MINDFULNESS:
An Introduction for Family Therapists

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Agenda

- Overview Mindfulness in Therapy
  - Therapeutic models
  - Outcome research
  - Neurological research
- Introduction to Mindfulness
- Suffering and Mindfulness
- Therapeutic Applications
Mindfulness and Mental Health

Mindfulness

- Meditation technique that has drawn tremendous attention in recent years
- Most closely associated with Buddhism, but virtually all religious and indigenous cultural traditions have some form
- Impressive growing body of research to support clinical outcomes
- Impressive neurological findings also support practice

- Mindfulness approaches have not emphasized Buddhist connection
  - Done intentionally to separate perception of religious practice.

Mindfulness in Therapy

- Mindfulness-based therapies
- Mindfulness-informed therapies
The Original Mindfulness-Based Therapy

- **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**
  - John Kabat-Zinn, University of Massachusetts
  - Behavioral medicine in medical context
  - Intensive 8-10 week course (2-2.5 hours per week with one 6 hour session)
  - Up to 30 participants; very cost effective
  - Includes
    - (a) body scan meditation
    - (b) mindfulness meditation (breath focus)
    - (c) basic yoga positions
    - (d) mindfulness with everyday activities
  - Participants do daily mindfulness practice at home (20-45 min)

Other Mindfulness-Based Therapies

- **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy**
  - Teasdale, Segal, Williams
  - A manualized 8 week group based on Kabat-Zinn’s program.

- **Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement**
  - For non-distressed couples
  - Uses compassion meditations primarily

- **Mindfulness-Based Parenting**
  - Several versions

- **Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness**
  - Address body image, weight, eating habits

- **Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention**
  - Observing urges
Mindfulness-Informed Therapies

• Dialectical Behavioral Therapy
  • Linehan uses mindfulness to help borderline clients work with the most central dialectic of acceptance and change.
  • Evidence-based treatment for borderline personality disorder
• Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
  • Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson encourage clients to recognize an observing self similar to mindfulness meditation.
  • Based in contemporary behavior analysis; do not actually term work as “mindfulness” but use similar principles.

Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Therapies for Couples

• Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy
  • Acceptance of partner added to original Behavioral Couples Therapy to improve long-term outcomes
  • Acceptance mediates link between partner’s behavior and one’s relationship satisfaction and own behavior.
• Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Couples
  • Reduce avoidance of distressing thoughts
  • Become less identified with one’s thoughts
  • Increase commitment to valued life direction
• Mindfulness-Based Couple Enhancement
  • Based on MBSR
  • Emphasizes compassion meditation
  • Shared activity linked to program effectiveness
Mindfulness and Adult Attachment

- Trait Mindfulness
  - Negatively correlated with anxious and avoidant attachment styles
- Anxious attachment
  - More difficult to be non-judgmental
- Avoidant attachment
  - More difficulty with being in present moment
- Increased trait mindfulness
  - Buffers against effects of anxious attachment

Mindfulness-Based Therapies with Children

- Sitting meditation for youth
  - Similar (but slightly smaller) effect size compared to adults
  - Feasible and acceptable treatment
  - Increased focus of research
- Mindful Parenting
  - Several forms, all based on established parenting programs
  - Mindful Parenting focuses on
    - Teaching parents to self regulate
    - Bring greater acceptance and compassion
  - Mindfulness-Based Parent Training focuses on
    - Reducing rigid, “mindless” interaction patterns
Mindfulness for Child and Adolescent ADHD & Conduct Issues

- ADHD
  - Potential to rehabilitate underfunctioning of prefrontal context
  - Teach parents also when work with children under 12
    - Teaching parents alone improved ADHD symptoms
- Conduct and Oppositional Issues
  - Mindfulness
    - Reduced expulsion in one study
  - ACT
    - Focus on accepting emotions, detach from thoughts, and choose action based on personal values
  - MBCT-C
    - Reduces internalizing and externalizing behaviors
Studies on Physical Disorders
- Chronic pain
- Cancer: Psychological, biological, and sleep outcomes
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Epilepsy
- HIV/AIDS
- Psoriasis
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Fibromyalgia
- Organ transplant
- Type II diabetes
- Multiple sclerosis
- Sleep disturbance
- Mixed medical diagnoses

Mental Health Disorders
- Depression/relapse
- Bipolar Disorder
- Anxiety and Panic
- Substance Abuse
- Eating Disorders
- Borderline Personality
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Oppositional and Conduct Issues
- Trauma and PTSD (emerging)
- Sexual Abuse (emerging)
- Psychosis (emerging)
**Emotional Benefits**
- Increased Positive Emotion and Wellbeing
- Reduced Stress
- Increased Emotional Regulation
- Increased Metacognitive Awareness
- Decreased Rumination
- Improved Attention
- Increased Acceptance and Decreased Avoidance
- Clarification of Values
- Increased Self Compassion

**Relational Benefits**
- Increased Marital Satisfaction
- Increased Empathy and Compassion
- Increased Acceptance of Self and Partner
- Increased Awareness of Interactional Patterns
- Increased Ability to Respond with Awareness
- Greater Sense of Freedom and Safety in Relationships
- Greater Sense of Unity and Separation
Proposed Mechanisms of Change

Increased/Enhanced:
• Trait Mindfulness
• Emotional Regulation
• Self-Compassion
• Decentering Relationship to Thoughts (Observing)
• Psychological Flexibility
• Values
• Spirituality
• Working Memory
• Neurological Changes

Your Brain on Mindfulness
General Findings: Mindfulness & the Brain

- Increases left-sided anterior activation, brain pattern associated with positive disposition
  - Effects continue long after practice
- Reduced grey matter density of amygdala (stress response)
- Increase grey matter density of hippocampus (memory)
- Experienced meditators
  - Greater grey matter density in brain stem (relaxation response)
  - Greater grey matter density in prefrontal cortex
  - Improved attentional processing
  - Increased activity in anterior cingulate cortex, believed to govern self-regulation

Stress Response and Mindfulness

- **Stress Response**
  - Amygdala scans sensory data for danger
  - Triggers an autonomic response long before prefrontal cortex has assessed reasonableness of the data
  - Fight, flight, freeze response
  - Prefrontal cortex only part of the brain able to shut off stress response
- **Mindfulness**
  - Increases a person's ability to consciously shut down stress response and invoke relaxation.
Neural Integration
- Dan Siegel proposes mindfulness increases neural integration
  - Correlated with
    - Mindfulness
    - Secure attachment
- 9 Characteristics
  - Body Regulation
  - Attuned Communication
  - Emotional Balance
  - Fear Modulation
  - Response Flexibility
  - Insight
  - Empathy
  - Morality
  - Intuition (Siegel, 2009)

The Brain: An Anticipation Machine
- Mirror Neurons and SIMA (Superior temporal regions; sensory implications of motor actions)
  - Creates a map of “now” by anticipating immediate next-of-now action.
  - Not planning but anticipating immediate next action
  - Violations to this create varying levels of startle to trauma
- Breath Meditation and SIMA
  - By focusing on in-out of breath, the brain enters into a highly integrated state because able to perfectly predict next moment
Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Attunement

- Secure attachment
  - Correlated with integrative neural patterns
- Interpersonal attunement
  - Secure attachment with others
- Intrapersonal attunement
  - Secure attachment with the self
  (Siegel, 2009)

Trauma and Neural Integration

- Trauma
  - Greatly impedes neural integration
- Trauma experience scatters memory
  - Hippocampus unable to develop explicit memory
  - Amygdala “sears” trauma into implicit memory
- Trauma memories stored primarily as implicit memory
- Implicit memory
  - Automatic, little consciousness
  - No distinction of time and place
  - Feels like happening now
- Resolving trauma
  - Link explicit to implicit memory into coherent memory/narrative
  - Mindfulness increases capacity for neural integration
Bottom-Up Processing and Not Knowing

- **Top-Down Processing**
  - Using top 3 layers of cortex
  - Using categories to interpret experience
  - Creates sense of order, consistency, predictability
- **Bottom-Down Processing**
  - Using bottom 3 layers of cortex
  - Use immediate lived experience to generate meaning and categories
  - Encourages openness, flexibility, growth
- **Mindfulness is bottom-up process** (Siegel, 2009)

Mindful Body Scan
What mindfulness meditation isn’t

- Simply a relaxation technique
- Stopping thoughts
- Going into a trance
- Developing special powers
- Running away from reality
- Only for monks

What mindfulness meditation is...

- Careful attention to the moment-by-moment flow of experience – both internal and external
Another layer . . .

- Receptive, non-judgmental and non-interfering awareness

- Seeing “What is” vs. “What I think should be” or “What I want”

The Guest House

Rumi—Translated by Coleman Barks (2003)

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as a unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture, still,
treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.
And another layer . . .

- Mindfulness encourages a shift in focus from the fusing with the content of experience to observing its process.

Inner Witness

- Cultivating an Inner Witness
  - Witnessing automatically generates new perspectives
    - Internal life: emotions, thoughts, body
    - External life: relationships, behaviors
  - As ability to witness one’s life increases...
    - Emotional reactivity (and therefore daily stress) decreases
    - Proactive, responsive decision making increases
    - Reflection on actions, life increases
    - Self Acceptance and Self Compassion increases (greater predictor of happiness than self esteem)
    - Acceptance of Others increases
Mindfulness as Compassion

- Perhaps the most important aspect for Westerners is to practice mindfulness compassionately.
  - This isn’t a competition.
  - You can’t do it wrong.
  - Expect your mind to drift.
- Most Common Pitfall for Westerners
  - Becoming frustrated at self for “not doing it perfectly.”
  - That’s the point: it is a PRACTICE!

How to Add Compassion to Your Practice

- Redirecting Focus Compassionately
  - When (note I did not say “if”) your mind wanders, gently and compassionately bring focus back on breath.
    Options include:
    - Compassionately labeling thought as “worrying,” “thinking,” etc.
    - Visualize thoughts as cloud drifting off or soap bubbles popping
    - Smile to yourself saying “that too” and return to focus
    - Whatever you do, make it a moment of compassion and gentleness with yourself
- The “Therapy”
  - is in the return to focus rather than the sustained focus.
The Bottom Line

- Mindfulness is NOT about changing or controlling your experience
- Rather, it is about changing your RELATIONSHIP to your experience

Suffering 101....
Suffering

• The First Noble Truth
  There is suffering (*dukkha*).
  • Inescapable Forms of Pain
    • Some pain is inherent to the human condition (illness, loss, death).
  • Self-Generated Forms of Suffering
    • However, much of our suffering is created through our *attachments* to ideas, things, and constructs.

Suffering and Attachments

• Attachments and Suffering
  • “My Way or It’s a Problem”
    • When we are “attached,” we insist that life go according to our preferred story.
    • Anything outside of this is interpreted as “problematic.”

• Reducing “Problems”
  • Reducing attachments is the easiest means to reduce self-generated suffering.
Attachment: Content vs. Process

- **Content vs. Process**
  - Buddhists maintain that it is not the particular story (*content*) but rather the **strength of our attachment** (*process*) to it that creates suffering.
  - Ex. Cinderella story: it is not the story or one’s particular interpretation of it but rather the strength of one’s attachment to it that causes suffering.
  - Both the woman who is determined to live the perfect Cinderella story and the one who adamantly fights it are its prisoners.

Resource for Change: Mindfulness

**Mindfulness: Moments without Language**

- **Pure Experience**: Moments of pure experience, those brief moments when the mind is not involved in the construction of meaning.
- **Embodied Knowing**: Mindfulness involves a visceral or “bodied” knowing rather than a more intellectual type of knowing.
- **Freshness in the Gap**: These “un-languaged” moments create space for fresh experience and new ways of relating to our suffering. Interrupts old patterns for relating, which is key to clinical usefulness.
Mindfulness and Non-Attachment

- Mindfulness Cultivates Non-Attachment
  - Non-attachment is *not emotional detachment*.
  - Compassionate Witnessing
    - Instead, it involves being a patient, compassionate witness of one’s experience without judging the experience as good or bad, preferred or not preferred.
  - Non-judgmental
    - The challenge is always *to experience without judgment or interpretation*.

Applications in Therapy
Applications in Therapy

- Teaching Mindfulness in Therapy
  - Mindfulness based therapies
  - Individual therapy
- Indirect Applications
  - Compassion as Therapeutic Stance
  - Befriending the Problem
- Supervision
- Therapist Self Care

Mindfulness-Based Groups

- Mindfulness-Based Groups
  - MBSR
  - MBCT
  - Etc.
- Benefits
  - Generally easiest way to motivate self to practice regularly enough to experience benefits
- Limitations
  - May not be available in area/at location that is convenient for clients
  - Many clients don’t want to take time/money to go
Teaching Mindfulness in Therapy

• More Challenging than Group Format
  • Little sense of community
  • Less “group pressure”
  • More isolated activity
  • Generally, less motivation

• Easier with Couples and Families
  • Have more social reinforcement
  • However, may trigger arguments if not set up correctly

Key Principles for Teaching Mindfulness in Therapy

• Generate Motivation
• Develop a realistic plan
• Keep it small: 2-5 minutes to start

• Teaching the “technique” is actually the easy part
6 Steps for Teaching Mindfulness

1. Identifying Need and Interest
2. Strengthening Motivation
   - Most important part
   - Benefits: disorder, stress, brain, etc.
3. Introducing the Practice
   - In session practice
4. Developing a Practice Plan
   - Start small but regular
   - Handouts
   - Recordings/timers
5. Anticipating Barriers to Practice
6. Fine Tuning and Follow Up

Couples and Families

Typically use *compassion meditation* instead

Common Barriers
- **Differing levels of motivation**
  - How are they going to handle varying levels of motivation or priority-making each day?
- **Differing Schedule/Moods**
  - How will they handle if one person wants to do it one day and the other does not and/or if their practice timeline gets off?
- **General Attitude Toward Mindfulness**
  - How will they handle it if one person is consistently more motivated than another to practice?
Compassion Meditation

Loving Kindness Meditation
Phrases for Loving Kindness Meditation
- May X be happy and joyful.
- May X be free from suffering.
- May X be healthy and in radiant health.
- May X have a sense of wellbeing and live with ease.
- May X be at peace with people in his/her life.
- May X dwell in peace.

X=Persons to Whom to Direct Loving Kindness
- A neutral other (e.g., acquaintance, co-worker)
- Significant others (e.g., partner, family)
- Difficult other (e.g., someone with whom there is conflict)
- Self
- All beings (e.g., everyone)

Counterindications
- Current crisis or chaotic situation
- Lacking sense of ownership of problem
- High conflict couple or family
- Extreme exhaustion or sense of overwhelm
- Active psychosis, mania, or trauma (intrusive memories) symptoms
3-minute Breathing Space
From MBCT
• Three steps
  • Stopping
    • What is my experience right now – thoughts, emotions, body sensations?
  • Gathering
    • Bringing the focus to the breath – observing in and out.
  • Expanding
    • Expand the field of awareness around the breath to include a sense of the body as a whole.

Other Clinical Applications
• Redefining Mental Health
  • Equanimity as goal of treatment
• Therapeutic Presence
  • Compassion
  • Quality of Presence: “Integrated state”
• Befriending the Problem
  • Problem as teachers
In Supervision: Teaching Therapeutic Presence

- Therapeutic Presence
  - “Bringing one’s whole self to the engagement with the client and being fully in the moment with and for the client, with little self-centered purpose or goal in mind” (Geller & Greenberg, 2002, p. 72).

- Teaching Therapeutic Presence
  - Historically: “Personal growth”; personal psychotherapy
  - Mindfulness-Based/Contemplative Approach
    - Students asked to engage in contemplative practice regularly
    - Teach students to use mindful listening with clients
    - Compassion exercises: day-in-the-life and compassion meditation

Self of the Therapist:
Importance of Therapist’s Own Practice

- Mindfulness-Based Techniques for Therapist Self Care
  1. Mindfulness meditation calms and focuses the mind, reducing personal and work-related stress.
  2. Mini-mindfulness exercises can help you get through your work day and feel rejuvenated at the end of the day.
  3. Mindful approach to everyday tasks (personal and professional) reduces stress and allows you to have “a good day” no matter what happens.

- Important to have personal practice before working with clients
Everyday Mindfulness

- Based in the Zen tradition, everyday mindfulness refers to applying mindfulness to everyday activities: “chopping wood and carry water”
- Mindfulness can be applied to all daily activities
  - Eating
  - Exercise and Walking
  - Washing dishes
  - Driving
  - Daily rituals
- Can be done at the office
  - Organizing papers/files
  - Washing hands
  - Straightening desk
  - Walking to meet clients
MINDFULNESS RESOURCES for THERAPISTS


**MINDFULNESS RESOURCES for CLIENTS AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION**


**ONLINE RESOURCES**

[www.dianegehart.com](http://www.dianegehart.com) - Guided meditations, client handouts and educational materials
[www.drericmccollum.com](http://www.drericmccollum.com) – 10 minute guided meditation soundtrack based on the “3 minute breathing space” from Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002
[www.marc.ucla.edu](http://www.marc.ucla.edu): Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA
[www.mbsr.mass.edu](http://www.mbsr.mass.edu): Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
[www.contemplativeprayer.org](http://www.contemplativeprayer.org): Christian Based Contemplative Prayer Information

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