

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction – Course Outline



Through the cultivation of skills, attitudes and knowledge, the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course offers a tested approach to develop and quicken our innate human capacities for attention, awareness and wise action. You will learn a range of mindfulness practices to cultivate an observant, accepting and compassionate stance towards your own internal experiences, including cognitions, emotional states, body sensations and impulses. And you will learn how to apply mindfulness in a practical way to immediate life challenges.

Through doing an MSBR course, change happens through:

- **Physiological regulation:** learning how to calm down from "doing" mode into "being" mode
- **Emotional awareness:** getting to know your own emotions and how to accept, explore and transform them
- **Cognitive flexibility:** developing more concentration and clarity and less rigidity in your beliefs and attitudes
- **Engagement with values:** bringing what you care about into how you live
- **Behavioural change:** experimenting with small changes leading to bigger shifts in life

Topics by week:

- Week 1 Recognising the present moment
- Week 2 Perception and how we make sense of the world
- Week 3 There is pleasure and power in being present, and keeping the body in mind
- Week 4 Investigating stressful experience and approaching the difficult
- Week 5 Finding another place to stand: relating differently to thoughts
- Week 6 Mindful communication in stressful situations
- Week 7 Living on purpose: connecting with your values and taking action
- Week 8 Making mindfulness a part of your life

A more detailed description of the content of each session is outlined below.

Week 1 - Recognising the present moment

There is more right with you than wrong with you, no matter what challenges you are facing. Problems can be worked with, and the MBSR program offers the opportunity to do this in a supportive environment. Present moment awareness of body sensations, thoughts, and emotions is the foundation of this work, because it is only in the present that one can learn, grow, and change.

Practices Introduced: Eating meditation, diaphragmatic breathing, body scan.

This week, you will be exploring how to:

1. Interrupt your 'automatic pilot'
2. Slow down and pay attention to your immediate experience
3. Use body sensations as an anchor in the present moment
4. Move from 'doing' mode into 'being' mode
5. Notice the flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations that arise in the present moment.

Week 2 – Perception, and how we make sense of the world

How you see things, or don't see them, will determine how you will respond to them. It is not the events themselves but rather how you handle them that influences the effects on your body and mind.

Practices Introduced: Sitting meditation (focus on awareness of breath); Breathing Space

This week, you will explore how to:

1. Notice how perception works
2. Observe experience through the lenses of sensations, emotions and thoughts
3. Observe how we appraise experience as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral
4. Use the breath as a way to anchor yourself in the present
5. Practice the Breathing Space
6. Cultivate a concentration practice using the breath
7. Honour and accept all of your experiences and not just the 'good' bits
8. Begin actively working with obstacles to practicing regularly

Week 3 - There is pleasure and power in being present, and keeping the body in mind

We miss many of our pleasant moments, perhaps by focusing only on the unpleasant ones (i.e. crisis or pain). You can have pleasant moments even when you are experiencing pain. Focus on the field of awareness: body sensation, thought, and emotion.

Practices Introduced: Mindful yoga

This week, you will be exploring how to:

1. Practice patience and acceptance of yourself as you are
2. Bring an exploratory attitude to unpleasant experience
3. Come back to the present moment again and again
4. Use movement practice to explore limits, and cultivate concentration, strength and flexibility of mind and body
5. Continue to develop concentration, through practice

Week 4 - Investigating stressful experience, and approaching the difficult

Cultivating mindfulness can reduce the negative effects of stress reactivity, as well as help develop more effective ways of responding positively and pro-actively to stressful situations and experiences. Focus on emotions.

Practices Introduced: Sitting meditation (expanding focus from awareness of breath to body sensations and hearing)

This week, you will be:

1. Learning more about the physiology and psychology of stress reactivity
2. Cultivating more equanimity in the face of difficult physical and emotional experience
3. Using metaphors to work effectively with stressful experiences
4. Using bodily sensations as a way to ground and open up choice in stressful moments
5. Recognizing and interrupting the thoughts which are associated with painful emotions
6. Focusing on the breath body sensations as a way of exploring stressful experience and watching it change.

Week 5 – Finding another place to stand: relating differently to thoughts

The learning objective of this session is to connect mindfulness with perception, appraisal, and choice in the critical moment. Particular attention is paid to observing thoughts as events, and distinguishing events from content — “You are not your thoughts.”

Emphasis in the sitting practice on observing the constant, ever changing flow of experience (impermanence and non-identification).

Practices Introduced: Sitting Meditation (expanding awareness beyond breath, body sensations and hearing, to observing thoughts, emotions, and whatever arises in the present moment)

This week, you will be exploring how to:

1. Investigate your conditioned ways of reacting to stress and stay present to this experience
2. Open up possibilities of responding rather than reacting in habitual ways - CHOICE
3. Recognise unhelpful patterns of thinking and how they shape your perceptions and contribute to your stress
4. Recognise the narratives or stories that you generate (Mediation is a great opportunity to do this!)
5. Interrupt ruminative thoughts with focus on the breath and sensations
6. Explore an open awareness mediation practice

Week 6 - Mindful communication in stressful situations.

Including awareness of your needs in the present moment, and ways to express those needs effectively. The learning objective of this session is to learn how to maintain your centre, recognize habitual patterns of relating, and discern skilful options in stressful interpersonal exchanges.

Practices Introduced: Walking meditation, Loving Kindness/Compassion

This week, you will be exploring how to:

1. Pay detailed attention to the ‘other’
2. Listen and see others in more flexible and accepting ways
3. Use mindful contemplation as a way of cultivating acceptance and compassion for yourself and others
4. Explore assertive communication through a mindfulness lens.
5. Explore patterns of relating through mindfulness.

In between session 5 and 6, or 6 and 7: One Day Mindfulness Retreat

Deepen mindful awareness of experience by formally cultivating mindfulness over an extended period of time, fostering the possibility of greater self-knowledge, and insight into the impermanence of body-mind states.

Practices: The full range of practices from prior sessions are reinforced, and two new practices are introduced — mountain or lake meditation, and loving kindness meditation

Week 7 – Living on purpose: connecting with your values and taking action

In this session, we will be reflecting on what matters most in our lives, at the end of the day, and will be exploring what kind of changes we might want to make in our lives, and where to start with that.

Practices introduced: practicing mindfulness meditation without guidance

This week, you will be exploring how to:

1. Integrate what you have been learning into daily life
2. Reflect on some options about caring for yourself and making choices in your life
3. Begin practising without the CDs.

Week 8 – Making mindfulness a part of your life

The learning objectives of this session are to help participants keep up the momentum and discipline they've developed over the past seven weeks in mindfulness practice, both formal and informal, and to present a range of resources, such as books, websites, advanced programs, and other opportunities for practice in the community, is reviewed to support continued practice. Meditations and opportunities for sharing with the group close the session and the course.

This week, you will be exploring how to:

1. Explore what you have achieved through the practice
2. Recognise that living mindfully is a process of ongoing practice
3. Explore choices about continuing to support this practice in your life
4. Pay attention to how it feels to be ending the course.
5. Give your feedback about the program