The Benefits of Including Mindfulness Practice in Counselling Sessions for Individuals Living with Multiple Sclerosis

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ANZACBS Conference RMIT Melbourne 2016
Welcome

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.
Presentation

- Identifying the key benefits of mindfulness in session for client and therapist
- Understanding the subliminal signals between client and therapist in session
- Experiential grounding exercises
- Overview of various mindfulness techniques I use in session
- Brain hemispheres & how mindfulness supports bringing the client’s implicit memory into explicit memory and cultivates intimacy with awareness
- How mindfulness helps the client to concentrate on body sensations; healing mind and body which:
  - Assists with pain relief and acceptance of chronic illness
  - Reduces anxiety and depression
  - Improves psychological function and quality of life
Sometimes it is external factors that are denying your client’s mind the calmness it needs to engage in counselling

Real and perceived fears

- Traffic
- Parking
- Child care issues
- Family/work issues
- Fear about being judged
- Fear about what will happen in session
Simple Grounding Exercise

- The Comma. A few seconds to a couple of minutes of mindfulness

- A short punctuation in a busy day between finishing one activity and starting another
  - Before starting the car
  - Beginning a meal
  - Before an interview/ counselling session
  - Between clients
  - Informal Mindful Practice: in the shower, brushing teeth, housework
“The Full Stop” and other techniques to facilitate client self regulation (5-30 mins)

- The 4-7-8 Exercise (relaxing breath) or yogic breathing
  - In-breath 1..2..3..4  Hold breath 1..2..3..4..5..6..7.. Out for 8  (4 cycles only)

- Relaxed Breathing
  - In-breath 1..2..3..4  Pause 1..  Out-breath 1..2..3..4  Pause 1..  (5 to 10 mins)

- Mindful Breathing and body scan

- Guided mindful meditation using the 5 senses

- Somatic techniques
  - For clients suffering from trauma or bereavement
    - Notice Five Things
    - Physical activities - drop the anchor
Everyone knows the popular myths about the two brain hemispheres

- Right brain:
  - artistic, musical, spatial, intuitive, and holistic
- Left brain:
  - linear, rational, analytical, and linguistic.

There is some truth in these labels.

fMRI now allows us to see images of living brains and records regions active during mental activity.
Subliminal signals between client and therapist in session

- Counselling effectiveness requires:
  - Integration of both right-brain and left-brain processing.
  - Mindfulness enhances this integration.
  - Expressive therapies
  - not only what the counsellor does or says - but the quality of the counsellor's interaction with the client
  - this interaction is at the core of effective counselling

- Neuroscience literature suggests that hemispheric processing for both counsellor and client is bidirectional.

- The counsellor's right brain to right brain attunement informs unconscious intuition and creativity for both counsellor and client.
Mindfulness supports bringing implicit memory into explicit memory

“Focused attention helps us to see the internal workings of our own minds; to be aware of our mental processes without being swept away by them; to direct our thoughts and feelings rather than being driven by them. By developing the ability to focus our attention on our inner world, we’re picking up a scalpel and re-sculpting our neural pathways. How we pay attention shapes the structure of our brains.”

Dr Dan Siegal
Mindfulness helps concentrate body sensations; healing mind and body

- Research on mindfulness-based interventions have been applied in the treatment of:
  - Multiple Sclerosis
  - Chronic fatigue syndrome
  - Insomnia
  - Heart disease
  - Eating disorders
  - Substance abuse
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Chronic pain
  - Promotes longevity

Mind Full, or Mindful?
Mindfulness can help manage stress & anxiety

- Inevitable in life
- Some clients are trapped in cycles which are debilitating
- Fears about the future - hoping for pleasure and dreading pain
- Mindfulness trains the brain and mind to bring attention to the present moment. The present moment is usually pretty safe. Doing this can really help cut anxiety
- Yogic and abdominal breathing
- Drop the anchor exercise.
Mindfulness can help reduce depression

- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy yields a 60 per cent chance of preventing relapse.
- If antidepressants carried a guarantee, no one would relapse.
- Meditation and medication is a double protection.
- Mindfulness empowers the client to help themselves.
Mindfulness assists with chronic pain relief and acceptance

- Thinking about self and not others diminishes brain activity
- The “stop and look” manoeuvre reduces overthinking and emotional reactivity, and boosts the “rest and recovery” effect
- Thinking about the pain - past and future. Being mindful of our bodily response to pain and if this response increases the suffering
- If stressed because of pain - practice relaxation which releases endorphins
- Acceptance stops the exhausting constant struggle with pain
Mindfulness improves psychological function and quality of life

It takes time

- Psycho-education
- Neuroplasticity
  - The brain is constantly rewiring itself, throughout our lives
  - MRI - increased neural connections after 8 weeks of mindfulness
- Practice
  - 15 mins 5 days a week.
  - 100-200 repetitions
  - and takes about 3 months to consolidate
Mindfulness maximises client and therapists self-awareness and resourcefulness
References:


Thank you for your attention.

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