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Bradford Teaching Hospitals **NHS**
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Mindfulness for Health & Well-Being
Psychology Services



Mindfulness Group - Welcome

Welcome to this introductory leaflet about the Mindfulness 8 week programme. If you are reading this, you are probably considering whether mindfulness is something that can help you in your struggles, whatever they may be. We hope that meeting for an introductory session and reading this information leaflet will give you a flavour of what mindfulness could offer, and what sort of commitment this involves.

This course invites you to make a commitment to yourself to engage in the formal and informal practices/exercises each week, paying attention with self-kindness and compassion to discover what happens, even if this feels awkward or deliberate at first. Some patience and persistence is required.

"You can always cope with the NOW, but you can never cope with the future--nor do you have to. The answer, the strength, the right action, or the resource will be there when you need it, not before, and not after."

(Eckhart Tolle)

What will the course involve?

This is an 8 week course which follows a core mindfulness meditation programme. Each week we will be practising different meditations that focus on cultivating different aspects of our attention. This starts with the breath as an anchor for our attention as a way of developing an ability to observe how the mind works. From here it is easier to expand our mindfulness to include bodily sensations, thoughts and other senses such as sound.

The programme provides a structure to guide cultivating mindful awareness. This structure is strongly evidence based out of well-established programmes of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT). The programme includes:

- 8 sessions of mindfulness training, involving meditation practises, videos and discussion. This will be facilitated by two clinical psychologists who will also participate in all aspects of the course. Both psychologists regularly practice mindfulness as part of their lives.
- Weekly assignments to practice in your daily life, which will be supported by hand-outs and a CD with audio mindful meditations for you to use and keep.
- A follow up session to meet together and reflect on your mindfulness journey after the course has ended.

What is Mindfulness?

Put simply, mindful awareness - or mindfulness - is the act of paying attention to the present moment, without judgement.

We are all gifted with an automatic pilot, which allows us to learn from repetition and do everyday things with ease. The downside is we can end up thinking, doing, feeling, eating, without awareness. Take the example of walking down the street – we may find that our minds are anywhere but where we are! We could be thinking about a recent conversation, what we'll have for tea, the jobs that we still haven't done. By contrast, when we are mindful we are noticing that we are walking, we are aware of the noises or the weather, or the feeling of the air against our skin. Mindfulness is therefore a way of learning to switch off this automatic pilot and bringing us back to full conscious awareness. We learn to see things as they are, not as we expect them to be and not getting stuck in past regrets or future worries.

Mindfulness is not about accepting the unacceptable. It is about developing compassionate awareness that will help you to understand what is important to you in life. It will help you to discover for yourself what those things are that need to be changed.

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking out new landscapes but in having new eyes.

(Attrib, Marcel Proust, 1871-1922)

Mindfulness is not a religion. It originated through Buddhism but it is now a scientifically proven method of training awareness. Although many of the practices involve sitting or lying, you will discover that mindfulness can be practised anywhere. It allows us to become more aware of our negative or critical thoughts, and also to discover the positive and enriching. It encourages us to become more patient and compassionate with ourselves.

Mindfulness is not just a good idea "to be less judgemental and be more present", that we can "switch on". It is a way of being that requires practice so that we can re-train the spotlight of attention and switch off the automatic pilot when it is not needed or helpful.

How can it help me?

Learning to pay attention to our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensation in a mindful way helps our ability to manage difficult situations and develop self-compassion. It can help you to cope with stress, anxiety and depression, and physical health. These benefits have been demonstrated through scientific research (see Williams and Penman, 2011).

An incredible finding about mindfulness meditation is that it changes the structure of the brain! An important area of the brain called the insula has been shown to grow and expand; this area is important for our sense of empathy (with others and ourselves). We will talk more about the 'evidence' for mindfulness on the course.