

The **M**indful Trainer

*Thoughts on bringing brief mindful moments into
motivational interviewing (MI) trainings*

Developed From Discussion Among MINT Members at the 2016 MINT Forum

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Compiled and Edited by Jesse J. Berg, MSW, LCSW

Jesse@intrinsicchange.com

www.intrinsicchange.com

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	<i>Page 3</i>
Terms & Cautions.....	<i>Page 4</i>
Reasons to Use Mindfulness Activities in MI Trainings and Practice.....	<i>Page 5</i>
How to Communicate Mindfulness Activities in MI Trainings.....	<i>Page 6</i>
Where and When to include Mindfulness Activities in MI Trainings.....	<i>Page 7</i>
Selected Mindfulness Activities.....	<i>Page 7 – 13</i>
Selected Bibliography.....	<i>Page 14 - 15</i>

Introduction

The thoughts and ideas contained in this MIndful Trainer resource were gathered from MINT Members during a workshop facilitated by Jesse Berg at the 2016 Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT) Forum entitled, “The MIndful Trainer.” Approximately 100 MINT members participated in this workshop. Of these participants, about 40% reported having a regular mindfulness practice of their own. The first half of the workshop was a brief overview of a variety of ways that “mindfulness” has been approached in “third wave therapies” and other contexts. During the second half of the hour-long workshop, participants formed small groups to discuss “the how, what, and why of incorporating mindfulness into MI training.” This publication is the organized and edited results of those discussions.

This resource is meant to be used as a starting point in an ongoing conversation about the use of mindfulness in MI trainings, and it may spark an additional conversation about how mindfulness may be used in the practice of MI skills and spirit. The ideas and notes in this resource are not intended to be a training manual or a set of instructions for mindfulness practice, it is assumed that the reader has familiarity and experience with mindfulness themselves. For those who do not currently have a mindfulness practice and want to learn more, I encourage you to seek out a qualified teacher before using the activities in this resource.

During Dr. Miller’s plenary speech at the 2016 MINT Forum, he highlighted a possible connection between contemplative practices and MI. Specifically, Dr. Miller focused on the idea of contemplative listening, “learning to observe without judgment... let go of dualistic thinking and experience in the moment as a beginner.” Dr. Miller then stated that, “...the discipline of mindfulness or meditation... and the discipline of motivational interviewing, that they are quite like each other. I have been wondering about that” (Miller, 2016). While this resource falls short of addressing Dr. Miller’s wonder head-on, it is my hope that this is the start of a conversation about how MI and mindfulness do and can overlap to create a more whole practice of helping helpers and helping clients.

Bill Miller’s Preparation Prayer

*“Guide me to be a patient companion
To listen with a heart as open as the sky
Grant me vision to see through her eyes
And eager ears to hear her story
Create a safe and open mesa on which we may walk together
Make me a clear pool in which she may reflect
Guide me to find in her your beauty and wisdom
Knowing your desire for her to be in harmony-healthy, loving, strong
Let me honor and respect her choosing of her own path
And bless her to walk it freely
May I know once again that although she and I are different
Yet there is a peaceful place where we are one”*

(Miller & Rollnick, 2013)

A Few Words on Language and Cautions

The term “mindfulness” is not always the most helpful term to use when introducing, practicing or talking about the centering activities that trainers often use in MI trainings. The word is widely used in a variety of contexts from religious, academic, to popular culture. The term can be political for some, for others it can inspire intellectualization (and distract from the practice itself). For these and other reasons it is important to be intentional about how we describe these activities, and to this end some possible alternate terms are listed below.

Mindful pause
Center ourselves
Notice our attention
Moment of reflection

Mindful Moment
Check in with the present
Let the mind settle
Quieting the mind

MINT members brought up several “cautions” or “hesitations” about using mindfulness with MI training participants. It is important to “do mindfulness right,” or at least to be effective in communicating what the purpose and objective is of these activities. MINT members also stressed the importance of using these activities precisely and at appropriate times with each unique audience. The list below includes some of the cautions brought up by MINT members.

Cautions and Hesitations

- Practice what you preach: trainers teaching or presenting mindfulness practices should have a practice of their own. This brings authenticity, modeling, and real experience to the instruction.
- Know your audience: there is a risk of participants seeing these activities as “too fluffy,” or otherwise not helpful. It is important not to unintentionally “force” participants to engage in these activities, participants should be invited to make the choice to participate or not.
- Make the purpose of the activity explicit: mindfulness activities are often mistaken for “relaxation exercises,” or “de-stress exercises.” It is important that the presenter be transparent regarding the purpose and function of the activity within the context of the training as a whole.
- The activity is not mindfulness: just going through the motions of an activity in and of itself is not mindfulness. Sometimes an activity can have the façade of mindfulness without the substance of the mindful experience.

Reasons to Use Mindfulness Activities in MI Trainings and MI Practice

MINT members noted that mindfulness-type activities can be helpful in the MI trainings for both trainers and training participants. Being present with others is an important part of listening, and it is a foundation of the MI spirit. Below are reasons why mindfulness may be useful during MI trainings.

General Reasons

- MI Spirit: being present with one's self and engaging in self-reflection is key to acceptance. Mindfulness activities allow space for that self-reflection.
- Openness: engaging in short mindfulness activities may help participants develop an openness for learning.
- Clearing Minds: training participants are often distracted by current events, working conditions and empathy fatigue. Some mindfulness activities might help participants settle their minds to be more present for the training. One's cup must be empty before it can be filled.
- Noting Ambivalence: often there is a sense of ambivalence regarding the helpfulness of MI skills and spirit among training participants. Mindfulness and self-reflection might highlight any participant ambivalence in the room.
- Self-Awareness: self-awareness is key for both MI trainers and MI training participants. By being present with ourselves we are more able to be present with others.
- Diversity of Learning Styles: mindfulness activities can cater to a variety of learning and communication styles and can be based on any of the 5 (or 6) senses. These activities may engage participants with different learning styles.
- Self Care: facilitating mindfulness throughout the training can model self-care for participants.

Learner Specific Reasons

- Good MI Practice: being present with one's self and the client is important for good MI practices like crafting helpful reflections and providing affirmations. Mindfulness practices may help the MI practitioner better attune to the client and embody the MI spirit.
- Comfort With Silence: mindfulness activities are often done in silence, and silence can be an important skill when implementing MI with a client. Activities may model tolerance for silence.

Trainer Specific Reasons

- Center the Trainer: facilitating an MI training can bring about anxiety, confusion and other unhelpful mental and physical events in the MI trainer. Taking a mindfulness break can help bring the trainer "back to the room."
- Pace of Training: a well timed mindfulness activity may be able to slow down a training that is moving too quickly, or it may be used to deepen the participant understanding/experience of the concepts being taught.

How To Communicate Mindfulness Activities in an MI Training

MINT members placed a lot of importance on how the mindfulness activities are presented during an MI training. It is important that the process is transparent when participants are invited to engage in an activity. Members also noted several ways that present moment awareness and MI naturally overlap, and some ways of communicating that overlap are described below.

Introducing Activities

- Teach By Doing: excessive discussion about “how to do mindfulness” can often be counterproductive. Instead of teaching a class on mindfulness or exploring the intricacies of the definition, it is best to teach through modeling and doing an activity.
- Use EPE: many participants will already have an idea of what “being present to this moment” is, participants may even have a formal meditation practice of their own. Eliciting the audience ideas (thoughts, experiences, memories, questions) about mindfulness activities can help to get a feel for the right activity and can potentially increase engagement.
- Disclaimer: mindfulness has roots in a variety of spiritual practice and sometimes this may scare folks off. Trainers can explain that the activities presented in the training will not be in-depth mindfulness practices, but are a secular way help the group be present for the training.
- Normalize: it can be helpful to remind participants that we all have minds with a variety of thoughts. Normalizing the chaotic “monkey mind” that most humans have can be helpful when participants are learning about present moment awareness and the mind.
- Research: presenting the evidence base and research behind the use of mindfulness may be helpful in engaging certain groups in the practice.

Communicating the Mindfulness Overlap

- Be Present With Ourselves to Be Present With Others: mental events such as thoughts, feelings, memories, and plans can get in the way of being present with others. It is important to always start with ourselves before looking out towards others.
- Non-judgment of Self to Foster Non-judgment of Others: often we are our own harshest critic. We judge our actions, thoughts, and behaviors in unhealthy ways. The skill of noticing our own thoughts nonjudgmentally can be translated to accepting our clients without judgment.
- Dr. Miller’s Preparation Prayer: taking a pause to be present with ourselves can offer us the opportunities to set intentions. Dr. Miller’s Preparation Prayer (page 3 of this resource) is an example of a way to center ourselves and set aspirations for our clients’ benefit.
- Skills Require Presence: Centering ourselves and being present is a vital part of crafting helpful reflections, questions, affirmations, and summaries.
- Self Care: training participants in helping profession are often prone to burn out or empathy fatigue. Developing a mindfulness practice can be an effective self care strategy for some.

Where and When to Incorporate Mindfulness in an MI Training

MINT Members noted that mindful moments can be facilitated before and after activities, during transitions, or as stand-alone activities. Sometimes these activities can help manage the energy, pace, or depth of the group experience. Mindfulness is often an implicit component of regular MI activities, in which case it may be helpful just to point out the mindfulness component of the activity before and/or after doing it. Below are a few notes on when to incorporate mindfulness activities into an MI training.

When to Use Activities

- Early in the Training: it may be helpful to model mind-awareness as a beginning activity for a larger training. Use of video, modeling, and other tools can be helpful when first presenting the activity.
- Before an Activity: taking a mindful moment before an activity can help participants focus themselves in order to be fully present with the experience of practicing and MI skill during a real play. Participants may want to consider taking a mindful moment before working with clients in the real world.
- Reflection: a mindfulness type activity can often be helpful in tandem with self-reflection activities in MI trainings. Avoiding grasping at thoughts and judgment can make self reflection easier for some participants.
- Highlight Mindfulness Components of MI Activities: activities such as “What the Heck” (Steve Andrew), “Buckets of Pearls” (Steve Berg-Smith), and righting-reflex jinga have naturally occurring mindfulness implications. More generic skills practice like deep listening and reflections also require mindfulness. In these cases it may be helpful to incorporate the mindfulness concept into the instructions and/or debrief of the activity.
- During Transitions: natural transitions such as after lunch, after breaks, and at the beginning or end of the training can be good opportunities to present mindfulness activities.
- Ask the Audience: watch for indirect signs among participants such as body language, a change in energy in the room, change in engagement, etc. Alternatively, it may be helpful to explicitly ask the group when an activity may be appropriate.

Focus on Breath

Adapted From Samatha Meditation



Before We Start:

- Notice and adjust posture to promote breath and comfort
- Relax back muscles
- Open airway (neck and chin)
- Soften or close eyes
- Focus attention inward

Instructions:

- Close your eyes or soften your gaze. I will ring the bell to start our activity and once to invite us back to full group.
- Let go of worries of past, concerns of future and be present with your breath.
- As you notice thoughts arise, gently redirect your focus to your breath.

Chair Yoga

Adapted From Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)



Before We Start:

- Listen to your body
- There is no “right way” to do this
- If something hurts, stop
- Remember to breathe throughout the movements

Instructions:

- I will demonstrate the poses and invite you to follow along.
- Feel free to adjust the poses to best suit you.
- Feel free to do a different stretch or movement or simply rest.

Defusion

Adapted From Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)



Before We Start:

- Thoughts are fleeting and temporary
- Often, thoughts arise in our minds, we do not have control over them
- Thoughts are not our “selves”
- When we “fuse” with thoughts it creates problems (the difference between watching a horror movie and actually being in a life threatening situation is huge)
- It takes practice to notice our thoughts, noticing our thoughts is a way to “defuse” from our thoughts

Instructions:

- Close your eyes or soften your gaze. I will ring the bell to start our activity and once to invite us back to full group.
- Imagine that you are comfortably sitting on a front porch on a warm sunny day, as a thought comes into your mind you watch it go by like a car driving past.
- You might wave to it, smile at it or otherwise notice it – but avoid fusing with the thought, just notice it.
- Avoid judging the thought or grasping at the thought.
- Do this for each thought that appears, just noticing it and allowing it to pass.

Mindful Eating

Adapted From Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)



Before We Start:

- I will be giving out a piece of chocolate for this activity - please don't eat it yet.
- If you do not want to eat, that is okay you can engage using the other senses.
- We eat every day; many times we are not aware of the experience.
- I will guide you through this activity; there is no right or wrong way to do it.
- I invite you to just participate and avoid judgment.

Instructions:

- Notice the wrapped chocolate: how does it look, feel, sound, smell?
- Unwrap the chocolate: how do you feel while doing this, what happens in your mouth, what thoughts arise?
- Notice the chocolate: appearance, weight, feel, smell, etc.
- Place the chocolate in your mouth but do not eat: how does it feel, how does it taste (how does that change), what do you notice about it?
- What happens in your mouth: tongue, teeth, lips, cheeks, etc.
- Move the chocolate around or chew it: how does that feel, notice sensations.
- After the chocolate is eaten: how do you feel, what do you taste, physically/emotionally?

HEAL

Adapted From Rick Perry



Before We Start:

- Our brain creates our thoughts (mind) and our thoughts (mind) can actually change the structure of our brain.
- The more we focus on negative thoughts and experiences, the more negative structures we create, and visa versa.
- Most experiences are either okay or good; it is fairly rare that we are under real threat.
- We rarely fully “take in” the good experiences in a way that helps build brains structure.

Instructions:

- Close your eyes or soften your gaze. I will ring the bell once to start our activity and once to invite us back to full group.
- Have experience - Notice something that is good, safe, stable about right now (it may help to offer an example).
- Enrich – Stay with the experience. Notice how it feels, how you enjoy it and truly appreciate it.
- Absorb – somehow internalize the experience, feel it being absorbed into you. You might visualize it seeping in. Allow it to fill you.
- Link – there may be a slight negative feeling in the back of your mind or recent memory. Link this positive feeling with the more negative one and let the positive one fill it.

Safe Space



Before We Start:

- Everyone's version of a safe space is different.
- Some people have a safe space in nature, at a family's home, or even somewhere they have only read about or seen in movies.
- I will be inviting you to visualize a safe space in this activity. It is simply a space where you feel comfortable, safe and relaxed. It is a space that is refreshing and rejuvenating.
- (It helps if the presenter provides a few examples)

Instructions:

- Close your eyes or soften your gaze. I will ring the bell once to start our activity and once to invite us back to full group.
- Imagine that you are in your safe space, wherever that is for you.
- Notice what you can see.
- Notice any sounds.
- Notice what you feel, maybe you can feel the wind or the sun on your face.
- You might even be able to smell something.
- How are you feeling right now? Find that restful feeling and stay with that feeling for a few seconds.

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