

**ASCO<sup>®</sup>**

# Resilience Skills Training Program

## Session 4: Using Your Attention Mindfully

## Facilitator Guide

### SESSION 4: Using Your Attention Mindfully

#### Key points:

- You've learned about using your strengths, noticing your activation, and noticing cognitive distortions. Throughout our discussions we have considered the mindfulness. Today we will focus solely on its application as a means for moment to moment awareness and its shift to an accepting stance when in the midst of pain. The point of mindfulness is **not** zoning out—it's shifting from a doing mode into a being mode. We hone a continuous awareness of moment-by-moment sensation.

#### Timetable & Talking Points:

00:00 – 00:10 **Check-in** = What happened when you paid attention to cognitive distortions? Pairs for 3 minutes then highlights from the group. Or simply group discussion.

00:10 – 00:20 **Reflect** = The moments when we most benefit from mindfulness is when we are overwhelmed or feeling pressed upon. We discussed our ability to step back and observe as the cornerstone of mindfulness. We drop into the moment and simply observe what is there. No judgment, just an awareness with an accepting stance (which does not mean approval, but rather awareness of what is happening now). For example, you might find yourself feeling something negative, like judging yourself or a worry that the nurse you just spoke with disagrees. You would notice these experiences and reassure yourself: You might say, "it's OK, whatever I'm experiencing, it's already here, it's OK."

00:20 – 00:30 **Learn** = Mindfulness, as we discussed in prior modules, allows us to practice paying attention to ourselves and our experiences. Think of it like snorkeling: instead of exploring sea life, you are noticing thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and body sensations. Like snorkeling, you stay "in the water" (or experience) and you observe. You don't get pulled under by any one observation nor do you jump back into the boat afraid of what you see. "It's OK, whatever it is, it is already here, I will take care of myself here." From this approach we are more aware of our feelings about a situation and we can think of what steps might be most effective next. Mindfulness helps us deal with what is present, not what we think or wish should be present. (Note: if mostly novices, 5 minutes is fine for [Mindful Breathing Exercise](#) on pages 5-6.)

#### What is mindfulness?

- "Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally"—from Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the pioneers of mindfulness. Another definition: mindfulness is the gentle effort to be continuously present with experience.
- Myths about mindfulness:
  - Mindfulness is taking a time-out. In reality, it's not about escape. It's a practice of paying **closer** attention, i.e., dropping into the moment.
  - Mindfulness is for people who are naturally relaxed. In reality, it's a skill for all of us, because we all have naturally busy minds that think all the time. We over think, we are working as a species on coming back into awareness through our senses.
  - People who practice mindfulness are like that all the time. The truth is that even people who practice have mindless moments.
- An important feature of mindfulness is that one observes thoughts and feelings **without** doing anything to change them, elaborate on them, stop them, or alter them. This practice is simply observational. It is a practice about 'being', and in that way is very different from the 'doing' that we are involved with most of the day as clinicians.

#### Why is this worth a try?

- Mindfulness does something that changes the way your brain works. The act of focusing your attention on awareness of your body, or your breath, or washing your hands, improves your ability to focus—it enhances the stability of your mind.
- Several research studies indicate that changes occur in as short as a two-week period, and that there is a dose effect—the more you do every day, and the longer you do, the more benefits you get. But even a very short dose—3 minutes or even 3 breaths can be beneficial.
- The more you have had a regular practice of some kind—and these can be things you do in the course of the day like mindful sitting (waiting for a conference to begin), walking (between patient rooms), washing your hands (see <https://www.bmj.com/content/352/bmj.i13.full>), eating—the more easily you can use mindfulness to change what you are feeling when you are challenged.

00:30 – 00:50 **Try** = [Experiential exercise]. A brief mindfulness practice – aim for about 10 minutes since we have been reviewing mindfulness throughout. We recommend using a guided meditation, such as one of the exercises available in this packet or those available on:

- The Headspace app (<http://headspace.com>)
- The Buddhify app (<https://buddhify.com/>)
- The 10 Percent Happier app (<http://www.10percenthappier.com/>)

After the guided meditation, debrief: What observations did people have? Allow for whatever is observed as valid. Help everyone accept that the mind wanders, “the heart beats and the brain thinks, it is what minds do, so the goal is not to only focus, but rather notice when one wanders and gently come back to the exercise.” You could also ask: who had trouble with this? How could you introduce and practice mindfulness in your daily life, (e.g., morning meditation, or use doorways as a cue to come back into yourself, practice a three-minute mindfulness when you sit at your desk, etc. or incorporate and use this during your day (washing your hands, opening a door, walking to a room)?

00:50 – 00:55 **Prep** = Learning partners. Try using the 3-minute mindfulness break on your own: <http://cdn.franticworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Three-Minute-Breathing-Space-meditation-from-book-Mindfulness-Finding-Peace-in-a-Frantic-World-128k.mp3>

00:55 – 00:60 **Check-out** = “One word”

## Additional Resources

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### 10-minute meditations (that you can start free)

- <http://headspace.com>
- <http://10percenthappier.com>

### Podcast: Dan Siegel interviewed about burnout, empathy, and compassion & mindfulness

- <http://thedoctorparadox.libsyn.com/dr-dan-siegel-on-empathy-compassion-in-healthcare>

### A nice 3-minute guided mindfulness session

- <http://cdn.franticworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Three-Minute-Breathing-Space-meditation-from-book-Mindfulness-Finding-Peace-in-a-Frantic-World-128k.mp3>

## Handout: Optional Guided Meditation Exercise – *Five Minute Mindful Breathing Exercise*

<https://healthypsych.com/5-minute-mindful-breathing-exercise/>

1. Find a comfortable and stable posture either sitting or lying on your back. Allow your back to be straight but not rigid. Let your arms and hands rest in a relaxed position.
2. Pause here and after each subsequent step.
3. Close your eyes, if it feels comfortable. If not, soften your gaze.
4. Bring your attention to the present moment by noticing how you're feeling physically. Scan your body from head to toe and consciously try to let any tension slip away. Take a moment to notice your environment – any sounds you might hear in the background, what the temperature feels like in the room.
5. After that, bring your attention to your breathing from three vantage points:
  - First, notice the sensation of your breath going in/out of your nostrils or mouth.
  - Second, as you breathe, pay attention to the rise/fall of your chest.
  - Third, notice the rise/fall of your belly as you breathe.
6. Pick the vantage point that seems to be the easiest for you to focus on. Follow the breath for its full duration, from the start to finish. Notice that the breath happens on its own, without any conscious effort. Some breaths may be slow, some fast, some shallow or deep. You don't need to control the breath, you just need to notice it.
7. If you find it helpful, you can say "1" to yourself on each in-breath and "2" on each out-breath.
8. Each time your mind wanders away from the breath (and this will happen many times!), notice where it goes and then gently bring your attention back to the feeling of the breath going in and out.
9. When the mind wanders, you can make a mental note of it. For example, if you drift away from your breath to thinking about the future, you can say to yourself "planning, planning." If your mind is pulled to a sensation of pain in your body, you can say to yourself "pain, pain." Or, if you notice you're focused on something worrisome from the past, you can say "worry, worry" and then gently bring your attention back to the present moment – noticing the breath.
10. Your mind may wander hundreds of times or more during these 5 minutes – that's ok and quite natural! Your "job" is to catch yourself when you've wandered and to gently bring your focus back to the breath every time, without judging yourself for how "well" or "poorly" you're doing the exercise.
11. Try to practice this exercise for 5 minutes (or longer if you'd like) every day, for at least one week. Notice how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath.

## Handout: Mindfulness Exercise Debrief

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1. Try the brief mindfulness exercise (you instructor will guide this).
2. Write a few bullets about what happened during the exercise? (e.g. I was fidgety, my mind kept going back to my to-do list, I remembered something I had forgotten about)
3. What did you notice after the exercise—how you are right now? (e.g., no different, more centered, more emotional). Be careful not to judge these insights, feelings, or thoughts. Just write them down.
4. Spend a few minutes discussing what you wrote with a partner. Your instructor will tell you how much time you have