

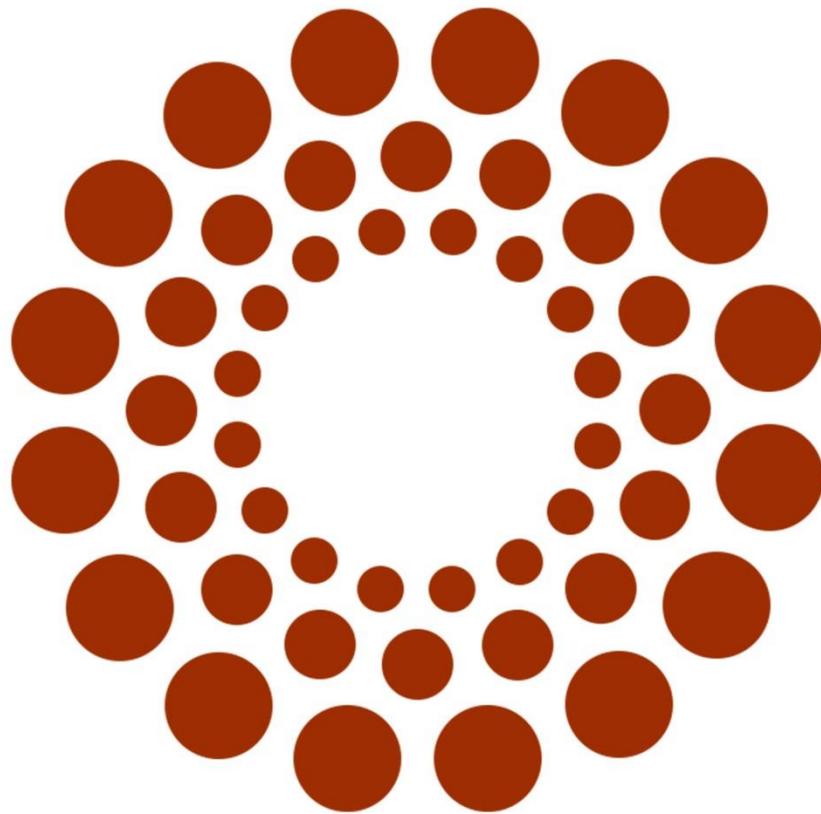
Brief Mindfulness

Training Programme
with

Shakya Kumara

(Brief Mindfulness Founder)

BUPA House, February – April 2014



Course Outline

Week 1: Laying the Foundations

- When have you felt most engaged and alive?
- What is mindfulness? What are its benefits?
- What do you want from the course?
- Simple body scan
- Mastery
- Creating helpful conditions

Week 2: Coming to your Senses!

- Harnessing the power of body awareness
- Cultivating clarity of purpose
- Stabilising your mind

Week 3: Qualities of Experience

- Exploring qualities of experience
- Savouring pleasure
- Exploring the neutral & finding more life in it
- Becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable

Week 4: Appreciative Awareness

- Discovering more beauty and enjoying it more
- Re-enforcing progress through appreciation
- Building the basis for confidence, self-esteem and positive relationships

Week 5: Thoughts, Emotions and Impulses

- Becoming aware of the play of the mind
- Creating space around unhelpful thoughts and emotions
- Opening “The Gap” – the chance to make the choice

Week 6: Choosing Suffering or Enjoyment and Freedom

- Creating conditions for enjoyment and freedom – not for suffering
- Cultivating positive thoughts and emotions; letting go of negative ones
- Distinguishing positive and negative
- Acting in ways that boost happiness (for yourself and others)



Introduction

21st Century life is full of amazing opportunity. With a few taps or clicks we can connect with people just about anywhere in the world. We can read about just about any subject we want to. We can watch an amazing variety of video, listen to an amazing variety of music - instantaneously.

Technology speeds life up. It took Shakespeare 4 days to travel from London to Stratford-on-Avon; today it's a two hour drive. Mail used to come once or twice a day; now we face a constant stream of emails and tweets, day and night.

But all this information, opportunity and rapid responsiveness takes careful management.

If we try to keep up with too much information and too many opportunities it puts our brains (and bodies) under tremendous strain.

Do you ever feel overwhelmed and unable to keep up with all this information?

Well, there's a good reason why. Our bodies and brains evolved in much simpler environments, with much smaller social groupings, much less information and much less change. There was a lot less to take in, and a lot more time to think it over.

When there's too much stimulus and pressure, the natural response is stress and anxiety. It becomes harder to enjoy life. We can lose touch with our own sense of meaning and purpose, leaving us feeling bleak and even depressed.

Mindfulness provides an alternative. It provides us with skills to manage all this information and change, opportunity and expectation.

Mindfulness helps us savour the simple pleasures in life - a lovely sunset, good conversation, the delighted smile of a little child. Instead of constantly chasing a better life, which we never quite attain, we can get more pleasure from the life we've already got.

Mindfulness helps us to stay in touch with what really matters. It helps us to make our own choices in a more considered way - so we can take advantage of the opportunities of 21st Century life without being taken over by them.

Cultivating mindfulness brings a wide range of different benefits (all of which have been demonstrated in published research): less stress and anxiety, reduced likelihood of depression, a clearer mind, more emotional intelligence, more creativity, better decision making – and simply enjoying life more.



What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is notoriously hard to describe - it's one of those experiences you really have to experience rather than simply read about. But I'm sure you're curious about it so I'll try my best....

A good place to start is with the times when you're already experiencing some mindfulness. Think about moments when you've felt most alive and engaged. Perhaps moments when you're out in nature, enjoying a beautiful sunset or a stunning view. Perhaps when you're immersed in your favourite sport or hobby. Perhaps when you've been delighting in the company of someone special.

Whatever it is, I bet you're not watching the clock or wondering what's next. You're not missing your high speed broadband connection. When you're fully present with what you're currently doing, fully alive to your experience - that's mindfulness.

The great thing is that you don't have to wait for peak experiences to happen to you. With mindfulness, you can start to access these qualities even in the mundane experiences of daily life.

Mindfulness isn't mere relaxation

Mindfulness *is* relaxing - but it's not *just* relaxation. (Relaxation methods are often used as controls in mindfulness experiments. For example, Mindfulness has been found to make specific improvements to the immune system, but such benefits have never been found with relaxation techniques).

Mindfulness combines relaxation with focus. So you're relaxed but awake and alert. It's a quality of mind that's great to have in time-off *and* when you're engaged in activity.

People sometimes think that mindfulness is about taking time out or slowing down. That's an understandable misunderstanding, because you do need to take a little time out in order to cultivate mindfulness, and it's easier to practice mindfulness when you slow things down.

But that's not the point - the point is to cultivate the relaxed yet focused mind that can respond beautifully to whatever happens, in rest and in activity. That gives you a richer and more vibrant experience of life. Your life - just as it is - becomes more enjoyable.

What is *Brief* Mindfulness?

So, what do you have to do to get all these benefits? I'm sorry to say that it's not like flicking a switch - you do need to develop some particular skills and habits. It does take some time and effort to cultivate mindfulness.

There's a cruel paradox here: the busier we are, the more we need mindfulness. But when we're really busy, how can we find the time?



That was my starting point for developing Brief Mindfulness. I wanted to provide ways you can activate Mindfulness in the midst of a busy life.

So Brief Mindfulness includes ways to weave mindfulness into your everyday routine. For example, one of the key techniques can be done in just 30 seconds, without closing your eyes or changing your posture. So you can do that pretty much any time or anywhere.

I've also been collecting other ways to cultivate mindfulness in less than a minute. I've included 3 of them in my "Alive at Work!" download. (You can get it from the course resources page, <http://www.briefmindfulness.com/bupa1-resources/>).

Having said all of that, we can't be *too* brief. Time spent in mindfulness practice is an extremely good investment, and a necessary part of getting good benefit from this course. So you will need to set aside 10-20 minutes per day for specific mindfulness practice. That's approximately 1% of your day – and the payoff in terms of time-saving clarity and alertness more than makes up for the time taken.

About this Course

Above all else, this is a practice course. After all, what would be the point of the course if it didn't make a difference in your actual day-to-day life?

Mindfulness skills are generally quite simple and straightforward – but they are also quite subtle, and can't be rushed. It takes time to learn them, start putting them into practice and integrating them into your life. Skills build on each other, so they're best learnt in short bursts, with plenty of time to practice and integrate each one before learning the next.

So, this course is 6 weeks long. Each week consists of a two and a half hour training session, and then some practical exercises to do during the week. The exercises are as simple and easy as possible, and they are designed to integrate into a busy life – it's about bringing mindfulness into what you already do.

As mentioned above, you'll also be expected to engage some "pure" mindfulness time. You need to give yourself a bit of space! The idea is to stop everything else and just focus on cultivating mindfulness. We'll start off with 10 minutes per day, and build up to 20 as the course progresses. Even 20 minutes is just 1.5% of your day – and people say it's well worth it. Through the day you'll find yourself saving time in many other ways, thanks to the boost in mindfulness that you get.

It's often said that mindfulness is easy, but remembering to be mindful is hard. So I build reminders into the course - email tips that are designed to remind and inspire. I'm also very much available by email if you have any questions or difficulties - and for when you want to share your successes! On the first evening I'll give you the option to opt-in to this dimension of the course, and to let me know which email address to use.



Engaged and Alive!

Swap manuals and ask your partner: “In the last 6 months, when did you feel most engaged and alive?”

Write notes for your partner. Help them to draw out the particular experience, e.g. by asking for more details, building a vivid picture of their experience.



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Mindfulness

Presence: not caught up in regrets about the past or worries about the future, but ***Engaged with experience as it's happening***

Inter-Connection: Not isolated, but ***feeling connected with life*** – the world around you, other people, yourself

Significance: Not aimless or vacant, but ***knowing what matters*** – a clear sense of value/purpose

Benefits of Mindfulness

Cultivating mindfulness brings a wide range of different benefits (all of which have been demonstrated in published research):

Less stress

With mindfulness you become more resilient in the face of the challenges life throws at you. Stress comes down (by up to 30%) and anxiety reduces too (by up to 70%). You develop better responses, and when you do take a knock, you bounce back more quickly. There are even physical benefits - your immune system gets stronger, and your sleep improves.

Clearer mind

Mindfulness helps you to focus more clearly, with less distraction, for longer. So you can get more done, and produce better work. You're less bothered by pressure, and your memory improves too.

Emotional intelligence

As awareness increases, this includes emotional awareness. That helps you avoid "emotional interference" from anxiety, anger etc. Instead you get a boost of calm, clear confidence that generates better responses to challenging situations. You can communicate, negotiate and influence more effectively.

Creativity

In a positive, mindful state of mind, you're more open to fresh new possibilities (from your own mind and from those around you).

Decision making

With your mind performing at its best, you're better able to intuitively weigh up different factors in a complex situation and come up with better decisions more quickly.

Enjoying life more

Mindfulness helps you to enjoy work more and find it energising rather than draining. That means you've still got energy and positive emotion at the end of the day - so you can really enjoy quality time with your loved ones.



What do you want from this course?

Ask the person on your left: "What will tell you this course has worked well for you?
Write notes for them (in *their* manual!)

My Aims for this course:

1.

2.

3.



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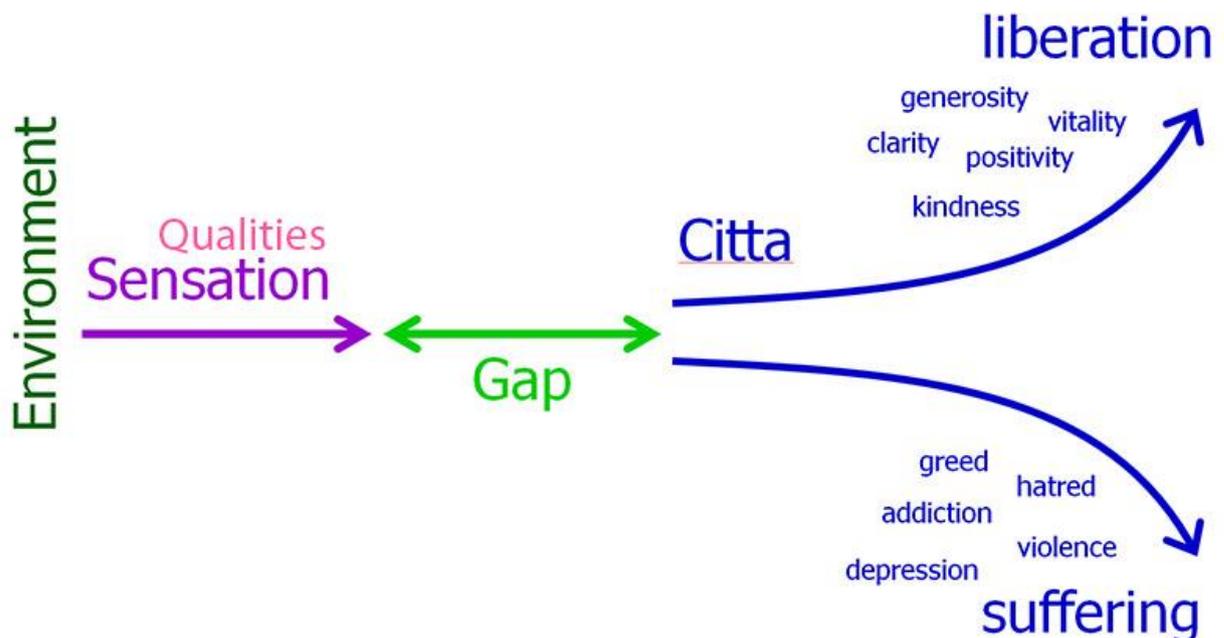
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The Gap Chart



The Gap Chart is a very simple model of the mind (which informs the structure of the course.)

From our **environment**, we get various **sensations** – the light reflected off the paper you’re reading this on, the sounds around you, the feeling of the chair you’re sitting in, maybe some lingering tastes from what you last ate or drank,....

Each of these sensations has **qualities**. A taste might be bitter or sweet. A light might be bright or dim. A touch might be rough or smooth. These qualities may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

Sensations and their qualities are a given – we can’t control them. But we *can* have some control over how we respond. The more of a **gap** we can create between stimulus and response, the more chance we have of responding well.

Our response comes in the form of thoughts, emotions and impulses. These aren’t separate - emotions have a cognitive component to them, thoughts have an emotional component. (If you don’t believe me, try feeling kind and gentle when your head is full of thoughts of what other people have been doing wrong!). To recognise how thoughts, emotions and impulses are all interlinked, we call them **cittas** – a word which includes all 3.

Cittas have **direction**. Some cittas lead to suffering, while others lead to enjoyment and happiness. In the heat of the moment, we often make unwise choices, and end up creating unnecessary suffering. But with a gap between sensations and response, we can make wiser choices. In this way, we can start to guide ourselves away from suffering and towards enjoyment, happiness and even liberation.



Brief Body Scan

Scan through your body, as follows. You don't need to read the words out loud, but it's a good idea to guide yourself by saying the instructions to yourself in your mind

- Notice your feet
- Notice the position of your legs
- Notice the depth of your breathing
- Notice the sensations in your shoulders
- Notice what you can feel at your fingertips
- Notice how your head is balanced on your neck and spine
- Notice the feelings at the centre of your chest



What's on Your Mind?

Concern	



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Theme for Week 1: Creating the Space

If you've got a million and one things calling on your attention, it's hard to be mindful. It's not impossible – but it's hard. So when you're starting out, it's a really good idea to make things easier for yourself.

So the theme for this week is laying some foundations, creating a bit more space, in order to make it easier for you to become more mindful.

So, how can we reduce the number of different pulls on our attention?

Tidy / Aesthetic Environment

Our physical environment can really pull on our attention. When there are lots of different things around, many of which needing action, it creates a tension. Tidying up can have a remarkably liberating effect! This can be hard to get started with – so I suggest choosing just one specific thing to tidy away (e.g. one piece of paper). That's enough to get the ball rolling.

If you want to go further, or try a different tack, you could make your environment more beautiful in some way. A neat new arrangement, a vase of flowers, hanging up that picture you've had lying around for ages... whatever it is, it helps draw your senses into the present moment in a pleasant way.

Reduce/Refine Input

We live in an era of tremendous stimulus – TV, internet, phone, tablet.... we've got ever more sources of stimulation. This all puts us on slightly higher alert than is necessary – without pauses and empty spaces we never quite relax.

So try reducing input, just a little bit. If you're used to having TV with every meal, try turning it off just once, and see what the effect is. If you're used to surfing the net on your tablet while watching TV and half having a conversation with your partner, try cutting out just one of those attention streams. (By the way, the science says that people who mono-task are much more efficient – even when they need to multitask they're better at it than people who multitask all the time).

Completion & Mastery

There's nothing that pulls on the mind like things that need to be done. The more things that we know need our attention, the more the conflicting pulls.

Step 1 is to write everything down. If you've got a commitment that's not on a list then at some level your mind is going to worry about it. Too many of these and it's going to start waking you up at 3 in the morning, just to make sure you don't forget.



So write everything down (and refer to the list!) so your mind knows you'll remember what you need to remember. That'll help you relax.

Step 2 is to close some open loops. Each time you reduce the number of uncompleted tasks, that takes away a little bit of tension. So my suggestion for this week is to pick one thing and commit to getting it finished. (Or pick something and decide *not* to do it. That gets it off the list too!).

There's an added benefit here. It's surprisingly hard to decide to do something and then follow through on that decision. But it's important to be able to do that – to be able to make and keep commitments to ourselves. It's an important part of mindfulness practice – we call it intentionality. So by choosing something to complete and actually completing it, you build your “intentionality muscle.” And that really pays off over time as you get more and more in control of your destiny.



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Week 1 Activities: “Creating the Space”

Tips for formulating intentions:

- Make them really specific
- Make them small enough that you know you will do them
- Make them appealing enough that you actually want to do them!

Tidy / Aesthetic Environment

What 1 thing will you tidy?

Reduce/Refine Input

What 1 input will you cut out, and when?

Completion

What 1 thing will you finish off?

Brief Body Scan

When will you do your Brief Body Scan each day?

How will you remind yourself?



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Week 1 Diary

Brief Body Scan

	When did you do it?	Notes (how did it go? What did you learn?)
Tuesday	<i>In the class!</i>	
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		

Other Micro-Assignments

	When did you do it?	Notes (how did it go? What did you learn?)
tidy 1 thing		
reduce or refine 1 input		
complete 1 thing		



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