

Some information about the Mindfulness group for potential staff participants

If you would like to register your interest to attend a mindfulness group for staff please complete the application form and return it to smc@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

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We spend too much time in the past or future:

Life consists of millions of moments, and most of us aren't 'there' in them because we are in auto-pilot mode, wishing we'd chosen a faster queue or worrying about work tomorrow.

Two hours a week for eight weeks can change your life:

That's the length of the mindfulness therapy course which is used to help with a range of problems such as stress, depression and anxiety. You learn techniques that help you to pay attention to what's happening in the mind and body moment by moment. We are often caught up in our heads so moving your awareness to your body can switch off habitual negative thought cycles that can lead to stress or depression.

Over-thinking is the problem:

Our mind often makes simple issues more complicated, telling us we're useless. Mindfulness shows you it's our relationship to thinking that's the problem. The mindfulness course teaches you how to relate to your thoughts differently: to see that thoughts are not facts...even the ones that say they are!

The mind has a mind of its own:

Thoughts are not necessarily true. Like clouds, they come and they disperse...if you have the courage to wait for them to disappear. The course asks people to sit for up to 40 min just focusing on their breathing or body sensations and noticing the thoughts and feelings that come and go. At first it's really difficult because the mind gets bored and starts wandering about, but if you train your attention to stay in one place, the next time you feel hijacked by negative thoughts you can remember how to relate to them differently...and let them go!

Taking mindfulness skills right into your everyday life:

One of the simple practices taught is called 'The 3-minute Breathing Space'.

This can be done whenever you're stressed or anxious. In this 3 step practice, for the first minute you become aware of what's going on in your body and mind. In the second minute you focus clearly on your breath. Then in the third minute you expand your attention to your body as a whole seeing all the sensations within it and then expanding out to listen to sounds around you before you continue with your day or evening.

(Adapted from an article in 'You Magazine' March 2011 by Prof Mark Williams of Oxford University)

Background, Aims and Practices of MBCT/MBSR

MBCT (Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy) is an approach developed in the 90's by three cognitive therapy specialists in an internationally linked programme of research into the prevention of depression. It was developed as an extension of Jon Kabat-Zinn's earlier work on Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in the USA. It is recommended by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) as a means to prevent depressive relapse but is being used increasingly widely with people who experience anxiety and stress.

How MBCT differs from Cognitive Therapy:

Cognitive therapy works through trying to change thoughts and feelings and is mostly done in a focussed, one-to-one therapeutic relationship. *'MBCT discarded the therapy framework to work more fully within a 'Mindfulness' approach which emphasises holding thoughts and feelings in awareness rather than trying to change them.'* (Segal et al, 2002) It aims to help people build their own strategies for staying well, based on skills and practices that are best taught in a group rather than in a one-to-one context.

Core aims of MBCT/MBSR:

To bring a kind and curious attention to thoughts, feelings and physical sensations in order to prevent the automatic escalation of negative mood/ thinking and the repetition of habitual, reactive patterns that restrict choice. Through developing an intention to be present with experience, conditions are created for greater resilience, self-compassion and appreciation to arise.

Core skills and practices:

All revolve around means to become more aware of negative patterns of thought and feeling, so as to 'step out of, and stay out of' them. 'MBCT introduces practices and skills that aim to bring about a different way of relating to experience, replacing an old mode of 'fixing and repairing' problems with a mode of allowing things to be as they are, in order to see more clearly how best to respond.'

How it works:

Since it is often the continued attempts to 'fix', escape, or avoid difficult experiences that keeps the negative cycles turning, the key skill revolves around non-judgemental acceptance. In Jon Kabat-Zinn's words:

'If you learn how to open to thoughts and feelings, and not try to shut them off or change them, you can then taste a degree of freedom, where you are not necessarily plagued by obsessive or difficult thoughts because you know they are just bubbles in the stream of thought, and they are not the reality.'

It's all about noticing patterns of thinking and feeling, and from this increased awareness learning to relate differently to them ...rather than habitually trying to 'fix' them. Trying to 'fix' or change difficult thoughts and feelings can too often be an expression of our anxiety, fear, frustration or denial, and because of this it does not 'work'.

What the course involves: some points to bear in mind

The general approach:

The core of the MBCT approach is *practice* and *experiential* learning. The sessions focus mainly on teaching skills that develop awareness of body sensations, feelings, and thoughts, which are then applied in relation to particular cognitive therapy-based exercises. In each session there will be a mixture of 'skills practice', 'conversation' about this practice and exercises from cognitive therapy. This is not a therapy group so you will not be expected to share details of your personal life. However, you will be in a group of about 10 colleagues, some of whom you may know. At the heart of each group will be a guided mindfulness practice and an opportunity to talk about it. Everything is 'invitational' and you will not be required to speak in the group if you would prefer not to. Often people attending staff MBCT groups want to go on to use it with their own service users.

Scope

Although attending a 9 week course as a participant is the first step to training to deliver MBCT yourself, **the completion of the course does not qualify you to deliver the intervention yourself**. Further training and experience are required to do this. Please go to the Sussex Mindfulness Centre website on: www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/mindfulness to find out more about training in this approach.

Confidentiality

We will let the manager and/or occupational health adviser who signs off your participation in the group know that you are attending a mindfulness group. We will not make any further contact with managers or occupational health unless a staff member is showing concerning signs of distress or vulnerability, in which case we would make your manager an/or occupational health adviser aware of that so that further support can be offered.

Evaluation

We will invite you to complete a pack of questionnaires in the first and last group of the course and to leave us any feedback that you might have about your experience. This information will be collected anonymously and collated centrally by the Research department. If you do not wish to take part in the evaluation, you are free to opt out of it.

Commitment to attend and do home practice

The patterns of the mind that we will be working to become more aware of have often been around for a long time. These patterns are frequently habitual and automatic. We can only expect to be less enslaved to these long established ways of the mind if we put **time** and **effort** into learning new ways. Because of this, the course asks for a commitment of 30 - 40 minutes of home practice per day.

It is challenging to carve out time to do the home practice that is part of this course. It really is worth it though. A useful attitude to adopt is 'I'll give this a go, with an open mind. In order for you to make a decision about whether this approach could be a useful part of your life, you need to engage with it as fully as you can during the course.

A part of each session will be used to reflect on your experiences of the home practice during the week. We will discuss any difficulties that you may be experiencing with the practice – either in getting to do it or things that arise for you during the practice itself. Much of the learning of the course can be drawn from these experiences.

Because each week, new ideas are developed and new practices introduced, which build on the work of previous weeks, we ask that you attend all the sessions. If you know you will miss more than 2 sessions, we suggest you try and find another course that better suits your availability. If there are up to 1 or 2 any sessions you know you will be unable to attend, please let the course teacher know about this in advance.

Facing Difficulties

A central aim of this approach is to learn how to be more fully aware and present in each moment of life. The good news is that this can make life more enjoyable, interesting, vivid and fulfilling. On the other hand, this can mean facing what is present, even when it is unpleasant and difficult. In practice you may find that turning to face and acknowledge difficulties is, in the long run, the most effective way to reduce unhappiness. In this course you will learn gentle ways to face difficulties and will be supported while doing this. It is recommended that you consider the support you can call on during the course (family members/friends/professionals).

The right time

It is generally not advisable to do this course whilst going through the effects of a recent life event, such as a divorce, bereavement or surgery. A dependence on alcohol or recreational drugs is likely to make the course too challenging or ineffective. You should also talk to the teacher of the group about any serious mental health problems. These may not prevent you from doing the course but it is important the teacher know about them so s/he can support you.

Patience and Persistence

Because we will be working to change established patterns of mind, much of the approach will involve investing considerable time and effort, the effect of which may only become apparent later. The encouragement is, therefore, to approach this course with the same spirit of patience and persistence – committing yourself to put the time and effort into what will be asked of you, while accepting, with patience, that the fruits of your efforts may not show straight away.