

Mindfully Aware of Myself: How My Mindfulness Impacts Others

Texas Model Training Series

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My Background

- Master's degree in Applied Behavior Analysis
- Have worked as a CBT therapist (specifically Motivational Interviewing and SAMHSA Anger Management)
- Began training in DBT during undergraduate internship

- *Scenario:* Snapping on someone who didn't deserve it because you were carrying stress from something else
- *Scenario:* Passing time without realizing because you were "zoned out"
- Both common when we live without mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

- Act of consciously focusing the mind on the present moment... without judgment or attachment to the moment
- We don't need mindfulness to live, but it certainly makes life easier.
 - *Ex:* Walking through a room in the dark. You can do it, but it's much easier to do with the lights on. Mindful awareness is turning on the lights to get through life

Continued: What is Mindfulness?

- Opening the mind
 - Observing and noticing thoughts, but not holding onto them
- Focusing the mind
 - Focus attention on specific internal or external events, such as mantras, breathing, series of sensations, etc.
- Without mindfulness skills, our minds are like untrained puppies that wander around and cannot sit or stay. With mindfulness practice, we can tame our minds to wander when we want, but to be mindfully aware when we want and need

What do I do to practice Mindfulness and **How** do I do it?

- “What” skills
 - Observe
 - Describe
 - Participate
- “How” skills
 - Non-judgmentally
 - One-mindfully
 - Effectively

Three States of Mind

- Emotional Mind
- Reasonable Mind
- Wise Mind

Emotional Mind

- “Hot mind,” controlled by strong emotions. No reason or rationality. Facts don’t matter
 - What you FEEL to be true
 - Not just having strong emotions -when you are ruled by your strong emotions

Reasonable Mind

- “Calculator mind,” controlled by facts and reason. No emotion. Feelings don’t matter.
 - What you THINK to be true

Wise Mind

- Synthesis of Emotional Mind and Reasonable Mind, includes intuitive knowing
 - What you KNOW to be true

Wise Mind

- Being mindfully aware of your thoughts, behavior, and of those around you
- You ACT rather than REACT

What gets in the way of using my Wise Mind?

- Strong emotions
- Attempting to shut off emotions
- Not listening to your “gut”
- Things that make it hard to regulate your emotions (next slide)

What makes it hard to regulate your emotions?

1. Biology
2. Lack of skill
3. Past reinforcement of emotional behaviors
4. Moodiness
5. Emotional overload

Emotional Overload

- When we neglect our emotions and stress, we tend to respond in one of two ways:
 - We may become emotionally volatile and emotional experiences may have a higher intensity, frequency, and duration (Emotional Mind)
 - May experience an “emotional explosion”
 - We may “bottle them up” or try to shut them down (Reasonable Mind)
 - When we do this, it is only a matter of time before the “bottle” gets too full and we eventually experience the same emotional “explosion” as above

Especially in a correctional setting

- When we are feeling emotionally overloaded, we can start to feel small, powerless, or even helpless
- Working in a position of power in corrections, the opportunity to make ourselves feel “bigger” can be tempting for such people
- When we feel small and powerless, any amount of power and dominance can feel intoxicating and it can be extremely difficult to stop and pull back
- This is why it’s so important to be mindful of ourselves and check in with ourselves often. Knowing is half the battle

Triggers and Cues

- Trigger: antecedent
- Cues: signs or "warning clouds" that you're escalating

Triggers/Events/Prompting Events

- Short-term triggers
 - Immediate (e.g. being cut off), everyday events
- “Red-flag” triggers
 - Events from your life that are still sensitive to you (e.g., someone making a “your mom” joke after you lost your mother)
- Long-term triggers:
 - Remembering events from your past that upset you, ruminating on these events can cause you to get just as upset in the present

Cues/Warning Signs

- The ways you respond to the triggering event
- Cues may be internal (i.e. only you notice them) or external (others can see them too)
- Types of cues:
 - Physiological cues
 - Cognitive cues
 - Emotional cues
 - Behavioral cues

Physiological Cues

- Things your body is doing in response to the triggering event
 - Chest may feel tight, face feels hot, heart racing, ears ringing, etc.
 - All warning signs that you are escalating
- The more escalated you are, the fewer strategies and less time you have to regulate yourself

Cognitive Cues

- 1) how you interpret the triggering event (thoughts)
- 2) thoughts you have in response to the triggering event
- Hostile self-talk
- Fantasizing
- Ruminating
- Catastrophizing, mind-reading, and other thinking errors
- Etc.

Emotional Cues

- Feelings you have in response to the triggering event
- Anger is usually one, and as anger is a secondary emotion, look for the primary emotions underlying anger as well
- Each emotion has a biologically corresponding action urge:
 - The immediate urge you have to do something when you feel a certain emotion

How to release my emotions when they build up?

- Not advised to scream/hit a pillow/punch a punching bag and pretend it's someone/thing causing you anger
 - This does not release anger; it creates more anger
 - “Venting” anger in an aggressive manner only reinforces aggression
- You can always take a “time-out” and step away from the situation
 - Physically remove yourself or mentally “check out” for a few minutes to a more calming place

Reducing Vulnerability to Emotional Mind

- The more vulnerable we are to our Emotional Mind, the less control we have over our thoughts, feelings, and actions
- The less control we have over the above, the less mindful we are
- Remember, when we are mindful and use our Wise Mind, we are able to ACT rather than REACT

ABC Skills

- Accumulating Positive Emotions
- Building Mastery
- Coping Ahead

Accumulating Positive Emotions

- Directly linked to resilience
- Short- and long-term
- Short-term accumulation: a useful coping skill and essential for long-term
- Long-term accumulation: when your life has more positive emotions, it raises your overall baseline of happiness
- The happier we are, the better equipped we are to handle difficulties and setbacks

Building Mastery

- Becoming proficient in and mastering any skill
- Competence = confidence
- Confidence is the opposite of helplessness and hopelessness
- The more confident we are, the happier we are and the more able we are to handle stressful situations
- Also builds resilience throughout the learning process

Coping Ahead

- Have you ever worried about something bad that might happen, such as a situation arising with your youth or at work?
- Coping ahead is when we imagine the worst case scenario and then imagine how we will survive it
- Knowing we have a game plan in place alleviates anxiety and helps us to stay mindful even in stressful situations

PLEASE Skills

- Incredibly important to maintain physical health and balance in order to decrease vulnerability to emotional overload
- Our body is our main defense against Emotional Mind
- If we don't take care of our physical wellbeing, our mental wellbeing will suffer too

PLEASE Skills

- Treat **P**hysical **iL**lness
- Balance **E**ating
- **A**void mood-altering substances and take prescribed medications
- Balance **S**leep
- **E**xercise

Handling emotions when I'm upset

- #1 skill to use here is mindfulness
 - How do you know you're getting upset?
- If you are upset, which emotions are you noticing that are upsetting you?
- Name as many emotions as you can that you are observing
- Every emotion has a purpose.
 - Is the purpose of that emotion useful for you in this moment?
- Mindfulness of current emotion

Prevention is most important

- If we can reduce vulnerability to our Emotional Mind, then we are much less likely to experience an emotional explosion
- The lower our baseline, the more space we have to identify escalating emotions and regulate ourselves before losing control
- Self-care is key

Have Any Questions?

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