolic
- Cardiovascular
- Immune

Increased risk of illness and disease

Behavioral Pathways...
- Eating
- Drinking
- Smoking
- Exercise
- Sleep

And, As You Probably Know, Social Work Professionals are NOT Immune from Stress, Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and their Consequences!

Emotional upheavals that tax caregiver resilience...
- Dealing with difficult colleagues: work with a jerk, poor communication, gossip, being judged
  - Conflicts with others: “don’t understand,” “don’t show respect,” “poor pain management”
- Bedside stress: prolonging life too long, “torturing” patients, end of life issues, dealing with suffering, death, dying
- Staffing, workload problems, “too many hats”

And, Social Workers are not the only health care professionals who are subject to stress reactions, burnout, compassion fatigue, and their consequences!
The prevalence and impact of post traumatic stress disorder and burnout syndrome in nurses.

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* 18% (61/332) met diagnostic criteria for PTSD
* 86% (277/323) met criteria for BOS

Burnout and Self-Reported Patient Care in an Internal Medicine Residency Program


* 50% of medical students burned out
* more than 10% have suicidal ideation

The Power of Fear and Anxiety to Distort Our Thinking and Behavior

“burnout”:
--emotional exhaustion
--depersonalization (feeling disconnected from oneself and others, treating patients as objects)
--low sense of accomplishment

Krasner, et al. JAMA, Sept. 23, 2009
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Burnout: results from a clinician’s interaction with the work environment

- Causes include: feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and inability to achieve work goals
- Key dimensions: emotional exhaustion, feelings of cynicism, depersonalization, detachment, and ineffectiveness
- Highly motivated professionals with intense investment in their profession at higher risk

Kearney, et al., JAMA, March 19, 2009

Compassion Fatigue

- Preferred terms are: Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder or Vicarious Trauma
- Common among victims of trauma and those who work directly with victims of trauma
- Is “the trauma that comes from taking care of traumatized people”
- First diagnosed in nurses in the 1950’s
- Sufferers can exhibit hopelessness, decreased joy and pleasure, feelings of stress and anxiety, and a pervasive negative attitude.

Compassion Fatigue in Health Care

- Evolves from the relationship between clinician and patient over time.
- More likely in the patient who is dependent and whose suffering is continuous and unresolvable.
- The basic human desire to help in the clinician has become degraded or is absent. Clinician may still care, but the basic desire to help is diminished or absent.
- Likened to PTSD
- Elements of hyperarousal, avoidance, reexperiencing appear in the clinician
- May lead to burnout.

Kearney, et al., JAMA, March 18, 2009

Human Factors Contributing to Medical Errors

- Fatigue, NEJM, 2004, 351 (18)
- Depression and Burnout, BMJ, 336, March 2008
- Diverse patients, unfamiliar settings, and time pressure, JAMA, 2002, 288

Factors That Mitigate Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

- Developing self-awareness
- Developing self-awareness to enhance self-care (when self-awareness permits the clinician simultaneously to attend to and monitor the needs of the patient, the work environment, and his or her own subjective experience).


“We do not need to suffer to remove suffering from others.”

--Thich Nhat Hanh
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What is Mindfulness?
Awareness
Heart/Mind

http://www.prairiewindzen.org/calligraphy/mindfulness.html

In any moment...
In the course of your personal life...
In the flow of your work life...
In any place your life takes you...
What perceptions are arising, and
What beliefs are operating?
What is happening in your body and mind?

The Remedy
(for going on “autopilot” and burnout)
• Practicing mindfulness
• Practicing compassion
• Practicing self-care and self-compassion

Components of Mindfulness
“Paying attention.”
Mindful Awareness
Intention
Attention
Attitude
“On purpose.”
“In the present moment, non-judgmentally.”

Practicing Mindfulness
Mindfulness Practice Exercise
to give a sense that what we are talking about—mindfulness and the importance of living more in the moment—is NOT an abstraction

“Mindfulness is strongly related to compassion, and it is compassion that serves as a source for all healing intentionality.”
- Stefan Schmidt, Ph.D.
Mindfulness and Healing Intention:
Concepts, Practice, and Research Evaluation
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Duke MBSR Study: Mindfulness & Self-Compassion

Compassion

• Compati/compassus: sympathy
• Com—together, pati—to suffer
  “to feel sorrow for the sufferings or trouble of another or others, accompanied by an urge to help…”
  Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4th Edition

What is Compassion?

“Compassion is not an entity “we” show toward the “other.”...We need to lose the dichotomy. It is not something I have, and give to you. It manifests in the relationship between beings.... If we are wholeheartedly engaged in each moment, responding to what is front of us, not judging or labeling ourselves or others, then I believe that compassion cannot fatigue.”
  -- Lisa Marr, M.D.
  Journal of Palliative Care, 12(8) 2009

Self-Compassion

• Self-compassion is extending compassion to one’s self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering.

Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind

Released by
William Morrow
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Elements of Self-Compassion

Self-kindness
Common humanity
Mindfulness

Source: http://www.self-compassion.org

How Effect the Remedy?
Practice! Practice! Practice!

Contemplative/Reflective Practice is:
Direct experience, not thinking, paying attention on purpose and non-judgmentally
Practice—it's up to you!

Metta for Caregivers

• May I offer my care and presence unconditionally, knowing it may be met by gratitude, indifference, anger, or anguish.
• I care about your pain, and I cannot control it.
• May I remain in peace, and let go of expectations.
• I wish you happiness and peace, and I cannot make your choices for you.
• May I find the inner resources to truly be able to give.
• May I see my limits compassionately, just as I view the suffering of others.
• May this experience help me to open to the true nature of life.
  --from Roshi Joan Halifax and Sharon Salzberg

“Whether one believes in religion or not—there isn’t anyone who doesn’t appreciate kindness.”

H.H. the Dalai Lama

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

• Teaches mindfulness meditation and application of mindfulness in daily life
• Emphasis on what a person can do to help themselves—using innate capacity for relaxation and attention
• Classroom-based training for anyone regardless of religious orientation

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

• 8-week program to reduce stress by training attention & cultivating mindful awareness
  – Est. in 1979 by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn at UMASS
  – Help patients cope with stress, pain and illness
  – Complement to medical treatment—not a substitute
  – 200+ MBSR programs in the U.S.
• Duke’s program est. in 1998 by Dr. Jeff Brantley
  – Winter, spring, summer, fall programs
  – 2.5 hr class once a week, plus daily home practice
  – Graduate classes available, plus quarterly 1 day retreats
  – Over 4000 people have enrolled in the program since 1998

www.umassmed.edu/cfm
www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org
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Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Typical MBSR Program

- Eight week class
- 2–2.5 hours each week
- Participants have diverse motivations that are health-based
- Variety of mindfulness methods taught

Daily home practice
- Formal and informal meditation
- Day of Mindfulness

Scientific Evidence for Practicing Mindfulness

Selected studies and clinical examples

Mindfulness Studies in MEDLINE

N = 1,084 total
N = 157 RCTs
N = 10 meta-anal.

Effects of Practicing Mindfulness on the Body and Mind

- chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1985; Morone, et al., 2008)
- cancer (Speca, et al., 2000; Carlson, et al., 2007)
- insomnia (Kretzer, et al., 2005)
- psoriasis (Kabat-Zinn, et al., 1998)
- type 2 diabetes (Rosenzweig, et al., 2007)
- fibromyalgia (Grossman, et al., 2007)
- rheumatoid arthritis (Zautra, et al., 2008)
- mixed medical diagnoses (Reibel, et al., 2001)
- organ transplant patients (Gross, et al., 2004)
- heart disease (Sullivan, et al., 2009)
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**Mindfulness Practice: reported mental health benefits**
- depression (Jain, et al., 2007)
- relapsing depression (Teasdale, et al., 2000)
- depression in bipolar patients (Williams, et al., 2008)
- substance abuse (Marratt & Chawla, 2007; Bowen, et al., 2009)
- eating disorders (Baer, 2006)
- binge eating (Kristeller, et al., 1999)
- ADHD (Zylowska, et al., 2008)
- aggressive behavior in developmental disability (Singh, et al., 2007)

**Is There Psychological Research to Support Practicing Mindfulness to Manage Fear and Anxiety?**
- Mindfulness training increases ability to focus attention (Jha, et al., 2007)
- Trait mindfulness is associated with lower levels of worry, thought suppression and experiential avoidance (Baer, et al., 2006)
- Mindfulness training is associated with a significant reduction in ruminations (Feldman, et al., 2008)

**Is There Clinical Evidence to Support Mindfulness Training for Managing Fear and Anxiety?**
- Multiple literature reviews conclude that mindfulness training is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, anger, and worry in a variety of clinical populations (Baer, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Cresswell, 2007; Grossman, et al., 2004)
- Mindfulness offers benefits when incorporated into treatments for generalized anxiety disorder (Roemer & Orsillo, 2002; Roemer, et al., 2006)
- Mindfulness training has been associated with reduced levels of anxiety in a variety of medical conditions including cancer (Carlson, Speca, et al., 2000, 2007), and chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, et al., 1982, 1985, 1986; Rosenzweig, Greeson, et al., 2009)

**Effects of Mindfulness on the Brain**
- Greater left prefrontal cortical activity is associated with mindfulness practice (Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, et al., 2003)
- Reduced activity in areas of the brain associated with OCD found in patients who practiced mindfulness (Schwartz & Begley, 2002)
- Higher levels of trait mindfulness is associated with a greater ability to engage the prefrontal cortex (PFC) to manage emotional reactions in the amygdala (Creswell, et al., 2007)
- Mindfulness training over 8 weeks associated with greater neural activity in areas of the brain believed to subserve self-awareness (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and medial prefrontal cortex) (Farb, et al., 2007)
**Neuroplasticity**

“Neuro” = neurons, cells of the brain  
“plasticity” = malleability, flexibility

Brain's ability to change its structure and function  
- Expanding or strengthening circuits that are used  
- Weakening those that are rarely engaged

**Increased grey matter density following Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

- Posterior cingulate cortex & cerebellum  
- Temporo-parietal junction  
- Cerebellum & brainstem

From Höfzel et al. (2011). NeuroImage

**Increased hippocampus density following MBSR**

From Höfzel et al. (2011). NeuroImage

**Components of Mindfulness**

- “Paying attention.”  
- “On purpose.”  
- Mindful Awareness  
- Attitude  
- “In the present moment, non-judgmentally.”

Adapted from Shapiro et al. (2006). Journal of Clinical Psychology

**Mindfulness supports:**

- “Presence”—inhabiting the present moment, including your own body, and available with awareness that is non-judging, allowing, and compassionate.

- **Self Awareness**—includes locating and knowing intimately your own changing inner landscape, moment-by-moment.

- **Self Care**—includes the very act of mindful attention, and the informed and healthy choices that follow from self awareness.
Mindfulness and Psychotherapy

Mindfulness can be seen as "a crucial ingredient in the therapy relationship, and as a technology for the psychotherapist to cultivate personal therapeutic qualities."


therapeutic qualities cultivated by mindfulness practice include:
- attention and presence
- compassion for self and for others
- empathy
- emotion regulation skills


Effects of Mindfulness on Mental Health

• MBSR for Health Care Professionals
  - ↓ stress
  - ↓ burnout
  - ↑ self-compassion
  - ↑ life satisfaction

Irving et al. (2009), Complementary Therapy in Clinical Practice.


"Originally I signed up for this class to learn how to deal with my stress at work. What I have learned is by taking care of me, the stress just falls away.” - Anonymous

Benefits of Mindfulness Practice for Health Care Professionals

--reduced anxiety and depression, and increased spirituality in pre-med and medical students (Shapiro & Schwartz, Behavioral Medicine, 1998)
--fewer medical errors for physicians (Epstein, JAMA, 1999)
--enhanced ability to conduct patient-centered interviews for medical residents (Smith, et. al. Academic Medicine, 1999)
--lower psychological distress in medical students (Rosenzweig et al., Teaching and Learning in Medicine, 2003)
--better outcomes for psychotherapy patients (Grepmair et al., Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, 2007)
--improved physician well-being and coping skills (Irving, et. al., Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice, 2009)

Sub-cortical areas: Insula

- Very involved in self awareness, particularly awareness of body sensations (interoception) and emotions.
- Also very involved in empathy for the emotions of other people
- By tuning into your own body sensations and emotions, you physically thicken the cortical tissues that are involved in both self-awareness and in empathy for other people.

Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness

"Why is mindfulness so sought after in this moment, and so necessary?...We long for some degree of effective balance and wisdom that supports meaningful, embodied, and significant work—the work of making a difference in the world, of adding value and beauty, of individually and collectively waking up to the full range of human intelligences and capacities we share for wisdom, ease of being, and kindness.”

--Jon Kabat-Zinn

In Conclusion…

Main Themes of This Talk

- We live in the present moment and life happens in this moment
- Anxiety and fear are not an identity, but only conditions arising in this moment
- Using inner technologies of mindfulness and meditation, we can train ourselves to see the true nature of the experience of anxiety and fear, and to establish a more effective and liberated relationship with these intense feelings

What Is the Connection Between Being Present and Being Healthy?

- Attention leads to awareness
- Awareness leads to insight and understanding
- Insight and understanding lead to increased choices

“Meditation practice isn’t about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better. It’s about befriending who we already are.” -- Pema Chodron

Practicing Mindfulness

"Mindfulness practice means that we commit fully in each moment to being present. There is no "performance." There is just this moment."

-- Jon Kabat-Zinn