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Addressing anxiety in college: A mindfulness group for use in college counseling centers

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Addressing Anxiety in College: A Mindfulness Group for
Use in College Counseling Centers
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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Dedication Page

This project is dedicated in loving memory to my father, Dana A. Severance. He was the first person to explain to anxiety to me, and it was in a way that helped me begin my own journey of self-compassion. I felt his presence throughout the process of completing this project in a way that helped me feel strong and remember his passion for helping others, his interest in lifelong learning, and his zest for life and human connection that I thankfully inherited.

For you, daddy. Love you forever.

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Thank you also to Shari Scofield, my dear friend and mentor for living mindfully. I'll carry the lessons I learned from you for the rest of my life.

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Abstract

This project proposes a mindfulness group to address anxiety in college counseling settings. As will be discussed, anxiety is often cited as the most common presenting concern in college counseling centers, and as the need for mental health services in college is increasing, the necessity for cost effective and timely interventions (i.e., groups) becomes apparent. Research on the efficacy of mindfulness as a treatment for generalized anxiety disorder and social anxiety disorder is reviewed, as is the potential for self-compassion to be used as a complement to learning mindfulness skills to address anxiety. Finally, an eight-session group protocol that incorporates this literature is presented, and guidelines and suggestions are offered.

Addressing Anxiety in College: A Mindfulness Group for Use in
College Counseling Centers

Mindfulness has been used as a treatment for various physical and mental health difficulties in the Western world as early as 1979 with John Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) clinic in Massachusetts. Kabat-Zinn, one of the founders of Western mindfulness as a treatment modality for mental health difficulties, defines mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). The origins of mindfulness come from Buddhist philosophy, dating back 25 centuries, and the aim of mindfulness practice, according to Buddha, was to diminish suffering and achieve peace (Bodhi, 2011). Since the 1990s, there has been an exponential rate of growth in the interest in and number of academic papers written on the applications of mindfulness. Applications of mindfulness can be found in the fields of medicine, psychology, neuroscience, education, and even in the corporate world (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Although the definition and conceptualization of mindfulness has been transformed by its Western applications, and even Kabat-Zinn acknowledges the potential for misuse when the fields of consciousness and empiricism converge, Bodhi (2011) graciously grants Western practitioners and teachers of secular mindfulness the use of the wisdom derived from Buddha to reduce the suffering of others, as long as these applications are pursued without selfishness, and with gratitude and respect for this ancient wisdom.

The potential for mindfulness to decrease human suffering in its many forms has been established in many studies, including one particular form of human suffering:

anxiety. According to Kessler et al. (2005), 28.8 percent of adults in the United States have experienced an anxiety disorder at some point in their life, and as Woodruff, Arnkoff, Glass, and Hindman (2014) state, this does not include the amount of people who experience anxiety in response to stressful life events or those who do not meet the specific criteria for anxiety disorders. The prevalence of anxiety in the general population is similarly high in the more specific population of college students: 11.9 percent of college students report experiencing an anxiety disorder (Blanco, Okuda, Wright, Hasin, Grant, Liu, & Olfson, 2008). Since the coping skills and patterns established in college have the potential to impact the rest of one's life, it is imperative for those invested in the wellbeing of emerging adults to investigate ways of decreasing this common type of suffering in an already vulnerable, impressionable population.

College students experience a unique set of challenges that may create mental health difficulties or exacerbate current difficulties. When considering the new environment, freedoms, and responsibilities coupled with academic, social, and familial pressures that the majority of college students experience, it makes sense that anxiety and stress are common concerns in college. The American Psychological Association (2013) stated that anxiety is the top presenting concern at college counseling centers, affecting 41.6 percent of students. This is similarly the case at James Madison University's (JMU) Counseling Center. From 2000 to 2016, there has been a reported 165 percent increase in students presenting to the JMU Counseling Center, and an 81 percent increase in sessions per Counseling Center clinician (D. Onestak, personal communication, August 30, 2017). Taken together, these illustrate the need for providing cost effective and efficient support

and treatment options for both JMU students and college students across the country, especially for those struggling with anxiety.

Mindfulness-based interventions have been established as potentially effective in treating anxiety, which is discussed further below (Bamber & Morpeth, 2018; Bamber & Kraenzle Schneider, 2016; Byrne, Bond, & London, 2013; Dvořáková, Kishida, Li, Elavsky, Broderick, Agrusti, & Greenberg, 2017; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Sears & Kraus, 2009). John Kabat-Zinn's widely known mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program in particular has been shown to be a potentially effective intervention for various physical and mental health difficulties, including anxiety disorders. The group proposed here, similar to MBSR in its teaching of mindfulness skills and guided mindfulness practices, will aim to be a more accessible mindfulness-based intervention than others that have been established in the past, like MBSR. It is designed specifically for college students who are experiencing anxiety who may or may not meet criteria for anxiety disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder and social anxiety disorder. Since the cost of a classic MBSR program can be up to \$600, and it often has an intensive time frame of seven to ten weeks of two and a half hour long sessions, often with one full day session, college students may struggle to commit that much money and time to participate in an actual MBSR offering (Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, 2017). This mindfulness group offers a more reasonable alternative for college students experiencing anxiety. In addition, though there is an MBSR workbook available online for a modest price, there is potentially priceless value in learning from others within a group setting and having the opportunity to reflect with trained mental health professionals. Though this group will specifically be for clinical use

in college counseling centers, and some practical aspects (i.e., screening processes, co-leaders) will be based on groups currently offered at JMU's Counseling Center, it could also potentially be adapted for the needs of a community population.

Mindfulness as a Treatment for Anxiety

Various psychotherapies that have been found to be effective in the treatment of anxiety disorders include components of mindfulness, including acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), emotional regulation therapy (ERT), and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) (Arch, Eifert, Davies, Plumb Vilardaga, Rose, & Craske, 2012; Evans, Ferrando, Findler, Stowell, Smart, & Haglin, 2008; Mennin, Fresco, Ritter, & Heimberg, 2015; Schwartz, 2017). Woodruff et al. (2014) suggest that mindfulness is a particularly promising treatment for anxiety because mindfulness is incompatible with anxiety. Anxiety is characterized by apprehensive future thinking, while mindfulness is focused on bringing into one's awareness what one is currently experiencing. Additionally, specific constructs or features of anxiety as it has been conceptualized in research literature, including a predisposition to negative thinking, are at odds with certain features of mindfulness, such as awareness, non-judgement/acceptance, and non-reactivity. The presence of these features of mindfulness, studied through the presence of trait mindfulness, have been found to predict the absence of anxiety (Branstrom, Duncan, & Moskowitz, 2011; Cashwell, Glossoff, & Hammond, 2010; Kiken & Shook, 2011).

Further, anxiety and related mental health disorders are often accompanied by physical symptoms, including a racing heart, labored breathing, sweating, and muscle tension. A five-day mindfulness training experience was found to serve as a calming

mechanism for the nervous system, evidenced by decreased heart rate, lowered respiratory rate, and an increase in high-frequency heart rate variability (Tang et al., 2009). It may make sense that cultivating a skill for mindfulness, and both using it as a tool during acute moments of anxiety as well as creating a daily practice of meditation, would be useful in treating mental health difficulties characterized by apprehensive forward thinking, negativity bias, and physical sensations associated with the nervous system.

Many studies have indicated the potential for mindfulness to be an effective treatment for those experiencing anxiety. In a meta-analysis of 39 studies in which mindfulness-based therapy, including MBCT and MBSR, was used as an intervention for anxiety and depression, mindfulness-based therapy was found to be moderately effective in reducing anxiety symptoms (Hofmann et al., 2010). A review of randomized controlled trials of mindfulness-based interventions, including MBSR and ACT, found that improvements in anxiety were superior in treatment groups when compared to control groups (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Furthermore, mindfulness has been examined as a way to greater psychological health in university samples. In a meta-analysis of stress reduction techniques for undergraduate and graduate students, Yusufov, Nicoloro-SantaBarbara, Grey, Moyer, and Lobel (2018) found that there was a moderate effect size for the impact of mindfulness-based interventions (specifically MBSR) on anxiety in comparison to no-treatment control groups. Dvořáková et al. (2017) established in a randomized controlled pilot study that an eight-week mindfulness program, *Learning to BREATHE*, significantly improved first year college students' anxiety and increased their life satisfaction and sleep quality, as compared to a control

group. Byrne et al. (2013) compared how a mindfulness-based group intervention and an interpersonal process group intervention affected symptoms of anxiety, depression, academic problems, interpersonal distress, and overall college adjustment in a clinical group of first year university students. At a six-month follow up, the members of the interpersonal process group maintained only interpersonal symptom reduction, while the members of the mindfulness group maintained symptom reduction in anxiety, depression, and other symptoms. These studies, despite their various limitations including sometimes small, non-diverse sample sizes and lack of an active control group, indicate that mindfulness can be used to effectively decrease anxiety in the college student population. Byrne et al. (2013) indicated in particular that a mindfulness group can be effective to treat anxiety in clinical university settings, and that these interventions have the potential to create lasting change and maintenance of reduced anxiety.

Moreover, in a narrative synthesis of 40 studies on the effect that mindfulness-based intervention had on college student anxiety, Bamber and Kraenzle Schneider (2016) found that these interventions (including MBSR and mindfulness meditation) decreased anxiety the majority of the time in most of the studies. The authors of this narrative synthesis suggested that further research was needed to determine what quantity of these mindfulness-based interventions (i.e., how many sessions) were needed to create a significant change in college students' experience of anxiety, as well as which mindfulness-based interventions (MBSR or other mindfulness meditation interventions) were more effective and what moderators exist for the effectiveness of these interventions. Still, the authors stated that these mindfulness interventions looked promising. Bamber and Morpeth (2018) conducted a meta-analysis that included 25

studies to examine potential moderators for the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions and found that these interventions are effective in promoting decreased anxiety for both clinical and nonclinical students in college. No significant differences in intervention type (i.e., MBSR, MBCT, or interventions created by the researcher) or type of mindfulness taught (i.e., loving-kindness, insight-based meditations) were found, and meditation homework decreased the impact that mindfulness-based interventions had on anxiety. It was suggested that students who are already experiencing anxiety and are likely overwhelmed with their academic and social lives would be further stressed by the request to take the time to practice mindfulness and incorporate it into their daily lives, even if this time would serve them well. The authors also found that a greater number of sessions was correlated with a greater decrease in anxiety, and they suggested that eight sessions was an appropriate length of intervention for college students. These studies illustrate how a mindfulness group could be effective in aiding college students' coping with stress, as well as with coping with specific anxiety disorders as conceptualized by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), defined by the American Psychiatric Association (2013) as the experience of uncontrollable worries and apprehension that are difficult to control for most of one's days, is one specific anxiety disorder that college students experience and that this mindfulness group could treat. One study found that 4.2 percent of randomly selected undergraduate students and 3.8 percent of randomly selected graduate students at a large public university met criteria for GAD (Eisenberg,

Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007). Anxiety, and GAD in particular, are associated with poor emotional regulation. Heart rate variability is a physiological measure of emotional regulation in that high heart rate variability shows that one's parasympathetic nervous system and sympathetic nervous system are functioning well. Mankus, Aldao, Kerns, Mayville, and Mennin (2013) found that heart rate variability was significantly associated and positively correlated with mindfulness in university subjects with high generalized anxiety; specifically, a mindfulness-based breathing intervention served to increase these subjects' heart rate variability while they completed questionnaires. Additionally, a group of eleven adults experiencing GAD that participated in a small open trial of a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy group, which included two-hour weekly session and a homework assignment of 30 minutes of formal meditation practice per day, showed significant decreases in anxiety symptoms after the eight-week trial (Evans et al., 2008). Although the authors caution against generalization to the wider population, due to the small nature and non-randomization of the study and the high education levels of the participants, this study illustrates the potential for decreased symptoms of GAD through mindfulness training and dedication to formal meditation practice.

Social Anxiety Disorder

Another common anxiety disorder that college students experience, social anxiety disorder (SAD), is characterized by intense fear and avoidance of situations in which one has the potential to be scrutinized by others (America Psychiatric Association, 2013). First year college students are confronted with novel social situations, including orientation, classes, and parties or other social gatherings, in which they are meeting and

interacting with new people. This could make college an especially distressing time for those who tend towards social anxiousness or have been diagnosed with social anxiety disorder. As shown with GAD, mindfulness-based interventions are promising not only in the alleviation of suffering through anxiety in general, but also in the treatment of specific anxiety disorders. This is similarly the case with the treatment of SAD. People who experience SAD tend towards negative self-evaluation and judgement in relation to their actions and behaviors in social situations, so the non-judgmental awareness that can be taught through mindfulness training could potentially combat this proclivity. In a study that assessed the relationship between self-reported mindfulness, self-esteem, and social anxiety in an Australian undergraduate sample, Rasmussen and Pidgeon (2010) found that mindfulness and self-esteem were negatively correlated to social anxiety, which confirms the potential for mindfulness to reduce SAD symptoms.

Various studies also illustrate the potential for mindfulness to effectively treat SAD. An adult sample of individuals who met criteria for SAD experienced reduction of social anxiety symptoms after completing MBSR training, and specifically showed neural responses that indicated increased positive self-evaluation (Goldin, Ramel, & Gross, 2009). Goldin and Gross (2010) also found that a mindfulness-based breathing task resulted in decreased activity in the amygdala, which has been linked to fear-based reactions, in a group of 16 adults who were experiencing social anxiety. MBSR has also been evaluated on its efficacy of treating SAD in undergraduate and graduate populations, and one study showed significant SAD symptom reduction after an eight-week program (Hjeltnes, Molde, Schanche, Vollestad, Svendsen, Moltu, & Binder, 2017). A six-week MBSR intervention was found to be effective in reducing SAD

symptoms, and the authors also found that self-compassion scores were elevated in the treatment group in comparison to the control group, indicating that self-compassion facilitates the relationship between mindfulness and SAD symptoms (Ştefan, Căpraru, & Szilágyi, 2018). Finally, although Koszycki, Benger, Shlik, and Bradwejn (2007) found that twelve-week cognitive-behavioral group therapy (CBGT) resulted in more significant social anxiety symptom reduction as compared to an eight-week MBSR course, the MBSR group still experienced significant symptoms reduction. Taken together, these studies indicate that mindfulness-based interventions offer a promising treatment option for students experiencing social anxiety disorder.

Self-Compassion

The concept of compassion is often infused in mindfulness and meditative training and practice, indicated by the existence of loving-kindness meditations in which feelings of love are cultivated and aimed at oneself, then extended to close others in one's life, and then offered to all of humanity. Self-compassion in particular, which has been widely studied by Dr. Kristin Neff, involves several components, including an attitude of kindness towards oneself; an acknowledgement of common humanity and realizing that one is not alone in one's feelings, failings, or sufferings; and awareness and attention to one's own internal state or emotions. Self-compassion asks, "How can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?" (Neff, 2018). When considering the self-criticism, over-identification, rumination, and distress associated with anxiety, it seems relevant to incorporate self-compassion through training, discussions, and conceptualizations in a mindfulness group aimed at decreasing the suffering associated with anxiety. In addition, students in this group may be learning mindfulness skills for the first time, and it could be

important to include self-compassion to help these students be kind to themselves in the process of learning something new, which can be a challenging process.

There is research to suggest that self-compassion is a potentially helpful complement to mindfulness training for individuals experiencing anxiety. Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) is an approach that incorporates psychoeducation on emotional regulation, mindfulness techniques, and imagery and is aimed to help those who tend towards self-criticism or experience high levels of shame (Matos, Duarte, Duarte, Pinto-Gouveia, Petrocchi, Basran, & Gilbert, 2017). In a non-clinical group of adults who were randomly assigned to either a treatment group of two weeks of compassionate mind training (CMT) or a no-treatment control group, the treatment group experienced statistically significant reductions in perceived stress and reduced negative self-evaluation and anxiety scores. Although the decreases in anxiety were non-significant, the authors suggested that this was due to the sample being non-clinical, and the participants may not have been experiencing significant enough levels of anxiety to make the decreases significant. In addition, the participants that completed two weeks of CMT showed increases in heart rate variability (HRV), indicating greater parasympathetic influences and greater emotional regulation/flexibility, which has also been linked to decreases in anxiety (Mankus et al., 2013).

Koru, a four-week mindfulness program designed specifically for emerging adults, emphasizes self-compassion in its teachings (Greeson, Juberg, Maytan, James, & Rogers, 2014). The program also introduces various mindfulness practices like breathing exercises, guided imagery, walking meditation, and mindful eating to give participants tangible activities they can engage in to quickly decrease distress, which may increase

their motivation to engage in a daily practice of mindfulness. In a randomized controlled trial of Koru on graduate and undergraduate students, the treatment group experienced significant decreases in perceived stress and sleep problems, and an increase in mindfulness, gratitude, and self-compassion as compared to the wait-list control group. Though this study did not evaluate the effect of Koru on anxiety, due to the hypothesized inverse relationship between mindfulness and anxiety, one might infer that the increases in mindfulness may have had a positive impact on anxiety in the students who took Koru, and that the emphasis on self-compassion may have facilitated the mindfulness training to have a greater impact on the existence of anxiety symptoms.

Though the literature on mindfulness-based interventions has been growing at an exciting and fast pace, more studies are needed to examine what populations mindfulness-based interventions work best for; how long interventions need to be; in what format these interventions need to be to make a significant difference; and how these interventions compare with other treatment methods. Still, the current literature on mindfulness-based interventions for college students experiencing anxiety is robust enough to merit creating a mindfulness-based group for this population. The viability of using mindfulness to treat generalized anxiety disorder and social anxiety disorder has been shown in various studies, and self-compassion, shown to be a potential mediator of the relationship between mindfulness and anxiety, is a feasible supplement to the mindfulness and meditative strategies and tools that will be taught in this group.

Proposed Group

The decision to design a group protocol for the treatment of anxiety versus an individualized treatment plan for the treatment of anxiety was based on the increasing

need for cost and time efficient mental health care in college counseling centers. In addition to the previously mentioned increasing need for mental health services at JMU's Counseling Center, 92 percent of college counseling center directors that responded to the 2012 National Survey of College Counseling Centers indicated that there have been rising numbers of students seeking services (Gallagher, 2013). Due to the limited amount of time counseling center clinicians have each week to meet with students, it seems desirable to offer treatment groups that allow clinicians to serve more students in a smaller time frame, and meta-analytic research has shown that counseling groups are superior to receiving no treatment for various mental health difficulties (Burlingame, Fuhrman, & Mosier, 2003). Counseling groups offer an alternative to individual counseling for college students in advantageous ways. Students will be able to express their experiences to others and hear about others' experiences, thus potentially decreasing the stigma surrounding mental health difficulties and helping participants recognize the common humanity in their suffering related to anxiety. Processing the learning and acquisition of mindfulness skills within a peer group is also potentially helpful since students can learn that they are not alone in their struggles to engage in healthier coping behaviors. In general, students will be able to learn from the psychoeducational and skill building aspects of the group, and also from others' struggles, triumphs, and strengths in the context of living with anxiety and learning to live mindfully, reflecting the instillation of hope, universality, and imparting information, some of Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) group therapeutic factors.

Schneider Corey, Corey, and Corey (2014) emphasize the imperative for group counselors to strive toward multicultural competence in group leadership, which is

relevant for the proposed group, since culture, identity, and life experiences (including trauma) can affect all aspects of students' experience of anxiety. Group leaders should develop an awareness that the above can affect students' development, maintenance, and experiences with anxiety, as well as how these individual aspects can affect their openness to learning mindfulness skills and participating in the group.

Format and Content

The proposed mindfulness group, which will include aspects of both counseling and psychoeducational groups, will be brief in nature, lasting eight weeks with hour and a half long sessions. Similar to the group formation process at JMU's Counseling Center, individuals will be referred to this group from initial intake sessions by clinicians who have been briefed on the group, and though individuals participating in this group do not need a formal diagnosis of anxiety to participate, they do need to be significantly affected by one or more aspects of their anxiety in daily life. Those with low risk would be included in the group, and those with higher risk or greater clinical impairment would be required to also be in individual counseling while participating in the group. The ideal size of the group would be eight to 12 students to promote reflection, discussion, and self-disclosure on the topics of anxiety and living mindfully. In line with other groups at the JMU Counseling Center, the group would have two co-leaders, at least one of them being a senior staff clinician with experience in mindfulness.

Though the standard time frame for treatment groups at JMU's Counseling Center informs the time frame of this mindfulness group, studies related to mindfulness-based interventions also inform this decision. In a study that examined the impact of a five-week MBSR-based program on trait anxiety, mindfulness skills, and self-compassion on

a nonclinical group of college students, Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013) found that though the program had a significant effect on mindfulness and self-compassion scores, the decrease in anxiety was insignificant, and the authors suggested that a longer intervention was needed to have a significant effect on anxiety. In addition, Josefsson, Lindwall, and Broberg (2014) found that there was no significant difference in anxiety between an intervention group that had received short-term mindfulness meditation training, an active control group that received relaxation training, and an inactive control group, suggesting that the length of mindfulness interventions need to be in excess of four weeks and have more than seven individual sessions included. Sears and Kraus (2009) found that meditation group participants who met for two hours over seven weeks and learned content including both mindful attention and loving-kindness meditations showed greater anxiety symptom reduction, as well as increased hope, as compared to a no-treatment control group and two groups that received only 15 to 20 minutes of meditation training of either mindful attention or loving-kindness. This study indicates that longer meditation training that incorporates multiple mindfulness activities (attentional awareness, loving-kindness, body scan, etc.) is more effective than a shorter session time-frame that only incorporates one type of mindfulness activity.

Similar to the Koru mindfulness program, multiple mindfulness and meditation skills and practices will be presented in the group to give students the chance to experiment with the variety of practices available, increasing the chance that they might find specific practices that resonate most with them. It will be suggested, but not required, that students in this group practice some of the mindfulness skills and techniques outside of the group (and resources including phone applications and websites

will be offered to guide students in their personal practice). This is in line with the suggestion in Bamber and Morpeth (2018) that required homework may decrease the impact that a mindfulness-based intervention has on student anxiety symptom reduction. To gain insight on the impact that this group has on student participants, there will be a pre- and post-test administration of the Beck Anxiety Inventory (discussed further in the protocol), and an informal journaling assignment will serve as a personal narrative assessment and record of participants' experience with learning mindfulness skills to combat anxiety.

The goals of the proposed mindfulness group as a treatment for college students experiencing anxiety are as follows: teach tools of meditation to participants for them to use throughout their life as a foundation for greater peace, acceptance, and non-judgement, and in moments of acute anxiety or other distress; decrease stigma surrounding experiences of anxiety and of using mindfulness and meditation as a self-care tool; facilitate discussions about anxiety and mindfulness; and foster interpersonal trust and self-disclosure. Self-disclosure, as asserted by Morran (1982), is an essential aspect of effective counseling groups, and although this group combines psychoeducation and experiential opportunities along with group process, self-disclosure has the potential to increase members' experience in this group beneficially.

What follows is a complete protocol for the proposed mindfulness group. This includes a detailed introduction for facilitators, a week-by-week group session plan with listed materials and resources needed, and a sampling of mindfulness meditation scripts, as well as suggested guided meditation recordings.

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Mindfulness Group Protocol

Sarah Deprey-Severance
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James Madison University

“If you want to conquer the anxiety of life, live in the moment, live in the breath.” –Amit Ray

Note to Facilitators

Welcome, readers and potential facilitators!

Thank you for taking the time to consider this protocol as a group intervention for those struggling with anxiety. As I have found personal growth and healing through the lessons of mindfulness and meditation, I feel hopeful thinking of others who may also benefit from these practices.

Some practical notes: My favorite (free!) smartphone meditation application is Insight Timer, and I've used a few guided meditations from this app in the protocol. Consider downloading it yourself and reviewing/practicing the meditations yourself before starting the group to ensure that the meditations match the needs of the group. It's relatively easy to find guided meditations for all of the themes covered in this protocol, so feel free to use my example scripts and guided practices from Insight Timer or find some of your own to share with the group. I've also included some resources in the James Madison University/Harrisonburg, Virginia communities for students looking to develop their practice outside of the group (in the Mindfulness Practices for Your Personal Practice handout), so be sure to develop that handout with resources in your local area.

A potentially important aspect of this group is to encourage members to reflect on their experiences in a journal or other documentable format (i.e., voice recording, expressive arts, etc.) to track their progress and further comprehension of the material and practices. You may notice that this is the only assessment-like aspect included in the group protocol, and this was done intentionally to hold the space as a welcoming, accepting, and non-judgmental place to encourage growth, personal reflection, and individual meaning-making. If you are interested in adding assessments into the protocol for your own group, some potential ideas might be a pre- and post-test Beck Anxiety Inventory, facilitator-created informal assessments, or a weekly scaling assessment of anxiety symptoms. I encourage you to make use of the material in a way that speaks to your own counseling or helping orientation and seems most appropriate for the needs of the group you are working with.

Furthermore, I'm of the mindset that practitioners of meditation and facilitators of mindfulness and meditative practices should have their own personal experience with these practices. Developing a mindfulness practice is a personal, on-going journey that looks unique person-to-person, so I will not operationally define "mindfulness practice" here. As

long as you, as a facilitator, have engaged in some mindfulness or meditative practices in the past, have a desire to continue them in the future, and can resonate with the struggles, frustrations, and rewards of developing a personal mindfulness practice, you will be serving your group members well.

Speaking of the struggles of developing a personal mindfulness practice, many difficult emotions can come up for people in meditation or other mindfulness activities. It is important to mention this to your group participants at the beginning, so both the facilitators and members are aware of this possibility. Mindfulness and meditation may not erase these difficult emotions from one's lives, but these practices can increase positive coping with difficult emotions.

That being said, it's important for facilitators to familiarize themselves with referral resources that are available in the local community should group members need additional support or higher levels of care and communicate these resources repeatedly to group members so they know their options. A handout of local resources could be provided in the first session, and brought up again in the 3rd, 5th, and final sessions. Members could be advised to speak to a facilitator before or after any session should they be interested in these resources, and facilitators should stay vigilant, looking for any increasing risk factors or particular struggles that may warrant a higher level of care (i.e, individual counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, partial hospitalization, etc.).

Thank you, again, for taking the time to review this protocol, and for your commitment to providing quality mental health services to those struggling with anxiety, a fundamentally human experience; helping others learn to find peace in chaos; and teaching skills to access the profound healing that can come from within.

Best wishes,

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April 2019

Week 1

Materials Needed

- Introduction to Mindfulness handout
- Mindfulness Resources for Your Personal Practice handout
- Mindful Attention Meditation Example Script

Welcome

- Introductions: Starting with co-leaders, have everyone share their name, year, major, and prior experience with mindfulness.
- Review group informed consent (consistent with site at which group is being conducted) and address any member questions.
- Collaborative approach to group rules/norms: Explain that as participants in this group, each member has influence on how the group functions, and that creating guidelines for the group can help create a feeling of safety and trust, enhancing participation. Examples that co-leaders can bring up if members do not mention include: Respect each other by listening and being present (i.e. no cell phones out, no interrupting); inform group leaders ahead of time if you cannot make it to a group meeting; decide as a group on how to handle seeing other group members around campus; do your best to participate in all group activities.
- Go over the general group outline for each week: check-in, educational/discussion piece, mindfulness meditation practice, personal reflections in journal (which they can take with them and bring back each week; encourage members to reflect in their journal throughout the week as a personal benchmarking and processing tool), group reflections, and check-out.

Introduction to Mindfulness

- Go over Introduction to Mindfulness handout as a group (i.e., go around the group and take turns reading).
- Distribute the Mindfulness Resources for Your Personal Practice handout.

Guided meditation

Mindful Attention meditation (5 to 10 minutes, example script below)

Reflections

- Personal (5 minutes) – Have participants draw, write, reflect quietly in journal on the below questions (these can be written on a whiteboard):
 - What was the meditation like for you?
 - What kinds of things did you think or feel during the meditation?
 - What was challenging about the meditation?
 - Can you see yourself practicing something like this in the week to come?
- Group discussion – Invite group members to share any answers of above questions or share their general impressions of meditation. Remind members that if they don't feel like sharing, they can have a pass, but encourage members to push themselves and share their experiences. Elaborate on this by explaining that verbalizing their experiences and sharing can be a rewarding part of being in a group and allows members to learn from each other. If members seem hesitant, co-leaders can share their own impressions of the meditation/psychoeducation/mindfulness in general.

Check-out

In what ways are you hoping to grow throughout this group experience?

Introduction to Mindfulness

Mindfulness, as defined by John Kabat-Zinn, is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.” Though the origins of mindfulness come from the ancient wisdom of Buddha and can be applied to one’s own personal religious or spiritual practices, mindfulness has been used for non-religious and non-spiritual purposes for many years, simply to reduce human suffering in its many forms.

Common Misconceptions About Mindfulness and Meditation

“There’s no way I can meditate – I can’t quiet my mind for that long.”

Mindfulness isn’t about clearing your mind or having a blank mind – it’s about paying attention to whatever is going on in this moment, including your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Thoughts will come up, and that’s okay. You can learn to be with the thoughts, acknowledge them, and allow them, without getting swept up in past or present thinking.

“I’m not doing it right.”

Even just acknowledging the thoughts that say, “I’m not doing this right” is part of the present-centered awareness that is mindfulness. Noticing the common judgments that we have about ourselves is part of the process of letting these judgments go and creating a healthier inner narrative. Plus, mindfulness doesn’t always feel “good.” Being mindful in moments of distress can increase your resilience and your belief that you can do hard things and endure difficult moments in the future.

“I don’t have the time to be mindful or to practice meditation.”

Mindfulness can be practiced in any waking moment. You don’t have to take 20 minutes a day to practice a seated meditation. Even deciding to be mindful while walking to class (What do you see, smell, hear, and feel? What thoughts are coming up?) can be part of a mindful way of living, and can serve to break patterns of worrying, anxiety, or rumination.

An Image of Mindfulness

“We tend to be particularly unaware that we are thinking virtually all the time. The incessant stream of thoughts flowing through our minds leaves us very little respite for inner quiet. And we leave precious little room for

ourselves anyway just to be, without having to run around doing things all the time. Our actions are all too frequently driven rather than undertaken in awareness, driven by those perfectly ordinary thoughts and impulses that run through the mind like a coursing river, if not a waterfall. We get caught up in the torrent and it winds up submerging our lives as it carries us to places we may not wish to go and may not even realize we are headed for.

Meditation means learning how to get out of this current, sit by its bank and listen to it, learn from it, and then use its energies to guide us rather than to tyrannize us. This process doesn't magically happen by itself. It takes energy. We call the effort to cultivate our ability to be in the present moment 'practice' or 'meditation practice.'" (From *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 9).

Mindfulness Resources for Your Personal Practice

Be Balanced Programming at James Madison University

Madison Meditates

An hour of guided meditation practice in the Meditation Room (Madison Union 419) led by student, faculty, staff, and guest facilitators. All experience levels welcome!

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 12-1 p.m.

Tuesday and Thursday, 4-5 p.m.

Koru

A four-session mindfulness-based program aimed at navigating the tasks young adults face, including coping with anxiety, and achieving personal growth. Facilitated by Shari Scofield. For more info, contact scofield@jmu.edu.

Sign up online at info.jmu.edu/studentactivities/koru-mindfulness

Apps, Books, and Websites

- Insight Timer, Headspace, or Calm apps
- *Wherever You Go, There You Are* by John-Kabat Zinn
- *When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chodron
- *The Mindful Twenty-Something* by Holly Rogers
- Greater Good in Action: <https://ggia.berkeley.edu>
- *Mindful.org*

Mindful Attention Meditation Example Script

Although it's difficult to actually "do" mindfulness "wrong," like we mentioned before, there are some practical pieces about cultivating mindfulness that can help with your practice. You can practice meditation pretty much anywhere, and you can decide to be sitting, standing, laying down, or even walking. Today we'll be practicing a seated mindful attention meditation, so start by getting a little more comfortable in your chair, maybe stretching out your legs and arms, getting a good foundation and sitting as flat as possible on your chair, with your feet as flat on the floor as possible. Try not to slouch or lean too much up on the back of your chair, and instead, keep your back at attention, separated from the back of your chair, and lift your shoulders up to your ears, pulling them slightly back and down, with your chest relatively open, so that air can move freely and easily through your lungs. If this feels too rigid, loosen yourself up a little and find a more comfortable posture that is still attentive; we're going for what some people call "a posture of dignity," where we are respectful of our body and mind by the way we position it. The way we hold our body can affect how we feel.

You can either practice meditation with your eyes closed, or if it feels more comfortable, you can keep them open and downcast, a couple feet in front of you, towards the ground. *Check in with everyone to see if they have any questions*

Now, using the sound of this singing bowl (or the sound of the bell, if you are using bells), close your eyes or keep your gaze downcast. *Ring the bells/bowl*

First, start to focus in on your breath. You don't have to change your breath right now. Just notice how it feels to be breathing. Maybe your breath feels shallow or quick, or full and long. Whatever your natural breathing pattern is right now is just fine. Feel the air come in and out of your body. Allow your breath to be an anchor for your awareness and come back to your breath if you feel your mind wandering.

This time is for you. Take this time to set things aside. There's no need to go over your to-do list or think about that conversation you had with a friend recently. There will be time for that later. Allow yourself this time to just

breathe. There may already be thoughts coming up for you. Am I doing this right? Why am I breathing so weirdly? Allow these thoughts. Thoughts are not the enemy. We don't have to push away thoughts. If you find yourself thinking, you could make a mental note of it, and say to kindly to yourself, "I'm thinking." The aim is not to have a blank mind, but instead, an attentive mind. What thoughts are coming up for you? Pay attention and keep breathing.

You can also use any of your senses as an anchor for your awareness, if focusing on the breath is uncomfortable for you for any reason. For instance, you can scan through your body and pick up on any sensations. How do your feet feel, resting on the floor? What sounds are you picking up on? Are there any tastes or smells you're currently experiencing? If your eyes are open, what do you see? Maybe pick one sense and focus on what it's currently bringing to your consciousness.

Whatever your experience is right now is fine. Allow your breath to give you an attitude of openness. Allow this openness to cultivate non-judgment of your experience. You might even say to yourself, "Whatever is happening now is alright. Whatever I'm feeling now is acceptable," bringing some self-compassion to the moment. If you feel yourself start to judge your experience, just notice that. Say to yourself, "I'm judging," allow it, and then breathe away the judgment.

You might imagine your thoughts and feelings as clouds in the sky, or as leaves going down a lazy river or stream. You can watch these thoughts and feelings, accept them, and watch them float away. And you can always come back to the breath, that you may notice has changed since we started. Sit for another few moments with whatever you're experiencing, knowing that it is just fine as it is.

Listen for the welcoming sound of the bell (or bowl), and keep your eyes closed until you cannot hear the sound anymore, then bring your awareness back to the room.

Week 2

Materials Needed

- What is Anxiety/Mindfulness vs. Anxiety handout
- Body Scan Meditation – Kate James (from Insight Timer app)

Check-in

Ask members, What are you carrying into this space from your life? What would you like to leave with at the end of this session to carry into your life?

Psychoeducation

Go over What is Anxiety/Mindfulness vs. Anxiety handouts as a group.

Mindfulness Practice

Body Scan meditation (for example, “Body Scan Meditation” by Kate James from Insight Timer, 15 minutes)

Reflections

- Personal – have members draw, write, reflect on these questions:
 - What was the body scan like for you?
 - What resonated most with you in our overview of the course of anxiety and how mindfulness can help?
- Group discussion – reflect as a group on above questions.

Check-out – How do you plan to use what you learned about anxiety and mindfulness as you go through the week ahead?

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the body's response to perceived threat. Everyone experiences some form of anxiety, apprehension, fear, and worry in their lives. Anxiety and fear are adaptive, and can help us survive, protect ourselves from potential dangers, and prepare for the future by planning. From an evolutionary perspective, anxiety served our ancestors by motivating them to act in ways that would increase their likelihood for survival (i.e., fear of heights kept people from falling off cliffs, concern about how others perceived them helped maintain connections). You can think of anxiety as an extension of the fight or flight response. However, anxiety can be overgeneralized, and when used as a rigid way of coping or perceiving the world, anxiety can lead to significant distress.

The Course of Anxiety

The human brain is wired to look for potential danger, and when a potential danger is perceived, physical (hypervigilance, heart racing, palms sweating, labored breathing) and mental/emotional (difficulty relaxing, worry about the future, feelings of overwhelm) responses arise in the body. Naturally, humans attempt to decrease these symptoms of anxiety by avoiding a feared situation (i.e., going to lunch with a new friend, initiating conversation, taking an exam, prepping for an interview). In the short term, avoidance causes anxiety to decrease. However, in the long term, these anxiety symptoms will continue in the face of the perceived threat, since in avoidance, one does not have the opportunity to prove to oneself that one can confront the perceived threat. Without this confidence in coping with difficult circumstances, anxiety and the body's response to threat will continue, and may even increase.

Changing the Course

Gradually confronting your fears in a way that is manageable (i.e., using relaxation techniques and starting with fears that are less intense and eventually using the skills learned for greater fears) helps create the confidence to know that you can cope with difficult situations. This may look like setting a goal for yourself to say hello to a new person every three days, which may eventually lead to initiating a conversation and offering to make plans with a new friend.

Material informed and adapted from "The Vicious Cycle of Anxiety" by the Centre for Clinical Interventions (2018).

Mindfulness vs. Anxiety

Mindfulness

Present-focused

Non-judgmental

Awareness of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations

Allowing thoughts, feelings, then letting go

Calming physiological response
physiological

Anxiety

Past or future thinking

Often characterized by harsh judgment of self

Over-identification with thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations

Rumination, holding on to thoughts, worries

Distressing symptoms: racing heart, sweating, shaking, blushing

Research has shown that there is an inverse relationship between mindfulness and anxiety, meaning that where there is mindfulness, there is less anxiety. Learning mindfulness and meditative skills can help us change the course of anxiety and help us intentionally cultivate attitudes and behaviors that are incompatible with, or at least reduce the presence of, anxiety and its various symptoms.

What are some other symptoms anxiety that you have heard of or experienced yourself? Think about/discuss how you think cultivating mindfulness skills might aid you in coping with these symptoms.

Week 3

Materials Needed

- Self-Compassion handouts
- Self-Compassion Medication Script

Check-in

Have members draw (or write) in their journal what anxiety, as they experience it, would look like if it took a physical form. Invite members to share something about that experience as a check in; indicate that they don't have to share what specifically they wrote or drew, but they are welcome to.

Psychoeducation

Go over the Self-Compassion handout as a group.

Mindfulness Practice

Self-Compassion meditation (15 – 20 minutes, example script below)

Reflections

- Personal - have members draw, write, reflect on these questions:
What was the self-compassion meditation like for you?
In what ways is self-compassion difficult for you to practice?
Think of a difficult situation you're currently in. What supportive words would you say to a friend in a similar situation?
- Group discussion – reflect as a group on above questions.

Check-out

In what way can you see yourself using self-compassion in the week ahead?

Self-Compassion

The Three Elements of Self-Compassion

- Self-kindness – The word “compassion” has its roots in the Latin word, *compati*, which means “to suffer with.” Think of the care one might show a friend in a difficult situation through comforting words, gentle touch, a listening ear. Humans have the capacity to offer this not just to others, but also to ourselves. Understanding and acceptance given to others can help soothe the pain of others, and we can also sooth our own pain through this warm presence.
- Common humanity – Self-compassion acknowledges that humans are vulnerable – we are not perfect, we make mistakes, and life can bring us pain, frustration, and difficult feelings. Recognizing the common humanity in suffering allows us to remember that we are not alone, and we are not the only ones who have ever felt these difficult feelings.
- Mindfulness – Instead of becoming wrapped up in difficult feelings, self-compassion is an acknowledgment and non-judgmental acceptance of what is going on in the present moment. Taking a step back from what we are experiencing allows an observing state of mind in which we can see situations with more equanimity.

Why Are We Self-Critical?

- We try to motivate ourselves. We worry that if we are kind to ourselves, we will become self-indulgent and last. In reality, research shows just the opposite. Self-criticism may motivate us in the short term, but ultimately undermines our motivation in the long run. When we engage in negative and critical self-talk, we tap into our body’s threat defense system. Cortisol and adrenaline are released to prepare the body for the fight or flight response. If the self-criticism and subsequent stress reaction are frequent enough, the body responds with anxiety or depression, which decrease motivation.
- We try to keep ourselves safe, since self-criticism is usually fueled by fear (of failure/mistakes, judgement, rejection, or criticism from others).
- Being self-critical allowed us to stay connected with important caregivers. Self-criticism is a survival strategy: as a young child, it is not safe to break the connection with parents or caregivers, so children attempt to align with caregivers, often by adopting the

critical statements. Children may even learn to “beat others to the punch” by criticizing themselves before the caregiver does, to avoid adverse consequences.

Why Practice Self-Compassion?

Practicing self-compassion supports greater health and wellbeing. It has been linked to decreased depression, stress, shame, substance use, and disordered eating behaviors. Self-compassion generates feelings of being safe. Oxytocin and endorphins are released when one practices self-compassion, and this calms the body's threat defense system. In addition, self-compassion increases resiliency (i.e., increasing coping after traumatic experiences and chronic pain), and supports healthy relationships with others. When we learn to be compassionate with ourselves, we are better able to be compassionate with others through supportive and caring behavior, since we ourselves are being taken care of, as well.

Self-Compassion is Not...

Self-compassion is not self-pity. Self-pity is self-focused and sometimes exaggerates the extent to which one is a victim of outside forces. It ignores one's common humanity and connections/similarities to other humans and their suffering. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence or ignorant to one's growth edges or mistakes, either. Acknowledging our pain, mistakes, or growth edges allows for us to take a good look at how we might want to change our attitudes, behaviors, or responses to others to increase well-being and connection.

Material informed and adapted from the content on self-compassion.org and by the research of Dr. Kristin Neff.

Neff, K. (2019). *What is self-compassion?* Retrieved from <https://self-compassion.org/>

Neff, K. & Germer, C. (2019). *The transformative effect of mindful self-compassion.* Retrieved from <https://www.mindful.org/the-transformative-effects-of-mindful-self-compassion/>

Self-Compassion Meditation

Take your time to get comfortable in your chair, feet flat on the floor, and bring about a posture of dignity where your chest is open, and air can flow freely. At your own pace, place your gaze downcast or close your eyes, and start to focus in on your breath. Whatever your breathing pace is fine and remember that you can always return to the breath as an anchor if you need to come back to the present. If it feels more natural, you can also focus on any sensations in the body – the way your hands feel resting on your legs, how your feet feel on the floor. Set everything else aside for now, give yourself permission to just be. Maybe even thank yourself for deciding to come today and take time for yourself and your health.

Start to remember the elements of self-compassion that we just talked about: being mindful and acknowledging your feelings. Showing yourself kindness, as you would a close friend. Recognizing the common humanity in these emotions, and in any distress you're feeling, knowing that you're not alone and that others have felt this before. See if you can cultivate these feelings in yourself right now, along with openness and non-judgment.

Now I invite you to image a safe, comfortable, peaceful place. This can be somewhere you've been, or even somewhere that just exists in your imagination. Investigate what's around you. What do you see? What smells or sounds are coming to you? What is the texture of what you're standing, sitting, or laying on? Really get a strong image of this comforting place into your mind.

Next, as you look next to you, a loving presence arrives. This can be a friend or family member, significant other, or even a character from a book or movie. Focus on finding someone who makes you feel safe and bring that person into your space with you. Notice that they're eager to listen to what you have to say, and that they are offering you unconditional love. What does it feel like to be in their presence? How does that love spread into any sensations in your body?

If you're having trouble focusing on this comforting place, with this loving presence with you, that's alright. It's alright if thoughts are coming up for you and distracting you from these images. If you find yourself thinking

about something unrelated, notice that, pause, breathe, and re-relax with the present moment, re-focusing on these comforting images.

Now, think of a difficult moment that happened recently. It doesn't have to be something big, just something that was hard for you. Share your emotions, and any pain you felt, with the person who is with you in this safe place. Offer the story up to the loving presence who is there with you. Imagine how they would listen and express their concern for you in their body language and any words they might offer you. What might those comforting words be? Keep observing that loving person, what they're saying, how they are acting towards you, and your comforting surroundings. Accept their compassion and empathy for you, even if this is difficult to do. When you hit obstacles, thoughts, shameful feelings, do your best to pause, breathe, and re-relax into the scene.

As it feels natural, start to focus back in on your breath, feel the chair beneath you, the floor against your feet. Know that you can always come back to this safe, comforting, compassionate place. Understand that though you invited this loving presence with you who showed you compassion, that the compassion they gave you actually came from yourself and is always there when you need it.

Week 4

Materials Needed

- Printed copies of The Guest House poem for all members and facilitators
- Naming Feelings Meditation Script

Check-in

In the past week, when was a time you practiced self-compassion, or could have used some self-compassion, in a difficult moment?

Psychoeducation

Review previous three week's psychoeducation by having members write three things they've learned and three questions they have. Address any questions as a group, inviting members to answer each other's questions and have co-leaders clarify information.

Mindfulness Practice

Pass out a copy of The Guest House poem by Rumi and have one of the co-leaders read it out loud to the group, followed by the Naming Feelings meditation (10-15 minutes, example script included below).

Reflections

- Personal – have members draw, write, or reflect on these questions:
 - What did the poem bring up for you?
 - How did you experience the naming feelings meditation?
 - Where did you feel certain emotions in your body?
 - Did any words frequently come up for you?
- Group discussion – reflect as a group on above questions.

Check-out – What technique, skill, or insight do you plan to use in the upcoming week?

Naming Feelings Meditation

The Guest House by Rumi

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 honorable.
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.

We can learn to view emotions as messages. What is our body trying to tell us with these messages? The first step is becoming aware of our emotions – where we feel specific emotions in our body, what comes before the emotions, what other emotions are associated or clustered together. We get to choose how we act based on our emotions, but this can get tricky if we don't allow space between an emotion and an action or behavior. Research suggests that naming our emotions when we feel them allows space and may even decrease the intensity of those emotions, since putting a label to a feeling uses more analytic parts of our brain than just feeling an emotion. With the space that naming emotions provides, you may find more space and flexibility to be able to choose what to do with the message the feeling is providing you. Practicing this in meditation allows it to be easier to practice in your daily life as things come up.

Position yourself in a posture of dignity and begin to check in with yourself. Close your eyes, or keep your gaze downcast, and start to focus in on your breathing. What are you feeling right now, in this moment? Scan through your body and see if you can pick up on that emotion somewhere, maybe in your chest or belly. Take some time to tune into yourself, allowing everything but the present to fall away. Try to think of a word or phrase that describes how you're currently feeling. Sit with that for

a few moments, and if you can't think of any words that resonate, just sit with your breath and whatever you're feeling.

As thoughts come and go, you may start thinking of something that happened in the past. If any situations come to mind, you might bring yourself back into that time and really focus in on how remembering that makes you feel. Where do you feel this in your body? What would you call that feeling?

Maybe think back to the poem we just read. What comes up for you when you think about that poem? Whatever it is, just breathe with it. Search for that feeling in your body.

Now, let your mind wander to anything. If your mind is feeling empty or blank, that's fine. Keep using your breath as an anchor for awareness of the present. If you start to follow a thought or a storyline in your head, let that happen, too. Pick up on any sensations these thoughts bring up in your body, even if it is uncomfortable. Breathe with whatever you're feeling and try to think of a word to describe something you're feeling. Try this for a few more minutes, and when you hear the sound of the bell (or bowl), feel free to open your eyes.

Week 5

Materials Needed

- “What Good is Gratitude?” video (Robert Emmons)
- “How Gratitude Changes Your Brain” article from Greater Good
- Gratitude Practices handout
- Gratitude Meditation – Sarah McLean (from Insight Timer application)

Check-in

What strategies have helped you cope with anxiety in the past?

Psychoeducation – Gratitude

- Watch video “Robert Emmons: What Good is Gratitude?” (<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude/definition>)
- Read article “How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain” as a group (https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_changes_you_and_your_brain)
- Go over Gratitude Practices handout as a group.

Mindfulness Practice

Gratitude (Sarah McClean from Insight Timer, 15 minutes)

Reflections

- Personal - have members draw, write, reflect on these questions:
What are three things that you are grateful for that came up during the meditation?
Can you see yourself developing a gratitude practice? If so, which exercises are you most drawn to? (Meditation, journal, letters, etc.)
- Group Discussion - reflect on the above questions as a group.

Check-out

What is something that could get in the way of practicing gratitude for you, and how could you work to overcome that obstacle?

Gratitude Practices

Practicing gratitude has been found to be associated with greater happiness and overall psychological wellbeing. There are many different ways to practice gratitude, and some of these practices are listed below.

Three Good Things

"This practice involves spending 5 to 10 minutes at the end of each day writing in detail about three things that went well that day, large or small, and also describing why you think they happened. A 2005 study led by Martin Seligman, founder of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, found that completing this exercise every day for one week led to increases in happiness that persisted for six months.

This simple practice is effective because it not only helps you remember and appreciate good things that happened in the past; it can also teach you to notice and savor positive events as they happen in the moment and remember them more vividly later on. By reflecting on the sources of these good things, the idea is that you start to see a broader ecosystem of goodness around you rather than assuming that the universe is conspiring against you."

Gratitude Journal

"...Involves writing down up to five things for which you are grateful once a week and reflecting on what these things mean to you. For this practice, you can expand the scope of your gratitude beyond good things that happened that day and consider positive events from your past and even those coming up in the future. The Gratitude Journal is especially effective when you focus on specific people you're grateful to have—or have had—in your life."

Mental Subtraction (Positive Events and Relationships)

"...Involves considering the many ways in which important, positive events in your life—such as a job opportunity or educational achievement—could have never taken place, and then reflecting on what your life would be like without them. Mental subtraction can counteract the tendency to take positive events for granted and see them as inevitable; instead, it helps you recognize how fortunate you are that things transpired as they did.

One variation on this practice is Mental Subtraction of Relationships, which is similar to Mental Subtraction of Positive Events but involves focusing specifically on important relationships, such as close friends or romantic partners. Although it may be painful to imagine your life without someone you care about, doing so once in a while can serve as a reminder not to take that person for granted and may improve your relationship as a result.”

Give It Up

“Ever notice that the first bite of cake is usually the best? We have a tendency to adapt to pleasurable things—a phenomenon called “hedonic adaptation”—and appreciate them less and less over time. But we can interrupt this process by trying the Give it Up practice, which requires temporarily giving up pleasurable activities and then coming back to them later, this time with greater anticipation and excitement. The goal of this practice is not only to experience more pleasure but to recognize how we take lots of pleasures for granted, and to try to savor them more. We often assume that more is better—that the greatest enjoyment should come from abundance and indulgence—but research suggests that some degree of scarcity and restraint is more conducive to happiness.”

Savoring Walk

“...Involves walking for 20 minutes by yourself once a week, ideally taking a different route each time, paying close attention to as many positive sights, sounds, smells, or other sensations as you can. Research by Fred Bryant and Joseph Veroff has found that taking this kind of stroll led to an increase in happiness one week later.

In addition to making you feel good, becoming more attuned to your surroundings can also give you more opportunities to connect with other people, even if it's just to share a smile.”

Gratitude Letter

“If there is anyone in your life to whom you feel you've never properly expressed your gratitude, writing a thoughtful, detailed Gratitude Letter is a great way to increase your own feelings of gratitude and happiness while also making the other person feel appreciated and valued; it may also deepen your relationship with them.”

Source: Breines, J. (2015). *Four great gratitude strategies*. Retrieved from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/four_great_gratitude_strategies

Week 6

Materials Needed

- Strategies That Increase Distress handout
- Visualization MBSR Lake Meditation – Dave Potter (from Insight Timer application)

Check-in

How did you use mindfulness or meditation in a difficult moment this past week? If you can't think of anything, how could you have used mindfulness in a moment of anxiety or worry?

Psychoeducation

Go over the Strategies That Increase Distress handout, below, as a group and after each item, brainstorm how mindfulness or meditative skills/techniques could help with each item.

Mindfulness Practice

Visualization (MBSR Lake Meditation with Dave Potter from Insight Timer, 20 minutes)

Reflections

- Personal - have members draw, write, reflect on these questions:
What was the visualization meditation like for you?
What are some "strategies that increase distress" that you have engaged in? Are there any that you tend towards frequently?
- Group discussion – reflect on above questions as a group.

Check-out – What is something that you plan to take with you from this session into the week ahead?

Strategies That Increase Distress

Research has shown that there are certain strategies that are ineffective coping strategies for dealing with negative emotions. Engaging in any of the following strategies can prolong and exacerbate your emotional suffering.

Experiential avoidance: You try to avoid painful emotions, thoughts, and uncomfortable activities. Whenever you feel uncomfortable you try to suppress, numb, or push away the experience or avoid the situation. Not only does this have long term consequences, but research has shown that efforts to avoid negative emotions make them more intense.

Rumination: You continuously worry and obsess about things to help prevent fear and uncertainty. You prepare for the worst and try to prevent bad things from happening. However, instead of solving problems, rumination raises anxiety by focusing on the negative, no matter how unrealistic or unlikely.

Emotional masking: You don't let people see your pain. You are afraid of what others would think if they saw your emotions. You fear being seen as weak, foolish, or crazy. Your real emotions and experiences stay hidden behind the mask you wear to look good. No one can provide you what you want or need in relationships because they never get to know what you really want or need.

Short-term focus: You engage in immediate relief from emotional pain. You try to avoid, suppress, and stop the emotion and create a wall between yourself and your feelings. Despite the momentary relief, the long-term consequences are not positive because you reinforce yourself for behaviors that isolate and disconnect you from yourself and others.

Response persistence: You're afraid of trying a new strategy and repeat behaviors that are not helpful or effective. You might have rigid rules about how you "should" react that prevents you from seeking a new solution. Your current strategies may have been helpful at some point, but right now they are not working for you.

Hostility or aggression: Anger is often an umbrella emotion that is used instead of recognizing that you feel fear, stress, loss, guilt, shame, overwhelmed, rejected, ineffective, or any other painful emotion. In addition to creating conflict, the more you use anger to cope, the angrier you get.

Negative appraisal: You use negative evaluations and judgments to prepare you for failures, bad outcomes, controlling others, and beating yourself up over the mistakes you have made or will make. You assume everything is going to go poorly and over focus on things you perceive as negative. This does not prevent painful experiences. It filters out the positive and prevents you from enjoying your experiences.

Source: James Madison University Counseling Center. (2018). *Strategies that increase distress*. Retrieved from <https://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/self-help/anxiety/strategies-that-increase-distress.shtml>

Week 7

Materials Needed:

- Grounding Techniques handout
- Walking Meditation Script

Check-in

Share a recent success and a recent challenge as it relates to something we've discussed or practiced in this group (anxiety, worry, meditation, mindfulness, self-compassion, gratitude, cognitive strategies, etc.)

Psychoeducation

Go over Grounding Techniques handout as a group, having each member read a few out loud.

Mindfulness Practice

Walking Meditation (15 – 20 minutes, guidelines below)

Reflections

- Personal - have members draw, write, reflect on these questions:
 - What was the walking meditation like for you?
 - What thoughts, feelings, or sensations came up for you during the meditation?
- Group discussion – reflect on above questions as a group

Check-out

What grounding techniques can you see yourself using in the future?

Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques are relaxing and pleasurable activities that decrease stress and anxiety. When you are anxious, you are out of touch with the present moment. Anxious thoughts are past and future focused. These techniques help you reconnect to the present and feel calmer and safer in the here and now.

Most of the techniques presented below involve focusing on some aspect of your five senses: touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. **Senses are in the present.** By heightening your awareness of your surroundings and your body, you can also heighten your awareness of the moment you are currently living within.

- Press your feet firmly to the ground to remind yourself where you are.
- Carry a polished stone or soft piece of cloth with you to touch.
- Carry a soothing picture with you and look at it when you are feeling anxious.
- Eat or drink a favorite food. Enjoy it slowly. Don't do anything else while you are consuming it except focus on enjoying and savoring it.
- Notice where you are, including the people, sites, and sounds as if you were watching a T.V. show.
- Exercise, Stretch. Massage your muscles to relax them and reduce tension.
- Concentrate on your breathing. Take a deep cleansing breath in through your nose and count. Exhale slowly through your mouth for twice as long. Continue for five minutes.
- Slowly and deliberately cross your legs and arms. Feel the sensations of you controlling your body.
- Call a friend and talk to them about something you have recently done together or want to do together.
- Take a warm, relaxing bubble bath or shower and pay attention to the water touching your body.
- Light a candle of your favorite scent or visit a place with enjoyable smells (bakery, coffee shop, etc.)
- Verbalize the following "It was just thought or memory." "It's over now." "I am safe now." Give yourself permission to not think about it right now.
- Realize that no matter how small you feel, you are an adult. Envision yourself being safe, strong, and capable.
- Find your pulse on your wrist or neck and count the beats per minute.

- Go outside. If it's warm, feel the sun shining down on your face. If it's cold, feel the breeze tickle against your skin. How does it make your body feel? Sit against a tree. Feel the bark pressing against your back. Smell the outside aromas like the grass and leaves. Run your fingers through the grass.
- Hold something that you find comforting, a stuffed animal or a blanket. Notice how it feels in your hands.
- Go outside and watch the clouds or go for a walk.
- Get active. Do the dishes, clean your room, or redecorate. Organize your dresser or closet.
- Pet or play with an animal. If you don't have one, visit a friend, pet store, or shelter.
- Listen to a familiar, comforting music and sing along to it. Dance to it.
- Write in your journal. Pay attention to yourself holding the pencil. Write about what you are remembering and visualize the memory traveling out of you into the pencil and onto the paper. Tear the paper up.
- Watch a favorite and fun TV program, DVD, or go to your favorite website. Play a videogame.
- Color in a coloring book or doodle on a notepad. Focus on the feeling of your writing utensil moving across the paper.
- Look up pictures or paintings online that you find beautiful. Save them as your background image or hang them in your room.
- Check out an audiobook from the library and listen to it.
- Go somewhere you've never been before (restaurant, museum, etc.).
- Play white noise or running water. Set up a mini water fountain or run a fan to provide soothing background noise. Go to a park or the Arboretum and listen to the sounds in nature.

Source: James Madison University Counseling Center. (2018). *Grounding techniques*. Retrieved from <https://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/self-help/anxiety/grounding-techniques.shtml>

Walking Meditation Guidelines

Note: this will need to take place in an alternative room where participants can walk the entire length of the room and have enough personal space to practice.

"In formal walking meditation, you attend to the walking itself. You can focus on the footfall as a whole; or isolated segments of the motion such as shifting, moving, placing, shifting; or on the whole body moving. You can couple an awareness of walking with an awareness of breathing. In walking meditation, you are not walking to get anyplace...Literally having nowhere to go makes it easier to be where you are...The challenge is, can you be fully with this step, with this breath?"

The practice is to take each step as it comes and to be fully present with it. This means feeling the very sensations of walking – in your feet, in your legs, in your carriage and gait, as always, moment by moment, and in this case, step by step as well. Just as in the sitting meditation, things will come up which will pull your attention away from the bare experience of walking. We work with those perceptions, thoughts, feelings and impulses, memories and anticipations, that come up during the walking in the very same way that we do in sitting meditation. Ultimately, walking is stillness in motion, flowing mindfulness."

Get into your posture of dignity while standing up and find yourself enough space to walk the length of this room, and back, which we will do for a while to see how the experience is for everyone. You can either keep your arms and hands relaxed at your sides, place your hands together point in front of you, or cup one hand in the other and hold them in the middle of your torso. Start to center yourself in awareness of the present. Allow everything earlier in the day, and all that is to come, slide away, and be here now. Using the sound of the bell (or bowl) as an anchor, and as a starting and ending signal, start walking with awareness of breath, body, and movement.

Quotations from *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (1994) by John Kabat-Zinn, pages 145-146.

Week 8

Materials Needed

- Loving-Kindness Meditation Script

Check-in

What thoughts and feelings are coming up for you as you consider that this will be the last time we will meet as a group?

Mindfulness Practice

Loving-Kindness (example script below)

Reflections/Check-out/Group Evaluation – reflect personally, then as a group:

What was this group like for you?

How was your experience of anxiety affected by participating in this group?

What parts of the group were most helpful? Unhelpful?

What was something that you struggled with in this group?

What is something you learned from another member of this group?

What do you plan to take with you from this group and incorporate into your life?

Loving-Kindness Meditation

Based on a meditation from Steven Smith, meditation teacher and advisor for the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (retrieved from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/loving-kindness>)

“Loving-kindness, or *metta*, as it is called in the Pali language, is unconditional, inclusive love, a love with wisdom. It has no conditions; it does not depend on whether one ‘deserves’ it or not; it is not restricted to friends and family; it extends out from personal categories to include all living beings. There are no expectations of anything in return. This is the ideal, pure love, which everyone has in potential. We begin with loving ourselves, for unless we have a measure of this unconditional love and acceptance for ourselves, it is difficult to extend it to others. Then we include others who are special to us, and, ultimately, all living things. Gradually, both the visualization and the meditation phrases blend into the actual experience, the feeling of loving kindness.”

I invite you to get into a relaxed and comfortable position, summoning a posture of dignity that allows air to flow freely and the chest or heart center to be open. With the welcoming sound of this singing bowl (or these bells), close your eyes or let your gaze fall, and start to focus in on your breath. *Ring the bowl/bells*

Begin to focus your breath and awareness around your heart center. Breathe in and out from that area, as if you are breathing from the heart center and as if all experience is happening from there. Anchor your awareness on the sensations at your heart center. You might even place your hand on your heart, if this helps focus your awareness. Begin by generating feelings of loving-kindness toward yourself. Feel any areas of mental blockage or numbness, self-judgment, or self-hatred. Then drop beneath that to the place where we care for ourselves, where we want strength and health and safety for ourselves.

As you breath in and out from your heart center, listen to the phrases I’m about to say, and repeat them silently a few times to yourself.

May I be well in mind and body.

May I be safe and cared for.

May I be filled with joy and gratitude.

May I be healed and may I be a source of healing for others.

May I live in peace and happiness.

Check in with yourself now, and notice what thoughts, feelings, or maybe even resistance, is coming up for you. Acknowledge whatever is present for you, breathing through the heart center with acceptance.

Now summon the image of a person in your life who is easily to love unconditionally – maybe a child or a grandparent, someone who elicits feelings of care. Repeat the same phrases directed towards that person from your heart center.

May you be well in mind and body.

May you be safe and cared for.

May you be filled with joy and gratitude.

May you be healed and may you be a source of healing for others.

May you live in peace and happiness.

Next, imagine a close family member or friend who you'd like to send loving-kindness to.

May you be well in mind and body.

May you be safe and cared for.

May you be filled with joy and gratitude.

May you be healed and may you be a source of healing for others.

May you live in peace and happiness.

Now, think of a person who you don't necessarily have positive or negative feelings towards, maybe someone you see every day at the store or in between classes, and repeat the phrases to them.

May you be well in mind and body.

May you be safe and cared for.

May you be filled with joy and gratitude.

May you be healed and may you be a source of healing for others.

May you live in peace and happiness.

Next, think of a person with whom you have conflict, or feelings of hostility or resentment towards. Send loving-kindness to them, too, with an open and forgiving heart.

May you be well in mind and body.

May you be safe and cared for.

May you be filled with joy and gratitude.

May you be healed and may you be a source of healing for others.

May you live in peace and happiness.

Finally, send these warm, caring, tender feelings to all living beings.

May all living beings be well in mind and body.

May all living beings be safe and cared for.

May all living beings be filled with joy and gratitude.

May all living beings be healed and may they be a source of healing for others.

May all living beings live in peace and happiness.

Take a few more deep breaths through your heart center. Notice how you feel in your mind, body, and heart. Using the sound of the bowl (or bell) as an anchor, slowly open your eyes and come back into awareness of this room at your own pace.

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