

Bringing Full Attention to the Present Moment

Mindful Counselors Practicing Mindfulness-Based Counseling



Dr. Todd T. Russell

Mindful Agenda

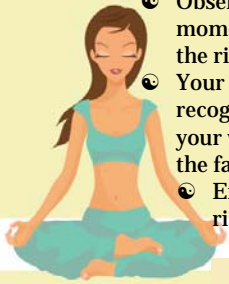
- 🕒 **Overview and Mindful Anticipation** [1:00 - 1:10]
 - ▲ **Mindfulness Practice: Traditional Breath Focus** [1:10 - 1:35]
- 🕒 **Definitions and Origins of Mindfulness** [1:35 - 1:50]
 - ▲ **Mindfulness Practice: Sensory Focus** [1:50 - 2:20]
- 🕒 **Commonalities of Mindful Counseling** [2:20 - 2:30]
 - ⚙️ **Mindful Break** [2:30 - 2:45]
- ▲ **Mindfulness Practice: Compassion Focus** [2:45 - 3:10]
- 🕒 **Overview of Major Evidence-Based Approaches** [3:10 - 3:45]
 - ▲ **Mindfulness Practice: Contemplation Focus** [3:45 - 4:10]
- 🕒 **Questions and Answers** [4:10 - 4:25]
 - ⚙️ **Mindful Closing** [4:25 - 4:30]



Mindfulness Practice

Traditional Breath Focus

- ☉ Choose your posture; relaxed but attentive; eyes gently closed or opened in unfocused gaze
- ☉ Gently place your attention on the in-breath (inhale); then watch how your body automatically releases the air in the out-breath (exhale); just follow the rise of the in-breath and the fall of the out-breath
- ☉ Allow your attention to embrace the rhythmic inhale and exhale; when your mind is somewhere other than on your breath gently and patiently return your focus to the rise of the in-breath and the fall of the out-breath
 - ☉ Observe the travels and wanderings of your mind; notice its moment-by-moment destinations; then lightly and patiently guide your mind back to the rise of the in-breath and the fall of the out-breath
 - ☉ Your breath comforts you and provides your wisdom home base; when you recognize that your mind has drifted or wandered this is true mindfulness; your wisdom home base where you follow the rise of your in-breath and the fall of your out-breath
 - ☉ Embrace each breath in this moment; your wisdom home base is the rise of your in-breath and the fall of your out-breath



Debriefing and Discussion

Personal Wisdom

- 👤 Small group of five or six
- 👤 Briefly share the wisdom of your experience
 - 👤 Discuss your learnings, awarenesses and discoveries
 - 👤 **Simplest** of instructions = **Hardest** of tasks
 - 👤 Appreciate the similarities and the unique idiosyncrasies



Mindfulness



Definitions and Origins of Mindfulness



Wisdom of Simplicity

***Paying attention in a
particular way: on
purpose, in the present
moment, and non-
judgementally.***

Jon Kabat-Zinn

***Attending to the present
moment as it really is and
not what we want it to be.***



Your Mind on Mindfulness

- 📌 Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.
- 📌 When we're mindful, we reduce stress, enhance performance, gain insight and awareness through observing our own mind, and increase our attention to others' well-being.



- 📌 Mindfulness meditation gives us a time in our lives when we can suspend judgment and unleash our natural curiosity about the workings of the mind, approaching our experience with warmth and kindness—to ourselves and others.

It is What It Isn't

- ⊗ Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic. It's familiar to us because it's what we already do, how we already are.
- ⊗ Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do. We already have the capacity to be present, and it doesn't require us to change who we are.
- ⊗ Therapeutic approaches and self-help solutions that ask us to change who we are or become something we're not have failed us over and over again; mindfulness recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.
- ⊗ Mindfulness is more than just a practice; it brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress.
- ⊗ We don't have to take mindfulness on faith; we examine the scientific evidence that overwhelmingly demonstrates positive benefits for health, happiness, work, and relationships.
- ⊗ Mindfulness can lead us to effective, resilient, low-cost responses to seemingly uncompromising problems.



Qualities of Mindfulness

- ॐ We ground ourselves in the present moment through our focus on the breath and grounding in our wisdom home base
- ॐ We accept what is happening in us and around us, whatever it is, we remain open to the experience without judgement
- ॐ We fully connect with our emotional experience without becoming overwhelmed by fight-or-flight reactivity
- ॐ We see how our mind works by learning to watch our thought patterns come and go



Unpacking Mindfulness

- ॐ Paying Attention
- ॐ Present Moment
- ॐ Non-Reactive
- ॐ Non-Judgmental
- ॐ Openhearted



Origins and Historical Perspectives

- ✿ Based on 5000 year old practices
- ✿ Origins of mindfulness in ancient Gurjar and Brahmana traditions and the later teachings of Siddhartha Gautama
 - ✿ *The secret of health for the mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.*
- ✿ Wisdom in dancing with our brain's natural **fight-or-flight** responses



Current Phenomenon

- ☉ In the past decade the word “**mindfulness**” entered the English language lexicon and became commonplace.
- ☉ The emergent phenomenon is both promising and perilous.
- ☉ Our field of counseling has been forever transformed by the mindfulness “*movement*.”
 - ☉ Counseling graduate programs now require course work in mindfulness-based work.
 - ☉ Mindfulness practices and approaches are being embraced by counselors in schools, universities, agencies and institutions.



Empirical Effectiveness

- ⌘ Memory Improvements
- ⌘ Brain Processing Speed Increases
 - ⌘ Measurable Brain Changes
 - ⌘ Healthier Emotional Reactivity
 - ⌘ Relationship Satisfaction
 - ⌘ Self-Efficacy
 - ⌘ Increased Immune System
 - ⌘ Cognitive Flexibility
 - ⌘ Rumination Reduction
 - ⌘ Stress and Anxiety Reductions
 - ⌘ Enhanced Attending
 - ⌘ Reduced Emotional Distress
 - ⌘ Fear and Anger Modulation
 - ⌘ Enhanced Well-Being



Mindfulness Practice

Sensory Focus

- 🕒 Get comfortable and safe in your seat
- 🕒 Close your eyes and imagine that your auditory sense is a radio that can tune in to different stations (you can briefly plug your ears for effect)
- 🕒 Listen to sounds farthest away from you; at the farthest end of this room; elsewhere in the building; or outside
- 🕒 Change the station and listen to sounds closer to you like those around you; the subtle movement of others; their shifting and breathing
 - 🕒 Change the station again and listen to sounds of your body like your breathing; your heartbeat; the whoosh of your blood pressure
 - 🕒 Bring yours attention to each part of your body, starting with the tips of your toes to the top of your head
 - 🕒 Change the channel again and tune into the station that only broadcasts your breathing



Debriefing and Discussion

Personal Wisdom

- ♣ Small group of five or six
- ♣ Briefly share the wisdom of your experience
- ♣ How do they feel now in comparison to when you started this practice?



- ♣ Was it easy to concentrate?
- ♣ What was the easiest part of the exercise?
- ♣ What was the most difficult?

Mindfulness



Overview and Themes of Mindfulness-Based Counseling



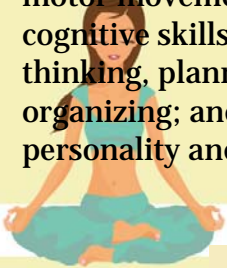
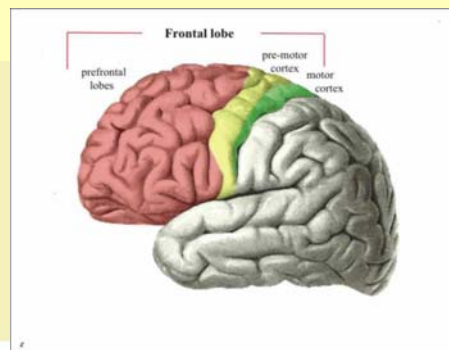
Commonalities of Mindful Counseling

- ✿ Responding instead of reacting to the natural limbic fight-or-flight response; the fight-or-flight response hijacks emotions, behaviors and cognitions
- ✿ Wisdom courage to be fully present with uncomfortable and painful emotions
- ✿ Bringing awareness to the present moment of uncomfortable or painful emotions
- ✿ Existence is impermanent; everything changes; your reactive emotions will change
 - ✿ There is no unchanging ego or self; the self is dynamic
 - ✿ Resisting or avoiding what is actually happening or demanding that things be different than they are creates suffering
 - ✿ Physical pain is an inevitability of long life; suffering is a choice
 - ✿ Letting go of clinging to habitual problem-solving modes and reactions



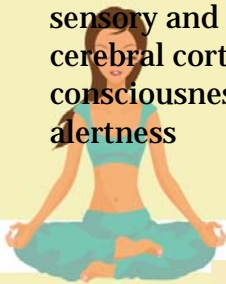
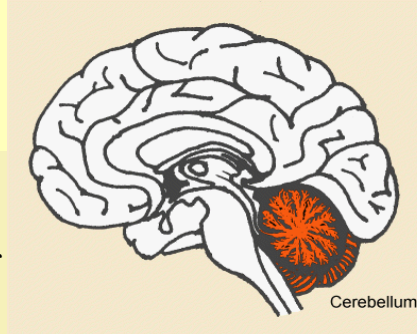
You Can Change Your Brain

- 🧘 Increase in insular cortex is responsible for emotional awareness, self-recognition, music, rhythm, and linguistic processing
- 🧘 Increase in frontal lobe related to initiating and coordinating motor movements; higher cognitive skills, problem solving, thinking, planning, and organizing; and aspects of personality and emotionality



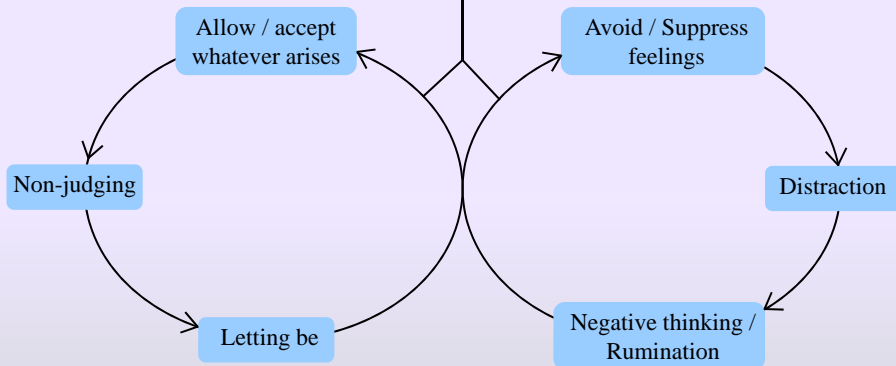
The Fight-or-Flight Dance

- ▲ Increase in cerebellum enhances regulation of emotions and cognitions
- ▲ Decrease in amygdala improves memory, emotional reactions, and stress responses
- ▲ Decrease in thalamus improves sensory and motor signals to the cerebral cortex, and regulation of consciousness, sleep, and alertness



Mindful Response

Hijack Reaction



Silly Monkey Mind

- ▲ Living on “automatic pilot” (*rather than with awareness and conscious choice*).
- ▲ Relating to experience through thought (*rather than directly sensing*).
- ▲ Dwelling on and in the past and future (*rather than being fully in the present moment*).
- ▲ Trying to avoid, escape, or get rid of unpleasant experience (*rather than approach it with interest*).



- ▲ Needing things to be different from how they are (*rather than allowing them to be just as they already are*).
- ▲ Seeing thoughts as true and real (*rather than as mental events that may or may not correspond to reality*).
- ▲ Treating yourself harshly and unkindly (*rather than taking care of yourself with kindness and compassion*).

S.T.O.P. the Wild Mind

- ☉ Stop what you’re doing; put things down for a minute.
- ☉ Take a few deep breaths; inhale slowly and deeply through your nose; exhale completely through your mouth.



- ☉ Observe your experience just as it is; notice the thoughts, sensations, and emotions.
- ☉ Proceed with vision and wisdom.

Mindful Break



Mindfulness Practice Compassion Focus

- Find your seat; take three slow deep centering breaths.
- Place your attention on your breath; follow the rise of your in-breath and the fall of your out-breath.
- Think of a time when you have suffered; gather the memory clearly and vividly.
- Notice how you feel when you remember this event; your thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.
- Visualize golden light emanating from your heart shining on your remembered suffering; with the rise of each in-breath you feel your wisdom; with the fall of each out-breath you feel the golden light emanating from your heart.
 - As you ride the rise and fall, and visualize the golden light of your heart, recite the following mantra to yourself:
 - May I be free from this suffering***
 - May I have joy and happiness***
 - May I be free from this suffering***
 - May I have joy and happiness***
 - Patiently and rhythmically continue repeating these lines to yourself as the golden light emanates from your open heart.



Debriefing and Discussion

Personal Wisdom

- ⊙ Small group of five or six
- ⊙ Briefly share the wisdom of your experience
- ⊙ What kind of sensations did you feel?
- ⊙ How was it to envision your own suffering?
- ⊙ How is this feeling different from when you wished your loved one's suffering to be relieved?
- ⊙ Did you feel warmth, openness and tenderness?



Mindfulness



Survey of Major Evidence-Based Mindful Approaches



Mindful Assumptions

ॐ Mindfulness creates space around our pain, allowing us to work with it without being overwhelmed.

ॐ Insanity = Doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results.



Major Evidence-Based Mindful Approaches

- ⊙ Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (*MBSR*)
- ⊙ Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (*MBCT*)
- ⊙ Dialectical Behavior Therapy (*DBT*)
- ⊙ Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (*ACT*)

⊙ Mindful Therapy (*MT*)

⊙ Problem-Specific Mindfulness-Based:
Eating Awareness, Art and Play Therapy, Relapse Prevention, Relationship Enhancement



Neurological Findings

Participating in an 8-week mindfulness meditation program appears to make measurable changes in brain regions associated with memory, sense of self, empathy and stress.



Mindfulness Meditation

⚡ Informal mindfulness (*i.e.*, “*off-the-cushion*” meditation) is when you focus your mind to your present moment activity and experience.

⚡ Formal mindfulness meditation is daily practice; scheduled time is devoted to practicing mindfulness meditation.



Mindful Mental Health

- ⊗ Mindfulness is the opposite of ruminative thinking; the tendency to dwell on the same thought or theme which strengthens the intensity and frequency of uncomfortable emotions
- ⊗ Mindfulness prompts us to attach labels to thoughts and to detach from the reactivity of emotions. *(You are experiencing an emotion – you are not that emotion.)*
 - ⊗ Mindfulness reminds us that thoughts are thoughts – not facts. *(Don't believe everything you think.)*
- ⊗ Mindfulness teaches us to observe and be aware; instead of clinging or judging.
- ⊗ Mindfulness teaches us self-compassion which enhances our empathy and compassion for our clients.



Mindful Counselor

The mindful counselor or therapist:

- ☉ Cultivates a personal practice of mindfulness meditation
- ☉ Exhibits authentic therapeutic presence
- ☉ Experiences and models self-compassion and self-attunement
- ☉ Demonstrates emotion regulation and dances with the fight-or-flight reactivity
 - ☉ Feels genuine empathy for clients and their suffering
 - ☉ Attends to his/her own suffering, clinging, grasping and habituation
 - ☉ Accepts the realities of life's situations and events
 - ☉ Remains present and accepting of his/her clients



Counseling with ELSA

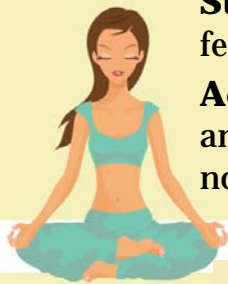
Therapeutic transformation and change occur when the following elements are realized and activated:

Embracing the experience through observations and analyses

Letting go of the neurotic routines

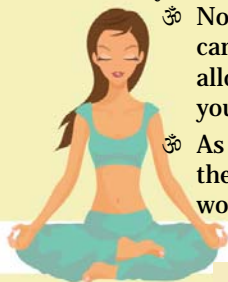
Stopping the repetitious cycle of thoughts, feelings and behaviors

Accepting the realities of human existence and **Acting** in a personally desired, nonjudgmental, and mindful fashion



Mindfulness Practice Contemplation Insight Focus

- ☺ Find your seat; take three slow deep centering breaths.
- ☺ Place your attention on your breath; curiously follow the rise of your in-breath and the fall of your out-breath.
- ☺ Then begin to notice that with your inhale your mind flashes on the events of today; and on the exhale your mind might land on a learning or discovery.
 - ☺ With the rise of your in-breath you allow your mind to examine the events of the workshop; and with the fall of the out-breath you find your mind the treasure you learned today.
 - ☺ Now as your in-breath draws your attention into your body, gently caress your heart and thank yourself for your new discoveries; allow your mind to express its deep and sincere appreciation to you for your courage, patience and engagement.
 - ☺ As we draw the final curtain on the day's events you are aware of the warm and kindness you feel as you head home and back to the world of your life.



Mindfulness



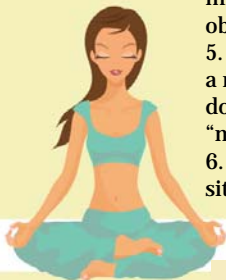
Questions and Answers



Sit and Know You're Sitting

1. Get comfortable with your back straight. Close your eyes and relax. Soften and let go of any tension.
2. Relax into your breath. Find your breath as it actually is without effort or force. Breathing in, know you're breathing in. Breathing out, know you're breathing out.
3. Notice the feeling of breathing. Notice how your body feels as you rise and fall with your breath. Settle in and stay with your breathing. Trust that your breath will find a natural rhythm.

4. If your mind gets busy, don't worry, that's what it's designed to do; remnants of our primitive brain; the chaos we call "monkey mind." Thoughts, images, and sensations will come and go. You observe them without engaging them. Just watch them come and go.
5. Watch what's happening in your mind and body the way you'd watch a movie or a TV show. Notice how the thoughts, sensations and images don't have much mass; no real substance. They all exist to feed the "monkey mind."
6. There is no need to do anything. Let go, settle back, relax your mind, sit and know you're sitting.



Brief Body Scan

- ☯ Close your eyes and bring your attention into your body.
- ☯ Notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the seat or chair.
- ☯ Take a few deep breaths; inhaling brings more oxygen enlivening the body; exhaling brings a sense of relaxing and letting go.
- ☯ Notice your feet on the floor; the sensations of your feet touching the floor; the weight and pressure.
- ☯ Notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, and lightness.
- ☯ Notice your back against the chair.
- ☯ Bring your attention into your stomach area; breathe gentle softness into any tense muscles in your abdomen.
- ☯ Notice your hands; and allow them to soften. Notice your arms; and allow them to relax.
- ☯ Notice your neck and throat; gently relax them.
- ☯ Soften your jaw, and let your facial muscles soften and relax.
- ☯ Notice your whole body in this present moment; be aware of your whole body that supports you day after day.
- ☯ Slowly return your awareness to your breath; take one long slow deep in-breath, hold it for just a second, and that gently allow the breath to leave your body.

