Creative Meditation and Mindset Strategies for Anxiety and Stress Reduction

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ICA Conference, November 8, 2019
We All Know the Problem

- Americans are probably as overworked and overstimulated as any people in history. Non-natives often remark upon the furious pace of American life. But the cost to the human spirit is high. We don’t know how to sit still; we don’t know what to do with ourselves when the TV is on the fritz, the mall closes, or Social Security kicks in.” (Rev. Michael Schuler, in Everyday Spiritual Practice, p. 25)

- Anxiety, Stress, Trauma, Social Injustice, Social Acceptance, Genetic Inheritance, Fight-Flight-Freeze Response, Brain “Flooding”

- All these contribute to the protective rigidity of Fixed Mindset.
Fixed Mindset

I’m too lazy to

get enlightened,

he told

me once

& I like restaurants
too much.

What does that have
to do with anything? I said.

I’m not sure, he said,

but any excuse is good

when there’s

change involved.

Brian Andreas “Good Excuse” in Hearing Voices
Growth Mindset

She kept asking if the stories were true. I kept asking her if it mattered. We finally gave up. She was looking for a place to stand & I wanted a place to fly.

-Brian Andreas “Place to Fly” in Mostly True
Welcome and Glad you are HERE

- So, how do we foster readiness, openness, awareness, growth mindset in our clients and ourselves?
- What are your thoughts about this?
- Make a list of the needs, anxieties, issues they state- i.e., Why are you here?
- Make a list of the behaviors you see – grabbing throat, restless hands, eyes darting, etc.
- Use Assessments: ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience), Depression, Stress, or Anxiety scales
- Intentional stress reduction activities (nature, gardens, walking, biking, etc.)
- Medication with prescribed drugs or non-prescribed alternatives
- **Meditation and Music**
“All of us have had the experience of wandering through a lush garden or a timeless dessert, walking by a river or an ocean, or climbing a mountain and finding ourselves simultaneously calmed and reinvigorated, engaged in mind, refreshed in body and spirit. The importance of these physiological states on individual and community health is fundamental and wide-ranging. In forty years of medical practice, I have found only two types of non-pharmaceutical ‘therapy’ to be vitally important for patients with chronic neurological diseases: music and gardens.”

Dr. Oliver Sacks (1933-2015) Neurologist and Author
Meditation teaches us Mindfulness. Why is mindfulness helpful?

- **Mindfulness:**
- Allows an experience to be accepted as fully as possible into consciousness;
- We slow down a racing mental response;
- We observe what we are thinking and doing;
- We experience complete mental and sensual awareness
Mindfulness

**Being Mindful:** Carrying a cup of tea from one room to the other

**Not Being Mindful:**
Talking to someone and become distracted by some thought or memory. You realize the person just asked you a question that you did not hear at all. Your mind was “away”.

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Mindfulness

“Our mind has a mind of its own and easily wanders off into some fantasy of the future or some evaluation, judgment, or remembrance of the past. All this time, we sacrifice what is right in front of us: this present moment. If we do this repeatedly, our minds become a very busy place to live, running back and forth from past to future, while our experience of the present moment becomes shallow and unfulfilling.”

James Austin, “Mindfulness”, Everyday Spiritual Practice, p. 74
Qualities of Mind Resulting from Mindfulness Practice

- We show up in the present moment.

- We learn quality attention and awareness (i.e., emotion, sensation, emptiness, as well as thought) Examples: flower in a garden, washing dishes, garment sleeve

- We learn to see the process of thinking itself, “a process we usually miss because we are so identified with the content of our thoughts.” (James Austin, *Everyday Spiritual Practice*, p. 76)

- We develop a more spacious mind, less dismissive of nonverbal experience.
More Qualities of Mind Resulting from Mindfulness Practice

- We learn to see emotion itself and this knowing creates a bit of space that can protect us from acting unwisely.

- We can be with, receive, and hold our anger or sorrow, rather than suppress, deny, or negate it.

- We learn that we do not have control.
Benefits of Mindfulness Practice 1

Easing the resistance and tension that come from armoring ourselves against pain, disappointment, loss, and suffering.

Easing the mind’s practice of restlessly racing around.

Mental alertness increases while psychological tension decreases as deep relaxation is coupled with a wakeful, and highly alert mental state. In meditation we are focusing – working to send only one set of signals in our brain at a time. This has a very positive effect on our physiology, such as lower metabolic rate with decreases in heart and respiration. This is an opposite state from that associated with anxiety or anger. Meditation also indicates different brain wave patterns than from sleep or hypnosis.

“Technically, meditation seems to bring about a hypometabolic state that is quite opposite to the ‘defense-alarm’ described by W.B. Cannon when he analyzed the physiologic state of the ‘flight or fight’ reaction.” Dr. Lawrence LeShan, How To Meditate.
Benefits of Mindfulness Practice 2

More coherent personality organization.

Less hostility toward life’s demands.

Deeper acceptance of one’s vulnerability.

We connect with our inherent self-worth and value what we are, in contrast with societal messages that often tell us our value is grounded in how we look, or in what we accomplish, produce or do.

Increased sense of competence in one’s acquired abilities with one’s body and mind.
Benefits of Mindfulness Practice

Increased ability to act wholeheartedly and whole-mindedly.

Increased patience and contentment with life.

Wider perception of reality and one’s place in and with it.

Development of a loving and gentle attitude toward the self, which then lays the foundation for living with a compassionate heart toward others.

Development of a compassionate heart lays the foundation for living a justice-centered life.
Life-Long Practice

- But meditation is a life-long practice. Who has the patience?
- Drugs are faster but – oh, shucks – can be addictive.
- How do sound and music contribute to a growth mindset? How do they make a difference?
Put Bells All Around Your Life

“Most meditation techniques say come back to something in the present moment: our breath, a candle flame, a word or sentence. Anything we are doing can be a mantra. We can pay attention to our walking when we walk; we can pay attention to our eating when we eat…to our conversation when we speak. We can't always do this, but…we can always bring our attention back to the present moment, maybe with little mindfulness bells.

In Tich Nhat Hanh’s meditation retreats, there’s always a bell going off. When the bell goes off, you stop whatever you are doing and take three mindful breaths. So put bells all around your life, take three mindful breaths when you get behind the wheel of a car, do some mindful walking as you walk from your car to your workplace. Put moments of mindfulness into your life.”

“A Spiritual Maintenance Schedule”
Everyday Spiritual Practice, p. 37  Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube
“It is only in the past decade that an organized community dedicated to research on music and the brain has emerged...new technologies...have quickly revealed that there is no single “music center” in the brain. In fact, it seems that each subcomponent of music (e.g., harmony, rhythm, etc.) engages a broad network of brain regions, so that music as a whole has access to vast portions of our brains.”

Brass Tone Bowls

- Scientists predict a future in which music will routinely be used as a prescription, when it will alter our genetic makeup, treat immune system disorders, and alter brain function in neurologically disabled and aging patients.

Mannes, E. The Power of Music, p. 167
Singing Bowls and the Brain

“The measurement of electro-magnetic brain waves has demonstrated that there are a number of clearly recognizable wavelengths, each connected with a different state of consciousness. In the normal state the brain produces Beta waves. Alpha waves are present in the brain in a state of meditation and calm consciousness. Theta waves are produced in a state of ‘half sleep’ and Delta waves are only activated during deep sleep.

It is also possible to record the waves produced by singing bowls. Among the wave patterns of different singing bowls there is a measurable wave pattern which is equivalent to the alpha waves produced by the brain. These bowls instill a sense of deep relaxation and ‘inner space opening up.’”

E.R. Jansen, Singing Bowls, p. 41
The Power of the Singing Bowls

- Scientific studies show that sound can produce changes in the autonomic, immune, endocrine, and neuropeptide systems.
- Every atom, molecule, gland, cell, and organ of the body absorbs and emits sound.
SINGING OR INTONING MANTRAS TO LOWER ANXIETY AND STRESS

A Mantra is a musical phrase or vocalized word used repetitiously that gives the mind more to work with, thus easing distractions. Mantras are effective because they root in our consciousness. Others believe that mantras are beneficial because words or phrases have particular frequencies. A third belief is that mantras work because, like meditation, you are training your mind to focus on one thing at a time.

Mantras can be chosen that have personal benefit and meaning. You might use “In, Out” or “Peace-ful”, “Love heals”, “Allah is one”, “Kyrie eleison”, or “Hare Krishna.” Chanting a mantra is powerful because music has the dual ability to imprint in our brain in a special way and music penetrates our bodies at the cellular level.
Aum (Om) Sometimes called ‘the first mantra’, this Sanskrit symbol and tone are said to represent both the dream and waking state, deep dreamless state, veil of illusion, and the transcendental state.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia

Christian

In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease.
Smile, release.
Present Moment.
Wonderful moment.

Thich Nhat Hahn

The earth, the air, the fire, the water
Return, return, return, return
I-a, I-a, I-a, I-o, I-o, I-o, I-O

Anonymous

Mowtay, le-nu le-nu gowtay. Ha-ee-no, Ha-ee-no, Ha-ee-no
(“The spirit and I are one forever & ever.”) Navajo

We are the flow. We are the ebb. We are the weavers. We are the web.

Lindie Lila, New Age World Music
References


