

Oxford University Student Eight-Week Mindfulness Course

*The course consists of one 90-minute class per week for eight weeks in a group of up to 30 people. 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, or at any reputable online retailer. 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 chapter a week to read in between sessions. **Please note:** this program is not being offered as a treatment for any specific physical or psychological conditions. It is not suitable for people who are currently experiencing very severe problems in these areas (please [click here](#) to check whether this is the right course for you and/or the right time for you to take part).*

Learning mindfulness experientially: 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, anxiety, helping prevent relapse in recurrent depression, and promoting wellbeing 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 [of 3-15 minutes' length, available on the CD that comes with the book or downloadable as MP3s], 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 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 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.

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 20-30 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.

We do understand that unforeseen circumstances may arise where you find you need to miss a particular class. If you find that this might be a regular occurrence however, please let the teacher know as soon as possible, as it might be possible for you to join another course at a later date. 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.

Thanks for reading, and we look forward to welcoming you to one of the Oxford student mindfulness courses.

If you wish to find out more about mindfulness, please consult the Oxford Mindfulness Centre website - www.oxfordmindfulness.org