

## **You asked? We answered!**

### **Q&A from CDP's Introducing Service Members and Veterans to Mindfulness webinar**

#### **How do you get a client interested in mindfulness practice**

*I don't think there is any special technique or guidance when it comes to building motivation for mindfulness practice. My approach is to help my clients recognize instances when they are not oriented to the present moment, contact the costs of that orientation, and then offer opportunities to practice skills that can help them to reorient themselves. I think it is really important to avoid presenting mindfulness as something that is exotic. Choosing simple practices such as breath awareness are usually best. Also, emphasizing the main goal of mindfulness is key: reorienting to the present moment. We want to make sure NOT to set up expectations that these practices are going to necessarily result in feeling calm or changing the CONTENTS of a client's experience.*

#### **Is this something you should use in one of the first few sessions or wait until you have built some rapport?**

*It seems to me that building rapport and introducing RPM/mindfulness aren't mutually exclusive tasks. In fact, part of introducing mindfulness is making the case to the client that their experience of being pulled out of the present moment by their private events is a common part of the human experience. Listening to your client, reflecting back their experience, and checking in to see if your sense of their experience rings true are all part of the process of introducing mindfulness. Appropriate self-disclosure about your own experiences of being disoriented from the present moment can also be helpful in building rapport.*

*In terms of when to introduce mindfulness/RPM, I think it's more important to have a clear understanding of the processes that are likely to be addressed by RPM rather than considering where in the sequence of clinical interventions these interventions "fit." In other words, being able to notice when your client is having trouble being psychologically present is probably more important than trying to figure out if you should introduce RPM in session 2, 3, etc. It's also important to remember that RPM interventions are scalable. A very brief breath awareness intervention or guided meditation to help the client "get in the room" could be appropriate within minutes of starting an intake session or a lengthy whereas a length, "eyes closed" session to target the same process could be more appropriate for a later therapy session.*

#### **I have a background in MBSR but am not certified. I think training or certification in MMFT might be helpful for an Active Duty Population. I can't find the manual or any trainings. Any leads?**

*Dr. Amishi Jha and her colleagues are doing some great work with MMFT and mindfulness in the military in general. Her website would be a great place to start <http://www.amishi.com/lab/>*

#### **How would you have clients practice basic mindfulness interventions between sessions?**

*Keeping practice simple and consistent is key. I would probably start with something like practicing breath awareness for 10 breaths once a day. Consistency is more important than length. Also, make sure*

*to manage expectations and to clearly explain the goal: to reorient to the present moment. Your client may find that the contents of their experience in the present moment are not pleasant. Often, this is the case if they are avoiding something important.*

**Would you recommend biofeedback as an adjunct to reorienting to the present moment (RPM)?**

*In general, I think that you want to present these interventions as simple, non-exotic skills that are portable and have enough flexibility that they can be used in all sorts of different life circumstances. I'm not sure if hooking a client up to various machines during mindfulness practice sends the right message.*

**How do you address the charge of cultural appropriation (often heard among college students)? The idea of borrowing traditions from a culture that is not your own. I have quoted a professor "everything in human knowledge is fair game" but they are quite resistant to trying anything "different"**

*Western mindfulness practices have been adapted from an East Asian, Buddhist tradition that is over 2600 years old. The term "mindfulness" is a shortening of the name of a core Buddhist teaching from the Noble Eight Fold path where it is known as "Right Mindfulness." Right mindfulness, along with Right Effort and Right Concentration, make up a triad of three aspects of Buddhist meditation. This is just one part of the Buddhist path which also includes a specific worldview, psychology, ethical system, etc. Complicating matters further, it would be more accurate to say that there are "Buddhisms" which include two major sub categories (Mahayana and Theravada) which also include many different traditions. Theravadan traditions are chronically older than Mahayana traditions and are most closely linked to cultures within the Indian Subcontinent and South East Asia (e.g., Tibet, Indonesia, Thailand). Mahayana traditions are related to Theravadan traditions in many ways, but include elements of Taoist and Confucian philosophy as well as Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese cultural traditions. In the last 100 years, teachers in both the Theravadan and Mahayana traditions have begun spreading their practices and traditions to the west. Most notably, Tibetan and Indian Theravadan schools have become more popular through Shambhala centers and the Insight Meditation Society, and Mahayana traditions (mostly Japanese Soto and Rinzai zen) have found a growing following with zen centers in almost every major city in America. It's important to remember that mostly all interest in applying mindfulness to mental health issues was born out of the personal experience of Western researchers/mental health professionals with East Asian Buddhist traditions. The interesting thing to note about Buddhism's/mindfulness's journey from West to East is how flexible and adaptable the core traditions, practices, and teachings are. Ancient Indian and Chinese cultures were vastly different as were Chinese and Japanese cultures, yet Buddhism was able to move between these cultures and find relevance in the context of the new culture. You could say that each culture to be exposed to Buddhist ideas "appropriated" the ideas, practices, traditions that fit best for the needs of that culture while maintaining a healthy respect for the larger tradition.*

*So, long story short, I would say that the history of Buddhism is a story about finding a balance between preserving the core traditions while adapting them enough to make them relevant to the culture in which those traditions are being practiced. Buddha himself is credited with saying, "I teach two things: suffering and the cessation of suffering." The core of those teachings is the practice of meditation, the realization that all beings are intimately connected, the compassion that arises from the realization of*

*that connection, and skillful acts to relieve suffering when possible. Western, secular Buddhism will not look exactly like Japanese Buddhism or Chinese Buddhism or Indian Buddhism (all of which look different for each other). In my humble opinion, this is necessary for the core teachings to remain relevant and to survive.*

*And if your client is very reluctant to practice mindfulness/RPM because of their beliefs, I would move on to something else.*

**I have witnessed issues with the term "Power-Breathing" There seems to be some resistance due to the concern of Eastern Religious inculcation. The specific focus being on "Emptying" oneself and opening themselves to spiritual influences that oppose the traditional (shall we say) Christian traditions.**

*This is a great illustration of concept creep. Many, many things are included under the umbrella of mindfulness these days. Although I am not familiar with "power-breathing" specifically, I think that putting the word "power" in the name of a practice sets up the participant with some unhelpful expectations.*

*Much of the resistance to mindfulness/meditation techniques due to concerns about religious incompatibility is, frankly, born out of a gross misunderstanding of words like "emptiness" and even the nature of Buddhism as a religion. Ironically, a main focus of Buddhism is to hold all beliefs lightly. In fact, Buddha's last words were, "Be a lamp unto yourself," reflecting the notion that each person should explore and discover the truth about their lives in their own, personal experience. Mindfulness practice is "about" clearly seeing what is there in one's experience. Nothing more, nothing less. If what is there are Christian ideals and beliefs, then perhaps mindfulness practice will help that person have a greater sense of choice and agency to manifest those beliefs. I would add that Roshi Robert Kennedy (Jesuit priest and zen master) has written several great books about the compatibility of zen/Buddhist practice with Christian teachings. Of note, one of the largest "branches" of the White Plum Asangha of Zen Buddhism has many, many lay Christian teachers. My sangha, for example, (Clare Sangha) in Baltimore was actually founded by two a catholic nuns. Food for thought.*

*That said, I'll echo the last sentence of my response to the preceding question:*

*And if your client is very reluctant to practice mindfulness/RPM because of their beliefs, I would move on to something else.*