

## Applying the assumptions of the approach to mindfulness:

Positive psychologists believe that we should **acknowledge the role that free will plays in people's behaviour**. Feeling in control of our thoughts, emotions and behaviour can help individuals to achieve happiness and a sense of well-being.

Therefore, individuals who do not feel in control of their thoughts, emotions and behaviour may experience psychological problems.

For example, **stress and anxiety might be caused by our perception of the event**, not just the event itself. If an individual has a pessimistic response and feels out of control of the situation, the stress can create issues.

**Mindfulness encourages people to be more aware of their own thoughts and feelings and be able to self-regulate them.** This means that they should be able to take control of them and use them to increase their level of life satisfaction.

In the case of stress, **it can help people to feel as if they have control over their response**. For example, it increases awareness of bodily sensations to help them to identify stress responses earlier and helps people to experience thoughts as transient events that will pass, not representations of reality.

Therefore, when an individual experiences a stressful event, they should appraise stress more helpfully and any feelings of stress should pass more quickly.

## Components of mindfulness:

### What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means *'awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally'*. (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

Mindfulness uses meditation and breathing techniques to help people focus on the moment and increase their well-being. These techniques help the individual to become more **aware of what is happening in the present moment instead of worrying about the past or the future**. People engaging in mindfulness practice should develop the ability to be accepting of their thoughts, rather than allowing them

to control their behaviour and emotions. This awareness and observation of our own thoughts helps us to recognise problems before they arise, which should improve our mental health and well-being.

Mindfulness techniques have been used for a range of problems. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends mindfulness as a preventative treatment for those who have had recurring depression. It can also be used in everyday life to improve well-being in those not experiencing a particular psychological issue.

### Examples of mindfulness techniques

#### Meditation

In a body scan meditation, the individual is guided through the process of paying attention to sensations in different parts of the body without reacting to them.

#### Informal practice

Mindfulness can also be practised informally by making a decision to focus our attention on a particular task like eating or brushing our teeth. Often, we engage in tasks like this while thinking about other things.

#### Online

The growth in popularity of mindfulness techniques has also led to an abundance of online meditation resources and apps.

### MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction)

MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) was developed in the 1970s by **Jon Kabat-Zinn**.

The individual is trained in a series of classes (usually 8 x 2.5 hour classes delivered across eight weeks). Participants are given **educational material** (e.g. teaching about the physiology of stress) alongside practising mindfulness meditation and yoga. They will also be given **home practice assignments**. Individuals are able to practise these techniques in the way that suits them best, but they are encouraged to incorporate them into everyday life and practise them regularly.



## Effectiveness:

### Research evidence:

Kuyken et al. (2013) compared children in secondary schools who took part in the mindfulness in schools programme to those who took part in the usual school curriculum. Children who were involved in the mindfulness programme reported less stress, greater well-being and fewer depressive symptoms compared to the control group.

### Research evidence:

Williams et al. (2014) compared MBCT (mindfulness-based cognitive therapy) with other treatments in people who had previously suffered from depression. They were randomly allocated to each of the conditions and followed up a year later. MBCT provided protection against relapse in people with a history of childhood trauma, but did not show any significant advantages in other participants.

## Ethical considerations:

### An ethical therapy:

As a therapy, it has few side effects (particularly if compared to biological therapies such as psychosurgery and drugs). It also takes a highly positive attitude towards individual well-being. It promotes free will, empowering people to make changes in their own lives.

### Widely accessible:

Forms of mindfulness are accessible to all. There are numerous apps, websites and courses running where people can be taught the basics of the process and be given opportunities to practise the techniques.

