

# Mindfulness & Meditation



## **LESSON 1: WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?**

**CAMERON L. GORDON, PH.D.  
MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY**

# Research on Mindfulness



- **Benefits physical health**
  - Pain
  - Cancer
  - Heart disease and hypertension
  - Epilepsy
  - Arthritis
    - ✦ Through improved sleep and coping with stress
- **Benefits mental health**
  - Substance abuse
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Marriage & family functioning (parenting)

# So, What is Mindfulness?



- **Awareness**
  - Intentionally focused
  - Oriented toward the present moment
  - Curious (some use the term “nonjudgmental”)
- **Mindfulness Meditation**
  - The formal practice of developing mindfulness skills
    - ✦ NOT stopping the flow of thoughts
    - ✦ Rather, focusing all of attention on one thing

# The Power of Awareness



- **Awareness Test:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSQJP40PcGI>

- **What we pay attention to has a huge impact on our overall experience**

- **Barriers to mindfulness:**

- Brain built to process massive amounts of data very rapidly
- Society encourages multi-tasking and divided attention
- However, many studies have now shown that we can train ourselves to be mindful with practice

# The Present Moment



- Why so much fuss about the present moment?
  - It is the only moment we actually have!
    - ✦ Yet we spend most of our time in the past or future
    - ✦ This causes us to lose much of our actual life
    - ✦ This is also the cause of repetitive and fruitless suffering

# The Present Moment



- Your mind's tendency to wander lays the foundation for your training in “gentle persistence”
  - When mind wanders, simply notice and bring it back
  - Moment by moment, over and over, gently but persistently bring your attention back to the present
    - ✦ Remember, it is *gentle* persistence – be on the lookout for struggle/violence/forcing your mind to submit and practice gently leading mind back to intention instead
  - Why should I?
    - ✦ This will strengthen patience, resilience, equanimity, etc., while creating a deeper contact with life!

# Curiosity



- **What does it mean to be curious in our practice of mindfulness?**
  - **Remain open**
  - **Approach experience without pre-determined impressions**
  - **Observing rather than trying to change the experience to be something**
    - ✦ **Think of mindfulness as a microscope - it is a tool to help you see things, not to intervene with them**
  - **Expectations set up a wrestling match with actual experience**
    - ✦ **Being curious gets you out of that battle**
  - **Why should I?**
    - ✦ **This promotes peace, insight, wisdom, creativity, etc.**

# Homework



- **Practice mindfulness meditation daily**
  - Set your duration (how long you wish to meditate) and your intention (what you intend to focus upon) before beginning
  - Intentionally incorporate present awareness and curiosity
    - ✦ Eating, breathing, listening, watching, sensations in body, etc.
- **Start with brief (5 minute) exercises**
- **When mind wanders, gently and persistently bring it back**
  - Remember, you ARE NOT trying to hold your mind still or produce deep relaxation – we are training in skills of awareness, curiosity, and gentle persistence – and that is all!





**Thank you!**

**Cameron Gordon, Ph.D.**  
**[drcamerongordon@gmail.com](mailto:drcamerongordon@gmail.com)**