STRESS MANAGEMENT AND MINDFULNESS (STUDENT LIFE 2.0)
PROGRAMME

• Introduction to the topic
• What is stress?
• Common stressors for students
• Tips for stress management
• What is mindfulness?
• Suggestions for home practices
• More information
• Final practice: breathing exercise
WHAT IS STRESS?

- Physical reaction to emotions, good and bad
- Stress can be both positive and negative
  - Small, passing challenges vs. major crises, prolonged stress
- Positive stress can help us perform better momentarily, make us more aware and concentrate on a specific task
- Negative, prolonged stress can have serious effects that take a long time to heal
- Stress can have both physical and mental symptoms
  - Sleep, eating, headaches, fatigue, increased heart rate, sweating, feeling overwhelmed, concentration problems, helplessness, memory loss, negativity...
WHAT ARE SOME COMMON STRESSORS FOR STUDENTS?

- Course work and exams (too difficult, too much, lack of support)
- Pressure to achieve certain grades
- Heavy workload, e.g. when writing your thesis
- Planning studies, such as minor subjects
- Transitions: graduation, moving
- Socialising with other students, making new friends and experiences, flatsharing
- Financing studies, finding internships / work, scheduling studies and work
- Independence, managing by yourself

- All of this in addition to other stress factors!
TIPS FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

- Understanding why/how you stress and identifying the causes and how it affects you
- No general, easy fixes that suit everyone
- Some tips:
  - Time management, boundaries, realistic expectations
  - Self-care: sleep, eating regularly, exercise
  - Down-time: reading, music, arts, games, TV/movies
  - Meditation, mindfulness, breathing exercises
- Some take longer, some can have instant effects - sometimes pausing even for a minute might help
ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF MINDFULNESS

• Mindfulness has been a part of the Eastern meditation tradition for thousands of years
• Its secular adaptation has become more popular in Western countries since the 1970s
• Mindfulness can be practiced e.g., though (guided) meditation, mantras, breathing exercises and yoga
• It is estimated that globally between 200 and 500 million people meditate
WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

- Mindfulness refers to concentrating, observing and accepting the present moment
  - Our mind is often either reviewing the past or planning for the future instead of concentrating on now
- Mindfulness can help
  - establish a connection with one’s body
  - becoming aware of our (harmful) thought pattern
  - According to research, we think almost as much what is NOT happening as what is, which typically makes us unhappy
- With mindfulness it is possible to learn to recognize when one’s mind is “wandering off”
BASIC STEPS TO MINDFULNESS

• Find a comfortable position (e.g. sitting/laying down)
• Start by focusing on your breathing: what kind of sensations can you feel? Your chest expanding, air moving..?
• Shift your attention to your thoughts and feelings. Try to let them float past you with "grasping" or judging them
• Whenever you feel your concentration slip, come back to the breath
  • You can e.g. repeat the words in (when you inhale) and out (when you exhale)
• The goal is not to "empty" your mind but to notice the passing thoughts without the need to start analyzing them
BENEFITS AND POSSIBLE CAUTIONS ON MINDFULNESS

• Mindfulness can reduce stress and ruminating (negative thought cycles), improve attention and memory and protect against anxiety and depression.

• However, maximum benefits require consistent (even daily) practice. But even if used only occasionally, mindfulness can be useful for calming down the mind.

• Caution: Some people have reported that meditation-like practices have either made them overly sensitive or numb to their feelings/thoughts (BBC’s article).

• Simple rule of thumb: If it’s not serving you, find another activity that is known to boost wellbeing OR find a mindfulness practice that directs your thoughts outside yourself (e.g. compassion/gratitude meditation).
FINAL NOTES ON MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION 1/2

• Not many of us can jump straight to a 20-minute everyday practice: start with 5 or even 2 minutes
• Use guided meditations, they offer a great way of combining instructions/structure with clearing your mind
• Be patient with yourself. Building concentration (especially in our distracted, modern world) takes time. Some days it might be easier to let the thoughts and emotions pass you by and sometimes they can feel annoyingly persistent. It’s all part of the process!
• Above all, mindfulness is more than just a practice: it can be a mindset that guides your everyday actions
Viktor Frankl: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In that response lies our growth and our freedom."
SUGGESTIONS FOR HOME PRACTICES

• Mindful eating/cooking/teeth brushing
  • Focusing attention, being more present and aware in whatever you are doing

• Moving meditation
  • Meditation while doing simple/slow movements, such as walking or tai chi (body sensations; breathing)

• Breathing exercises
  • Paying attention to your breathing; different kinds of exercises available (e.g. box breathing, count to a certain number, alternate nostril breathing)
MORE INFORMATION

Find exercises:

- YouTube videos
  - Goodful (5-15-minute exercises)
  - Yoga with Adriene
- Mindful.org: Guided practices
- See a list of meditation apps
  - Calm’s YouTube channel
  - Headspace’s YouTube channel

Want to learn more?

- Why is mindfulness a superpower: an animation (there are unicorns at the end!)
- TED Talk: All it takes is 10 mindful minutes | Andy Puddicombe (co-founder of Headspace)
- Mindful.org: Getting Started with Mindfulness
- Buddhaimonia: 10 awesome mindfulness tips for beginners
- Book tip: 10% Happier – Dan Harris (also has a podcast)
THANK YOU!
QUESTIONS?

The content of this session was based on:

• Mieli – Mental health Finland (material in Finnish)
• The Harvard Gazette: Less stress, clearer thoughts with mindfulness meditation
• Psychology today: Mindfulness

Remember to check out other Student Life 2.0 events on the Guidance Corner website!

Photos: Presenters’ own/ Pexels