

## Cognitive Behavioral Mindfulness Therapy

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Cognitive Behavioral Mindfulness Therapy may be used for treating a variety of conditions: depression, anxiety, thought/personality, eating, and substance. Foundations: 1) Thoughts mediate between stimuli and emotions/physical responses. 2) Client has capacity to be aware of thoughts and change them. 3) Sometimes (often) thoughts elicited by stimuli distort reality.

Behaviorism: Remember Pavlov's Dogs – stimulus (meat) which produces automatic behavior (salivation) is paired with unrelated stimulus (bell). Overtime, when the bell is rung in the absence of the meat, the dogs salivate. BUT, the response can be extinguished over time by presenting the bell tone without the presence of meat and the "conditioned" stimulus is "extinguished."

Behaviorism began with this approach to addressing troubling stimuli in the lives of clients. Exposure to feared/triggering stimuli was engaged so that over time the fearful/upsetting emotional response was extinguished. Example: Client that fears that squirrels will drop from trees onto his head practices walking in increasing proximity to trees and then notes that squirrels don't drop onto his head. Over time, the fear is extinguished.

The cognitive addition to behaviorism invites the client to examine his thinking, checking it for accuracy, reasonableness, probability, and consequences. Regarding the squirrel example, research would indicate that it is contrary to the behavior of squirrels to drop out of trees onto the heads of pedestrians. And even if it happened by accident, one can be

further comforted by knowing that squirrels are not carnivorous creatures.

Mindfulness is the most recent permutation/addition to the CBT model. Mindfulness assists the client to notice errant thoughts without attaching to the thoughts, much like noticing birds flying over one's head. It is grounded in teaching the client to focus on his breathing. By practicing mindfulness breathing on a daily basis, morning and evening, the client will automatically engage this calming behavior when confronted by anxiety / depression provoking stimuli.

### Protocol for Mindfulness

1. Choose a comfortable sitting position -- lotus or in a chair. The goal is not to fall into sleep, but to keep the energy path open as one focuses on the breath. Eyes may be open, shut, or "soft" -- unfocused. A candle may help as a focal point. Meditative music or the sound of water may be helpful.
2. Breathe through the nose and exhale through the mouth, as if through a straw.
3. When inhaling notice the sensation of the air through the nasal cavity as you fill the lowest portion of the lungs to the upper portion.
4. As the lungs feel comfortably full, exhale without forcing the process.
5. While inhaling and exhaling, direct your consciousness to the breath -- simply enjoying the process...in through the nose and out through the mouth.
6. As thoughts or sounds distract, simply direct your attention back to the breath. You are not starting over. You have not failed. You are practicing mindfulness breathing. Each return to the breathe is a release of the distraction.
7. Some practitioners find it helpful to silently say "thought, thought, thought" or "sound, sound, sound" as they

acknowledge the distraction and return their attention to the breath.

8. You may wish to set a timer so that length of meditation does not become a distraction.

**A Word on Neuroplasticity:** The more we practice certain physical and cognitive patterns, the more those patterns are reflected in our neurology.