

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression Relapse Prevention

Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013). Copyright by The Guilford Press.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is designed to help people who suffer repeated bouts of depression and/or anxiety. It combines the ideas of cognitive therapy with meditative practices and attitudes based on the cultivation of mindfulness. MBCT was developed by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale, based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program.

Research has shown that people who have struggled with recurrent depression and accompanying anxiety (sometimes for twenty years or more) find that taking the program and learning these skills helps to reduce considerably their chances that depression will return. The evidence from two randomized clinical trials of MBCT indicates that it reduces rates of relapse by 50% among people who suffer from recurrent depression.

How do we understand recurrent depression?

New research shows that during any episode of depression, negative mood occurs alongside negative thinking (e.g. "I am a failure") and body sensations of sluggishness and fatigue. When the episode has passed, and the mood has returned to normal, the negative thinking and fatigue tend to disappear as well. However, during the episode, a connection has formed between the moods that were present at that time and the negative thinking patterns. This means that when a person feels sad again (for any reason), a relatively small amount of such mood can reactivate the old thinking patterns. Once again, people start to think they have failed, or are inadequate, even if it is not justified by the current situation. People who believe they have recovered may find themselves feeling 'back to square one', constantly asking, "What has gone wrong?", "Why is this happening to me?", or "When will it all end?" They feel that such rumination ought to help them find an answer, but it only succeeds in prolonging and deepening the mood spiral. When this happens, the old habits of negative thinking start up again, getting the person into the same rut, and it can feel a bit like struggling to get out of quicksand. The very struggle to escape from depression makes things worse. As time passes, a full-blown episode of depression may result. One of the main messages of MBCT is that it is possible to learn to step back and find a different way of relating to these thought patterns, and the program is designed to help you find ways to do this.

How does mindfulness help reduce depressive relapse?

MBCT teaches you to become aware of the workings of your mind and, in so doing, to recognize where there are choice-points to prevent your mind from slipping back into old patterns. One of the main approaches for learning about this is the practice of mindfulness meditation. A number of different practices are covered over the 8 weeks, and you will be helped to discover the ones that are most useful to you. We ask that you try all the meditations during the classes and at home. We also emphasize that the classes provide an opportunity to care for yourself during this process by being kind and gentle with any new learning that may occur during this process.

How will the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy course be helpful to you?

Clinical studies of hundreds of patients have shown that MBCT can significantly reduce the risk of your depression returning. Here are some things that participants in past groups have reported:

- I became aware of the workings of my mind.
- I learned to recognize patterns.
- I learned to stay steady, but also to stand back a little.
- I could recognize that I have choices other than slipping back into old patterns.
- I learned to take a kinder, more gentle attitude toward myself.
- I learned to recognize warning signals and take helpful action.
- I learned how to put less effort into “fixing” things.
- I learned how to focus on the here and now.

Participants will learn to:

1. Step out of ruminative thinking patterns
2. Recognize and be more aware of potential relapse-related mind-body processes
3. Access new ways to relate to both depression-related and other aspects of emotional experience
4. Turn towards, befriend and engage with both difficult and other aspects of experience

During the course, you will find that there are lots of different ways to be mindful. By letting yourself try all the mindfulness practices, you may discover the ones that are most useful for you. The weekly classes also provide the opportunity for you to practice being kinder and gentler to yourself.

Group Format:

- 2 h weekly sessions
- 8 sessions total; closed group format
- Regular attendance and completion of daily mindfulness home practice strongly recommended in order to gain the greatest benefit
- Group size up to 15 people

Home practice: The Importance of Practicing Between Classes

Together, we will be working to change patterns of mind that often have been around for a long time. These patterns may have become habit. We can expect to succeed in making changes only if we put time and effort into learning skills.

This approach benefits from your willingness to do home practice between class meetings. The suggested home practice will take up to an hour a day, 6 days a week, for 8 weeks, and involves tasks such as listening to the recorded meditations and other exercises, performing brief exercises, and so on. We appreciate how it is often very difficult to carve out that amount of time for something new in lives that are already very busy and crowded. However, ***the commitment to spend time on home practice is strongly recommended gain the greatest benefit from the class***

To help you find the room in your life for this new commitment, it is helpful to consider the following:

- Where in your day will you find the time needed for practice?
- Let others in your family or social circle know what is involved.
- Do you have access to a device on which you can play the guided meditation practices?
- See if you can balance the different motivations that naturally come up, such as being impatient for results versus letting go of your expectations for 8 weeks.
- Treat yourself with kindness throughout this time, especially if you run into some rough spots.
- Many people struggle to find time to practice consistently, and ***you are strongly encouraged to practice Good for Me's for any practice that took time, energy or effort. Self compassionate people are much more motivated than people who are self critical.***
- ***Life happens for all of us and one of the most important practices is to begin again***

Facing Difficulties

The classes and the home practice assignments can teach you how to be more fully aware and present in each moment of life. On one hand, this makes life more interesting, vivid, and fulfilling. On the other hand, this means facing what is present, even when it is unpleasant and difficult. In practice, you will find that turning to face and acknowledge difficulties is the most effective way, in the long run, to reduce unhappiness. It is also central to preventing further depression. Seeing unpleasant feelings, thoughts, or experiences clearly, as they arise, means that you will be in much better shape to “nip them in the bud,” before they progress to more intense or persistent depressions. In the classes, you will learn gentle ways to face difficulties, and be supported by the instructors and the other class members.

Patience and Persistence

Because we will be working to change well-established habits of mind, you will be putting in a lot of time and effort. The effects of this effort may become apparent only later. In many ways, it is

much like gardening—we have to prepare the ground, plant the seeds, ensure that they are adequately watered and nourished, and then wait patiently for results.

You may be familiar with this pattern from your treatment with antidepressants: Often there is little beneficial effect until you have been taking the medication for some time. Yet improvement in your depression depended on your continuing to take the antidepressant even when you felt no immediate benefit.

In the same way, we ask you to approach the classes and home practice with a spirit of patience and persistence, committing yourself to put time and effort into what will be asked of you, while accepting, with patience, that the fruits of your efforts may not show straight away.

Challenges of the Course

You might find that taking the MBCT course is challenging for a number of different reasons. Should these challenges arise, please discuss this with your facilitator so they can support you. Often others are facing similar challenges. The feedback that past participants want to convey to those who are just getting started is that it is worth hanging in there, even if it is a struggle. The knowledge and understanding you gain will have an impact on reducing your risk for depression.

You will be offered modifications throughout the course including options to open the eyes, add movement if needed, focus attention on anchors other than the breath. Please let your facilitator know if you are struggling so they can support you, troubleshoot and offer appropriate modifications for your situation

Practical Arrangements

- The group starts promptly at the start time, please do your best to be on time. It lasts for 2 hours. ***However, please come late rather than not at all***
- It is a good idea to wear comfortable clothes, and you might like to bring a light blanket.
- **We would like to emphasize the importance of attending each session. Please let your facilitator and the group known in advance if you can't be there.**
- Because the class may be challenging, there may be times when you do not feel like coming. If this happens, you are encouraged to attend as often the groups we are most reluctant to attend turn out to be the most important groups.
- If something comes up between groups that you feel is important and cannot wait for the next group, please email hello@mind-space.ca
- If you miss a class, it can feel difficult to come back if you miss a session, but it is worth it. You are always welcome to return and encouraged to do so.
- ***The following book can be a helpful supplement if this is available to you financially. If you do not have the means to purchase this book, please do not worry as you will be provided with all the handouts needed for the course.***

- ***“The Mindful Way Workbook: An 8-Week Program to Free Yourself from Depression and Emotional Distress” by Teasdale, Williams and Segal, 2014.*** https://www.amazon.ca/Mindful-Way-Workbook-Depression-Emotional/dp/1462508146/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2HZ8ZIUXLCUWY&keywords=mindful+way+workbook&qid=1649200542&srefix=mindful+way%2Caps%2C189&sr=8-1

This group is for people who:

- Have experienced recurrent unipolar depression or are suffering from anxiety
- In full or partial remission from depression (MBCT is designed for people who are not currently experiencing depression; it is a relapse prevention program).
- Committed and motivated to undertake MBCT program (able to attend eight 2 hour sessions and ideally find 30-60min for daily home practice)

This group is not the right fit for people who struggle with:

- Organic brain damage or other cognitive dysfunction
- Current substance use disorder
- Current or past psychosis
- Bipolar Disorder with severe manic episodes or any symptoms of hypomania
- Aggression or problems with violence
- Significant Emotional Dysregulation (e.g. flashbacks or dissociation)
- Current or persistent self-harm or suicidality

General Group Therapy Agreement

The principles outlined below are designed for you to get the most out of group psychotherapy.

I understand it is my responsibility to adhere to these principles to achieve the maximum therapeutic benefit from the group and adherence to these principles will enhance my experience in the group and that of fellow group members.

1. I agree to discuss my mental health difficulties as they relate to MBCT with the group facilitator during group, and to seek care from my primary care provider (nurse practitioner, family doctor or psychiatrist) or individual therapist between groups for acute mental health difficulties. I am aware that if I have an active psychiatric condition, I require a primary care provider or mental health professional to be primarily responsible for the coordination of my overall treatment. The group leader will do their best to deal

with problems that arise, but they cannot be responsible for one-on-one care of those members who might be experiencing a mental health crisis (suicidality, extreme depression, mania, psychosis or others). This type of care is not possible in the context of a 120 min group.

2. I agree to seek care from my primary care provider or seek care via the emergency department or crisis line if I am experiencing intense suicidality or a mental health crisis.
3. An environment of tolerance and respect is required in group. No violence or threats are acceptable and will result in discharge from the group.

It is my understanding that adherence to these guidelines will create a safe environment for personal growth for myself and my fellow group members.

Group Confidentiality

Confidentiality, a trust of privacy or secrecy of communication and information, is special in a group setting in that it is the shared responsibility of all group members and their leader(s). Although a group leader will not disclose client communications or information except as required by law or in other limited circumstances (ie. a person is at risk to themselves or others, child abuse, elder abuse, and/or court ordered), group members' communications and information are protected. Thus, this agreement is an attempt to provide you and your fellow group members with as much confidentiality as possible.

What is NOT permissible:

I will not disclose to anyone outside of the group any information that may help to identify another group member. This includes but is not limited to names, physical description, biographical information, and specifics of content of interactions with other group members.

What IS permissible:

I understand that I am free to disclose to people that I am a group member and am attending this group. By my choice I also may disclose personal information about myself with respect to the group experience. This includes MY personal reactions (feelings and thoughts) to MY group experience, feedback from other members concerning myself, and any personal information about myself such as new skills I have

Feedback

Your facilitator is growing and learning and welcomes your feedback. You may provide it after the group, or to hello@mind-space.ca or in the mid point or final feedback form

Thank you for reading through this document in advance. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions during the first group and at any point through the group.

****Please bring a raisin or other small food item to Session 1**

Course Resources

Audio for MBCT:

- The official audio by the course developers is on the Guilford website www.guilford.com/MBCT_audio where you can find the guided meditations for the week. The body scan is 40 min on this website
- Center for Mindfulness Studies app has all of the MBCT guided meditations including a 40 min body scan (different voice from Guilford website) - <https://www.mindfulnessstudies.com/get-the-app/>
- **If 40 min is too long, I would recommend using the practices on the following websites:**
 - Dr. Christiane Wolf has body scans that are 5 min, 7 min, 10 min, 15 min, 25 min and 35 min <https://www.christianewolf.com/audio-meditation/>
 - University of California San Diego has body scans that are 10, 20, 30 and 40 min - <https://cih.ucsd.edu/mindfulness/guided-audio-video>
 - UCLA has a website and an app (UCLA Mindful) with meditations in many different languages - https://www.uclahealth.org/programs/marc/free-guided-meditations/guided-meditations?id=22&iirf_redirect=1
 - The UCLA app has a 14 min body scan under Wellness Meditations

It is best to do shorter practices more frequently (daily) than longer practices less frequently. So if a 5-10 min body scan is what is most possible for you then that's a great place to start and you will gain benefit from it
There is more benefit with longer practices
Most participants find 10-20 min most days more achievable

Additional optional resources

- Plum Village app has practices in the tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh: <https://plumvillage.app/>
- The Plum Village website has excellent resources about mindfulness: <https://plumvillage.org/mindfulness/mindfulness-practice>
- Tara Brach and Jack Kornfield have many great resources and guided practices on their websites: <https://www.tarabrach.com/> and <https://jackkornfield.com/>
- Jon Kabat Zinn Body Scan Meditation GUIDED MEDITATION <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4gZgnCy5ew> - another option for the body scan (45 min)
- Breathr App has short practices: <https://kelymentalhealth.ca/breathr>
- Insight Timer is a popular, free app