



## **Mindfulness, compassion and health: CBCT® (Cognitively Based Compassion Training).**

### **Intention/Goals**

- Formulate strategies to become more socially competent while reducing our own stress.
- Address apparent contradiction between universal (scientific) and personal (relationship-centered) approach to care for others.
- Summarize the principles of CBCT® (Cognitively Based Compassion Training), and the empirical evidence supporting its benefits for self and others.
- Discuss CBCT in the context of the core human values of (i) health and aspiration for happiness, and (ii) interconnectedness with all fellow human beings.
- Practice coping strategies to increase behavioral flexibility by bringing thoughts and actions under greater awareness and voluntary control.
- Practice strategies to strengthen connections with others, while being aware of one and others' needs.

### **Attitude/Action Plan**

The training includes the actual training techniques, exercises and homework. At the end of the course, participants receive a diploma by Emory University, Atlanta, USA, certifying completion of 16-18 didactic hours of CBCT®. Additionally, this training is recognized as continuing education (CEU credits) by several professional organizations in the US like, for example, the American Psychological Association (APA). Emory University's administrative fees to process this request are \$50.

The course includes an opening/greeting/introductions, presentations and discussions, practical exercises, questions and answers, and closing. The topics to be presented are:

- A summary of the empirical data supporting the benefits of CBCT for self and others.
- Discussion of this model in the context of the core human values of (i) health and aspiration for happiness, and (ii) interconnectedness with all fellow human beings.
- Principles of CBCT® (Cognitively Based Compassion Training) a mindfulness and compassion training in social competence that also reduces stress and burnout.
- Practical sessions to exemplify this model that will offer participants the opportunity to gain insight about their own ethical conduct and social and cultural sensitivity.

Optionally, several measures will be given to the participants before the first session and again after their last one in order to assess possible changes. These will include questionnaires about (1) stress and acceptance (2) empathy and compassion; (3) behavioral flexibility; (4) social competence; and (5) satisfaction. A list of the instruments, together with a description of each can be made available if requested.

## **Attention/Themes and contents for each one of the sessions of the courses**

### *Session 1:*

*A. Introductions.* Brief questions on personal needs of each participant together with a short explanation of the course timeline, what it will involve (mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral psychology, and compassion training), leaving room for questions and comments.

*B. Foundation Module, Resting in a Moment of Nurturance, and Module I, Attentional Stability and Clarity.* Participants are provided with an introduction to the concept of a nurturing moment, a memory of an experience of security and safety and how to utilize it to prime themselves in the attention exercise in which they are going to engage. Basic breathing exercises will continue to help them understand how to cultivate refined attention and mental stability.

### *Session 2: Module II, Insight into the Nature of Mental Experience.*

Building on basic meditation and refined attention strategies provided in Session 1, participants are provided with guidance to use their meditative mind to gain insight into their own thoughts, feelings, emotions, and reactions.

### *Sessions 3 and 4: Module III, Self-Compassion/Self-Care.*

Focus is on observing the innate desire for happiness and well-being, as well as freedom from unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Participants use mindfulness and cognitive behavioral techniques to focus on shedding toxic mental and emotional states that promote unhappiness.

### *Session 5: Module IV, Cultivating Impartiality toward Others.*

Participants are encouraged to examine the labels they assign to people in their lives (e.g., friends, adversaries, strangers, etc.) and to consider the superficiality of these labels. Exercises focus on connecting more deeply to others through understanding of the shared desire for happiness.

### *Session 6: Module V, Gratitude and Affection for Others.*

This session focuses on recognizing the interdependence of all things and people. Participants are encouraged to consider the many ways in which they are dependent on others, so as to develop appreciation and gratitude for the people in their lives. Assigned homework seeks to achieve this aim through 1) reflecting on the kindness of others, intentional or unintentional, as well as the drawbacks of a self-centered attitude, 2) using gratitude to cultivate affection and endearment for others, promoting, in turn a deep sense of empathy.

### *Session 7: Module VI, Empathetic Concern & Engaged Compassion.*

The focus of this session is on using the gratitude and empathy cultivated in previous sessions to help participants cultivate compassion for themselves and others. Exercises focus on moving from wishing happiness for others to actively committing to assistance in the pursuit of happiness and freedom from suffering.

### *Session 8: Feedback session.*

Participants are provided with strategies and tools to continue their exercises beyond the program.

## Empirical support for this training

The practice of mindfulness meditation is reportedly linked to stress reduction in several populations (see Grossman et al., 2004, and Davis & Hayes, 2011, for comprehensive reviews). In health professionals, mindfulness meditation for short or long-term practitioners is associated with increased satisfaction and improved patient care (Goodman and Shorling, 2012; Irving 2009). Mindfulness meditation involves a group of self-regulation practices “that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calmness, clarity, and concentration” (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006, p. 228).

While compassion is considered to unfold naturally in some mindfulness meditative practices, there are also analytical meditation techniques that specifically promote compassion toward self and others. Compassion can be defined as the deep wish that another be free from suffering, coupled with the motivation to alleviate such suffering (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010; Kim et al., 2009; Klimecki, Leiberg, Lamm, & Singer, 2013). Compassion from others, or social support, protects us from disease and even death (e.g. Broadhead et al., 1983). Remarkably, psychophysiological evidence suggests that social support is most beneficial, in turn, for those best able to take advantage of it: individuals high in compassion (Cosley et al, 2010). In other words “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion” (the Dalai Lama, 2012, p. 48). The four mechanisms proposed by the Dalai Lama (2012) when discussing the benefits of compassion for self are: diversion (worrying less about ourselves), comparison (the fact that there are always worse problems than ours), problem-solving (engaging creatively in possible positive outcomes), and connectedness (feeling closer to others).

Compassion can be understood then as both a coping strategy to reduce stress and a social skill when relating to others. CBCT® (Cognitively-Based Compassion Training) is a secular and analytical protocol for mindfulness and compassion meditation practice developed at Emory University and empirically validated in different populations (Pace et al., 2009). Recent research on the impact of six to eight weeks of CBCT practice on undergraduate students without prior experience in meditation shows reduced immune inflammatory and emotional distress responses to psychosocial stressors (Pace et al., 2009), as well as enhancement of empathic accuracy when assigning emotions to other people’s faces with changes in the neurobiology supporting it (Mascaro et al., 2013). In addition, CBCT has shown benefits with at-risk adolescents in foster care (Reddy et al., 2013), breast cancer survivors (Dodds et al., 2015), and medical students (Mascaro et al., 2016).

CBCT uses the principles of mindfulness, cognitive-behavior psychology and compassion training to reduce stress and promote social competence. CBCT has been pilot-tested as an intervention for parents of children with autism and professionals at the Marcus Autism Center, in Atlanta, Georgia, with data recently presented at several international conferences (Fernandez-Carriba et al., 2015, 2016), three book chapters and in a recent article (available in <http://www.mhfmjournal.com/pdf/MHFM-127.pdf>). The consensus is then that enhancing the parents and providers’ quality of life and social competence does not only reduce their personal stress but also increase their ability to contribute to the children’s progress in treatment and education. The focus of the proposed course is therefore on self-regulation and social-regulation. Empowering individuals this way will benefit others around them.

## About the Instructor

Dr. Samuel Fernandez-Carriba is a clinical psychologist and mindfulness and compassion instructor with more than 18 years of experience serving families of children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other conditions. He obtained his PhD in Psychology from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain, in 2001, during which he approached the study of human emotions and communication through an examination of biological determinants and evolutionary history as observed in the chimpanzee. That work continued with a postdoctoral fellowship at the Language Research Center, Georgia State University, and gave rise to numerous peer-reviewed articles, presentations at international conferences, and even appearances in international popular media like CNN and the National Geographic magazine. During this journey, Dr. Fernandez-Carriba realized that a meaningful and honest search for his own health and well-being necessarily involved helping others in their search for health. This goal led him back to Emory University, where he completed his postdoctoral training at the Emory Autism Center, (Department of Psychiatry, Emory University School of Medicine). He became a licensed clinical psychologist in Georgia in May 2012, and worked for seven years as a senior psychologist at the Marcus Autism Center, a center affiliated with Emory University and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Georgia. At the Marcus Center, he conducted diagnostic evaluations on children and teenagers with ASD and related disorders as well as research on sociocultural disparities in ASD and cultural competence in health care professionals. He obtained his CBCT® (Cognitively Based Compassion Training) Instructor Certificate, Level 1, at Emory University in 2013, and Senior Level in April, 2018, with the ability to teach the foundational course to future instructors. His line of work, as independent researcher and clinician affiliated to Emory University in his role of Adjunct Assistant Professor, focuses on the effects of a mindfulness and compassion meditation training on resilience, quality of life and social competence in populations under high stress, including families of individuals with ASD and professionals. He does this work regional and internationally in Spain and Latin America. Mindfulness and compassion meditation, and CBCT® in particular, helps individuals understand and address their own personal needs through their relation to others in a social context. This recent work has led to a scientific article, three book chapters and has been covered by CNN.

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