

## Mindfulness Courses for Oxford University Students

*The course consists of one 90 minute class per week for eight weeks in a group of up to 30 students. The course text is: "Mindfulness: a Practical Guide to finding Peace in a Frantic World", by Prof Mark Williams & Danny Penman. This is available at Blackwell's. Please obtain a copy before the course starts, and if you have time, have a read of Chapters 1-4. You will be assigned one or two chapters a week to read for homework.*

### Learning mindfulness: what can I expect from a course?

Mindfulness is 'present moment awareness': the awareness that develops through learning to pay attention on purpose, in the present moment, with curiosity and kindness. The aim of a mindfulness course is to encourage a gradual waking up from living on 'automatic pilot' into a more sustained, embodied awareness, and compassionate acceptance of present-moment experience. Mindfulness is known to be effective in reducing stress and anxiety, helping prevent relapse in recurrent depression, and promoting wellbeing and effective performance in daily life.

Mindfulness involves learning the wisdom of turning towards difficulties with friendly curiosity and interest – a response that does not always come naturally in our driven and time-pressured culture, but which offers us new and potentially transformative ways of working with our experience. Any obstacles that arise are thus part of the process (boredom, sleepiness, and judgement will probably all visit at one point or another), and you are encouraged to approach mindfulness training with patience and persistence, trusting the value of the practice even if the fruits of your efforts may not show straight away.

Mindfulness is developed both through guided meditation practices [of 3-15 minutes' length, available on the CD that comes with the book or downloadable as MP3s – the course teacher will provide details], which you will be encouraged to do once or twice each day, and through the encouragement to practise being mindful at other times during the various activities of your day, so as to build a capacity for more sustained awareness during the experiences of daily life. The classes will also involve some basic psycho-education about rumination, anxiety, and depression, through cognitive exercises drawn from Cognitive Therapy, together with practices for deepening a sense of kindness and compassion towards oneself and others.

Although there is no requirement at all to talk about personal difficulties during the sessions, or to contribute any more than you wish to, sometimes participants do speak openly about what has brought them to the course. In order to create an atmosphere of trust and sharing within the group, we will agree together that confidentiality will be observed by both the participants and the teacher: whatever is said in the room stays in the room. The teacher will also be available via email between sessions to answer questions and offer support.

### How much time will I need to commit?

In order to benefit fully from the course, **it is important that you commit to attending every session**, as each class builds on the learning and meditation practices from the week before. It is also important that you are able to engage with the home practice, which means being able to set aside up to 30 minutes a day, 6 days a week, for the duration of the course. It might be helpful to think of it like committing to an exercise programme; before the course begins, do give some thought as to how you will make time for this in your day.

We do understand that unforeseen circumstances may arise where you find you need to miss a particular class. However, if you think that this might be a regular occurrence then we would recommend that you postpone doing the course till another term. It is sometimes possible to move to a course running in another college on a different day, but this is not guaranteed. We also understand that you might occasionally find yourself unable to do the home practice, or that you struggle with the home practice more generally once the course begins, and again we invite you to be patient with yourself and to continue attending the classes each week, and to discuss this with the teacher.

### Can everybody take part?

There are some other issues that we have found can limit or prevent people from benefitting from our student mindfulness classes. Please read the following [information sheet](#) before signing up, to see if any of these issues apply to you.

Of course, everyone's situation is different and you may wish to speak to the Course Lead (Chris Cullen; [chris.cullen@psych.ox.ac.uk](mailto:chris.cullen@psych.ox.ac.uk)) if after reading the information, you have remaining concerns or questions about the suitability of the course for you.

### How can I host a course at my college?

If you would like your college to host a course, please ask your College Nurse, College Dean, or Senior Tutor to contact the Course Lead (Chris Cullen; [chris.cullen@psych.ox.ac.uk](mailto:chris.cullen@psych.ox.ac.uk)).

### More information

If you want to learn more about mindfulness before taking part, please consult the [Oxford Mindfulness Centre website](#). Refer to our [Resources](#) page, for books, videos and other reading materials.

The [Oxford University Counselling Service](#) runs termly, eight-week, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) courses for students. Taught by an experienced counsellor and mindfulness teacher Dr Ruth Collins, these courses are particularly helpful for students experiencing low-mood, anxiety or stress. To access these courses students should make an appointment for individual counselling and let the counsellor know that they would like to explore the possibility of joining the mindfulness course. Further information about the course can be found [here](#).

The [Oxford Student Mindfulness Society](#) holds drop-in mindfulness classes for Oxford University students each week during full term, and also runs two mindfulness taster sessions per term. To join the mailing list about these sessions, please find the OSMS on Facebook or email [oxfordstudentmindfulnesssoc@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordstudentmindfulnesssoc@gmail.com).

*Thanks for reading, and we look forward to welcoming you on one of the Oxford University Student Mindfulness Courses.*