

Chapter 8

Mindfulness–Based Interventions for Caregivers (Parents) of Children With Cerebral Palsy

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ABSTRACT

Families of children with disabilities often experience high levels of stress associated with taking care of a child with disability. The perceived stress by the caregivers may often lead to negative outcomes in day-to-day functioning for caregivers themselves as well as the child. Mindfulness as an element of consciousness has been acknowledged to promote positivity and well-being among individuals. It is a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. This chapter focuses on the application of mindfulness-based therapies for caregivers (parents) of children with cerebral palsy. This chapter also entails in detail therapeutic techniques like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), its in-depth description, background, and applications as an effective approach for the intervention of caregivers.

INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness is a state of mind achieved by centering awareness of oneself on present moment, and at the same time addressing and accepting one's own thoughts, feelings, emotions, actions, sensory experience of the body as well as the environment that surrounds us. Mindfulness as an element of consciousness has been acknowledged to promote positivity and well-being among individuals. A non-judgmental practice of focusing our attention and awareness on the present moment, Mindfulness has its cultivation in the philosophies of Buddhism. Furthermore, it is also inspired from ancient Greek philosophy; Hinduism; Existentialism, and Naturalism in later Western European thought; Transcendentalism and Humanism in America (Brown et al., 2007). Originating mainly in eastern philosophy thousands of years ago, the ideas were borrowed by western societies in the late 20th century.

Mindfulness finds its core rooted in human experiences and the central activities of consciousness, that is, awareness and attention. Thus, mindfulness may be considered a combination of focused attention and enhanced awareness of present moment or current reality. The core characteristics of mindfulness are understood as open or receptive awareness and attention (Martin, 1997). The term mindfulness is an English counterpart of the word "Sati" from Pali language or "Smriti" from Sanskrit, borrowed from the concepts of Buddhism, reflecting the meaning 'remembrance, memory, reminiscence or recollection. Mindfulness, as a means of consciousness reflects "presence of mind" (Bodhi, 2000).

The pioneer of the contemporary concepts of mindfulness is John Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Stress Reduction Clinic, at University of Massachusetts Medical School in the late 1970's. Kabat-Zinn (2003) proposed that mindfulness encompassed the awareness emerging through paying attention purposefully and non-judgmentally, in the present moment to moment experiences. Kabat-Zinn brought the application of mindfulness practice into mainstream medical treatment and it was further encouraged that the employment of mindfulness will bring improved changes in physical and psychological symptoms and will also promote positive changes in behaviour and attitude towards health. The treatment procedure that was used with mindfulness as the core was established as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) by Kabat-Zinn. Following this, researches were conducted to explore the applicability of Mindfulness based therapies which further became one of the central techniques used by practitioners to help clients reach "meta-cognitive awareness" or the awareness of the thought process (Segal, Williams & Teasdale 2012). Interventions designed on therapeutic approaches based on mindfulness have predicted relief and have been found efficacious in bringing about significant changes in well-being of individuals, as supported by various theoretical and empirical literatures.

Families with children having disabilities time and again experience increased level of stress owing to Emotional, Psychological, Physical, Social and Financial needs associated with taking care of a child with disability. The severity of stress may further be mounted if the nature of disability is severe, causing total to profound dependency on caregivers even for activities of daily living and survival. The perceived stress by the caregivers may often lead to negative outcomes in day to day functioning for caregivers themselves as well as the child, which may demand a need for intervention for caregivers' well-being.

The continuous process of caregiving for a family member with Cerebral Palsy often contributes to chronic stress, which can further have significant detrimental effects on various aspects of the lives of caregivers.

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