

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



Mindfulness Meditation Trains 2 Types of Attention

- | | |
|---|---|
| <u>Focal Attention</u> | <u>Open Monitoring</u> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Directing attention on a chosen object.• Detecting mind wandering. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

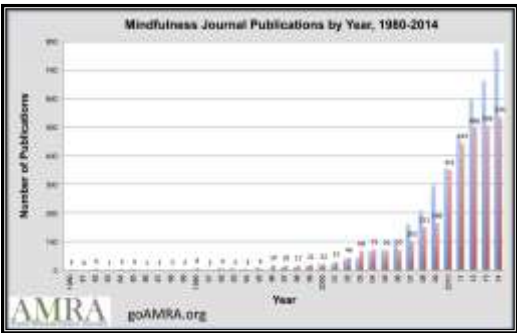
- Take moments throughout the day to observe breath, take a break, or simply check in with yourself with nonjudgmental awareness
- Become aware of thoughts, feelings, and sensations throughout the day
- Practice nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment
- Fully inhabit the body and attend to sensory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

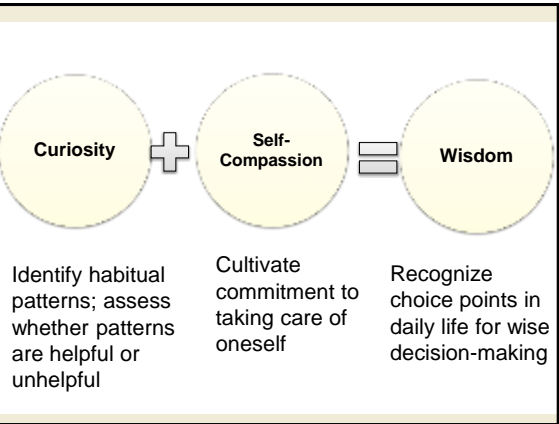
- Treatment goals are behavioral
- Goal of living valued life despite/along with symptoms
 - Paradoxical results - symptoms are often reduced
- Acquisition and generalization of skills
 - Anyone can learn a skill
 - Skills develop through practice
- Not avoiding experience, even when distressing
- Find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




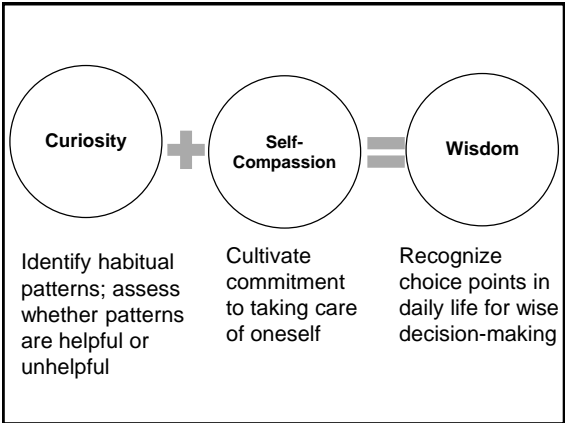
Practicing Awareness

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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