

MSC TEACHER TRAINING

Teacher Handbook

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Center for
Mindful Self-Compassion

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On Becoming a Teacher

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.

- Henri Nouwen -

MSC is an experiential learning process. Each classroom is a laboratory and each exercise is an experiment. We introduce a variety of new practices, such as savoring the breath or repeating loving-kindness phrases, and then explore what happens for each participant. Group discussions that follow are a collaborative inquiry and reflection upon each student's direct experience.

MSC participants are encouraged to discover what works to them—what opens their awareness to present-moment experience (mindfulness) and what helps them respond with kindness and understanding (self-compassion). One participant remarked at the end of a MSC program, "It's really quite simple: Sit down. See what arises. Give yourself love." Simple, yes, but not always easy. It's even trickier to *teach* self-compassion because self-compassion is more subtle and nuanced than commonly expected.

A particular set of teaching skills, or domains of competence, are required to teach MSC. Rebecca Crane and colleagues (2014) in the United Kingdom carefully articulated six domains of competence for teaching mindfulness-based interventions such as MBSR and MBCT. There is some overlap between MSC and MBSR/MBCT, but MSC is more focused on *compassion* training than mindfulness training so the domains of teacher competence also tend to vary from the Crane et al. model. This chapter presents six domains of teacher expertise, adapted by Steve Hickman and Kristy Arbon (2015), which are necessary to teach MSC. They are:

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The state of mind of an MSC teacher that supports all six domains of competence is *loving, connected, presence* (Michelle Becker, personal communication). These qualities correspond to the three components of self-compassion, namely, kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. When a MSC teacher is in loving, connected presence, the course becomes a joyful, enriching experience for most everyone.

1. Unfolding the Curriculum

The first domain of competence is teaching the curriculum. The MSC curriculum is carefully structured so that new skills build upon previous ones. For example, Session 1 sets the stage, beginning with personal introductions, tips on how to get the most out of the program, and guidelines for creating a culture of compassion in the classroom. The second half of Session 1 is a conceptual introduction to MSC with informal practices that can be tried during the week. Session 2 introduces mindfulness both conceptually and in practice. The main purpose of Session 2 is to teach participants how to anchor their awareness in the here-and-now before dropping into more emotionally activating practices such as loving-kindness and self-compassion meditation. In later sessions, students have a chance to test their skills with difficult emotions and difficult relationships and the course closes on a positive note with an exploration of savoring, gratitude, and self-appreciation. Since the program has been strategically scaffolded to teach self-compassion as easily and safely as possible, we hope that new teachers will work with the curriculum in its current form. We like to say, "Find your own voice, not your own curriculum."

Each session requires about 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours, including a 15-minute break during each session and an additional 4-hour retreat, for a total of about 24 actual teaching hours. Prospective teachers should be advised that this manual contains more material than can be delivered in the allotted time, including additional talking points and optional exercises that may have more appeal to some teachers than others. Before beginning their first course, teachers are encouraged to carefully review the material of each session, understand the intention behind each topic, exercise, or meditation, and then to prioritize the most essential elements that a teacher wishes to present in the time available. Whatever is left out of one session can usually be succinctly introduced during a later session when the subject naturally arises in the group process.

Over time, teachers improve in their ability to deliver the entire curriculum in the allotted time. For example, when teaching a didactic topic, teachers gradually learn what points their students need to hear and how to say them. While leading discussions, teachers learn to anticipate the kinds of questions that are asked and they are prepared to respond. Even during inquiry, seasoned teachers can identify the typical challenges that arise during each different exercise or meditation, often including possible underlying issues, so they can be more focused in how they guide the inquiry. The process of learning to teach MSC cannot be rushed. A teacher often needs to lead 4-5 courses before becoming proficient at delivering the whole curriculum.

Time management is a critical skill for MSC teachers, especially balancing the emotional needs of the group with the need to cover all the material. When in doubt, it is generally advisable to err on the side of group process and drop the unfinished teaching points and slip them in during a later session. This is because MSC is primarily about cultivating a particular tone or attitude - an inclination of heart - rather than delivering information. Everything in the curriculum points toward a compassionate attitude and when people are in a rush, compassion goes out the window (Darley & Batson, 1973). Our students are also more likely to remember how they *felt* in a session, even years later, than what they learned.

Group participants are usually supportive of a teacher's efforts to strike a balance between delivering the entire curriculum and attending to individual or group needs. If an individual is emotionally distraught after an exercise and the teacher just moves on, the

attention of the group will probably be lingering with the individual rather than the new subject. Conversely, if a student talks too long and bores the group, the teacher is obligated to intervene. When a teacher is unsure if the group is ready to move on to a new topic or exercise, he or she can be candid and ask, “Are we ready to move on?” A skilled teacher is flexible and collaborative, working *with* the group to accomplish the tasks at hand.

Before teaching their first MSC course, many teachers are intimidated by the comprehensiveness of the curriculum and the diverse skills required to teach MSC. There is indeed a lot to attend to, but the curriculum has been designed to support both teachers and students every step of the way. In MSC teacher training, we say “trust the program” and “love ‘em up!” In other words, focus on the emotional tone of the group and unfold the curriculum in a spacious, compassionate way.

2. Relating Compassionately to Others

The best way to teach self-compassion is to *give* compassion. Compassion can be defined as a *deep feeling for the suffering of a living being along with the wish and effort to alleviate it*. If you take a moment to reflect on teachers who’ve had the greatest impact in your life, they’re likely to be teachers who understood the challenges facing you during the learning process. If a subject was particularly difficult, such as physics, your teacher probably knew when to step in and how to encourage you. That’s a compassionate teacher. Similarly, it requires compassion to teach MSC because self-compassion can be quite subtle and confusing at times.

The first task of a compassionate teacher is to be curious and willing to feel the struggles of our participants in their own hearts and minds. The second task is to *remain* curious and openhearted even when teachers feel the distress of their students and wish it weren’t so. When our students sense that we are *with* them in the midst of their difficulties and we engage them in a deeper conversation about their experience, the intimacy of the conversation cultivates self-compassion. Consider the following interaction with Joshua:

Joshua: I’m afraid I’m not very good at self-compassion. When I look inside, I just see so much I don’t like and it isn’t going away. I just can’t feel good about myself. I’m feeling pretty lost, to tell you the truth.

Teacher: I can see that you’re working really hard at this. Could you describe the feeling that you are struggling with...what it’s like?

Joshua: Yes, it’s like a big hole inside. One I could fall into if I’m not careful. It’s not a new feeling, but here it is again. I hate it.

Teacher: May I ask where exactly in your body you feel the big hole?

Joshua: Sure. It’s right in the pit of my stomach.

Teacher: And is there an emotion tied up with it?

Joshua: I’m not sure. Well, mostly afraid, I guess. Afraid of something going wrong because I don’t know what I’m doing. That’s really it. Like being lost...lost and frightened about being lost.

Teacher: So you feel lost and frightened in the pit of your stomach. Would you be willing to just let those feelings be there for a moment? (pause) And if you are willing, could you put your hand on your stomach and just feel the warmth and the sense of touch of your hand? (long pause, teacher does this with the student)

Joshua: (tears starting to flow) I don't know why I'm crying.

Teacher: Could it be that you are actually being compassionate with yourself?

Joshua: (now smiling sheepishly). You mean I'm not so bad at this after all?

In this dialogue, the teacher connected with Joshua's struggle to be more self-compassionate and didn't try to fix the problem. Instead, she entered into Joshua's distress, they anchored it in the body and named the emotion, and the simple physical gesture of placing a hand on the abdomen allowed Joshua to replace self-criticism ("I'm no good at this.") with self-kindness. The external, self-to-other interaction with the teacher was felt by Joshua as new, internal, self-to-self relationship.

Compassion has many faces. When a teacher is being compassionate, there are a host of positive qualities that may or may not arise at the same time. They include:

- *Curiosity* – genuine interest in what a student is experiencing
- *Kindness* – a hospitable, non-judging attitude
- *Warmth* – a tender inclination of heart toward the individual
- *Respect* – appreciating the uniqueness of each individual
- *Non-fixing* – allowing that each person is whole and complete as they are
- *Humility* – assuming that we don't know what is best for another person
- *Mutuality* – sense of commonality in our struggles and aspirations
- *Confidentiality* – willingness to protect the privacy of others
- *Receptivity* – ability to listen and learn from others
- *Flexibility* – capacity to be moved in a new direction by the student
- *Authenticity* – readiness to be open and honest in a helpful way
- *Appreciation* – recognizing the inherent strengths in each individual
- *Attentiveness* – ability to focus on the experience of another
- *Generosity* – willingness to go beyond our usual limitations
- *Empathy* – feeling another's world as our own
- *Equanimity* – perspective and steadiness in the midst of strong emotions
- *Wisdom* – understanding complexity and seeing a way through
- *Confidence* – inner strength that arises from goodwill

These qualities associated with compassion can be found in different teachers in different measure. Furthermore, some of these qualities can be a support to our students and others may have the opposite effect. For example, some students need respectful distance to explore their own experience more fully whereas others need intimacy to alleviate emotional isolation. Sometimes a teacher who speaks in a warm, motherly tone may trigger a student's childhood yearning for connection and subsequent betrayal whereas another student might welcome the soothing effect of a motherly voice. As teachers become adept at teaching MSC, they learn to adapt their personal style to students' needs.

Individual qualities of compassion can be cultivated as needed. For example, teachers who are psychotherapists might discover that they have a tendency to try to fix other people's problems and they may want to learn the new habit of embodied listening and restraining the impulse to fix. Or if a teacher has a Type A personality and is always in a rush to accomplish specific tasks, he or she can commit to following the energy and flow of the group and enjoying the group for its own sake. This is also how teachers learn and grow.

Most of the time, teachers behave just like themselves, for better or worse. Being human means we don't always behave compassionately. For example, imagine that you are teaching a MSC class after a long, hard day at work. Your students are also tired at the end of the day and one participant announces that he or she is getting nothing out of the course. How might you react? Your first reaction would probably be fear that you are not doing a good job and then you might get angry and internally judge the student for being incapable of learning what you're teaching. It's also possible, if you feel angry, that you are having a simple empathic response to the student's anger – you are caught in an emotional contagion. But where's the compassion?

We continually slip in and out of compassion. Compassion is more of an *intention* than a state of mind. Therefore, when we notice that we're frightened and angry, we can choose to return to compassion, perhaps by taking a deep in-breath for ourselves and then exhaling for the student – giving and receiving compassion (p. xx). Or we might double-down and ask ourselves about the student, "Where's the pain?," exchanging anger for curiosity about what may lie beneath the participant's unsettling comment. Just like our students, teachers are always learning to become more compassionate, starting with self-compassion.

3. Embodying Mindful Self-Compassion

The next domain of competence by MSC teachers is embodiment of what we're teaching – loving, connected presence. When mindful self-compassion becomes a way of life for teachers, it naturally informs and supports how they teach. Some students learn as much from *how* teachers conduct themselves in class as they learn from *what* is being taught.

Modeling self-compassion is a much easier task than modeling compassion for others because it thrives on making mistakes. A novice MSC teacher, Jennifer, once shared with us that she had meticulously prepared for her first MSC class only to discover, shortly before her class began, that she left her notes at home. Caught in a moment of confusion and anxiety, she recognized "this is indeed a moment of suffering!" and she shared her quandary, including her embarrassment, with her group. They were greatly amused but also impressed by how Jennifer responded to her predicament. Jennifer then used her own in-class experience to illustrate the concept of self-compassion, the topic of Session 1. In their post-course evaluations, many of Jennifer's students wrote that her handling of this situation was the most memorable event of the course.

Jennifer had been practicing mindfulness and self-compassion for over a year before her first course so she was primed to respond to her mistake with humility and good humor. She meditated every day, opening with kindness to what she was experiencing moment-to-moment. When she felt discomfort and it persisted longer than she could bear, she gave herself compassion. This process of opening to suffering and responding with warmth and goodwill had already become a habit for Jennifer when she entered the classroom. Jennifer embodied mindful self-compassion.

MSC teachers need an ongoing, personal practice of mindfulness and self-compassion to embody it and teach it to others. This means that they practice the core meditations of the MSC program on a regular basis and also make an effort to respond with mindfulness and compassion when they experience problems in daily life. Remembering to practice is hopefully a joy and a relief for teachers rather than a chore - cultivating an easier way of being with our discomfort and with ourselves when things go wrong. Also, when teachers figure out how to sustain a regular meditation practice themselves, they are in a better position to guide their students to do the same.

Meditation Practice

Meditation can be organized into two categories: formal and informal practice. *Formal* meditation refers to practicing for a dedicated period of time. Formal practice is a laboratory to discover what happens, at a deep level, in the field of our awareness when we focus on the breath, use loving-kindness phrases, give spacious awareness to body sensations, and so forth. We can practice in a variety of postures, such as sitting, lying down, standing, or walking. Sitting meditation is the most common type of formal meditation but practicing in other postures should not be considered a lesser form of meditation. Formal practice increases the likelihood that we'll practice self-compassion informally.

Informal meditation refers to the application of mindfulness or self-compassion skills in everyday life, such as while driving, at the workplace, or during conversation with others. We need suffering to learn compassion, so informal practice has an important role in MSC training because we're more likely to struggle emotionally during the day than during 30 circumscribed minutes of sitting meditation. Each practitioner needs to find a balance between formal and informal practice that fits his or her lifestyle. Our preliminary research (Neff & Germer, 2013) showed that formal and informal practice were equally effective in helping people become more self-compassionate.

How Long Should I Practice?

The more we practice mindfulness, the more mindful we're likely to become (Lazar et al., 2005; Pace et al., 2009; Rubia, 2008). We found this was also the case for self-compassion (Neff & Germer, 2013). However, simply sitting down to meditate doesn't mean we're actually meditating. It's possible that someone could practice meditation for years cultivating the fine art of daydreaming rather than mindfulness or compassion. It's equally possible to practice meditation for a short period, intensely concentrated, and one's life is changed forever. We need to practice with a mixture of quantity and quality. It can be quite useful, for example, to sit still for an extended period of time to learn how to apply the tools of mindfulness and self-compassion to experiences that we might otherwise avoid by getting up and distracting ourselves in daily life. On the other hand, shorter meditations with a clear intention, perhaps 20 minutes at a time, are sometimes more useful than long meditations. Practitioners need to find a balance that works for them as individuals.

Prospective MSC students commit themselves to practicing 30 minutes per day, formally or informally, when they register for the program. Teachers are good role models when they do the same, perhaps by relating personal obstacles to practice and how they overcame them. Some teachers and students practice for longer periods, perhaps 30-45 minutes in sitting meditation and an additional 5-10 times informally throughout the day. Extended meditation practice is recommended for teachers who wish to deepen their

understanding of meditation and how to guide their students. However, learning to meditate is not the point of MSC – meditation is a *vehicle* for becoming more mindful and self-compassionate in daily life.

Which Meditation?

What type of meditation is best? Meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg (personal communication) wisely responds to that common question, “The one you’re most committed to!” MSC teaches 3 core meditations, 4 other formal meditations, and 16 informal meditation practices. Teachers and students are encouraged to try each practice and see for themselves how it works and whether it fits them as individuals in their particular circumstances. Which meditation best fits your needs? Which is most pleasant to practice? How do you feel afterwards? While meditating, it’s important to follow the instructions and practice for its own sake, rather than judging whether you feel good or bad, or are achieving a particular state of mind. Pleasant and unpleasant mind states will arise and pass during meditation and our task is to meet them all with loving awareness. Unpleasant states do not necessarily mean that we are practicing incorrectly. However, in order to practice regularly, meditation needs to be generally pleasant and it has to achieve the desired effect over time.

Retreats

MSC includes a 4-hour retreat roughly halfway through the program. The purpose is to have a deeper experience of the core meditations and also to learn some new practices. Retreats usually occur in silence so students can delve more deeply into their own experience while still feeling supported by the structure and common purpose of the group.

A prerequisite for taking the MSC Teacher Training is attendance at a 5-day silent meditation retreat. This standard is primarily to insure that prospective teachers can regulate their own emotions for a long period of time without distractions. Teachers also need to have a deeper experience of retreats before leading one of their own. Trained MSC teachers are encouraged to continue to attend silent retreats each year during the time they are teaching. Retreats at meditation centers vary in their emphasis, such as a focus on mindfulness, concentration, body awareness, loving-kindness, or compassion. No matter what the approach, the process of sustained inner attention invariably puts us in contact with old mental and emotional habits and invites new ways of holding and responding to those experiences. Sometimes radical new insights may emerge on retreats, such as insight into the impermanent nature of self or a sense of deep connection with all beings. These insights support our understanding and ability to teach mindful self-compassion.

Tips for Maintaining a Practice

MSC teachers and their students all need encouragement and support to sustain a meditation practice. This is because stopping and looking inward for an extended period of time goes against the stream of our busy lives. It can also be uncomfortable at times. Below are some tips that help to sustain a personal practice of meditation:

Starting Small

When we start a practice, or when we’re lapsed and want to resume meditation, it’s best to start small. Our ideas about the length of time we should be meditating make meditation unnecessarily burdensome. The main thing is to *begin*, perhaps by fixing the intention to sit for only a few minutes and discover what it feels like to have a human body

and give oneself a little love. Can you arrange your schedule so that you sit for just a few minutes, perhaps before you eat breakfast, read the morning news, or answer emails?

Making it Pleasant

When we practice correctly, meditation feels like a vacation rather than yet-another task to squeeze into a busy day. If meditation feels like work, it helps to ask oneself, “What can I let go of to make meditation less like work and more like play?” “Can I shed the need to be relaxed or to concentrate better, and just *be*?” “Am I trying to achieve a particular state, or can I simply open more fully to what I’m feeling and who I am?” “Can I start the day by giving myself and others a little love?” The point is to make meditation more pleasant and self-reinforcing. For example, when practicing breath meditation, can you let yourself be gently rocked by your breath? During loving-kindness and compassion meditation, can you give yourself kindness whenever you need it and let go of the idea that you need to fix anything about yourself during meditation?

Connecting to Core Values

Does meditation have a place in what you consider a meaningful and valuable day? For example, do you want to be awake and aware of the beauty of each passing moment so you don’t feel you’ve wasted your life preoccupied with problems? Do you want to be happy? Is it important to you to be as compassionate as possible? Reminding ourselves of our core values may be an incentive to meditate rather than keeping up with onslaught of information that bombards us every day.

Non-judging

Most people, even experienced meditators, want to slip into a happier state of mind during meditation. They wish to be clearer, calmer, more peaceful, or more loving than before. This may happen some of the time, but one way that meditation works is by desensitizing us to difficult emotions, thoughts and sensations that inevitably arise. When we meet difficult experience with loving awareness rather than fear or anger, we usually feel better in the long run. Therefore, we should avoid the tendency to judge our meditation or ourselves *during* meditation. Difficult emotions may just be passing through us.

Finding Social Support

Meditation can be quite lonely for some people so they lose interest. Some suggestions to make meditation less solitary are to meditate with your cat or dog, listen to guided meditations, connect to other meditators with a smart phone application like the *Insight Timer*, join an online meditation support group, listen to a talk by an inspiring teacher before practicing, meet weekly with a practice group, or go on a retreat.

Feeling Comfortable

Make a cozy, attractive space in your home dedicated to meditation. Include objects that have special meaning to you. It helps to practice at roughly the same time each day so that you get in the habit of moving toward your meditation space rather than beginning other activities. It’s also important that you are comfortable while meditating. You will not meditate very long if it is physically painful. Try to find a chair that you like, or if you want to sit on a

cushion or bench, make sure your posture is properly adjusted to support your body without effort. Lying down is fine, too.

Being Self-Compassionate

We will inevitably skip a day or a week of meditation and start to feel bad about it. Teachers might have a nagging feeling that they are being fraudulent if they ask their students to do something they are unable to do themselves. Shame is usually a deterrent to resuming good habits so if this occurs it's an excellent time to practice self-compassion. Remember that everyone lapses from time to time, and then ask yourself why you want to meditate regularly and what you may need to get back into it. The suggestions given above might help you get back into the practice, especially starting small and making it pleasant.

Insights from Practice

When teachers have their own practice of mindfulness and self-compassion, they make discoveries that help them relate to the experience of their students, understand the practice at a deeper level, and become better teachers. Some of the lessons learned are glaringly obvious (but we tend to overlook them) and others are quite subtle or paradoxical and only arise after years of practice. They include:

"I'm not very good at self-compassion."

One of our first discoveries when we practice self-compassion is that we're less self-compassionate than we imagined. This can be quite disheartening but it's often a sign of progress. Usually we don't hear the negative chatter in our minds and we don't realize how we undermine or disregard our deepest needs. When we give ourselves loving-kindness again and again, we're likely to notice the discrepancy between what we want and what we're already doing. Discovering that we're not particularly self-compassionate signifies that we're starting to see things as they actually are.

"I feel uneasy about self-compassion"

Most of us are afraid of self-compassion to some extent (Gilbert et al, 2011). For example, we might worry that if we were more compassionate toward ourselves, we'd become self-centered, self-indulgent, weak or lose our motivation to improve. Ironically, the research shows precisely the opposite (see Chapter 2). Even after practicing self-compassion for many years, internalized cultural or familial prohibitions against self-compassion can be quite strong.

"Self-compassion is doing less, not more."

We spend most of our waking hours struggling to achieve one thing or another, such as approval, connection, fame, wealth, or comfort. This attitude of striving naturally carries over to the task of learning to become a more self-compassionate person. However, self-compassion is not a lot of work. When we find ourselves struggling to become more self-compassionate, that's "struggling" and not "self-compassion." Self-compassion feels like a long, delicious, sigh of relief. It's subtraction, not addition.

“Self-compassion is the practice of goodwill, not good feelings.”

Offering ourselves compassion can trigger three kinds of emotional reactions: we can feel *good, bad, or nothing at all*. Sometimes self-compassion makes us smile, sometimes it triggers old wounds and we feel pain, and sometimes our minds are elsewhere and it doesn't touch us at all. Everyone who participates in MSC experiences all three reactions. Trying to feel good is a common source of frustration and we cannot control that outcome. However, we can choose how we *wish* to respond to difficult emotions. Self-compassion is goodwill training – cultivating a friendly attitude toward oneself during periods of emotional distress. Fortunately, good feelings are an inevitable byproduct, or side effect, of goodwill.

“Love reveals everything unlike itself.”

Giving ourselves unconditional love typically reveals the conditions under which we felt unloved in the past, e.g., interactions with early caregivers, current relationships, or cultural biases. This is called “backdraft” and it's an essential part of the healing process. When we develop the skill of self-compassion, our minds naturally open to old relational pain. MSC students learn to expect backdraft and to meet it with the resources of mindfulness and self-compassion.

“Practice makes imperfect”

When some people first hear about self-compassion, they believe that self-compassion will solve all their problems – emotional difficulties, challenging relationships, and so forth. Eventually they discover that, despite their best efforts, life remains difficult and they are the same person as before. This can be rather disappointing but it's actually a sign of progress. We never really learn self-compassion; we learn to embrace our imperfections. Meditation teacher, Rob Nairn (2009), probably said it best: “The goal of practice is to become a compassionate mess.” Being a compassionate mess means being fully human, often struggling, with great compassion.

“What we can feel, we can heal.”

Self-compassion involves opening to pain, not bypassing it. Otherwise it's just sugar-coating, a vain attempt to manipulate moment-to-moment experience by trying to feel good. Love and sorrow comingle in compassion. Poet Naomi Shihab Nye (1995) wrote: “Before you can know kindness as the deepest thing, you must first know sorrow as the other deepest thing” (p. 42). Fortunately we don't need to experience the fullness of our pain to train ourselves in self-compassion; we just need to touch it, as we would touch the flame of a candle with moist fingers.

“We practice not to feel better, but because we feel bad.”

This is the essential paradox of self-compassion practice. Everyone starts on the path to self-compassion to feel better and we instinctively try to avoid feeling bad. When we first learn self-compassion practices, there is a tendency to apply the techniques the instant we feel bad like giving ourselves a magic pill. This approach is destined to fail because what we resist, persists. We cannot manipulate our moment-to-moment experience without making matters worse. The alternative is to allow our hearts to melt in the heat of suffering much as we might feel toward a child who has the flu – not to make the flu go away but as a spontaneous outpouring of affection.

“Self-compassion is a path, not a destination.”

Seasoned practitioners of self-compassion understand that the journey never ends. Life includes pain. Have we increased our capacity to receive it, and let it go? Have we learned to accept *ourselves* more wholeheartedly, especially when we suffer? With consistent practice, our emotional pain will definitely decrease and our hearts will stay open more continuously, but there will always be the need to practice the art of mindfulness and self-compassion. We never arrive.

4. Teaching Topics and Guiding Practices

The next domain of competence for MSC teachers is skill in delivering didactic topics, guiding exercises and meditations, and reading poetry. These skills all require “teaching from within.” The qualities of mindfulness and self-compassion are essentially pre-conceptual states of mind and teaching them is like pointing a finger at the moon. However, when teachers speak from their inner experience and follow their passion for the subject, the minds of students are likely to resonate with the mind of the teacher and students will sense in their own bodies what the teacher is trying to communicate.

Teachers are more likely to teach from within when they avoid reading from the manual. Instead, teachers are encouraged to find their own voice by taking notes and referring to those notes when needed. Some MSC practices, however, especially class exercises, necessitate reading from the manual because the instructions have been carefully edited to be safe and effective for a wide range of participants. One such exercise is “Awakening our Hearts” in Session 3 (p.xx). The MSC developers still read over 90% of the written instructions of that exercise, although the spoken word is filtered through the teacher’s felt experience so it comes alive for the listener. The different teaching components of MSC that require teachers to read from the manual, starting with the least necessity to read, are (1) didactic topics, (2) meditations, (3) class exercises, and (4) poetry. Reading poetry requires absolute fidelity to the words of the poet and didactic topics offer teachers the most freedom to improvise and find their own voice. Each component is considered individually below:

Didactic Topics

An important goal of MSC is for students to become their own best teachers. Toward that end, we provide the *rationale* for each practice offered in MSC. Didactic topics provide a conceptual foundation, the rationale, for experiential exercises. For example, we define self-compassion before we teach informal self-compassion practices, we discuss the pain of disconnection before we teach students how to address their pain, and we explain the nature of shame before we learn to meet shame with mindful self-compassion.

Didactic topics can usually be taught in 5-10 minutes. They should be considered a segue to experiential exercises rather than a lecture. We simply want to get buy-in for the forthcoming practices, not to have a conceptual debate with our students. Some topics take longer to introduce, such as self-compassion in Session 1 and mindfulness in Session 2, because those topics are carried through the entire program. Teachers are also encouraged to connect with their students by keeping a topic as interactive and playful as possible, using

various teaching modalities such as short films, poetry, movement, personal anecdotes, stories, discussion, and relevant research.

The curriculum contains more information and supporting materials for each topic than can be delivered in a short period of time. Teachers are encouraged to discover for themselves what is important in each topic – the basic concepts – and then to build a short presentation around that, speaking with their own voice and using their own examples. By hearing what they are saying in real time and noticing how a group reacts to it, teachers gradually learn to deliver topics in an interesting and succinct manner. Over time, teachers discover there is a natural flow to how they present each topic and they don't need to read or use notes. That's when topics are taught "from within."

Meditation

Guiding meditation is a subtle art that also develops with time. Having a strong personal practice of meditation is the best training for guiding others. Teachers are encouraged to make personal recordings of the 3 core MSC meditations and to share them with their students. Recordings build a bridge between class and home practice and listening to the teacher's voice at home strengthens a student's connection to the teacher. The following points may be helpful to consider when guiding meditation:

Understanding the intention

Know the purpose of the meditation you are guiding. For example, Affectionate Breathing is not only a concentrative meditation in which we return attention to the breath, again and again, but it is also a savoring practice in which we allow ourselves to be gently caressed and soothed by the rhythmic motion of breathing. It's easier to guide meditation when we have a clear understanding of why each practice is included in the curriculum.

Guiding yourself

Connect with your meditative awareness. The teachers' eyes are partially or fully closed most of the time while guiding meditation. Guiding oneself helps with pacing. Allow sufficient time to hear your own instructions and experience in your own awareness what you are inviting others to do.

Finding your own voice

We want to lead meditations from within while using the printed instructions only as a guide to the sequence and flow of the meditation. It is fine to peek at the instructions from time to time, but students will lose connection with their own experience if it sounds like the teacher is reading from the text.

Tone

Speak in a natural voice that is also warm and kind. Compassion meditations are likely to sound more soothing than mindfulness meditations but we also don't want to make them intentionally hypnotic or syrupy-sweet. Speak as you might with a good friend. When teachers are in a compassionate state of mind – loving, connected presence – the tone of the meditation takes care of itself and students naturally absorb what we're trying to communicate.

Cultivating an invitational style

We are welcoming our listeners into meditation rather than trying to induce a particular mood or state of mind. In the English language, a simple grammatical way to cultivate an invitational style is by using the present participle of a verb, ending with “-ing.” For example, instead of giving the instruction “feel your breath,” we can say “*feeling* your breath.” The present participle implies ongoing activity that will persist into the future as well as a sense of doing it together. Our tone of voice can also convey an invitational style. For example, consider the difference in tone when you read an instruction manual out loud compared to when you express sympathy for a friend. Your inclination of heart is likely to be communicated through subtle inflections in your voice. Sometimes our pacing and intonation are even more important than our words.

Balancing Awareness

When MSC teachers guide meditation, they seek to maintain a dynamic balance between three points of awareness – our inner experience, the meditation instructions, and the response of the group (Brandsma, 2016). That means we should stay connected with our meditative awareness, but we also need to occasionally open our eyes and see how the group is responding as well as keeping track of the flow of the meditation by glancing at the instructions. Conversely, we don’t want to keep our eyes open during the entire meditation since we’re likely to lose connection with our inner experience and the contemplative mood.

Exercises

Whereas meditations are taught in class and practiced at home, class exercises are designed specifically for experiential classroom learning. They require more preparation and attention to detail than meditations and topics because they tend to be emotionally activating. For example, exercises often begin with “bring to mind a situation in which you felt emotional discomfort...” Class exercises can also be tricky to lead because they have many elements, such as open and closing one’s eyes, writing and reflecting, and using memory and sensing. Therefore, teachers need to pay more attention to the text and the response of the group than inner awareness while leading class exercises.

The first priority of MSC teachers when leading exercises is to insure the safety of course participants. There is always a balance between feeling safe and taking risks in order to learn something new. Our experience, however, is that teachers don’t need to encourage MSC participants to take risks. Teachers find themselves more often in the position of advising students to reduce their striving and to tackle less difficult life situations during class exercises. Furthermore, the purpose of MSC is not to heal old wounds or solve personal problems, but simply to learn to *meet* one’s problems with mindfulness and compassion. Bringing highly emotional situations to mind often interferes with a student’s capacity to follow the guided instructions and complete the exercise.

There are 5 particularly challenging exercises in MSC: Awakening our Hearts (p. xx), Compassionate Walking (optional) (p.xx), Motivating Ourselves with Compassion (p. xx), Soften-Soothe-Allow for Shame (also optional) (p.xx), and Meeting Unmet Needs (p. xx). These exercises are usually prefaced with safety caveats that are offered to students in a matter-of-fact, non-fear-inducing, non-shaming manner. They include:

- Feel free to take a break if you are not ready for a challenging exercise.
- Practice mindfulness whenever you need to, such as naming any difficult emotions in a friendly way, finding the physical aspect of emotion in your body, focusing on your breath, or listening to sounds.
- Practice self-compassion anytime you wish, such as putting a hand over your heart or breathing in warmth and kindness for yourself.
- Feel free to open or close your eyes whenever you need to.
- Disregard the instructions and think about something else.
- Get up and take a walk.

Participants are always encouraged to practice self-compassion *in relationship to the program itself* and to *each exercise*. Being self-compassionate in ordinary, behavioral ways, such as skipping an exercise, taking a bathroom break or making a cup of tea, are what keep the program safe. Flooding oneself with emotional pain in order to learn self-compassion is not self-compassionate.

Teachers can also regulate the intensity of an exercise by modulating the tempo and tone of their instructions. Long pauses encourage students to delve more deeply into their inner experience. The softer the tone of a teacher's voice, the more deeply students will go as well. When we speed up our tempo and add a lighter touch, students enter into their experience more superficially. Teachers can sense the energy and mood of the group to ascertain how to guide each exercise.

Students process information at different rates, too. For example, some students are naturally introverted and think slowly and deeply whereas others like to dart around their inner landscape. During a writing exercise, some students finish writing before others have even begun. It's difficult to find a pace that perfectly suits everyone in a group so teachers look for median length of time and they can invite slower participants to continue writing when they're home. Pacing of exercises is generally not a problem when teachers are in a compassionate frame of mind because they are more likely to sense group needs and gracefully accommodate them.

Poetry

MSC contains 17 poems and teachers are invited to substitute these poems with others that appeal to them. Poetry can be a remarkably effective way of communicating states of mind through language. Mindfulness, for example, is a pre-verbal moment of simple awareness ("a rose is a rose is a rose") and compassion is a *quality* of awareness characterized by moistness or tenderness. Poetry has a unique capacity to evoke these subtle states within the listener with relatively few, carefully selected words.

However, poetry is nothing more than splotches of ink on a page until a living, breathing reader makes it come alive. The best poems for teachers to read in a MSC class are ones that touch or inspire the teachers themselves. Students will be moved by a poem when they can hear the passion in the teacher's voice.

Some poems, even short ones, may take years for a poet to write. Before reading a poem, teachers are encouraged to discover which words they would like to emphasize. For example, in the Mary Oliver line, "You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves," notice how the meaning changes when you read the whole line but emphasize a

different word. Poems should also be read slowly enough so that listeners can *hear* each word and *feel* what is evoked inside. The pace of a poem is usually about right when teachers read to themselves and give themselves enough time to feel the words work inside. Finally, when a poem is presented to the group as a gift, it is generally received with appreciation.

5. Conducting Inquiry

Inquiry is a powerful teaching tool. It is a particular way of engaging in conversation with individual students about their experience of practice, often immediately right after the practice is completed. The purpose of inquiry is to strengthen the resources of mindfulness and self-compassion. Inquiry is a *self-to-other* dialogue that ideally mirrors the *self-to-self* relationship that we wish to cultivate. The tone or quality of the interactions between teachers and students transmit the qualities of mind that we wish to engender in our students – loving, connected presence. Since inquiry is both a personal and a public encounter, everyone gets chance to learn from the exchange.

Inquiry is the component of teaching that intrigues and confounds most teachers. We can become adept at teaching topics, leading meditations and exercises, and reading poetry, but inquiry will always be a live, fresh, unrepeatable process. Inquiry is as complex as any authentic human relationship and it's as simple as showing up. For this reason, we rarely get it right and we hardly ever get it wrong. Inquiry is a *real* encounter between *real* human beings about *real* experience guided by curiosity, respect and humility.

Inquiry is an art that can develop as long as we practice it. Fully one-half of MSC Teacher Training program is dedicated to the art of inquiry. The best way to learn inquiry is through lots of practice and by observing and experiencing inquiry with seasoned teachers.

To understand what inquiry is, it helps to consider what it is not. Inquiry is *not*:

- *Discussion* – A discussion refers to an exchange of ideas *about* an experience whereas inquiry is a collaborative account of moment-to-moment experience itself – thoughts, emotions, and sensations.
- *Elaboration* - Inquiry is a distillation, not an elaboration. Inquiry is the opposite of telling stories about our experience.
- *Interpretation* - Interpretation refers to what our experience *means*. Meaning often depends on our mood or past experience and is less trustworthy than direct experience.
- “*Why?*” - Inquiry asks *what*, not *why*. It is anchored in current experience rather than a retrospective evaluation.
- *Fixing*. – Inquiry is opening to what is happening in the present moment. Trying to fix how we feel or who we are is often an effort to avoid our experience.
- *Therapy* – The purpose of inquiry is to build the resources of mindfulness and self-compassion rather than heal old wounds.
- *Objective* – Since our experience is always subjective, no one has all the answers. However, the foremost expert on the student's experience is the student him or herself.
- *You/Me* - Inquiry arises out of “we,” a unique interpersonal field, always fresh and new.

- *Doing* - Inquiry is a way being, not doing. It is *being with*.
- Q & A. - Inquiry is a gentle unfolding, not digging for answers.
- *Formulaic* –Inquiry is a natural human encounter and rules about inquiry can often get in the way.

Mindfulness and Self-Compassion

A teacher invites the class to inquiry by asking questions such as “What did you notice?” “What emotions arose for you?” “How did you respond?” “How are you doing now?”

MSC cultivates both self-compassion and mindfulness. Inquiry in *mindfulness* training focuses primarily on the *content* of a student’s moment-to-moment experience - intentions, sensations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors – and whether the awareness is non-judgmental. Inquiry in *self-compassion* training places somewhat greater emphasis on the *quality* of awareness (“Is it warm and accepting?”), especially how we relate toward *ourselves* as objects of awareness.

Mindfulness questions that may arise in the mind of a teacher during inquiry include, “Is there any emotional discomfort?” “Can the emotion be named?” “Can it be found in the body?” “Can the student respond with greater ease?” Self-compassion questions might be, “Can the student hold him or herself with more kindness?” “Is there anything else the student needs?” When a student shares emotional distress during inquiry, MSC teachers can assume that the student is fighting, resisting, or avoiding something. The purpose of inquiry is to help the student adopt a friendlier relationship to the *experience* (mindfulness) and the *experiencer* (self-compassion).

Although MSC is primarily compassion training, mindfulness is especially likely to become the focus of inquiry under the following circumstances:

- A student feels nothing when practicing self-compassion. Teachers can then ask themselves, “*Is there pain?*” or “*Where’s the pain?*” and bring mindful awareness to that experience before exploring a compassionate response. We cannot be compassionate with ourselves if we aren’t suffering or don’t know we’re suffering.
- A student is overwhelmed by emotion. Teachers can redirect the student’s attention to a different present-moment experience, such as the breath, soles of the feet, or sounds in the room, to stabilize attention. If the student is willing and able to work with the emotion, inquiry can be used to explore where the emotion is felt in the body and also find an accurate label for it.
- A student is trying too hard to be self-compassionate. Students easily appropriate self-compassion in their struggle to feel better, trying to eliminate their pain by throwing self-compassion at it rather than allowing the heart to melt in the heat of suffering. Mindfulness with self-compassion allows us to *be with* our suffering in a more spacious way, with equanimity.

Resonance and Resource-Building

The first task of a teacher doing inquiry is to *emotionally resonate* with the student. While resonating, teachers listen not only with their ears but also with their bodies. Resonance is embodied listening. Resonance occurs when students can say, “I know that you know how I feel.” They “feel felt” (Siegel, 2010, p. 136). Another measure of resonance is

when a student feels “cared-for,” “connected, and “attended-to” by the teacher, corresponding to the components of self-compassion - “loving,” “connected” “presence.”

Resonance is inherently healing insofar as it alleviates emotional isolation. The intimacy of emotional resonance evokes a feeling of deep connectedness. One student reported, “When my teacher and I were speaking, it felt not only like *she* was loving me, but also that *I* was loving me.” In this way, inquiry can also activate and strengthen the compassionate voice within each student. Additionally, since other members of a group are also likely to resonate with the student engaged in inquiry, the dyadic process can activate self-compassion in everyone in the room.

Inquiry is already successful when a student and teacher emotionally resonate, but a complete inquiry has an additional dimension - *resource-building*. (A helpful acronym for inquiry is “R & R.”) Resource-building occurs when a teacher either validates how the student used the resources of mindfulness and compassion based on what was shared in the inquiry dialogue, or when the teacher engages in further inquiry to identify or strengthen an aspect of mindfulness or self-compassion that is not yet evident.

For example, when a student gets derailed during an exercise because of strong emotions, the teacher can return to the point in the exercise where the student got lost, bring mindfulness or self-compassion to the scene, and then escort the student through one or more remaining phases of the exercise. Here’s an inquiry with a participant, Joan, after the Meeting Unmet Needs (p.xx) exercise in Session 7:

Joan: I don’t know about that exercise. I just checked out.

Teacher: Can you remember when you checked out?

Joan: Not really. Wait...it was when you asked us to let go of the person who hurt us and go deeper into what we were feeling. I didn’t want to do that. I want an apology from the person.

Teacher: I can understand that. Don’t we all, when we’re hurt by someone? I’m sorry that you were hurt so much. Do you think you’ll ever get an apology?

Joan: No, not really.

Teacher: Do you want to just keep waiting, or do you want to free your heart a little bit right now?

Joan: I guess so. It sucks, but what else can I do?

Teacher: Okay. Do you know what deeper need you had that wasn’t met with this person? For example, did you want to be treated more respectfully, or be seen, or be valued?

Joan: Yes, I really loved this person and needed to be loved back. I just wanted to be loved back. (eyes becoming moist)

Teacher: Of course you did. You needed to be loved back. (pause) I hurts so much when we don't feel loved back. (pause) I wonder, what would you say to a good friend who felt this longing, just like you?

Joan: Oh, I'd say, "You are so lovable. You are so beautiful. He just couldn't see that."

Teacher: Yes, you would say, "You are so lovable. You are sooooo beautiful." Would you mind doing a little experiment together?

Joan: Sure.

Teacher: Let's just say those words together, silently. Maybe even as a whole group, silently, if others are willing, let's close our eyes and just say those words, "You are so lovable. You are so beautiful." Let's just say them, perhaps to ourselves or to someone else in this room. (long pause)

Joan: (smiling) I get it.

Teacher: What do you get?

Joan: It will take some time, but I get it. I can give it to myself. I actually feel much better right now.

In this short exchange, the teacher referred Joan back to the moment in the previous exercise when she "checked out." That grounded the conversation in direct experience. Then the teacher escorted Joan through the next set of instructions that were about discovering unmet needs behind hurt feelings. When Joan was able to complete that activity, she was guided into the final part of the exercise, giving ourselves compassion in response to unmet needs. Joan was able to complete the exercise this time with the companionship of the teacher and the rest of the group. The inquiry process also reminded and reinforced for the whole group the key elements of the exercise they had just experienced, especially how we can meet our unmet needs from old relationships using the resource of self-compassion.

Assessing Motivation

At the start of inquiry, when a student raises his or her hand, we begin to assess the student's motivation. We're interested in ascertaining as quickly as possible if there is a problem that needs to be addressed or if the student is simply wishing to share an insight or observation.

When there's no problem, or if the student had a problem that resolved itself, the student may be speaking to:

- Feel part of the group
- Be admired by others
- Strengthen an insight
- Find words for a new discovery
- Help others by sharing an interesting experience

All these motivations are welcome. In general, when there is no problem, the teacher can simply resonate with the student and validate the resource that was evident during the sharing. For example:

- *The resource of mindfulness*: “It seems you were able to make a lot of space for your anxiety. That takes some courage.”
- *The resource of self-compassion*: “And then you put your hand over your heart and you felt reassured. Is that something you might like to try again when you feel like that?”

Sometimes a warm smile or a nod is all that’s needed. If a teacher hears a few comments in succession that require no more than a nod or an appreciative smile, an atmosphere of quiet, mutual reflection can be generated in the room.

Sometimes there is an *ongoing* difficulty and a participant may want to speak in order to:

- Alleviate discomfort left over from the practice
- Find a solution to an ongoing life dilemma
- Confirm whether he or she is practicing correctly
- Connect with others and feel less alone
- Speak as a means to avoid discomfort

This is when inquiry can be used to find or strengthen the resources of mindfulness and self-compassion. For example:

- *The resource of mindfulness*: “When you say you feel hopeless, is there some place in your body where you feel hopelessness the most?”
- *The resource of self-compassion*: “I’m wondering what you might say to a dear friend who was struggling in the same way as you are now?”

Overcoming obstacles to practice is what makes inquiry most interesting for everyone in the class. In the first few weeks of MSC, participants have a tendency to share positive experiences and insights. It’s necessary to invite students to share challenging experiences as well so they don’t feel isolated by their difficulties, doubts and frustrations.

Promoting Safety

We can only generate compassion when we feel safe so a student’s emotional safety is paramount during inquiry. Inquiry itself can make a participant feel vulnerable and exposed, especially if old wounds are opened during an exercise. Therefore, if a teacher senses that a student is feeling vulnerable but the student would still like to understand his or her experience more deeply, the teacher can inquire, “May I ask you a question?” or “Would you be willing to go a little further into this?” Even those questions should be asked without expectation because some students are unable to say “no.” When in doubt, it’s always better to err on the side of safety.

In general, open-ended questions are experienced by students as safer and more respectful than specific questions or statements. Open-ended questions give room for a student to choose what he or she is willing to share. For example, we might ask, “How do you feel right now?” rather than “Are you upset right now?” Another example is closing an

inquiry with “Is there anything you need?” rather than suggesting what a participant should do next.

It’s especially important to be gentle with trauma survivors and ask for permission before going deeper. We do not want our students to feel over-exposed. Simple questions such as “How do you feel?” or “What do you need?” may trigger some trauma survivors, or yield a blank stare since many people with a trauma history have survived by dissociating from their bodies and their feelings. Not feeling and not knowing has probably allowed them to function. If this is the case, slow the inquiry down. There is no rush. It may help to openly acknowledge that we often don’t know what we feel or need. Traumatized students will open up emotionally when it’s safe to do so and teachers should respect a student’s need to stay closed as long as necessary.

When a teacher notices conflicting signals, such as a big smile through copious tears, realize that you have hit a defense. Pause. Do not try to push through or interpret the conflicting signals. It is often more skillful to just say, “Let me be with you in this moment. Let the class be with you.” Get clear permission before proceeding. Non-verbal cues are often more authentic than verbal cues. If a teacher senses that it’s time to stop, the teacher could say, “I get the feeling we should stop for now. Just know that we are here for you if you’d like to check in after class or during the week.” Be slow, be gentle, and be compassionately respectful.

It is especially helpful to have a co-teacher to insure safety in a group. Generally speaking, the teacher who guided the preceding class exercise or meditation usually leads inquiry. The co-teacher has more freedom to observe the reactions of group members during the practice and also during inquiry. When inquiry nears completion and a co-teacher senses that an aspect of the interaction was overlooked, perhaps a group member is left feeling hurt or unrecognized in some way, the co-teacher may ask the inquirer for permission to speak and complete the inquiry.

Ending Inquiry

Teachers can usually tell when an inquiry is over by a sense of ease in the body and nothing left to say. When we’re unclear if the student is finished, we can simply ask, “How do you feel now?” Five minutes is usually enough time for inquiry with one person, but more time might be helpful if the participant requires it and the topic is relevant to the whole group. If it appears that a participant has personal issue that necessitates longer than 5 minutes, the teacher can extend an offer to speak after class or a co-teacher might go outside the room with the participant. Some inquiries take less than one minute, especially when a participant is sharing an insight and doesn’t have a problem.

Teachers may extend inquiry too long for a variety of reasons. For example, they may feel a student’s distress and can’t stop talking until it’s alleviated. Sometimes teachers don’t trust the power of their own compassionate presence or the power of the group to hold the distress of students after a student has spoken. Another reason for extending inquiry too long is when teachers enjoy the limelight and wish to be admired by their co-teachers or their students. When a teacher finds him or herself talking too much, it helps to use the acronym W-A-I-T, or “Why Am I Talking?” Some teachers think they *should* keep talking in order to properly conduct inquiry when there might actually be nothing left to explore. Less is more.

Sometimes students talk too much as well. There are also many reasons for this, including enjoying the attention, desperately trying to feel better, or looking for deeper understanding. Teacher should not be afraid to interrupt students who speak too much. Instead, when a teacher inquires deeply into the emotional core of a student's comments, the student usually appreciates being interrupted because he or she was enriched by it. The rest of the class is appreciative as well.

MSC participants are instructed in Session 1 to keep their comments in class as "practice-focused" as possible, sharing their direct experience of a meditation or exercise rather than conceptualizing about it or reflecting on related experiences that occurred outside the class. However, remaining practice-focused is not always easy since self-compassion can be emotionally activating, which propels students out of their bodies and into their heads. Some conceptual comments can be put on the flipchart for consideration later in the program if they might be of interest to the whole group. Otherwise, students can often be reoriented to the preceding exercise and invited to reflect on their direct experience of the exercise. For example:

- Asking the student to reflect on the *sensations* or *emotions* of the preceding exercise
- Asking the student about his or her body sensations *during the inquiry process itself* ("Can you feel your grief in your body right now?") and then if possible, link it to the preceding practice ("Did these sensations arise during the exercise as well?")
- Keeping the *intention* of the preceding practice in mind, narrowing the student's attention to that purpose (e.g., "Were you able to warm up your awareness when you thought about someone you love?")
- Refocus the student on the *skill* taught in the practice (i.e., "Were you able to find a phrase that was meaningful to you?")

Reorienting the Heart

Needless to say, we don't always resonate emotionally with our students during inquiry. We might be confused by what a student is saying, perhaps because we really don't know much about each student or because the student is confused about what he or she is saying. Maybe we feel emotionally threatened, or simply tired and shut down. All these eventualities are normal and are clear signs that we're human. It's important for teachers to know their emotional triggers, such as seeing a participant yawn, feeling intellectually intimidated, being dismissed by a group member, or seeming unable to relieve a participant's distress.

The most important emotional state with which MSC teachers need to familiarize themselves is *shame*. Anyone who sincerely wishes to be a good teacher will experience shame when it seems that he or she is failing at the task. Do you know what shame feels like in your body, can you recognize it when it arises, and can you be kind to yourself knowing this is part of the teaching experience? Recognizing shame when it arises creates inner space and protects us from shaming others in return.

No matter what the reason may be for a teacher to lose connection with a student during inquiry, the first step back into connection is to recognize and admit to oneself that we're lost or distracted. Then it helps to inhale for oneself, feeling the breath go in, and then exhale for the student, allowing our attention to flow back to the student. We can do this a few times, and when connection is restored, we can open our awareness to what it feels like

to be in dialogue with the student, allowing ourselves to become aware again of what is most salient and alive for the student.

The safest way to do inquiry is to be humble and open-hearted, learning together with our students. MSC participants are very forgiving of teachers' mistakes when they know that we genuinely care for them and wish to learn from them. Being fully human is the best example we can set for others on the path to self-compassion.

6. Holding the Group

The sixth domain of competence when teaching MSC is group process skills – holding the group. There are actually 4 containers that hold or support a student's learning: (1) the physical environment, (2) the teachings, (3) the teachers, and (4) the group itself. Teachers attend to each of these containers. The *physical environment* should be as pleasant and comfortable as possible to do the work of MSC. Sometimes a simple bouquet of flowers in the center of the room can transform a workspace. The *teachings* themselves do most of the work of MSC. When students are emotionally distraught, they can be redirected to their mindfulness and self-compassion skills to find a way through. Nonetheless, *teachers* are an important source of support as students cultivate new skills, especially when teachers embody the practice and serve as role models. Finally, the effectiveness of MSC depends largely upon the *group* itself. When there is a culture of compassion in the group, students can more easily “tuck themselves in” and be compassionate toward themselves.

Embodied Ethics

Compassion is at the root of most ethical systems, especially doing no harm and alleviating suffering. Each new MSC class begins to create a culture of compassion in Session 1 when participants share how they would like to treat others and how they would like to be treated. They usually suggest guidelines such as confidentiality, recognizing differences between people, compassionate listening, and respecting boundaries. Teachers are also bound by these guidelines and try to embody them in their style of teaching.

The authority of a MSC teacher depends primarily on his or her integrity – when the teacher's thoughts, words and deeds are in alignment. In order to maintain integrity, teachers must be willing to be students throughout their teaching careers. Students are willing to be corrected and to learn from others. MSC teachers are encouraged to stay in connection with other MSC teachers and to build teaching communities that allow for feedback in a spirit of support and goodwill. To quote G.K. Chesterton, “Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.” We never want to get stuck in the teacher role.

The ethical guideline of respecting boundaries is especially important for teachers to observe regarding sexuality and power. Students can idealize teachers when the teacher represents something important to the student, such as compassion or wisdom, and with idealization may come physical attraction. Teachers who want to be idealized or who feel lonely in their personal lives may be inclined to reciprocate these physical urges. Recognizing these situations and discussing them with a co-teacher or within the community of MSC teachers goes a long way to maintaining the status and integrity of the teacher. Teachers will also recognize that students may become attracted to one another as their hearts open during the course. Teachers should be ready and willing to remind students to be

mindful of the harm that crossing intimacy boundaries may cause in their lives outside the classroom.

MSC teachers should set an example for embracing diversity, inclusiveness, and equity. This includes being able to see the influence of racism, sexism, ageism, genderism, classism and ableism in the classroom. When people find themselves in a loving and supportive environment, their minds naturally go to times when they felt invisible, marginalized, or devalued. This is especially true for minority groups, including unseen minorities such as those who are chronically ill or suffer from childhood emotional trauma. Teachers need to make room for these wounds to surface and meet them with mindful self-compassion.

At the present time, the majority of participants in MSC classes tend to be middle-aged, middle-class women. Teachers are encouraged to make their courses available to a wide range of people, perhaps by offering scholarships to those with low incomes. Men are also in the minority in MSC trainings (usually only 10-25%), so special effort can also be made to bring men into courses and make them feel welcome. Participants tend to feel most comfortable in a course when they find “people like me.”

Group Cohesion

Group cohesion refers to the readiness of group members to work together toward a common purpose and to stay together in the group. There’s always a dynamic balance between authentically expressing oneself as an individual and fitting in socially. The same tension plays out in MSC as teachers try to support individual needs while encouraging group participation and a sense of group belonging.

Cohesion develops gradually as students learn to trust one another and feel comfortable in the group. Each group unfolds in its own way over time. The curriculum is designed to facilitate group cohesion with a blend of large and small group discussions, break time for informal chatting, and exercises that invite increasing levels of self-disclosure. For example, the *Awakening our Hearts* exercise (p.xx) in Session 3 throws the door open to trusting one another and experiencing a deeper sense of common humanity for the remainder of the course.

Groups have moods just as individuals have moods. The mood of a group depends on a variety of factors such as the time of day, the attitude of the individual participants, the energy of the teachers, the phase of the group (beginning, middle, ending), and the content of the session. The group mood can be especially challenging in sessions when students are invited to recall difficult emotional situations. One of the tasks of a MSC teacher is to keep the mood of the group generally positive without denying or sugar-coating difficulties. Toward that end, teachers can occasionally uplift up the group with humor, warmth, and connection. For example, when a group needs lightening up, teachers may suggest small group discussions, lead some physical movement (e.g., *Shameless Chi Gung*, p.xx), or suggest a snack break.

The mood of participants depends a lot on the mood of the teacher. Therefore, teachers who know how to regulate their own emotions are often in the best position to maintain a positive atmosphere in the group. Teachers can draw courage from the fact that no matter how dire a situation may appear in the moment, human beings always have the possibility of relating to it in a new way and finding relief. The MSC program teaches just that

and it has been carefully sequenced to make the learning experience as safe, interesting and enjoyable as possible. Over time, MSC teachers learn to rely on the power of mindfulness and self-compassion, and to trust the MSC program itself, and they become examples of emotional balance and optimism (at least during the course itself!).

Each group member also has an impact on the atmosphere of the group. Therefore, teachers need to use their “people skills” to support and manage individual personalities. For example, every group has talkative members and quiet members. As the program progresses, a teacher might gently suggest to quiet individuals that they give themselves permission to speak when they feel the urge. A teacher can restrain overly talkative members by reminding them to keep their comments practice-based, or by identifying a relevant point in the speaker’s comments and bringing it out to the rest of the group.

Participants are usually screened before joining a MSC course (see next chapter) but sometimes there is a disruptive or domineering student in the class who compromises the learning environment for everyone. If it appears that the student cannot adapt to the group, the teacher may wish to have a private conversation with the student about his or her goals and expectations in the course. If the course does not fit that individual, an arrangement can be made to try the course at a later date or to leave the program. Teachers sometimes need to ask a disruptive individual to leave the group to protect the learning experience of everyone else.

When students register for the course, they commit to attending every session. If a student misses more than two sessions, teachers may want to inquire privately with the student about the reason for absences. Usually there are challenges in the student’s life that interfere with participation. Sometimes there is a mismatch between the student’s expectations and his or her actual experience of the program, or the student finds it difficult to connect with other participants. If a participant quits the program prematurely, that usually happens in the first few sessions. Even though students are encouraged to discuss concerns about the program with a teacher, they may feel too confused or embarrassed to do so. Nonetheless, students generally appreciate when a teacher reaches out to them and understands their wish to leave. Teachers can exercise discretion and return the registration fee if it appears clear that the student really cannot benefit from the course.

Sometimes MSC is too emotionally activating and the student just doesn’t know how to work with it yet. This is the process of “backdraft” mentioned earlier and it’s part and parcel of the transformation process. Examples of backdraft are feeling bad about oneself (unworthiness), frustration with not learning quickly enough (perfectionism), feeling uniquely alone and misunderstood (emotional isolation), or physical agitation (fear of being vulnerable). Teachers need to keep backdraft in mind and create opportunities for students to mention it. To facilitate conversation about backdraft, every session begins with a general discussion (“How is your practice going?”) and students are also asked to fill out a Weekly Feedback form. The most powerful breakthroughs are often those that occur when participants apply mindfulness and self-compassion to their difficulties with the course itself. *Most* students are disappointed by their progress halfway through the program. They are likely to blame themselves, the program, or their teachers for their difficulties. By expecting and embracing disappointment, teachers do not need to fear their students’ frustration or criticism.

Students open and close emotionally throughout the course. Opening occurs when emotions are vivid and attention is wide and clear. Closing is usually accompanied by

fatigue, irritation, or distraction. Teachers create a safe container for the group when they compassionately embrace both opening and closing and encourage their students to do the same.

Co-Teaching

MSC is ideally taught by two trained teachers. Sometimes there aren't two trained teachers in the same geographic area or the course has too few participants to make co-teaching financially viable. In that case, a trained MSC teacher may still wish to have an assistant in the room. A teaching assistant is a person who has skills related to teaching MSC, such as training in psychotherapy or teaching meditation, but isn't trained to teach MSC itself. Assistants often get free tuition for their efforts. A simple way to explore whether someone may be a good match as a co-teacher or an assistant is whether the thought of working together makes you smile.

Co-teachers help one another lead MSC safely and effectively. Teaching MSC isn't necessarily easy because teachers go through emotional ups and downs along with their students, including moments of joy, sadness, uncertainty, curiosity, fatigue, elation and despair. They also have to teach the curriculum. Co-teachers are a second set of eyes to help teachers respond to the needs of the group. For example, one teacher can watch the emotional reactions of individual members while the other focuses on leading an exercise.

The relationship between the co-teachers sets the tone for the whole group because participants are often rather astute observers. When teachers honor each other's unique personality and skills, students are likely to extend the same generosity to one another. Differences in personality or style between co-teachers can support students insofar some students have natural preferences for different kinds of teachers.

We recommend that one of the group facilitators be a trained mental health professional. The mental health needs of group members are difficult to predict so it's advisable to have a professional ready in case of emergency. For instance, in the rare event that a participant is emotionally triggered in class and cannot calm down, a co-teacher or assistant may accompany the student outside the classroom for a while as the other teacher continues leading the group.

Co-facilitators should make time after each session to reflect together on how the program is going, identify individual participants that may require special attention, and provide supportive feedback to one another. Teachers can expect that they will have disagreements about how to teach parts of the curriculum or how to work with particular students. Sometimes co-teachers may find themselves competing for the affection of students or trying to impress one another. One facilitator is often more experienced or skilled than the other, leaving the less skilled teacher to feel diminished or superfluous in the teaching role. These are natural human reactions that can hopefully be discussed so that they do not impact the atmosphere of the group. When disagreements arise, it helps for co-teachers remind themselves of their purpose - "May we support, encourage, nourish, and inspire each other."

Co-teaching extends beyond the classroom as well. All MSC teachers are encouraged to participate in the global, online network of teachers who are learning together how to teach MSC to an increasingly wide range of populations. MSC teachers are also

encouraged to engage in continuing education after completing formal training through online Advanced Training Seminars and teacher retreats.

Points to Remember

1. There are 6 domains of competence which are necessary to teach MSC: (1) unfolding the curriculum, (2) relating compassionately to others, (3) embodying self-compassion, (4) teaching topics and guiding practices, (5) conducting inquiry, and (6) holding the group.
2. MSC requires 24 hours of teaching time to present the full curriculum. Teachers become more efficient as they familiarize themselves with the program.
3. The best way to teach self-compassion is to give compassion. The *intention* to be compassionate is more important than getting it right all the time.
4. Embodying self-compassion – loving, connected presence - supports all aspects of teaching. Teachers should practice what they preach, including a daily practice of meditation both formally and informally for 30 minutes each day.
5. Teachers are encouraged to find their own voice and teach topics, exercises, and meditations from within.
6. The first priority of MSC teachers is to insure the emotional safety of participants.
7. Inquiry is a *self-to-other* dialogue between a teacher and student that mirrors the *self-to-self* relationship that we wish to cultivate. Inquiry consists primarily of emotional resonance and resource-building – R & R.
8. The integrity of the group depends on the integrity of the teachers, as well as the teachers' ability to balance individual and group needs. Teachers create a "culture of compassion" by making participants feel safe, attending to the mood of the group, working with emotional challenges, managing disruptive students, and cultivating a harmonious co-teaching relationship.

Ethical Guidelines for MSC Teachers

Teaching Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC), I am aware of my responsibility in regard to the course participants. For that reason I observe the following ethical guidelines:

1. Transparency and Openness

In advance of the course, I will accurately inform all participants about the content, form, duration and costs of the course. I will also be clear about my own qualifications and training to teach MSC.

2. Embracing Diversity

MSC is a learning environment that is inclusive of all. I will respect the differences between people, both visible and invisible, and will teach without biases based on differences of any kind. I will honor the unique challenges that each individual faces as we learn together to embrace our common humanity.

3. Financial Integrity

Although I recognize that I am entitled to be fairly compensated for my time teaching MSC, my primary goal is to be of service to others and I agree to always balance my own economic needs and those of my participants when making decisions about fees and scholarships for those in need.

4. Respecting the integrity of the program

Being a member of this teacher organization, I will ground my teaching in what I learned at the MSC Teacher Training and subsequent group consultation sessions. I respect the integrity of the MSC curriculum and when using the MSC name I will strive for a minimum of 85% adherence to the curriculum. To the best of my ability, I will abide by the CMSC policies and procedures for teaching MSC, and will seek out consultation from CMSC if I have questions or concerns about these policies and procedures.

5. Acknowledging the limitations of the program

I am aware that MSC is not a substitute for medical or mental health treatment, and I will endeavor to assure that my public communications (e.g., advertising, writing, speaking) make this clear to all prospective and current participants.

6. Ongoing learning and personal practice

In order to remain qualified to teach, I will stay abreast of developments in the fields of mindfulness and self-compassion and participate in the professional community of MSC teachers. I am aware that an ongoing, personal practice of mindfulness, compassion, and self-compassion, both formally and informally, is essential for teaching.

7. Responsibility for my relationship to participants

I understand that the way to teach mindfulness and self-compassion is to behave

compassionately. I also realize that the relationship between teachers and students is asymmetrical. I take responsibility for this relationship without seeking further material or immaterial rewards, and above all else, hold the emotional and psychological safety of my MSC participants as paramount. For this reason I will maintain a professional teacher-student relationship with all participants while teaching an MSC course.

8. Respect in regard to other teachers and programs

I see clearly that compassion and mindfulness includes my behavior towards other teachers as well as other mindfulness and compassion-based programs. This includes adopting an appreciative attitude - recognizing the commonality of our shared goals of bringing mindfulness and compassion to the world - and not commenting on other teachers or other programs in a disparaging way. I will also attempt to address any existing or potential conflicts directly in a constructive and compassionate manner.

9. Ideological neutrality

Teaching MSC I refrain from political, ideological or religious indoctrination. I may, of course, discuss the background of MSC or my own practice if asked.

10. Disregard of the ethical guidelines

I am aware that if I continually disregard these ethical guidelines it may lead to exclusion from the Center for MSC, its activities, or other MSC organizations.

Adapted with permission from the Ethical Guidelines of the German MBSR-MBCT Association

Pathway to Teacher Certification

There are 3 designations of MSC Teachers:

1. Teacher-in-Training
2. Trained MSC Teacher
3. Certified MSC Teacher.

1. Teacher-in-Training

The first step toward becoming a MSC Teacher is to take a 6-day MSC Teacher Training program (TT). After completing the TT, participants are known as Teachers-in-Training.

Prerequisites for attending a MSC Teacher Training (TT) are:

Personal Skills:

- Established daily mindfulness practice of at least two years.
- Ongoing daily sitting meditation practice
- Ongoing practice of loving-kindness and self-compassion in daily life
- Attendance in at least one 5-day silent teacher-led meditation retreat

Professional Skills:

- Previous participation in a 5-day intensive or eight-week MSC
- Experience teaching meditation in groups, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, or in clinical settings

Please note:

- You must allow at least 6 months to elapse between completing your MSC course and beginning Teacher Training. This will allow you to reflect on whether you really want to begin the teaching journey. However, you may *register* for teacher training at any time after you complete the MSC course.
- You do not need to be a mental health clinician to take the MSC Teacher Training.
- Upon completion of the MSC Teacher Training, participants receive a *Certificate of Attendance* from the Center for MSC stating that he or she has attended the TT in its entirety and can start teaching MSC as a Teacher-in-Training.

2. Trained MSC Teacher

The process of becoming a fully trained MSC Teacher in conjunction with the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion encompasses all of the pre-requisites for attending the MSC Teacher Training (TT), as well as the following additional requirements:

- Completion of the MSC Teacher Training (TT)
- Teaching or co-teaching a full 8-week MSC group course (after Teacher Training) **with at least eight participants.**
- Participating in 10 online consultation sessions while teaching or co-teaching one's first MSC group course. Consultations are hosted by a Teacher Trainer or experienced MSC Teacher and a modest fee is charged for the service.

Upon completion of these requirements, the Teacher-in-Training can apply for a *Certificate of Training* from the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion. This certificate indicates that he or she has fulfilled the necessary requirements and is now trained to teach or co-teach MSC, and can apply for teacher certification. The bearer can now advertise him or herself as a "Trained Teacher of Mindful Self-Compassion". The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion reserves the right not to grant a Certificate of Training, if it is determined that the Teacher-in-Training has not successfully completed the requirements and/or needs further consultation or remediation.

Trained Teachers can be listed on the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion website along with their upcoming MSC programs (see www.CenterForMSC.org). In the future, MSC Teachers will be expected to engage in continuing education, in order to maintain their affiliation with CMSC (not yet available).

3. Certified MSC Teacher

Certification is the verification of a teacher's competence, whereas the designation of Trained MSC Teacher simply recognizes that a person has completed the requisite training activities. This level of training and verification is highly recommended for those who continue to teach the program, and it offers a number of opportunities and advantages as well. The designation of Certification indicates that the individual has been individually mentored by an expert MSC Teacher, has received specialized advanced training in teaching the program, has taught a significant number of MSC courses and had his or her teaching reviewed by an expert MSC teacher for competence. For more information see: <http://mbpti.org/msc-teacher-qualification-and-certification/>

Advantages of becoming a Certified MSC Teacher include:

- You may represent yourself publicly, including in the directory of the CMSC website as a Certified Teacher who has received the approval and support of CMSC and the UC San Diego Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute.
- You will be approved to offer MSC in the intensive format.
- You will have the support of CMSC to adapt MSC for special populations (subject to review and approval by CMSC).
- Furthermore, all CMSC Teacher Trainers, Mentors and Teacher Training Consultants are required to be certified as well. Thus, those who hope to potentially serve in those roles must obtain certification, in order to be considered for these positions.

Teacher-in-Training: Your First Teaching Experience

a) Co-Teaching with a Trained MSC Teacher

If possible, we recommend that Teachers-in-Training co-teach their first 8-week MSC course with a Trained MSC Teacher. This eases the transition into teaching and enhances the learning process.

The Trained MSC Teacher remains responsible for the quality of the program while providing help and support to the Teacher-in-Training. While the Trained MSC Teacher may lead a majority of the meditations and exercises, a substantial portion of the course must be taught by the Teacher-in-Training, in order to count as a co-teaching experience.

b) Assisting a Trained MSC Teacher

Sometimes a Teacher-in-Training prefers to gain initial practical experience by *assisting* a Trained MSC Teacher leading an 8-week course before teaching or co-teaching one's own course. This means that the Trained MSC Teacher or Teachers are responsible for delivering the content of the course and the Teacher-in-Training will do some limited teaching in an area of competence. While this is an ideal learning opportunity, please be advised that being an assistant for a MSC course does not fulfill the requirement for becoming a Trained MSC Teacher. Teaching or co-teaching an 8-week MSC program, with online consultation during the program, remains a prerequisite for becoming a Trained MSC Teacher.

c) Teaching with a General Assistant

We understand that it is often difficult to arrange co-teaching with a Trained MSC Teacher in many geographic areas. (The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion provides a list of Trained MSC Teachers in various regions.) If necessary, a Teacher-in-Training may also teach his or her first course on his/her own, but with the help of a "General Assistant." A General Assistant is typically a person who has already taken the MSC program (but not the Teacher Training) or has prior experience teaching mindfulness. A General Assistant usually helps with course logistics and offers support to the Teacher-in-Training. The Assistant may also do some limited teaching in an area of expertise, such as guiding meditation, but the Teacher-in-Training remains responsible for course content.

If an experienced assistant is not available, Teacher-in-Training may simply ask a colleague who is interested in taking the course to act as an assistant when needed (usually in exchange for waiving the course registration fee). Because teaching MSC takes focus and concentration, it is highly advisable to have another person in the room who can observe other participants to see if any are having difficulties that require further attention or discussion.

d) Co-Teaching with a Mental Health Professional

It is recommended that if the Teacher-in-Training is not a mental health professional, that he or she co-teaches with or is assisted by a mental health professional. This is because emotional challenges are part of the transformative process of mindful self-compassion, and it helps to have a mental

health professional in the room for consultation on the psychological needs of individual group members.

e) Assisting in an MSC Intensive Course

While it is ideal for a Teacher-in-Training to assist with an 8-week program, he or she may also wish to gain initial practical experience by assisting at a 5-day MSC intensive program. If you wish to learn about teaching MSC during an intensive, the best scenario is to be an assistant to *two* Certified MSC Teachers leading the course, picking up parts of the teaching that the course leaders and you feel most comfortable with. It is also possible to assist a single Certified MSC Teacher in an intensive program, but that arrangement should be carefully considered with the teacher. Again, assisting at a MSC intensive does not fulfill the requirement for becoming a Trained MSC Teacher.

CMSC Policy on Scope of MSC Teaching Based on Experience and Levels of Training

In order to ensure that teachers are properly prepared to teach some of the related forms and adaptations of MSC, CMSC has outlined the following policies to guide our teachers:

1) After successfully completing Teacher Training & receiving the Teacher-in-Training Certificate:

- You may then offer the 8-week in-person MSC course (preferably with a co-teacher) while attending 10 concurrent Zoom Consultation Sessions, as the MSC teacher training pathway indicates
 - In order to qualify, your course must include at least eight participants and be in the standard 8-week format
 - We strongly recommend that this be the first MSC 8-week course that you teach after completing Teacher Training, and you may not represent yourself as anything other than a MSC Teacher-in-Training until you have completed the consultation sessions.
- You may offer introductory talks and workshops up to 3 hours in length.
- Other formats or adaptations are not allowed for Teachers-in-Training

2) After completing your first course with Zoom Consultation and receiving your Trained Teacher Certificate:

- You may continue to offer the 8-week in-person MSC course to the public (preferably with a co-teacher)
- You may co-teach a MSC Intensive, but always with a Certified MSC Teacher who takes primary responsibility for the program.
- You may offer modified forms of MSC as long as they contain at least 85% of the content of the full MSC program and do not include more than one MSC session in a single day. Courses that group two sessions on one day are considered intensives and Trained Teachers may not offer such intensives without a Certified MSC Teacher as a co-teacher.
- You may offer introductory talks and workshops up to one day in length

3) After completing mentorship and becoming a Certified Teacher:

- You may continue to offer the 8-week in-person MSC program.
- You may offer 2-day MSC Core Skills programs
- You may co-teach MSC intensives, preferably in the 4- or 5-day residential format, but this may include further modifications like multiple weekends, or four 2-session days, etc.
 - Please note: CMSC does not allow programs that include the material from more than two sessions in a single day, as we believe strongly that this is just too much material for participants to absorb in such a short period of time.
 - You are strongly encouraged to consult with CMSC or an MSC Mentor on any modifications to the standard formats.

- If you are unable to co-teach an intensive with another Certified MSC Teacher, you may have a Trained Teacher as a co-teacher or have a General Assistant (who could be a Teacher-in-Training) present for the full program.
- You are eligible to be trained to teach Live Online MSC or other CMSC-endorsed online programs

General Guidelines for MSC Teachers

Co-Teaching

We recommend that MSC be co-taught by two trained teachers. Co-teaching implies that each teacher delivers a substantial portion of the course content (guiding meditations, leading exercises, etc.). Co-teaching is useful for a variety of reasons, including:

- One teacher can rest while the other teaches.
- Teachers may have complementary skills, such as mindfulness/compassion or research/mental health.
- Gender, personality, and teaching style differences help students connect with different teachers.
- Collaborative teaching facilitates a culture of kindness.
- Co-teachers can provide feedback, consultation, and support to one another.

If a group is small (8-10 participants), it might be feasible for a Trained MSC Teacher to lead the group without a co-teacher.

To insure the quality of co-teaching, co-teachers may need to take some time to get to know each before they teach together. The purpose is to feel like a “we” rather than an “I” when you enter the teaching space. Co-teaching thrives when you feel supported, nourished, and safe in the presence of your co-teacher or assistant. The prospect of teaching together should make you smile when you think about it.

MSC teachers are welcome to consult with a MSC Teacher Trainer if they have questions about their upcoming teaching arrangements.

Teaching Assistants

General Assistant

A MSC teacher may also enlist the help of a general assistant, especially when a co-teacher is not available. Several different types of people may serve as a general assistant. The assistant may be someone who has already taken the MSC program and has a regular practice of mindfulness and self-compassion, but has not completed MSC Teacher Training. He or she may also be a Teacher Trainee (someone who has completed the Teacher Training but who has not yet taught or co-taught an 8-week MSC course with consultation) who wants to gain preliminary experience with the program. Alternatively, the assistant may be someone who has experience teaching mindfulness but who has not yet taken MSC. A general assistant will primarily help with course logistics and offer support to the teacher, and may do some limited teaching in an area of competence.

Mental Health Assistant

It is recommended that one of two MSC co-teachers be a trained mental health professional. This is because emotional challenges are part of the transformative process of mindful self-compassion and it helps to have a mental health professional in the room for consultation on

the psychological needs of individual group members. If neither co-teacher is a mental health professional, they can enlist the help of a mental health assistant. This person may be a general assistant (see above) or an “observer” who participates in MSC as a regular group member while monitoring the psychological needs of the others. Having a mental health professional present should not be confused with psychotherapy. Mindful Self-Compassion is a skill-building course in self-compassion, not psychotherapy.

8-Week and Intensive Formats

MSC was carefully developed as an 8-week program and we hope that most teachers will instruct in this format. However, the MSC program can also be taught in a 5-day Intensive format, with one weekly session being taught in the morning, another in the afternoon, etc. The 8-week program offers participants more breadth of experience since they will integrate MSC into daily life between sessions, whereas an intensive, 5-day program offers more depth in a shorter period of time. In either format, MSC was designed for each session to be 2.75 hours or longer, including a 15 min break.

Trained MSC Teachers are encouraged to share information about self-compassion and MSC through introductory workshops of fewer than 4 hours. Trainings longer than 4 hours (1-day introductions to MSC or 2-day MSC Core Skills programs) should only be led by teachers who have taught at least two (2) 8-week MSC courses and have previous experience leading mindfulness- and compassion-based programs, or have taught at least four (4) 8-week MSC courses. 5-day MSC Intensives should only be taught by Certified MSC Teachers because of the greater skill and familiarity with MSC that is required.

CMSC also plans to offer an online Advanced Training Seminar (ATS) to teachers to familiarize them with the challenges, adaptations and nuances of conducting intensive programs. We hope the MSC teaching community will help us maintain these standards to insure that our participants get the best possible experience of self-compassion training.

If MSC teachers want to gain preliminary experience teaching an Intensive program, they should consider first serving in the role of an assistant (rather than a co-teacher) to two Certified MSC Teachers leading an Intensive course.

Fair Use of MSC Materials

The information in the MSC Handouts booklet and the MSC Teacher Guide are the intellectual property of Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff. However, we have a strong wish for these materials to be widely disseminated in the most beneficial manner. The following guidelines pertain to sharing MSC materials with others.

MSC Handouts:

Printed - The handout booklet may be photocopied for participants in MSC classes. MSC teachers may also offer printed copies of 4-5 practices from the handout booklet for distribution at workshops and lectures. Please do not offer the entire handout booklet to people who are not taking the MSC course because *how* the material is presented is as important as what is taught.

Online – To prevent random online sharing of the MSC course, please do not distribute the handout booklet as an electronic file to your students. However, the following *individual* practices from the handout booklet may be shared electronically or posted online by teachers, either as an audio or video recording or as written instructions:

Core Meditations

Affectionate Breathing
Loving-Kindness for Ourselves
Giving and Receiving Compassion

Other Meditations

Compassionate Body Scan
Compassionate Friend
Loving-Kindness for a Loved One
Compassion for Self and Others

Informal Practices

Self-Compassion Break
Self-Compassion in Daily Life
Finding Loving-Kindness Phrases
Compassionate Letter to Myself
Working with Difficult Emotions

When posting these handout materials online or when distributing printed materials, please be sure to cite the source in the following way:

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All rights reserved. If you would like permission to reproduce, distribute, publish,
display, or modify these materials, please contact <http://www.CenterForMSC.org>.

MSC Teacher Guide:

The Teacher Guide is only distributed to MSC teachers in the context of a hands-on teacher training and the curriculum requires a trained teacher to insure its effectiveness. It is also the intellectual property of Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff. Please do not offer the Teacher Guide to anyone or distribute any materials from the Teacher Guide that are not in the Handouts. This refers especially to the topics and to the class exercises. The class exercises tend to be emotionally activating and should only be shared with others in relative safety of the classroom

Some teachers wish to share material from the Teacher Guide with students who have missed a class. There is information on HAIKU that teachers can offer to students instead of sharing the Teacher Guide or teachers can offer absentee students private instruction.

How to Use MSC Teacher Online Consultation

Purpose

The main purpose of online consultation sessions is to support your early MSC teaching experience through interaction with a teacher trainer, or an experienced MSC teacher, and fellow teacher trainees. You are encouraged to bring questions, challenges, reflections and insights to the online sessions in order that we may mutually enhance our skills and knowledge.

Another purpose of these consultation sessions is to participate in the growing MSC teacher community. You will meet and learn from the experiences of new teachers around the world and contribute to the development of a professional sangha.

Online consultation sessions are intended as a place to support, nourish, and inspire beginning teachers. They are not an occasion for evaluation by others, although areas of development can certainly be discussed, as you wish, during consultation.

Group Teaching

To receive consultation credit toward becoming a Trained MSC Teacher, the trainee should teach a group of students rather than a single individual or a few people individually. Also, to reduce the stress of first-time teaching, trainees are advised to teach only one group until they become more familiar with teaching MSC.

Confidentiality

Participants in online consultation groups agree to maintain the confidentiality of the other teacher trainees as well as the members of their MSC groups. Toward that end, teacher trainees should not discuss the personal material shared by anyone in the consultation session with individuals outside the group, or divulge the names or other details of MSC participants that could lead to someone identifying a particular individual.

Preparation

The best way to prepare for a consultation group is to spend a few minutes contemplating what you wish to understand or learn. For example, you can reflect on what transpired in your last group session, noting the moments that were most salient for you—moments of insight, inspiration, challenge or concern. Or you can reflect on the unfolding process of the group over time, or changes in an individual participant. You don't need to offer a lot of detail, but are encouraged to boil your impressions down to essential points for the benefit of all the participants in the consultation group.

Participants in consultation groups are invited to identify difficulties or concerns as they arise so you can be supported in your growth as an MSC teacher. Also, please share experiences you are pleased with—successes, breakthroughs, and new insights.

You may also wish to review an upcoming session before a consultation meeting and ask for clarification about anything with which you may not feel entirely comfortable. Finally, consultation groups are an excellent opportunity to discuss your learning process as a teacher—how you feel about your role as a teacher and changes you may notice in your teaching style.

Video

These consultations are professional meetings with colleagues from around the world. To enhance a sense of mutuality and respect, please consider the following recommendations:

- Find a private space that insures confidentiality.
- Log into Zoom on time, at the specified time. We are using only one Zoom "room", so another meeting might be ending just before you start.
- Put one or two lamps behind the computer monitor to better light your face and make sure there are no bright lights, including a window, behind you.
- Put your laptop or tablet on a stable surface so others have a steady, clear image of you.
- Raise your computer monitor to a level where the web camera is at your eye level. You may need to elevate it with some books.
- Move the Zoom application window to the top of your computer, just under your web camera, so you are looking into the camera (and the eyes of others), when anyone is speaking.
- Mute your microphone, when you are not speaking.
- Please refrain from eating (or other distracting activity) during online consultation.

Process

Consultation groups are an opportunity to practice embodied, compassionate listening and speaking. That means that the general guidelines for running a MSC group are carried over to the consultation groups, such as non-judgment, non-fixing, respecting differences, and taking personal responsibility for one's own wellbeing.

Although consultation groups are hosted by a teacher trainer or a senior MSC teacher, they are conducted more like peer consultation groups. We are all learning together. Also, please feel free to express yourself if the group is not meeting your needs.

Sample MSC Brochure

MINDFUL SELF-COMPASSION

(teachers)

(location)

(dates)

(self-compassion quote)

[Mindful Self-Compassion \(MSC\)](#) is an empirically-supported, 8-week, training program designed to cultivate the skill of self-compassion. Based on the groundbreaking research of Kristin Neff and the clinical expertise of Christopher Germer, MSC teaches core principles and practices that enable participants to respond to difficult moments in their lives with kindness, care and understanding.

The three key components of self-compassion are self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and balanced, mindful awareness. Kindness opens our hearts to suffering, so we can give ourselves what we need. Common humanity opens us to our essential interrelatedness, so that we know we aren't alone. Mindfulness opens us to the present moment, so we can accept our experience with greater ease. Together they comprise a state of warm-hearted, connected presence.

Self-compassion can be learned by anyone, even those who didn't receive enough affection in childhood or who feel uncomfortable when they are good to themselves. It's a courageous attitude that stands up to harm, including the harm that we unwittingly inflict on ourselves through self-criticism, self-isolation, or self-absorption. Self-compassion provides emotional strength and resilience, allowing us to admit our shortcomings, motivate ourselves with kindness, forgive ourselves when needed, relate wholeheartedly to others, and be more authentically ourselves.

Rapidly expanding research demonstrates that self-compassion is strongly associated with emotional wellbeing, less anxiety, depression and stress,

maintenance of healthy habits such as diet and exercise, and satisfying personal relationships. And it's easier than you think.

After participating in this workshop, you'll be able to:

- Practice self-compassion in daily life
- Understand the empirically-supported benefits of self-compassion
- Motivate yourself with kindness rather than criticism
- Handle difficult emotions with greater ease
- Transform challenging relationships, old and new
- Manage caregiver fatigue
- Practice the art of savoring and self-appreciation

What To Expect

Program activities include meditation, short talks, experiential exercises, group discussion, and home practices. MSC is a workshop rather than a retreat. The goal is for participants to directly experience self-compassion and learn practices that evoke self-compassion in daily life.

MSC is primarily a compassion training program rather than mindfulness training like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), although mindfulness is the foundation of self-compassion. MSC is also not psychotherapy insofar as the emphasis of MSC is on building emotional resources rather than addressing old wounds. Positive change occurs naturally as we develop the capacity to be with ourselves in a kinder, more compassionate way.

It is said that "love reveals everything unlike itself." While some difficult emotions may arise when practicing self-compassion, MSC teachers are committed to providing a safe, supportive environment for this process to unfold, and to making the journey interesting and enjoyable for everyone.

MSC includes 8 weekly sessions of 3 hours each, in addition to a 4-hour retreat. Prior to registering, participants should plan to attend every session and practice mindfulness and self-compassion at least 30 minutes per day throughout the program.

Prerequisites

No previous experience with mindfulness or meditation is required to attend MSC. To insure safety, participants are asked to provide background information when they register for the program.

It is recommended that participants read one or both of following books before or during the program:

- *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, by Kristin Neff
- *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, by Christopher Germer

This program fulfills one of the prerequisites for becoming a MSC teacher. For more information on MSC and MSC Teacher Training, please visit www.CenterForMSC.org.

Instructors

Registration

USEFUL MSC FORMS
(Also available on Haiku)



MSC Background Information Form

Please provide the following background information to help your teacher(s) assess if MSC will be helpful to you at this time and to support you during the program. This information will only be read by the course instructors. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, please note that on the form and we can have a private conversation before the program begins. Leaving a question blank will have no impact on inclusion in the program.

Thank you.

Program location and dates:

Name and Address

.....
.....

Occupation

Date of birth

How do you self-identify your gender?

Do you identify as a person of color? []Yes []No

Will you be attending the program with a significant other (spouse, relative, friend)? If so, please list the name/names:.....

Why are you interested in participating in MSC at this time? Please be advised that MSC is primarily designed for personal growth and development.

.....
.....
.....

Do you have a regular practice of meditation? If so, what type and how many years have you been practicing? It's not necessary to have any experience of meditation prior to this program.

.....
.....

Do you have any meditation *retreat* experience?

.....
.....

Do you have any physical illness or limitation that may impact your participation in the program? []Yes []No If yes, please describe.

.....
.....

Are there any stressful life circumstances that might make this program difficult for you at this time (e.g., recent loss of a loved one or job, substance use, fasting).

.....
.....

Are you currently seeing a therapist or counselor? []Yes []No

If so, is your counselor aware you are attending this retreat? []Yes []No
In the unlikely event of a psychological emergency, may we contact your counselor? If so, please provide contact information:

.....
.....

Are you currently taking psychoactive medication, or any medication that may affect how you feel during MSC? If so, please provide details.

.....
.....

Is there anything else that might be helpful for the instructors to know at this time?

.....
.....
.....
.....

I understand that my participation in this program is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice, except for the non-refundable course fee. At the present time, I am planning to participate in the entire course (including the 4-hour retreat), and to practice mindful self-compassion at least 30 min/day (formally or informally). I also understand that I am responsible for my personal safety and wellbeing and will practice self-care throughout the program.

Signature:

Date:



Emergency Contact Information

Your Name (*please print legibly*).....

Emergency Contact Person - *In case of emergency, the following person should be contacted*:*

Name (*please print legibly*)

.....

Relationship

.....

Daytime Phone Evening Phone

E-mail

** The emergency contact person should be someone who can either pick you up from the MSC course or help to make transportation arrangements.*

** To participate in MSC, we need to have your emergency contact person's name and contact details.*

Prescription Medication Information

We ask for this information so that, in the event of an emergency, we can give this form to Emergency Medical Services personnel on your behalf. Teachers will see this information and unless needed in an emergency situation, it will be kept entirely confidential.

Are you allergic to any medications? If so, please list:

.....

Please list your current medications and the conditions being treated.

.....

.....



Waiver of Liability

- I voluntarily agree to participate in activities at the 8-week MSC program. I hereby assume all risks of injury to me and my property that may be sustained in connection with activities undertaken during the program.
- I understand that I must provide the name and contact details of an emergency contact person in order to attend MSC. The teachers will make every effort to communicate with this person in the event of an emergency. This person is someone who can either pick me up from the facility or help to make transportation arrangements if I need to leave the course.
- I understand that the teachers are not expected or able to provide medical and/or psychological care. I agree that, in the event a teacher determines that I need professional medical or psychological attention, the teacher has the authority and sole discretion to contact the designated emergency contact person or 911 emergency services.
- Any costs incurred for health services are my responsibility and not the responsibility of the teacher or the course facility.
- I further understand that participation in MSC is at the discretion of the teachers at all times. If, in the opinion of the teachers, I am unable to continue to participate productively in the course, I may be asked to leave.
- If I am taking prescription medications of any kind and discontinue taking them during the program, this may be grounds to be asked to leave.
- I understand that MSC is a compassion skills training program, not group therapy. MSC is designed to teach participants the tools needed to develop and cultivate a mindfulness and self-compassion practice. I understand that MSC does not take the place of personal therapy.
- I understand that personal safety and emotional wellbeing are the foundation of self-compassion training and that I am primarily responsible for my own safety. I will not push myself to do anything that feels distressing or harmful. If I feel overwhelmed, I will stop what I am doing or slow down until I feel comfortable again. If I need to discuss a personal matter, I can consult with a teacher but I understand that the opinions of others are not a substitute for caring for myself in the best way I know.
- I have read this agreement and fully understand its contents. I sign it of my own free will. I am of legal age and accept the above disclaimer and authorization.

Your Name (*please print legibly*)

Signature Date

MSC Coping Agreement



Mindful Self-Compassion Coping Agreement

I agree to take care of myself while I participate in this group. If I am feeling overwhelmed, I will slow down. I will not push myself to do things that feel unsafe.

If I need to take a break and stop thinking about this work, I will:

If I need to process through my feelings, I will:

If I need to reach out, I will call:

_____ I do not have a therapist or counselor right now, but I will ask for a referral from my group facilitator if I think that will be helpful.

_____ I have a therapist/counselor whom I can call and meet with when I need to.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Sample Certificate of Attendance

(insert your logo here, if you wish)

(participant's name)

attended

Mindful Self-Compassion

with

(teachers)

on

(dates)

at

(location)

(add names of teachers and signatures)

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) is an 8-week, mindfulness-based, self-compassion training program developed by Christopher Germer, PhD and Kristin Neff, PhD to cultivate the skill of self-compassion.
www.MindfulSelfCompassion.org