

Relaxation/Coping

Department: Counseling and Recreation

Priority: Elective

Overall purpose of class:

Relaxation Students learn to sit quietly applying mindfulness-based meditation methods to reduce stress and deepen relaxation. This is an extraordinary and extremely popular class where students have the opportunity to get in touch with silence in order to become aware of breathing in response to anxiety, stress and fear. Students have the opportunity to genuinely and accurately experience and explore their feelings, some for the first time. Many students repeat this class as often as their schedule allows. Several have gone on to take the Mindfulness Meditation class offered at the local hospital and paid for by some insurance companies.

Number of classes held per week:

The class is offered once a week.

Optimum class time:

Morning

Instructor requirements:

Counselor with training in Meditation and Stress Reduction

Number of students:

Up to 20

Student ability range and limitations:

Wide range of abilities possible. However, fairly high level cognitive skills allow students to get more out of class. Expressive language can be impaired.

Space and Equipment requirements:

- Room that will accommodate 15-16 people.
- A minimum of 10 very comfortable chairs and space for 5 wheelchairs
- Television with DVD player
- Video capability to capture discussions of topics that will help other students.

Student Needs to be met from the perspective of the instructor:

Need for stress reduction and in-depth exploration of feelings.

Typical Student Goals that lead to placement in the class:

Students who have goals of greater understanding of their emotions and to reduce stress take this class.

Suggested Lessons and Activities:

There are at least 10 minutes of silence in every session. Occasionally a guided meditation is offered. Classes are based on the work of Jon Kabot Zinn as adapted for the program by Dr. Robert Stahl. The following was written by Dr. Stahl when he was serving as a counselor at the Center:

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction and the Stress of Illness

Introduction: The stress of living with illness can have a profound effect upon one's inner and outer life. The very way we perceive ourselves, our self-esteem, our interpretation of the world and meaning in life can be enormously challenged. I have had the privilege and honor in working with hundreds of people living with Acquired Brain Injuries, M.S., Parkinson's, Strokes, and various Neurological and Orthopedic conditions. I have had the unique opportunity to work with an innovative paradigm using mindfulness-based stress reduction, as an adjunct to educationally oriented rehabilitation for students at the Cabrillo College Stroke Center. Having seen students experience deeper levels of understanding and compassion, I am convinced of mindfulness-based strategies in being of vital importance in educational and medical settings. In this short summary below three areas will be presented with an annotated bibliography at the end.

What is Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction? The practice of mindfulness has its historical roots in early Buddhism. It is a specific practice of noticing what is occurring in the present moment and acknowledging it. The practice consists of paying close attention with non-judgmental awareness and inquiry and beginning to recognize the underlying habitual patterns of the body, sensations, emotions/feelings, and thoughts. By seeing the mind and the body more clearly the participant can then begin the process of awakening (getting off automatic pilot) and live more fully in the here and now. In the last twenty-five years there has been a growing interest in the connection between the mind and body and its relationship to stress. Out of this research an innovative program was pioneered and developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D. at the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Clinic from the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, it is called "Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction". The program gained national and international attention when it was featured on the Bill Moyers series, "Healing and the Mind." Currently, there are hundreds of health care professionals who are either in the process of developing mindfulness-based stress reduction programs or making therapeutic use of its applications around the world. Mindfulness-based stress reduction is designed for participants who are experiencing stress in their daily lives and want to promote healthy living. It is also designed to complement the medical management of chronic or acute medical conditions such as: A.B.I., AIDS, Arthritis, Asthma, Cancer, Chronic pain, Fibromyalgia, G.I. disorders, Heart disease, Hypertension, Migraines, M.S., Panic/Anxiety Disorders, Parkinsons, Sleeping disorders, Strokes, and various Neurological and Orthopedic conditions.

The Importance of Mindfulness in Rehabilitation: I would love to see the day when mindfulness-based strategies are implemented as part of the curriculum in the various disciplines in medical schools, from preventative medicine to rehabilitation. Because of my work at the Cabrillo College Stroke Center, I am particularly interested in seeing Occupational, Physical, and Speech therapy schools implement mindfulness-based strategies in the classroom, on the field, and in the clinic. It is my observation that although rehabilitative therapists are trained in the latest techniques and modalities for both physical and cognitive components in therapy, there is an important use for mindfulness-based strategies in working with people living with various neurological and orthopedic disorders. The role of paying close attention to what one is feeling (physically and emotionally) is little understood in the larger context of rehabilitation and for its potentials in the healing process. The words healing and curing are often used interchangeably in the medical world. It may be useful now to define some important philosophical distinctions between these two terms. Curing has to do with the ability in fixing a medical condition. For example, when a patient breaks a leg, and the M.D. straightens it out, places it in a cast and hopefully the damage repairs itself back to normal. Healing on the other hand takes on the possibility that people can be whole, whether living or dying. That even in the face of a life-threatening illness or living with chronic pain or a stroke that has caused extensive physical impairment one may learn how to live with greater harmony and meaning. Mindfulness practice teaches a way of learning to see the world from a wider and broader perspective. The emphasis on mindfulness-based stress reduction is teaching participants skills to take more responsibility for their health and wellness. To help participants cultivate deeper levels of understanding and compassion in relation to their conditions and become more responsible and active in the management of their health. This may even reduce the physical and mental stress as a contributing factor in dis-ease. By cultivating the practice of non-judgmental awareness and acknowledging it, one can begin to develop problem-solving strategies and seek new options. When one begins to deal with their challenges rather than suppressing them, there may be a quicker recovery of mental equilibrium and homeostasis.