

Navigating Anxiety and Stress Through Mindfulness

Workshop Series: Participant Comments

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Following are participant responses provided at the end of this eight-week program, presented here with permission.

1. What are some of the main points about “mindfulness” that resonate for you?

- “Presence resonates with me. The quality of my activities is very closely tied to how present my attention is with the activity.”
- “Being more connected to the world and simple pleasures.”
- “Mindfulness helps me experience fear and anxiety without getting paralyzed.”
- “Not getting caught up in the “me”-ness. I can be with all sensations that are horrible, and deal with it—noticing that my storyline/feeling/thoughts are not me.”
- “Avoiding and resisting discomfort tends to make it worse, and the present moment is much richer than we generally believe.”
- “That it is OK to sit with the feeling of pain or sadness.”
- “I have changed my view of anxiety. I now can more easily recognize negative thoughts as just thoughts and stop them from escalating.”

2. How helpful has this workshop series been for you? Specifically, how has it helped you deal with anxiety and stress?

- “Makes me more aware of other feelings; makes me more open, less depressed. Keeps me from ruminating on different things happening in my life.”
- “Helpful in getting me to open up to people again.”
- “It has helped me to know that my suffering is caused when I get further away from reality.”
- “It’s made me more aware of what my triggers are, and how I can use what I’ve learned to help me deal with whatever shows up in life.”
- “Shifting perspective. For example, it’s OK to let the feeling be. (I’m) really believing now that there are times when you accept things as they are.”
- “It has reinforced the need to be with whatever is happening, pleasant or unpleasant, without resisting or clinging. Generally, I find this allows strong negative emotions to arise and dissolve on their own, rather than intensify.”

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Navigating Anxiety and Stress Through Mindfulness

Quantitative Evaluation

Number of participants and average improvement score by group and combined (40%)

Group #	Number of Participants Who Completed	Average Pre-Intervention Score	Average Post-Intervention Score	Average Improvement
1	8	38.9	52.6	13.7
2	11	37.4	56.5	19.1
3	7	42.0	61.0	19.0
4	9	47.1	59.1	12.0
5	5	35.9	53.6	17.7
Total	40	40.3	56.6	16.3

EVALUATION STATEMENT	AVERAGE IMPROVEMENT
I get stuck with the storylines that make me feel anxious. I don't know how to pause/interrupt this pattern.	1.6 (60%)
I think over and over about things that have already happened.	1.45 (45%)
My storylines keep the everyday stress rolling and pull me out of the present moment.	1.4 (40%)
This pattern of not being fully present in my immediate experience is normal for me.	1.3 (30%)
I have difficulty accepting things as they are.	1.25 (25%)

Evaluation statements with the highest change

Qualitative evaluation

How helpful has this workshop series been for helping you deal with anxiety and stress?

Extremely helpful = 12 Very helpful = 14

Somewhat helpful = 14

	Frequency
Learning a new technique and practicing a new way to deal with anxiety and stress	14
Allowing negative thoughts and emotions to arise and dissolve	8
Being more open and less depressed/pausing more/being more mindful in the present/being OK with emptiness	6
Realizing that not controlling things makes me anxious (security pattern is threatened)	5
Not resisting change and accepting what comes (pleasant or unpleasant)/we don't control everything	5

Excerpts from:

Traverso-Yepez, M. & Safer, A. Navigating anxiety and stress through mindfulness. Presentation at Memorial University's Psychiatry Annual Research and Awards Day, June 24, 2016

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Navigating Anxiety and Stress through Mindfulness:

Program Evaluation Summary

Evaluation support provided by Dr. Martha Traverso-Yepez

This workshop series was presented from October to December 2014 to ten individuals who self-identified that they were experiencing anxiety and/or stress in their lives. The program consisted of eight two-and-a-half-hour weekly sessions on Tuesday nights. Seven females and three males between the ages of 41 and 65 participated in the series. A minority of participants had attended a Mindfulness-Awareness workshop series conducted by Andrew Safer. Seven participants completed both pre- and post- evaluations. The sessions were held in Canon Wood Hall at St. Thomas' Anglican Church in St. John's, Newfoundland. Confidentiality was agreed by all parties.

The Mindfulness Approach

Whereas normally we become identified with our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and impulses and are immediately drawn in to the ongoing drama, mindfulness practice enables us to take a step back and see these states of mind as events that come and go. This approach to dealing with anxiety and stress involves (1) the development of non-judgmental awareness, (2) an orientation to the present moment as opposed to being lost in thought about the past or future, (3) a willingness to relate to current experience, whether agreeable or disagreeable, (4) developing the ability to distinguish between thoughts and reality, and (5) recognizing beliefs and habitual thought patterns that feed anxiety and stress, and learning to disengage from them.

Through mindfulness-awareness meditation (both sitting and walking) and other practices that are introduced, participants cultivate their innate capacity to be mindful and aware. One of the practices is “head and shoulders,” which facilitates pausing in order to interrupt habitual patterns and actions that flow from them. The other practices include paying attention to routine daily tasks, and “tonglen” which develops loving-kindness and compassion toward oneself and others. This undermines the tendency towards self-absorption while emphasizing interconnectedness with others.

Program Elements and Content

The sessions include mindfulness-awareness meditation practice and Q&A / coaching, PowerPoint presentations, worksheet completion, journaling, and discussions both in pairs and within the group.

Key themes include:

- Introduction to Mindfulness and Anxiety / Stress
- Key Elements of Mindfulness and Awareness
- Anxiety: Imagination vs. Reality
- Stress: Reacting vs. Responding
- Attention: Our Precious Resource
- Recognizing Thoughts and Being Present
- Working with Fear and Fearlessness
- Basic Goodness: A Breath of Fresh Air

Participants are encouraged to practice mindfulness-awareness meditation at home for one-half hour daily as well as the mindfulness-in-everyday-life practices that are introduced.

Evaluation Summary

The evaluation instrument was developed collaboratively by Martha Traverso-Yepez (PhD), a professor and researcher at the Division of Community Health in the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University, and Andrew Safer, mindfulness instructor, trainer, program developer, and facilitator. The pre-intervention quantitative evaluation was completed during the first session, and the post-intervention evaluation, which included a qualitative component, was completed during the last session. Participants wrote unique personal codes on their pre- and post- evaluations to facilitate pairing. Anonymity was ensured in both instances and all of the participants provided written consent authorizing the presentation of aggregated data with no personal identification.

All participants showed significant improvement in their grasp of the material that was presented during the “Dealing with Anxiety and Stress Through Mindfulness” program. The average score change after the intervention was **+45.2%**.

Quantitative Evaluation

Pre- / Post- Comparison

Participant	Pre	Post	Change
1	55	59	+4
2	58	78	+20
3	28	61	+33
4	53	66	+13
5	37	60	+23
6	41	70	+29
7	22	33	+11
Total Score	294	427	+133

The following statements evidenced the most significant changes between pre- and post-scores. Totals include responses from all participants. (1=Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree)

“Navigating Anxiety and Stress through Mindfulness” Evaluation Summary—May 2016

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Evaluation Statement	Pre	Post	Change
I have difficulty dealing with troubling emotions.	17	28	+11
When I start thinking about something that concerns me, I can't get it out of my mind.	14	24	+10
I get stuck with the storylines that can make me feel anxious and I don't know how to pause or interrupt this pattern.	19	28	+9
My mind never stays in one place and keeps jumping from one thought to the next.	13	22	+9
This pattern of not being fully present in my immediate experience is normal for me.	12	21	+9
I have difficulty accepting things as they are.	19	27	+8

Qualitative Evaluation

Some of the participant responses included different ideas, which were assigned to the appropriate categories. The categories are listed in descending order by frequency in the following tables. Selected participant responses are listed after the following table.

1. *What are some of the main points you remember about mindfulness?*

Categories	
Meditation makes me more aware / enjoy what's happening around me / being in the moment / grounded	4
Stop, breathe / pausing, Head and Shoulders	2
Responding vs. reacting	1
Helps me experience fear and anxiety without getting paralyzed	1
Slows down thoughts	1
Relieves body tension	1
Thoughts are invisible, like air	1
Narrative can change; doesn't have to be focal point	1
Mindful choices	1
Deep listening, not getting caught up in "me"-ness / noticing thoughts, feelings, storylines are not me	1
Can be with horrible sensations and deal with it	1

"It is wonderful to enjoy what is going on around me when I am mindfully observing."

"The narrative can change, rather than being the focal point of repetition."

"I can be with all sensations that are horrible and deal with it, noticing my storyline / feeling / thoughts are not me."

"Being grounded and more aware."

"Navigating Anxiety and Stress through Mindfulness" Evaluation Summary—May 2016

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2. Which mindfulness-in-everyday-life practices are you finding helpful, and in what way?

Categories	Frequency
Pausing (creating space): come back to present / gap, less likely to speak / Time to be quiet / gives a minute to collect thoughts	4
Sitting meditation	3
Walking practice	2
Focusing on what I'm doing in the present	2
Daily chores (tooth brushing, hand washing)	2
Less reactionary to things that would normally bother me	1
Tonglen	1
Breathing	1

3. How helpful has this workshop series been for helping you deal with anxiety and stress? (0 = not helpful; 10 = extremely helpful)

Ranges / Categories	Participants
5-7 (somewhat helpful)	2
8-9 (very helpful)	2
10 (extremely helpful)	2
No answer	1

4. Have you been able to do some meditation at home?

Frequency of meditation practice at home:

Times / Week	Participants
1-2	0
3-4	2
5 or >	4
No answer	1

Length of time per session:

Length of session	Participants
5-15 min.	2
> 15 min.	5

5. Do you think other people can benefit from learning about mindfulness—both meditation and other practices?

Seven participants responded “Yes”. No one responded “No”.