

Grounded in the Present: Benefits of Mindfulness Practices for Those in Helping Professions

MARY STANTON, M.Ed., LADAC
ROBIN RETTMER, LISAC
Amity Foundation
Circle Tree Ranch
(www.circletreeranch.org)
Tucson, Arizona

A World in Crisis

- We live in a world of increasing alienation, disconnection, and fragmentation
- We bear witness to the pain of others day after day
- Mindfulness techniques have been found to contribute to personal and professional healing.



Global Challenges

- Advances in technology designed to “connect” people have resulted in increased isolation, loneliness; declining relational skills
- Loss of non-verbal cues impacts emotional communication; fundamental need to “feel felt” is unmet
- Social Networking and Virtual Communities
 - Blogs, Twitter, My Space, Facebook
 - Loss of interpersonal relational skills
- Socially isolated individuals are at a higher risk for depression and suicide

Professional Challenges

- The accumulated exposure to trauma, pain, and distress in working with others carries with it consequences including:
 - Burnout
 - Compassion fatigue
 - Vicarious trauma
 - Feelings of being underappreciated and overwhelmed
- Impact on the therapeutic relationship
 - The “energy of the healer” is critically important
 - There is a direct relationship between the therapeutic relationship and treatment outcomes

Personal Challenges



- Lack of balance, integration, and harmony in our personal lives impacts us physically, emotionally, and spiritually
- Lack of awareness of our own emotional baggage can unpredictably interfere in our relationship with self and others

Personal Challenges

- Feelings of inadequacy resulting from early life experiences often result in unhealthy coping strategies: resistance, denial, perfectionism, self-judgment
- *Shifting perspective and making sense of our own life history is an essential starting point for creating nurturing, secure relationships*



Mindfulness: A Definition

- Synonyms of “Mindful”: alert, astute, attentive, aware, careful, heedful, thoughtful, wary, watchful, and wise
– J. I. Rodale (1978)
- Mindfulness in education: open minded and avoiding premature closure of possibilities
– Ellen Langer (1997). “Mindful Education”
- Contemplative usage:
 - “A state of awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally to unfolding of experience moment by moment.”
– Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005)

The Challenge of Non-Doing

- We live in a driven, goal oriented society
- Value is placed on being productive; on “doing” rather than “being”
- The *goal* of mindful practice is simply *mindful practice* – it is not about going anywhere or doing anything



The 3-Minute Breathing Space Meditation Practice



Compassion



“Act as if you always had compassion, and then you will find you always did.”

~Bob Aitken Roshi

Mindful Awareness

- Mindful awareness helps us to identify leftover, unresolved issues, and approach them with compassion.
- Mindfulness Practices provide a means of tuning into our physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences as they unfold moment by moment in response to life's challenges.
- Reflecting on emotionally significant themes, past or present, and integrating them into our self-understanding, allows those around us to experience their own emotional worlds without restrictions or fear.

A Mindful Approach to Areas of Difficulty

- Being fully present through mindful awareness training has been demonstrated to be a crucial factor in giving us resilience to face challenges that arise in our daily lives.

~ Daniel Siegel (2010)

- We develop an “approach” state: moving toward rather than away from difficult situations.

~ Davidson, et al. (2003)

Mindful Presence: A Courageous Discipline



“We have to face the pain we have been running from. In fact, we need to learn to rest in it and let its searing power transform us.”

~ Charlotte Joko Beck

The Gift of Presence

- Every day we miss opportunities for making true connection with others
- Instead of listening empathically and responding appropriately, we respond from our own point of view and fail to make a connection to the other person's experience.
- Mindfulness techniques improve our ability to separate our own issues, thoughts, and emotions from those of the other person.

Presence

“The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.”

~Thich Nhat Hanh



Presence is not Passivity

- We recognize that often we have to intervene, sometimes rather forcefully in people's lives----but being aware of who we are and where we are coming from will help us not to be reactive and to do this appropriately.
- We often are working with groups, not just the "therapeutic dyad". In these situations it is essential to be centered and aware of the entire group dynamic.
- Presence allows us to "meet people where they are", both confronting and supporting.

*"People need both. It is the sound of two hands clapping."
~ Betty Dederich*

The Loving-Kindness Meditation Practice



Attunement

- Attunement requires focused attention on something or someone outside of ourselves and taking that essence into our internal world
- Interpersonal attunement
 - Taking in the internal world of other people and allowing them to shape who we are in that moment
- A simple but challenging practice
 - Letting go of our internal notion of what should be and remaining open to what is

~ Daniel Siegel (2010)

Creating Sanctuary

- Our job is not to be the one who knows everything --- It is to be present, attuned, and open
- Through presence and attunement we provide the sense of safety and security necessary to build trust
- As each person attunes to the other, a deep feeling of coherence, resonance, and harmony is established
 - Feeling felt, heard, and seen
 - A genuine sense of care and interest develops



Respond with Kindness and Compassion

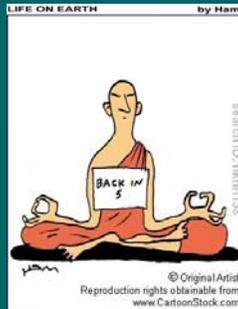
- Non-Verbal Cues
 - Relaxed, Open Body Posture
 - Facial Expressions/Eye Contact
 - Respectful Movements
- Accepting, non-judgmental presence
- Empathize with feelings
 - Empathy ~ being sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another without the person directly communicating these feelings.
- Provide authentic evidence that we are changed in the moment because of another's internal world

Practicing Attunement

Returning to the
Loving-Kindness Meditation
And listening with an
open heart

Personal and Professional Benefits of Mindfulness

- Caring for ourselves is an essential daily practice – not a luxury
- Self reflection is not selfish – without it we become limited in how we can care for others.
- Taking brief periods of time to reconnect to the present moment throughout the day helps us to “reset”, improving our ability to focus our attention.



Resiliency:

A Benefit of Mindfulness

- Resilience is the ability to bounce back after experiencing disappointment, stress, or trauma
 - Adapting to changing circumstances
 - Responding positively to difficult situations
 - Turning the most difficult or traumatic experiences into constructive ones
 - Using coping strategies and problem-solving skills effectively to work through difficulties

Resiliency

- Resilience is the ability to learn and grow through the positive and the negative experiences of life.



Factors That Contribute to Individual Well-Being

- A Holistic Approach
 - **Self Image:** sense of self, including self-esteem secure identity, ability to cope, and mental health and well-being
 - **Behavior:** social skills including life skills, communication, flexibility, and caring
 - **Spirit:** sense of purpose, including motivation, purpose in life, spirituality, beliefs, and meaning
 - **Heart:** emotional stability, including emotional skills, humor, and empathy
 - **Mind:** problem solving skills, including planning, problem-solving, help-seeking, and critical and creative-thinking.
 - **Body:** physical health, physical energy, and physical capacity

Mindfulness:

An Ancient Practice Becomes an Innovative Solution

- Mindfulness practices enhance self-efficacy, self-knowledge, self-care, and wellness.
- Changes in brain, mind, body & behavior result from the daily discipline of mindfulness meditation, influencing emotional, mental, social, and spiritual health.
- Personal and collective transformation is possible when individuals, families, and communities become more mindful.

Implementing Mindfulness in a Therapeutic Community

- The Therapeutic Community provides an ideal setting for practicing and teaching Mindfulness techniques
 - Whole person approach to treatment
 - An environment that fosters trust, where new values can be formed
 - Responsibility is developed by teaching people the ability to respond without impulsivity.



Implementing Mindfulness in a Therapeutic Community

- “Community as Method” -George De Leon (2000)
- All members of the community work to develop healthy behavioral patterns which expand both mind and spirit
 - Faculty serve dual roles as role models and counselors
 - Example: As faculty members integrate mindfulness in their personal lives, they model the benefits for others.
- Emphasis on peer accountability and mutually supportive relationships
- Community folds around the person, and changes to keep current and innovative

A Mindful Community

- Imagine for a moment what a “Mindful Community” would look like; feel like...
 - Within our family, neighborhood, work place
- Building healthy relationships and stronger families
 - Mindfulness improves skills in areas such as parenting, communication, relationships, money management, stress management and coping skills.

A Mindful Community

- Encouraging healthy lifestyles
 - Promote regular exercise
 - Provide continuing education opportunities
- Building community cohesion
 - Communities that work together and work towards common goals have a greater sense of optimism and morale.
- Building safe and healthy environments
 - Communities that are safe and secure are more likely to manage difficult circumstances positively.

Mindfulness: Professional Development

- Amity Foundation provides the opportunity for all members of our faculty and staff to participate in Mindfulness-Based Courses.
- Participants report:
 - Mindfulness practices have facilitated empathic attitudes among Circle Tree Ranch Practitioners.
 - Mindfulness practices increase self-care and decrease the tendency to take on others' negative emotions.
 - Self-care trickles down to improve the quality of other relationships, reducing "burn-out".

What We Have Learned

- When we began integrating Mindfulness practices in the Therapeutic Community we did not consider the personal benefits or the impact on the community as a whole.
- Faculty report an increased capacity to cope with stress, improved focus, and a decrease in feelings associated with "burn-out".
- Residents report a calm, accepting, non-reactive environment which creates the necessary sanctuary for personal growth and healing.



Mindfulness: Professional Training

- Amity offers professional training and retreat opportunities at our Circle Tree Ranch Campus in Tucson, AZ.
- Course objectives:
 - To develop and deepen personal mindfulness-based meditation practices
 - To understand course curriculum and discuss methods for course implementation in a variety of settings
 - Explore techniques for facilitating mindfulness courses through practice and feedback sessions



Summary

- We encourage others in helping professions to incorporate mindfulness practices and to experience the personal and professional benefits.
 - Mindfulness practices assist in developing:
 - Presence - a gift to ourselves and others
 - Attunement – creating the sense of safety, security and trust necessary to build healthy relationships
 - Resilience - facing challenges that arise in our daily lives
 - Caring for ourselves as an essential daily practice

*Thank you for your participation.
Let us know how it works for you!*

Contact Info

Mary Stanton, M.Ed., LADAC

mstanton@amityfdn.org

Robin Rettmer, LISAC

rettmer@amityfdn.org

Amity Foundation

Circle Tree Ranch

Voice 520-749-5980

Enrollment 1-800-381-3318

Fax 520-749-4852
