UTILISING MINDFULNESS TO SUCCESSFULLY TACKLE STRESS: How to A.C.T. differently

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Introduction

Suffering is the *distress* or *pain* (psychological and/or emotional) we experience when we have to contend with emotional-images, thoughts (cognitions), or physical sensations that are contrary to our chosen or ideal versions of ourselves.
Introduction

Implications of this definition:

All stress/ suffering occurs in the context of a relationship. For example:

• Relationship to our emotions, images, cognitions.
• Relationship to others
• Relationship to self or chosen identity
• Relationship to body
• Relationship to future
• Relationship to those aspects of self/ body that are considered foreign, wrong, unusual
Some non-clinical thoughts about Mindfulness

The Meta position:

• Viewing thoughts and feelings like a member of your internal ‘family’.
• Knowing how thoughts and feelings impact you.
• Knowing the agenda and motives of each ‘family’ member.
Some non-clinical thoughts about Mindfulness

Radical Acceptance:

• You can choose your friends, you can't choose your psyche (thoughts, feelings, images) and very often you can’t choose what goes on in the body.

• Strangely: everything is inspiration- thoughts, feelings and images most often come to you, you don’t go looking for them.
Some non-clinical thoughts about Mindfulness

Thoughts/ feelings/ images only inform you about what's going on:

• See them as guests and advisors.

• They can never determine how you respond...your value system will determine this.

• Don’t sail toward the lighthouse.
THE GUEST HOUSE (Jelaluddin Rumi, Translation by Coleman Barks)

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice. meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes. because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.
Some non-clinical thoughts about Mindfulness

Attentional control:

• Can you choose who to listen to?
• The body seems to have enormous power- this is often the hardest guest to resist.
• When someone drives a nail through your thumb, all of you lives in the thumb- Plato(??)
Some non-clinical thoughts about Mindfulness

Fusion:

• Being held hostage by a set of thoughts, feelings, images...They own you; you don’t own them.

• Stockholm syndrome (dependence, identification, isolation, kindness)

• Imagine being attached at the hip to someone (like anger) in your environment. Imagine doing something vulnerable with that person in tow.
Some non-clinical thoughts about Mindfulness

On a bad day you can feel like you’re ‘betraying’ yourself if you become healthy and more creative:

• Betraying an old habit.
• Betraying someone who mentored parented you.
• Betraying the need to win.

Choosing new ways of living can subconsciously feel like a break-up.
Mindfulness

“Mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 108).
Mindfulness

“Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to things as they are” (Williams, et al., 2007, p. 47).
Mindfulness

“(A) nonelaborative, nonjudgemental, present-centred awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is” (Bishop et al, 2004)
Key Words

Non-judgmental awareness:

• Moment to moment
• Paying attention on purpose- curiosity
• Being in the present- here and now
• Being non-reactive/ non-reactive being
• Non-judgemental- allowing things to be as they are
• Open-Hearted
Mindfulness as Relationship

- Like all relationships, mindfulness is a *lived* experience. Try and try again.
- Mindfulness is *inclusive* of *all* thoughts, feelings, images, theories, paradigms etc. (i.e. the pleasant and unpleasant).

Mindfulness puts you in a *META* position: meta-cognitions/ meta-position:
- You realise that thought, feelings, images, body-states, and sensations come and go.
- Allows you to avoid one-sided representations of self, world, and future.
- Allows you to avoid theory-building and conceptual problem solving; e.g. trying to understand why something has happened.
- You learn: you have thoughts, you are not your thoughts/ you have feelings, you are not your feelings.
- You learn that thoughts, feelings, images are transient states of mind and not depictions of reality.
Characteristics of the Meta-position: Attentional Control

Two central characteristics:

1. The *self-regulation of attention* (i.e. Attentional Control): remaining focussed on the here-and-now.

2. Mindful *awareness* of immediate experiences: curiosity, openness, accepting, forgiveness, trust, compassion.

(Bishop et al, 2004)
Consequences of increasing Attentional-Control
[i.e. the Meta-position]

2. *Attention switching*- being able to bring attention back to the present moment when the mind wanders
3. *Inhibition of elaborate processing*- to avoid dwelling or ruminating on thoughts or feelings that are outside of the present moment and to circumvent theory building.
4. *Non-directed attention*- to regulate assumptions, theories or expectations.

(Bishop et al, 2004)
Consequences of increasing Attentional-Control [i.e. the Meta-position]

1. Increased focus on the Process of awareness (i.e. how I think)

2. Decreased focus on the Content of awareness (i.e. what I think)

“Over time, individuals might develop greater insight into their habitual tendencies of thinking, which then allows them to alter negative patterns of thinking and/or react differently to them”

(Robins et al, 2012)
Consequences of increasing Attentional-Control [i.e. the Meta-position]

A more inclusive view of self

Symbolic self:
- *Complex*- no one sided views of self
- *Contradictory*- opposites
- *Changing*: as opposed to fixed, enduring, inflexible

Relationship to internal experience:
- Mindfulness is not a reduction in symptoms.
- Mindfulness is a reduction in suffering.

Paul Chadwick (2013)
Mindfulness as Relationship

- *Curiosity/ Non-judgement:* Less emphasis on finding meaning. Greater emphasis on here and now living.
- *Curiosity/ Non-judgement:* Less emphasis on predictions [increased tolerance of uncertainty/hope and despair coexist].
- *Curiosity/ Non-judgement:* Reduction in rumination.
- *Curiosity/ Non-judgement:* Reduction in positive beliefs about worry.
Mindfulness as Relationship

- *Exposure to dreaded experiences*: Less anxiety and dread in the face of pain even when the pain levels don’t change.
- *Exposure to dreaded experiences*: Less focus on trying to find the meaning of the pain or predict future pain (i.e. less torment).
- *Exposure to dreaded experiences*: Symptoms of cancer become more tolerable: pain, fatigue, weakness, nausea, changes in capacity.
Mindfulness as Relationship

• *Wise-action*: Greater freedom to take wise-action as opposed to acting unconsciously (emotions, images and thoughts are seen as transient and non-permanent).

• *Wise-action*: Physical sensations are seen as messages. Leads to greater nurturance and respect for the body’s symptoms and needs.

• *Wise-action*: Non-judgement allows patients to transition into healthier lifestyle changes even when these changes contradict their ideals.

• *Wise-action*: Allows for greater tolerance of intense emotions in self and others. This can help reduce self-imposed isolation.

• *Wise-action*: Greater sensitivity to all aspects of self allows for earlier interventions and remedies as opposed to allowing a build up of symptoms.
Outcomes of the Meta-position: Synopsis

1. CURIOSITY and NON-JUDGEMENT
2. EXPOSURE TO DREADED EXPERIENCES
3. WISE ACTION
Consequences of the Meta-position: another angle

1. PAYING ATTENTION IN A DIFFERENT WAY: ‘Being’ versus ‘Doing’/ ‘Automatic Pilot’

2. INTENTION: Value based decisions and behaviours.

3. ATTITUDE: Emerging attitudes toward self and other that focus on compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, and acceptance.

Self Compassion

In order for individuals to fully experience self-compassion, they must adopt a mindful perspective:

• They must not avoid or repress their painful feelings…
• They need to develop compassion toward their experiences whilst at the same time,
• They must not over identify with their experiences because,
• They need the space to be kind toward themselves,
• And recognise the humanity of their experience. (Neff, 2003)
Self Compassion

1. Self- Kindness *versus* Self-Judgement
2. Common Humanity *versus* Isolation
3. Mindfulness *versus* Over-identification
Thinking about A.C.T.ing differently

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

The last of human freedoms - the ability to chose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances.

Victor Frankl
Thinking about A.C.T.ing differently

It is remarkable how liberating it feels to be able to see that your thoughts are just thoughts and they are not ‘you’ or ‘reality’……..So the simple act of recognizing your thoughts as thoughts can free you from the distorted reality they often create and allow for more clear-sightedness and a greater sense of manageability in your life—Jon Kabat-Zinn [(1990) Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness. Delta: New York]
Thinking about A.C.T.ing differently

HANDOUT
References


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• Neff, K [2003]. The Development and Validation of a Scale to Measure Self-Compassion. *Self and Identity*. 2: 223-250


• http://www.google.co.uk/#q=neff+scoring+the+self+compassion+scale
Recommended Reading


