



Mindfulness for individuals with ASD

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Overview

- Introduction to Mindfulness
- Why mindfulness for CYP with ASD?
- Challenges of mindfulness
- Evidence base
- Adaptations of mindfulness for ASD



***Paying attention in the present moment in a
non-judgemental and accepting way***

(Kabat-Zinn, 1990)



Introducing mindfulness



‘Attention is like aiming or pointing a torchlight in a particular direction’



The Fly – Hanjin Song

(The Art of Meditation)





Breathing meditation





Mindfulness inquiry in pairs

- *What did you notice during this practice?*
- *Was it enjoyable/neutral/uncomfortable exercise for you?*
- *How could this exercise help you in daily life?*

Mindfulness Interventions



‘Third Wave of cognitive and behavioural therapies’ (Hayes, 2004)

- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
- Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

Mindfulness Interventions



- Experiential learning programmes (8 wk)
- Formal mindfulness practices
(mindful breathing, body scan, sitting, movement and walking meditations)



Mindfulness Interventions



- Informal mindfulness practices
(*mindful awareness to activities of daily living*)

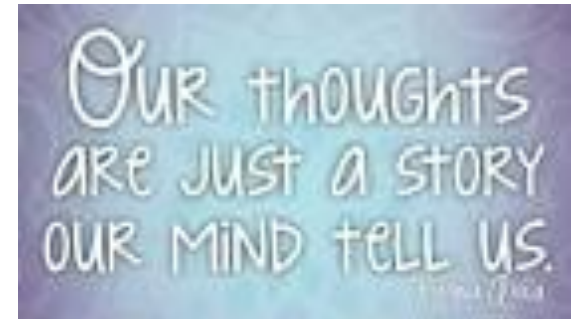


- Discussion of experience (‘Inquiry’)
(*What noticing and interpretation of experience & patterns*)
- Psycho-education
(e.g. mind/body association, stress reactivity, problem-specific)

CBT & MBCT Similarities



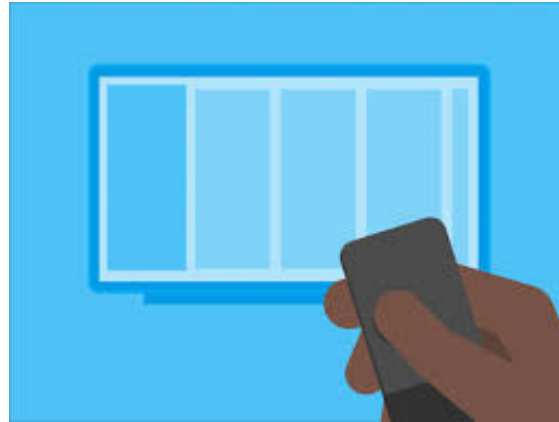
- Awareness of thought patterns & reactions
- Reduce automatic reactions to thoughts, feelings & events
- Short to medium term therapies, incl homework



CBT & MBCT differences



CBT	MBCT
Analytical	Experiential
Target content of thinking	Target relationship with thinking
Mastery & Control of feeling	Acceptance of feelings
Problem specific	Broad intervention



Case study video 1

CBT and Mindfulness



Suitability of Mindfulness for CYP with ASD

Why mindfulness with ASD?



ASD Challenges	Mindfulness approach
Poor awareness of self and others	Increase awareness
Attention difficulties	Increase attentional control (retrieval, shifting, widening)
Internal distractors <i>e.g. own thoughts</i>	Observe thoughts and let them pass, non judgementally



Why mindfulness for ASD?

ASD Challenges	Mindfulness approach
External distractors e.g. sensory	Relating differently to experiences e.g. attitude of beginners mind non judgementally
Emotion regulation – alexithymia and reactivity	Improve awareness of feelings and response>reactivity.
High rates stress	Letting go and responding with awareness



Limitations of CBT with ASD

- Verbal and analytical approach
- Cognitive restructuring
- Limited generalisation of CBT techniques to real life situations

Challenges of mindfulness with ASD



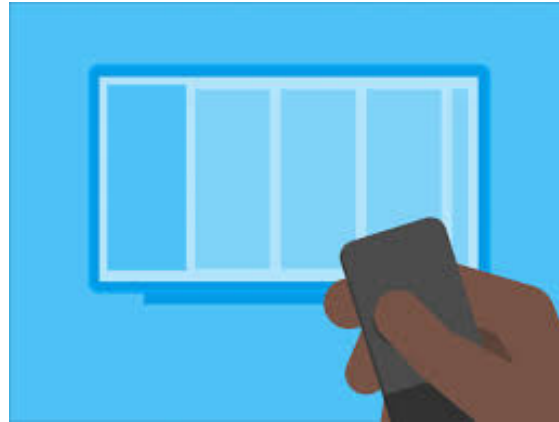
- Hard work' concentrating
- Non compliance with ODD/CD
- Ability to 'feel the body'

(Spek et al., 2013)



Challenges cont.

- Time involved (*Ridderinkhof et al., 2018*)
- Methodological limitations of ASD adaptations (*Sizoo et al., Kuiper, 2017*).
- Not advised if person experiencing upheaval in life, acute psychiatric conditions



Case study video 2

*Challenge of increased
awareness*



Evidence base for mindfulness for CYP with ASD

Meta-analysis of Mindfulness for CYP and Adults with ASD (Hartley et al., 2019)



- 10 independent studies
- CYP + Caregivers (3) / Caregivers (3) / Adult (4) (n=454: CYP = 74; Caregivers = 241; Adults = 139)
- MBSR/MBCT with adaptations for ASD

Meta-analysis of Mindfulness for CYP and Adults with ASD (Hartley et al., 2019)



- Comparison interventions (n=3), wait list controls (n=2)
- Group or individual format, weekly (1.5-2.5hr)
- 5 week – 12 month intervention + home practice



Intervention effectiveness

- Multi-item measure of subjective wellbeing (SWB)
- Consistent short-term benefits in SWB continued at 3 month follow up in all 3 groups

Mindfulness vs other interventions



- Mindfulness > skills based parenting

(Feraoli & Harris, 2013)

- Mindfulness (MBS-AS) = CBT

(Sizoo & Kuiper, 2017)



Moderators

- Children < Adults ST benefits of mindfulness
- Caregiver involvement may increase child's responsiveness



Moderators

- ? *Specific aspects of SWB that benefit from mindfulness*
- ? *Gender (Male > female e.g. Bluth et al., 2017)*
- ? Critical differences in MBSR/MBCT, gains in caregivers SWB on child SWB, ASD symptom severity or comorbidity



Evidence base for CYP

My Mind (Bruin et al., 2015; Ridderinkhof et al., 2018)

- Improvement in QOL and wellbeing, emotional and behavioural functioning, attention, rumination.
- Decrease in social communication problems
- No change in mindful awareness or worry

Parent meditated child mindfulness training



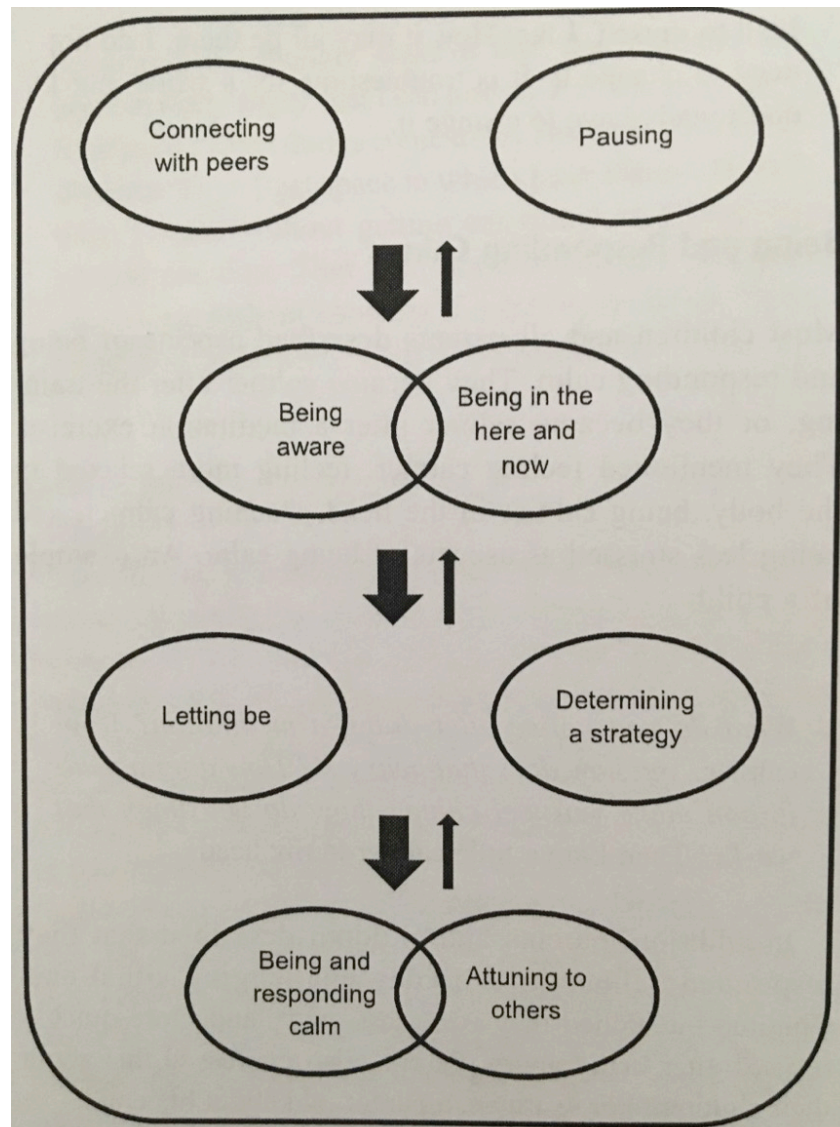
- Reduction in problem behaviour, anxiety, aggression, thought problems, rule breaking (Hwang et al., 2015)
- Reduction in physical aggression (e.g. Singh et al.; 2006; 2011 – Soles of the Feet program)



Mindfulness with caregivers

- Increase in QOL, wellbeing, emotional and behavioural functioning
- Decrease in parenting stress
- Increase in mindful awareness, mindful parenting skills and self-compassion.

(De Bruin et al., 2015; Ridderinkhof et al., 2018; Ferraioli & Harris, 2013; Neece, 2014)



Change processes

(Ridderinkhof et al., 2018)

Summary of evidence base with CYP



- CYP with ASD and their carers could benefit from mindfulness-based programs
- Indication of social acceptability
- Methodological limitations

Summary of evidence base with CYP



- Directions of future research
 - RCT: Active control group
 - Qualitative feedback
 - Individual vs group format
 - Treatment fidelity measure
 - Mechanisms of change?



Adapting mindfulness for individuals with ASD

ASD Mindfulness adaptations



- Variation in format, contact hours and intervention elements
- Caregiver involvement in all studies with CYP

Cachia et al., 2015

ASD Mindfulness adaptations



- Group & Individual
- Common elements *e.g. working with anger/rumination*
- Application of mindfulness in everyday life





Screening

- Intake interview with child and parent together/separate
- Practice meditation and show room
- ODD – ask child to wait in room for 3 minutes without disrupting discussion between trainer – parent (give table, drawing & toy)



Programme structure

P

Contents MYmind program

Session 1: WHAT IS ATTENTION?

Session 2: ATTENTION FOR THE BODY

Session 3: ATTENTION FOR THE BREATH

Session 4: ATTENTION FOR STRESS

Session 5: ATTENTION FOR EXTERNAL DISTRACTORS

Session 6: ATTENTION FOR INTERNAL DISCTRACTORS

Session 7: ATTENTION FOR FEELINGS (OF ONESELF/OTHER)

Session 8: ATTENTION FOR CHANGES

Session 9: ATTENTION FOR MINDFULNESS AFTER TRAINING

Session 10: BOOSTER SESSION (9 weeks after the training)

Session Structure



Sequence/structure of each session

1. Breathing meditation (sometimes also body meditation)	10 min.
2. Review last week's home practices	10 min.
3. Introduction of today's theme (experience theory and theme through games)	25 min.
4. Short (semi-structured) break	5 min.
5. A (new) type of meditation	15 min.
6. Yoga	10 min
7. Review next week's home practices	10 min.
8. Breathing meditation (or breathing space)	5 min.



Mindful parenting group

- MBSR + Mindful Parenting training (Bogels & Restifo, 2014)
- Same themes and joint sessions with CYP to promote a shared experience
- ASD adaptations: *1) increase understanding of child's experience 2) parenting themes 3) suitable for parent with ASD.*



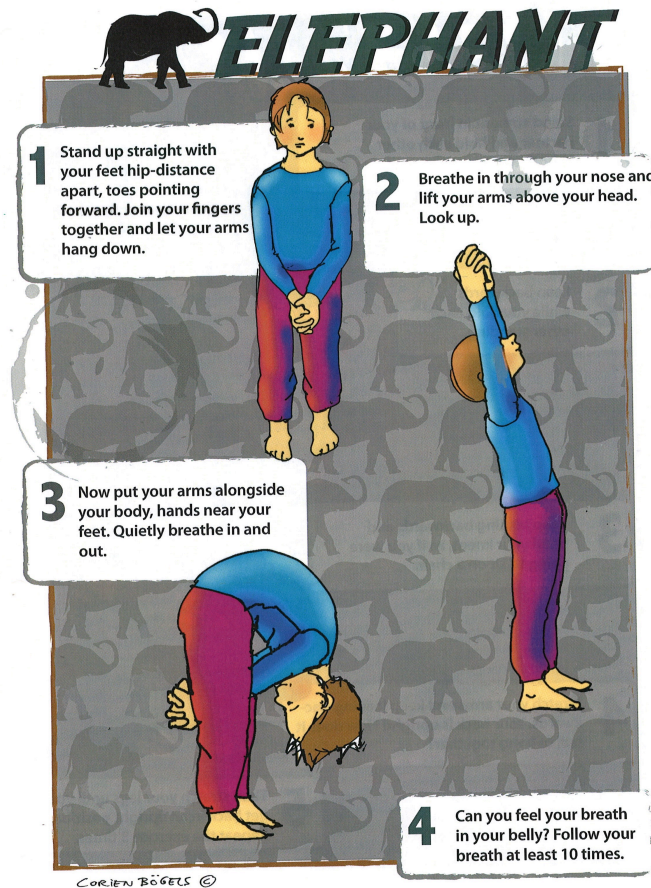
ASD friendly environment

- Minimal distraction in training room
- Quiet place in room (optional)
- Sameness – *e.g. room set up, structure of session, name of sessions, meditation scripts.*

ASD friendly environment



- Visual aids
- Co-trainer support





ASD meditations

- Shorter, fewer words
- Remove abstract language e.g. *not 'feel your feet...but bring your attention to your feet'.*





ASD meditations

- Trainers voice on CD (or forewarn them)

- Keep to script



- Increased movement practices (e.g. yoga)



Yoga practices

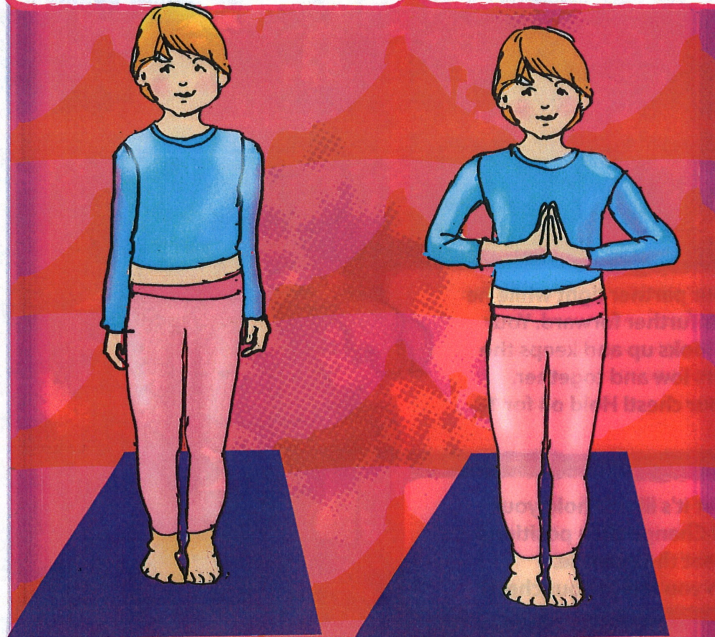
- Weekly yoga in session and at home
- Presented in 2nd half of session to ‘reconnect with the body’ and help to maintain focus
- Special yoga pictures (visual aid and structure)



MOUNTAIN

1 Stand up straight, feet hip-width apart and toes pointing forward. Wiggle your toes a bit and feel how the feet and toes are firmly connected to the ground. Gaze forward, lift your chest, relax, and lower your shoulders.

2 Bring your hands towards your chest and press your palms together. Breathe normally, in and out. How do you feel? Keep this pose for 30 seconds.

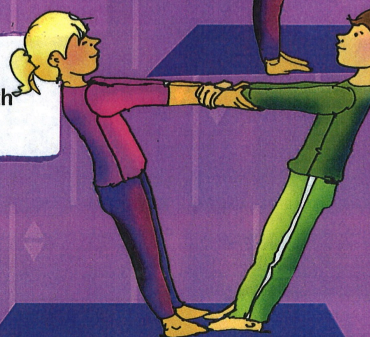


ELEVATOR

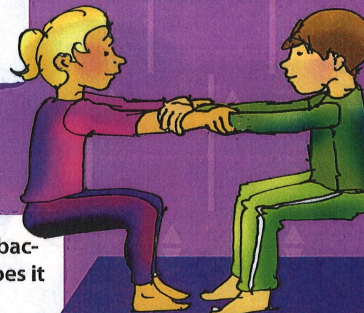
1 Stand straight in front of your partner and hold each other at both wrists.



2 Lean backwards while you hold each other standing.



3 Keep leaning backwards and bend your knees, as if you were going to sit on a chair.



4 Stretch your arms and keep leaning backwards. Your back is upright! How does it feel to hang together?

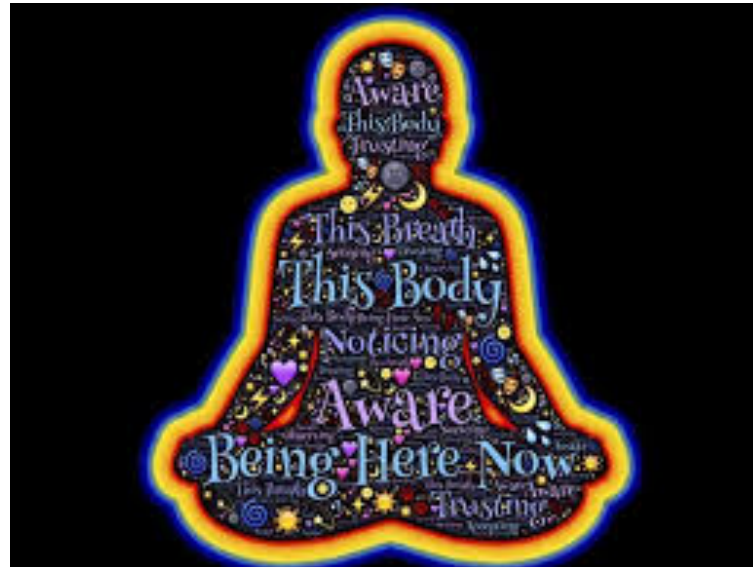
5 Then stretch your legs until you get back in an upright position. Repeat the exercise 3 times.






Inquiry process

- Explicitly explain inquiry process once
- Short inquiries with closed questions
- Discussion of how to apply mindfulness practices





















Home practice

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How did it go with the breathing meditation?

Circle the + if you practiced the meditation and the - if you didn't. Circle the *green face* if you liked the practice, the *yellow face* if the practice was neutral to you, and the *red face* if you didn't like the practice. If you want to note some comments on your experience you can do so in the right-hand column.

Today it's:	Practiced/Did not practice	Liked/neutral/did not like	Comments (why did you like or did you not like it?)
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Psycho-education

- Focuses on ASD challenges: *e.g. internal & external distractors, change, feelings*

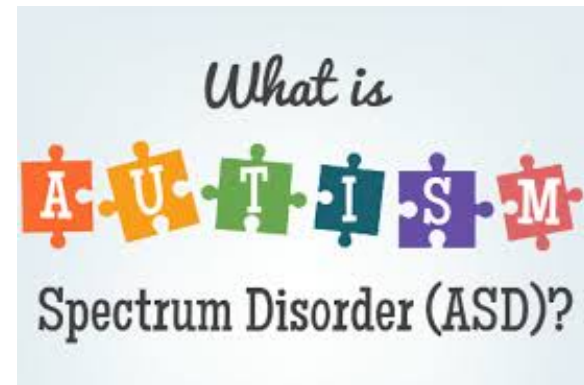


- Concrete experiential exercises to support theory

Psycho-education



ASD awareness



What makes you realise you have ASD? What are your special quirks? Or do you have other stuff? What do you dislike about having ASD? What is great about it? Sometimes you can feel ASD in your body? Can you feel that too? Where?

Experiential exercise:

Visual distraction: zooming in and out



Experiential exercise: *Awareness of Thoughts*



What is going on in your mind?

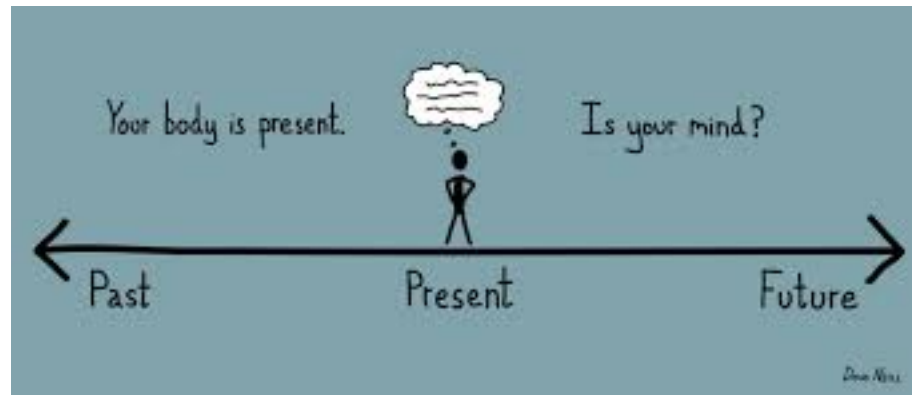


*Write down whatever thoughts enter your mind for
the next two minutes*



Awareness of Thoughts

Indicate next to each thought if it was something in the: *Past (P)*; *Present/Now (N)* *Future (F)*



What did you notice? What thoughts occurred most often?

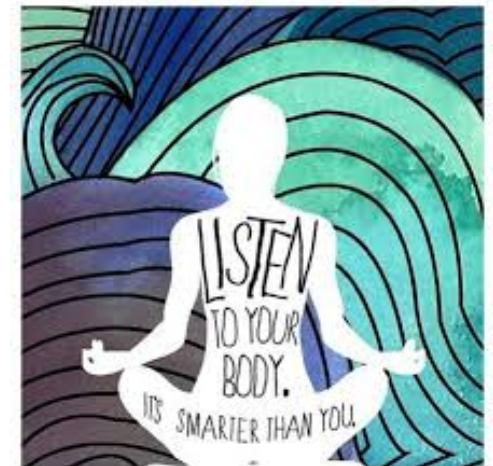
Thought metaphor





Attention to the body

- Connection between mind and body is underdeveloped
- Support to enhance physical sensations
*e.g. materials on the floor with walking meditation;
stretch and release (in body scan)*
- Reconnecting to body through yoga





Attention to feelings

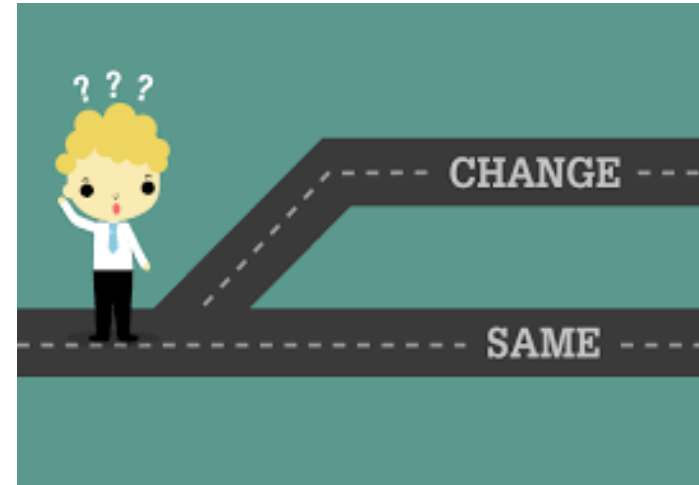
- Relationship and connectivity to other people
- Exercises focus on attention to own feelings, feelings of others and mindful communication with others
- Feelings meditation





Attention to changes

- Trainer makes physical changes in the room
- Notice changes & meditate on effects
- Use breathing space to cope with unexpected events

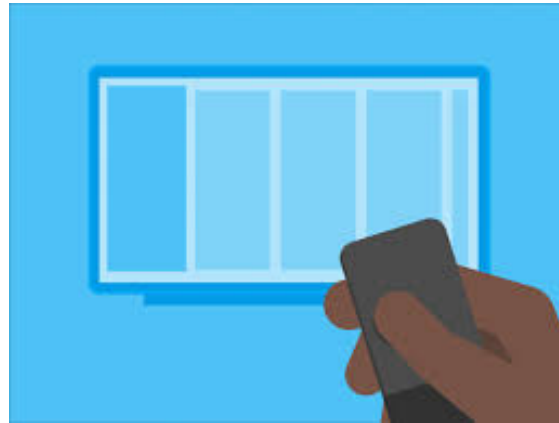




Kindness and acceptance

- Kindness > Compassion (abstract term for ASD)
- Practice how to be kind to oneself in stressful moments
- Friendly voice 'alongside' critical voice





Case Study video 3

*How mindfulness has helped with
relationship towards ASD*



Summary

- Introduction to Mindfulness
- Suitability of mindfulness approach for ASD
- Evidence base for mindfulness
- Adaptations of mindfulness for ASD
- Next steps?

Training & Resources



- <https://bemindful.co.uk>
- <https://www.teach-mindfulness.org>
- <https://bamba.org.uk/teachers/good-practice-guidelines/>
- <https://centrumvoormindfulness.nl/en/teacher-training/teacher-training-mymind-for-youth>