



Building Professional Excellence- Part 1 Session 6: Mindfulness and Counselor Self-Care

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Corinne Zupko

Question from Danielle Hunt

If the goal is to avoid judging, what then are you supposed to do once you become "aware?" Even in the example of taking out the "foul smelling" trash... isn't recognition of the "foul smelling" trash "judging?" I am having trouble understanding how to be "mindful" versus being in "denial."

Answer from Presenter

Once you become aware, you simply work to stay aware. You fully notice what is coming up for you in your thoughts, your emotions, and your body. Mindfulness is very different from denial. In denial, we're overlooking or ignoring what is actually present. In mindfulness, we are acknowledging and being with what is present. You are correct in that noticing a "foul" odor is more of a judgmental description because it is our evaluation of the scents in the air. Instead of using the word "foul" we might come up with words to describe the smell like musty, sour, pungent, etc. Our brains are designed to judge and categorize, so if we can bring awareness to the fact that we are judging, we are being aware and hence we are not in denial. The concept of "non-judgment" speaks to the practice of letting things be as they are in our present moment awareness.

Question from Brad Thorne

Great research! When it mentions meditation, can that be other meditation methods/focus other than mindfulness or is meditation mindfulness?

Answer from Presenter

The studies I reviewed specifically looked at mindfulness meditation. There is additional research available on various types of meditation like Transcendental Meditation, yoga, Qi Gong, etc.

Question from Rachel Block-Stewart

Can you speak about how you incorporate mindfulness practice with clients? Particularly younger clients.

Answer from Presenter

The most effective way to teach mindfulness is to teach from your own practice. I usually introduce it to clients in a way that would be most meaningful for them. For instance, if they are scientifically minded, I might introduce it by talking about attention training and the benefits to the brain. For younger clients, practices tend to be shorter because children have shorter attention spans. You can teach kids about breathing by having them blow into a pinwheel or breathe with a stuffed animal on their bellies. You might teach them about mindful movement by having them jump over cushions as a "choo-choo train." These are some of the suggested mindfulness activities for kids in the appendix of the following article by Lisa Flook et al. Check it out below for more details on activities for kids. Also, if you search for "mindfulness and kids" on Pinterest, you can find a lot of great ideas.

Flook, L, et al (2010). Effects of mindful awareness practices on executive functions in elementary school children. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 26, 70-95.



The article is currently posted online here: <http://www.stillquietplace.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Flook-Effects-of-Mindful-Awareness-Practices-on-Executive-Function-1.pdf>

Question from Francine Pritt

Can you recommend in the North East a meditation retreat for families, individual or couples?

Answer from Presenter

I am very fond of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts (<http://www.dharma.org/>). It is a silent retreat center with varying retreat lengths, and although most of their retreats are for individuals, I have seen them offer retreats for families or couples. The Omega Institute (<http://www.omega.org>) has great programs as well. There are additional retreat centers that you can find on Google.

Question from Kris Sandra Wheatley

Is there any relationship between the practice of mindfulness and lower cholesterol and or blood pressure levels?

Answer from Presenter

The practice of mindfulness is showing promising results in lowering blood pressure, although more research is needed. See this article from the International Journal of Hypertension for more information:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3303565/pdf/IJHT2012-578397.pdf>

Although many reputable websites report that mindfulness has been shown to lower cholesterol, I have not been able to locate the actual research studies.

Question from Julia Massarelli

Do you consider yoga effective mindfulness meditation? How about exercise: swimming? running?

Answer from Presenter

Regarding yoga, yes and no. In its truest form, yoga and meditation are synonymous. However, in our culture, yoga tends to focus more on body fitness than on mind fitness. Regarding exercise, there are studies that show that it increases telomerase enzymes (it increases telomere length which slows down the aging process) just like mindfulness meditation may. Speaking from personal experience, exercise is not a substitute for the quiet time that I spend practicing being present. However, some people report that they feel like exercise serves that purpose for them.

Question from Denise Latour

Is there an app you would recommend for personal use to meditate and develop mindfulness?

Answer from Presenter

I personally do not have experience with apps, but others have said that Headspace is a wonderful app (<https://www.headspace.com/>).



Question from Jillian Newkirk

Can mindfulness be soundly tied to some of the major religions in case people don't identify with Buddhism?

Answer from Presenter

Yes! There are elements of mindfulness in all spiritual traditions. To give just a few simple examples, in Christianity there is contemplation, prayer, or walking meditation. In Hinduism, there is yoga and yogic meditation. In Islam, there is Sufi breathing and Sufi dancing. In Judaism, mindful blessings are recited before ritual actions and before enjoying food.

Question from Melissa NewMyer

When I think about being mindful 100 percent of the time, it feels exhausting. Doesn't having some auto responses somewhat protective of our cognitive resources?

Answer from Presenter

Of course! The brain has to be selective with the information it takes in otherwise we would be constantly overloaded with sensory stimulation. But many of us don't just tune out unnecessary sensory information. We tune out our feelings, our thoughts, and our experiences by trying to get through one thing and onto the next. This can be very depleting. When we practice orienting our minds to the present, rather than being exhausting, it actually can become quite enjoyable. It is like learning how to become your own best friend. Also, sometimes mindfulness meditation feels more restful and satisfying than sleep.

Question from Mary Blackwood

How can mindfulness be used for couple and family therapy?

Answer from Presenter

I highly recommend that you take a look at this book: "Mindfulness and Acceptance in Couple and Family Therapy" by Diane R. Gehart (2012). Mindfulness techniques can be taught to clients as a means to help them self-regulate, better communicate (for instance, by using the acronym STOP – Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed), and improve their relationships. Mindfulness can also inform your approach to couple and family therapy, even if you do not explicitly teach techniques to clients.

Question from Kathleen Floyd

Can you talk about how we can systemically change the value we seem to have placed on multitasking as a being a desirable skill?

Answer from Presenter

I once heard Janice Marturano, founder of the Institute for Mindful Leadership, say that mindfulness is about debunking the myth of multitasking. Our brains can only do one thing at a time. Through brain-based education, starting at a young age, I believe that we can shift this cultural value. Also, many businesses are finding positive results in their employees from mindfulness training, so change is happening at this level as well. Janice Marturano's institute is working on changing this cultural value by training leaders in mindfulness. Find out more about the Institute here: <http://instituteformindfulleadership.org/>



Question from Blair Baucom

What age range do you recommend doing mindfulness with? I am a school counselor and I am wondering how I could use this with adolescents (middle schoolers).

Answer from Presenter

Mindfulness can be used with all ages. There are many different programs being developed for use with kids in schools. I would recommend checking out the program, “Mind UP” by the Hawn Foundation (available on Amazon) or Mindful Schools: <http://www.mindfulschools.org/>. Activities can include breathing, letting go of judgment and criticism, gratitude exercises (like writing a list of what they are thankful for), taking mindful action in the world (performing acts of kindness for those in need), and turning to their breath to help calm themselves in stressful moments.

Question from Jennifer Batina

Do the benefits of mindfulness apply to guided imagery and guided meditation as well?

Answer from Presenter

Guided imagery is not being as widely studied as mindfulness at the moment. However, there are some studies that show that guided imagery has health benefits as well.

Question from Holly Wilson

Can you recommend where to begin to look for mindfulness training on a professional level?

Answer from Presenter

I highly recommend training through the Center for Mindfulness and University of Massachusetts Medical School. This is the program that was founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Visit: <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>
There are also professional trainings available at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, NY:
<http://www.eomega.org>

Question from Lindsay Nelson

How could you use the mindfulness practice with your own children? I would imagine that this could be used to diffuse tantrums in young children?

Answer from Presenter

Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting is a program that teaches how to integrate mindfulness in parenting. Mindfulness in parenting would benefit you as well as your children. It could help you manage the stress of a tantrum as well as teach your child how to self-regulate. There are three books by Dan Siegel which are worth exploring: (1) Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive (10th Anniversary Edition), (2) The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind, and (3) Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain.



Question from Celena Cordova

I'm a high school career counselor, can you give an example how mindfulness can be incorporated in career counseling with high school students?

Answer from Presenter

See the following question.

Question from Mary Sweeney

What about Mindfulness in Career Counseling?

Answer from Presenter

Mindfulness can be taught as a skill to help one deal with the stress of unemployment, to improve work relationships, to think clearly on the job, to improve focus, attention, and productivity. Mindfulness skills can help people act from a calm place rather than react to stressful circumstances. In interview coaching, you are already using elements of mindfulness in helping clients monitor their posture, their tone of voice, and in helping them to take a pause to think before they respond to a question. For high school students, it can help them reduce stress surrounding the transition to college or the work force. The college admission process is incredibly intense, and students put a lot of extra stress and pressure on themselves. With mindfulness, students can first notice these extra pressures and work to be kinder to themselves.

Question from Marjorie Hendrickson

Do you have a reference for building up the myelin in the brain?

Answer from Presenter

This is from Dr. Dan Siegel's book, "The Mindful Therapist."
Siegel, D.J. (2010). The mindful therapist: A clinician's guide to mindsight and neural integration. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

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