

## MBSR Orientation Class Notes East Coast Mindfulness Summer 2024

Mindfulness is the **awareness** that arises from paying attention **on purpose**, in the **present moment**, and **without judgment** in the service of **self-understanding** and **wisdom**.

--Jon Kabat-Zinn

Attention is a finite resource that, during our waking hours, is always operating at 100% capacity. However, we spend much of our lives not utilizing our attention intentionally. On average our minds are wandering 50% of the time as we operate on autopilot, lost in thought and disconnected from ourselves, our experiences, and the people in our lives. Mindfulness is an innate capacity that allows us to live our lives differently.

Mindfulness Practices cultivate the capacity to:

- Focus attention intentionally
- Notice when attention is not where you meant it to be and bring attention back (Notice and recover from mind wandering)
- Observe what is arising in the moment-to-moment experience of the mind/body—sensory information, body sensations, thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Awareness)
- Observe what is arising in moment-to-moment experience without automatically reacting to it (Non-reactivity)

Formal and Informal Mindfulness Practice

- Formal mindfulness practices are practices that we engage in for the express purpose of cultivating greater mindfulness. Some examples of formal practice included in the MBSR curriculum are body scan, sitting meditation, walking meditation, and yoga.
- Informal mindfulness practices are day to day activities that offer opportunities for practicing mindfulness. Some examples include eating, speaking, listening, taking a walk, showering, and exercising.

Some Things Mindfulness is Not

- A relaxation technique
- A method for controlling or stopping thoughts
- A method for controlling or stopping sensations, feelings, or emotions
- Positive thinking
- Avoidance
- Escape
- Passivity
- A Self-improvement Program

The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Course

- Developed by Jon Kabat Zinn at University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness in 1979
- Systematic and intensive training in mindfulness meditation and mindful movement
- Experiential Group Learning
- Curriculum designed to guide participants in the “how” of learning to practice, and the “how” of integrating mindfulness into their lives
- Provides a structured pathway to increase wellbeing for participants facing a range of challenges and stressors
- Recognizes present moment awareness as a necessary foundation for positive health behaviors, psychological and emotional resilience, and wellbeing
- Scientifically validated/evidence-based



### Some Potential Benefits of Participating in MBSR

- Improved ability to focus and sustain attention
- Improved awareness
- Decreased reactivity
- Improved emotional regulation
- Opportunity to discover new ways to cope with existing conditions—pain, illness, stress, challenging thoughts, and emotions
- Increased capacity for better self-care

### Some Potential Risks of Participating in MBSR

- Learning is non-linear; challenges can worsen at first, or it might seem like nothing is “happening” at times.
- Experience of emotions can become heightened.
- You may discover things about yourself that you don’t like.
- You may feel challenged at times.
- You may feel more stress while taking the course due to adding an additional commitment to your life.
- There may be physical risk associated with movement practice.

### Guidelines for Working with Challenges

An important aspect of this course is learning new ways of responding to things that are challenging. In light of this, it can be helpful to consider this model which depicts challenges encountered during meditation on a continuum from "none" to "too much".



- In the center zone, the experience is largely pleasant and there is very little challenge. This is the zone where things feel dreamy and one might drift off to sleep.
- In the middle zone, the experience is characterized by some degree of unpleasantness and discomfort, but the challenge feels workable. This is the zone of learning and growth.
- In the outer zone, the experience is painful, overwhelming, or triggering, and too much to work with. During the course we will discuss a number of strategies for how to respond when you encounter this, but the commonality of all of these strategies will be to move away from what feels unsafe and towards something that feels safe and supportive.

## Participant Responsibilities

- Commit to attend all sessions, engage with assignments, and practice meditation daily. Benefits are dependent on consistent engagement and practice.
- Utilize the meditation guidance provided by your teacher for assigned practices.
- Include one's life as an essential part of the curriculum.
- Practice self-care at all times.
- Commit to the co-creation of a supportive space for group learning that includes:
  - Respect for the confidentiality of everyone in the group
  - Sharing from one's own experience and not from what one has read, heard, or "knows" outside of their own experience
  - Refraining from advice giving and the inclination to rescue or fix another
  - Speaking one at a time and refraining from crosstalk

## Zoom reminders:

- Webcams: We will keep webcams on with natural or blurred backgrounds to support a sense of community.
- Chat: The chat will be available for you to communicate directly with your teacher in the event that something urgent arises during class. You do not need to wait for a response for the teacher to take care of something that you need to take care of.
- Virtual Raised Hand: We will not be using the virtual raised hand during this course.

## Course Materials

The Weekly Assignments and supporting documents will be emailed to you after each class. These will also be posted on the Course Webpage along with recorded guidance for the meditation practice. The Course Webpage address is:



<https://www.eastcoastmindfulness.com/Summer-2024-MBSR-Course/>

## Class Make-up Policy

- While missing even one class of this experiential course is not ideal, in the event that you must miss one class, you will be given access to the Zoom recording of that one class.
- In order to stay current with the weekly practice assignments, you will be asked to view the recording, practicing along, within 48 hours of the missed class.
- After viewing the recording, you will be asked to email a couple takeaways from the class to your teacher.

## Get ready...

Adding an hour of practice to your already busy schedule will be challenging. Here are things you might consider around practice:

1. **When will I practice?** This may be the same time each day or a different every day, depending on your schedule and responsibilities. It's best to set aside some time each day rather than hope to "find" time.
2. **Where will I practice?** It can be helpful to choose a place in your home that you are least likely to be distracted or interrupted that you can make your designated practice space.



3. **Who do I need to tell so they can support me?** Talk to the people in your life who might support you during this course. This may include anything from watching the kids while you practice to taking on some additional responsibilities around the house during the 8 weeks so you can carve out the time you need. It may be just giving yourself the privacy you need to practice.
4. **What obstacles might I face?** Consider what might come up for you that would keep you from practicing and how you will meet that. This can include everything from an ill parent who is depending on you to just knowing that you have difficulty keeping in a routine. Approach obstacles with self-kindness, considering what is best met with discipline and what is best met with flexibility.

### **Get set...for next week:**

- Wear comfortable clothing.
- Items to have with you: water, yoga or exercise mat, and a couple of blankets or pillows.
- Arrive early enough to “check your tech” before class starts. The Zoom room will be opened 10 minutes before class.
- If something unexpected comes up and you will be late or will miss class, email me at least 10 minutes before the start of class.

### **Go!**

Get some raisins! See you next week for Class 1!

