

Mindfulness Training Programme

This programme is a comprehensive training in mindfulness that is suitable for beginners and for those who already have a mindfulness practice. Participants will be taught progressive skills in mindfulness through presentations, guided practice and tutorial sessions. A strong emphasis is placed on experiential learning, and for this reason there are home assignments between weekends that include regular mindfulness practice, daily life exercises and journal writing. Each module will take place over a weekend and the four modules will be spread out over the course of approximately six months.

Module One – Becoming Present

Mindfulness is defined as paying attention to our moment by moment experience in a way that is non-judgmental and kind. In the beginning we notice how our attention is like a butterfly flitting from one thought to the next. So we start by slowing down and settling our mind through regulating breathing and counting. We then introduce practices that ground us allowing our attention to drop out of the battlefield of thoughts in our heads into the sensory awareness of the body. We then learn to rest in the present moment getting used to disengaging from our habits of compulsive doing. And then, when we notice our attention drifting away into thinking, we learn to work with the mindfulness supports of sound and breath.

We are initiated into this graduated process through the core practices of settling, grounding, resting and mindfulness support. We also practice bodyscan and walking meditation and simple practices for integrating mindfulness into daily life. Throughout each of the modules we work on developing kindness as a basis for self compassion.

Module Two – Working with Distraction

Having had the opportunity to practice settling, grounding, resting and support on a daily basis between modules one and two, we are now in a position to become more familiar with how the mind moves and the unique pathways of habit it follows. We become increasingly familiar with the changing dynamic of mindfulness and distraction, and begin to see how distraction reveals an inner world of habitual patterning that ensnares our energies. We also begin to recognise attitudes of preference – like and dislike – and see how they narrow and contract our awareness, imprisoning us.

At this point we introduce the model of ‘undercurrent and observer’ as a way of mapping out the inner landscape of our mind and identifying where change can take place. The ‘undercurrent’ refers to the continuous stream of thoughts, emotions, memories and images that stream through our mind moment by moment, whether we like it or not. The ‘observer’ refers to that part of our mind that sees the undercurrent and has the capacity to reflect on itself. As our practice deepens we learn to step out of the undercurrent and simply leave it alone. Instead, we focus on working with the attitudes of preference in our observer as this is where genuine change can take place.

In this module we also introduce mindful movement as a way of integrating mindfulness into how we move through our lives, and the three minute breathing space as a way of breaking the reactive cycles we get caught in during everyday life.

Module Three – Self Acceptance

Throughout our training we are working in two areas – redirecting our attention to the present moment by using a mindfulness support, while at the same time learning to accept the diverse range of our inner experience. Part of mindfulness practice is learning to work with strong emotions that arise and developing the capacity to ‘hold’ difficult experiences within body and mind. The model of undercurrent and observer reveals how working on attitude is all important, and so, through training in acceptance we learn to acknowledge and come to terms with difficult thoughts and emotions by paying them close attention with a kind and inclusive attitude. This leads to a gradual dis-identification with the contents of our experience and shift in perspective in which we come to see that we are not our thoughts but the awareness that witnesses them.

We use the RAIN method (recognise, accept, investigate and non-identify) as a way of progressively training in acceptance, and practice loving kindness as a way of bringing warmth to our inner environment. We also introduce a more in depth version of the three minute breathing space in which we learn to relate with a kindly and accepting attitude to difficult thoughts, feelings and emotions that arise in our daily life.

Module Four – Deepening Practice

Through training in this way our minds gradually become stable. In this context we define stability as being aware of the arising of our thoughts and emotions without identifying with them and being overwhelmed by them.

In the final module of the mindfulness training we review the skills and methods that we have learned to date, and there is the opportunity to participate in a retreat weekend to deepen our practice of mindfulness. There will be periods of silence and also an opportunity for a personal interview with one of the tutors to review the training and assess how to go forward with our practice in a sustained and supportive way.