



Treating Adolescent Complex Trauma with Mindfulness

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Disclosures

- Randy Semple has no conflicts of interest to disclose
- John Briere receives royalties as coauthor with Cheryl Lanktree of the book: *Treating Complex Trauma in Adolescents & Young Adults*, which discusses ITCT-A
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Learning objectives

- Describe the mindfulness component of ITCT-A
- Learn mindfulness techniques for working with specific trauma responses
- Discuss personal benefits of mindfulness for trauma therapists

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Roadmap

- Complex trauma & ITCT-A
- Treating trauma with mindfulness
 - Cognitive
 - Emotional
 - Physiological
 - Behavioral
- Teaching mindfulness to teens
- Summary & discussion



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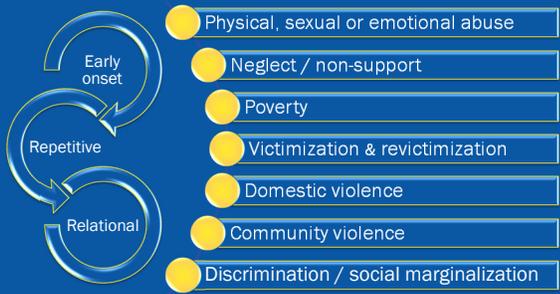
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Complex trauma



- Physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Neglect / non-support
- Poverty
- Victimization & revictimization
- Domestic violence
- Community violence
- Discrimination / social marginalization

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Complex posttraumatic outcomes

- Anxiety, depression, anger
- Posttraumatic stress
- Affect dysregulation
- Negative relational & self schema
- Identity/self-reference issues
- Avoidance responses
 - Dissociation
 - Tension reduction behaviors, including SIB
 - Substance abuse
- Suicidality



About ITCT-A

- Multiply traumatized, socially marginalized teens
- Customized
 - Age, gender, culture, level of affect regulation
- Flexible time-frame individualized for each client
- Assessment-based with regular re-assessments
- Early attention to safety issues
- Focus beyond posttraumatic stress
- Centered on the client's experience
- Importance of the therapeutic relationship



ITCT-A interventions

- Psychoeducation
- Affect regulation training & behavior self-control
- Titrated therapeutic exposure
- Cognitive processing
- Relational processing
- Trigger identification & interventions
- Communication skills development
- Problem-solving
- Advocacy & system-level interventions



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Mindfulness in ITCT-A

- Optional module
- Therapist training & experience is recommended
- Benefits to being a mindful therapist
- Simple mindful awareness activities can be taught with minimal training
- Refer to a qualified mindfulness program for more extensive training

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Mindfulness means...

“... paying attention to things as they are in any given moment, however they are, rather than as we want them to be.”

Williams, Teasdale, Segal & Kabat-Zinn (2007)

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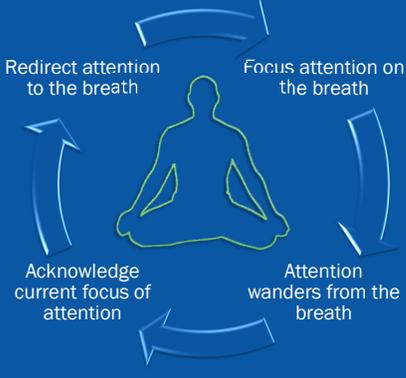
Mindfulness doesn't mean...

c'mon, inner peace.
I don't have all day.



- Turning off your thoughts
- Emptying the mind
- Escaping from reality
- Being passive or complacent
- Hypnotic or addictive
- You're being self-indulgent
- Religion
- It's a quick fix

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Redirect attention to the breath

Focus attention on the breath

Acknowledge current focus of attention

Attention wanders from the breath

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Mindful breathing practice

- Sit with straight back & hands in the lap
- Closed eyes (or a "soft" unfocused gaze)
- Bring attention to the experience of breathing
- When you become aware that mind has wandered, simply note the thoughts & feelings
- Then, return attention to watching the breath



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Contraindications

- Ongoing traumatic environment
- Chronically overwhelmed
- Current alcohol/substance abuse
- Mania
- Severe anxieties
- Severe depression
- Suicidality
- Psychosis



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Cognitive effects of trauma

- Cognitive distortions or attribution errors
 - Pessimistic about self, world & future
 - Overly critical of self or others
 - Self-blame, shame, guilt, remorse
 - Self-loathing
- Intrusive thoughts & memories
- Dissociation

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Mindfulness of thoughts

- Trauma increases past & future-focused thinking
 - Mindfulness is present-focused attention
- Metacognitive awareness reduces reactivity
 - Practice observing without reacting
 - Seeing clearly—watching thoughts flow by
 - Thoughts become simply events in the mind
 - Not facts... not real... not current... not me... not true... just thoughts

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Emotional effects of trauma

- Anticipatory anxiety
- Catastrophic fears
- Anger
- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Despair
- Sense of doom

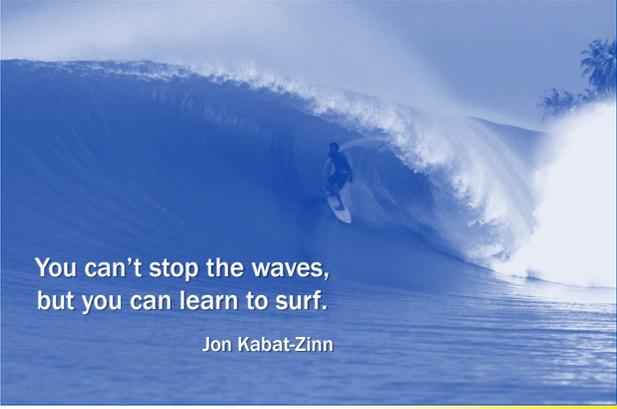


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Mindfulness of emotions

- Explore & identify emotions (detective work)
 - Attend to emotional experiences
 - Observe without clinging or pushing away
 - Reduce identification ("just" emotions, not facts)
- Practice non-judgment & acceptance
 - Befriend emotions (sitting with distress)
 - Enhance self-compassion & empathy
- Recognize the ever-changing nature of emotions

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You can't stop the waves,
but you can learn to surf.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

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Physiological effects of trauma

- Agitation
- Hyperarousal
- Hypervigilance
- Hyperreactivity
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite changes
- Fatigue/low energy
- Somatic distress



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Mindfulness of body sensations

- Body awareness
 - avoid “body scan”
- Mindful movement
 - yoga & t'ai chi
- Grounding techniques
 - soles of the feet
 - slow walking
- Relaxation
 - deep breathing
 - breath counting



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Mindfulness in everyday life

- Practice a few minutes of mindful awareness
 - Before doing homework
 - Doing household tasks
 - Brushing teeth
 - Washing hands
 - Eating meals
 - Listening to music
 - Walking



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Embody mindfulness

- Attend to your own practice
- Ground your teaching in your own experience
- Encourage curiosity & openness
- Share your own experiences
- Attend to your own practice

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Cultivate mindful relationships

- Let go of goals & expectations
- Practice compassionate acceptance
- Avoid judging
- Foster authenticity, mutual respect & connection
- Offer encouragement
- Model mindfulness in your speech & actions

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Make it meaningful

- Relevant to what's happening in their world
 - Invoke suitable role models (celebrities, athletes)
- What's in it for them?
 - Less worry, better physical & mental health
 - Improve relationships with family & peers
 - Better performance (academically or in sports)



Practice tips

- Start with short, simple practices
- Be clear about practice expectations
- Invite participation (emphasize freedom to choose)
- Don't read scripts or instructions
- Find your own voice
- Practice together
- Attend to your own practice



There's an app for that



iPhone

- Mindfulness Meditation 2.0
- Be Happy Now 1.0
- Open Your Heart 1.0

“Meditation is the ultimate mobile device. You can use it anywhere, anytime, unobtrusively.”

Sharon Salzberg (2011)



Android

- Mindfulness Bell
- Nature Sounds Alarm Clock
- Meditation Helper



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Cultivating mindfulness

- Attention
 - Metacognitive awareness
- Acceptance
 - Self-compassion & empathy
 - Equanimity
- Empowerment
 - Recognize choices
 - Choose adaptive responses



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Take-home message

1. Mindfulness is present-focused attention
2. Practicing mindfulness is not difficult
(But remembering to practice is challenging)
3. We choose how to respond to the internal & external events that make up our lives
(So don't believe everything you think)

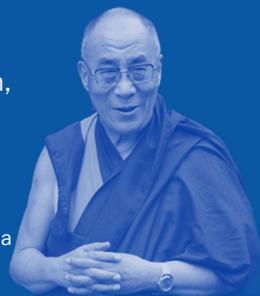


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Discussion

“If every 8 year old in the world is taught meditation, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation.”

HH the XIV Dalai Lama



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References

- Briere J & Lanktree CB (2013). Integrative treatment of complex trauma for adolescents (ITCT-A): A guide for the treatment of multiply-traumatized youth, 2nd edition. Los Angeles, CA: USC Adolescent Trauma Treatment Training Center, National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
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