

# Mindfulness Training for PhD Students at AU

## What is the purpose of mindfulness training?

The purpose of mindfulness is to learn to integrate a set of skills that enhance attention to achieve greater balance, improved clarity, and better prioritization abilities. Additionally, it aims to develop a better ability to prioritize to be present in the daily life, leading to an overall increased sense of personal well-being and connection with others. Furthermore, the aim is to provide skills to manage stress and, importantly, to train awareness of stress symptoms in the body and mind as early as possible, thereby potentially limiting stress-related absenteeism.

During meditation and mindfulness practice, individuals cultivate conscious presence towards thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. Specifically, the training focuses on recognizing negative thought patterns as they arise and redirecting attention away from these thought processes. It involves working on body awareness and emotion regulation.

Awareness of the body and its signals, along with the observation of thought patterns, can contribute to reevaluating and changing unhelpful behavioral patterns. The process of change through sustained meditation and mindfulness training can be described as:

- Self-observation
- Enhanced self-regulation
- Opportunities for personal insight and change

## Why focus on mindfulness training as part of mental health promotion?

Research from the Danish Center for Mindfulness indicates that mental health can be improved in organizations, fostering greater psychological safety and collaboration. WHO's guidelines for mental health at work recommend mindfulness-based interventions to promote mental health, reduce stress, and increase work effectiveness and job satisfaction. Research shows that systematic mindfulness training can:

- Increase joy and performance
- Improve energy and sleep
- Enhance concentration and working memory
- Reduce ruminating thoughts and stress
- Alleviate anxiety, pain, and depressive symptoms
- Improve collaboration and increase psychological safety in the organization.

## Why should specifically Ph.D. students undergo mindfulness training?

Several studies show that Ph.D. students experience a pressured work environment, as highlighted in surveys such as this one:

<https://www.akademikerbladet.dk/aktuelt/2022/april/hver-anden-ph-d-studerende-paa-universiteterne-mistrives>.

In most jobs, there can be occasional busyness, which is normal. However, in a busy daily routine – even when not feeling pressured – maintaining calm, focus, and presence with oneself and colleagues is crucial.

Ph.D. students may feel overwhelmed by seemingly endless and complex tasks. It is essential, from time to time, to pause, breathe, and pay attention to whether tasks are being approached in the most effective way – both for oneself and for the organization as a whole. In this process, it is important for Ph.D. students to lead by example, knowing where they are heading and how they will get there.

Mindfulness training enhances both focus and presence with oneself and others, increasing awareness of both personal and others' potential stress reactions.

## **How to implementate the mindfulness training:**

### **Two workshops, each with a duration of 2 hours**

First workshop: Focus on meditations to enhance focus, concentration, and body awareness.

Content:

- Introduction to mindfulness, including fundamental attitudes in mindfulness training.
- Training conscious presence through practical mindfulness exercises, such as body scanning, gentle yoga exercises, and seated meditations.
- Homework training agreed upon for the time until the second session. Daily home training, lasting a minimum of 15 minutes, is tailored to each participant.

Second workshop: Continued focus on meditations to enhance focus, concentration, and body awareness. Introduction to compassion and insight meditations to clarify personal motives and values and increase compassion for oneself and others.

Content:

- Introduction to compassion and insight meditations.
- Follow-up on homework.
- Training conscious presence and compassion through practical mindfulness exercises, including insight meditation, compassion meditation, gentle yoga exercises, body scanning, and meditation on the breath.
- Review of the two sessions and discussion on how participants can integrate mindfulness into their daily lives.

The teaching will take place in groups of 10-20 participants, alternating between meditation exercises, gentle yoga, participant sharing, and instruction in the theoretical and philosophical background of mindfulness.

## Who will be teaching?



- MBSR instructor from the Danish Center for Mindfulness at AU
- Teaching mentor programs at IKK
- Yoga instructor
- Employed as a supervisor at Sind
- 13 years of experience as a counsellor at Rådgivnings – og støttecentret, AU
- Cand. pæd. soc.

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Lykke Elisabeth Ramsdal. Aarhus, April 2024