



# MINDFULNESS BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Please read this before we meet!

For our first session, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, consider having any particular props available for your comfort during meditation. This might be a cushion for the floor or your chair, a blanket if your surroundings are sometimes cool, or a yoga mat to lay down on, if you prefer. Also please remember to bring a piece of dried fruit for a mindfulness exercise. We traditionally do this exercise with a raisin, but if you don't have any raisins available, any kind of dried fruit will do.

## **DEPRESSION:**

Depression is a very common problem, with twenty percent of adults becoming severely depressed at some point in their lives. Depression involves both biological changes in the way the brain works and psychological changes – the way we think and feel. Because of this, it is often useful to combine traditional pharmacological treatment with alternative approaches that focus on increasing overall health and wellbeing.

## **TREATMENT OF DEPRESSION:**

When you have been depressed in the past, you may have been prescribed an antidepressant. Antidepressants generally work on various neurotransmitters, such as Serotonin, Norepinephrine and Dopamine, which act as chemical messengers within the brain. Western Medicine has proposed the explanation that when we have lower levels of Serotonin, or disruptions in the balance of Serotonin, Norepinephrine, and Dopamine, it effects our mood and anxiety levels. Also our energy levels become low, our sleep and appetite become disrupted, among other symptoms. It is thought that antidepressants can correct the levels of neurotransmitters in our brains. Most people (60-80%, depending on the study) experience some improvement in their mood after about 6-8 wks.

Although antidepressants generally work well in reducing depression, they are not a permanent cure – their effects continue only so long as you keep taking the pills. Your doctor could continue to prescribe antidepressants for months, or even years, since this is now often recommended to prevent depression from relapsing. But, anti-depressants are not without risks of unpleasant side effects such as weight gain, stomach discomfort, headaches, sexual side effects, and dry mouth to name a few. Many people prefer to use other ways to prevent further depression, which is the purpose of the class you are taking here.

### **PREVENTION OF DEPRESSION:**

Whatever caused your depression in the first place, the experience of depression itself has a number of after effects. One of these effects is the increased likelihood that you will become depressed again. The purpose of these classes is to improve your chances of lessening your current depression and preventing further depression. In the classes ahead, you will learn skills to help you handle your thoughts and feelings differently. You will learn these skills in a class with others who have also struggled with depression and/or anxiety, many of whom may have also tried antidepressants or other treatment modalities already.

### **MBCT BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Over eight weeks, the class will meet 8 times for 2 ½ - hour sessions to learn new ways of dealing with what goes on in our minds and to share and review experiences with other class members as an alternate coping strategy in dealing with depression. The clinical groups are led by me, Sidney Edsall. I have many years of experience in mindfulness and have taught this class several times before at UCSF. You will discover gentle ways to face mindfulness meditation as a way to facilitate new and transformative relationships with your depressive experiences. You will learn to focus your attention in a particular way in the present moment, with a sense of purpose and without any judgment. As you become more aware of your feelings, thoughts, and body sensations in any given moment, you give yourself greater freedoms, choices, and abilities to combat your depression.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF AT-HOME PRACTICE:**

Together, we will be working to change patterns of mind that have been around a long time. Often times, these patterns have become a habit. We can only expect to succeed in making a change if we put time and effort into learning new skills. This approach depends entirely on your willingness to do practice at home between class meetings.

You will be asked to select a daily practice time best for you and to record on a log sheet what you practiced and for how long. Class will normally involve a review of previously assigned homework with discussion of difficulties you may have experienced, introduction of new material, and hands-on practice; experience with new techniques or skills.

The home practice will take approximately 45 minutes a day, 6 days a week, for the 8 weeks of the course and may involve listening to new music, going for a walk, or planning a healthy meal. We appreciate that it is often very difficult to carve out that amount of time for something new in our lives as they are already very busy and crowded. However, the commitment to spend time on home practice is an essential part of the class.

### **FACING DIFFICULTIES:**

The classes and the homework assignments can teach you how to be more fully aware and present in each moment of your life. The good news is that this makes life more interesting, vivid, and fulfilling. On the other hand, this means facing what is present, even when it is unpleasant and difficult. In practice, you will find that turning to face and acknowledge unpleasant feelings, thoughts, or experiences clearly, as they arise, means that you will be in much better shape to “nip them in the bud,” before they progress to more intense or persistent depression.

### **PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE:**

Because we will be working to change well-established habits of mind, you will be putting in a lot of time and effort. The effects of this effort may only become apparent later. In many ways, it is much like gardening – we have to prepare the ground, plan the seeds, ensure that they are adequately watered, and nourished, and then wait patiently for the results.

You may be familiar with this pattern if you have used anti-depressants as a component of your treatment. Often there is little beneficial effect until you have been taking the medication for some time. Yet, improvement in your depression with medications did depend on taking the medications consistently even when you felt no immediate benefit.

### **STATEMENT of EQUALITY:**

To participate in this group, you don't need to be experienced with CBT or meditation. For those of you who have experience with some form of meditation, we invite you to join the group with an open and curious mindset – have a present moment experience with this group, rather than allowing yourself to be pulled in

to expectations based on past experiences. IF you have a meditation practice now, we ask that you pause that practice until the group is over and do the same practices that we will all be doing together as a group. For those of you who have not had any experience with CBT or meditation, we invite you to also consider the program with openness and curiosity – to allow a present moment experience with the group just as it is, and not be pulled into any preconceived ideas about what a meditation group is supposed to be like.

### **MBCT ONLINE:**

The MBCT Group Online will be meeting over Zoom and I, Sidney Edsall, am the Host for these virtual Zoom meetings. Every registered group participant will receive an email invitation to the Zoom meetings. My Zoom account is secured and adheres to the privacy guidelines for healthcare providers and organizations. All group participants are required to have zoom software capability, but it is okay if you don't feel you are a "Zoom Expert". The goal of the group is to learn more about mindfulness skills and meditation, not about online video platforms. We will be providing all the instruction you need to use Zoom effectively for the group, during the group.

We can anticipate an online group will have to make use of different communication guidelines and skills in comparison to an in-person group. In order to maintain a safe and confidential group practice, I request your video remains 'ON' for the entirety of the group, and please make sure your video share does not include any other persons in your home who are not group participants. Sometimes we will take turns speaking and listening to each other by video. Other times I will ask you to type questions or comments into the Chat Messaging within Zoom. Also, we will sometimes work in smaller groups within the Zoom platform. When it is time for such small groups, you will receive a message via Zoom messaging from me to join a "Breakout Virtual Room".

Please note, it is important to keep your microphone on MUTE if you are not talking, in order to avoid any additional background noise or feedback that might make it difficult to hear the speaker.

I anticipate there will be technical challenges that will arise not just for me, but for all of us. I'm reminding you now to do your best to practice patience and compassion for ourselves and others if we experience these challenges.

**LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AT THE GROUP!**