

## Interpersonal Mindfulness

MiCBT can not only help us change distressing thoughts, feelings and behaviours, it can also help us change our relationships with others. The skills we learn in MiCBT can help us to not react to others and foster a greater understanding and acceptance of ourselves and others. This usually results in more harmonious relationships and helps prevent relapse into habitual moods and behaviour. This is explained during Stage 3 of the program.

## Mindfulness and the power of empathy

Stage 4 of MiCBT teaches us to use our own resources for empathy towards ourselves and others. The three previous stages lead to the realisation that we are the first beneficiary of the emotions we produce, whether this is a positive or negative emotion. A deep sense of empowerment, acceptance and change usually takes place at the end of Stage 4, which is the last stage of the MiCBT program.

## Contraindications

The MiCBT program is usually very safe and non-intrusive. However, practicing mindfulness meditation on your own during extremely distressed states is not advisable. People with lack of insight or poor understanding of the techniques who cannot handle very distressing thoughts can at times get worse. It is not recommended to practice mindfulness meditation while experiencing psychotic states (e.g., delusions, hallucinations, paranoia), manic states (e.g., extreme anxiety or anger, uncontrollable agitation or impulse) or suicidal states. In case you encounter increasingly distressing symptoms during your program, it is advised that you contact your MiCBT-trained therapist immediately and discuss the situation with them.

## Program Duration

The MiCBT program generally requires about 8 sessions, but it may vary between 6 and 12 sessions, according to the problem you intend to address. Sessions are best held weekly or fortnightly for optimum progress.

# What is MiCBT?

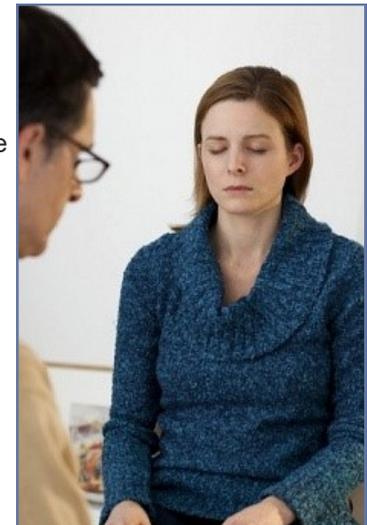
There is a growing number of therapy approaches that incorporate mindfulness training. **Mindfulness-integrated Cognitive Behaviour Therapy** or MiCBT is one of these approaches. It offers a practical set of evidence-based techniques derived from mindfulness training and principles of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to address a broad range of psychological disorders and general stress conditions. This brochure will give a brief overview of the foundations of MiCBT as well as the core mechanisms and basic practice components of this valuable therapeutic approach.

## What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness involves paying attention to each event experienced in the present moment within our body and mind, with a non-judgmental, non-reactive and accepting attitude. In learning to be mindful, we can begin to counter many of our everyday sufferings such as stress, anxiety and depression because we are learning to experience events in a more impersonal and detached way. Mindfulness has its roots in an Eastern meditation technique called *Vipassana* and shares with it a number of central principles and mechanisms, including *equanimity* and *impermanence*.

## Equanimity

Equanimity is best described as a neutral response to something we experience. It is a state of awareness. We feel neither an aversion to unpleasant experiences nor craving for pleasant ones. Other ways of describing equanimity are balance, calmness and composure. The development of equanimity, or an equanimous mind as it is sometimes called, is an important part of mindfulness skills because it allows us to be less reactive and less judgmental no matter what is experienced. This creates a feeling of ease, self-control and composure as we go about our daily lives.



## Impermanence

Mindfulness also incorporates the notion of *impermanence*, the changing nature of all things including our own mental and emotional experiences. By experiencing the changing nature of internal experiences, we can learn to see ourselves in a more objective and scientific way. We can detach ourselves from rigid views which sometimes lead to stress and unhappiness.

## How do we practice mindfulness?

While we can practice being mindful in everyday life by just observing what is happening around and within us, formal training by way of sitting meditation is most effective for developing mindfulness skills. During mindfulness meditation we sit with our eyes closed and initially focus on the breath to develop concentration. This alone helps to decrease the intrusion of unhelpful thoughts that we may have.

During this training, all sorts of thoughts frequently arise. But instead of being caught up in a thought, we learn to see it for what it is, just a thought, an impermanent mental event no matter what the content of the thought may be, and go back to our focus of attention. In this way, we learn to not react to thoughts. We gain a direct experience that thoughts cannot truly affect us or define who we are.



Similarly, when we pay attention to our body sensations, we also learn to perceive a body sensation merely as a body sensation, regardless of how pleasant or unpleasant it is. Mindfulness training helps us realise that body sensations, like thoughts and all other experiences, are also impermanent by nature and no matter how pleasant or unpleasant they are, they pass away. As we become more mindful of this reality, it becomes increasingly easy to observe that body sensations are essentially an experience that cannot affect us unless we react to them. Body sensations are significant because they are the only means by which we

can feel emotions. Accordingly, training ourselves to not react to them helps us accept and let go of emotions, rather than suffer from them. This is called *emotional regulation*.



## What is CBT?

The way we think often affects our emotions and behaviour. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, or CBT, helps people with conditions such as anxiety and depression change the content of unhelpful thoughts and their maladaptive ways of coping, such as avoidance or addictive behaviour.

## MiCBT: Integrating Mindfulness and CBT

MiCBT is a 4-stage therapeutic approach which integrates mindfulness and some of the basic principles of CBT in order to help us improve the way we feel and to change unhelpful behaviours. MiCBT helps us make changes in a different way to CBT. While CBT attempts to change maladaptive behaviour by modifying people's unrealistic thoughts and beliefs, MiCBT tries to help people learn to develop control over the processes that

maintain the unrealistic thoughts and beliefs, through mindfulness training. MiCBT helps change the process of thinking, not just the content of our thoughts.

## Changing reactive habits

Like CBT, MiCBT draws on the principles of *exposure* and *desensitisation* to help us change habitual unhelpful reactions or coping strategies. However, unlike other models of cognitive-behaviour therapy, MiCBT regards learned reactive habits as being the result of our own way of reacting to the body sensations that result from our judgmental thoughts. Preventing such reactions, while remaining fully aware and accepting of bodily experiences, leads to rapid change in our habitual feelings and behaviours. We feel emotionally relieved.

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