

After Stillbirth: Improving
Maternal Mental Health
Outcomes Through
Mindfulness Techniques

Dr. Ivy Love Margulies
Stillbirth Summit 2019

Statistics on Stillbirth and Traumatic Birth Experiences

- Approximately 4 million births in USA per year
- 24,000 Stillbirths per year in USA
- 2.6 to 3.2 million Stillbirths globally per year
- 1 out of 3 women report experiencing a traumatic birth (whether the baby lives or dies)*

*Journal of Obstetrics, 2017



What is Mindfulness?



“Present Centered, Non-Judgmental Attention”

What is Meditation?



Only Mindfulness Cultivates Sensory Clarity

What is Sensory Clarity?

Sensory Clarity is the ability to track our sensory experience in real time.

What is Equanimity?

Equanimity is the ability to allow your sensory experience to come and go unimpeded.

What is Concentration?

Concentration is the ability to focus on what we deem relevant at any given moment.



4 Parts of the Brain Affected by Trauma (PTSD)

- The **Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)**, known as the “Thinking Center” and our executive functioning
- The **Hippocampus**, where memory is stored
- The **Amygdala**, known as the “Fear Center”
- The **Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC)**, known as the “Emotional Regulation Center”



How the Brain Responds to Grief

- Loss of Concentration
- Difficulty Remembering
- Significant Decrease in Decision Making
- Difficulty Organizing and Planning
- Completing Projects or Returning To Work Seems Impossible
- Emotional Dysregulation



Benefits of Mindfulness-Based Techniques

- Ease the distressing emotional and physical symptoms of grief and trauma
- Calm your mind and support regulation of difficult and painful emotions
- Increase your capacity for self-compassion
- Improve your awareness of the present moment



Studies Reporting Benefits of Mindfulness for Symptom Relief from Grief and PTSD Associated with Stillbirth

- Mindfulness-based Intervention for Perinatal Grief after Stillbirth in Rural India (Issues Mental Health Nursing, 2015 March; 36(3):222-230) Finding: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) skills practiced with bereaved mothers significantly decreased their emotional suffering and improved their ability to cope.
- Relationship Between Mindfulness and Posttraumatic Stress in Women Who Experienced Stillbirth (J Obstet Gynecol Neonatal Nurs., 2018 Nov; 47(6): 760-770) Finding: Mindfulness may have potential benefits for grieving women after stillbirth.



What Are Some Well Known Techniques to Develop Mindfulness?

- Transcendental Meditation (TM): is an ancient Vedic technique for avoiding distracting thoughts and promoting a state of relaxed awareness. For example: Saying a mantra word to yourself over and over to maintain focus for a sustained period of time
- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR): is an 8-week evidence based mindfulness program to decrease stress, anxiety, depression and pain. In 2015, MBSR is offered as a complementary medicine in close to 80% of medical schools.
- Unified Mindfulness (UM): is a system of meditation developed to help rewire your nervous system to counteract stressful habits of the mind and body. Tuning into special flavors of release sensations in the body activates the parasympathetic nervous system and a special place to “park” attention that does not require or activate the thinking process. In fact, it’s our verbal thinking that contributes to our experience of stress.



How Mindfulness Reduces Suffering Through Sensory Clarity

The first step is to untangle the elements of:

- 1) Uncomfortable physical sensations in the body
- 2) Uncomfortable emotional sensations in the body
- 3) Negative talk in the mind
- 4) Negative images in your mind



After Untangling the Elements

- First, separate the body part from the mind part
- Then in the body, separate the physical from the emotional
- And in the mind, separate the visual thought (*usually centered in front of/behind the eyes*) from the auditory (*usually centered in the head/at the ears*)



Start with a Neutral Anchor such as an Object in the Immediate Environment

- Always available
- Free
- Safe to return to if triggered emotionally
- Safe to use if your patient feels anxious
- Connects them back to the present
- Neutral Anchor: Sound, Object or Feet



Mindfulness and Meditation to Heal and Improve Emotional Self Regulation

- Start with eyes closed or softly gazing down
- Reminding the patient/client they always have a choice to stop, return to a neutral sound or object if triggers come up
- Stay in the “window of tolerance”



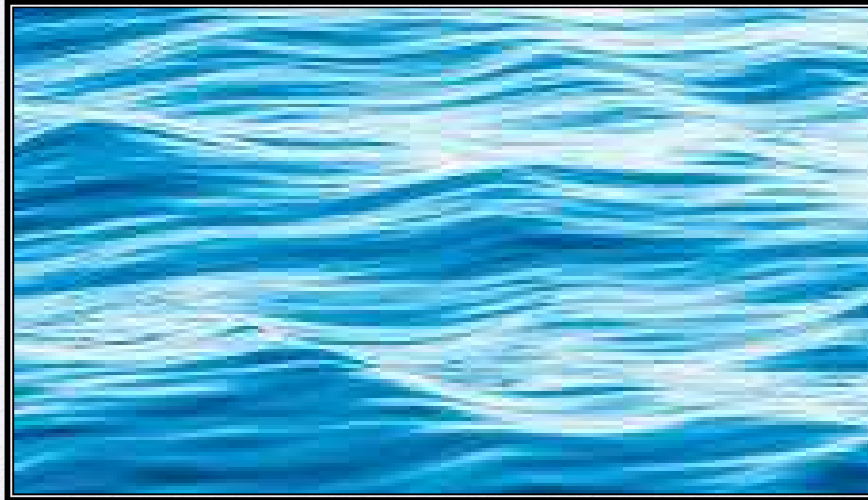
Grounding



1st Experiential Exercise



2nd Experiential Exercise
“Purification of the Visual Field”



3rd Experiential Exercise
“Focused Out”



4th Experiential “Cultivated Sound”


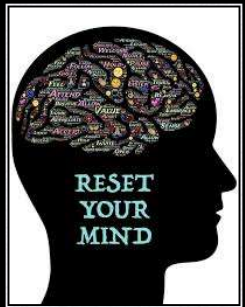


Mindfulness



How Do You Develop Mindfulness?

What are you feeling?
Breathe
What are you hearing?
What are you seeing?
Are you present in the here and now without judgment?



Thank you and Namaste
Dr. Ivy Love Margulies
drivylove@gmail.com
www.drivylove.com



The Podcast