



*Blue Lotus Meditation &  
Mindfulness Center*



## A Beginner's Guide to Mindfulness:

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Uses and Benefits in Everyday Life

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## Introduction

There is a lot of speculation as to the difference between Mindfulness and Meditation. Let's discuss the differences before we begin our discussion surrounding Mindfulness.

Both Mindfulness and Meditation allow you to accomplish three goals:

- Inner Peace and Calm
- Self-Awareness
- Compassion for Self and Others

Contrary to popular belief of late, both Mindfulness and Meditation can be spiritually life-changing practices when you incorporate them into your everyday life.

When you practice Mindfulness, you become fully aware of everything in the present moment. You become Mindful of your consciousness without trying to judge it or change it.

By doing this, you are quieting your mind and allowing yourself a glimpse at some of the ways you have been running your life. In other words, you allow yourself to see that you are running the same auto-pilot reactions time and time again without breaking the pattern.

Being Mindful allows you to take a step back and re-evaluate or re-assess a reaction to something you are experiencing. You can accept the action/reaction by looking at it in this new light which will in turn reduce stress and instead give you a sense of inner peace and happiness. Being mindful means staying in the present moment.

If you participate in meditation, this technique involves you concentrating and focusing on particular exercises to quiet your mind. These techniques allow you to connect with deeper wisdom within ourselves, thereby seeing the auto-pilot reactions as above, and allowing you to make changes.

Meditation also allows you to slow down your mind, focus more clearly and prepare yourself for techniques with much deeper meaning.

With those definitions, keep in mind that there is overlap of the two methods but they are also complementary to each other.

Mindfulness allows you to pay attention in a certain way. Mindfulness allows each and every thing in your life to be different to anyone else's. Mindfulness brings unique awareness to your experiences. Mindfulness can be used in your sensory experiences as well as your thoughts and emotions allowing you to notice those experiences without over-reacting to them.

Without Mindfulness, you receive a stimulation and you react.

With Mindfulness, you receive a stimulation, you trigger Mindfulness and elicit a response (vs. reaction).

In order to meditate, you need to be Mindful. What do we mean by that?

There are several ways that people practice both and there is no real right or wrong way. It might be a little tricky to explain but you need to be in the present moment in order to practice meditation and Mindfulness is a form of meditation.

Does this make sense?

Both are practiced differently and serve two distinct purposes by they are intertwined with each other. If you try to separate them, one of them won't work.

Whichever way you spin the meaning of the two words, meditation is a powerful practice if you want to transform and experience all that life has to offer.

On the other hand, it's really a potato vs. potata type of word play. Both of the words give you an experience and that is the bottom line in Meditation and Mindfulness. It depends on you as to which you are going to experience.

The benefits of Mindfulness are:

- Impulse Control Improvement
- React to Difficult Emotions differently
- Becoming Self-Aware
- Improved Focus and Concentration
- Reduction in Stress and Anxiety
- Empathy and better Understanding of Others
- Natural Conflict Resolution Skills
- Improved Sense of Calm
- Overall Health Improvement

Most definitions you will find on the internet state that, “*Mindfulness is a simple but powerful technique to focus attention, manage emotions, handle stress, and resolve conflicts.*”

The topics covered in the book are by no means the exhaustive list to using Mindfulness. We have only scratched the surface here.

One note before we delve into Mindfulness: start and keep a journal as you make your way through some of the suggestions here in the book. By journaling you can take a look back and see how far you have come in your journey 😊

## Chapter 1: What is Mindfulness?

As we mentioned in the introduction, Mindfulness is becoming fully aware of everything in the present moment. You are taking a glimpse at the way you have been running your life.

According to the dictionary, Mindfulness is a “Presence of Heart. It states that it is “a quality of state of being conscious or aware of something.”

You could say it is a state in which you focus your awareness on the present moment. At the same time you are using it as a therapeutic technique by accepting feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations.

By being in a “Mindful” state it means that you are aware of your thoughts, feelings, body and surrounding environment moment-by-moment.

If you are Mindful, you are paying attention to and accepting your thoughts and feelings without judging them. You come to believe that there is no right and/or wrong way to think or feel in any given moment.

When you practice Mindfulness, you become aware of what you are sensing in the present moment instead of reliving the past or imagining what could happen in the future.

Are you happy with the way things are going in your life? Do you need to make changes? Have you been running on auto-pilot for so long that you need to stop and make changes?

Even an airplane can't run on autopilot forever. A pilot has to be the one who programs in the coordinates to allow the plane to run on autopilot. Every trip is different according to wind conditions, the route they are given, etc.

The same is true with your life. Each experience in your life is different. If you keep running the same responses your reactions to each situation are on auto-pilot. At some point you might want to make some changes.

In other words, you need to figure out different responses to break those old patterns that aren't working so well.

By becoming Mindful of those auto-pilot reactions, re-assessing the responses you are performing and making changes based on those responses, you are aware that you need to break the old patterns.

Take some time to learn how to use Mindfulness in the following areas:

- Good for our bodies
- Good for our minds
- Changes our brains
- Helps you to focus

By reassessing what is working and not working, you can look at things differently, respond differently and you will feel much happier and achieve that inner peace you desire.

There are some great programs out there in order to achieve the practice of Mindfulness:

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR)
- Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)
- Mindful Schools

Let's take a look at each one:

### **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) –**

This program melds meditation with yoga. The group of people who will receive the most benefit from this program tend to be those who have suffered with diseases and chronic disorders.

This program is 8 weeks of intensive training using Mindfulness meditation incorporating the ancient healing practices.

If you practice Mindfulness in this setting, you can allow your mind and body to work as one. You become more aware of how to achieve unity between the two. The program also teaches you ways to deal with behaviors, unconscious thoughts and feelings and how these can interfere with physical, emotional and spiritual health.

## **Mindfulness-Based Stress Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) –**

MBCT is a form of MBSR but it also includes information if you happen to be suffering from depression. MBCT takes you through therapy-based exercises allowing you to see how your thinking is impacting your feelings.

MBCT takes you through the necessary steps to work with your depressive thoughts and feelings when you feel overcome with depression. You can become aware and recognize the depressive moods and how that can trigger negative thought patterns.

## **Mindfulness Schools –**

Adults as well as youth can learn how to use Mindfulness by using direct experience. By learning Mindfulness someone is being given the choice of making wiser decisions (changing old patterns of behavior) instead of irrational ones in the heat of the moment.

Learning Mindfulness allows someone to improve their attention span, learn how to better concentrate, be more empathetic and learn a sense of calm.

After learning the techniques, it can also be described as now having an “inner compass.” Have you heard the saying that someone has lost their way and has no compass? This is what they are referring to.

Some of the visible improvements you can see (along with a calm mind, focused attention and empathy) when someone understands their own thoughts and feelings are:

- ✓ Improve Academic Performance
- ✓ Relieve Stress, Mental disorders
- ✓ Reduce Juvenile Delinquent tendencies
- ✓ Increase Scholastic Aptitude

Mindfulness, over the course of your life, allows you to live and be in this moment whether your experience is good, bad or neutral.

## Chapter 2: Mindfulness and Obesity

What is Mindful Eating?

Mindful Eating gives yourself nurturing and positives ways of looking at and selecting food. You will be looking inside yourself to make decisions based upon your own internal wisdom.

By using all your senses in choosing to eat food that is both satisfying to you and nourishing to your body, acknowledging your responses to food (what you like, what you don't like and which foods fall somewhere in between) without judgment you can become Mindfully aware of what you are eating.

Recognize your physical hunger pains and cues to guide your decisions to begin good eating habits and end bad ones. By doing this, you can change your relationship with food.

There is a growing phrase and it goes like this "Mindless Eating." What is that? It is overeating whether you are hungry or not and it is linked to overeating, stress and increased anxiety.

Most of the time this behavior is performed when you are not hungry but when you are participating in something such as watching TV, going to the movies, going to a sporting event, eating out (portions in the U.S. are extremely LARGE).

The first thing to remember is to eat ONLY when you are hungry and then make Mindful decisions about the food you are eating.

By eating Mindfully, you become aware of the present moment and what you eat. You pause and becoming curious or focus your mind what it is that you are putting in your mouth. The taste, the feel—Mindful eating allows your eating to become a sensory experience.

Mindful eating can become empowering because it serves two purposes in particular: it nourishes your body and your heart.

By making yourself aware of what you are eating, you can understand what your body truly needs. Mindful eating allows you to become aware of your thoughts, physical sensations and feelings which are related to eating.

Mindful eating shifts helps you to shift the focus of your eating from external decision-making to only eating based on what your body is telling you need.

You can make healthier eating choices by knowing you are choosing foods that are good for you versus a “diet” which can be a complete turn off just by that word alone. Diet usually means food deprivation which in turn leads to more eating.

By eating Mindfully you are deliberately paying attention to what you are eating. You will eventually be able to free yourself of habitual bad patterns of overeating and negative ways of thinking, feeling and acting about your food choices.

If you are someone is eating Mindfully, you are:

- ✓ Aware that you are making a choice that you understand there is no right or wrong decisions when it comes to eating
- ✓ Becoming aware that there are varying degrees of awareness with your food choices
- ✓ An individual who has your own unique eating experiences
- ✓ Making eating choices on a moment-by-moment basis
- ✓ Becoming aware of how you are making choices that will support your own health and well-being
- ✓ Practicing Mindful food choices to promote wisdom, balance and acceptance of what Mindful eating can do for you

Mindful eating is a choice. You have to deliberately pay attention to everything you are going to eat. You are not judgmental in your decision but only present in the moment.

Once you start Mindful eating, it will replace your old habits with completely new and healthy choices. And, as mentioned before, you will not feel as if you are on the never-ending “diet treadmill” with no end in sight.

### Chapter 3: Mindfulness and PTSD

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? PTSD can occur after you have been through a traumatic event. Most people associate PTSD with returning combat veterans but along with veterans there are others who can experience events that are so traumatic it triggers PTSD:

- ✓ Sexual or physical assault (Adult or Child)
- ✓ Car Wreck or Serious Accident
- ✓ Terrorist Attack
- ✓ Any naturally occurring event such as tornados, hurricanes, fires, earthquakes or floods

If you feel that the event is life threatening or that you or your loved ones are in danger, this can trigger PTSD. It is normal to feel stress after one of these types of events but it

crosses over to PTSD if your reaction to the event doesn't go away over time and it disrupts your life.

We don't want to get into all of the technical/clinical definitions of PTSD here, but will give you just a brief overview of the four types (or symptoms):

1. Avoiding situations or people that can trigger the memories you have of the traumatic event. You try your hardest to not think about it and definitely avoid talking about it.
2. If your positive thoughts about yourself and others changes after the traumatic event, you could start having negative beliefs and feelings. You might feel shame, fear or guilt. If you lose interest in activities you once had, you might be experiencing PTSD.
3. Reliving the event over and over again in your mind can trigger bad memories or nightmares. Some PTSD patients experience "flashbacks" where they are right back in that moment in time and experiencing the event as if it were in real time.
4. Do you experience the jitters or are always on the alert looking out for danger around every corner? If so, you might have trouble sleeping or concentrating and could have what is known as hyper-arousal. Also, another side effect of PTSD.

The effects of using Mindfulness for PTSD have not been fully studied by researchers but the research does show that it can help with other anxiety problems. Mindfulness has been shown to help with symptoms of avoidance and hyper-arousal (PTSD symptoms).

Mindfulness can assist you in your ability to cope with difficult emotions during your bouts with PTSD. When you practice Mindfulness, you can deal with anxiety and depression by becoming more focused and aware of the present moment.

This in turn will allow you to be more willing to cope and deal with some of the more difficult emotions that you experience with PTSD. Mindfulness can move you away from labels such as good or bad and allow you to notice your thoughts and feelings more and be able to just let them go. You can allow yourself to avoid acting on good or bad feelings and avoid them all together and without behaving impulsively.

Mindfulness takes continuous practice. Some people find it a little difficult at first but with regular use you can more easily identify those thoughts that you feel can harm you and learn to step away from them.

Mindfulness, in PTSD situations, can help you to become more aware and learn to deal gently with your trauma reactions. While practicing Mindfulness, you can become a more compassionate person toward yourself and also others.

If you are someone who is being treated for PTSD, you are most likely participating in Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure treatments. A therapist asks you to write or talk about the traumatic events that triggered the PTSD.

By using Mindfulness, you can better handle your feelings toward the PTSD because it gives you the skills and confidence you need. Mindfulness allows you to become aware of what is happening in your mind and body. This allows you to deal with more and more difficult feelings and thoughts but in a healthy way.

By keeping things under control during treatment, it will allow you to keep going and you may see that you are getting more out of your PTSD treatment with the help of Mindfulness than if you are not using it.

There are different types of therapy that are used in conjunction with Mindfulness. Not only is it used in PTSD, it can also be used for depression, anxiety and substance abuse.

Some of these therapies may target specific problems such as:

- ✓ Attaining goals
- ✓ Drug or Alcohol Abuse
- ✓ Negative Thinking Patterns
- ✓ Physical Health Problems
- ✓ Daily Living Feelings and Stress

Mindfulness can be used as a standalone treatment for PTSD/Trauma survivors or in conjunction with other standard treatments used in effective PTSD therapy.

Combining other skills, along with Mindfulness, can strengthen and regulate emotions when PTSD treatments are incorporated and may improve a PTSD patient's outcome in the following ways:

**Engagement.** Mindfulness may be the choice for people who do not want proven/research driven treatments. By using Mindfulness before seeking professional help, it may improve engagement when you do seek help in engaging with a professional.

**Preparation.** Some may seek Mindfulness treatment in order to prepare for their of PTSD treatment. Learning how to deal with internal reactions (without judgment) so that you can accept feelings, thoughts and sensation as they arise could be extremely helpful in PTSD therapy.

**Compliance.** If someone uses Mindfulness skills during PTSD treatment, they may be able to better comprehend and understand their thoughts and feelings as they are

guided through their PTSD therapy. This will be extremely beneficial and may assist them to get more out of their sessions.

## Chapter 4: Mindfulness and Walking

Walking is a great way to clear your mind and allow you to think without the interruption of phones, kids, work, spouses, and everyday distractions. It is your time and no one can interrupt you when you are in your “Mindfulness” zone.

Taking a walk is almost considered a meditative technique because it requires very little concentration and something that can become very easily adapted to your life and living conditions.

While walking, you can allow yourself to drift away into a semi-conscious state where you are moving along but don't really have to think about it. At the same time, your mind can be off thinking about other things that don't require a great deal of concentration.

Walking takes you away from your present state and allows your mind to drift off to other places. You can listen to meditation-type music or nothing at all. You don't want to do anything while walking except to concentrate on moving away from all of your direct life experiences (for the moment).

We get so busy with life that we forget how to live life. We feel, in this day and age, that everything has to be planned down to the smallest detail to get the most out of our day. And, top that off with the “noise” of social media distractions, TV and any other form of entertainment that has you captivated for great lengths of time.

If you already take walks, you can easily incorporate these techniques into your everyday steps. This can be used whether you are walking to or from work (inner city), walking for exercise purposes or walking in a nature park. The point is to get out and walk and direct your mind in a different way from what you have experienced before.

Techniques and Strategies:

- Notice how your body feels. Do you feel as if you are carrying around a large weight and it feels heavy? Do you feel as light as a feather? Are you relaxed?
- What is going on around you (Sight)? Notice the scenery or people around you. Are you in the inner city? What do you see in each of the display windows at the various stores? Take notice of the use of colors and shapes on display. Are

people being silly? Are there serious people? Don't overthink it. Just observe all your surroundings.

- What do you hear (Hearing)? What are the noises you hear? Do you hear birds chirping? Cars honking? Running streams. Don't think too much about the sounds but just notice and be aware of the sounds.
- How do you feel at this moment? Do you feel as if you are walking awkwardly? Do you feel as if your steps are heavy? Don't change the way you are walking but just notice it. If you take the time to think too long on this, you might overthink it and become self-conscious.
- What do you smell on your walk? If you are in the city, do you smell bakeries cooking their delicious cakes, cupcakes and other goodies? If you are in the country, do you smell fresh-cut grass, rain in the distance, flowers, or trees? There might be unpleasant smells but try to concentrate on the pleasant smells. Do any of the smells bring back memories of something, someone or somewhere in your past?
- What are you feeling as far as the essence of the outdoors? Is there a gentle breeze? Is the sun beaming down on your face? Are you feeling each step you take or your arms swinging in the breeze? Take in all of the sensations of these ordinary walking sensations and don't overthink them—just enjoy them.

Make sure when you are taking a walk that you are aware of your surroundings. Watch for traffic, cars, trains and pay attention to signs. You can become so melded into the space you are creating with your walk that you might forget to stay aware.

While you are walking, let all of the sensations and feelings come and go into your consciousness and awareness. Don't overthink any of it but just simply notice the things that are coming and going in your thoughts.

What is your rhythm of walking? Take notice of how your body is moving. You can probably feel each side and how it feels as you walk along. Don't try to speed up or slow down but walk at a regular pace. If you try to walk too fast and that is not your norm, you will not be able to enjoy the Mindfulness you are trying to accomplish with your walk. Your body may be telling you to slow down. If that is the case, let your body take over.

While walking, try to notice your feet touching the ground as you take step after step. Each step can be your base for grounding yourself if you have let your mind wander too far off the beaten path. This elicits the same sensation as meditational breathing as far as the rising and falling sensation.

By using Mindfulness while walking, your usual way of thinking might become more apparent and your mental habits more clear. Using the Mindfulness techniques, we can

understand our reactions of the things going on around us. Instead of thinking of things as an annoyance on your walk, you might turn it into a positive feeling.

## Chapter 5: Mindfulness and Health Care, Mental Health Professionals

Health care professionals are prone to experience stress just as much as or if not more than the normal worker. This stress can have a negative impact on health care professionals in ways such as decreased job satisfaction, disrupted personal relationships, psychological distress, and even suicide.

Other side-effects of stress can also cause decreased attention span, lack of concentration, impair decision-making skills and reduce the ability to connect or build strong relationships with patients.

Long-term stress in any profession can lead to what is known as “burnout.” Burnout has been loosely defined as emotional exhaustion, low personal self-esteem and a sense of depersonalization meaning not wanting to get personal with anyone on or at the work level.

Health Care and Mental Health professionals need support sometimes just as everyone else in dealing with the immense amount of stress and pressure they feel on their jobs every day. If you think about it, every decision they make affects someone’s life.

Indications are that when Mindfulness is used, it helps in reducing the amount of stress, depression and anxiety in both clinical and non-clinical fields. The level of empathy also increases significantly.

No matter which field you are in, Mindfulness involves paying attention to your present experiences in a non-judgmental way. And although Mindfulness does require someone to have mental calmness, composure, an even temper and be tranquil, it is not the same as relaxation techniques.

So overall you might say that by using Mindfulness, you can generally expect to learn how to:

- Cope with Stress
- Connect with patients
- Improve General Quality of Life
- Reduce negative emotions/anxiety

- Increase positive emotions and feelings of self-compassion

A Mindfulness program can easily be incorporated at hospitals and health care clinics where the overall benefits will be seen by all who participate. It also had the added bonus of enhancing patient care when your health care professional has less stress and job burnout.

## Chapter 6: Mindfulness and Relationships

Relationships are a constantly evolving process whereby as time goes by, you learn more and more about the people you either work with or surround yourself.

We all have co-workers, partners, friends and family. Each of these relationships are unique in their own way. You have a more intimate relationship with your partner. You have a close relationship with your friends. You have a loving relationship with your family. And co-workers are people that you need to get along with in this world in order to carry out business each day.

In order to use Mindfulness in relationships, you have to take an honest look at how you connect with each of these people and your feelings toward them. If you want to deepen your relationship with this person you have to acknowledge what is your present relationship status.

By using Mindfulness in this way, you can hope to achieve:

- More satisfying relationship
- Optimistic and Relaxed
- Accepting and Closer

Take a close look at each of the relationships in your life. How are you related to that person? How well do you relate to them? Start a list for your partner, your family, your friends, your co-workers.

Are you more kind to some than others? Are you more gentle? Do you treat others with not so much respect because your relationship has grown tiresome?

Look at all of your relationships with fresh eyes. Mindfulness allows you be reflect upon why you are unkind, why you do love that person, how you can improve or heal a relationship.

Don't try to do this all in one sitting. Start a journal. Put each person on a different page and see what happens. Write down all the good, the bad and the ugly.

Meditating on love and kindness towards those on your list can allow you to look at someone in a different light. Mindfulness can open your heart and your mind to see people for who they really are. Maybe someone is having a bad experience in their life and whereas you thought they were being rude, they might be going through a bad time.

In your own personal relationship with your partner, try to understand the difficult emotions that they may be going through. Try to take deep breaths and move toward the emotion and away from overreacting. By doing this, you will allow the other person to see your willingness to completely understand them in a loving, responsive way.

Mindfulness will allow the compassionate side of you to shine through. You can truly accept someone if you are willing to look at them for who they are where they are at in their life. No two people are alike and no one travels the same road as anyone else. We are all unique individuals.

Practicing Mindfulness will give you the patience to understand someone else's difficult times and give you the patience and wisdom to understand the situation. You can be there to help someone move through these difficult situations via your use of Mindfulness.

You need to be able to stay present for someone even though they may have shortcomings; especially with those we love. Accept them for who they are, shortcomings and warts included, so that you can acknowledge your own expectations and perceptions about the relationship.

Following these principles, we can see ourselves as a compassionate human being who can deal with not only our own but others difficult emotions. This in turn allows for increased communication and growth within those relationships.

Mindfulness allows you to pause and reflect. When you see a fight or argument approaching, it can sometimes end up in miscommunication where no one gets their point across and it can, and oftentimes does, leave the situation worse off than when it started.

If you take the time to take a step back and pause for a moment before heading straight into the storm, you allow yourself the gift of deepening your relationship with yourself and those you love. The opposite of "Mindful" is "mindless" and that is where you end up without using Mindfulness techniques: reinforcing negative, mindless responses.

By practicing Mindful communication, it has far-reaching benefits and enriches not only our lives but the lives of those with whom we interact. Mindfulness takes practice so don't expect results overnight.

What you can expect over time when you use Mindfulness to relate with others is that you become aware of how habitual patterns can continually bring down your relationships so you want to always remember to move toward Mindful communication.

Other benefits of practicing Mindful communication allow you to be gentler and kinder with yourself. Being Mindful allows us to connect with our own needs and how we can respectfully request that others be mutually Mindful so as to enrich the relationship experience for both parties.

Remember that you are still dealing with the fragile human ego. Mindfulness is a slow process and can cause frustration in the beginning. Overall, though, Mindfulness lets you achieve the end goal which is a desire to be loving in all of our relationships.

In conclusion, Mindfulness improves relationships in the following ways:

- ✓ Mindfulness integrates the emotional side of your brain with the intellectual side of your brain allowing you to deal with your emotions in a more integrated way.
- ✓ Mindfulness reduces the stress in your life. It is all too easy to overreact to small problems and let things get blown out of proportion. Practicing Mindfulness meditation reduces your stress levels so arguing is less likely to take place.
- ✓ Mindfulness helps you to build empathy. Unlike prior to practicing Mindfulness, you were most likely on auto-pilot when it came to your feelings. Now, you can become more conscious and aware of your own state of mind. You can become in tune with your feelings and can feel a sense of empathy. Learning empathy can help in dealing with your partner as well; it helps you to be a more caring, kind and understanding individual.

Ask yourself some questions as you navigate the waters of any relationship (especially if you looked at the person with anger or fear) and as you look back at your history with that person:

- What emotion(s) were you experiencing at the time?
- Did you overreact? If you didn't overreact was it because you allowed yourself some time and space before you reacted?
- What was going on with your body? Were you tense? Relaxed? Calm?

- What were you feeling right before the overreaction? Were you thinking about being hungry, how tired you were at the moment, frustrated with others, happy about something that had just happened?
- What was your reaction and how did you deal with the situation?
- What worked this time and what will you do next time? (For instance, did you go for a walk, listen to music, use Mindful breathing, etc.)

## Chapter 7: Mindfulness and Compassion/Altruism

Being Mindful when integrated with compassion allows you to become more likely to help someone in need. You can understand more compassionately the suffering of others.

Being Mindful in this context also helps you to regulate your emotions and can boost your self-compassion.

There are numerous studies which have been performed in treating the various pathologies of the human mind. But to date, not much has been studied on the positive qualities of the human mind. Some of these qualities include compassion, altruism and empathy.

Each person walking on the earth has these innate qualities yet we don't put enough emphasis on how these prosocial traits affect our everyday lives. We, as human beings, are unique in the fact that without our capacity to feel compassion we surely would not have survived over all these years of our existence on earth.

Some words that describe compassion/altruism as it is interconnected with Mindfulness include:

- ✓ Empathy
- ✓ Nurture
- ✓ Compassion
- ✓ Selfless
- ✓ Sympathy
- ✓ Consideration
- ✓ Kindness
- ✓ Gratitude
- ✓ Love

When your life has meaning and purpose, you are less focused on satisfying your own needs but more interested in helping others. Giving of yourself is a life rich in altruism, compassion, and has greater meaning.

A compassionate lifestyle can improve your longevity because it serves to lower the stress levels in your life. Giving of yourself is a pleasurable activity.

Giving takes the focus and attention off of yourself and allows you to not become self-absorbed in your own predicaments and problems. If those who are depressed about their life could step outside that depressed state and help others (especially those less fortunate), what would the possibilities be that they realize their problems are not as dire as they seem. It is something to think about and ponder.

Research shows that depression and anxiety are linked to a state of self-focus. Those who are depressed are focused on themselves and only think about “me, myself and I.” When you do something for someone else your state of “self-focus” shifts to a state of “other-focus.”

Do you ever remember a time when you were feeling down and someone called you out of the blue and asked if you would like to volunteer to help or solve a problem? What did you feel in that moment?

As you focus your attention outside yourself, you somehow lift yourself out of the fog and your mood suddenly seems to lighten. You are jumping up off the sofa and racing out the door. Before you know it, you have forgotten all about your problems, gained some perspective and feel good about helping others.

If someone is motivated, it appears to play an important role in finding a correlation between a compassionate lifestyle and whether that type of lifestyle has a beneficial impact on someone’s health.

In some studies, it appears that those who engaged in volunteering seem to live longer than those who did not volunteer. This was only true if their intentions are altruistic rather than self-serving.

When you volunteer, it brings out the compassion in you. Volunteering helps you to look beyond yourself to see that we can give and brings about a real sense of self-worth, humility and compassion toward others.

Compassion allows us to feel a sense of connection to others. If you have no social connections, you are causing more harm to your overall health than you realize. This lack of socialization causes more damage than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure.

On the other side of this coin is the fact that if you do have strong social connections, it can lead to a 50% increase in your chances for longevity.

By participating in social connections it has been found that there is a correlation between that and strengthening your immune system, helping to recover from diseases faster and they think it may even lengthen a person's life.

Mindfulness, compassion and altruism can allow people to become more connected which, in turn, can lower their bouts of anxiety and depression. It boosts their self-esteem and they become more empathetic to others.

This trio also allows you to trust others more, become cooperative and as a result, it is returned fifty fold as others want to trust and cooperate with you.

To stay on top of your game, practice social connectedness. Use Mindfulness to create a positive experience in your life by interacting with others on social, emotional and physical levels.

Don't let yourself fall into the dark sides of no social connectedness. Your health physical and psychological health will suffer greatly. If you practice antisocial behavior it can lead to further isolation.

Make the effort every day to live a life of compassion and improve your physical and psychological well-being.

## **Chapter 8: Mindfulness and Self-Control**

Everyone in their lifetime loses self-control but it is the degree to which you use self-control that is important.

Self-control is purely emotional. If you are angry there is going to be a completely different response than when you are, for instance, sad, mad or glad.

The responses you elicit can signal different things that need to change or the outcomes. If you are angry about something, that can tell you that something needs to

change. If you are sad because of a loss of someone close to you it is telling you that you didn't want to lose that person that you love and who has been a part of your life.

When you let your emotions override common sense that is where the trouble lies. We can get into all sorts of trouble if we don't keep those emotions in check. Keeping your emotions under wrap can best be only described as a helpful and healthy choice.

Mindfulness can help you to regulate those emotions. By controlling your behavior (or executive control) it may be the key to doing just that.

By using mindfulness in controlling your emotions in can actually help you to become aware and accept those nagging emotional signals therefore allowing you to control the behavior.

Mindfulness can help you to change an attitude toward certain emotions when they arise rather than focusing on trying to change the emotion itself. By removing the labels of the emotion as good or bad it allows you to have greater self-insight and to just observe the contents of your mind.

By using "executive control" you are using willpower. This means that you have greater control over your impulses. Mindfulness may help to improve executive control and improvement in emotion regulation.

For most of us, life is an emotional rollercoaster. Our emotions come through at times whether we want them to or not and those emotions can allow us to get carried away without our even wanting them to.

If we start feeling sad or upset, the emotions start to snowball out of control which leads to other negative thoughts which makes things even worse.

Mindfulness needs to be fully understood in that it leads to people being less emotional. That is not true.

Mindfulness can help to improve emotion regulation. We don't want mindfulness to take away a person's emotional experiences but instead bring about present moment awareness and acceptance of their emotional experiences.

If you can become aware of your emotions and know what comes next when they are allowed to spin out of control, it allows you to still experience the emotion but doesn't allow things to get out of hand.

In becoming aware of our emotions and dealing with them through Mindfulness, you can prevent or limit the disruptive aspects of emotions.

## Chapter 9: Mindfulness and Children, Schools and Classrooms

Is it beneficial to build mindfulness into the syllabus of schools allowing our children to learn how to cope with different areas of their life?

Some in the academic world say yes and others say no.

Here are some reasons as to why some people say it should be built into a school's curriculum:

- Children become Mindful of their thoughts and actions
- Exercises can be tailored for children
- Reduces behavioral problems and aggression
- Improves happiness levels
- Increases ability to pay attention
- Teachers tend to have lower blood pressure, improved positive emotions, less depression and greater compassion and empathy

Incorporating the Mindfulness program into a school is extremely cost-effective. It has been shown that students, teachers and principals who participate in a Mindful program say that it has greatly improved the classroom and the overall school environment.

Mindfulness taught in a school setting is a toolset that anyone can use for the rest of their life. Teaching mindfulness in school means letting everyone pay attention to their own experiences through using their senses and their mind.

Mindfulness in school teaches how not to label things as good or bad but simply by observing with a neutral attitude. You can also learn how to still the heart and mind although your body may still be moving. It can't be used for discipline to demand certain behaviors. It is there for the quality of acceptance.

At the lower grades/middle school level, set up a schedule for when Mindfulness will be taught:

- ✓ Same time every day (after recess or lunch is a great time)
- ✓ Make the environment conducive (no distractions)
- ✓ Get all the students involved

- ✓ Allow everyone to share their experiences with Mindfulness in their own life
- ✓ Practice this EVERY day
- ✓ Incorporate a minute or two for each: mindful listening and breathing
- ✓ Let students see how incorporating Mindfulness affects their daily lives
- ✓ It has to be relevant to their own life in order for it to grab their attention
- ✓ Keep the group or class size small in order for Mindfulness teachings to be more effective

At the higher learning level, make learning Mindfulness creative:

- ✓ Tell stories to help the students remember more easily
- ✓ Build up trust before diving into fully teaching Mindfulness
- ✓ Take your Mindfulness class outside to give it a more relaxed feeling
- ✓ Ask everyone to participate
- ✓ Incorporate activities into the teachings
- ✓ Make it all relevant and let those who are really interested to fully participate over those who don't seem as engaged.

The more someone feels engaged in the conversation about Mindfulness the easier the job becomes. Everyone wants to feel a part of something bigger so allowing students to speak freely in a relaxed environment will only add that much more value.

The amount of classes that need to be offered is a total of about 9-12. The more classes you have available, and the more time that goes by, everyone will become more engaged and the conversation will have changed from the first class to the last class.

The last important piece to teaching Mindfulness in schools is the teacher. It is better to bring in someone who is trained in Mindfulness to teach the class. Students get someone whom nobody knows and it can make it a much more pleasant experience and they even open up more so than with a standard, full-time teacher.

Teaching mindfulness in school can be extremely beneficial to all of those involved. It can teach those who participate in the class to live life with a whole new point of view and may cause them to look introspectively at their life.

## **Chapter 10: Mindfulness and Childbirth/Parenting**

Mindfulness in childbirth and parenting can promote family health and well-being during all stages of the pregnancy and childbirth along with the “early parenting” years.

The effects of using Mindfulness during the pregnancy can cause decreases in anxiety, depression and have a positive affect from pre-pregnancy to peri-natal and early parenting periods.

Mindfulness during these times can:

- Increase confidence and decrease fear of childbirth
- Tap into deep inner resources for working with pain
- Improve couple communication, connection and cooperation
- Provide stress-reducing skills for greater joy and wellbeing
- Reduce pregnancy-related anxiety, stress and depression.
- Being happier with parenting skills, relationship with their kids and their kids have better social skills

All pregnancies are different in that they all pose significant physical and psychological challenges for not only the woman but also for their partners.

Pregnancy and new parenting can cause numerous amounts of stress and finding new ways of coping with all the changes. And, once you make it through the pregnancy, there are new challenges in becoming parents and learning to adapt and cope all over again.

All of this stress and coping leaves the relationship open to experience distress which can pose risks to not only their own health and well-being but that of the unborn child.

Maternal stress is a significant factor in post-partum depression. Post-partum depression can cause marital conflict as well as the mother not being able to experience the mother-infant attachment.

Infusing Mindfulness to help deal with all the stress and coping skills a person or couple is going to need is just what the doctor ordered. Stress reduction is the order of the day.

Learning mind-body skills such as Mindfulness will help promote a happier and healthier pregnancy and birth. Using mindfulness-based skills will:

- ✓ Reduce stress
- ✓ Improve psychological well-being
- ✓ Increase positive thoughts
- ✓ Reduced anxiety and depression
- ✓ Help to eliminate recurrences of major depressive disorder and substance abuse

- ✓ Approve immune function
- ✓ Enhance interpersonal relationship functioning and stress coping
- ✓ Satisfaction with parenting

Using Mindfulness during these times is related to greater self-controlled behavior and mental stability. This may also prevent the new mom from feeling overwhelmed which might allow her to open her mind to learning new stress coping strategies.

Mindfulness can therefore be of great assistance during the actual birth, becoming a new parent and can aid in the couple learning awareness, kindness, connectedness and care.

Learning Mindfulness during pregnancy and during new parenting can be fully integrated with any other learning or current knowledge the couples possesses. Most couples already have a sense of what the pregnancy, the labor, and the birth will entail by attending birthing classes.

Mindfulness can also assist greatly after the baby is born with the mother's feelings and possible bouts with post-partum depression and the demanding needs of the baby.

Participating in a group setting allows couples to "normalize" the stress they are experiencing. Participants can share things such as couple and family relationships, changes to the woman's physical body, their financial obligations, work lives, emotional changes, hormonal changes, and self-identity.

Mindfulness can help you and your partner stay in the present moment. During the actual delivery, mindfulness can be used to cope with pain and fear by focusing on breathing or being mindful of physical sensations such as touch or verbal reminders from their partners.

Learning Mindfulness before, during or after the birth of a child can only enhance the overall joy of a baby being born. Mindfulness can act as a buffer whenever the new mom or dad senses that life is getting a little too hectic.

Normal "problems" and situations can crop up but when you don't know what to expect with all the emotions, thoughts and feelings of having just brought a new life into this world, Mindfulness can keep the new couple on track for a happier and healthier home environment for years to come.