

Outline for ResilientMind 8 week course.

The ResilientMind course is a pain management course which is based on a compassion focused formulation of long term pain. The course uses mindfulness and lovingkindness exercises alongside informal presentations, group discussions and mindful enquiry to weaken some of the cycles which are thought to act as maintaining factors to long term pain. The exercises are based on those taught on the Mindfulness Based Living Course by Mindfulness Association trained teachers. Course leaders need to be trained as mindfulness teachers (from any of the recognised Mindfulness teacher training organisations, e.g. Mindfulness Association, Breathworks, Oxford, Bangor, Aberdeen or Exeter Universities or other organisations as listed on www.ukmindfulnessnetwork.co.uk/organisations) and to be familiar with the exercises presented through their own personal practice. Training in mindful enquiry is also a prerequisite for leading this course.

The course is designed for between 8 and 15 participants. Each session lasts for 2 hours including a short break.

Session 1: Orientation and Settling the Mind

Learning points: mind-body link, fighting vs allowing experience, subtle expectations which may be present.

Introductions and Groundrules	15 mins
Short settling exercise	5 mins
Visual analogy – introduction (colour constancy image)	5 mins
Discussion in groups: how do we explain the discrepancy in what we see?	5 mins
Analogy to pain – automatic processing below the level of our awareness influenced by what’s going on in the background	10 mins
BREAK and filling in questionnaires	25 mins
Introduction of Settling and Grounding Practice: Not trying to fight experience but choosing where to focus attention. Instructions are guidelines only. It’s fine to skip a bit if you have concerns about being overwhelmed.	20 mins
Attitude of Kindness towards experience	
Settling and Grounding practice	10 mins
Discussion in small groups	10 mins
Discussion and enquiry in larger group	10 mins
Home Practice: Settling with the Breath each day if possible	10 mins

Session 2: Practising Mindfulness and how it can help

Learning points: Skills and attitudes of mindfulness, noticing without judging, importance of a kind and gentle attitude, beginning to experience how mindfulness practice fundamentally differs from our usual habit of trying to monitor and change the contents of our internal experience.

Settling Exercise	5 mins
Questions / Comments from last week	10 mins
Settling, Grounding Resting and support: talk (10m), practice (20m), small group feedback (5m) and group enquiry (10m).	45 mins
BREAK	10 mins
Talk and Discussion: Relevance of this approach to pain management:	30 mins
<p>We know that ‘background conditions’ can affect our perception in a very real way (eg colour constancy exercise as practised last week). A colour that we see can seem to change depending on the colours that surround it.</p> <p>We can link this to pain management. Direct attempts to target and reduce long term pain are similar to attempts to ‘see’ a different colour by focusing directly on that colour. Even when we know that the colour is different to how we see it, the experience that we do see does not change. Similarly, even when we know that pain is not a sign of physical damage this on it’s own will not help us to experience it differently. The best way of having an influence on our pain is to change some of the ‘background factors’ as we did in the colour experiment.</p> <p>The background factors that can influence how we experience pain are more complex than those that influence vision. Many of these conditions consist of automatic patterns that run in our minds. These patterns lie below the level of our awareness but are similar in most people. They continually trigger a physiological response to unpleasant experiences like pain which can maintain and increase the intensity of pain.</p> <p>The first pattern that we consider is the tendency to dislike some experiences (which we can’t change) and to label the experience as ‘bad’, ‘wrong’ or ‘unwanted’. This causes a chronically stressful situation whereby, for example, we experience intense pain, we think we should not be in so much pain (maybe we should be able to reduce it, we are weak, the doctors don’t understand, our partner shouldn’t have made us do what we did earlier...). I’m in pain, but I should not be in this much pain. This creates a cycle that we cannot solve. Inflammatory chemicals are released and will add to the duration and intensity of the pain.</p> <p>With mindfulness we are trying to ease away from this pattern a little. We are aiming to allow the experience to be as it is. This addresses the second part of the cycle ‘it should not be like this’. There is less dissonance, therefore less inflammatory chemicals released. The body’s natural soothing can more easily take place as we are not constantly interrupting it.</p>	

Exercise: allowing and refocusing	30 mins
Enquiry	20 mins
Agree Home Practice: Settling, Grounding Resting and support daily. Read through handout and bring any questions to the next session.	10 mins

Session 3: Developing Kindness

Learning points: mind-body link, what kindness feels like, potential difficulties with kindness and need for a gentle attitude towards these, introduction to the 3 systems Model.

Settling Exercise	5 mins
Questions / Enquiry from last week	10 mins
Memories of Kindness: Talk (from Mindfulness Based Living Course curriculum)	10 mins
Memories of Kindness practice	10 mins
Feedback in small groups	10 mins
Enquiry	10 mins
BREAK	10 mins
Talk: The 3 systems model of emotion:	15 mins
Outline of CFT framework of how our emotions are grouped into 3 systems which help us to respond to danger (threat system), the need to strive for resources and status (drive system) and the need for caring, affiliation and connection (soothing system). Each is regulated by different hormones. We are at our best when the activation of these systems is equally balanced, however stressful modern day life can lead to an overactivation of the threat and drive systems which in turn suppress the soothing system (which plays a part in the natural production of endogenous opiates).	
Feelings of kindness relate to the emotional soothing system. For most of us this is the least well developed of our three emotional systems. For many of us, at first it is difficult to relate to our own experience with kindness. We have grown up in a culture which encourages us to push ourselves, and we may see kindness as weak, self-indulgent or something which we can give to others but not ourselves. If we had a difficult upbringing we may not have developed the capacity to feel kindness very much at all.	
One of the aims of this course is to work to develop our natural capacity to experience kindness. In doing this it is important to recognise that this can feel difficult and uncomfortable. Therefore we need to be prepared to approach the exercises slowly and to bring a kind and allowing attitude to whatever we experience, pleasant or unpleasant. For some this will mean practising the	

<p>exercises for just a minute or so at a time and using grounding throughout the practices. When we first start to work to develop awareness of kindness and build the soothing system this can feel very uncomfortable but this does not mean it is a bad thing. A useful analogy could be with exercising a muscle. It is important to find the right level for current circumstances and to avoid overdoing things which can make things worse, however some discomfort can be a positive sign of growth.</p>	
Group Discussion: potential relevance to pain management	10 mins
Kindness to Other: Talk and practice	10 mins
Feedback in small groups	5 mins
Enquiry	10 mins
Home practice (memories of kindness or lovingkindness to other each day). Read through handout. Notice how it feels to give or receive kindness, particularly any feelings in the body	5 mins

Session 4: More About Kindness

Learning points: reinforcement of mind-body links, dealing with difficulty by finding an 'edge', negativity bias, kindness towards self.

Settling Exercise	5 mins
Questions / enquiry from last week	10 mins
Small groups: how does kindness feel in the body?	10 mins
Talk: Kindness Exercises	20 mins
<p>A key part of the exercise is approaching it with kindness towards your own experience. This includes an awareness that it may be challenging and unfamiliar and that it may not cause you to feel the way you want to or feel you should feel. Potentially kindness exercises can evoke strong feelings of loss or hurt. In the spirit of kindness It is important to go gently with ourselves and this includes sometimes taking it more slowly and in smaller chunks than the spoken exercises. The aim, when one of the exercises causes difficulty with emotional or physical pain, is to stop at the 'edge' of your discomfort, so that it feels challenging but not overwhelming.</p> <p>Some people will have experienced very little kindness up to now. There could be a number of reasons for this, including that in some settings kindness is seen as inappropriate and a sign of weakness. We can think of the mind like a mental muscle. With exercise we can build up our capacity to experience and benefit from kindness but it is not helpful to set the bar too high at first as we would just overwhelm our capacity to cope and would not benefit. We have to start gradually from where we find ourselves now. The Kindness exercise we will practice today is lovingkindness for other and self. Most people find it more challenging to direct kind thoughts towards the self than towards others. If it</p>	

feels challenging and a little uncomfortable, great, try to bring a kind attitude towards this. But if it feels overwhelming the kind response might be to skip the second part of the exercise for now, or repeat the lovingkindness towards other instead of directing it towards the self.	
Practice: Kindness to Other and Self	15 mins
BREAK	10 mins
Talk: Negativity Bias: It can be useful to recognise that human minds have a bias towards negativity. This is because in evolutionary terms it is safer to attend to potential threats than to ignore them. The consequence of missing a potential threat is much greater than of failing to spot an opportunity. In this way our tendency to look for the negative in a situation is understandable and even helpful. We need to be aware of it so that we don't take thoughts of this nature to be objective truth and so when necessary we can put in strategies to deal with the impact of experiencing thoughts driven by our natural negativity bias.	10 mins
Discussion in pairs:	5 mins
What response do people need from their friends in times of difficulty?	
How do you respond to yourself in times of difficulty?	
Group Discussion: What can we learn from what you have just talked about and how might we respond to ourselves when things are tough?	10 mins
Talk and short practice:	10 mins
When times are tough we need kindness, not criticism	
Home practice (daily mindfulness or kindness practice of choice from those covered so far). Notice positives. Notice if you are hard on yourself when experiencing difficult feelings. Try to say to yourself 'When times are tough we need kindness, not criticism'.	10 mins

Session 5: Working with the Bodyscan

Learning points: Embodiment, relating to experiences in the body with kindness, wanted or unwanted. Cycles between emotional systems that can maintain and intensify pain. Links between mindfulness and lovingkindness practices and how practice can weaken some maintaining cycles.

Settling Exercise	5 mins
Feedback and discussion from last week	10 mins
Presentation and discussion of CFT basis of physiological pain maintaining and intensifying mechanisms:	30 mins
As humans, the success of our species comes from our ability to think and to figure out how to change things around us. Over centuries we have changed the	

physical world to meet our needs and this has made us very successful as a species.

It is only natural that we should try to apply the same skills to trying to change and refine our internal world – the world of our physical sensations, thoughts and feelings. In fact our minds automatically try to do this – whether we like it or not. When we experience a sensation (or thought or feeling) this has usually already started to be processed by the mind. By the time we are aware of the sensation it comes complete with a sense of whether it is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, and with a plan of action for dealing with it. All of this may have happened below the level of our conscious awareness. The result of this is that what we experience as ‘pain’ can actually be a combination of painful sensation, not liking it and thoughts about wanting it to go away.

This reaction can trigger a wind-up cycle between the threat and drive systems. Bringing mindful awareness and kindness to our experience can reduce this. Instead it can activate our soothing system which has access to naturally painkilling chemicals and can promote healing.

The constant activity in the threat and drive systems shut down the soothing system. The soothing system can release opiates and oxytocin when it is activated. It also prioritises natural healing and immunity. This system will naturally be suppressed whenever we are trying to change what we experience internally. So in fact ‘just allowing things to be as they are’ can harness our powerful natural painkillers and ability to soothe ourselves at times of difficulty.

Whenever we are responding automatically, we will tend to fight against our pain and fight ourselves when we have pain. Our mind will be pulled in this direction because we are biologically wired to try to change what we don’t like. It is only with practise that we can bring in a more mindful and kind response to the difficulties, such as long term pain, that will not respond well to a fight.

The essence of this training is in trying to undo the automatic patterns that block the activation of the soothing system and, with the kindness exercises, to also focus directly on exercises that will help to strengthen the neural pathways in the soothing system itself.

BREAK

10 mins

Bodyscan: Talk and practice

35 mins

Discussion in pairs

10 mins

Group enquiry

15 mins

Home practice (daily practice of bodyscan or body awareness). Continue working to be kind to self at times of difficulty

5 mins

Session 6: More about background conditions and resilience.

Learning points: Resilience and the importance of flexibility. Patterns of resistance, inward focus and distancing which can be triggered by difficult circumstances and can feed into a cycle that maintains pain: Resilience as a broad concept that weakens these patterns.

Settling Exercise	5 mins
Feedback and discussion from last week	10 mins
Talk: Summary of unhelpful patterns, which are understood as automatically driven and not chosen. Fighting experience, inward focus and lack of connection with kindness (distancing). We practice mindfulness and lovingkindness exercises because they can help us to build capacity to respond differently.	20 mins
Settling, Grounding, Resting, Support practice with kindness	15 mins
Enquiry	10 mins
BREAK	10 mins
Talk: Resilience	10 mins
Kindness to other (or other and self) practice, flexibly	10 mins
Discussion in pairs	5 mins
Enquiry	10 mins
Group discussion: weaving resilience into everyday life	15 mins
Home practice (daily practice of mindfulness exercise of choice, bring awareness and try to respond helpfully to things that happen in everyday life)	5 mins

Session 7: Staying Connected

Learning points: normal human tendency to shift from expansive focus to narrow inward focus when triggered by threat (which may include pain). Difference in how we respond and understand our experiences related to this. Natural tendency will be to narrow focus in relation to any threatening or ambiguous cue. We can aim to counteract this by deliberately cultivating kindness for self and other.

Settling Exercise	5 mins
Feedback from last session and questions	10 mins
Mindful 'Sitting or Movement' practice	10 mins
Talk: Staying Connected:	20 mins
Most of us can identify experiences of calm, clarity and expansiveness that have occurred, often at times when we have been outside in nature and fully aware of	

our surroundings. Amidst the stress of everyday life however our focus is likely to be very different. We tend to respond to stress by becoming very inward focused and self-centred. This is triggered automatically, as it helps with our response to danger. Constant hassles can serve to keep our focus narrow and inward facing which can cause longer term problems both in terms of our interactions with others which can become fraught and also our capacity to reach out for support when we need it. We aim to bring awareness to this pattern and use whatever methods we can to try to counteract it.	
Discussion: Barriers to being connected	15 mins
BREAK	10 mins
Equalising exercise talk and practice	15 mins
Discussion in pairs	5 mins
Enquiry	10 mins
Group discussion: How can we hope to benefit from being flexible, staying connected and responding with kindness?	15 mins
Home practice: daily practice of mindfulness or lovingkindness exercise of choice. Read through handouts and bring any questions to the final session next week.	5 mins

Session 8: Living with Less Resistance

Learning points: Recap of key material covered including the patterns of resistance, inward focusing and distancing, how these can affect the maintenance of pain and how we aim to weaken this cycle through the exercises practised on this course. Possible avenues for continuing to engage with the learning from this course beyond the final session.

Settling Exercise	5 mins
Feedback and discussion from last week	10 mins
Short bodyscan exercise	10 mins
Recap of material covered on course including group discussion	30 mins
BREAK	10 mins
Outcome and Feedback forms	20 mins
Intentions for the future	20 mins
Ending and Goodbyes	15 mins