

How to Maximize the Effects of Mindfulness Counseling

Mindfulness is increasingly favored in therapeutic settings for its many benefits extending beyond traditional talk therapy. Mindfulness counseling trains your brain to exist freely in the present moment, releasing judgements and distractions.

Mindfulness counseling can help cultivate a sense of heightened awareness, through meditation, mindful breathing or walking, and body scans, or "check-ins," of physical reactions to a stressful event. At [private client], mindfulness features prominently in our offerings including dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), acceptance and commitment therapy, and relaxation training.

What is Mindfulness Counseling?

Mindfulness dates back nearly 3,000 years to ancient Eastern philosophy and Zen Buddhism. The concept of mindfulness was developed and adapted to Western culture in 1979 by University of Massachusetts professor Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues. Kabat-Zinn is often referred to as the founder of mindfulness as we know it today.

Mindfulness meditation can increase positive and decrease negative thoughts and feelings. By heightening your awareness of your own feelings in the moment, mindfulness counseling and training helps you minimize anxiety-inducing distractions and regulate emotions appropriately. Developing mindfulness as a skill can positively shift the way your brain processes information.

Mindfulness embodies the following core principles:

- Patience
- Trust
- Beginner's Mind
- Non-Striving
- Acceptance
- Non-Judging
- Letting Go

In contemporary psychology, therapists continue to study this innovative therapy and its many benefits. UCLA mindfulness research has helped bring global awareness to this and other CBT modalities. Therapists increasingly use contemporary applications of mindfulness counseling independently and alongside other CBT and DBT techniques to treat diverse conditions and disorders.

The following are just some of the many benefits of a healthy mindfulness practice:

- **Reduced Rumination:** Studies show patients who learn mindfulness techniques experience a lower frequency of ruminating thoughts, a higher attention span, and a lower rate of depression, overall.
- **Less Stress:** Stress reduction is a major component of mindfulness meditation, helping patients to minimize depression, anxiety, and somatic symptom disorder.

- **Working Memory Boost:** Extended studies show patients practicing mindfulness demonstrated a better working memory capacity over time when exposed to a stressful event than non meditating patients, who experienced diminished memory capacity under the same controls.
- **Increased Focus:** Patients who practice mindful meditation demonstrate the ability to focus and hold their attention for longer periods than non meditating patients.
- **Reduced Emotional Reactivity:** A core skill of consistent mindfulness practice, emotional regulation and reactivity is known to improve significantly over time.
- **Improved Cognitive Flexibility:** This includes the ability to see an upsetting situation from a more positive perspective and recover more quickly from emotional provocation.
- **Improved Relationships:** Mindfulness training helps patients manage stressful events in their relationship more effectively and more clearly communicate their needs and goals.
- **Enhanced Pre-frontal Lobe Functions:** Studies show patients who practice mindful meditation experience high-functioning intuition, morality, fear-modulation, and insight.
- **Increased Immune Function:** When patients develop a healthier psychological state of being through mindfulness, increased physical benefits can follow.
- **Reduced Psychological Distress:** Patients who learn mindful meditation report a higher sense of well-being and lower instances of psychological distress, overall.
- **Increased Information Processing Speeds:** Mindfulness can help patients lessen the time it takes to perform simple tasks and reduce distractions that can impact processing times.

Who Should Practice Mindfulness?

Mindfulness can serve everyone, from those experiencing mild psychological conditions to people suffering from severe behavioral disorders. Therapists may engage adult or minor patients in a course of treatment focused on mindfulness meditation for a variety of cases recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

Psychologists commonly use mindfulness in treating conditions including:

- Depression
 - Treatment-resistant depression
 - Depression resulting from a medical illness, injury, or procedure
- Anxiety Disorders
- Bipolar Disorder
- Anger Management
- ADHD
- Insomnia
- Rumination
- Substance Abuse
- Stress Disorders
- Phobias

Studies show mindfulness benefits extend well beyond the walls of your therapist's office. Children as young as toddlers can learn mindfulness meditation techniques to get a jump on

emotional regulation and understanding the mind-body connection. Mindfulness and mindful meditation are offered in some progressive K-12 and post-secondary schools.

Some employers also offer mindfulness training through professional development programs. Mindfulness can potentially enable educators, executives, and administrators to lead more effectively in their respective career by enhancing their own emotional well-being and perspective-taking abilities in the classroom, conference room, or office.

Is Mindfulness More Effective Than Regular Talk Therapy?

Mindfulness counseling is often used in conjunction with, rather than in place of, other cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and DBT modalities. Traditional talk therapy can only go so far in shifting a patient's emotional response, whereas mindfulness training with CBT engages patients on a deeper level in their own recovery and supports sustainable, long-lasting results.

Specifically, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) encourages patients to non-judgmentally recognize their thoughts and feelings in the present moment. MBCT employs techniques including meditation, yoga, stretching, and body "scans" to direct one's focus to their body-mind connection and ground them in their feelings, where they stand.

Mindfulness is also widely proven to help therapists deliver better care to their patients. Practitioners with their own mindful meditation routine are not only better equipped to manage their own stress but more tuned in to the needs of their patients in the here and now. The following are just some of the many ways mindfulness helps mental health practitioners:

- Enhance emotional depth
- Practice mindful and active listening
- Preach and practice non-judgement
- Cultivate self-love and self-compassion
- Build awareness of the mind-body connection
- Encourage patients to "just *be*"

Mindfulness Counseling at [Private Client]

Mindfulness counseling at [private client] is designed to instill healthy habits and improve your overall well-being. Our therapists employ techniques like meditation and body scans to increase a patient's self-awareness and focusing skills. By learning to hone in on your feelings in the moment, you can remain calm in any situation.

Our therapists can also determine the best course of treatment for your individual symptoms. We often utilize MBCT methods or use therapies including CBT and group DBT in combination or succession, depending on your presenting mental health condition. We look for ways to share our expertise in mindfulness training with patients in an effort to help improve their daily routine.

[private client] offers a variety of dynamic therapies aimed at minimizing specific symptoms of conditions like depression, anxiety disorders, and OCD. Within the realm of CBT, we offer targeted treatments including cognitive restructuring and cognitive reappraisal, behavioral

activation, and exposure therapy. We often focus on anger management, relaxation, and emotional regulation skills through MBCT.

Whether you suffer from debilitating mental health issues or are simply curious about the benefits of mindfulness and meditation, the experts at [private client] can help. Contact us today to schedule an appointment.

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Making the Connection: Maladaptive Daydreaming and OCD

Maladaptive daydreaming is a psychological condition first identified as recently as 2002. Characterized by excessive and obsessive fantasy activity, maladaptive daydreaming is aligned with behavioral addiction disorders and comes with extremely high comorbidity rates, with the vast majority of patients meeting the criteria for at least three additional diagnoses.

Specifically, maladaptive daydreaming occurs most frequently with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and/or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Diverse studies over the past two decades show a marked improvement or resolution of maladaptive daydreaming symptoms through cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and mental health services focused on mindfulness.

What is Maladaptive Daydreaming?

In 2002, Dr. Eli Somer, Ph.D. introduced maladaptive daydreaming to the psychiatric community as "extensive fantasy activity that replaces human interaction and/or interferes with academic, interpersonal, or vocational functioning." Maladaptive daydreaming often occurs alongside other conditions, most frequently OCD and ADHD, which has led some therapists to question its unique diagnostic qualifiers. As yet, maladaptive daydreaming is not recognized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

The prefix "mal-" rightly suggests maladaptive daydreaming is inherently negative, much like malware is bad for your computer and malnutrition is critically dangerous to the state of your health. Occasional mind-wandering or daydreaming is not necessarily worrisome and may actually help your mind "let go" and relax. The purpose of intermittent daydreams for most people is high-level escapism through stream-of-consciousness, mundane, wandering thoughts.

By contrast, maladaptive daydreaming can become uncontrollable and take over your life. People may begin to seek escape after a traumatic event through frequent, intense, and all-consuming daydreaming sessions. They may lose hours at a time fully immersed in their fantasies, to the detriment of their family, colleagues, and social circle. Maladaptive daydreaming becomes top priority over daily work, school, or parenting responsibilities.

Like any mental disorder with a high comorbidity rate of anxiety, stress, or depression, maladaptive daydreaming can sometimes prove tricky to diagnose. A dual-diagnosis of alcohol or substance addiction disorders with maladaptive daydreaming is not uncommon. Symptoms may appear as intermittent daydreaming before gradually intensifying into disruptive obsessions over time, especially following a recent trauma or psychologically disorienting event.

Recognizing Maladaptive Daydreaming

The following symptoms are common among people experiencing maladaptive daydreaming:

- Difficulty focusing and/or concentrating on "real life" activities in the moment
- Involuntary movements, talking, or facial expressions (such as when sleeping or whispering along to a daydream)
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- An obsessive desire to daydream
- Anger or agitation when someone or something interrupts a daydream
- Daydreams triggered by real-life events or people
- Highly realistic daydreams that include well-developed plots, characters, and settings

Is Maladaptive Dreaming A Type of OCD?

Some therapists think so, which perhaps contributes to the exclusion of maladaptive dreaming as an independent condition in the DSM and limited research in the psychology community around this disorder. Maladaptive daydreaming is viewed by some in the psychology community as an obsessive expression of a subtype of OCD.

Obsessive compulsive disorder consists of three primary aspects: obsessions, emotions, and compulsions. People may experience any combination of each of these aspects at varying levels of frequency and intensity. Within this range of symptomatic expression, there are five subtypes of OCD:

- Contamination obsessions/cleaning compulsions
- Harm obsessions/cleaning compulsions
- Hoarding
- Symmetry obsessions/ordering compulsions
- Obsessions without compulsions

The obsessive nature of maladaptive daydreaming overlaps many other characteristics of OCD. People suffering from OCD obsessions cannot control the repetitive cycle of intrusive, often disturbing or distressing thoughts in their mind. Maladaptive daydreamers may experience such intense, engrossing fantasies that this process negatively impacts their day-to-day reality.

The emotional response to OCD obsession can cause intense stress and anxiety. While not all patients experiencing OCD receive a dual diagnosis of anxiety, depression, or ADHD, these symptoms are common among people who struggle to ensure the rigors of daily life under the stigma of OCD. The lack of sleep that commonly affects maladaptive daydreamers can also contribute to weakened defenses when it comes to emotional response.

Obsessions drive compulsive behavior in someone suffering from OCD. Compulsions might manifest in physical actions like repetitive "checking" or cleaning, or mentally, like repeating the same word or phrase to yourself in your head or counting the same sequence of numbers over

and over. Maladaptive daydreamers often cannot control the compulsion to go over every detail of a story repeatedly in their head for hours at a time.

Common Symptoms of Compulsive OCD behavior

Some people may recognize symptoms of maladaptive daydreaming alongside behaviors commonly associated with OCD, even though they may not have been officially diagnosed with either condition yet. The following are some of the most common symptoms of OCD:

- Checking (such as checking if the oven is off or the light switch is down)
- Cleaning/Hand-washing
- Counting
- Arranging/Ordering
- Repetition of words (in your head)
- Hoarding
- "Neutralized" thinking, in an effort to counteract negative thoughts

Studies show especially high efficacy rates for CBT in treating anxiety disorders and OCD. At [private client] we treat many clients through techniques including cognitive restructuring and cognitive appraisal, behavioral activation, exposure therapy, and mindfulness therapies.

CBT is also highly regarded among psychologists as a reliable and effective treatment for maladaptive daydreaming. Many of our clients seek treatment for symptoms or behaviors that intersect OCD and maladaptive daydreaming, such as intrusive thoughts, rumination (constant, repetitive thoughts, typically negative in nature), and compulsions.

Treating Maladaptive Daydreaming With CBT

CBT engages patients in their own treatment and recovery. This therapy enables patients to re-train their minds to react more reasonably to situations that can trigger their maladaptive daydreaming. Our therapists at [private client] can access a wide variety of treatment options including exposure therapy, mindfulness, and emotion regulation.

An emerging technique increasingly used with talk therapy, mindfulness can help patients suffering from maladaptive daydreaming get back on track. If maladaptive daydreaming seeks to effectively isolate patients from reality, mindfulness counteracts the compulsion to mentally "escape" and instead engages patients on a profound personal level.

We also utilize exposure therapy techniques to treat maladaptive daydreaming and comorbid disorders and conditions. Exposure therapy is highly regarded among psychologists and CBT specialists for its efficacy in treating anxiety and behavioral disorders. At [private client] we routinely employ exposure therapy as part of our CBT treatment plans.

Exposure therapy may include in vivo (real-life contact) or imaginal (imagined fear-inducing situations) exposure. Our therapists work with patients to develop a fear hierarchy, ranking their least-to-most-fear-inducing activities. Through a gradual, stepwise approach, patients confront their fears and come to understand their fear actually holds very little power over their agency.

CBT is goal-oriented and intended for a limited treatment period with your therapist; however, [private client] specializes in providing support through CBT to apply in your everyday life even after you have met your initial treatment goals. CBT and mindfulness therapies are widely customizable and adaptable by design.

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Playing Favorites or Better Together: CBT vs. DBT Treatment

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) are both therapeutic techniques proven highly effective in treating complex mental conditions including anxiety, depression, and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). The issue of CBT vs. DBT is personal and depends on a patient's particular diagnosis, symptoms, and treatment goals.

CBT vs. DBT: Similar but Different

Both modalities are based on the same high-level principles of talk therapy but with distinct underlying approaches to treatment. CBT focuses on conscious behavior modification while DBT helps patients accept and regulate especially intense emotions.

CBT	DBT
Short-term, goal-oriented	Long-term, process-oriented
Anxiety; depression; substance abuse	Borderline personality disorder; suicidal tendencies
Identifies and redirects unhealthy thoughts and behaviors	Accepts the reality of mental challenges + distress tolerance and emotion regulation

Understanding CBT

Cognitive behavioral therapy is aimed at problem-solving and focuses on a primary goal, such as reducing anxiety or depression, or minimizing OCD symptoms. CBT differs from traditional talk therapy in that it utilizes mindfulness and behavior modification techniques to manage mental health challenges affecting your daily life, in the present moment.

CBT helps you to identify the connection between certain feelings and behaviors, and replace unhealthy thinking patterns with a more beneficial response. CBT dives deep, helping patients to get to the root of their pathological thinking and/or irrational behavior. This treatment is popular in its ability to utilize both cognitive and behavioral assessment and reorganizing techniques.

Unpacking DBT

DBT helps patients to accept and regulate their emotions, with a focus on improving interpersonal relationships. DBT is still based on core CBT principles but emphasizes mindfulness as a coping strategy. The fundamental concept of dialectics in DBT guides patients toward accepting their reality but improving their distress management skills wherever they can.

DBT comprises four main principles:

- Mindfulness
- Interpersonal effectiveness
- Emotional regulation
- Distress tolerance

DBT often targets a more complex psychological issue or dual diagnosis and is therefore a longer process than short-term, goal-oriented CBT. DBT explores each of the above areas exhaustively through a multi-faceted therapeutic approach.

Combining CBT and DBT

Therapists may use CBT and DBT in tandem to treat complex mental health conditions. Every patient is different and some may benefit from starting with CBT before deciding with their therapist to either end CBT sessions or try DBT as a next step. Our therapists at [private client] can advise you on the best treatment for your circumstances.

CBT or DBT for Specific Conditions and Disorders

CBT and DBT are both highly regarded as effective therapies for treating a broad scope of psychological conditions. Therapists often apply CBT in the treatment of common phobias, OCD, and post-traumatic stress disorder, while DBT is especially effective in more severe cases of self-harm, chronic suicidal ideation, and borderline personality disorder.

Conditions commonly treated by CBT include:

Anxiety (intense symptoms may also be treated with DBT)

Depression (intense symptoms may also be treated with DBT)

OCD

PTSD

ADHD

Bulimia

Substance abuse

DBT may better serve patients with one or more of the following conditions:

Suicidal ideations

Self-harm tendencies

Borderline personality disorder

Compound diagnoses

History of abusive relationships

How to Choose Between CBT and DBT

Reaching out to the specialists at [private client] is the first step toward taking control of your mental health. Whether you are experiencing the early onset of symptoms or increasing disruptions to your day-to-day routine over an extended period, CBT can offer relief for even the most debilitating mental disorders.

Our therapists will develop a customized course of treatment tailored to your needs. Upon meeting your therapist and exploring your options, you may decide to pursue CBT or DBT depending on your experience and the severity of your symptoms. Within the parameters of CBT or DBT treatment, our therapists can employ a variety of modalities to offer support.

What to Expect

At [private client], we support a variety of highly effective treatment options. We work collaboratively with each patient to customize a course of treatment that supports achievable results. We commonly employ techniques within the framework of CBT including exposure therapy, mindfulness, and cognitive restructuring and cognitive appraisal.

CBT at [Private Client]

CBT sessions require intensive patient participation, activating a heightened sense of awareness or mindfulness around their existing behavior in order to unlearn unwanted reactions and feelings. Our therapists at [private client] engage with patients one-on-one and enable the patient to help guide the pace of their progress.

Formal CBT with your therapist is intended to be brief but the impact can be lifelong. Since this therapy is goal-oriented, you will discuss with your therapist how to proceed once you reach the natural conclusion of your structured therapy sessions. CBT typically includes self-development "homework" between sessions to help patients see results as quickly as possible.

Our therapists can help you unlearn and reorganize distressing thought patterns to move toward a better quality of life. Therapists commonly treat anxiety and phobias using exposure therapy, which gradually increases your controlled exposure to a fearful event or entity to diminish its power. Our therapists also regularly practice CBT techniques including behavior activation and CBASP for chronic depression and other hard-to-treat conditions and disorders.

DBT at [Private Client]

Our therapists offer DBT group sessions for conditions considered more challenging to alleviate through time-limited CBT. DBT at [private client] has proven especially effective in cases of impulse control issues, substance use issues, and severe anxiety, depression, or compulsivity.

Our DBT group sessions develop regulating and coping skills through an informal "curriculum." Each cohort group explores the core science and psychological principles around their individual conditions in an effort to nonjudgmentally learn acceptance and tolerance. [private client] focuses on increasing your overall well-being through DBT.

This therapy begins with the primary tenant of DBT: mindfulness. Once patients grasp the concept of mindfulness they can explore the other key principles of DBT: distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness skills. DBT is a long-term process designed to prepare you to master better regulatory skills for managing your emotions throughout your life. Contact [private client] today to explore CBT or DBT options.