Mindfulness and Meditation In the First Year

Meditation Tools Study for University Students: A Randomized Controlled Trial
(Manuscript in progress)

Objective:
Determine which meditation tools best help students learn to meditate to self-manage stress

Methods:
142 University students participated in a 1 month meditation intervention that consisted of a 1-hour in-person orientation to learn how to meditate, followed by one month daily self-guided meditation (10 minutes per day) using assigned tools. Participants were randomly assigned to practice using either 1) the 10% Happier meditation app, or 2) 10% Happier meditation app plus the Muse EEG-Neurofeedback device.

Results:
Students in both groups showed significant improvements compared to baseline measurements on the following measures:

- stress, anxiety, and depression (DASS-21; and Perceived Stress Scale),
- sleep disturbances (Pittsburgh Sleep Inventory)
- self-esteem
- resilience
- emotion regulation

There were no significant group effects, suggesting that adding the EEG-Neurofeedback tool does not result in measurable improvements beyond those produced by the 10% Happier App.

Conclusion:
A 1-month daily meditation intervention with the 10% Happier App can lead to significant improvements in important mental health indicators in university students.

TAM Grant - Award notifications will be presented on May 29, 2019

- **Grant Objective:** Use technology to improve adolescent mental well-being
- **Project Proposal:** includes a series of studies aiming to develop meditation programs for university classrooms (specifically FYE classes) that 1) teach students how to meditate using the 10% Happier app, 2) assist students in developing a habit of daily meditation and mindfulness, and 3) improve mental wellbeing, self-esteem and emotion regulation.
- **Length:** 1 Year Funding (with option to extend additional year)

What does this mean for FYE instructors?

- New module designed to engage and motivate students in a “30-Day Meditation Challenge"
- Learning objectives of guest lecture include:
  - Review latest scientific findings on mindfulness/meditation from a neurobiological perspective to help motivate students to understand the importance of building skill
  - Illustrate through experiential learning how mindfulness techniques work
  - Address obstacles, pitfalls, and common misconceptions about mindfulness practices.
  - Provide tips and habit change strategies for maximizing benefits of mindfulness in daily life, to improve resilience and mental well-being
- Material includes:
  - 1 Year subscription to 10% Happier Meditation App for students and instructors
  - 1 Day guest lecture with Dr. Acabchuk to introduce module
  - Lesson plan suggestions for homework
  - Ideas to incorporate module into larger course objectives
- **Initial study objectives:**
  - Feasibility, acceptability, adherence
  - Feedback from instructors and students to refine program for later goals, which include:
    - Scalability
    - Effectiveness (improving mental well-being, self-esteem, resilience, emotion regulation)

**Meditation Resource Page:** [https://sharp.uconn.edu/meditation-resources/](https://sharp.uconn.edu/meditation-resources/)
Mindfulness teaches us to tune into our lives, as it unfolds (like the dog, by seeing what is right in front of us), instead of being caught up in our heads (like the person in the image).

Key Elements to Mindfulness

- **Noticing**
  - paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment

- **Curiosity**
  - beginner’s mind – approaching life with a child-like wonder and awe
  - be curious about what you are experiencing right now, in your body, in your surroundings, in this moment
  - what does it feel like to be alive right now? what does it feel like to be you in this moment?

- **Non-judgement**
  - seeing without judgements towards self or others

- **Acceptance**
  - letting go of expectations
  - not striving to do or achieve anything
  - seeing things how they are, which will help you to experience life more fully

- **Kindness, Gratitude, Compassion**

- **Practice**
  - mindfulness is a life skill you can strengthen like a mental muscle
  - training occurs through practice

**Bio:** Dr. Acabchuk, PhD in Physiology and Neurobiology, is an expert meditation instructor (15+years teaching experience), with established connections in the university and community. She works closely with the university Director of Counseling and Mental Health, UConn Kids In Developmental Science and key personnel in First Year Programming, where the 30-Day Challenge will be implemented within the university. Acabchuk won an “Outstanding Service” award for her involvement in First Year Programming from 2013-2016. Dr. Acabchuk’s research focuses on mindfulness interventions and self-regulation mechanisms of health behavior change. She teaches mindfulness classes and workshops for a variety of populations (e.g., recovery groups, workplace, students, athletes) and she has experience conducting randomized controlled trials, including having designed and delivered the initial study upon which this protocol is based, with 142 participants (manuscript in progress). She presented these findings at multiple conferences and is part of the Science of Behavior Change network. Acabchuk is currently conducting a focus group to optimize the program for high school students.

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