



Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Clinical Care

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- Licensed Supervising Professional Clinical Counselor, Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (IEATA), 500-hour trained yoga teacher
- EMDRIA Certified Therapist/Approved Consultant and Training Provider
- 24 years of experience working in social services and counseling; includes three years in civilian humanitarian (Bosnia-Herzegovina)
- Author of *EMDR Made Simple*, *Trauma and the 12 Steps*, *Trauma Made Simple*, *Process Not Perfection: Expressive Arts Solutions in Trauma Recovery*, and *Transforming Trauma with Jiu-Jitsu*; co-author of *EMDR Therapy & Mindfulness for Trauma-Focused Care* and *Healing Addiction with EMDR Therapy*
- Creator of the Dancing Mindfulness practice and author of *Dancing Mindfulness: A Creative Path to Healing and Transformation*
- Author of *Dissociation Made Simple: A Stigma-Free Guide to Embracing Your Dissociative Mind and Navigating Life* (2023) and *You Lied to Me About God: A Memoir* (2024)
- Interfaith Seminarian, The Chaplaincy Institute

Purpose Statement

Often, mindfulness in clinical and secular settings is seen as a simple relaxation technique. However, this approach misses the historical depth of what mindfulness truly offers: equipping us to be present and responsive to whatever life may bring us.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this course is to give clinicians more historical depth in their understanding of mindfulness that will ultimately allow them to more effectively use, implement, and adapt mindfulness-informed clinical interventions. This course does not encourage you to abandon your existing clinical orientation. Rather, it works with you to implement mindfulness approaches alongside what you already do.

Objectives

1

Define mindfulness from both a spiritual lens and a secular lens.

2

Describe what makes an intervention both trauma/dissociation-informed and mindfulness-informed.

3

Implement at least three to five mindfulness-informed skills in clinical settings that can be woven into many modalities for clinical practice.

4

Address challenges that clients might have in practicing mindfulness-informed intervention through proper modifications and attention to trauma-informed elements of care.

**What is your working
understanding of *mindfulness*?**

(There is no right or wrong answer here, this is simply a
question for your reflection.)

Common Responses May Include:

- 1.** Being in the moment
- 2.** A relaxation technique
- 3.** Here and now
- 4.** Single-pointed awareness and attention

What Does it Really Mean?

- The English term *mindfulness* was first coined in 1881 by an English monk studying in India.
- It comes from the Sanskrit word *smriti*, meaning “awareness,” specifically, “coming back to awareness,” or the “memory of having been aware.”
- It is considered the heart of Buddhist meditation, although other global wisdom traditions have similar teachings on mindfulness approaches and attitude.
- For example, the Rule of St. Benedict (6th c.): *Always we begin again*

Other Definitions

Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the presence of the moment, and non-judgmentally; as if your life depended on it (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2005, 2011)

The self-regulation of attention to the conscious awareness of one's immediate experiences while adopting an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004)

Picturing Mindfulness

- **Reflection:**
 - What makes this a better depiction of mindfulness compared to most of what you find when you conduct an Internet search?



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“You can’t stop the waves from coming, but you can learn to surf.”

–Jon Kabat-Zinn

Research and Writing Collections on Mindfulness

Mindfulness Research Monthly

<https://goamra.org/publications/mindfulness-research-monthly/>

The Greater Good at UC Berkeley

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

Research Summary

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) have the greatest level of support at the randomized controlled study level, primarily for depression and anxiety.
- Veterans Administration/DOD (Lang et al. 2023) guidelines recognize that mindfulness-based approaches can help with distress and are best used as adjuncts to trauma-focused psychotherapies, not as first-line treatments in and of themselves.
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) are two other well-known, evidence-based clinical modalities that significantly incorporate mindfulness.

Recent Data Analyses

- Dou, J., Lian, Y., Lin, L., Asmuri, S. N. B., Wang, P., & Durai, R. (2025). Effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions on burnout, resilience and sleep quality among nurses: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. BMC Nursing, 24, 739. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-025-03101-0>
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Connections to Trauma (as reviewed by van der Kolk, 2014)

Mindfulness: Being able to hover calmly and objectively over our thoughts, feelings, and emotions and then take our time to respond

Connections to Trauma (as reviewed by van der Kolk, 2014)

- Traumatized people are often afraid of feeling—mindfulness practices can help orient them to and ease them into this process by widening sensory experience.
- Practicing mindfulness is calming to the sympathetic nervous system, lessening the destruction of fight/flight responses.
- The practices help to promote distress tolerance as awareness develops that emotional states constantly shift.

Connections to Dissociation (Forner, 2019)

- The mindful brain seems to be more about connection, and dissociation seems to be more about how to survive disconnection.
- In many ways, dissociation is a state of missing mindfulness.
- If someone dissociates often enough, they will become a human being who is phobic of mindfulness.

Trauma-Focused Considerations (Marich & Dansiger, 2018)

- Eyes can stay open.
- Time in the exercise is variable.
- Let people know how long the exercise, specifically the silence, will last.
- Clarify any misconceptions or misinformation about what the terms mindfulness and meditation mean.
- Be open to variations in practice.
- Have your own practice—this will help you to modify if your worksheets seem to fail you.

Meta-Analysis (Addiction Treatment-Related) from Li et al., 2017

34 randomized controlled trials

“Virtually all studies found that mindfulness treatments were associated with superior treatment outcomes at posttreatment and follow-up assessments compared to comparison conditions” (p. 69).

Mindfulness Techniques	Biological Mechanisms	Behavioral Mechanisms	Clinical Outcomes
Mindful Breathing	Amplifying Prefrontal Activation	Restructuring Reward Processing	Decreasing Craving
Body Scan	Increasing Frontostriatal Connectivity	Boosting Executive Function	Reduced Substance Use
Mindfulness of Craving	Decreasing Limbic Reactivity	Strengthening Dispositional Mindfulness	Decreased Distress
Informal Mindfulness	Improving Autonomic Regulation	Reducing Stress Reactivity Decreasing Drug Cue-Reactivity Minimizing Thought Suppression	Enhanced Well-Being & Meaningful Recovery

**“As I breathe in, I know I am
breathing in....
As I breathe out, I know I am
breathing out.”**

Attributed to the historical Buddha

Simple Mindful Breathing Exercise

- Eyes can stay closed or open.
- You do not have to do anything special with the breath.
- Begin by simply noticing the rise and fall of the breath.
- Notice if there is a temperature or a sensation.
- Notice if there is a sound or vibration.

Simple Mindful Breathing Exercise *(continued)*

- See if you can give yourself 30 seconds to start with, paying full attention to the breath.
- If your attention wanders, you have not failed; simply invite the attention back.
- Even your noticing that your attention has wandered is mindfulness!
- Use the saying from the Buddha as an anchor if you need the assist.

Simple Body Scan

- You are invited to sit down in a comfortable way. (NOTE: If it's appropriate for the context, the client may elect to lie down or recline.)
- Feel the rise and fall of your body as you breathe, not changing it, just becoming aware of this movement.
- Start at the crown or top of the head, guide awareness into this space, and take a natural breath. (NOTE: Then repeat the same instruction for the following body parts, giving yourself or the person you are leading time to breathe in each one: forehead, nose, throat, chest center, shoulders, elbows, hands, etc.)

Simple Body Scan *(continued)*

- Work your way all the way down to your feet, then back up to the top of your head.
- After you have spent some time paying attention to each body part, notice what you notice in the entire body, from the top of the head to the bottom of the toes—and from the bottom of the toes to the top of the head.

Body Scan Modifications

- A person may elect to trace an outline of their body if supplies are available, or draw a representation of their body, even if it looks like a gingerbread person! Invite the client to use colors to describe how they experience certain parts or aspects of their body. If tracing the entire body feels inaccessible or inappropriate, you can invite the client to begin by tracing their feet and hands, also using the color to describe their feelings in those parts of the body.
- A moving body scan can be a delightful experience for people who struggle with stillness. As you, the facilitator, call out each part of the body, you can invite them to move it or to wiggle it. Perhaps a natural dance will even unfold for the person.

Mindfulness of Feeling Tone (Adapted for Craving)

- Begin to more carefully track general body sensations, thoughts, and feelings. If you notice a physical sensation, rate it on the scale of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. As you continue to track physical sensations, you might wander toward feelings, thoughts, sounds, and other sensory stimuli.
- Have a goal of beginning to find the rhythm of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral being the one thought you are having in each moment.
- When you consider how you normally experience craving or even being triggered, how does it show up in your physical body? Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?
- What can you do with this information?

**How do you practice
mindfulness in your daily life?**

(This is the essence of *informal mindfulness*.)

Common Responses May Include:

- 1 Washing the dishes
- 2 Taking a walk in nature
- 3 Brushing your teeth
- 4 Chopping vegetable and preparing food
- 5 Dancing and the expressive arts

Self-Assessment Question

Which of the following definitions is the most accurate definition of *mindfulness*, based on what you've learned in this course?

- A. It's a relaxation technique.
- B. It was invited by Jon Kabat-Zinn.
- C. It is the practice of returning to the present moment, without judgment.
- D. It is only practiced by Buddhists.

Self-Assessment Answer

Which of the following definitions is the most accurate definition of *mindfulness*, based on what you've learned in this course?

- C. It is the practice of returning to the present moment, without judgment.**

The Case of Andrea

- A contributor to *Dissociation Made Simple* (Marich, 2023) who lives with derealization (a dissociative disorder)
- “A lot of times after a hard day, I stand outside barefoot, or I walk to a nearby creek to engage in grounding.”
- “I know that nature or animals are real, even if I doubt that other things are real.”

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Thank You!

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You have completed the course: Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Clinical Care

Thank you!