

Facilitator Support Document

Self-Care: Using Mindfulness to Prevent Burnout



FSD

Self-Care: Using mindfulness to prevent burnout

LESSON PLAN INTRODUCTION

In this session you will be providing a general high-level overview of the series, and introduction to you, the Facilitator. You'll share a working definition of mindfulness in the context of caregiving. You'll progress to a group meditation and provide the opportunity to offer feedback and comments. You'll then explain the relationship between mindfulness and self-care, as well as the relationship between self-care and better care. You will facilitate an exercise that offers participants an opportunity to share their experiences with both relaxation practices and how they deal with distraction. After showing a short video, your closing comments should generate interest in practicing at home and interest in other sessions we are running.

SESSION TEACHING OBJECTIVE

Introduce the elements of mindfulness practice, and practical ways caregivers can apply mindfulness in the experience of caregiving. Encourage participants to “practice” throughout the course by simply observing their experience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Participants will be able to offer a basic definition of mindfulness. They will leave with an ability to explain the quality of the attentive mind versus the distracted mind. They will be able to name at least two benefits of mindfulness for caregivers, and create a plan to integrate “mindful actions” into their experience of caregiving.

PARTICIPANT TAKEAWAYS

- Short definition of mindfulness
- Building a mindfulness practice does not need to be complicated or time consuming
- Distraction is not only natural, but common in all aspects of life
- Benefits for care recipient (CR) when mindful actions are used in caregiving

- Basic instructions for sitting quietly and following the breath
- Attention in the moment can be focused on noticing physical sensations, emotions, thoughts and the external environment
- Thoughts can be observed without feeding them
- Ideas for blending mindfulness into caregiving

ACCOMPANYING SESSION DOCUMENTS

- Lesson Plan
- Meditation Script
- Video Script
- Participant Handout

Facilitator Background Notes

- For some participants, learning about mindfulness can be intimidating or off-putting. Acknowledge the varying levels of experience with mindfulness in the room. All approaches (styles, traditions, practices) to mindfulness are welcome. It is helpful to normalize inexperience with mindfulness.
- Mindfulness is a technique that exists in every major spiritual tradition around the world. In presenting mindfulness practices, we look to both spiritual and scientific perspectives on its benefits.
- Definition:
 - Paying attention on purpose to one's present moment experience without judgment.
 - Tracking what is happening right here, right now.
 - A quality of attention that allows one to notice when the mind becomes distracted.
- Mindfulness practice is different from relaxing activities. While mindfulness allows us to reach a more relaxed state, napping, listening to music, taking a walk, etc. should not be confused with mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is a quality of attention that can in fact be

absent from activities that are commonly considered relaxing. Relaxation is good and an important aspect of self-care, however it is not necessarily mindfulness practice.

- Persons new to mindfulness or meditation practice often believe that they should be achieving an “empty mind.” Or, that they should be able to free themselves from distracting thoughts. Actually, mindfulness allows us to notice our thoughts, rather than eliminate them. The brain “secretes” thoughts, plain and simple. It is not possible to stop this process through effort. Mindfulness is about noticing, it is not about the absence of thoughts.
- Without an awareness of what is happening internally, it is easy to get swept up in the physical, emotional, or mental reactions to stressful situations. Reactions that can be characterized as losing it, are good examples of getting swept up; reactions we regret after the fact. When we lose our temper, or express ourselves in an inappropriate way, we probably have not been paying very close attention to our inner experience. Do you have your own examples of getting swept away with reactions to stressful situations?
- There is a growing body of research using standardized mental health measures to assess the impact of mindfulness interventions on general sense of well-being. The findings are extremely promising in demonstrating that mindfulness practices used as interventions do positively impact general sense of well-being by building resilience.
- There is a direct relationship between mindfulness, resilience, and well-being: **Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stressful situations.** It actually protects individuals from adversity and challenging circumstances. A 2015 study looking at the role of resilience in the impact of Mindfulness on life satisfaction showed that it is resilience that is enhanced through mindfulness, and thus improves the sense of well-being and lowers stress levels. Resilience is a mediator in the relationship between mindfulness and well-being. (Personality and Individual Differences 93 (2016) 63-67; Bajaj and Pande) Mindfulness leads to resilience, and resilience leads to a sense of well-being.

Distraction

- The human mind very naturally becomes distracted, or unable to concentrate on what is in front of us. In a culture vying for our attention, our ability to pay attention is diminished. For most of us, about half our time we are experiencing the trait of distraction. We would do well to address this deficit to enhance the quality of our caregiving. Attention makes a difference for us as caregivers, and it makes a difference for those needing our care. The good news is, we can change our brains in regard to attention. Cultivating mindfulness is a practice. We practice and we practice and in this process, we change our brain. The brain

scientists tell us this is neuroplasticity; the brain's ability to form new neural pathways or synaptic connections. Whether our practice is 30 minutes on the meditation cushion in the morning, or three intentional breaths in the midst of a busy day, we practice paying attention.

- A 2015 study conducted by Microsoft, showed that the **average attention span is currently about 8 seconds** (2015, Microsoft Corp.) When we practice mindfulness, we learn to notice when we become distracted, and how to bring attention back to the object we were focused on prior to the distraction. Practicing mindfulness supports focusing on the task at hand. Distraction is exhausting, while presence nurtures vitality.

Integrating practice

- Mindfulness practice does not necessarily mean sitting in a quiet place upon a meditation cushion, though it could. It can be extremely simple; something that can be applied in the midst of an activity, or conversation. It does not matter what you are doing, applying lotion, assisting with feeding, or trying to calm an agitated parent; mindfulness can be applied by offering our full attention to the task. While possibly challenging at first, over time maintaining a state of mindful awareness becomes quite natural.
- The ability to stay in contact with our present moment experience is learned by stopping and taking “mindful moments.” It does take practice. Even long-time meditators have to practice staying mindful. It does get easier over time, however a routine does need to be established.
- It can be helpful to think of mindfulness as an insurance policy. One's caregiving circumstances may get more challenging. The time and attention we devote to cultivating mindfulness today, tomorrow, the next day, will pay off in the future when things get really rough. Build that mindfulness muscle. Whereas we used to get agitated in reaction to a situation, thinking how things might get worse and imagining worst case scenarios, now we can notice this tendency and direct attention to things that are actually true at this very moment. We learn how to be with the challenging situation without the addition of anything extra. Can you think of your own examples of meeting challenging situations with presence?
- Initially, learning how to pay attention to our inner experience can bring up feelings of discomfort. We can begin to notice unpleasant sensations, emotions, or thoughts that we have suppressed or turned away from. Examples are aches or pains; boredom, sadness, or anxiety; and resentment, jealousy or impatience. If this happens, it is best to simply notice

what is happening without the all too common interface of judgment, or an attempt to change it. Do your best to observe with kindness. [For example... Often when I sit, I begin to think of tasks I have not yet accomplished. In the quiet of meditation, I am reminded of what has been either avoided or forgotten. Then, invariably anxiety will follow. While I often get hooked by the thought long enough for the emotion to arise, generally if I can return to the breath, the thought drifts off. If the thoughts return, I work on decreasing the time it takes me to return to the breath again.]

- When we are truly present, we are not lost in what has happened (regret or rumination), or in what will happen in the future (anticipation, dread or anxiety).
- Mindfulness provides a tool to notice what is arising in the moment. This noticing, or tracking, provides for an opportunity to choose a response rather than react automatically. Example: The person in need of our care does something that we find unreasonable. Our heartbeat increases, our body temperature rises, we feel anger and frustration, and our thoughts scream “No!” With a mindfulness intervention, we bring attention to the inner experience. We notice that things have become agitated. We take a couple deep breaths to slow our heart rate. We observe that we are angry and frustrated, so we can see that perhaps it is best to take a moment to let things settle before saying anything. We pause long enough to consider the best response given the circumstances. We choose to *respond*, rather than *react*. This process of calming things down is the bouncing back. We may not be able to change the circumstances we confront, however we can change the way we respond.
- Suggestions for integrating mindfulness into daily caregiving:
 - Set a reminder for a few times a day when you can stop and mindfully take three breaths, noticing how they feel in your body.
 - Each time you walk into a certain room, pause at the doorway and take a mindful breath.
 - Take a minute in the day to close your eyes and listen to everything around you - the sounds, the silence, the hums and the layers of noise.
 - When having a drink of water, or your cup of coffee, can you focus on the experience and how it tastes, how it smells, how the liquid feels in your mouth and how the cup feels in your hand.
 - When standing, bring your attention to your feet and explore the sensation of your feet on the floor.

- Think of your own...

Meditation instruction

See the meditation section in the *Facilitator Best Practices document*

Meditation

- Participant feedback on meditation experience
 - Return to the group and ask for any comments or questions.
 - Some prompts you can use to generate feedback if participants do not have much to share:
 - What did you notice about your experience during the meditation?
 - Did you find the experience pleasant? Unpleasant?
 - Was the meditation easy for you, or difficult?
 - Any surprises you would like to share?
 - Can you imagine yourself doing this at home on your own?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites

- [Getting started with Mindfulness](#), Mindful.org
- [How to Meditate](#), New York Times

Videos

- [Introduction to Mindfulness](#) by Dr Mark Williams, Oxford University (3 mins)
- [The Healing Power of Mindfulness](#) by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1h 52m)

Books

- Hanson, Rick. [Buddha's Brain](#). Berkeley: New Harbinger, 2009
- O'Hara, Pat Enkyo. [Most Intimate: A Zen Approach to Life's Challenges](#). Boston: Shambhala, 2014

Apps

- [Insight Timer](#)
- [Headspace](#)