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MBSR Week 6

Managing Emotions with Mindfulness



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Accepting Difficult Emotions

There are moments in life that are hard, painful, scary and difficult to endure. There are times when we feel anger, anxiety, grief, embarrassment, stress, remorse or other negative emotions. In these trying times we often want to escape the pain, drown it out or push it away somehow. We may begin a mental struggle with the pain trying to mentally talk our way out of it, or we distract ourselves with activities or drown it out with food or drink or something stronger.

All these ways of avoiding pain only perpetuate it in the long run. Avoidance creates suffering and keeps us from living fully this miraculous and precious life that we have. Through mindfulness you can learn to turn your negative emotions into your greatest teachers and sources of strength. How?

Instead of ~~turning away~~ from pain in avoidance we can learn to gently ~~turn towards~~ what we ~~are~~ experiencing. We can bring a caring open attention towards the wounded parts of ourselves and make wise choices about how to respond to ourselves and to life. It's a paradox that we all must understand: It is by turning towards negative emotions that we find relief from them . not by turning away.

Home practice – week 6

1. Practice sitting meditation every other day, alternating on the day in-between with either yoga or the body scan
2. If difficult feelings (such as fear, anger, sadness, impatience or confusion) arise when observing emotions during the sitting meditation, turn to them mindfully with interest and friendliness. Try to be aware of the feelings as clearly and as acceptingly as possible. It can be useful in this context to briefly label the feeling mentally, e.g. ~~my~~ fear+
 - Do the best you can to let yourself feel the emotion in your body, paying particular attention to the belly and chest areas. Observe also the thoughts that arise and that accompany the emotion without pursuing them.
 - If you feel resistance against the emotion, just be with it as best you can at this time and let yourself also feel the resistance physically.
 - Remain mindful and try not to identify with your experiences. It is helpful in this respect to no longer think of the fear as ~~my~~ fear+but simply be aware that fear is present.
 - Observe how all emotions arise, shift in intensity or duration and disappear without you having to do anything. When you experience that an emotion lessens/abates/subsides or weakens, return gently and clearly to awareness of breathing.
 - If a difficult emotion occurs in your daily life, try to pause for a moment. Become aware of how you habitually tend to react to difficult emotions, e.g. judging, repressing, distraction, dramatizing, trivializing, self-pity, resistance, feelings of failure, blaming yourself or someone else.
 - Simply be aware of this process as non-judgmentally as you can. You can then try to be with the emotions as described above. Do you notice any shifts or changes from the way you reacted earlier?
- 3 To prepare for the topic of communication in Week 7, please fill in the communication exercises calendar in the course handbook
4. Read the additional documents.

My best wishes for week 6!



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Homework Record Form – week 6

Record on the Homework Record Form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the homework, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Comments
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	



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Questionnaire on being with challenging emotions

Observe in your daily life the occurrence of challenging emotions and acknowledge them by naming them when they happen. For example: anger, fear, panic, sadness, solitude, rage. Choose an emotion that often recurs and that you find hard or at least not so easy to deal with.

The challenging emotion is:

Body sensations as this difficult emotion appear: (eg: short breathing, chest tightening, palms sweating etc)

Typical triggers for this emotion are: (eg: traffic, my boss, lack of sleep, bad weather etc)

Then direct your attention to the habitual reactions that are involved with this emotion and name them: e.g. trivialising, repressing, emotionally overwhelmed, thinking about the emotion, taking the emotion extremely seriously, making yourself feel bad about the emotion occurring again etc. Please make a note of some of these reactions.

This is how I react:

Then, explore how you behave in order to deal with the emotion, e.g. by smoking a cigarette, working more, talking about it to someone, going jogging, eating etc. Please make a note of some of your behaviour patterns. I then deal with it in the following way:

When you explore your emotions and your reactions to them in this manner, try to do so with mindfulness, without judging yourself. As much as possible, try to take the attitude of a neutral observer. There is no need to change your emotions or your reaction to them. It is more a question of exploring them and becoming acquainted with them.

Source: German Institute of Mindfulness



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Inquiry and Naming: Practices to Dispel the Trance

Sometimes, when our carefully constructed lives seem to be falling apart . when we get a divorce, lose a business, or are laid off, for example . we can torture and berate ourselves with stories about how we've failed, what we could have done better, how no one cares about us. Yet, this response of course only digs us deeper into what I call ~~the~~ the trance of unworthiness. +Distracted by our judgments, we are unable to recognize the raw pain of our emotions. In order to begin the process of waking up, we need to deepen our attention and touch our real experience.

One tool of mindfulness that can cut through our numbing trance is inquiry. As we ask ourselves questions about our experience, our attention gets engaged. We might begin by scanning our body, noticing what we are feeling, especially in the throat, chest, abdomen and stomach, and then asking ~~What~~ What wants my attention right now?+or ~~What~~ What is asking for acceptance?+Then we attend with genuine interest and care, listening to our heart, body and mind.

Inquiry is not a kind of analytic digging. we are not trying to figure out ~~Why~~ Why do I feel this sadness?+This would only stir up more thoughts. In contrast to the approach of Western psychology, in which we might delve into further stories in order to understand what caused a current situation, the intention of inquiry is to awaken to our experience exactly as it is in this present moment. While inquiry may expose judgments and thoughts about what we feel is wrong, it focuses on our immediate feelings and sensations.

It's important to approach inquiry with a genuine attitude of unconditional friendliness. If I were to ask myself what wants attention with even the slightest aversion, I would only deepen my self-judgment. It may take some practice to learn how to question ourselves with the same kindness and care we would show to a troubled friend.

Naming or noting is another tool of traditional mindfulness practice that we can apply when we're lost. Mental noting, like inquiry, helps us recognize with care and gentleness the passing flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations. If I am feeling anxious and disconnected before giving a talk, for example, I often pause, ask myself what is happening or what wants my attention. With a soft mental whisper I ~~do~~ name what I ~~am~~ am aware of: ~~afraid~~ afraid, afraid, tight, tight.+If I notice myself anxiously assuming that my talk will be boring and fall flat, I simply continue naming: ~~Story~~ story about blowing it, fear of rejection,+then, ~~judging~~ judging, judging.+If instead of noting I try to ignore this undercurrent of fear, I carry it into my talk and end up speaking in an unnatural and insincere way. The simple action of having named the anxiety building before my talk opens my awareness. Anxiety may still be present, but the care and wakefulness I cultivate through noting allows me to feel more at home with myself.

The practices of inquiry and noting are actually ways to wake us up to the fact that we are suffering. Caught up in our stories, we can effectively deny the truth of our experience.

I have worked with many clients and students who reach a critical gateway when they finally register just how much pain they are in. This juncture is very different from feeling self-pity or complaining about our lives. It is different from focusing on how many problems we have. Rather, seeing and feeling the degree of suffering we are living with reconnects us to our heart.

Recognizing that we are suffering is freeing. self-judgment falls away and we can regard ourselves with kindness. When we offer to ourselves the same quality of unconditional friendliness that we would offer to a friend, we stop denying our suffering. And, most importantly, as we figuratively sit beside ourselves and inquire, listen and name our experience, we can begin to open our heart in tenderness for the suffering before us.

Source: Tara Brach: Radical Acceptance (2003)



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RAIN Model to work with Difficult Emotions

R.A.I.N. is an acronym developed by Michelle McDonald, a senior mindfulness teacher, to summarize a powerful way to expand self-awareness.

R = Recognize: Notice that you are experiencing something, such as irritation at the tone of voice used by your partner, child, or co-worker. Step back into observation rather than reaction. Without getting into story, simply name what is present, such as ~~%~~annoyance, ~~%~~thoughts of being mistreated, ~~%~~body firing up, ~~%~~hurt, ~~%~~wanting to cry. +

A = Accept (Allow): Acknowledge that your experience is what it is, even if it's unpleasant. Be with it without attempting to change it. Try to have self-compassion instead of self-criticism. Don't add to the difficulty by being hard on yourself.

I = Investigate (Inquire): Try to find an attitude of interest, curiosity, and openness. Not detached intellectual analysis but a gently engaged exploration, often with a sense of tenderness or friendliness toward what it finds. Open to other aspects of the experience, such as softer feelings of hurt under the brittle armour of anger. It's OK for your inquiry to be guided by a bit of insight into your own history and personality, but try to stay close to the raw experience and out of psychoanalyzing yourself.

N = Not-identify (Not-self): Have a feeling/thought/etc., instead of being it. Disentangle yourself from the various parts of the experience, knowing that they are small, fleeting aspects of the totality you are. See the streaming nature of sights, sounds, thoughts, and other contents of mind, arising and passing away due mainly to causes that have nothing to do with you, that are impersonal. Feel the contraction, stress, and pain that comes from claiming any part of this stream as ~~%~~or ~~%~~me, ~~%~~or ~~%~~mine+. and sense the spaciousness and peace that comes when experiences simply flow.

And whatever ways we work with the garden of the mind . pulling weeds and planting flowers . will be more successful after it R.A.I.N.s.

Source: Rick Hanson: Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom



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The king who found it easier to live with his difficulties

There is a story told of a king who had 3 sons. The first was handsome and very popular. When he was twenty-one, his father built him a palace in the city in which to live. The second son was intelligent and also very popular. When he became twenty-one, his father built a second palace in the city for him. The third son was neither handsome nor intelligent, and was unfriendly and unpopular. When he was twenty-one, the king counsellors said: %There is no further room in the city. Have a palace built outside the city for your son. You can have it built so it will be strong. You can send some of your guards to prevent it from being attacked by the ruffians who live outside the city walls.+ So the king built such a palace, and sent some of his soldiers to protect it.

A year later, the son sent a message to his father: %cannot live here. The ruffians are too strong+. So the counsellors said: %Build another palace, bigger and stronger and twenty miles away from the city and the ruffians. With more soldiers, it will easily withstand attacks from the nomadic tribes that pass that way+. So the king built such a palace, and sent one hundred of his soldiers to protect it.

A year later, a message came from the son: %cannot live here. The tribes are too strong+. So the counsellors said: %Build a castle, a large castle, one hundred miles away. It will be big enough to withstand attacks from the peoples that live over the border+. So the king built such a castle, and sent five hundred of his soldiers to protect it.

But a year later, the son sent another message to the king: %Father, the attacks of the neighbouring peoples are too strong. They have attacked twice, and if they attack a third time I fear for my life and those of your soldiers.+

And the king said to the counsellors: %Let him come home and he can live in the palace with me. For it is better that I learn to love my son than that I should spend all the energy and resources of my kingdom keeping him at the distance!+

The story of the king holds an important lesson: it's often far easier and more effective in the long run to live with our difficulties than to pour resources into battling and suppressing them.

Source: Mark Williams and Danny Penman . Mindfulness, a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world.



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The Guest House

This being human is a guest-house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,

still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you
out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

-Rumi,

Translated by Coleman Barks and John Moyne
in the Essential Rumi



Communication Exercises

Describe the communication. With whom? Subject?	How did the difficulty come about?	What did you really want from the person or situation? What did you actually get?	What did the other person(s) want? What did they actually get?	How did you feel during and after this time?	Have you resolved this issue yet? How?

Source: *The Stress Reduction and Relaxation Handbook*
(Center for Mindfulness and Stress Reduction Clinic, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester)