

Brief Mindfulness

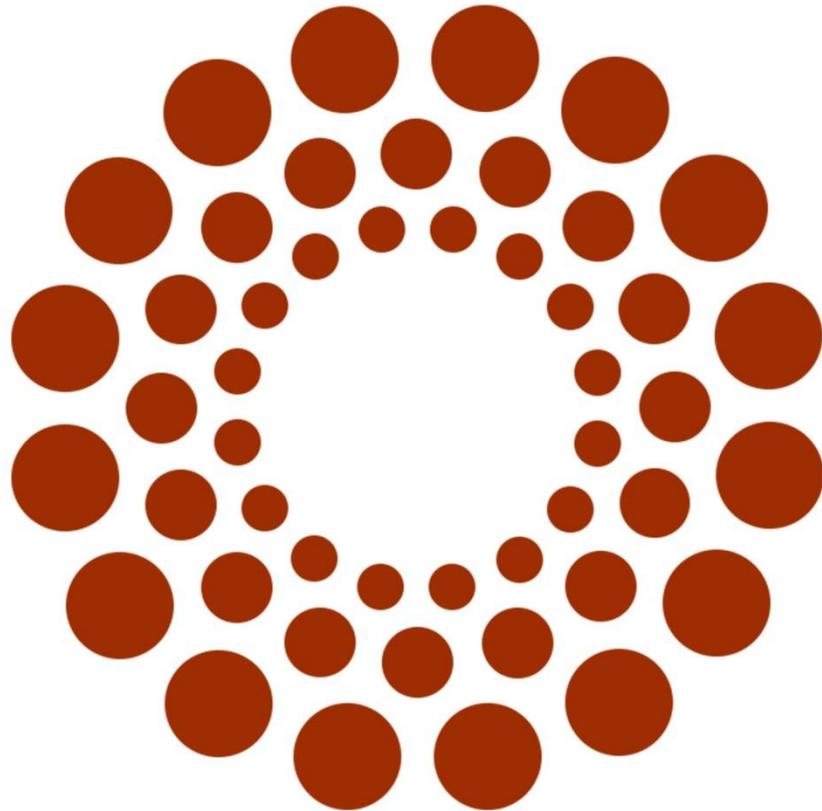
Part 1

Training Programme
with

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(Brief Mindfulness Founder)

ScHAAR, 25th March 2015



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, whether it's a lovely sunset, good conversation or 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. The “Reconnect” in particular takes just 30 seconds, and you don’t need to close your eyes or change your posture. So you can do it 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/brief-intro/resources>).

Most people get benefit from these 1 minute exercises. The last time I ran the course, of the 60% of people who filled out the survey, 100% had experienced some reduction in stress, 60% had found more enjoyment, and 80% had become more focused or effective.

But if you really want to get the most from mindfulness, you’ll also want to set aside some time to stop and do some mindfulness meditation, such as the 10 minute guided practice included with this course.

Now 10 minutes is less than 1% of your day, and the time saved by your extra clarity and alertness more than makes up for the time invested.

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. So you please don’t expect too much from this 110 minute workshop!

So what can you expect from this course?

- In the workshop you’ll learn basic mindfulness principles, and practice the core “Reconnect” technique
- You’ll experience the stress-reducing effect of mindfulness, on one of your “live” stressors
- You’ll have the chance to sign up for the 3 week programme, which consists of daily emails to remind you, inspire you and fill out some of the things you’ve learnt. You can also email the course trainer with any questions or difficulties you have – or just to share your success stories! This helps you take the “Reconnect” out from the training room and into your life.



Brief Mindfulness

Rapid stress reduction; enjoyable high performance

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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

What are the characteristics of Mindfulness?

- **Presence:** not caught up in regrets about the past or worries about the future, but **Engaged with experience as it's happening**
- **Purpose:** Not aimless or vacant, but **knowing what matters** – a clear sense of purpose and value
- **Connection:** Not isolated, but **feeling connected with life** – the world around you, other people, yourself

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.



Brief Mindfulness

Why *Brief* Mindfulness?

Firstly, we lead busy lives! Many people find it hard to make time for meditation – so Brief Mindfulness includes the “Reconnect” that you can do in 30 seconds, without closing your eyes or changing your posture.

Secondly, we’ve got lots to do! Inside and outside work, we’ve got responsibilities that require us to get things done. Most of our day has to be spent in activity. So Brief Mindfulness is designed to help integrate mindfulness into that purposeful activity. It explicitly addresses the dimension of purpose, to help you avoid wasting time on less important activity, and stay focused on what matters most.

Dropping in a Question

Conscious mental processing happens in just one part of the brain – the pre-frontal cortex. Estimates vary wildly about how much of your processing power is unconscious – from 90% to 99.9999%! Whatever the truth is, it’s clear that we can get tremendous benefit from utilising the unconscious mind well. That means conscious and unconscious processing being more connected – in particular, bringing more conscious awareness to otherwise unconscious processes.

Here’s one way: dropping in a question.

It’s like dropping a pebble into a still pond, and watching what happens next. You drop the question in, and wait to see what happens. You might get an answer in all sorts of ways – a thought, an image or an emotion, for example.

Or you might get nothing at all. That’s perfectly normal and fine. Even dropping in the question makes a difference. At the very least your mind will be more ready for the question another time.



“Reconnect”

Guide yourself by saying the instructions to yourself in your mind

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-
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Ask yourself the question:

-

Reconnecting in your daily Life

When would you like to find yourself doing Reconnecting?

Choose 2 or more regular opportunities to Reconnect:

- 1.
- 2.

Choose 2 (early) Signs of Stress that will tell you that you need to Reconnect:

- 1.
- 2.



Meditation – Training the “Muscles of Mind”

In the modern world there are more and more pulls on our attention. This makes it hard to focus, generates stress and dissipates our energy.

To counteract these effects, we need “muscles of mind” – the ability to return, time and time again, to our chosen focus. To train our mind in this way we do need to be persistent – but also extremely kind and gentle.

With stronger muscles of mind, you can:

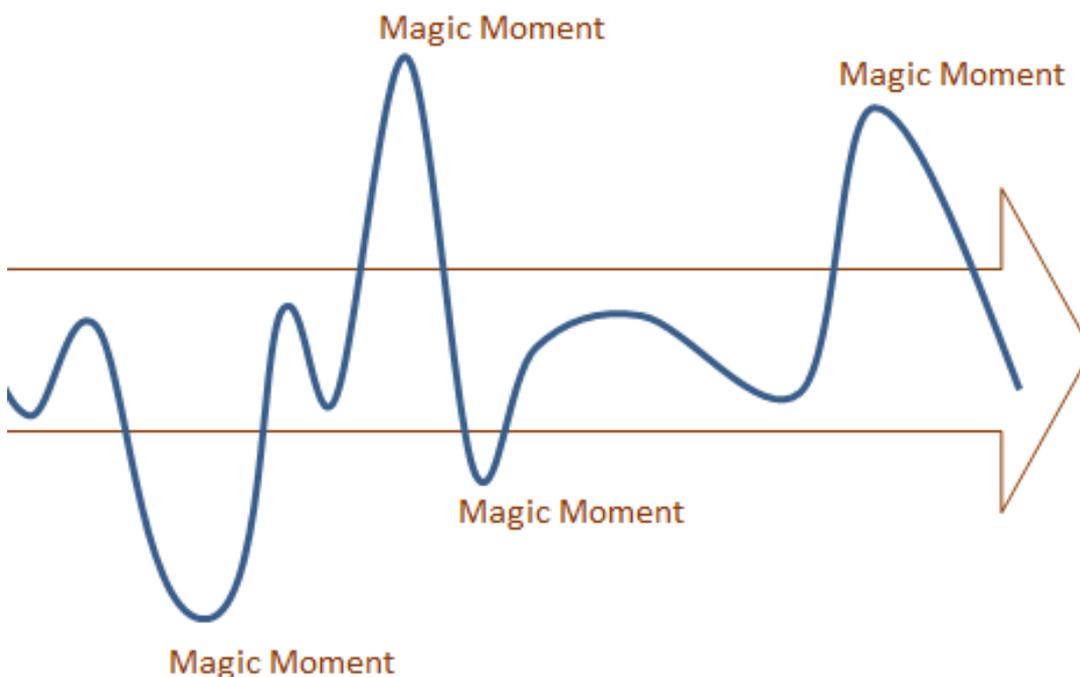
- (Presence) be more focused, more easily, for longer
- (Purpose) know what’s a distraction and more easily set it aside, so you can put more energy into what matters most
- (Connection) stay more “alive” to yourself, other people and life in general

How does this work?

First of all you need to understand the natural movements of the mind. It’s naturally curious and is constantly moving from object to object. This is wonderful! It’s the natural energy of a young child exploring a fascinating beachscape for the first time, delighting in every new rockpool, creature and possibility.

How do we develop this natural quality of mind to also have the focus and discipline we need, without losing the energy and joy?

Firstly by recognising and appreciating the ever moving nature of mind.



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Then by gently, kindly and repeatedly returning to a chosen focus. This is “meditation”, and it works as follows:

- Choose a focus
- When you notice that your mind has wandered from that focus
 - Remember it’s not a mistake, nothing’s gone wrong, it’s just what minds do
 - Celebrate that you’ve noticed! You’ve returned to *presence*, remembered your *purpose*. It’s a “Magic Moment”!
 - Gently, kindly, with curiosity (*connection*), bring your attention back to the focus

There are many different meditations, with many different functions and aims. You’ll find a 10 minute guided meditation practice on the course resources page,

<http://www.briefmindfulness.com/brief-intro/resources>

This is particularly helpful to calm a busy mind and develop fuller awareness of your emotions and states of mind – which helps reduce stress and increase enjoyment.

As with all meditations, this practice will also help build your ability to sustain focus and be more effective. But don’t worry about that for now, just enjoy the process of meditation. Enjoy the play of your own mind!

