

Mindfulness As Stress Management Technique

Tutor's Handbook



Mindfulness – what, why and how?



Mindfulness vs Stress

In general, mindfulness can be described as a technique of relaxation that aims to help you achieve a state of mind that is featured by **purposeful paying attention to the present moment**. Mindfulness is a training of your mind that involves various exercises and methods. Its aim is to help you in managing your emotions and thoughts, including stress. This technique is especially effective for stress and anxiety management, as it teaches you how to experience or observe situations, emotions and thoughts in objective manner, and without impulsively reacting to them. **This attitude effectively lowers the level of stress and strengthens your inner coping mechanism, making you less liable to the impact of stress and anxiety in the future.**

The stress management technique of mindfulness is based on four elements:

- Self-awareness,
- Focus on the present,
- Acceptance of your feelings and thoughts,
- Observation of sensations in your body coming both from inside and outside.

Why to Practice Mindfulness?

Explain the members of your local target group, that in relation to coping with stress, mindfulness can help to:

- Become more aware of one's thoughts, which in turn helps you to look at them from perspective and makes your stress response less impulsive,
- Turn on the 'being' instead of 'doing' mode of your brain which helps you to relax,
- Become more aware and sensitive to the needs of your body – ex. more sleep, better food or relax. These are important elements of stress management system,
- Reduce the activity in the part of the brain that is responsible for stress response,
- Remain more focused on present activities, what limits the anxiety and stress connected with thinking about future and its challenges,

- Build self-awareness helping you to better control your actions that may lead to stressful situations.

How to Practice Mindfulness to Combat Stress?

The technique of mindfulness origins from Buddhism and is most often practiced as a form of meditation. You should underline, that for the mindfulness meditation to be most effective, you should practice it regularly, at least few minutes every day. The technique of **mindful meditation involves focusing your attention on the present moment, which gives your mind a break from everyday chatter, and allows you to relax.** To practice this type of meditation for stress relief, members of your local working group should follow few simple steps:

- 1) Sit in a chair or on the floor in comfortable position.
- 2) Let go your thoughts concerning past or future – focus on the present moment.
- 3) Concentrate on your breath. Try listening to the sounds around you or recognising smells, think of sensations in your body.
- 4) When stressful thoughts come to your mind, don't try to suppress or ignore them. Let them flow. Stay calm and focus on breathing. Eventually, stressful thoughts will calm down and you will feel much more relaxed.

You should stress, however, that mindfulness is something more than just a meditation technique. It is more, an approach to life that places an emphasis on focusing attention in present moment. You can practice mindfulness, really, by any activity that you perform while being fully present. **So, if the members of your local working group don't feel like meditation is for them, you may encourage them to try introducing its elements to other everyday tasks.** Especially combining it with some form of physical activity, and alone time. Encourage them to try it while washing dishes, ironing clothes, repairing a car, gardening or mowing the yard. A great opportunity for practicing mindfulness is trying to stay mindful and aware while taking a walk – focus on what you see, how you feel, what smells do you recognise or what noises do you hear. Remind, the members of your working group, not to put too much pressure on themselves. If they feel like they cannot focus, it's always enough to just direct attention to breathing.



How To Use This Resource In Your Work With Local Group?

In this handbook you will find general information on what is mindfulness and how it can be applied to stress management. Use this resource and the presentation titled '*Mindfulness As Stress Management Technique*' to:

- Talk to the members of your local working group about the benefits of mindfulness for their mental health.
- Explain that mindfulness may be practiced by everyone, and in many forms. One of the most popular form is mindfulness meditation.
- If members of your local target group are worried, explain, that this form of meditation doesn't have to be related to any specific religious believes.
- Present examples on how to apply various techniques of mindfulness in practice.

Group Activity

Once you share with members of your local working group the video and presentation titled '*Mindfulness As Stress Management Technique*', you can invite them to participate in a short mindfulness practice – it is called *body scan*. You can use some slow, relaxing music for the back ground. First, ask members of your working group to sit or stand in comfortable position. Now, instruct them to take few slow, deep breaths, and bring their attention from outside distractions to inside their bodies. They may close their eyes, if feel comfortable. Now, slowly direct their attention from one part of their body to another. One at a time. Start from feet and direct gradually up their body. Instruct participants to focus on relaxing the body part they are thinking about. Remind them to breath slowly.

As you come to the end of the practice, invite participants to a discussion on this experience, and how it influenced their level of stress.





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