

Maria Napoli: *Tools for Mindful Living: Practicing the 4-step MAC Guide* (3rd Ed.). Kendall Hunt, Dubuque, IA, 2016, 193 pp

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Social work educators worldwide are increasingly electing to incorporate integrative pedagogies of mind–body and spirit into their preparation of social work students for professional practice because of the practices' perceived value for enhancing relationships with the self and with others. Specifically, the skills of mindful awareness have been used to foster a range of personal–professional aptitudes within social work trainees, such as self-awareness, critical reflection, therapeutic presence and self-care. The author, Napoli, has a particular passion for incorporating mindfulness into education at all levels. Accordingly, she has researched, taught and developed mindfulness-informed educational programs for students from elementary school to postgraduate institutions.

Her most recent workbook, *Tools for Mindful Living: Practicing the 4-Step MAC Guide*, was designed to augment the learning of postgraduate social work students undertaking a quality of life elective. Social work practitioners are occupationally at risk for stress, burnout, depression and compassion fatigue. Equipping students with skills known to enhance physical and emotional resilience in their programs of study thus seems essential, if not imperative, to reduce the potential of these occupational hazards.

Napoli sought in this workbook to strengthen her students' capacity for self-care, stress reduction, clear thinking and responsive action through the practice of mindfulness. Four elements are identified as pivotal to this learning process and are referred to in the workbook as the four-step MAC guide; the steps comprise (1) empathic acknowledgement of experience,

(2) intentional use of attention, (3) acceptance of experience without judgment, and (4) taking action toward change and decision making. The MAC acronym is derived from the mindfulness principles subsumed within the four steps: M (mindfully), A (acknowledge, attend and accept) and C (choose). Development of responsive action appears to be an inherent objective of the training offered, facilitated first by enhancing greater levels of conscious awareness to one's experience through a range of self-reflective exercises and subsequent mindfulness practices. Although Napoli's workbook was designed to support a discipline-specific course, it is an accessible guide that may appeal to educators and students of more general interest.

Embodying the spirit of mindfulness, the reader's senses are invoked from the outset: the cover image appears designed to stimulate a learner's curiosity. Visual imagery is adeptly used throughout the text to both signal and reinforce key mindfulness constructs and major learning points. The manual is organised in two sections. The first consists of three chapters which broadly impart information on the fundamentals of mindfulness and its applicability for use in daily life; these are appropriate to a novice audience. The second section contains seven chapters that offer readers a range of practical strategies for developing and implementing their own mindfulness practice. The home practices associated with section two are also supported by six audio-guided meditations developed by Napoli and two musically skilful collaborators. This supplementary resource is important to encouraging participants to engage in the regular daily practice recognised as vital to the cultivation of mindfulness. Practitioners beyond the novice group may also appreciate the audio resource.

Chapter 1 sets out the purpose and rationale of the manual and suggestions for its use. A definition of mindfulness is offered and its relevance to daily life and relationships discussed. The four key MAC elements upon which all mindfulness

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practices in the workbook rest are briefly introduced and the process of learning how to apply these skills to one's experience are also presented. Participants are conceptually and experientially introduced to the attentional differences between mindful awareness and automatic reaction through a range of self-reflective exercises, metaphorical stories and well-chosen research sound bites. The latter structure is replicated throughout the workbook. Use of 'breath as anchor' is naturalistically and skilfully interwoven into these early contemplative activities and the benefits of mindful living are subsequently emphasised. The chapter concludes, as each subsequent one does, with a reflective journaling activity. Participants are encouraged to apply the four-step MAC elements to their reflections on each of the mindful living topics contained in the workbook, inclusive of the meditative practices. Use of reflective journaling is supported in the educational literature as an additional contemplative practice useful to charting an individual's personal experience of, and growth in, the practice of mindfulness.

Chapter 2 commences with a poem designed to inspire the use of 'beginner's mind'. Each element of the four-step MAC principles introduced earlier is then elaborated upon supported by instructive content, self-reflective exercises and practical procedures and tools for translating the use of mindful awareness into daily life.

Chapter 3 focuses on the physical manifestations of stress and its consequent impact on mind, body and emotion. A further series of self-reflective exercises and practical tools are offered to aid participants to consider their own personal stressors, such as time use and finances, alongside identifying strategies for change.

Chapter 4 heralds the start of section 2. This section presents information on the key mindfulness skills important to cultivating a learner's personal mindfulness practice. Use of the breath as anchor (a concentration practice that serves to strengthen attentional focus) is the first skill focused upon; three forms of breathing exercise are provided, all of which are supported by use of audio-recording.

Chapter 5 presents the 'body scan' and associated self-reflective exercises aimed at directing participant attention to their sensory experience of the body. The body map is particularly helpful to this process, although points 5 and 6 of the map appear to be transposed. The scan is also audio supported. The key message underscored by this chapter is the importance of learning to use somatic information pre-emptively to respond to stress, if and when it strikes, rather than react to it.

Chapter 6 stays with the body focus and offers a series of delicious, stretching poses that are accessibly described and pictorially supported. Attunement to sensory information across the fields of sensation is addressed in chapter 7, comprising the traditional five: sight, sound, taste, touch and smell, plus intuition. A range of practical and self-reflective exercises are included that are designed to foster the learner's sensory acuity. In-depth information on the influence and impact of emotion on experience is the focus of chapter 8. Exercises are offered aimed at supporting participants to become

increasingly practiced at observing experience while uncoupling it from automatic evaluation, thus enhancing the capacity for greater levels of emotional regulation.

Chapter 9 speaks to 'monkey mind' under the banner of '*Mindless Monster*'. A number of different exercises, including a fun drawing activity, are offered to support participants to become well acquainted with their own *Mindless Monster*. By contrast, activities that focus on liberating the mind are also offered based on the tenets of nonjudgmental acceptance. Participants are instructed, consistent with the MAC principles, that learning to accept 'what is', will better enable them to act responsively in relation to themselves and others.

The concluding chapter, chapter 10, focuses on communication and the integrative role mindfulness plays in interpersonal interactions. Readers who are parents, grandparents or caregivers and/or practitioners who work with children and families will find the segment on mindful parenting of particular interest.

While the text is coherent, at times, there were unsettling lapses in formatting: research sound bites set against unrelated text, for instance. The spiral binding adds to the workbook's ease of use. Perhaps, thought could be given to establishing the source as an eBook in later editions as this would remove the extant space limits on journaling associated with the current print volume.

Overall, this workbook offers a veritable feast of practical tools and activities well positioned to stimulate the development of mindful awareness in novice participants. The instructional content is well supported by topical and current mindfulness research which is consistently incorporated throughout the manual in 'sound-bite' fashion. This novel profiling of research makes for interesting reading and provides a sound stepping-stone for students to delve deeper into areas of relevance to their own developing practice. While some editing discrepancies were noted across the *Manual* and these proved distracting, especially in a relatively expensive volume, this workbook would be a valuable resource to those interested in facilitating the use of mindfulness in participants at a beginner's level. Supplemental information by way of facilitator notes may further augment the practical utility of the workbook. These may be of particular value to prospective educators in other disciplines or for those who may wish to incorporate the content into courses other than those for which the workbook was originally designed. Inclusion of a worked example for all activities, inclusive of reflective journaling, encompassed in the first chapter may also be of benefit from an educator's perspective.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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