



# Using Mindfulness with Groups

3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday Assembly

## Nadia Chaney: Goals:

- 1) To explore the potential, principles and practices of working with MINDFULNESS in facilitated groups.
- 2) To use case studies (examples) to imagine ways to bring mindfulness to the groups we facilitate.
- 3) To share our experiences of mindfulness in groups.

## 4) To connect, reinvigorate and have meaningful fun online

In order to achieve the goals (posted below), here are some suggestions for agreements to make our time together flow really well. We are still experimenting with this form, so be sure to add what you need or want AT ANY TIME DURING THE PROCESS.

- 1) No put downs of self or others. Keep a positive, lift-up vibe.
- 2) Share at your level; Everyone is welcome, no matter their level of experience as a facilitator or community organizer. All questions are important, and all answers (or further questions) are valuable. It is also okay and important to respectfully disagree with each other.
- 3) Show your presence, by LIKING and by responding to keep the flow. Ask questions, make comments, connect. The technical trick for this format is to REFRESH your browser fairly often. LIKING IS MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER SINCE FACEBOOK HAS CHANGED AND WE CAN NO LONGER SEE HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE READ A POST.
- 4) Answer any questions in the COMMENTS below the question to keep the conversation organized and readable. Only open NEW questions in new threads.
- 5) You can come and go as you please, take as long as you like to respond, and basically enjoy the text-format to make this work no matter whether you are just waking up, just going to bed, or on your lunch break (time zones unite!!) A pdf transcript of the conversation will be provided. Feel free to continue the conversation even after the 90 minute period has ended.

**Nadia Chaney: Check-in Question for September 18, 2014 : What, if anything, is your relationship to mindfulness practice? Please answer with an animal metaphor (for example, my relationship to mindfulness practice is a big, hairy, orange caterpillar climbing up a tall tree)**

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** Hey Nadia! Hope you're well

My relationship to mindfulness practice is a young leopard waiting behind the tall grass, ready to pounce!

**Silvia Giovannoni Webster:** Mine is a firefly illuminating pathways and dark spots in all kinds of forests and woods!!

**Katie Jackson:** I'm a bit like a mole when it comes to mindfulness, a bit short-sightedly feeling out my way bit by bit and occasionally surfacing and seeing glimpses of light.

**Bunty Cumberpants:** My relationship to mindfulness practice is a cat that waits patiently outside the window just as dawn rises reminding me to get up, that it's time to be!

**Tanaya Thomas:** my relationship to mindfulness practice is a bird circling in the sky looking for somewhere to land.

**LeAnne Moss:** Mine is like an ocean wave, rolling in and out.

**Rachelle Sloss:** Mine is a puppy chasing its tail, and then getting distracted...

**Chatelle Jeram:** my relationship to mindfulness is that of a seal - immersing itself in a vast ocean at times, and other times chilling out on the sidelines.

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** Mine is a frog on a lily pad, watching and waiting for the time to jump in.

**Holly Heffernan:** Mine is a bird soaring on the wind

**Elis Motta:** Mine is like a dolphin that constantly comes in and out of water with grace, but most likely never dives deep down into the ocean.

**Paula Fonseca:** Still little hard for me to see mine, getting there!!!

**Arindita Gogoi:** Mine is like a cheerful labrador... I am alert, mindful and thoroughly committed to things that concern people I love. But like an abrupt chewey in the scene, I do get distracted with things that I personally love.

**Shilpa Setty:** Mine is like a curious Emu watching carefully

**Mariko Ihara:** A flying squrell, because of the extended moments of high-release suspension

**Nadia Chaney: Discussion Question #1: Let's start with some definitions. 1) What, according to you, is mindfulness? 2) What are the benefits of mindfulness in group settings? There is a lot of material out there about the benefits of mindfulness. What have you noticed in your own practice?**

**Katie Jackson:** Hmm, to me mindfulness is all about keeping my thought process in the here and now and preventing it wandering around in all different directions that end up leaving me feeling stressed and tired at the end of the day. It's being able to clear my mind of the worries and doubts and just really focus on where I am now and what I need to do to get where I am intending to go.

**LeAnne Moss:** To me, mindfulness is intentional awareness of thoughts, feelings, behavior, etc in my everyday experience.

**Katie:** Yes LeAnne, that says it really nicely.

**Tanaya Thomas:** Yes! What LeAnne said and adding in "without judgement"

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** I'd agree with LeAnne and Tanaya. I like the "without judgment" part added.

**Bunty Cumberpants:** Mindfulness for me is being present in this moment with exactly what is, to be awake, to be noticing the fleeting thoughts and feelings that come and go in this very moment and this ... and this ... being mindful is essential in my work with people with Learning Disabilities, particularly those with more profound difficulties, noticing is a constant

**Silvia Giovannoni Webster:** Yes, for me it's fine tuning my present moment awareness.

**Rachelle Sloss:** I also agree with Bunty and Silvia...for me both the challenge and benefit of mindfulness is being in the present moment. In groups, if an entire group can bring their focus to the present, it brings such a powerful energy to the workshop.

**Nadia:** Go to question #2 to describe some of those experiences, Rachelle. Would love to hear!

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** To me mindfulness is all about finding my balance in the present, and practicing ways to tune into myself.. more awareness.. I find it really useful in group setting because it helps me stay with the process of the group, without getting ahead of it. My mind usually drifts into planning the next thing. But mindfulness in group setting helps me be more empathetic, less triggered.

**Silvia:** benefits for me include (but are not limited to): - being able to read the energy/needs of a group; reading your own emotions and understanding where they come from; being more present; being able to bring your energy into the room more powerfully; being able to see what is and not what you imagine is...if that makes sense...For me it also helps keeping group debriefs/conversations real and relevant.

**Bunty:** I really like that Silvia, it's so important to be able to have that awareness of your 'own stuff' particularly in the group settings, so many of our patterns can overlap and butt up against each others

**Chatelle Jeram:** To add to Silvia's comment, benefits for me in a group also mean being able to act and react spontaneously with what the group wants or needs to happen to keep energy levels and focus high.

**Nilisha:** I like how you've framed your response, Silvia. I was thinking along the same lines. To manage energy- how much energy.. qualities of my energy..

**Jennifer:** Benefits of group mindfulness - bringing the group in tune in terms of their energy. Helping focus. Bringing authenticity/right brain aspects to the discussion at hand.

**LeAnne:** One major benefit is being able to manage my triggers if that happens in a personal relationship or group. I respond from a more grounded place.

**Holly Heffernan:** Mindfulness is a way of being with what is, not changing this to ones own desires. The benefits would be group cohesion, stillness and creating a space for calm and acceptance

**Matthew Spears:** To me mindfulness involves using deeper aspects of the brain, specifically the limbic system/ brain stem/ gut. Too often we try to be only intellectual mindful of breathing and thoughts - I know lots of longtime meditators that are essentially eggheads. But the creative impulse comes from something more raw. I really like Middendorf breath work for exercises on connecting to how an uncontrolled breath permeates the body. To be mindful you really have to be IN the body.

**Jennifer:** Matthew, that's what I like about the mindfulness, particular some meditation work at the outset to tap the non-intellectual mind

**Paula Fonseca:** This is really nice, I am reading all this to try to understand the meaning of MINDFULNESS. And I found out that I have been thinking about this for while (in Portuguese). How to achieve a deep level? Yoga? Meditation? What you use?

**Holly:** I use both x

**Matthew:** As for the benefit, to me it's all about listening. Listening comes from awareness, and if you're not listening to yourself you can't listen to others from a receptive place. So mindfulness starts from creating a space for things to reveal themselves first internally, and then can expand to a group. That mindful space doesn't have expectations on what should come out - what it is. A group dynamic gels when people feel they can be themselves and it's received.

**Chatelle:** Paula I use yoga and meditation techniques and also EFT (emotional freedom technique) - EFT combines gently tapping on acupressure points on different parts of the body while exploring your emotions, triggers to situations and addressing any sources of pain or discomfort (physically and emotionally). EFT is also very effectively used in groups or individually.

**LeAnne:** Love EFT!

**Paula:** How do you learn about EFT? There is a course?

**Nadia:** Paula: <http://eft.mercola.com>

**Paula:** thank's! it has being helpful.

**Danise Elijah:** For me, I am a person with a loud inner voice. So it is not a struggle to be mindful when it comes to self-awareness. But I get easily exhausted and check out of large groups to just focus on one or two people. My work in mindfulness is to focus on developing endurance and continuing to maintain an openness to my awareness so that it includes the group I am facilitating, my co, other adults, the content, the space, things happening in the space and participants reactions to it and each other.

**Elis Motta:** I also agree with Katie, LeAnne and Tanaya: I think mindfulness involves being in the here and now, having this intentional awareness, and being free of judgement, that is, accepting what is happening in the moment and being open to experience it at its fullest. To me mindfulness also involves an important balance between being with and aware of yourself, while also being with and aware of the others around you. In that sense, I agree with Silvia that mindfulness allows us to better read the needs and energy of the group (and our own), and being able to react to them in a true and judgement free way. As a facilitator, I think it is essential to have the ability to be present in the moment, and that is also a great benefit of mindfulness...

**Katie:** Well said Elis

**Arindita Gogo:** For me mindfulness is a process that involves my awareness of self and the present and also being equally aware of the cohesion in a group. Many a times during facilitations with children and young adults in India, we observe that because of the immense socio cultural diversity many a times the members of the group are unmindful of one another's socio emotional construct. Hence there are many stereotypes, bullying and tension in the beginning. I feel it is extremely important for the facilitator to be mindful of the dynamics of energy between members of the groups and bring about a balance. Or at least make way for that balance by giving cultural exposures, promoting acceptance and non-judgmental attitudes.

**Shilpa Setty:** For me mindfulness is like most of you said to be aware of your inner self, triggers, .. And To be able to meet the needs of the group and also to be aware of the community the group comes from and be prepared, patient, and understanding and not to be too attached to what you think is the perfect outcome

**Danise Elijah:** Yes Shilpa Setty I appreciate what you said about mindfulness not being attached to an outcome. I feel like there is a commitment to the journey and an awareness of the purpose

**Nilisha:** Shilpa and Danise: I second that. That is my exact challenge right now.

**Nadia Chaney: Discussion Question #2: What are some examples of mindfulness activities or practices that you have used or seen other people use when facilitating groups?**

**Sarah Cathrae:** You may remember a teacher who played Pink Floyd while we lay on the floor of the music room and stared up at the bottoms of our chairs. Effective? Maybe. Memorable? Definitely

**Nadia:** Sarah! I do remember that!

**Rachelle Sloss:** Guided/creative visualizations (Sola's during Art of Facilitation--amazing!), group breathing, and even that group counting game that Nadia introduced.

**Nadia:** That counting game is where you have the group count to ten together, one person at a time, in no particular order, and if two people say a number at the same time, you go back to the beginning. Really gets a group to focus together

**Jennifer:** I've done the counting, but also keeping a paper ball in the air while counting. We used to do that with a teen repertory group as a warm-up exercise.

**Nadia:** Oooh Jennifer! That's next level!

**Tanaya Thomas:** body scanning and noticing where you're holding tension, particularly if it's something physical

**Silvia Giovannoni Webster:** There are some great breathing and grounding practices I have been doing lately. Bringing your attention to the rhythm of your breath...which can then lead on to a mindfulness meditation on different themes such as gratitude/compassion, etc.

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** Imagery work - doodling, meditating to a guided imagery piece. Standing outside in dirt and being rooted, figuratively in the ground, taking pause to breathe in and out together before starting a productivity session. Just a few coming to mind right now.

**LeAnne Moss:** I also use various breathing, body scan, visualization. rooting.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** I am particularly fond of this one activity where you give a colour to your energy/vitality/life force and visualize it moving through your body, lending strengths/qualities to different parts or even healing every part.

**Silvia:** Love that Nilisha!

**Chatelle Jeram:** I introduce simple yoga poses and breathing techniques when I work with my students (ages 4 - 12) - likening the poses to animals and identifying with how that animal moves or sees or hears, etc, helps bring the group together. I also encourage the students to move around and interact with each other as that animal - makes for interesting reflections!

**Rachelle:** Ooh sounds fun Chatelle!

**Bunty Cumberpants:** I like to use the stories that our Members bring along to the Groups as a starting point and then work a visualization out from there in the moment, this can relate to smells, noises, touch and other senses. It's a very helpful technique, as many of the people I work with have sensory impairments as well as LD.

**Paula Fonseca:** That is nice, maybe I should do myself!

**Nilisha:** Yes! I've always found it powerful. Another version of it using a balloon as a metaphor and physically moving the balloon to different body parts...learning that we can manage our emotions, our mind. Playing some gentle music in the background is a definite plus.

**Jennifer:** OH! Great technique - the 20 minute dance from the Presencing Institute at MIT

**Nadia:** Jennifer can you describe that dance, or do you have a link where people might learn about it?

**Jennifer:** This is where it comes from: [www.presencing.com/engage/group/social-presencing-theater](http://www.presencing.com/engage/group/social-presencing-theater) Basically, it's taking 20 minutes of body meditation to bring awareness of what your body actually wants to do. I'm not a facilitator of it, though. I do have a friend who is whom I can connect you with, Nadia and others who might be interested.

**Sarah:** My son balances on a Bosu when he wants to focus.

**Tanaya:** I haven't tried this but I wonder if there is a way to introduce mindfulness through theater and character development. Looking at motivation, tactics, etc.

**Mariko Ihara:** guided visualization...i.e. "meeting your creative spirit," "finding your spot," etc..

**Elis Motta:** The counting game is amazing!! Thanks for reminding me of that! And definitely all the different breathing activities and body scan. I've also had a facilitator use Tai Chi exercises in a very effective way. And like Chatelle described: animals. This facilitator also started the day with a "think of an animal" activity in which he had to be and behave like our animal from being asleep in the middle of the forest to slowly (very slowly) waking up, start moving, and meeting the other animals...

**Kimi King:** most of my work connects inward, using nature as the platform.....one of the activities is being lead into the forest blindfolded to a tree. you spend 5-7 min. with the tree before being lead back to a starting point, and then you must go out and find the tree. This is brilliant because it is all about getting beyond the voices in our heads...into deep listening, with your other senses.....

**Nadia:** Kimi that's one of my favourite activities!

**Elis:** Kimi that sounds amazing!!

**Katie Rapp:** Nadia and Jennifer, this is an excellent training with Arawana Hayashi on the Twenty Minute Dance and other Social Presencing Theatre/mindfulness experiences: <https://www.presencing.com/.../embodied-presence-workshop...>

**Jennifer:** Thank you, Katie!

**Arindita Gogoi:** Wow! You guys are great! Such fantastic ideas. For a group of adults from varied backgrounds within our organization (a combination of people from sales, tour operations, accounts, IT, media and facilitation teams) and from very different outlook towards and expectations from life, I had one storytelling activity where each person told a childhood story about one of their grandparents. The session was unbelievably cathartic... there was awareness about struggles, love, Indian partition from different regions, migration, courage, bondings... I am not able to express it effectively... But the mindfulness impact was huge.

**Salomeh A:** if the group is very talkative, I use 'share the air' as a guideline, followed by, speak after 5 other people have spoken, so not the same speaker is dominating

**Arindita:** We also use PROPS (please respect other people speaking) with children instead of saying 'keep quiet ' or 'stop talking and listen'.

**Salomeh:** I also use a stretching icebreaker - in a circle each person shares name and a stretching activity. This helps to relax everyone's energy and become aware of self. Another game is listening: have everyone stand in a circle with their eyes closed and they have to raise their hand when the paper drops. drop an 11x14 piece of paper, keep doing this as you rip the paper in half each time, dropping it each. At the end, DISCUSS: what happened? what kind of listening occurred? Focusing on how the body and mind have to really empty to become mindful of just one thing. We sometimes have to hone in when we want to listen in a generous way.

**Nadia: Discussion Question #3: What are some resources that you recommend? How can a facilitator become more prepared to bring mindfulness practices to their groups? Are there meditation/mindfulness practices that you recommend?**

**Silvia Giovannoni Webster:** Having a regular mindfulness/meditation practice is a good start!

**Nadia:** What kind of practice Silvia? Prayer, meditation, yoga?

**Silvia:** I find meditation (different kinds of meditation including movement, yoga and dance) really work for me. I have been keeping a regular morning practice which I find so grounding. I usually meditate on different themes/intentions for myself/for the day and I do the same with the dance. I solve problems/shift energy through inquiring in my body through the movement practice. . . all of this is great material/real life case study that i can then adapt, experiment with in my facilitation practice....

**Paula Fonseca:** Writing?

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** Morning pages. Playing music and allowing students free flow to draw, write, whatever and then give them two minutes to analyze what they produced and then starting the conversation.

**Nadia:** Paula I think journalling is a great mindfulness practice. Have you heard of Julia Cameron's book the Artist's Way? She recommends a practice called "morning pages."

**Paula:** oooo...nice thank's. I will look for it!

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** So funny, Nadia - that was my first response.

**Bunty Cumberpants:** The Morning Pages are wonderful, I use them everyday.

**LeAnne Moss:** I've also incorporated a "mindfulness bell" in groups sometimes...stop what they are doing to be aware of what's going on with them. Also can use that at work - set a timer or something to remind yourself to do a scan.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** I follow up my morning pages with a gratitude practice.. making a list of 5-6 things I am grateful for at the moment.

**LeAnne:** Also, end of the day either group or individual questions: Where was I inspired today? When did I feel energized? Drained?

**Silvia:** LeAnne I really like this - I've also used this at the youth camps we run in the UK - breathing spaciousness into the process by pausing - taking a breath with the team of facilitators - over lunch, at our team meeting! It worked really well and brought a sense of calm to what is a pretty full-on non-stop week...

**Nilisha:** [This website](#) has some great talks on mindfulness and meditation.. even metta meditation.

**Paula:** I have done...stop at a landscape or a painting and looking for 5 or more minutes, it is amazing how much we can see, but I never did with the mindfulness focus...maybe could work, what you think?

**Jennifer:** The 20 minute dance and other resources from The Presencing Institute would be useful.

**Bunty:** I have a daily morning practice of Kundalini Yoga which I find extremely grounding, so movement, chanting and meditation - plus Morning pages on waking - as already mentioned, these practices really help you to reside in your body in the moment

**LeAnne:** Somatics work is really good too (training from the Strozzi Institute and Generative Somatics).

**Jennifer:** Singing in several-part harmony or a round is also nice.

**Kimi King:** Noah Levine, who founded dharma punx is quite amazing, he has a book called "against the stream"

**Mariko Ihara:** Standing shoulder-to-shoulder in a circle. Breathing together and sounding is great.

**Chatelle Jeram:** I find that activities you really enjoy or challenge you are determined to work on also help you be mindful and in the present moment. Currently I'm learning a new language and the times when I am practising speaking/reading/writing instantly engage my senses in the moment.

**Katie Jackson:** I love [this song](#) from Rebekka Goldsmith - it's a gorgeous song to close a mindfulness session with or to use as a form of meditation guide during the session. So uplifting.

**Nilisha:** I read this really cool book called '[Buddha In Blue Jeans](#)' by Tai Sheridan. It is an extremely short guide to stillness. I think the book is less than 20 pages and just talks about the power in sitting still. I found that particularly helpful for my meditation practice

**Bunty:** I find that skills-based workshops in making seem to have a 'presence' to them where the participants are generally 'all present' in that moment of making - it's very difficult to articulate it as it is a 'felt sense' - but it is rather like the feelin one gets when meditating in a group setting. I find that when I am immersed in my own visual arts practice I am completely and utterly present with it in that moment - it sort of commands that

**Danise Elijah:** I practice! When I am in my religious meetings at visiting time, I commit myself to keeping mindfulness during the time before and after when we are visiting. That simple practice has helped me immensely in my work facilitating.

**Shilpa Setty:** Personally, I have being benefitted from a few things

1. Practising a heart centred meditation under a method called sahajmarg. You can find more details about this on [www.sahajmarg.org](http://www.sahajmarg.org)
2. Undergoing facilitator training under my favourite and much admired facilitator Nadia Chaney for without that I would have not found my strengths

**Nadia Chaney: Extra Question: Great question, Paula Fonseca! Would be great to hear a little about how people got started in their own mindfulness practices.**



**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** Meditation, walking meditation, yoga. Trying to minimize inflammation, reduce stress and heal. Wish I'd started years and years earlier, but so grateful to have it now!

**LeAnne Moss:** Can't remember! Always had some sort of meditation/prayer practice and then learned more about the mindfulness piece gradually. Sometimes I have to admit, I like the IDEA of mindfulness better than practicing it ... because of stuff that might come up. Just a confession!

**Nadia:** I think that's an important point, LeAnne. I'm going to frame one more question about challenges in mindfulness practice!

**Chatelle Jeram:** Currently I'm working on focusing on what my five senses are experiencing to frequently bring myself into the present moment, to reduce distracting/unnecessarily repetitive thoughts.

**Matthew Spears:** I first started meditation many years ago, I think at the Shambhala center. What really brought it home was doing voice work - using mindfulness to connect to one's body and learn to reveal what was going on instead of trying to control one's expression. So often we need bridges from meditation into other activities.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** Since I am just starting on my practice, I find sitting still and just counting my breaths really useful. Baby steps

**Bunty Cumberpants:** I came across the Jon Kabat Zinn mindfulness practice around seven years ago, following a neurological illness - used it to 'be with' and 'go into the pain' - doing the course changed my life and helped enormously

**Mariko Ihara:** Seeking to find myself in a genuine slight smile..as "home," and be conscious that every person I pass out in the world is an opportunity to genuinely connect, if even for a brief moment in time.

**Silvia Giovannoni Webster:** Started with my mum who took me to a Transcendental Meditation course in Brazil MANY years ago....I don't particularly identify with the TM mantra method, but since then have experimented with other methods and finding the ones that really work for me.

**Paula Fonseca:** Thank you all!!! I need that kind of connection and it is nice to know that there are people what there connecting too!

**Nadia: Extra Question #2: Thanks for the great question LeAnne Moss! What are some of the challenges people face in their mindfulness practice, both in and out of group situations?**

**Rachelle Sloss:** Impatience. I find myself getting distracted, mind-wandering etc, and then usually move on to other things instead of sitting through it. Any tips?

**Sarah Cathrae:** While I have been working on mindfulness for years - I am one of the most easily distracted people I know. My own thoughts and extraneous sounds are my downfall.

**Nadia:** For me, one of the challenges with groups is to offer mindfulness activities that really honour different learning styles, and are accessible to different characters

**Bunty Cumberpants:** Absolutely, distraction and 'getting in my own way' are the biggest challenges

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** I agree, Nadia! Rachelle - sometimes just letting yourself be with the distraction - non-judgment and moving on - will let you progress slowly but surely. I struggle with that, too.

**Mariko Ihara:** the pressure to "move forward," "be productive," ha.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** My biggest challenge has been the need to get to some place with my mindfulness practice! Be a certain way, feeling or not feeling something! I am learning s.l.o.w.l.y now that the practice itself is the goal.

**Elis Motta:** I can see myself in so many of these answers...

**Nadia: Extra question #3: Can anyone practice mindfulness? Is there any particular training that you think is necessary for facilitators who want to use mindfulness practices? Are there any cautions you might suggest?**

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** I feel mindfulness is meant to be our basic way of being, and hence a practice is to find our way back to that being because we drift away as we experience life. So yes, anyone and everyone can practice mindfulness. I quite like this course a friend of mine recommended and am planning to join their next cycle: <http://www.mindfulschools.org/>

**Bunty Cumberpants:** I agree with Nilisha, that mindfulness is part of our basic way of being and can be difficult in a world which seems to be filled with so many displacement activities that take us away from our being. I think that having your own practice is a good starting point - I really appreciated being taught by people who had practiced for many years themselves.

**Shilpa Setty:** I feel meditation and constant introspection will help a great deal in practising mindfulness. As a caution, I would say, what we see and understand may be wrong sometimes and it's impossible to be right always; so it is always best to be Authentic and Accepting.

**Arindita Gogoi:** Observation and awareness of socio cultural backgrounds, emotional constructs and a practice of impact assessment of behaviour on various age groups will automatically make us mindful, of course combined with a lot of inward reflection.

**Olusola Adebisi:** I think that anyone can listen to their own breathing and that to do so is to practice mindfulness. ...

**Nadia: This is an amazing conversation! Here's my final question for you good people: Is mindfulness essential to good facilitation? Is it a necessary part of the skill set of a great facilitator?**

**Katie Jackson:** I think it's a great tool to have in your toolkit as a facilitator, both for yourself and to work with the participants.

**Arindita Gogoi:** Absolutely, this also compels us to be more aware and most importantly to accept other thought processes.

**Elis Motta:** Instead of saying that mindfulness is essential to good facilitation, I think I would say that it is essential for a better facilitation...

**Shilpa Setty:** I think that's THE tool to have, as once we are aware of what is happening then we can work around with the other things

**Katie:** Is it essential? Hmm, I am not sure really, I can imagine that some facilitators bring their whole selves to their work and that it doesn't include any knowledge of mindfulness at all but that they are still fantastic facilitators.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** I think mindfulness is definitely needed a great practice/skill to have. I also feel that as facilitators all of us find our own ways of cultivating mindfulness, by default. It just may not be how we understand mindfulness individually. But I do believe that all facilitator become more mindful as they facilitate,

**Katie:** Maybe that's the truth Nilisha - I love that the more I think about it. Perhaps we don't have to understand mindfulness as a concept to have found it within ourselves. That's my big takeaway from today. Thanks so much for articulating that.

**Nilisha:** That is a powerful sharing, Katie! Love how you've said mindfulness is not necessarily a concept. That is my take away too

**Bunty Cumberpants:** I think as others have said that perhaps it becomes more finely tuned as a result of being a facilitator - it's an essential ingredient not just for self-reflection, but also for noticing the subtle nuances that occur in a group setting.

**Sarah Cathrae:** I am currently taking classes in child and youth work and a professor of mine is conducting meditation sessions during our breaks for those who are open to it. It has been described as a piece that has been missing in child and youth care and something that will only gain momentum in the field. I guess the only thing missing is to make it safe and accessible for kids who think it is embarrassing.

**Olusola Adebisi:** In my view Mindfulness is essential (whether called that or not) to doing 'anything' better. Being mindful, relates to receptivity and responsiveness. It allows communication between inner and outer realities and the flow between the two increases the ease of translation. Key to being a facilitator in my view, is the capacity to make communication and translation easier.

**Mariko Ihara:** Yup (That the facilitator is mindful and builds mindful practices of various kinds with the group:)

**Nadia: Case Study #1: You are invited to do an hour-long session on mindfulness and creativity for a classroom of 16 year olds. You have been working with them using art-based practices all year, using theatre and dance activities mostly. How do you introduce the idea of mindfulness to this group?**

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** I would consult my friend Mery (the facilitator I mentioned) and do the 20 minute dance with them. Absolutely.

**Matthew Spears:** I don't think youths are usually that enthused by sitting meditation or even yoga which is prescriptive movement and breathing. I would start by having everyone stand and put their hands on the front and back of their diaphragm. And just stand there noticing how their body moves with the breath and what thoughts are inside. Then placing hands as they desire, aiding to noticing how the body moves. From there, exploring small, slow movements (that they choose), always being aware of the breath in the body.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** I would do a check-in where I would invite the group to embody their emotion...and sing out the quality or colour it is.

**Jennifer:** I love that idea, Nilisha. Matthew, that's very similar to the 20 Minute Dance that I was talking about.

**Elis Motta:** I would probably introduce the idea without explicitly mentioning the word "mindfulness". In that sense, the counting game could be a great way to start with something fun, that requires concentration, but that doesn't require being in total silence, for example. I would also like to play with dance and music, particularly drumming sounds. Maybe making the music together with them?

**Chatelle Jeram:** I would use the 'group rhythm' activity to start the session, as that works well for helping people focus. And it introduces body movement that could lead to more activities to increase awareness. I think some pair based activities after that which focus on balance and being a mirror to another's movements would also be effective in exploring mindfulness.

**Katie Rapp:** A brainstorm on what comes up for them when they think of the word "mindfulness;" maybe coming up with a working definition of "mindfulness;" journaling (in my mind, a mindfulness practice/tool) on their experiences with mindfulness, the challenges, the rewards; yoga... partner yoga!

**Shilpa Setty:** I would do a check in as Nilisha suggested that's a nice one and would want to do an activity from The Theatre of Oppressed in which there are 2 partners and one places the hand just a few metres away from the partners face and lead them, the they have to make sure the distance between hand and face is same. Then they switch roles and do the same.

**Nadia: Case Study #2: You want to pitch the idea of a six-session mindfulness workshop for a community centre. How do you describe your session? What kinds of activities will you offer?**

**Katie Jackson:** Do you think that sometimes using the term Mindfulness in itself is confusing to people. I would be tempting to come up with a title for the sessions that was a little more along the lines of, 'clear your mind and gain focus' or something like that, and then mention the mindfulness within the explanation. I think it's important to remember that not everyone knows what it is and to keep the session really open to as many people as possible. Essentially I would focus on the intention for your session and what you really want people to leave with.

**Tanaya Thomas:** Yes! I'm so glad you mentioned that Katie.

**Elis Motta:** I absolutely agree with you, Katie! I think it is essential to think of ways to make the wording of it accessible to everyone - often people have practices of mindfulness but just call it something else...

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** I'm not sure about a description - something along the lines of "Being Alive - bringing focus and thought to each moment". As far as activities, I would provide a variety that would hit all types of learners and that would include meditation, art, music, theater writing, movement, yoga, etc.

**Bunty Cumberpants:** That would be really helpful

**Sarah Cathrae:** My godson goes to a community centre four days a week and on Tuesdays they have mindfulness workshops this month. They seem to have gone the brain teasers and puzzles approach to teaching mostly 11-13 year old boys about the practice. My godson was less than impressed but it has helped a few of the kids with focus more than mindfulness.

**Shilpa Setty:** May be doing a small activity like a Blind drawing with the group will be helpful and give experience to understand about the importance of mindfulness N then formally present our idea

**Salomeh A:** I would focus on themes of: self-care, spirituality, and discovery of self - to destress in a way that fits the person - not requiring the person to fit the practice

**Nadia: Case Study #3: You have a session where a number of participants live with anxiety and depression. Are mindfulness practices appropriate for this group? What kinds of activities might you offer?**

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** I would love do the energy visualization activity I mentioned earlier. I'll follow it up with a workshop on writing affirmations to change thought patterns.

**Katie Jackson:** YES, I think they are so appropriate. Mindfulness can really be helpful for people to allow them to clear anxiety by stopping focus on harmful thoughts and bringing people back to the present moment. I would love to hear ideas for the kinds of activities people would use. I think you need to choose very very carefully as there is some possibility that you could trigger someone by asking them to look deeply at their own thoughts and feelings if they are struggling with depression or anxiety.

**Jennifer Shikes Haines:** I absolutely think they're appropriate as they can reduce stress. I might start with guided imagery. I like Nilisha's ideas about affirmations. Gratitudes and sharing of gratitudes might be good as well. I think I'd also want a co-facilitator who worked consistently with this population.

**Bunty Cumberpants:** This is an interesting case study and I'm not sure that I have the answer. We have a centre for Mindfulness Based-Cognitive Therapy here in Oxford and it has proven incredibly helpful for those with anxiety and depression, but I read some research recently about exercising caution in this area, as some people are really struggling with this practice around their depression. <http://oxfordmindfulness.org/>

**Elis Motta:** Nilisha, you are so right! Writing activities can be very powerful - and the great thing about them is confidentiality. You can have amazing writing activities in which participants never have to share their writings with anyone if they don't want to. Following the same logic, drawing can also be useful. Yes, Jennifer - a co-facilitator with experience with this population!!

**Bunty:** As Katie says I would be concerned about choice of activity because of triggers for people

**Katie:** Yes I agree Bunty - proceed with caution. For those that show an interest and are at a point where they just don't want to keep having certain thoughts, it could be fantastic, but I would really feel my way to see if it was right for a particular group.

**Mariko Ihara:** my instinct is anything that brings laughter and fun in..a ball passing, or funny-face-making stand-off..

**Kimi King:** this is an article which cautions around it....AND To me it's all about the container -- being able to hold what comes up as a practitioner/facilitator. Also its ok to feel uncomfortable, people forget that, again its about being able to hold what comes up...

**Bunty:** Thanks for posting that up Kimi - I have just read Tim Park's book - Teach Us to Sit Still and this looks like an interesting article

**Nilisha:** Elis, I completely agree with you. Writing is cathartic in more ways that we know! I would even try Metta Meditation for this workshop. I personally haven't practiced Metta, but I have often seen sharings of friends who have. Unless I am totally off the mark, I think metta involves writing affirmations as well.

**Matthew Spears:** Given the shame about anxiety and depression, it could work so long as it's made clear it's about connection, not about calming the mind or peace. It would have to be balanced with expression of one's state in some way. There's nothing worse than connecting with a disturbed internal state and then feeling unsafe to be in that state in a group, or that there's no outlet. I wouldn't have it as a beginning exercise, either. Part of letting go of shame is finding connection with others in those states.

**Nadia:** Okay good people, we are at the end of our scheduled 90 minute session. This has been a very lively discussion! Thank you for your wisdom, experience, compassion and all that you do to bring your authenticity and care to your work in the world. Katie Jackson will soon post the transcript, and this page stays open if you would like to add anything to any of the posts. We are seeking new topics for the upcoming sessions. Do send any ideas you have to [katie@pyeglobal.org](mailto:katie@pyeglobal.org) or post them here. If you enjoyed today's s