Mindful Birthing

TRAINING THE MIND, BODY AND HEART FOR CHILDBIRTH AND BEYOND

This guide was created by the faculty at the [Mindful Birthing and Parenting Foundation](#) who have collectively spent many years training Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting teachers online.

The Mindful Birthing and Parenting Foundation (MBPF) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to providing education and training in mindfulness skills for expectant parents, families, children, and the professionals who care for them. Our signature program, Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting Teacher Training (MBCPTT) is an 11-month, online live-training where we train perinatal professionals to teach MBCP to expectant parents in their communities.

Teaching mindfulness online requires unique considerations and thought. Our hope is that this guide will serve you in responding to the needs of your community if you are intending to put your mindfulness-based programs and services online.

Guidance and Resources for Teaching Mindfulness Online

Preparing the Technology: Finding an Online Platform

- We use Zoom as a platform for providing the MBCP Teacher Training online. It is a secure and stable platform and quite user friendly. There may be other tools available in your region.

- HIPPA – In the US, most professionals don't need a HIPAA compliant system to teach Childbirth Education (CBE). However, if you are working within a system (i.e. through a hospital) that expects HIPAA compliance even with CBE, then you may need a higher level of technology, one which includes a Business Associate Agreement (BAA) signed between the company (i.e. Zoom) and the hospital system. Talk to your hospital administrator to see if Zoom for Healthcare is relevant to you.

Preparing Yourself for Teaching Online: General Guidelines

- Create an outline of the class you will be teaching, including the approximate timings for the meditation practices and other activities.

- In your outline, remember to include time for a snack break during each class. It takes more concentration to learn online than in a face to face classroom and this can be quite tiring.

- If at all possible, practice all the technological skills you will be using during the class with another teacher or colleague before you begin teaching, such as how to share your screen. This will allow you to become familiar with all the technical skills you will need for the class to run smoothly. Include guiding a meditation online as well as an inquiry session during this practice session.

- Make sure that you know how to create break out rooms for small discussion groups and how to let people know when their time together is almost over. If you are using Zoom, this video provides a good tutorial.

- Close down all other apps on your computer, especially emails or other notifications, before starting the class.

- Make sure to have your poems, meditation bells and water or tea easily within reach. Take care not to ring the meditation bells too close to the microphone, as this can make for an unpleasant hearing experience for the participants.

- Having an easily visible clock that is separate from your online screen clock can be helpful.

- Before each class, take time to do some practice yourself, as much as you can make time for; touch into your deepest intentions for the class.

Preparing Participants

- Have a pre-class Intake interview with your potential participants, just as you would for an in-person course. Email the Intake form to them before your interview and review it with them during the interview. Use the telephone, FaceTime or your online platform if the participants have the technological skills to connect in that way.

- Before the online class begins, send a simple document to participants with information about how to use the platform, how and when to use mute, PC requirements such as Internet speed and possible backup telephone numbers to log onto the platform by telephone if necessary.

- Consider setting up a Facebook group or another online space before the class begins so that participants can connect with each other between classes.

- Working with a tech person who can handle tech problems in case they appear can be a wonderful support for you, especially while you are learning to navigate the skills needed for teaching online. If you are able to have someone who can fulfill the tech person role, give out their email/phone number in case participants experience problems logging in or other issues. (Don't forget that your tech person will need to observe professional confidentiality.) Once you begin teaching a class, it can be very difficult in the moment for you to try to take care of technological problems. You may need the tech person only for the first few sessions until everyone learns how to navigate the platform you are using.

Guidance for Participants during the First Class for Managing the Online Learning Environment

- Protecting the classroom learning environment is important. Ask participants to close the door of the room they are using to create a quiet, secluded space. Request that they turn off/silence their phones if at all possible so everyone can have the opportunity to drop in to this special time together. Follow these guidelines yourself.

- Acknowledge the challenges of using online technology and that there are perhaps different levels of expertise (or lack thereof) including your own that participants may have. There is a learning curve here and everyone is learning together. This acknowledgement can lessen tension with this format for everyone.

- Instruct participants that if they seem to be having difficulty getting a turn to speak, consider waving or raising their hand. You as the instructor need to be alert to these signals. One of the challenges of online teaching is that you, the teacher, have fewer body language clues available to "read the group". Know that you may miss something and bring kindness to the situation, for yourself and the participants.

- A very important guideline for participants is the direction to suspend the use of the chat function during class. Share the rationale for this guideline as a teaching about stress and multitasking; the chat function encourages multi-tasking. It is very distracting for the person writing the chat, for the participants, and for you, the teacher. That being said, the chat function could be deliberately used for particular activities, for example, a horizontal inquiry.

- Ask participants to support their wellbeing and the wellbeing of the group as a whole by being as fully present during class time as possible. To facilitate this, request participants keep their video ON unless something urgent needs to be attended to. Keeping the video on helps reduce the temptation to multi-task.

- Ask participants to put themselves on mute when not speaking unless they are in a small group. It takes time to learn to unmute before speaking, and that's okay. Experiment with using the "mute all" function to help block out extraneous noise.

- Encourage participants to let their voice be heard. Their experiences and observations are valuable and important and when they share, they are contributing to the good of the whole class.

- For some, speaking in a group can be challenging. In an online setting, this may be even more challenging. Offer the teaching that noticing rehearsing before speaking and self-judgement and the comparing mind that can arise after speaking is a mindfulness practice. Practicing self-compassion before and after speaking can be very helpful.

- Participants can either respond to the urge to speak when it arises or choose to just notice the urge as it arises and passes away.

- For those speaking in a language other than their first language, acknowledge that it could be a challenge for them and thank them for their courage. Encourage them to take their

time when speaking. What they have to contribute is important. In this learning environment, every person's contribution matters.

General Teaching Guidelines and Suggestions

- Remember, there is a learning curve for everyone, including you, and that can at times be stressful. However online learning allows for the possibility of reaching many in need. It also provides multiple opportunities for the teacher to practice patience and equanimity, as well as kindness for oneself and others.

- Start each class with a roll call using one word or short sentence about how the participant is doing now, in the present moment. This roll call can be very helpful for you to keep track of who is attending and making sure everyone's presence is acknowledged. This is also a way of taking the 'temperature of the group' in the absence of the usual body language clues.

- Starting and ending on time, just as you would in an in-person class, is a way of showing respect for the participants and is recommended. This also helps create a sense of structure, safety and a holding of the group learning environment.

- At the beginning of class, share in a very general way what you expect the flow of that particular class to be. Though you know how much time you will have allotted to each activity, it is helpful not to be too specific about exact times with the participants. This will allow you the flexibility to change plans in the present moment in order to respond to needs or issues that may unexpectedly arise during the class.

- When you break into small groups, teach a bit about mindful speaking and listening and encourage this practice among participants.

- When leading a meditation online, open your eyes every now and then to make sure the WiFi connection is still working!

- Options for the whiteboard or didactic sessions could include using PowerPoint slides in a particular way: A question appears on the slide: What is pain? (just the question). Participants can then speak and share. The answers can be written directly into the PowerPoint slide so everyone can see them. Microsoft Powerpoint / Apple Keynote / Google Slides are useful applications for presenting slides.

- A possibility worth exploring is the use of a digital drawing tablet to make teaching the whiteboard more dynamic.

- Consider creatively using appropriate images from established texts for didactic presentations. For example, for MBCP, use images from Mindful Birthing (link)

- Allow time for participants to adjust their device so that they can see you for yoga practice or a body scan.

- Using a Bluetooth headset when teaching movement practices (yoga, walking meditation) is recommended.

- Regarding your teaching space, consider decluttering the background participants will see, the lighting and/or hanging a backdrop.

- In order to communicate your presence, attention and deep listening during online teaching, it is important that participants be able to see your facial expressions. To this end, the camera distance/angle is important. Do your best to arrange your camera so that it is about 18in (45cm) from your face. Make sure your line of sight is aligned with the camera so that you appear to be looking into participants eyes.

- If you have a quiet group or your group is reluctant to share, experiment with building in a little time for a writing reflection after a meditation practice before moving into inquiry. You'll need to ask participants or send an email before the class to prepare for some writing by having pen and notebook/paper handy. Ask participants to write down what came up for them or what they noticed. Open the inquiry by asking participants to share some of what they have written. Writing something down before being asked to speak can help quieter groups open up online.

- Foster community as much as possible. Encourage the use of the Facebook group or other online space you have created for participants to communicate between classes. Experiment. Be creative. Find ways to make the class fun.

- Do remember that your own embodied presence makes a very real difference.

And finally…ENJOY YOURSELF!

- You will learn a lot, which means you probably will experience times when you wish you would have handled something differently. Remember, there are no "mistakes"; just mistakes.

- You'll probably not be perfect and that's more than okay, because you are perfectly human. Remember, good enough is in fact, good enough.

- Teaching online feels different than teaching an 'in person' class. It takes time to get used to it. Nevertheless, teaching online is still your mindfulness practice. Notice moments of attachment and aversion, of liking and not liking.

- Watch out for that self-judgement when it arises; bring gentleness and kindness to yourself.

- Learn from your participants. Ask the group what they appreciate and what is working for them.

- Pay attention to process as much as to content.

- Share what you learn about teaching online with others.

Resources

1. Jon Kabat-Zinn's online MBSR course from Sounds True
   https://content.soundstrue.com/opening-to-our-lives

2. Jon Kabat-Zinn's Cultivating Mindfulness at this Critical Moment sessions - meditations, talks and Q&As

3. Jon Kabat-Zinn's article "I Read the News Today, Oh Boy"

4. "Finding Peace in a Frantic World" practices

5. Zoom is an easy to use online video communication platform.

6. Zoom for Healthcare offers a standard feature set for healthcare enterprises and providers, enabling reliable, HIPAA-compliant communications between organizations, care teams, and patients.

7. Zoom has tutorials for new users

8. Zoom has tutorials for Getting Started with Breakout Rooms

9. The digital drawing tablet for the white board teaching is available here:

10. A short video by Stephen Porges talking about how to be effective in our presence, even online.