

Summary for people using SPFT services

Advisory Statement on Safe and Effective Practice of Mindfulness-based interventions (Mindfulness based Cognitive Therapy – MBCT - and other mindfulness-based adaptations)

What is Mindfulness based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) ?

MBCT is a structured 8 week group programme combining mindfulness meditation with cognitive and behavioural therapy exercises. The course lasts for 8 sessions and each session is 2 hours long.

Mindfulness practice involves bringing attention to present moment experiences (such as breathing or body sensations) as best we can. Inevitably the mind will wander. When it does, we practise greeting this with a sense of patience and gentleness, before guiding our attention back to the present.

What will MBCT be like for me?

MBCT can help us learn ways to reduce worry and negative cycles of thinking, which can increase our mental wellbeing. MBCT works by strengthening our ability:

- to notice thoughts, emotions and body sensations
- to learn to be with difficult experiences
- to relate to ourselves with greater gentleness and kindness.

Each week there is a mixture of mindfulness practice, discussion about this practice, and exercises from cognitive therapy. Participants do not need to share their personal histories in the group.

The size of the class can vary, but is likely to be between 6 and 12 people. The course also involves up to 50 minutes of homework a day. It is important to have the time available for this.

What is the evidence for the effectiveness of MBCT ?

There is good evidence that MBCT can reduce the chances of depression returning and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) particularly recommends it for people who have previously experienced three or more episodes of depression. There is also growing evidence that Mindfulness can help with current depression, stress, chronic pain and some types of anxiety.

When would it be best not to do MBCT?

Becoming more aware of our present-moment experience can often reveal richness and pleasure in our lives that we may have been missing, through being caught up in worries and rumination. However, it can sometimes also bring us more into contact with difficult experiences that we may have been trying to avoid. This can be valuable, because mindfulness can help us gradually develop our ability to relate to difficulty with gentleness and kindness. However, coming on an MBCT course, it is worth thinking about whether you currently feel ready and able to become more aware of both pleasant and unpleasant experiences.

Also, if you are currently feeling particularly fragile or are in the midst of high levels of distress, depression, anxiety or other difficulties, now may not be the right time to start MBCT. Rather, the course could be something to hold in mind for the future, when you're over the worst of the current difficulties. It can be helpful to have a discussion with the clinician or therapist you have been working with and/or the teacher leading the MBCT course who can help you think further about this.

What qualifications should a practitioner have to deliver MBCT ?

An MBCT teacher should meet the national Good Practice Guidelines produced by the UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations. These include the completion of an in-depth, rigorous mindfulness-based teacher training programme or a supervised pathway over a minimum duration of 12 months and appropriate professional clinical training (if delivering MBCT to a clinical population).

What supervision should a practitioner have when they are delivering MBCT?

They should receive regular supervision from a mindfulness supervisor who meets our supervision governance requirements, which include having had generic supervision training, specific 2-3 day mindfulness supervision training, and having taught at least 9 eight week MBCT courses over a minimum of 3 years.

What related approaches are there, and what are the qualification and supervision requirements for these?

Other mindfulness adaptations have been developed to meet the needs of specific populations. Some of these, such as Mindful Self Compassion (MSC), Mindfulness based Compassionate Living (MBCL) or Breathworks (for physical pain) require their own programme-specific training. Other less established adaptations require practitioners to meet specific governance developed for these approaches, which include a 7 day training, CPD and supervision with a mindfulness trained supervisor.