Mindfulness and Stress Reduction

An introductory session with Emily Herzlin, MBSR Teacher
In today’s session…

- Intros
- What is mindfulness?
- What is stress?
- Mindfulness and stress
- 15-20 minute guided meditation
- Discussion, questions
- Practicing on your own
Before we start…
Intros

- About me:
  - Teacher, writer
  - Live in NYC
  - Trained at UMass Medical School Center for Mindfulness to teach Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
  - Trained at the Interdependence Project, yearlong Meditation Teacher Training Program
  - Daily meditation practice
Who’s here?

- Any experience with meditation or yoga?
- Where in the world are you?
Mindful Check-in
(short practice)
Responses

- What was that like?
- What did you notice about your body?
- What did you notice about your mind/emotions?
- What was challenging, if anything?
- Any other observations?
What is mindfulness?

- Paying attention on purpose in the present moment without judgment (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

- Knowing what is arising within you or around you from moment to moment so you can respond with awareness (Sylvia Boorstein)

- Knowing/observing what our experience is vs. being carried away by it

- MEDITATION is a way we can practice mindfulness, a way we can develop our ability to be mindful in our daily life
What is stress?

- What does stress feel like? How do you know when you are stressed? (Body? Mind? Emotions?)
What is stress?

- **Stressor**: stimulus that produces the stress response
- **Stress**: what we experience in response to the stressor
- Different stressors cause different amounts of stress for different people (public speaking, going to the dentist, crowds, cooking, traveling…)
- Why?

**Stress is the perception** of a threat to our physical or psychological wellbeing, coupled with the perception that we somehow won’t be able to cope with it.
- It isn’t the stimulus itself, it’s our relationship to it
- Perception isn’t always accurate
Stress Physiology

- A threat is perceived by the nervous system (unconscious process)
- Sympathetic nervous system activates adrenal glands to release fight/flight hormones (cortisol and adrenaline)
  - Increase heart rate and blood pressure
  - Muscle tension
  - Release stores of blood sugar
  - Decreased digestive function
  - Decreased immune function
Chronic Stress

- Stress reactivity evolved to help us survive actual threats. Fight/flight is necessary for when there is an actual threat. These are short, infrequent bursts.

- Most of the stressors we experience on a daily basis are not actually threats to our wellbeing. (They are just unpleasant.)

- Our body isn’t built for chronic stress reactivity, and the physiological effects of stress can negative impact our health.
Role of Mindfulness

- Mindfulness helps us retrain our minds to relate differently to stress.
- Can help us pause and examine what is happening, is it actually a threat, am I ok, can I be with what is happening? (It may be unpleasant, but can I handle that?)
- Rather than being pulled by our thoughts and emotions, we can simply observe them as they arise and pass.
- We can notice when we are stressed earlier on by reading cues from our body (tightness, clenching, tension, heart rate) and help ourselves calm down sooner.
- Mindfulness activates the parasympathetic nervous system.
Practice, practice, practice

- In order to work with a lifetime of learned stress reactivity, we have to actually **practice** mindfulness.

- Regular meditation **practice** helps us to strengthen our ability to be mindful.
Guided Mindfulness Practice
Responses, Q&A

- What was that like?
- What did you notice about your body?
- What did you notice about your mind/emotions?
- What was challenging, if anything?
- Any other observations or questions?
Practicing on your own

- There is no “right” time of day for practice. Find the time of day that feels right for you.
- Build in time for practice, rather than fit it in. Make it a routine like brushing your teeth.
- Designate a space for practice. Make sure you’re not staring at your laundry or a pile of unpaid bills.
- Sit comfortably in a chair or on a cushion, stand, or lie down.
- Make it consistent: 10-minute sessions 5 times a week is better than 45-minute sessions 2 times a week.

- Set a timer or alarm for yourself so you don’t have to look at the clock. Practice for the amount of time you set out to practice for.

- Each meditation session will be different. Some will be peaceful, some will be more challenging. It’s all good practice.

- Attend groups/meditation classes to get support from others.
Everyday Life Practice

- Brushing your teeth
- Morning coffee
- Walking to the bus/train
- Driving
- Checking email
- Eating a meal
- Waiting in line
- During conversations
- Washing dishes
- Putting on shoes
- Checking text messages
- Washing your hands
- Cooking
- Listening to music

Your top 3 major stressors. Take a breath before/during/after (can you think of what they are?)
“Formal” practice
+ “informal” everyday life practice
+ bringing mindful awareness to stressful moments
Resources

- Look for meditation centers near you
- Apps like Headspace, Insight Timer, and Calm
- Books
  - *Coming to our Senses* by Jon Kabat-Zinn
  - *Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation* by Sharon Salzberg
  - *True Refuge* by Tara Brach
  - *Start Where You Are* by Pema Chodron
  - *Thoughts Without a Thinker* by Mark Epstein
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