

UNC School of Social Work's Clinical Lecture Series

**Singing the Blues:
Honoring Emotional Experience
through Mindfulness-based
Treatment of Depression**

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Agenda

- Characterizing mindfulness
- Mindfulness-based CBT for depression
- Benefits of mindfulness and relevance to depression

Characterizing mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Paying attention in a particular way:

- 1) On purpose
- 2) In the present moment
- 3) Nonjudgmentally

(Kabat-Zinn, 2003)

7 pillars of mindfulness

1. **Nonjudgment** – not applying evaluations
2. **Patience** – without urgency
3. **Beginner's mind** – openness, curiosity
4. **Trust** – in one's inner wisdom
5. **Nonstriving** – process rather than outcome
6. **Acceptance** – reality as it is
7. **Letting go** – getting unstuck

(Kabat-Zinn, 1990)

Historical Roots of Mindfulness

- Most systematically articulated and emphasized in Buddhism
- Contemplative traditions in many other religions, including Christianity and Judaism
- Meditation as a spiritual practice
- Meditation as a way to reduce suffering
 - ✧ Now applied to secular context

Mindfulness in the West as a Secular Practice

- Research on meditation began in late 1950s/early 1960s
- Research on mindfulness meditation as a clinical intervention began in early 1980s
- Insight Meditation Center – founded early 1970s in Barre, MA – Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein
- Jon Kabat Zinn established the Stress Reduction Clinic in 1979, now the Center for Mindfulness – Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) through the University of Massachusetts Medical Center

Mindfulness practice

Practice

- Like any skill it takes practice
- Systematic training
- Regular, consistent practice
- Nonstriving – not about achievement; still **practicing** after decades of meditation

Mindfulness practice


1) **Formal practice**

- Meditation practice (often 20-40 minutes) to cultivate skillfulness
- Vipassana meditation practice – sitting, standing, lying down, walking
- Mindful embodiment practice – yoga, tai chi, qigong

2) **Informal practice**

- Practice of mindfulness (techniques and metacognitions) in everyday contexts
- Directing one’s attention
- Eating mindfully, washing dishes mindfully, listening to music mindfully

Formal practice



The key to meditation is learning to stay.

Mindfulness Meditation
Trains 2 Types of Attention

Focal Attention

- **Directing attention on a chosen object.**
- **Detecting mind wandering.**

Open Monitoring

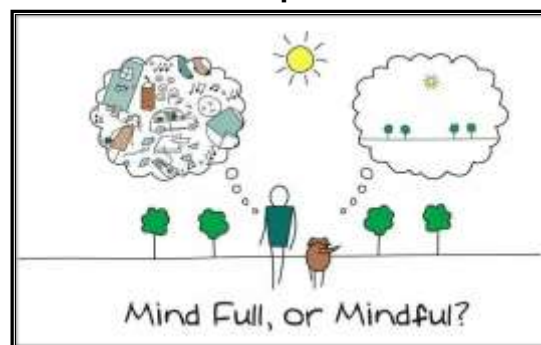
- No explicit focus on objects of awareness.
- Non-evaluative labeling of experience.

(Lutz et al., 2008)

So why don't people practice more?

- Time
- Priorities
- Focus on others
- Not feeling that one is worth it
- Believing that one is doing it "wrong" or not well enough

Informal practice



Mindfulness in everyday life

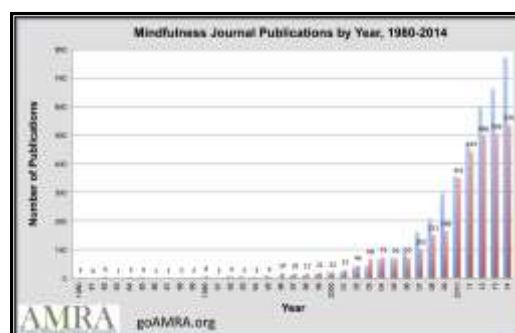
- Take moments throughout the day to observe breath, take a break, or simply check in with yourself with nonjudgmental awareness
- Become aware of thoughts, feelings, and sensations throughout the day
- Practice nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment
- Fully inhabit the body and attend to sensory experience during a daily activity

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Controlled studies of mindfulness-based interventions

- Overall, two categories of intervention:
 1. Meditation-oriented interventions
 - Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
 - Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)
 - Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention (MBRP)
 2. Interventions that incorporate less formal mindfulness practices and exercises
 - Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
 - Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Bowen et al. (2010), Hayes et al. (1999), Kabat-Zinn (1990), Linehan (1993), Segal et al. (2002).



<https://goamra.org/resources/>

Back to the definition of mindfulness

Paying attention in a particular way:

- 1) On purpose
 - **Directing one's attention**
- 2) In the present moment
 - **Opposite of worrying and ruminating**
- 3) Nonjudgmentally
 - **Releases attachment to shoulds, contributes to acceptance**

Mindfulness-based CBT

- Efforts to avoid or control thoughts and emotions contribute to dysregulation
 - Thoughts often cannot be controlled
 - Emotions cannot often be controlled
 - Many life situations cannot be controlled
 - Our reactions or responses are within our control
- Change stance toward emotional experience by observing and accepting
 - Paradoxical effect that symptoms are often reduced
 - Even when not, distress is.

Pain x Nonacceptance = Suffering

Hayes et al. (1999), Linehan (1993), Roemer & Orsillo (2009), Segal et al. (2002), Witkiewitz et al. (2005)

Focus of MB-CBT

- Focus is on the approach to one's own internal experiences
- Thoughts about and reactions to the emotional experience create distress and suffering
- Focus on meta-cognitions; observe and notice the cognitions and their impact
 - Judgment of emotions
 - Nonacceptance of emotions
- Practice acceptance while moving toward change

Hayes et al. (1999) Linehan, (1993) Roemer & Orsillo (2009); Segal et al. (2002), Witkiewitz et al. (2005)

MB-CBT Stance and style

- Collaborative
- The human condition – “we”
- Collecting data from a place of curiosity
- Investigating hypotheses
- Modeling compassion and acceptance of challenges paired with commitment to caring for oneself effectively

MB-CBT Format

- Structured with an agenda
- Includes mindfulness practice
 - Theoretical use, focused on awareness and nonjudgment of present moment experience
 - Contrast to traditional CBT technical use for relaxation
- Home practice assignments
 - 168 hours per week!

MB-CBT Goals for Treatment

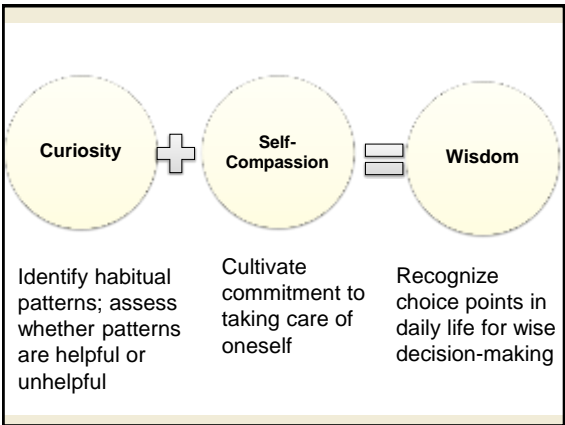
- Treatment goals are behavioral
- Goal of living valued life despite/along with symptoms
 - Paradoxical results - symptoms are often reduced
- Acquisition and generalization of skills
 - Anyone can learn a skill
 - Skills develop through practice
- Not avoiding experience, even when distressing
- Find tenderness and openness toward experience
- Balance acceptance and change

Serenity prayer as an example of synthesis

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
The courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Main messages of mindfulness-based CBT

- Approach emotions, thoughts, and urges as experiences that come and go
 - Can facilitate this process through cultivating the ability to release our attachments to controlling our internal experiences and developing our ability to let go
- Willingness to experience whatever comes
 - Greeting whatever presents itself (feelings, images, sensations, thoughts)
 - Finding tenderness and openness toward experience
- Make room for living with the symptom
 - Idea of living a life worth living, not waiting for symptoms to end before beginning your life
- Relinquish judgment of ourselves and others
- With mindfulness practice, one will begin to perceive alternatives to automatic assumptions and reactions



Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Applied to the Territory of Depression

Automatic pilot

- Often we live on *automatic pilot*, without awareness of the details of what we are doing
- On automatic pilot, we are more likely to engage in habitual patterns of thinking, which may be maladaptive or unhelpful
- By becoming aware of thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, we cultivate greater capacity to *respond* instead of *react*

Doing Mode

- Motivated by achievement, striving for goals
- Focused on planning, preparing for goals
- Productivity, efficiency
- Outcome focus

Being Mode

- **Acknowledging what is already here rather than focusing on goals**
- **Direct experience of the present**
- **No need to evaluate experience**
- **Process focus**

States of mind that enhance vulnerability to depression

- Automatic pilot
 - Attention is passive (little intentional control)
 - Tendency toward avoidance or suppression
- Content
 - Conditional happiness (in order to be happy...)
 - Rumination centered on self
 - Metacognitive judgments
- Process
 - Strong identification with thoughts and feelings
 - Believing the "truth" of automatic thoughts

Tools that reduce vulnerability to relapse

- Harnessing and shifting attention
- Shifting out of habitual cognitive patterns and switching out of automatic pilot
- Recognizing mood dependent thinking
- Tolerating and exploring difficult experiences
- Cognitive defusion
 - Thoughts as mental events
 - Observe thoughts without getting caught up in the content

So that regardless of mood...

- Automatic pilot → Intentional Mode
- Avoidance → Curiosity, openness, acceptance
- Rumination → Direct experiencing
- Doing mode → Being mode

Benefits of mindfulness for depression

Benefits of mindfulness #1: Attention

- Awakening and shifting out of automatic pilot
- Harnessing and shifting attention
- Improving attentional control
- Attention to present moment experience as an alternative to past focus (e.g., rumination) and future focus (e.g., worrying)

Benefits of mindfulness #2: Nonjudgmental awareness

- Enhancing self-awareness through an attitude of curiosity
- Becoming aware of habitual patterns
- Assessing what is healthy versus harmful (an alternative to judgments)

Benefits of mindfulness
#3: Cognitive flexibility

- After becoming aware of habitual patterns (e.g., avoidance) and learning what is helpful versus helpful, we open up to alternatives and clarify the range of choices that are available
- Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
~ Viktor Frankl

Benefits of mindfulness
#4: Emotion regulation

- All emotions are important; learn to tolerate and accept distressing emotions
- Tolerating and exploring difficult experiences (exposure)
- Developing distress tolerance skills
- Developing emotion regulation skills

Benefits of mindfulness
#5: Cognitive Defusion

- Also known as decentering and reperceiving
- Thoughts as mental events
- Not necessarily true – thoughts are not facts
- Observe thoughts without getting caught up in the content
- Metaphors

Experiential Exercise:
Mindfulness Practice

Noting internal experiences

Thoughts
Emotions
Images
Sensations
Urges

Practicing Awareness

Observations about the experience of the mindfulness practice

Benefits of mindfulness
#6: Cultivating compassion

- Bringing a kind, friendly awareness to current experience
- Caring for oneself and others, particularly in the face of hardship
- Including oneself in one’s compassion
- Provides intervention for self-directed anger as well as other-directed anger

Benefits of mindfulness
#7: Radical acceptance

- Curiosity, investigating without judgment or rejection
- “How interesting, there you are again”
- Acknowledging reality as it is
- Letting go of fighting reality and deciding to tolerate things as they are
- Acceptance is not approval, it is not agreement, and it is not resignation
- Embracing things as they are actually creates the opportunity to consider change.

Radical Acceptance

For after all, the best thing one can do when it’s raining is to let it rain.

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(The Poet’s Tale)



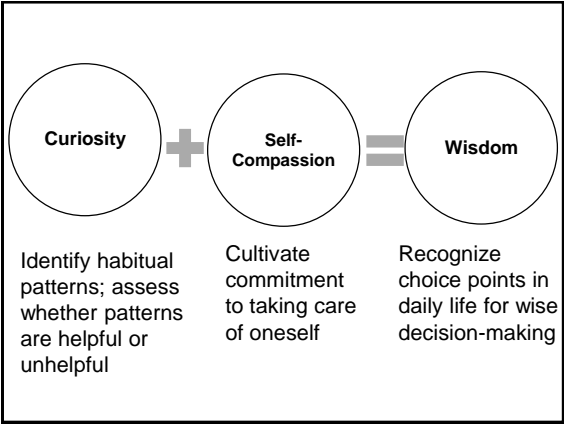


Practice:
Mindfulness of difficulty



Practicing Awareness



Observations about the experience of the mindfulness practice

Case Example



Still some sadness...

- Distinguishing between sadness and depression
- Allowing emotion; responding with self-compassion and self-nurturance



Invitation for Questions
& Feedback

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