

GUIDED MINDFULNESS PRACTICES FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS: USING NATURE TO PRACTICE SELF-CARE AND REACH INNER PEACE

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Abstract

According to the World Health Organization Report (2022), 23 to 46 percent of health and care workers reported anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 20 to 37 percent experienced depressive symptoms, while burnout factors rose to 52 percent. The risk factors and adverse mental health outcomes have also been reported to be higher among younger health workers, putting them in compromising positions of risking their overall well-being. In this workshop, the audience will learn the specifics of these risk factors and the adverse impact on the professional's physical and mental health. Using guided mindfulness techniques, the audience will learn how to use nature-based practices that are evidence-based and clinically proven to create protective factors, develop inner peace, and build habitual self-care practices. The primary goal of this workshop is to train healthcare professionals such as therapists, counselors, coaches, and medical professionals in the art of self-care through guided mindfulness techniques. The secondary goal of this workshop is to teach the audience how to advocate for their well-being by seeking effective interventional and supportive mental health programs while safeguarding their rights across their profession. Healthcare professionals often undermine their own well-being and neglect self-care, leading to health risks and burnout factors. Practicing self-care ensures that the individuals in the care profession build the strength to fight off things like compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, secondary traumatic stress, and other common challenges mental health professionals face. This workshop will highlight the importance of sharing care responsibilities among self, organization, and governing states (Guy, 2000).

Keywords: *Nature, meditation, mindfulness, clinicians.*

1. Introduction

Stress, burnout, and professional impairment are prevalent among mental health professionals and can hurt their clinical work, while engagement in self-care can help promote therapist well-being. This literature review examines the role of self-care in promoting well-being among mental health practitioners. Specifically, empirical research is presented about specific domains of self-care practice, including awareness, balance, flexibility, physical health, social support, and spirituality. Findings from this review underscore the importance of taking a proactive approach to self-care, particularly integrating self-care directly into clinical training programs and the quality assurance processes of professional organizations within mental health (Posluns & Gall, 2019).

2. Overview of workshop

- Emphasize the role of mindfulness in healthcare
- Introduce the theme of using nature for guided mindfulness practices

Mindfulness-based therapies differ from mindfulness retreats, as the latter entails more intensive practice (e.g., ten hours per day) over days, weeks, or even years. In the clinical context of mindfulness-based therapies, mindfulness retreats are typically led by a meditation teacher in a residential retreat center. They are marketed to healthy populations to optimize well-being and psychological health (Lustyk et al., 2009).

Research has determined correlational determinants between exposure to nature and health. Associative evidence has also shown correlations between exposure to nature and higher cognitive function, brain activity, blood pressure, mental health, physical activity, and sleep. Results from experimental studies provide evidence of the protective effects of exposure to natural environments on mental health outcomes and cognitive function. Cross-sectional observational studies provide evidence of positive associations between nature exposure, increased physical activity levels, and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. Longitudinal observational studies are beginning to assess the long-term effects of natural exposure on depression, anxiety, cognitive function, and chronic disease. Limitations of current knowledge include inconsistent measures of exposure to nature, the impacts of the type and quality of green space, and health effects of duration and frequency of exposure. Future directions include incorporating more rigorous study designs, investigating the underlying mechanisms of the association between green space and health, advancing exposure assessment, and evaluating sensitive periods in the early life course (Lustyk et al., 2009).

3. Understanding mindfulness and nature in healthcare

Several scientific communities and international health organizations promoting an interdependent human-nature health perspective call on healthcare professionals (HCPs) to integrate this vision into their practice and become role models. However, rising cases of stress, burnout, and depression among this group jeopardize this potential and their self-care. Therefore, we conducted an exploratory qualitative study focusing on how HCPs relate to their self-care, their relationship with nature, and its implementation into their professional practice. Semi-structured interviews with 16 HCPs were executed, transcribed, and imported into NVivo. We conducted a thematic analysis using the six-step framework and two-step member-checking. Three main findings arose. First, participants employ various self-care strategies outside of work whenever possible. Second, their natural experiences can be drawn along a continuum ranging in intensity, attitude, and reciprocity, which is not disclosed during consultation. Third, the reflexive interviews may have increased awareness and agency on the former topics, termed ‘nature-connected care awareness.’ A preliminary framework to stimulate nature-connected care awareness could support HCPs in becoming role models (Jimenez et al., 2021).

4. Connection between nature and mindfulness

- Nature as a Source of Calm (Our heritage from our ancestors)
- Introduce research on nature's impact on mental well-being and how connecting with nature aligns with human well-being
- Discuss how nature can enhance mindfulness practices.

5. Guided mindfulness practices

- Breathing Techniques: Deep abdominal breathing exercises Emphasize the connection between breathing and mindfulness and talk about Vagus Nerve
- Script for being at the sea, or jungle, or mountain
- Grounding techniques incorporate imagery of nature to enhance the experience

6. Practical tips for integrating nature into daily practice

- Brief Mindfulness Moments
- Suggest incorporating brief moments of nature throughout the day
- Mindful walking in nature
- Creating a Nature-Inspired Space
- Find ways to bring nature into the workplace or personal space

7. Group reflection and discussion

- Time to share experiences
- Discuss challenges and potential solutions
- Take-home questions

How are you currently meeting your own mirroring needs? Do you get sufficient admiration, attention, and care from one or more significant individuals in your life? Can you readily identify reliable sources of nurturance, support, and praise? Who cheers for your victories and applauds when you are successful? Do you allow enough time to draw strength and energy from these meaningful relationships? Do you need to build these up or rebuild others? When have you sought mirroring from your psychotherapy clients? Supervisees? Graduate students? What were the consequences? Why did some situations turn out OK and others did not? What boundaries have you established to help you resist turning to these individuals for recognition or admiration? (Sterckx et al., 2023).

8. Q&A Session

- Open the floor for questions and comments
- Provide additional resources for further exploration
- Encourage continued mindfulness and self-care
- Provide contact information for follow-up questions or support

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