

Dublin

9 Week Course on Mindfulness

The Irish ME Trust are facilitating a 9 week course on Mindfulness with course tutor Fidelma Farley. This course will begin on Wednesday 22nd September at 2.30 pm till 4.00 pm at the Dublin Buddhist Centre, James Joyce Street, Dublin 1, and will continue each successive Wednesday thereafter.

Could those wishing to enrol on this course, please contact Fidelma in advance to register, so as she can gauge the numbers. Please text Fidelma prior to 15th September on 087-6834717 or e-mail info@breathworks.ie.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a special kind of awareness that is attentive and warmly engaged with each moment of life, enabling you to be honest and objective about what is happening. This means you can be creative with your experience rather than stuck in the familiar groove of reactive habits. Anyone can learn and practice mindfulness and participants generally find they feel much happier and more in control through incorporating mindfulness into their lives.

Living Well with M.E.: A Mindfulness-based Approach

Living with a long-term health condition such as M.E. can give rise to stress, tension, irritation and depression. While these are perfectly normal and understandable reactions, they are ultimately unhelpful in dealing with a long-term health condition. Mindfulness provides a way to change our relationship to the M.E., by providing a tool kit of resources that help reduce these unhelpful reactions. Some of the benefits of learning and practising Mindfulness include:

- an increased ability to relax and experience calm
- greater confidence in ability to undertake activities
- increased ability to cope effectively with flare-ups or set-backs
- an increased ability to cope more effectively with short and long-term stress
- a decreased tendency to catastrophise (i.e. imagine the worst)

This workshop will provide an introduction to Mindfulness. During the workshop, you will learn about what Mindfulness entails, and you will also learn some Mindfulness skills that you can apply in your life.

Fidelma Farley (MA, PhD) has been practising mindfulness for over five years. Having experienced for herself the transformative effects of practising mindfulness, she trained with Breathworks and now works full-time as a Mindfulness Trainer. She has led mindfulness-based courses and workshops for MS Ireland, for community groups, for carers and for people experiencing pain, illness or stress. She also teaches mindfulness to individuals on a one-to-one basis. People who have benefited from these courses, workshops and one-to-one work have had, e.g., M.E., M.S., back pain, cancer, I.B.S., post-operative pain and fibromyalgia.

Interview with Fidelma Farley

How did you come to be teaching Mindfulness?

I was a lecturer in film studies for 15 years and I was working the last two years in Galway University when my contract came to an end. There were very few jobs out there and at that point I realised that this was the opportunity to explore other things. By this stage my heart wasn't in teaching film and I wanted to find something that I could feel passionate about. I had learnt how to meditate 2 years previously at the Dublin Buddhist Centre, originally to deal with stress, but as time went on, I found that meditation was helping me to work through some very difficult personal issues. Experiencing first hand how Mindful meditation can transform difficult circumstances, I wanted to pass those benefits on to others.

So what kind of training did you do and where?

I trained with Breathworks, a not-for-profit organisation based in the UK who run Mindfulness courses for people with pain, illness and/or stress. The training was very experiential, based primarily on your own practice, with intensive retreats providing guidance on how to teach Mindfulness. After that I assisted on Mindfulness-based courses for people with stress and pain and illness and in the past year I've been teaching my own courses. I really love the work and I especially like to see how people gradually change during the course. By the end of the course most people are sleeping better, are calmer, more relaxed and more open.

How does Mindfulness specifically help people suffering from chronic pain or a long term health condition?

In general, Mindfulness enhances people's ability for self-care, by allowing them to draw on their own inner resources. For people with pain or illness, stress and tension, anxiety, grief or anger may often arise, or they may have difficulty sleeping, and their perspective of the world can come to revolve around the pain and illness. Mindfulness can't get rid of the pain or illness but it can significantly reduce the 'secondary suffering' i.e. those difficult reactions to the pain or illness.

To give an everyday example, if you are stuck in traffic you may experience frustration, impatience, anger and anxiety. Mindfulness won't get the traffic moving but will reduce those difficult reactions.

How does it do that Fidelma?

Mindfulness has three principal characteristics: Awareness, Being in the Moment and Kindness.

With Awareness we get to know ourselves, getting more in touch with our experience physically, mentally and emotionally. With that awareness, we can choose how to respond to our circumstances rather than reacting unthinkingly in our habitual manner.

Learning to be in the present moment works against the tendency to be either worrying about the future or looking back nostalgically at the past. If we are aware of what is going on right now, we are seeing things as they really are, rather than how we think things should be or how we'd like them to be. This means that any changes that we make will be sustainable.

Kindness is the quality that allows us to make the changes to care for ourselves better. So many people are hard on themselves, even when their lives are already difficult, and kindness allows them to give themselves a break.

