

## MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION (MBSR)

### COURSE INFORMATION

We can spend so much time either living in the past or focussed on the future, that we are in danger of missing our actual lives! Mindfulness teaches us how to come into the present moment and make friends with it. When we do this, the landscape of our life changes: our sense of appreciation and well-being increases, as does our capacity to meet life's challenges with creativity and greater equilibrium.

**Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)** was originally developed over 30 years ago by Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre. Initially working with patients with chronic pain, then progressively working with people with a range of physical and psychological difficulty, it became clear that, whatever the condition, it is our relationship to it – and to ourselves – that plays a large part in determining the levels of stress and suffering we experience.

**“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally”** (Kabat-Zinn). In developing mindfulness we pay attention to our breath, body, mind, heart, and the world around us, becoming aware of the activity and habits of our minds that take us away from the present moment. We are learning to let ourselves be as we are, rather than constantly needing to be different in some way. If we can let our experience be as it is, we begin to let go of the stress and strain which come from judging, criticising and striving. When we can let ourselves be, we become paradoxically much freer to make wise choices and move forward in the direction of greater well-being.

This has been affirmed by numerous **research studies**, which show that mindfulness can help people manage physical illness and pain, reduce stress, anxiety and depression, strengthen the immune system, and develop areas of the brain associated with well-being.

We learn mindfulness both through **meditation** (the “formal” practice) and through ways and means of bringing awareness into **everyday life** (the “informal” practice). The course is **experiential**: we do practices and exercises in class, and then explore our

experience of them. The focus is on present moment experience rather than background stories. We spend time in pairs, small groups and the larger group as a whole (maximum number 15, but often a bit smaller than this), and as group members get to know each other and become more comfortable, the group itself becomes a real resource for learning. However, there is no pressure to participate, and in everything we do you are encouraged to listen to yourself and do what feels right for you in that moment. This is actually part of learning mindfulness.

**Home practice** is a big part of the course, and you will be asked to commit up to an hour a day to do this. It consists of a main practice of about 30 minutes, plus shorter bits and pieces. You are given **CDs** and a **workbook** to support the home practice, but it is important to consider *how* and *when* you would be able to manage it. The seeds of mindfulness are planted and nourished in the practice. You need to do it to enjoy the fruition!

**The course consists of** an Orientation session, eight two-hourly classes and a full Day of Practice on a Sunday around week 6. Making a commitment to be at all the classes is important as they build on each other.

Though there are clear benefits to learning mindfulness, you don't get something for nothing! This is a **challenging** course and it is really important to consider whether it is the right time for you to do it. In mindfulness practice we cultivate a *turning towards* our experience. This is not so easy when our experience is difficult. If, for example, you are currently under great stress, clinically depressed, or very recently bereaved, it would be better to wait until things are on a more even keel before taking on MBSR. The **Orientation** session can be helpful in clarifying whether this is a good time to do the course, and if this is uncertain you will be able to discuss it further with the tutor. If you decide not to proceed with MBSR at this stage, the course fees will be refunded less an administration charge.

**The tutor**, Helena Martin, is a trained mindfulness instructor with a professional background in counselling. Engaged in an ongoing process of training and supervision, she is both committed to and profoundly grateful for the unfolding development of mindfulness in her own life.

The Centre offers follow-on mindfulness practice sessions for MBSR graduates.

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