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CONTEXTUAL BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE



Károli Gáspár University
of the Reformed Church in Hungary

Mindfulness and meaning in life

Dr. Nikolett Eisenbeck

Wellness Lunch & Learn session

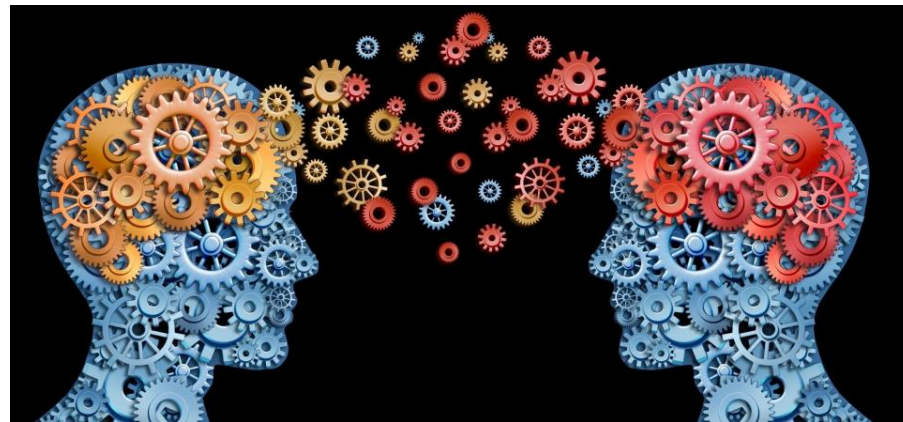
About me

- ▶ Visiting lecturer
- ▶ Researcher, lecturer, counselor working with mindfulness, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and psychodrama



Topics

- ▶ Mindfulness, meaning in life: importance & possible integration
- ▶ Experimental studies about mindfulness, meaning in life and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- ▶ Simple exercises that can be used in your daily life



Human suffering

- ▶ Society tells us a good life is a pain-free life (normal = happy)
- ▶ **If you are not happy, there is something wrong with you**
- ▶ If you cannot control your unhappy feelings, you haven't tried hard enough



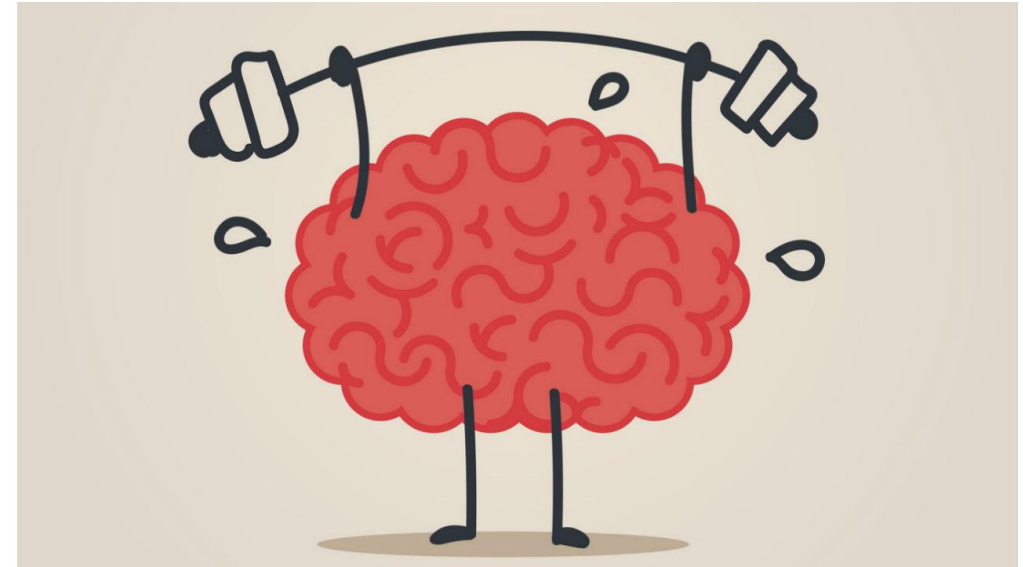
Human suffering is general



- ▶ Antidepressants most prescribed drugs in the US (CDC)
- ▶ 1 in 3 people develop a psychiatric disorder in their lifetime (28-44% chance) (Kessler et al., 2004)
- ▶ 40% will think about suicide (Chiles & Strosahl, 2005)

What is normal?

- ▶ We have psychological suffering not in spite of our human condition, but because of it
- ▶ Our mind has evolved to survive, to **solve problems**
 - ▶ Good side: you can incorporate experiences of others
 - ▶ Dark side: constantly searches and evaluates potential dangers



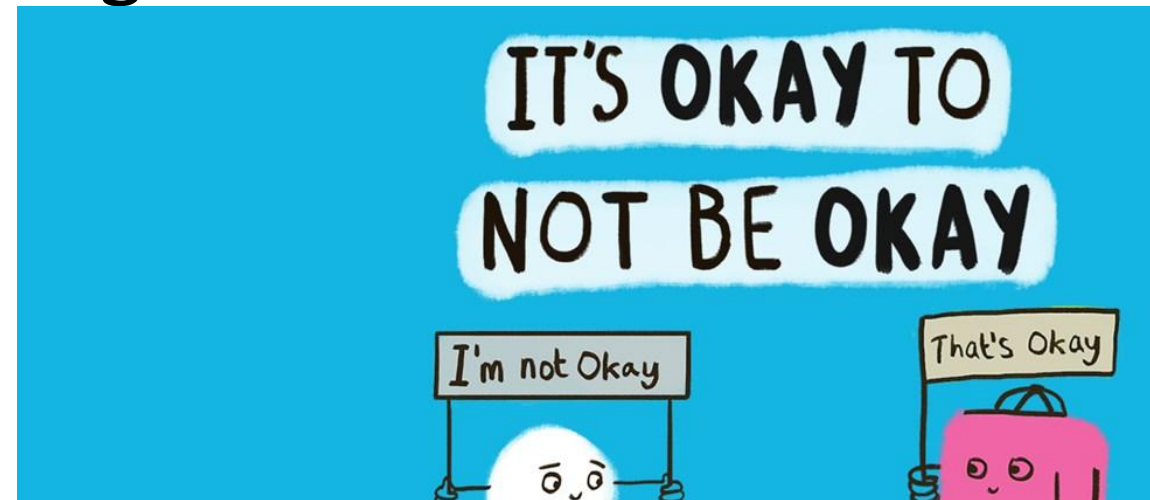
What is normal?

- ▶ Our “normality” is the constant change
- ▶ A good life does not mean that we should feel “happy” all the time
 - ▶ It is a **meaningful life** with all kinds of emotions



Accepting our human nature

- ▶ We always will have unwanted inner experiences
- ▶ Maybe the main problem is not their existence, but the way we treat them
 - ▶ Trying to control them → These attempts lead to a limited life
- ▶ **What if we do not have to eliminate unwanted inner experiences in order to live a fulfilling life?**
 - ▶ Mindfulness
 - ▶ Meaning in life



Mindfulness

- ▶ As a practice: “Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)
- ▶ Many ways
 - ▶ Breathing, body-scan, eating, movement, etc.



Mindfulness



- ▶ It is successful at improving cognitive performance and emotional regulation (e.g., Chiesa, Calati, & Serretti, 2011; Gallant, 2016) Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011; Khoury et al., 2013)

Breathing exercises

- ▶ The focused or mindful breathing exercise (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Segal et al., 2001)
 - ▶ Sit comfortably
 - ▶ Bodily sensations
 - ▶ Breathing
 - ▶ **Re-focus**
- ▶ Eisenbeck et al. (in review)
 - ▶ ‘observing self’; meta-awareness or metacognitive perspective



How can we make it more effective?

- ▶ Mindfulness programs do not teach acceptance skills in isolation
 - ▶ We want the effect of the practice to extrapolate to other life areas of the practitioners → **Values and meaning**
 - ▶ Eisenbeck et al. (in progress)



Meaning in life

**THE
MEANING
OF LIFE
IS _____.**

- ▶ *Existential Psychology:*
Humans **create** their own meaning, rather than finding it in the world around them
- ▶ Meaning = self-transcendence, not only self-actualization
- ▶ Related to well-being and mental health

Meaning in life

- ▶ Sources of meaning
 - ▶ Love
 - ▶ Work
 - ▶ Suffering (Frankl, 1946)
- ▶ PURE model
 - ▶ Purpose, Understanding, Responsible action, Enjoyment/Evaluation (Wong, 2010, 2011)
- ▶ Values vs. goals
- ▶ Clarification & commitment



Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

▶ Acceptance

- ▶ Willingly experience whatever shows up with openness and without judgment (mindfulness)

▶ Commitment

- ▶ Actively moving towards what we truly want in life



Exercises anyone can do

- ▶ Mindfulness
 - ▶ Breathing (e.g., Headspace)
 - ▶ Mindful eating, mindful walking
 - ▶ Five senses exercise
 - ▶ Notice four things
 - ▶ I have a thought...
- ▶ Meaning in life
 - ▶ Gratitude diary
 - ▶ What does my life stand for?
 - ▶ Who do you admire?
 - ▶ Future me
 - ▶ Commit to one small thing

How to Practice Mindfulness

1

Take a seat. Find a place to sit that feels calm and quiet to you.

2

Set a time limit. If you're just beginning, it can help to choose a short time, such as 5 or 10 minutes.

3

Notice your body. You can sit or kneel however is comfortable for you. Just make sure you are stable and in a position, you can stay in for a while.

4

Feel your breath. Follow the sensation of your breath as it goes out and as it goes in.

5

Notice when your mind has wandered. When you get around to noticing this—in a few seconds, a minute, five minutes—simply return your attention to the breath.

6

Be kind to your wandering mind. Don't judge yourself or obsess over the content of the thoughts you find yourself lost in. Just come back.



By Mindful Staff

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Thank you for your attention!

Dr. Nikolett Eisenbeck