



MoodMaster®

Enabling professionals to deliver world class materials to those who want and need them.

Mindfulness.

Relevant to: Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

Being mindful of what is in you and around you, whilst not necessarily striving to do anything about it.

Mindfulness is currently a very fashionable concept, and rightly so; it is fundamentally quick and easy, with big benefits. Moreover, those benefits are experienced by people with a whole range of problems: depression, anxiety, irritability and various emotional problems. Many books have been written about mindfulness and some of them are excellent, but it is as well not to lose sight of the fact that it is basically a very simple concept and one that is easy to master. Central to mindfulness is the idea that you should be aware ('mindful') of what is going on inside you, and around you, without necessarily trying to influence it. (It is that struggle to influence our distress that sometimes causes more agitation than the distress itself.)

Case Study 1: Chris

Chris describes applying mindfulness with depression. Previously Chris had strenuously fought against depression and, usually, lost. The depression was the victor, and Chris felt worse still. Having been introduced to mindfulness, Chris decided simply to 'monitor' depression levels and frequently found that they were in fact quite low. When they were higher, Chris would still simply monitor them, sometimes giving them a number as in, 'I am 8 out of 10 depressed today'. Interestingly Chris reported that a lot of the 'sting' of the depression disappeared and that, moreover, freed of the obligation to 'Do something about it' Chris found that it was in fact possible to act more often and reduce the depression level.



Case Study 2: Jo

Jo described having lapsed into 'a state of almost permanent anxiety'. In particular, Jo would wake up at 2 or 3am in the night and be 'uncontrollable'. By this Jo meant that heart rate was raised, sweating was evident, it was impossible to lie still, agitation was intense, and thoughts were catastrophic. 'No matter what I do, nothing works!' Jo explained. Introduced to mindfulness, Jo simply watched the agitation when it occurred, so simply monitored the increased heart rate, the sweating etc without trying to do anything about it. 'Miraculously' Jo found that this took most of the agitation out of things so that eventually Jo would go back to sleep again, and, further along, ceased waking in the middle of the night.

Case Study 3: Sam

Sam had always had 'a short fuse'; it had never taken much 'to get Sam going'. Having tried 'all sorts of things' Sam was introduced to mindfulness, took a little while to get used to it, but eventually mastered it. Above all Sam learned to monitor the 'instant-anger' that sprang forward all too often and had led 'like a reflex' to saying things that would have been better left unsaid but, once uttered, could never be withdrawn.

So Sam learned to observe this instant anger springing forward and somehow that very observation usually meant the 'reflex response' didn't happen.

A Happy Paradox

So, to view one's own physical and mental state with the eyes of a dispassionate observer, without any obligation to intervene in any way, is the core of mindfulness. When you master this, (and it is not difficult to do) the happy paradox is that - now knowing that you can easily withstand the distress - you may sometimes choose to intervene to take active and effective steps to reduce it.

TIP: When observing your distress, put a name to it, 'sadness', 'agitation', 'worry' or whatever. Maybe even rate it, e.g. 3/10, 7/10, or whatever.

In-session discussion.

What have been your experiences of actively trying to control distress?

Trying to control distress, failing, and then giving up, feels quite different from never having tried to control it in the first place. ('Dispassionately observing it'). Why should this be?

How easy do you think you will find it to (a) dispassionately observe distresses, (b) put a name to it, (c) maybe even rate it out of ten?

Project:

The project for you to do between now and next time is to practise mindfulness. That is, when you become distressed, simply to 'monitor it with the eyes of a dispassionate observer'. Put a name to it if you can and maybe even rate its intensity out of ten.

Note: doing the projects is very important so you may like to note your observations during the week so that you can report back next week. The group leader will make a point of enquiring how you got on with the project.

TIP: Practise mindfulness (observing, naming and maybe even rating your feelings) even when under little or no distress. e.g. 'bored 2/10'. That way you can become really good at it so that you can do it when you need to do it.

TIP: Mindfulness does not say that you mustn't take other measures to reduce your distress, it simply says that you needn't.

Mythbuster:

"When you get distressed you have to take active steps to reduce that distress." Not true.

It sounds like it should be true, but it isn't. Very often it's best to sit back and observe your distress with 'the eyes of a dispassionate observer'. This is much more sophisticated than it sounds because what you are really doing is allowing your infinitely complex mind and body to sort itself out without any interference.