Including Mindfulness-based Intervention in Your New Normal

Future of Work Webinar Series

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Mental & Physical Health Effects of Stress

- Psychological responses include overwhelm, sadness, anger, indifference, exhaustion, anxiety, and depression.

- Somatic experiences include feelings of tension, upset stomach, and neck or back pain.

- Stronger initial reactions to traumatic events are associated with short- and long-term negative effects on health.

- Effects of media-based and direct exposure to large scale events accumulate over time.

Garfin, Holman, & Silver, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 2019
Garfin, Thompson, & Holman, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 2018
Garfin, Holman, & Silver, *Psychological Science*, 2015
Overview

- Research on relationship between exposure to collective & individual stress and physical & mental health

- Overview of how mindfulness can help downregulate the stress response

- Specific tips on how to incorporate mindfulness into your new normal
Exposure to stress occurs on multiple levels

- Media exposure to collective trauma
- Direct exposure to collective trauma
- Individual-level events
- Stress reaction

Type of Cumulative Exposure and Early Responses to COVID-19

*** p < .001

*** N = 6,514

Holman, Thompson, Garfin, & Silver, Science Advances, 2020
Media exposure to COVID-19 & acute stress

Holman et al., Science Advances, 2020

N=6,514
Collective traumas are experienced in the context of individuals’ lives.

**Traumatic Events**
- Abuse
- Assault
- Serious accident
- Suicide of a loved one

**Stressful Events**
- Divorce
- Illness
- Economic hardship
- Bereavement

Garfin, Holman, & Silver, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 2019
Garfin, Thompson, & Holman, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 2018
**Individual-level Adversity & Responses to the Boston Marathon Bombings (N=3,583)**

* * p < .05, ** p < .01 Garfin, Holman, & Silver, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice & Policy*, 2020

* * p < .05, ** p < .01 Garfin, Holman, & Silver, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice & Policy*, 2020
Past
Present
Future
Any type of stress can activate fight-or-flight process

- The body’s “gas pedal”
- Sympathetic activation
- Increased flow of blood to skeletal muscles
  - Increased HR, BP, opening of airways
- Pupils dilate, eyes adjust
- Repair process are inhibited
- Release epinephrine & norepinephrine
- Emotional & cognitive reactions can amplify these processes
The Stress **Reaction** Cycle

- **Sympathetic nervous system activated “gas pedal”**
  - Activation
  - Internal & External Stressors
  - Automatic Pilot
  - Fight or Flight Response
  - Physical sensations, thoughts, emotions, & behavior
  - Leads to doing
  - Habitual reactivity leads to more stress
  - Reactivity

**STRESS**

**Activation**

**Reactivity**
Most of the time, we run on autopilot
Mindfulness-based interventions can help break the stress reactivity cycle

• “Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment, non-judgmentally.” – John Kabat-Zinn

• Mindfulness can help us respond, rather than react

• We have a chance to make a different choice & downregulate the stress response, even during times of great difficulty
The Stress **Response** Cycle

- **Parasympathetic nervous system**
  - "the break"

- **Internal & External Stressors**

- **Mindfulness**

- **Awareness**
  - Pause leads to "being"

- **Response-ability**

- New relationship to stress

Response = Choice
Mindfulness is...

• Seeing clearly and being present with reality as it unfolds and as it is

• It is NOT
  • Pretending everything is okay
  • Being happy 100% of the time
  • The absence of negative emotion
  • A stress-free existence
  • Lack of thoughts
  • Denial
Integrating mindfulness into your new normal
Integrating mindfulness into your new normal

• The STOP method:
  • S – Stop what you are doing
  • T – Take a pause
  • O – Observe your thoughts, emotions, & body sensations
  • P – Proceed
Integrating mindfulness into your new normal

• Use an app – Calm, Insight Timer, Headspace

• Do a “body scan” mediation at your home, car, or office (see Mindful.org)

• Take a “sense and savor” walk on a lunch break

• Bring awareness to small daily activities

• Every time you come back to a meditation – or practice in general – that is a moment of mindfulness
Integrating mindfulness into your new normal: Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
Integrating mindfulness into your new normal: Check out the Susan Samueli Integrative Health Institute!

- Awakening in Nature
- MBSR
- Mindful Parenting in the Pandemic and Beyond
- Mindful Self-Compassion Short Course
Integrating mindfulness into your new normal: Explore what works for you!

• Eat some ice cream mindfully!
• Spend time in nature
• Watch a movie with your friends or family
• Binge a Netflix show
• Call a friend
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Positive Benefits Experienced as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Reflected/readjusted priorities
- Recognized new strengths & skills
- Increased gratitude
- Felt greater sense of community
- More time for leisure activities
- Reprioritized important relationships

N=5,661

Garfin, Jones, Holman, & Silver, in preparation