

MINDFULNESS BASED INTERVENTIONS GUIDANCE

The HSE is exploring the appropriateness, efficacy and safety issues associated with Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBIs) in an effort to support employees in the area of stress, mental health and wellbeing. The popularity of mindfulness has led to an exponential interest in MBIs and myriad uses of the term mindfulness. There is confusion regarding what mindfulness is, what it can do for health and wellbeing, and which interventions have a sound evidence base. There can be an impression that mindfulness is an all-encompassing, quick fix, risk free intervention, with little cost in terms of time, money or participant effort. This guidance is provided in response to a request from the Health and Wellbeing Division.

In order to ensure ethical and safe delivery of MBIs to employees of the HSE, when procuring facilitators of MBIs, senior management need to hold the following points in mind:

1. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program is the gold standard (8 week experiential program which includes a full day practice and home practice, circa 80 hours contact time)
2. The demands of the MBSR program can be challenging to introduce into the workplace setting.
3. MBSR is open to modification to suit populations and settings, but it requires expertise of experienced mindfulness teachers to faithfully transform it (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, Good, 2016).
4. Where psychological interventions have a mindfulness element or ethos they cannot claim the broad spectrum of benefits that are seen as a result of MBSR.
5. Training to become a mindfulness teacher of MBSR is a rigorous program of a least 12 months duration and competence assessed using the MBI:TAC criteria (Crane, 2012).
6. People completing an eight week MBSR program are not trained to teach mindfulness.
7. There is no regulatory authority or registration body for teachers of mindfulness but the Irish Network for Mindfulness-Based Teachers is in the process of creating a formal professional body with an accreditation process.
8. The above network has developed Irish Good Practice Guidelines for Teaching Mindfulness-Based Courses which includes supervision and continuous professional development requirements.
9. Organisations need to decide whether or not a modified or briefer program will meet anticipated outcomes (Kelly, 2017).
10. Alternate stress reduction psycho-educational programs being delivered both in the HSE and voluntary hospital sector could be considered. These programs are evidence based e.g. Stress control, WRAP and Resilience Plus.
11. The programs identified in point 10 may be suitable for Train the Trainers facilitation whereas the MBSR program or tailored interventions such as MBCT or MBRP are not (see point 5).

An innovative option would be to develop a pathway for employees in stress management. Staff could be offered interventions from a range of stress reduction psycho-educational programs that are available, including “taster” or educational sessions holding a mindfulness ethos. Participants, who find it suitable to their needs, may then choose to progress to the full MBSR program.