

Mindfulness for Oxford University Staff

Please Note that in order to attend this course you must attend a Course Taster Session. Taster sessions are offered every term across the university. Please contact Ruth Collins: ruth.collins@admin.ox.ac.uk for information about the next taster session.

Learning Mindfulness – What to Expect from the Course

This practical six-week course is based on the curriculum developed to accompany the book *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World* by Professor Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman. It is a curriculum that is particularly well-suited to the workplace setting as it places emphasis on developing the skills needed for managing the stress and anxiety typical of a busy working environment, as well as techniques for building resilience and developing healthy relationships, that everyone can fit into their busy daily lives.

A recent report, *Mindful Nation UK (2015)*¹, published by an all-party parliamentary committee following a review of the latest evidence-based research into the benefits of mindfulness, stated that mindfulness has an important role to play in the workplace. Research shows that a less stressed and anxious workplace makes for a happier and more productive working environment with reduced absenteeism. The development of a regular mindfulness practice reduces the likelihood of stress, anxiety and depression and enhances both physical and mental wellbeing.

Learning Mindfulness – What to Expect from the 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, and for promoting wellbeing, resilience and 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 the enterprise 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 (provided via access to digital tracks) and informal meditation practices, which you will be encouraged to do once or twice each

¹ Hyland, T., 2016. *Mindful nation UK*—report by the mindfulness all-party parliamentary group (MAPPG).

day; and through the encouragement to practise being mindful at other times during the various activities of your day. This will help you 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 expectation to talk about personal difficulties in the group, or to contribute any more than you wish to do so, 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 teachers: 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.

Committing to the Course

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 where in your day you will find time for this.

Occasionally unforeseen circumstances may arise which means you need to miss a particular class. However, if you think that this might be a regular occurrence then it may be better to postpone doing the course till another time

You might occasionally find yourself unable to do the home practice or find yourself struggling with the home practice more generally once the course begins; the invitation is to be patient with yourself and to continue attending the classes each week even if you have not managed all the practice. We are happy for you to contact us in-between sessions to discuss any practice or other issues that may arise.

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 (please link to the is this the right course for me) 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, Ruth Collins: ruth.collins@admin.ox.ac.uk if after reading the information, you have remaining concerns or questions about the suitability of the course for you.

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 (please link), for books, videos and other reading materials.

The OMC also runs mindfulness courses for students more information about which can be found here: <http://oxfordmindfulness.org/course/oxford-students/>

We look forward to welcoming you to one of the Oxford University Staff Mindfulness Courses!