

Introduction to Mindfulness

Sheri Van Dijk, MSW, RSW
sherivandijk@rogers.com

Conflict of Interest

No individuals who have the ability to control or influence the content of this webinar have a relevant relationship with any commercial interest, including but not limited to members of the Planning Committee, speakers, presenters, authors, and/or content reviewers.

Many of the concepts I'm presenting today are from my books. I do benefit financially from royalty payments from the sale of these products.

Objectives

Participants will learn:

- About mindfulness, including:
 - a variety of ways to practice mindfulness
 - how to teach mindfulness
 - some of the ways mindfulness is helpful for clients with mental health problems
 - the importance of practicing mindfulness ourselves as clinicians

Effects of Mindfulness

Studies report a range of mind/body benefits with the most common being:

- Enhanced emotion regulation, attention, and self-awareness
- Reduced levels of depression, anxiety, pain, psychological stress, and substance abuse
- Decreased blood pressure and inflammation, improved immune function and glucose and insulin resistance, and increased telomerase activity (Basso et al, 2019)

Effects of Mindfulness

In addition, mindfulness has been shown to

- Reduce stress, anxiety, sleep problems (providing some of the same functions as sleep), and fatigue
- improve ability to tolerate uncomfortable or distressing experiences
- improve ability to pay attention, and have compassion and empathy
- decrease stress-related cortisol
- Improve ability to cope with physical illness
- help a variety of medical conditions such as heart problems, asthma, type II diabetes, pre-menstrual syndrome, and chronic pain.

A Little Introduction to Mindfulness...





What is Mindfulness?

Focusing on one thing at a time, in the present moment, with your full attention, and with acceptance.

- Step out of automatic pilot
- Turn your attention to what is happening NOW, within yourself or within your environment.
- Adopt an attitude of curiosity, acceptance, and openness toward your experience

Mindfulness Exercise

Introductory exercise:
Abdominal Breathing

- Posture
- Eyes
- Bowl/bells
- Four Steps

How to Practice Mindfulness

Four steps to mindfulness:

1. Choose a focus
2. Start to focus on that activity
3. Notice when your attention wanders
4. Gently, without judgment, bring your attention back

Repeat steps 3 & 4 over and over and over...

What is Mindfulness?

Responsive (i.e. thoughtful & deliberate) action versus reacting

Making choices about what we want to attend to based on our own inner wisdom, instead of based on attraction or aversion

Directing our mental processes rather than being at the mercy of these processes

Why Practice Mindfulness?

Mindfulness skills are central to DBT and are the first skills taught in group. Mindfulness is helpful in MANY different ways:

1. Reducing dwelling or rumination
2. Improving concentration and memory

Why Practice Mindfulness?

3. Increasing pleasurable emotions
4. Relaxation
5. Managing urges
6. Getting to know yourself
(it helps to get buy-in from your client if you personalize this skill for them)

What is Mindfulness?

Two types of practice:

1. Formal: requires devoting a specific amount of time to to focus all of your attention on the exercise (e.g. breathing exercise, body scan, Zentangling)

Formal exercises help you to become more aware of internal experiences, increasing self-awareness and your ability to manage yourself more effectively.

What is Mindfulness?

Formal Mindfulness Practice:

- Counting Breaths
- Observing Sounds

What is Mindfulness?

2. Informal: can be practiced at any time during your day; incorporating mindfulness into your daily activities such as walking, driving, watching TV, etc.

Informal exercises help you to live your life more mindfully and to be in the present moment on a more regular basis. Both types of practice are extremely important.

What is Mindfulness?

Informal Mindfulness Practice:
Observe your environment
Pay attention for 2 minutes

Reactive and Proactive Practice

Reactive Practice: how our clients often start practicing – i.e. when they feel they “need it”

Proactive Practice: how we want our clients to be practicing more often; the more they practice proactively, the less often they’ll find themselves “needing” mindfulness

Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

The amygdala is regarded as a central processor of emotional arousal and intensity; amygdala modulation is therefore considered a neurobiological indicator for emotion regulation

Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

Herwig et al 2010 study: fMRI comparing subjects in three states:

1. "think" condition: directed to think about and reflect on the self, life goals, etc.
2. "feel" condition: directed to be aware of current emotions and bodily feelings
3. "neutral" condition: directed to do nothing specific, just await the neutral picture

Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

- A main finding of this study was that the left amygdala was found to be activated with the "think" condition; while the "feeling" condition was associated with a decreased activation of this area of the brain, indicating a decrease in emotional arousal
- The authors theorized that becoming aware of one's emotions may lead to an inner distancing from these feelings, leading to an improved ability to regulate these emotions

Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

- These findings support a study by Creswell et al (2007) which found that the more a subject practiced mindfulness, the less the amygdala was activated, indicating less emotional arousal or intensity

Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

- Long-term use of mindfulness is associated with an increased ability to observe and describe internal experiences (decentre), rather than being judgmental and reactive to these experiences; and the ability to respond to internal experiences in these ways is associated with greater psychological wellness

Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

- Helps clients learn to identify emotions accurately – first step in managing emotions more effectively; opens the door to validation
- Mindfulness as exposure to emotions
- Mindfulness to current emotion – not worrying about when it will end, not thinking about how long it will go on for, but practicing acceptance of it in this moment, and learning that it doesn't stay the same

What are you Practicing???
(toboggan analogy)

Tips for Teaching Mindfulness

- Practice what you preach! – you must be practicing mindfulness yourself
- Make it easy – short practices, choice of activities
- Do a variety of practices in group
- Emphasize *informal* as well as *formal* practices (DBT mindfulness vs. other)

Tips for Teaching Mindfulness

- Eyes open vs. closed
- Stay away from “meditation” and “Buddhism” (Contemplative Prayer)
- Repetition
- Examples – personalize these for your clients: TV, music, walking, kids & pets, work, hobbies, sports, etc.
- Give personal examples as well

Problems Clients Often Encounter

- “It makes me more anxious”
- “I just can’t do it”, “It’s not working, I’m not doing it right, I can’t stay focused” (Monkey Mind & Puppies)
- “I don’t have time”
- “I already focus on the task at hand”
- “I fall asleep”
- (“It’s not scientific” – mental noting)

Mindfulness Analogies

Monkey Mind...hear that voice chattering away in your head? That's your Monkey Mind. It's NORMAL!

Puppies... think of your brain as a puppy. Right now you're training your puppy to sit and stay, but you can't expect it to get it right away, it takes time.

Problems Clients Often Encounter

- "I HAVE to multi-task!"
- "Isn't mindfulness just avoiding or repressing?"
- "But I have to plan for the future"

How Mindfulness Can Reduce Therapist Burn-out

- When we practice mindfulness ourselves, we experience all of the benefits of mindfulness which help us reduce feelings of burn-out in a variety of ways:
 - Our ability to manage stress and tolerate distress increases with mindfulness practice
 - When we're more self-aware, we're going to notice problems more quickly so we can address them with things like improved self-care and limit-setting

How Mindfulness Can Increase Self-Care

- Being nonjudgmental and accepting will help us to be more patient and understanding
- (All of these things will also help to improve our relationships, which of course also contributes to self-care!)

Mindfulness With...

- Depression (Melissa)
- Anxiety (3 year-old son)
- Bipolar Disorder (Carleen)
- Trauma (brother's suicide)
- Substance use (Katie)
- Eating disorders (BED, bulimia)
- Grief (widow)
- Anger (parade client)
- Self-esteem/shame (Lauren)
- OCD (Katie)

What About "Negative" Effects?

- Trauma (Reffi et al, 2019 – "findings suggest the mindfulness facet most relevant to PTSD may be nonjudging of inner experience")
- Mindfulness to emotions
- Increasing anxiety
- Mindfulness to avoid?
- Psychosis (Jacobsen et al, 2019 – "evidence of positive effects and no evidence of any harmful effects arising from people with psychotic symptoms taking part in a mindfulness for psychosis session")

Resources

- The Mindful Way Through Depression (Williams, Teasdale, Segal & Kabat-Zinn)
- Wherever You Go, There You Are (Kabat-Zinn)
- Brain Lock (Jeffery Schwartz) - OCD
- The Mindfulness Solution to Pain (Gardner-Nix) – chronic pain/illness
- The Mindfulness Path to Self-Compassion (Germer)

Mindfulness Practice Examples

General examples:

- Noticing sounds in the room
- Notice five things
- Breathing
- Walking mindfully
- Eating mindfully
- Listening to music
- Zentangle

You can do ANYTHING mindfully!

Log Sheets

Date	Activity	Length	What I noticed about my experience
------	----------	--------	------------------------------------

Overview of DBT Skills

There are four modules in DBT:

1. Core Mindfulness Skills
2. Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills
3. Emotion Regulation Skills
4. Distress Tolerance Skills

The CM skills are the first taught in group as they're the foundation for the other modules; remember flexibility and adaptability of DBT!

Thank You!!!
