



# \* Using Mindfulness for Self-Care

Tim Duerden



COUNSELLOR  
RESOURCES

# \* Aims and Objectives

## **Aims:**

- ✓ To provide an experiential introduction to the use of mindfulness for counsellor self-care
- ✓ To introduce key theoretical concepts relevant to applying and adapting mindfulness for self-care

## **Objectives:**

- ✓ To experience examples of mindfulness practices relevant to counsellor self-care
- ✓ To plan how mindfulness practices can be integrated into ongoing counsellor self-care
- ✓ To evaluate mindfulness resources for their relevance to counsellor self-care

## \* How to Reference This Lecture

If you use this lecture as a source of information for an assignment or other writing, please ensure you include it in the references. Using the Harvard style of referencing, this would appear as follows:

For CSR:

Duerden, T. (2022). *Using Mindfulness for Self-Care* [lecture]. Counselling Study Resource. Counselling Tutor. [Date viewed].

For Counsellor CPD:

Duerden, T. (2022). *Using Mindfulness for Self-Care* [lecture]. Counsellor CPD. Counselling Tutor. [Date viewed].

However, there are different styles of referencing and your learning institution or publisher might require you to do it a different way. Please check the relevant handbook/style guide.

# \* Why Practise Mindfulness for Counsellor Self-Care?

Mindfulness can help (Fletcher, Pond and Gardiner, 2022; Pollak and Pedulla, 2014):

- ✓ Reduce stress and increase resilience
- ✓ Develop your capacity to be psychologically present and offer the core conditions
- ✓ In the transition from one client to another, and from counselling to other activities.



# \* What is Mindfulness?

Mindful awareness has been described as:

- ✓ 'Paying attention to what's happening in the present moment in the mind, body and external environment, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness' (Hyland, 2015, p.6).
- ✓ 'Knowing directly what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment ... to see the present moment clearly' (Williams, 2018, 'What is mindfulness?' section).

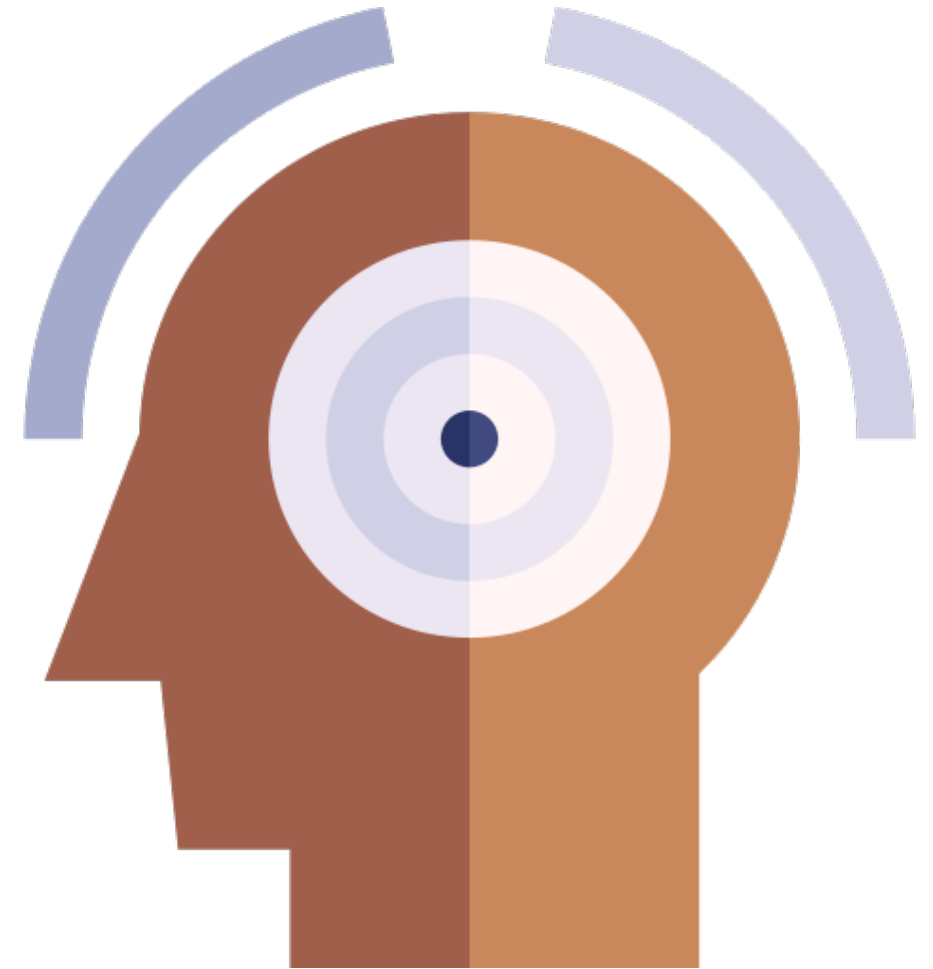


image: Flaticon.com

# \* Mindfulness: Awareness versus Practice

- ✓ **Mindfulness practices** are what you do to cultivate **mindful awareness** (Pollak and Pedulla, 2014).
  - So always question what the general term 'mindfulness' is being used to describe: awareness, practice or both.
- ✓ There are many types of mindfulness practice:
  - Different mindfulness practices may suit you at different times and in different places.
- ✓ Even if mindfulness is new to you, you are probably already doing things that are a lot like mindfulness practice.
  - Grounding practices are a good example of this.

# \* Mindfulness Practice: Key Concepts

Most mindfulness practices involve:

- ✓ Choosing a physical sensation to focus your attention on – the '**focusing anchor**'
- ✓ Noticing when your attention wanders away from this focusing anchor, hooked away by something else
- ✓ Choosing to deliberately unhook your attention from whatever hooked it and returning your attention to your chosen focusing anchor
- ✓ Returning to noticing when your attention has been hooked again, and then being able to practise unhooking your attention once again.



Image used with permission of Integrated Mindfulness Ltd

# \* Mindfulness Practice: AKA 'Unhooking Practice'

'Unhooking practice' is more descriptive of what mindfulness practice is all about.

- ✓ Mindful awareness is about being able to recognise what's hooking your attention and then making choices about what you then actually focus on.
- This also includes practising unhooking from the self-criticism and low self-worth that are often influencing how people relate to themselves, moment-to-moment in the background.



Image used with permission  
of Integrated Mindfulness Ltd



# \* Mindfulness Practice: AKA 'Unhooking Practice'

- ✓ This can make a huge difference to:
  - Becoming less bothered by (and having perspective on) the stressful stuff going on in your mind or around you
  - Being more able to focus on what matters most to you and acting on that by unhooking from what might otherwise hijack your attention and negatively influence your actions.



Image used with permission  
of Integrated Mindfulness Ltd



Photo by [engin akyurt](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## \* Mindful Sipping Practice

□ *[Pause video now to get a drink – hot or cold.]*

This grounding mindfulness practice is in three parts:

- ✓ **Sitting** – notice what you can physically sense before you sip: three sights, two sounds, contact points with floor and chair, how the drink container feels as you hold it, and then what else you notice about the drink container.
- ✓ **Sipping** – notice changing physical sensations as you take a slow, deliberate sip and (at some point) swallow. Taste? Temperature? Texture?
- ✓ **Savouring** – notice the physical sensations that linger after the sip – at some point, repeat, starting again at sitting.



## \* Mindful Sipping Practice

Each time that you notice your attention has moved away from what you are choosing to physically sense (getting hooked), just notice this has happened and then return your attention to what you are physically sensing in an easy-going way (unhooking).

- ✓ Adapt in any way that seems right for you.
- ✓ Stop at any point that feels right for you.

Photo by [engin akyurt](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## \* Mindful Sipping Practice as In-Session Mindfulness Practice

- ✓ Mindful sipping can be done in a counselling session: it's a socially acceptable way to briefly pause, refocus and re-engage.
- ✓ Almost any activity or sensation can be a focus for this kind of practice:
  - Identify one or more physical sensations involved in the activity – these sensations are now the focusing anchor.
  - Focus on these sensations, noticing when your attention has become hooked.
  - Unhook from the hook and refocus back on the chosen sensation.
  - Only do as much as you want to do at the start – don't force yourself to do more.



# \* In-Session Mindfulness Practice

- ❑ Perhaps pause the video now and consider what sensations are available when you are with a client that could be a focus for this kind of mindfulness practice.
- ✓ What physical sensations can you focus on while still looking at your client and listening to their words.
  - Common examples include: the feeling of feet on floor or sitting bones on your chair, breath moving in your body, or feelings of contact in your hands.
  - Choose one to 'test-drive' and cultivate in situations when you are with people in everyday life.
  - You are building the skill of being able to re-engage with embodied presence with your client when your attention gets hooked away.

# \* Mindfulness Practice: Focusing Anchors Create Contrast

The role of a chosen focusing anchor is to create contrast between your chosen focus and whatever might hook your attention – this makes spotting when your attention has been hooked easier.

- ✓ As thoughts are common hooks, focusing anchors based on physical senses make for the greatest contrast.
- ✓ Focusing anchors should be neutral or pleasant – avoid choosing unpleasant or painful sensations.
- ✓ A **vivid focusing** anchor is best – it makes it easier to spot when you've been hooked and makes unhooking easier, with a clearer focus point to return to.
- ✓ A **vague focusing** anchor, in contrast, makes it harder to spot when you've been hooked and can be an uphill struggle to find and return to when strongly hooked.



## \* **Mindfulness Practice: Focusing Anchor Types**

Different people find different sensory anchors helpful.  
Anchor possibilities include:

- ✓ A sound you can hear
- ✓ Something you can see (perhaps with eyes still or tracing its edges)
- ✓ An object you can feel with your hands
- ✓ The feeling of contact in the soles of your feet or sitting bones
- ✓ The feeling of your body moving with your breath at your nostrils, in your belly or in your back.
- ✓ The sensations of changing movement as you do something (e.g. showering, chores or walking).
- ✓ A mixture of sensations linked to what you are focusing on (e.g. the look and feel of an object being held).

## \* Mindfulness Practice: Means Getting Hooked

Mindfulness practice depends on your attention getting repeatedly hooked so you can practise the skills of hook-spotting and then unhooking.

- ✓ These skills are what makes cultivating mindful awareness relevant in your life.

Sneaky mental hooks can be hard to spot. For example:

- ✓ The thought: 'I'm useless at mindfulness as I can't stay focused/my mind is too busy.'
  - But spotting this particular hook and then unhooking from it is being mindful, whatever your mind says.
- ✓ The thought: 'I'm doing this wrong as I don't feel relaxed.'
  - Mindfulness practice is often not easy and effective skill-building practice can feel effortful at times when the hooks come fast and strong.
  - The benefits come after frequent practice, as with physical exercise.



# \* Mindfulness Practice Possibilities: Context Matters

As a counsellor, mindfulness can be practised (Pollak and Pedulla, 2014):

- ✓ **In-session** – to help steady yourself and be in psychological contact
  - The choice of anchor and form of practice is restricted to what fits with being engaged with your client (e.g. mindful sipping).



## \* Mindfulness Practice Possibilities: Context Matters

- ✓ **Between sessions** – to help let go of the impressions from the previous client, so as to be more engaged with the next client.
  - There is a wider choice of anchor, with more practice options (e.g. three-stage pause).
- ✓ **Out of sessions** – to help become more engaged with whatever you are doing.
  - The widest choice of anchor and forms of practice (e.g. mindful walking/moving) exists here.







## \* Three-Stage Pause: For Between and Out of Sessions

- ✓ This can take from 30 seconds to five minutes – or longer.
- ✓ You choose what is the most helpful anchor in a given situation.
- ✓ It also helps identify ‘sticking points’ – i.e. what feels unfinished or preoccupying from a previous session that is hooking your attention, and what happens when you practise unhooking from this.



## \* Three-Stage Pause: Details of Stages

1. **Check-in:** hook-spotting: what is hooking your attention in your surroundings, in your body physically, and inwardly – mentally and emotionally?
  - Notice these hooks and allow them to be in the background.
2. **Unhooking practice:** choosing a focusing anchor, practising focusing, spotting when hooked, unhooking and refocusing
  - Are there any sneaky hooks that are telling you it should be different from how it is?



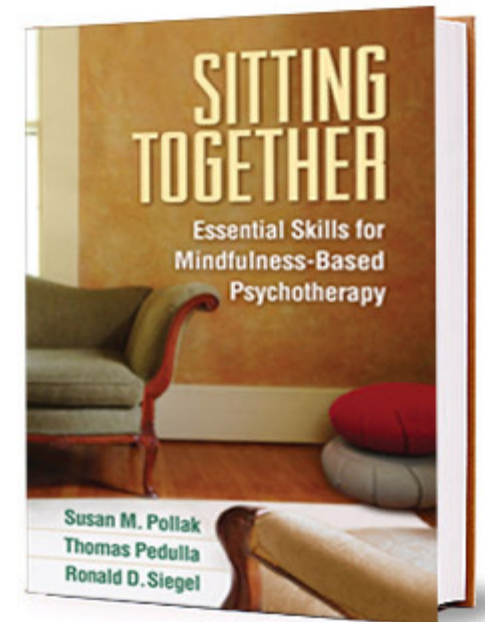


## \* Three-Stage Pause: Details of Stages

3. **Check-out:** broad sensory awareness – notice what you can physically sense, sense by sense, then some senses together.
  - E.g. Noticing sounds, then sights, then contact points, then multiple senses of sitting in the chair, listening to sounds, and feeling your breath move in your body
  - End the practice here (move, stretch, yawn) or else do further cycles of three stages before then ending.

# \* Useful Resources

- ✓ A good textbook for counsellors is 'Sitting Together' by Pollak, Pedulla and Siegel (2014), with the practices available online:  
<https://www.sittingtogether.com/meditations.php>
- ✓ The Insight Timer (<https://insighttimer.com/en-gb>) and SoundCloud apps offer a vast number of free mindfulness practices to try.
- ✓ A variety of versions of the practices explored in this session are available at this SoundCloud playlist:  
[https://soundcloud.com/resilienceplus/sets/m4sc/s-vEqAUCMGer3?utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/resilienceplus/sets/m4sc/s-vEqAUCMGer3?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)



# \* Takeaways

- ✓ Mindfulness practice is 'unhooking practice': you train your skills of spotting when your attention has been hooked and then unhooking to refocus on what matters most to you, here and now.
- ✓ Choosing a vivid, neutral or pleasant sensation as a focusing anchor makes practice easier.
- ✓ Different types of anchor suit different situations.
- ✓ The more frequently you do a mindfulness practice in a given context, the more you build your skills of hook-spotting, unhooking and refocusing.
- ✓ You are the best person to decide what types of mindfulness practice suits you best.  
Experiment: be creative!

MINDFULNESS  
*You just can't get it wrong...*

# \* Reference List

## Citations Used in Slide Pack:

- ✓ Fletcher, L., Pond, R. and Gardiner, B. (2022). Student counsellor experiences of mindfulness-based intervention training: A systematic review of the qualitative literature. *Psychotherapy Research*, 32(3), 306–328.
- ✓ Hyland, T. (2015). Mindful Nation UK Report [online]. *The Mindfulness Initiative*. [Viewed 23/3/22]. Available from: <https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/mindful-nation-report>
- ✓ Pollak, S., and Pedulla, T. (2014). Sitting Together Meditations [online]. *Sitting Together*. [Viewed 10/3/22]. Available from: <http://www.sittingtogether.com/meditations.php/>
- ✓ Pollak, S.M., Pedulla, T. and Siegel, R. D. (2014). *Sitting Together: Essential skills for mindfulness-based psychotherapy*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- ✓ Williams, M. (2018). Mindfulness [online]. *NHS*. [Viewed 10/3/22]. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>

## Excellent Critical Reviews of Mindfulness:

- ✓ Van Dam, N. T., Van Vugt, M. K., Vago, D. R., Schmalzl, L., Saron, C. D., Olendzki, A., Meissner, T., Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Gorchov, J. and Fox, K. C. (2018). Mind the hype: A critical evaluation and prescriptive agenda for research on mindfulness and meditation. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(1), 36–61.
- ✓ Britton, W. B. (2019). Can mindfulness be too much of a good thing? The value of a middle way. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 159–165.

Title slide image: Photo by [Eric Ward](#) on [Unsplash](#)