Module 21

Mindfulness and ADHD

Flourish



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WHAT DOES MINDFULNESS EVEN MEAN?

If you're confused about what mindfulness means, you aren't alone.

The confusion results from different people using it to mean different things.

One person might use it to mean a particular type of meditation practice, another person might use it to mean a state of mind in the moment.

Part of the reason for this is that mindfulness has its roots in Eastern philosophy and spiritual traditions.

When it was brought to the West, it was interpreted in a variety of ways that diluted the original and intended meaning.

Mindfulness has also been co-opted by capitalism! It's been repackaged as a product to be bought and sold for profit.

Its meaning has been further muddled by the scientific community's well-meaning attempt to study its beneficial effects.

WHAT DOES MINDFULNESS EVEN MEAN?

Most definitions of mindfulness relate to being fully present and engaged in the current moment. It's about noticing what's happening right now, in your body, mind, and surroundings, **without judgment.**

Cultivating mindfulness through certain practices can help you learn to be more present with your experiences in the present rather than being lost in the past or worried about the future. This has been shown by science to lead to more happiness, wisdom, and less stress, anxiety, and depression.

It's okay for your mind to wander during mindfulness practices. It's natural for minds to wander. The goal of mindfulness isn't to clear your mind of thoughts, but to notice them without judgment or getting swept away by them. When we practice, just gently guide your attention back to the present moment, again and again. That's actually what mindfulness is, the noticing.



Is Hyperfocus Mindfulness?

When you "hyperfocus" and are fully engrossed in a task or activity, you might demonstrate high levels of concentration on a specific task.

In a sense, you are mindful, or deeply present in the moment with the task you are engaged in.

The goal of mindfulness practice is to be able to bring this kind of present-moment awareness into all aspects of one's life, not just those that are inherently interesting or stimulating, and to have more control over this ability.



The Definition of Mindfulness

There are many definitions of mindfulness, but one that I particularly like comes from Jon Kabat-Zinn: "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally".

Jon Kabat-Zinn is a Western doctor and founder of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, as well as the developer of the MBSR (Mindfulness- Based Stress Reduction) clinic in Massachusetts.



Emotional Regulation and Mindfulness

Mindfulness involves cultivating awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations while acknowledging them without getting caught up in them. This allows you to develop a sense of detachment from your thoughts and emotions, which can help you feel more emotionally regulated.



Aspects of Mindfulness Include

- Curiosity



- Openness





- Acceptance

- Non-judgment



Why Try Mindfulness?

I think Mindfulness can be particularly beneficial for women with ADHD for several specific reasons:

1. Mindfulness can decrease shame and self-criticism. It provides distance from painful emotions, especially when combined with self compassion, so the grip they have is loosened.

2. Overwhelm and Burnout: Mindfulness has been shown to decrease stress, anxiety, and depression.

3. Making Empowering Choices: Mindfulness can serve as a bridge from old habits to new ones, as it can aid in choosing conscious actions over habitual responses.

4. Manage hyperfocus: Mindfulness increases the capacity to choose focus rather than it being a spontaneous occurrence.

5. Reduced Impulsivity: Mindfulness emphasizes taking a moment to pause and observe one's thoughts and feelings before reacting to them.

Why Try Mindfulness?

7. Increased Self-Awareness: Mindfulness can help you better understand yourself, because it slows down thinking.

8. Better Decision Making: Better self awareness leads to better decision making.

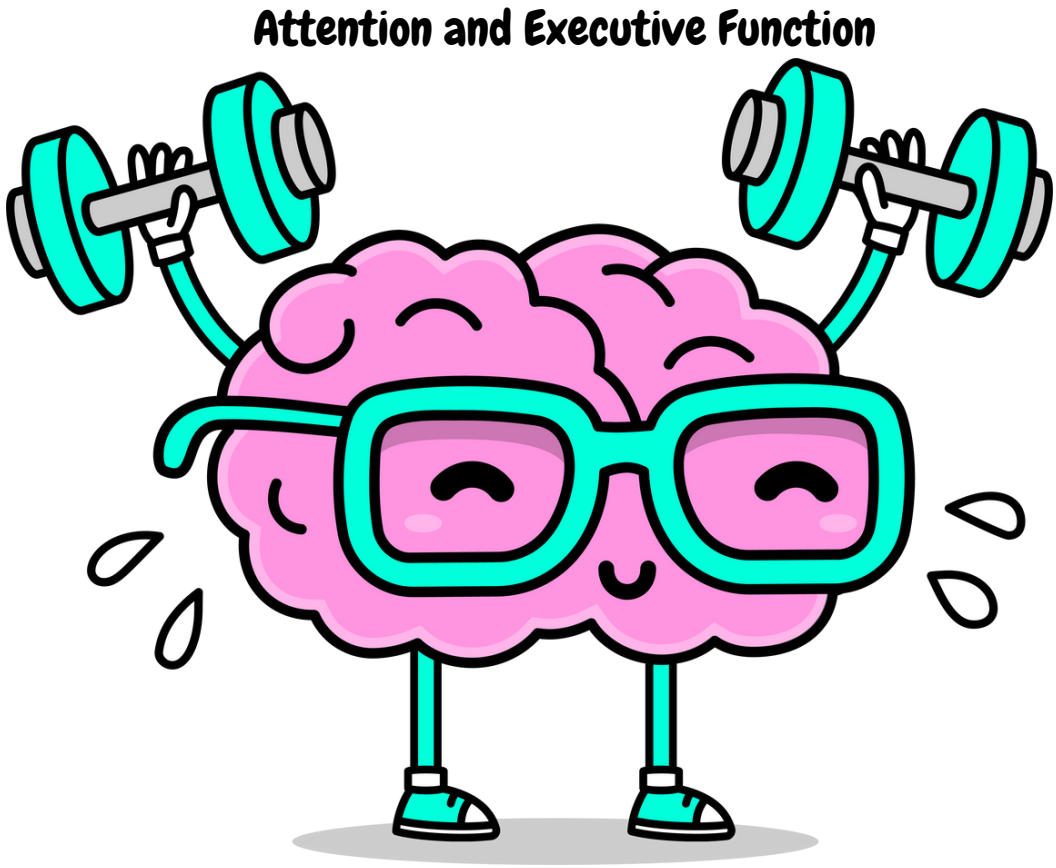
In our ADHD and women's group, we've been using mindfulness concepts from the first module. This module is almost like a refresher, giving a name to a lot of what we've done.

What do others say about Mindfulness and ADHD?

Lydia Zylowska, an author of two books on mindfulness and Adhd, suggests that mindfulness can:

- strengthen self-regulation skills
- lower perceived stress
- improve communication,
- and enhance relationships with others.

Additionally, mindfulness practices can increase activity in areas of the brain responsible for attention and executive function, which can help compensate for deficits in these areas.



Can Mindfulness Hurt Me?

There is research that indicates mindfulness can be helpful for those with ADHD; however, there are also cautions against certain mindfulness techniques, in particular, meditation.

Meditation CAN cause symptoms of distress in people who have trauma. Small-scale research also suggests it might worsen the awareness for some people of distressing thoughts or struggles.

If you have a response that feels upsetting or distressing stop immediately. Trust your body, get grounded, and care for yourself.





If you begin to feel too distressed

How do I practice Mindfulness?

Mindfulness practices are usually divided into formal and informal practices.

Formal practices are exercises you set aside a particular time to do, while informal practices are those that you can easily weave into your life without scheduling a particular time to do.

Often, informal practices entail things you can notice when you are doing and then do them more intentionally.

You can do these practices with chores, walks, and eating, for example. You notice what you are doing, pay attention to the experience, notice if your mind wanders from the moment, bring it back to the moment.



How Do We Practice Mindfulness? Informal Practices

Here are a few examples of opportunities for informal mindfulness practices:

- Spend time with children,
- Do creative projects
- Spend time in nature.
- Eating
- Mindful Walking
- Showering
- Mindful Jogging/exercising or other movement
- Combing your hair
- Making the bed
- Playing with your children
- Cooking
- Mindful Listening
- Mindful breathing
- Practice Rain
- Practice Stop
- Practice Timer check-ins

How Do We Practice Mindfulness?
Formal Practices

Most people think of meditation when they think of formal mindfulness, but there are many ways to practice mindfulness.

Some formal practices that are not meditation include:

• Body Scans: Paying attention and tuning into different parts of the body.

• RAIN Practice: Stands for Recognize, Allow, Investigate, and Non-Identification. It is a mindful practice for identifying and letting go of emotions.

• Mindful Communication Practices: These involve connecting with the speaker in an open and nonjudgmental way.

We will do several mindfulness practices today including meditation.

Different Ways Mindfulness is Taught in Western Culture: Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

MBCT is typically delivered in a group format and consists of eight weekly two-hour sessions.

Each session is organized around a theme.

The sessions involve a combination of mindfulness meditation exercises, cognitive therapy techniques, and group discussions.

Participants are also given homework assignments to help them practice the skills they've learned in their daily lives.

Research shows that MBCT can be particularly effective for depression.



Different Ways Mindfulness is Taught in Western Culture: Mindfulness Self Compassion (MSC)

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) is a way of relating to oneself kindly, especially in times of difficulty. It involves treating yourself with the same kindness, care, and understanding that you would offer to a good friend.

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) is a practice of kindly relating to oneself during challenging times, akin to treating oneself as a dear friend. Its core elements are:

- Mindfulness: The non-judgmental awareness of our thoughts and feelings.
- Common Humanity: Recognizing shared human experiences of suffering and imperfection.
- Self-Kindness: Treating oneself gently, refraining from harsh judgment.

Practicing MSC helps navigate difficult emotions and situations with kindness and understanding, fostering forgiveness towards oneself during instances of mistakes or perceived inadequacies.

Different Ways Mindfulness is Taught in Western Culture: Mindful Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

MBSR is a program developed in the late 1970s by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.

It uses mindfulness meditation to help individuals manage stress, pain, and illness.

The MBSR program typically involves Group session, homework and a retreat.

Evidence shows his group is highly effective and widely studied with a variety of physical and mental health issues.



What might get in the way of your practicing mindfulness?

1**. Thinking you should have a clear and focus mind:** Every time you notice your mind has wandered and you bring your attention back, you're strengthening your mindfulness muscle. It's not a problem.

2. Self-Criticism: Remember to practice self-compassion, and perhaps switch up your choices of activity. Pick something that you enjoy and feels good to you.

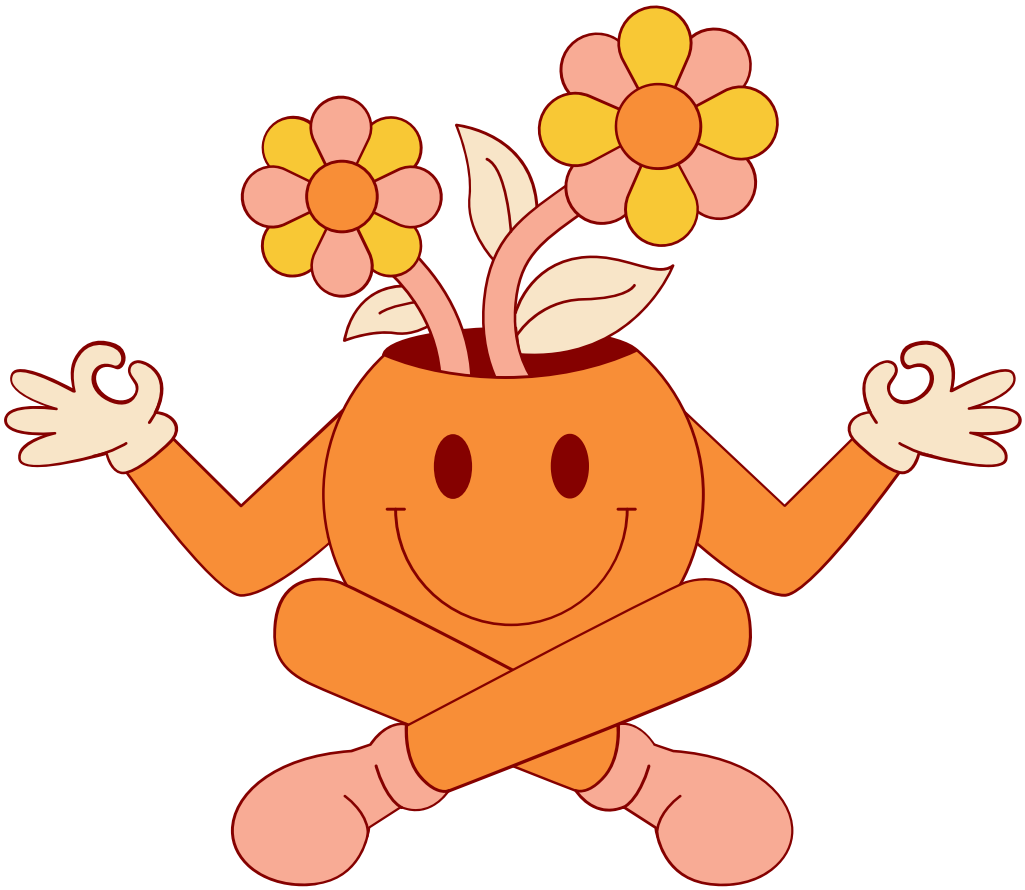
3. Trying activities that aren't suited for you: Accommodate your Mind. Shorter practice times or using guided meditations with background music can help. Also, mindfulness can be practiced in motion, like during a walk, which may feel better for you.



What might get in the way of your practicing mindfulness?

4. Difficulty in Establishing a Regular Practice : Consistency is key in mindfulness, but ADHD might make establishing routines more challenging. Make it as easy and fun as possible, and pair it with something you are already doing. Varying the practices (like body scan, mindful eating, etc.) can help keep the practice engaging.

5. Unpleasant Experiences: Always prioritize safety and comfort, and it's okay to take a break or seek professional help if mindfulness practice is bringing up challenging emotions.



STOP



MINDFULNESS CHECK IN SKILL

Stop

Stop what your doing

Take a breath

Take a breath





Observe

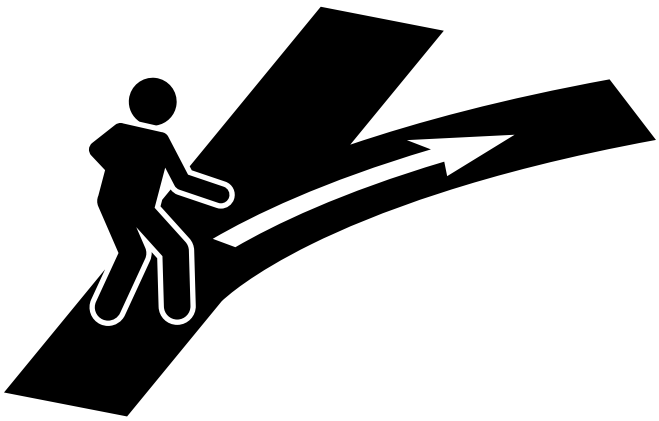
Where is my Attention right now?

I start by noticing Sound, Breath, or Body.

What Thoughts, Emotions, or Actions do I notice right now?

Proceed?

Do I keep going as before or do I change something



STOP Practice



Do I need to Self Accommodate?

Do I need to Practice Self Compassion

Do I need to Practice Self Care?

Do I need to Practice Self Advocacy

STOP Practice

Reflection:

After the practice, take a moment to reflect on how you feel. Notice any changes in your mental state and emotions.

Consider writing down your experiences in a journal to track your progress over time.

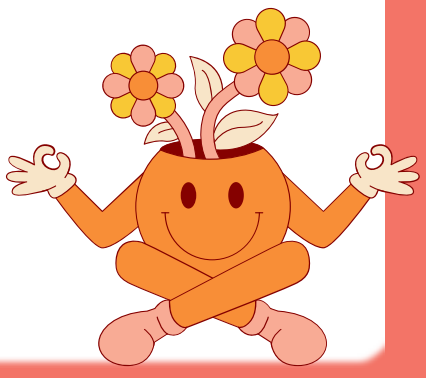
Additional Tips:

Start slowly: If four minutes feels too long at the beginning, start with shorter intervals and gradually increase the duration as you feel more comfortable.

Create a routine: Incorporate the STOP practice into specific daily activities, such as before meals, during breaks, or before bedtime.

Be gentle with yourself: Remember that mindfulness is a skill that takes time to develop. Don't be critical of yourself if your mind wanders during the practice. Simply acknowledge it and gently redirect your attention to the present moment.

This practice is similar to our timer check ins.



Group Exercises

Body Scan
Mind Like The Sky
Rain

You can find these files in our course or at this site https://www.guilford.com/companion-site/Mindfulness-for-Adult-ADHD/9781462545001

