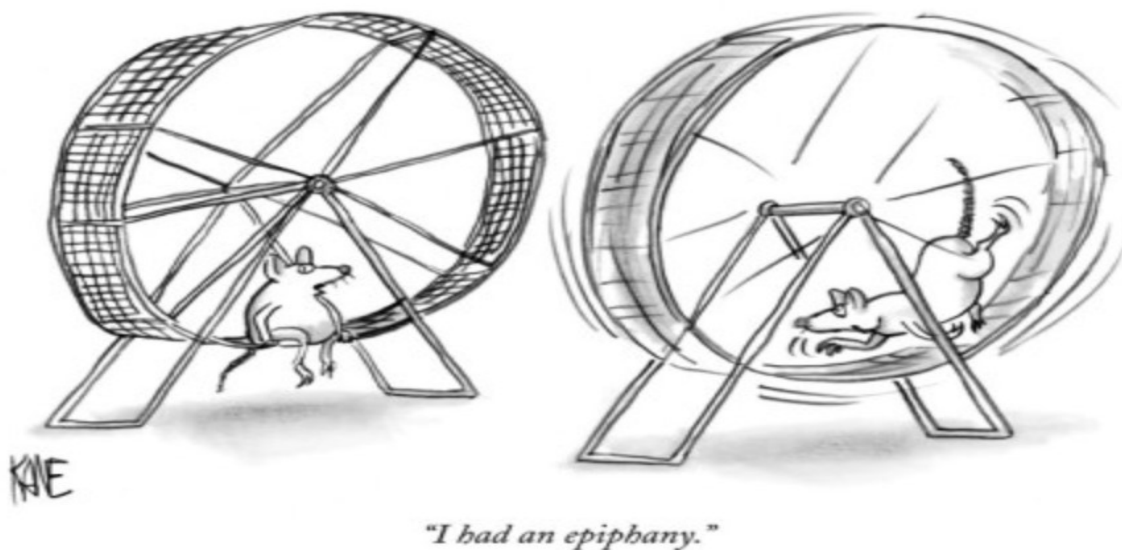


Pocket sized Mindfulness for People Who Care – Week 2 Handout

***'If your mind isn't clouded by unnecessary things,
this is the best season of your life'***

WU-MEN



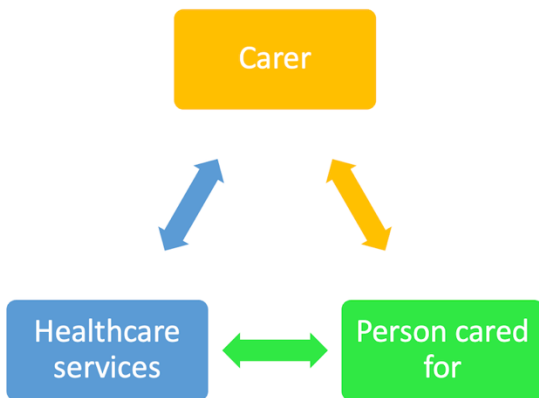
Everybody who attends these classes has made an enormous commitment, to attend the classes in the first place, to make time for and complete the home practice. This session is about exploring the thoughts and feelings that may have come up during the first week of practice, along with any barriers that may have prevented you from doing some or all of the homework.

These barriers can be practical, physical, emotional or social. Their arising allows us to see them through the lens of mindfulness. Is this a barrier that I need to *do* something about? Or is it a thought or feeling that I could observe and let go?

What thoughts or feelings came up for me about taking time to do the practice for myself? Were the barriers real or imagined?

'Compassion for others begins with kindness to ourselves.' – Pema Chödrön

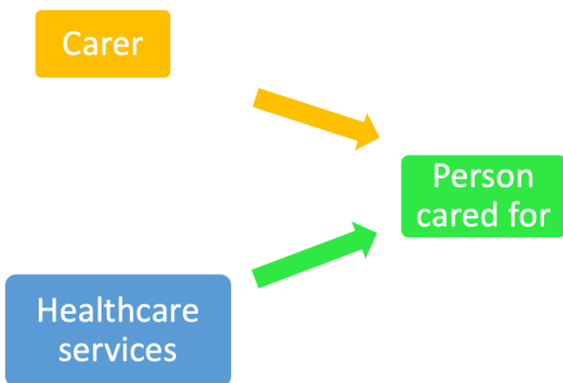
The Triangle of Care



Caring for loved ones is an important and a challenging role.

Carers play an important role in our society, creating many social and economic benefits for themselves, the people they care for and the whole community.

Healthcare services recognises the importance and value of carers and are making a commitment to ensure carers are identified, included and supported.



When we care for others in our daily lives, we can often forget our own physical and emotional well-being. This can have an adverse impact on ourselves as carers and the person we are caring for.

How can Mindfulness help people who care?

1. Mindfulness can help reduce your stress and anxiety in you and the person you are caring for.

Reduced stress and increased feelings of calm are what we would all like to experience, and less stress is associated with improved mental and physical health. But feeling more calm can also help the person you are caring for. When calmer, you are able to manage situations and interactions more thoughtfully, taking a moment to stop, be present and choose how to respond, rather than reacting immediately in a way you may later regret. Feeling calmer can also be contagious. We have all experienced being with someone who is very anxious and how that can leave us feeling unsettled too. In the same way, if you are feeling calmer the person you are caring for will notice this and may be calmed by it as well.

2. Mindfulness increases concentration and reduces the likelihood of making mistakes.

As a caregiver you are probably an expert in multi-tasking, but sometimes doing too many things at once means that tasks take even longer. It's also proven that multi-tasking is cognitively tiring. Mindfulness helps you to focus your attention on one thing at a time, reducing fatigue. It also reduces the likelihood of error as you are a lot less likely to make mistakes if you have all our attention on the task at hand.

3. Mindfulness supports better self-care.

Many of us spend a lot of time dwelling on negative thoughts about past events that we can't change and worrying about future events that haven't happened yet. Mindfulness helps to interrupt those looping thoughts and helps us see the difference between our thoughts and what is actually happening right now.

Being more aware of our present moment experience also helps with self-care, something that caregivers often overlook. With a mindfulness practice you can notice sooner when you feel tired, or are having an emotional experience, and make sure you stop and look after yourself.

4. Mindfulness can improve relationships.

The practice of mindfulness can help us develop a deeper understanding of our own emotions as carers and also the ones we are caring for, leading to improved relationships and more effective care giving.

The Breath as an Anchor

The present is the only time that any of us have to be alive – to know anything – to perceive – to learn – to act – to change – to heal.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, 'Full Catastrophe Living', Piatkus: London, 1996

Why the breath?

Firstly, the breath is probably something that you take for granted despite the fact that you cannot live without it. You can live without food for weeks, without water for days, but you cannot survive without the nourishment that the breath provides for more than a few tens of seconds. The breath really is life.

Secondly, there is an important way in which the breath does not need us to make it happen, The breath breathes itself. If it was up to us to remember to breathe, we'd have forgotten a long time ago. So turning in to the breath can be an important antidote to the natural tendency towards believing that we have to be in control. Attending to the breath reminds us that at the core of our being, something is happening that depends very little on who we are or what we want to achieve.

Thirdly, the breath provides a natural, gently moving target to focus on in your meditation; it grounds you in the here and now. You cannot take a breath for five minutes ago, or for five minutes time. You can only take a breath for now.

Fourthly, the breath can be a sensitive monitor for your feelings. If you can sense more clearly when the breath is short or long, shallow or deep, rough or smooth, you can begin sensing your own internal weather patterns, and choose whether and how to take skilful action to look after yourself.

Finally, the breath provides an anchor for your attention so that you can see more clearly when your mind has wandered, when it is bored, or restless or when you are fearful or sad. It teaches you how to observe your thoughts and feelings, rather than getting caught up in them.



A THREE-STEP BREATHING SPACE

1 Acknowledging

Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting a dignified posture. Then ask:

'What is going on with me at the moment?'

Notice and acknowledge your experience, instead of turning away. Accept all your experiences in the body, emotions and thoughts, and stay with them for a few moments, allowing any negative feelings or experiences to be present.

2 Gathering

Then gently focus your full attention into the breathing. Experience fully each in-breath and out-breath as they follow one after the other. The breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and to help you tune in to a state of awareness and stillness.

3 Expanding awareness

Expand your awareness around the breathing to the whole body, and the space it takes up, as if your whole body is breathing. Have a sense of the space around you, too. Hold everything in awareness.

This sequence is rather like an hour-glass. Wide focus, followed by narrow focus, followed by wide.

Enough

Enough. These few words are enough
If not these words, this breath.
If not this breath, this sitting here.

This opening to the life
we have refused again
and again until now.
Until now.

David White: Where many rivers meet

