

Kindfulness-Based Stress Reduction — *KBSR*?

By Certified MBSR Educator, Cassie Schindler

Right there, in the foreword of Jon-Kabat Zinn's powerful book, *Mindfulness for All; The Wisdom to Transform the World*, he coins the word ***kindfulness***, knowing that someone would pick it up, and expand, rather than exploit, its relevance. I hope to do that with this writing.

If the name of the 8-week MBSR course began with the word kindness instead of mindfulness, would you register? Would you have a clear understanding of that word and concept? Would it appeal to you to take a course that suggested training your heart, as opposed to your mind?

Even as recently as five years ago, you may not have (or, still may not) truly understood the word mindfulness. Understand it or not, like it or not, the words mindful and mindfulness have become highly-recognizable, often overused and misused elements of our common speak.

So let's tackle that first. Mindfulness is a practice, as well as a state of heightened awareness. Awareness is our innate, human, sentient skill to perceive our internal and external worlds.

Heightened awareness, is achieved through the

diligent observation of the present moment experience. Much can be learned when we reside in *now*; allowing the past and the future to remain (more often) in their respective domains.

As it turns out, this is no easy feat. Out of sheer habit, our un-reigned minds rule the day, and the moment, delivering to us streams of past regrets, rumination, rehashing of events, as well as projection, worry and our futile attempts to control the future.

When we begin the process of lovingly, and non-judgmentally witnessing our habit of *thought time-travel*, we can then begin to exercise a *new* muscle, the one that kindly escorts us back to this moment, over, and over, and over again.

When Jon Kabat-Zinn created the MBSR multi-week stress reduction program in the late 70's, the learning intention model*, which includes *experiencing new possibilities, discovering embodiment, cultivating observation, moving toward acceptance, and integration*, had at its core, the *cultivation of compassion*. Kindness (to self and others) was laced in to each experiential session. It is to this day.

As Jon has shared many times, "the word for mind, and word for heart in Chinese and many other

Asian languages, is the same word". So, mindfulness is and always has been, a matter of heartfulness, aka kindness.

Woven into each of the MBSR sessions I have facilitated over the past 10 years, is my sincere invitation to elicit mindfulness as a means of cultivating self-compassion, and to then unleash it into the world.

I'm convinced that my own lack of self-love and care at an earlier age, allowed my nervous system to play host to M.S. (multiple sclerosis), the healing of which lies at the very heart of my ongoing passion for teaching, and quest for balance and wellness for all.

Consider this...it may do each of us well to establish, deepen and nurture our inner relationship, or as Derek Walcott put it so beautifully in his poem, ***Love After Love***, *Give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all your life, whom you have ignored for another, who knows you by heart.*

So, how do we tend to the heart, especially one that may be wounded and closed? Is it possible to cultivate self love, and then altruism, in order to let this love spill outside of the self?

Even a shallow dive into the work of Dr. Kristen Neff, provides all you may need to re-unite with this stranger, and light the candle of kindness for yourself and others.

In her book, *Self-Compassion; The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, Dr. Neff offers a life line to those who wish to re-establish their inner love affair, strengthen emotional resilience and soothe the self when waves of imbalance rock our waters.

The Hand-on-Heart practice below (and link to the full description on Neff's site) is a short and sweet way of giving yourself a supportive touch, that activates the internal care system, and the parasympathetic nervous system, to bring about a sense of calm and safety.

Research shows that physical touch, which so many are longing for during this time of separation from loved ones, releases oxytocin, providing a sense of security and calming cardiovascular stress.

Give this exercise a try?

Hand-on-Heart Practice

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-4-supportive-touch/>

- When you notice you're under stress, take 2-3 deep, satisfying breaths.
- Gently place your hand over your heart, feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand. If you wish, place *both* hands on your chest, noticing the difference between one and two hands.
- Feel the touch of you hand on your chest. If you wish, you could make small circles with your hand on your chest.
- Feel the natural rising and falling, as you breathe in, and as you breathe out.
- Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

The time is ripe for those who care about this planet and its inhabitants (including you!) to lean in, step up and model the wisdom and change that is needed now, more than ever before.

Kindfulness is a two-way street, and a sure method to transform our world and make us whole.

As I close, I'm sending waves of kindness your way. I hope you feel it.

**MBSR Learning Intention Model - Teaching*

Mindfulness; A Practical Guide for Clinicians and Educators (McCown, Rebel, Micozzi, 2011)