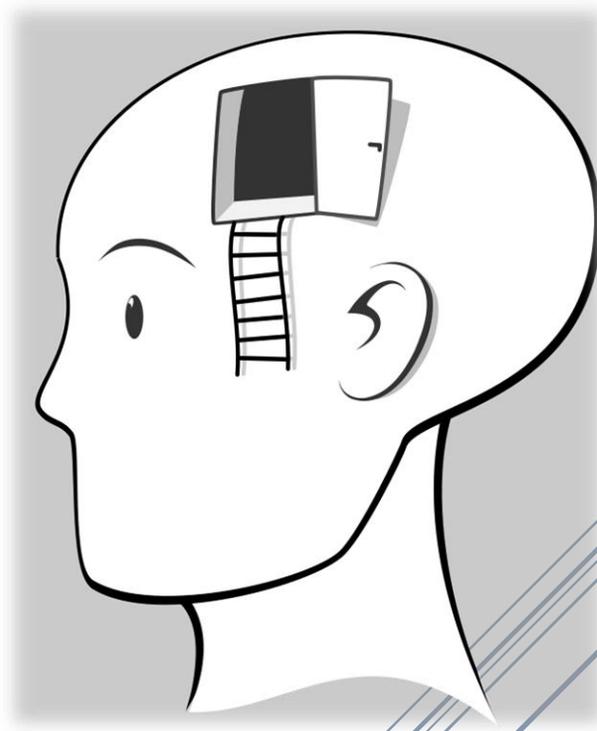


MINDFULNESS

Leader's Guide



Area 8
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Leader's guide

Needed:

2 handouts (1 per member)

A box of raisins

Mindfulness – The Act of Being Mindful

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the intentional awareness of our self and our surroundings. It is the act of becoming more aware of sights, sounds, feelings, smells and thoughts. Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, in the “here and now”, with a non-judgmental attitude.

Introduction

Technology has made it easier than ever to fracture our attention, but at the cost of being unable to fully inhabit the place where we are or want to be. Mindfulness says we can do better. It is a method to cope with and reduce, anxiety, depression and stress. There are multiple pathways to achieve mindfulness and each one is personal. What works for one may not work for another. We are going to discuss 3 pathways in this lesson, the path through mindful breathing, the path through mindful movement, and the path through mindful eating.

Some think of Mindfulness as just another fad. But there is research behind the practice of Mindfulness that indicates numerous health benefits. The practice of Mindfulness has been found to decrease anxiety, depression, ADD, substance abuse and grief. It is now a growing part of formal psychotherapy. It has been proven to improve the quality of life while living with back pain, heart disease and other chronic illnesses. It can help people find meaning in their lives and their jobs. It has been proven to improve memory and concentration. Chronic pain sufferers have reported less pain, diabetics have reported having better control over blood glucose levels, people sleep better, and lowered blood pressure and cholesterol have been reported by people who practice mindfulness.

There are interesting findings that mindfulness meditation actually appears to change the physical structure of the brain which changes our capacity for managing stress. Studies using a PET scan have shown repeatedly that mindfulness training can lead to brain changes consistent

with more effective handling of negative emotion under stress. These changes endured for at least 4 months.

Personal Stress Barometers (handout)

Stress is often the root cause of not being mindful. We have to be able to notice our symptoms of stress, before we can address them.

You can't change if you don't notice how it feels when you are stressed. Share with members the handout titled, Personal Stress Barometers. Give members time to circle the cues that apply listed in the first box and to add their own personal signals in each category. Then ask them to share their signals.

Learning mindfulness begins with the foundation of recognizing our personal cues. Any stress cue, whether it is a physical sensation or an emotion, thought or behavior can remind us to move into mindfulness, a nonjudgmental way of noticing our reactions. The first step is to notice our stress cues, which can be signals for us to take a breath and move into a mindful practice of breathing.

Mindful Breathing

One thing we can consciously control is our breathing. To illustrate this, we will take about 5 minutes to simply pay attention to the breath.

Activity

Say the following to your members to gently lead them through this breathing exercise. Speak in a low, soft voice to create an atmosphere of relaxation:

Please sit in a comfortable upright position, uncrossing your legs, placing both feet on the floor. Keep your back straight and let your shoulders drop. Take a deep breath and close your eyes.

Gently guide your attention to the natural rhythm of your breath in your chest and belly. Simply notice the breath as you breathe in.....and out.....an in.....and out. There is no need to make your breath faster or slower, deeper or shallower. Just allow your breath to do its thing. Focus on the sensation of the air moving in and out of your lungs as you continue to breath.

As thoughts come into your mind and distract you from your breathing, simply acknowledge them and send them on their way, and return to focusing on your breathing. Notice the rhythm of your breathing, the rising and falling of your chest and belly and the air moving in and out of your lungs. Notice if you start judging yourself, "I can't do this", or, "I'm not doing it right". Your

job is to simply notice the distraction and then gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Breathe in.....and out.....in.....out.....in.....out.....in.....out.

Now gradually bring your attention back to the room. Slowly open your eyes and notice your surroundings. Do they look or feel different? Did you notice any changes in your breathing as you become more mindful? Was this exercise easy or difficult?

Some will find the exercise easy and others will have struggled. Encourage everyone to share, but assure them that neither is right nor wrong, but more about the level of mindfulness that exists within us. Some may have to work harder than others.

As your breath slows, your heart rate and blood pressure drop. Practicing mindful breathing for even 3 to 4 minutes daily can have great physical and mental benefits, but the recommendation is to practice 10 minutes a day. You may have to work up to this. Think about how, when or where you might be able to incorporate this breathing exercise in to your daily routine.

Mindful Movements

Another area of mindfulness is of our movements. How aware are you of your body, your movements? Do you notice how your arms hang, your feet position themselves when standing. How aware are you of your posture and when it causes discomfort or even pain?

Activity

Repeat each step 4 times.

Step one: As I lead you through this activity of mindful movements, notice the quality of the movement, do these slowly and stay aware of your breath. Begin by standing straight, feet slightly apart. Arms are straight in front and down, with palms facing down. Keeping palms down, inhale as you move your arms shoulder height. Exhale as you move your arms back down, keeping palms down. Enjoy the movement and be aware of your breath.

Step two: Begin with arms straight down and palms together. Inhale as you lift your arms as high as possible over your head. Exhale as you lower arms to the beginning position.

Step three: Start with your fingertips on your shoulders with elbows to the side. Breathe in as you unfold your arms straight out to each side. Breathe out as you refold your arms in and bring your fingertips back to your shoulders.

Step four: Begin with your arms straight down with palms together. Inhale as you bring your arms above your head. Exhale as you break hands apart, moving arms down each side. Bring hands to rest at hips. Reverse the circle.

Step five: Exhale while slowly bending forward and down, hands facing the ground. Inhale while slowly rising and bringing hands over your head.

Mindful Eating

In this fast paced world, sometimes we throw down our food without even tasting it. This habit can lead to many physical problems, at the very least indigestion. Enjoying our food and becoming mindful of it can aid in digestion problems and other food related health issues, such as reflux or irritable bowel syndrome. This next activity will give you an opportunity to experience what mindful eating should feel like.

Activity

Give each participant a raisin. Ask them to hold it in their hand and look at it. Really look at it. Notice its color, its texture, its size. Look at its wrinkles, one by one. Are they different? The same? Now put the raisin in your mouth. Roll it around on your tongue for a minute. Notice its size in comparison to your tongue, notice its shape, its texture. Now bite into the raisin. Notice its flavor. Feel the inside texture with your tongue and how it is different from the outside texture.

You have all eaten a raisin before, but this time was different. This time it was mindfully. Have participants describe the experience.

What You Can and Cannot Control (handout)

There are always things beyond our control. Mindfulness practices can't change what is out of our control, but it can help us to manage the stress and related issues that come with losing that control.

Pass out the Handout entitled What You Can and Cannot Control. Have members read each statement and circle the items they believe they can control. How did they score? Were they surprised? Were there some members who felt they could control a situation others could not? Ask for volunteers to tell why or why not they can control a particular situation and how they could do it.

Conclusion

We have more control over our lives and events than we think we do. We are happiest when we have ways to connect within ourselves and re-establish a sense of balance. Our mental, emotional and physical health suffers when we lose that connection while being busy with projects and life responsibilities. A simple practice, a change in habit can be so powerful as to help us achieve that balance and lead a happier, healthier life. **CHOOSE** to notice. **SHIFT** to gentle acceptance. **PRACTICE** daily tuning into mindful awareness.

Personal Stress Barometers

When we notice our personal signs of stress, we have an opportunity to change the way we respond to things that bother us. Circle the cues in column 2 that you have noticed lately in yourself. You can use column 3 to add your own personal signals in each category.

	Circle the cues you have noticed	Add your own personal signals
My Body	Change in appetite, headaches, muscle pains, tired feeling, sleeplessness, colds, upset stomach, rashes or hives, pounding heart	
My Thoughts	Forgetful, confused, can't concentrate, mind races, bored, spaced out, negative thoughts	
My Feelings	Anxious, edgy, sad, frustrated, mood swings, irritable, worrying, discouraged, cry easily	
My Relationships	Want to be left alone, lonely, resentful, nagging, distrust, clamming up, lowered sex drive, anger outbursts	
My Spirituality	Feel empty, loss of meaning, feel unworthy, doubtful, feel used, uncaring	
My Behaviors	Smoking more, increased use of medicines, drinking more alcohol, fics, yelling, slamming doors, having accidents	

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