

**This document is an annotated sample of an IRB application, provided by the Eastern Mennonite University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the purposes of instruction. The annotations are offered as guidance, but should not be seen as requirements or as offering a prescribed way for preparing a completed and acceptable application. Please direct questions to members of the IRB, as listed at [emu.edu/irb](http://emu.edu/irb)**

**Proposed Title:** Therapist's experiences of mindfulness and meditation and its relationship to therapist perceptions of the therapeutic relationship

**Researchers:** Cheree Hammond & Michael Horst

**Email of primary researcher:** [cheree.hammond@emu.edu](mailto:cheree.hammond@emu.edu)

**Start Date and Duration:** Fall 2014-Fall 2015

**Brief Description and purpose of research:**

There is a growing movement to include mindfulness and meditation within counseling interventions and a number of theoretical approaches now rely heavily on mindfulness and meditation, Linehan's Dialectical Behavior Therapy (1993) and Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (1990) to name but of many. A growing body of literature supports the efficacy of mindfulness and meditation in the amelioration of anxiety and depression symptoms (Carmody & Baer, 2008; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Ramel, Goldin, Carmona, McQuadid, 2004) as well as in pain management (Morone, Greco & Weiner, 2008), dealing with terminal illness (Williams et al., 2005) and managing substance abuse concerns (Bowen, et al, 2006), for example. A great deal of the available research focuses on positive outcomes in a wide range of mental health symptom reduction (Fjorback, Arendt, Ornbol, Fink & Walach, 2011).

Theorist are also exploring the role of mindfulness in developing the components of a strong therapeutic relationship such as the cultivation of empathy (Shappiro & Izati, 2010), therapeutic presence (Gerhart and McCullen 2010), and deep listening (Kramer, Meyers, & Turner, 2010; Shafir, 2010).

Research is needed that focuses on the person of therapist and his or her experience of the therapeutic relationship. The proposed study is an investigation into how therapists experience mindfulness and meditation courses and how and if these courses affect how they make meaning of the therapeutic alliance given their experiences of the course. A second aspect of the study is to gain insight into how therapists make use of opportunities for self-care.

**Commented [A1]:** This is history of mindfulness in counseling and is not required but offers a context for reviewers who may not have a great deal of knowledge in this area.

**Commented [A2]:** This paragraph also offers context to the study.

A second aspect of the study is to gain insight into how therapists make use of opportunities for self-care. Self-care is an issue of great concern to therapists and other helping professionals who face high rates of burn-out and secondary trauma.

**Commented [A3]:** This paragraph and the one before it describe the purpose and need for the study.

#### References:

**Commented [A4]:** References are not required but are good practice.

- Bowen, S., Witkiewitz, K., Dilworth, T., Chawla, N., Simpson, T., Ostafin, B., Larimer, M. Blume, A., Parks, G. Marlatt, A. (2006). Mindfulness meditation and substance use in an incarcerated population. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 20(3), pp. 343-347.
- Curtis, B., Zack, M., & McMMain, S. (2002). An information-processing analysis of mindfulness: Implications for relapse prevention in the treatment of substance abuse. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 9(3) pp. 275-299.
- Fjorback, L. O. Arendt, M., Ornbol, E., Fink, P.L., & Walach, H. (2011). Mindfulness-based stress reduction and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy-a systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 124, 102-119.
- Hoffmann, S., Sawyer, A., Witt, A. & Oh, D. (2010). The effect of mindfulness-based therapy on anxiety and depression: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 78(2) pp. 169-183. Doi: 10.1037/a0018555.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, Pain, and illness.
- Linehan, M. (1993). Skills training manual for treating borderline personality disorder. NY: Guilford Press.
- Morone, N. E., Grego, C. M., Weiner, D. K. (2008). Mindfulness meditation for the treatment of chronic low back pain in older adults. *Pain*, 134 (3), pp. 310-319.
- Ramel, W., Goldin, P., Carmona, P., McQuaid, J. (2004). The effects of mindfulness meditation on genitive processes and affect in patients with past depression. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 28(4), pp. 433-455.
- Williams, A., Selwyn, P. A., Liberti, L., Molde, S., Njike, V.S., McCorkle, R., Zelterman, D. & Katz, D. L. (2005). A randomized controlled trial of meditation and massage effects on quality of life in people with late-stage disease: A pilot study. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 2005, 8(5), pp. 939-952. doi:10.1089/jpm.2005.8.939.

#### Participants:

**Commented [A5]:** The highlighted areas describe who will be recruited, how they will be recruited and who will be excluded—in this case, those who are suicidal.

Participants in this study will include adults who are actively providing professional counseling in community agencies, schools, private practice or in their internship of their counselor training. Participants will be recruited by sending a recruitment letter to local therapists (attached) explaining the purpose of the research and inviting potential participants to contact the researchers for an interview. We will screen out participants who are actively suicidal, have crisis needs that would make them a poor fit for meditation, or those with personality structures that would not benefit from a group study setting. The research team will carefully review each screening interview and select 8-10 participants.

**Approximate duration:**

The study will be comprised of **eight 90-minute group sessions** of mindfulness and meditation training held weekly. Participants will be asked to commit to meditating **20 minutes per day, 6 days a week** for the duration of the eight week study, for a total of **12 hours of class time** and **16 hours at home meditation time**. Participants will be asked to complete one mindfulness activity per day of approximately **15 minutes** (many of which are activities of daily living, such as brushing one’s teeth or washing one’s face or hair), **totaling about 12 hours of total mindfulness activity** during the course of the study. Further, participants will take part in one opening individual interview and one closing interview, each approximately one hour in duration, for a total of 2 hours. Finally, each participant will be asked to keep a journal describing their experiences of aspects of the therapeutic relationship over the course of the 8 weeks. The amount of time given to the journal will vary a great deal from one participant to the next but will likely take about 40 minutes a week, for a total of just over 5 hours of journaling. All together, **participants will give 47 hours of their time to this study.**

**Commented [A6]:** The highlighted areas give clarity to the total number of hours required of the participants. You will notice that sub-totals and totals are clearly outlined.

**Procedures for informing participants about the purpose of the research and for obtaining their consent to participate.**

Participants will be provided with an informed consent form that outlines the purpose of the research, the extent and procedures of their participation, the potential personal risks and benefits of participation, and the standards of the project's confidentiality. The researchers view informed consent as an ongoing process for participants. This means that participants will have access to all research information and procedures, with the exception of information that is not their own. All participation is strictly voluntary. Participants may choose not to participate at any time for any reason without consequence. Participants will consent to being audio recorded.

**Commented [A7]:** This first sentence of the paragraph describes the how

**Commented [A8]:** This notation about the researcher’s stance on consent is not needed but is good practice.

**Commented [A9]:** NOTE: This section might have included the how and where of recording to be more clear.

*Sample Informed Consent Draft*

Dear Potential Research Participant,

The purpose of this research is to investigate how therapists experience mindfulness and mediation and if these practices affect how therapists make meaning of their therapeutic relationships and therapy in general. Participation in this research will provide you with the opportunity to engage a course in mindfulness and meditation free of charge. You can expect to learn and practice various mindfulness and meditation practices in a group setting and individually. You can also expect to learn avenues for observing and managing difficult thoughts and emotions as a benefit of participation. The results of the research may contribute to an increased understanding of meditation and mindfulness practices and therapeutic relationships.

**Commented [A10]:** This first sentence of the paragraph describes the purpose to the participants.

Participation in this research will provide you with eight 90 minute group sessions of mindfulness and meditation trainings held once per week and a commitment to meditating 20 minutes per day, 6 days a week for the duration of the six week study, for a total of 12 hours of class time and 16 hours at home meditation time. Participants will also be asked to attend mindfully to at least one task of daily living per day (such as brushing one's teeth, washing face or hair), totaling approximately 12 hours of mindfulness. Finally, participants will be asked to keep a journal of their experiences. Additionally, participation will include engaging one opening individual interview and one closing interview with Cheree Hammond and Michael Horst. Each individual interview will take approximately one hour, for a total of two hours. Altogether, your participation will comprise approximately 47 hours between class sessions, home meditation, and individual interviews.

It is possible you may experience some discomfort during or as a result of your participation in this study. Meditation can reveal or bring into greater focus uncomfortable thoughts and emotions. These experiences are not unlike those that a person might experience in counseling. Meditation can also bring physical discomfort from prolonged sitting (e.g. back, knees, hips, and feet). If you experience discomfort as a result of your participation, please inform Dr. Hammond or Mr. Horst. Dr. Hammond and Mr. Horst will provide initial instruction in how to sit properly for maximum comfort and stability. Chairs will be provided for those with mobility issues that would preclude sitting on the floor or for those who experience discomfort in meditation.

Your participation in this research is *strictly voluntary*. You may refuse to participate at all, or choose to stop your participation at any point in the research without fear of penalty or negative consequence.

Participation in this study will take place in Eastern Mennonite University's Master of Arts in Counseling space located at 1181 Smith Avenue, Harrisonburg VA, 22802. The eight meditation and mindfulness classes will be held in room 003. The opening and closing interviews will be held in the department's counseling rooms (16).

The information you provide for this research will be treated confidentially, and all raw data will be kept in a secured file by the researcher. No individually identifiable information will be presented unless explicit permission is given to do so. You also have the right to review the results of the research if you wish to do so. A copy of the results may be obtained by contacting the researchers:

Dr. Cheree Hammond  
cheree.hammond@emu.edu  
(540) 432-4228

Michael Horst:  
michael.horst@emu.edu  
**(540) 908-9150**

***Participant consent***

**Commented [A11]:** The remainder of the paragraph and the next paragraph explain what participants could expect and next describes the benefits and more details of the study. The demands of the study are clearly outlined.

**Commented [A12]:** This paragraph described the potential risks of the study and how those risks are being addressed.

**Commented [A13]:** This assures that participation is voluntary.

**Commented [A14]:** This tells participants where the study takes place.

**Commented [A15]:** This section describes what will happen to the data.

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I, (print full name) \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understand the foregoing information explaining the purpose of this research and my rights and responsibilities as a subject. My signature below designates my consent to participate in this research, according to the terms and conditions listed above.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I, (print full name) \_\_\_\_\_, give the researchers permission to use, publish, and republish, in the context of this research, photographic, video, or audio reproductions of my likeness or voice made for this study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have concerns about this research that you have not been able to clarify with the researcher or researchers please feel free to contact the IRB:

Jeff Copeland, Chair  
Eastern Mennonite University  
[jeff.copeland@emu.edu](mailto:jeff.copeland@emu.edu)

**Describe any risks to the participants, how you will minimize such risks, and how you will address any adverse conditions arising as a result of your research.**

Meditation can reveal or bring greater focus to uncomfortable thoughts and emotions. Mindfulness and meditation can bring greater self-awareness and increased awareness of the world in which the meditator lives, an experience that can sometimes be difficult or even painful. These experiences are not unlike those that a participant may already expect to experience in the counseling setting, however. Meditation can also bring temporary physical discomfort to areas of the body affected by prolonged sitting, such as the hips, knees, feet, back or neck.

Participants will be provided with the names of counseling providers that can provide support in case of need. (While the participants will be counselors/therapists themselves, many local therapists find it difficult to find counseling for themselves within the community due to professional boundary issues.) Within the group sessions participants will have weekly opportunities to share their experiences of meditation and mindfulness, including difficult thoughts and feelings that might emerge in those sessions. At that time the researchers will offer support for managing difficult feelings and thoughts as they arise. Both researchers have counseling skills with which to offer needed support for difficulties as they arise.

The primary researcher earned an M.A. and Ed.S. in Counseling Psychology and a Ph.D. in Counseling and Supervision in 2009. (The primary researcher is certified in mindfulness and psychotherapy and has 15 years of meditation practice

**Commented [A16]:** See the EMU IRB website for a current (up-to-date) template for the informed consent letter, including current contact information for the IRB chair.

**Commented [A17]:** The risks that were described before were described in the sample consent form that must be provided. This provides the discussion of the risks within the proposal itself. You will notice the risks have been framed as similar to those experienced in counseling because the participants will be counselors and they will be accustomed to this kind of inquiry.

**Commented [A18]:** Here, the researchers have described how they will manage risks.

**Commented [A19]:** Here the researchers describe their credentials.

as well as both formal and informal training in meditation and mindfulness). The secondary researcher has an M.A. in counseling and experience in research in mindfulness, meditation and anxiety.

Researchers will also provide initial instruction in how to sit properly for maximum comfort and stability. Chairs will be provided for those with mobility issues that would preclude sitting on the floor or for those who experience discomfort in meditation.

**Describe any benefits participants will receive as a result of participating in this research.**

Mindfulness and meditation have been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, and stress responses, as well as support memory, focus and general well-being. Courses in mindfulness and meditation like the one being offered in the area often cost between \$300-\$600 but will be offered to participants at no cost. Participants can expect to learn avenues for observing and managing difficult thoughts and emotions as a benefit of participation.

**Commented [A20]:** Here researchers describe fully the potential benefits of the study.

**Describe how and to whom your results will be reported.**

Researchers intend to write up results for the purpose of publication in a professional journal, such as the *Journal of Counseling and Development* or the *Journal of Counseling and Values*. Researchers also hope to present at a professional conference such as the American Counseling Association or the Virginia Counselor's Association or other state or national professional venue.

**Commented [A21]:** Note that the researchers included all possible presentation and publication options so that they have some latitude later.

**Describe how you will maintain anonymity, confidentiality and privacy.**

All information and data for this research will be maintained on a password protected computer and will only be accessed by Dr. Cheree Hammond and Michael Horst. All hard copies of information and data related to the study will be maintained in a locked file. Audio recordings will be destroyed directly after being transcribed. No identifying information will be attached to files and participants will be given the opportunity to use pseudonyms. Participants will agree to maintain group confidentiality for all group meditation and mindfulness sessions.

**Commented [A22]:** The details of the how of confidentiality are laid out here.

**Briefly describe the steps involved in your research:**

1. We will begin the study by recruiting participants through a letter to local therapists (attached: Part 1)
2. Participants will be screened for appropriateness to the group setting and for serious mental health concerns that would preclude participation.
3. Participants will be provided informed consent, including the expectations for meditation at home and potential for difficult feelings and thoughts to arise.

**Commented [A23]:** Note that the steps have been outlined in a clearly. The more clear you are here the fewer questions your board will have about your research.

4. Selected participants will participate in an individual taped interview of about one hour. (interview protocol attached: Part 2)
5. Six taped 90 minute sessions will be spaced one week apart. Each session will include a didactic component, meditation, group discussion and processing as well as opportunities to ask and answer questions.
6. A final individual taped interview (protocol attached: Part 3) will be conducted.
7. Audio tapes will be transcribed and audio recordings destroyed.
8. Transcripts of the interview will be returned to participants for member checking, a process by which participants are able to provide feedback and comments within the research process.
9. Qualitative analysis of transcribed data will be performed using a grounded theory approach.
10. Findings will be written up, presented and submitted for publication.

**Describe Instruments or equipment to be used, including research materials to be used:**

For this project we would like to gain permission to audio record interview sessions as well as the meditation group meetings, consequently, audio recording devices will be needed. Three researcher-created protocols will be used: 1) screening tool, 2) initial interview protocol, and 3) final interview protocol (all attached).

**Suggested information for letter to therapists:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As you may know, mindfulness and meditation have gained greater attention in the counseling literature and have been shown to make significant differences in depression, anxiety, pain management, substance abuse management, focus, memory and general well-being. We are writing to you today to share with you an opportunity for your clients to participate in a free mindfulness and meditation group that is part of a research study being conducted at Eastern Mennonite University in the fall of 2013. This study is examining the lived experiences of clients who practice mindfulness and meditation as an adjunct to therapy. The study will be conducted by me and a second year student in the Master of Arts in Counseling at EMU, Michael Horst.

We are seeking clients who are not currently actively suicidal or a danger to others, who would likely work well within a group setting, and for whom mindfulness and meditation might be beneficial. Groups like these often cost between \$300-600 but will be offered to participants at no cost.

If you have a client or clients that are 18 years of age or older that you believe may benefit from this experience, please provide him/her with one of the enclosed cards

**Commented [A24]:** Notice that all devices are noted here.

**Commented [A25]:** Researchers must include all recruitment details including scripts for telephone calls and drafts of recruitment letters. These are included below.

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and ask that they contact us as soon as possible as we will begin scheduling the 6 group sessions as soon as we have 5 participants.

Please feel free to contact either researcher with any questions that you might have about this study.

Thank you,

Cheree Hammond, Ph.D.  
cheree.hammond@emu.edu

Michael Horst  
michael.horst@emu.edu

### **Suggested information for letter to prospective participants:**

Greetings,

We recently contacted local therapists with letters similar to this one letting them know about an opportunity for clients to participate in a free course on meditation and mindfulness and asked that they give this letter and our contact information to clients that may be interested in participating.

This mindfulness and meditation course is being offered as part of research in the Master of Arts in Counseling at Eastern Mennonite University by Dr. Cheree Hammond, a faculty member, and Mr. Michael Horst, a second year graduate student. It is our aim to expand upon and deepen existing research that demonstrates the beneficial effects of mindfulness and meditation in stress-reduction and the management of experiences of depression and anxiety. You do not need to have any prior experience with mindfulness or meditation to participate.

If you think that you would be interested in participating in this course, or simply want to know more about the details please contact either of us (contact information below). We will begin scheduling the course as soon as we have 5 participants, so please don't hesitate.

Sincerely,

Cheree

Cheree Hammond, Ph.D.  
(540) 432-4228  
cheree.hammond@emu.edu

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Michael Horst  
michael.horst@emu.edu

**Suggested screening questions:**

1. Do you have experience with meditation? If so can you describe it?
2. Are you currently experiencing crisis or traumatic experience in your life? If so can you describe this?
3. Are you currently working with suicidal or homicidal thoughts?
4. How comfortable are you talking in a group about your thoughts and feelings?
5. What do you think you will bring to this experience? What challenges may present themselves to you in this experience?
6. Do you foresee any difficulties with scheduling throughout this six week experience?

**Commented [A26]:** Notice that all three of the protocols are combined into one document and attached together. Note that the protocols are clearly labeled.

**Initial Interview Protocol:**

1. Describe what interests you about participating in the meditation and mindfulness group.
2. Do you have experience with meditation? If so can you describe it?
3. What do you hope to learn from this course? What would you like to be different in your life that you feel meditation and mindfulness can help you with?
4. Current experience with therapy?
5. When you are in therapy, what do you notice about yourself and the therapeutic relationship?
6. Any questions/ anything participant would like to add?

**Final Interview Protocol:**

1. At the opening of the course we met and talked a little about your hopes and expectations for this course. Can you share a bit about what you experienced in the past weeks of our course and how that relates to the goals you had at the opening of the group?
2. While you have participated in this group you have been in therapy. Can you speak to the ways your practice of mindfulness has influenced how you experience your therapy or your relationship with your counselor?
3. How about your experience of meditation? Has this practice influenced at all your progress in therapy or your relationship with your therapist? Can you describe this?
4. How has mindfulness/meditation influenced your relationship with the difficulty that has brought you to therapy in the first place? Have you noticed any shifts in your experience of your difficulty since beginning the group?
5. How has the experience of talking with others about mindfulness and meditation been for you? Can you describe this experience?

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6. Can you reflect on what you have contributed to others in this process? How important was it to have community.
7. Do you think that you will continue meditating? If so, in what ways? Will you continue practicing mindfulness?
  - a. If you have been able to continue what have you noticed about yourself?
8. Is there anything that you would like to add that you feel has not been discussed?