

Healthcare Provider Course Summaries

► Module 1: Protecting ourselves from the pain: empathy habit loops

Empathy is all about feeling our patients' pain in order to help them heal. Pain is a signal for danger and our natural response is to do something to get away from or protect ourselves from it. We develop different protection and coping strategies that become habits via the cue behavior result process of reinforcement learning. **Common habit loops include:**

1. Over-empathizing loop: your patient is feeling anxious, frustrated, angry, hopeless. You empathize. You feel these feelings.
2. Self-protection loop: You armor up or distance yourself so that you don't get burned.
3. Fix it loop: You jump into action, you have that strong urge to do something, anything.
4. Take it home loop: You worry, you can't stop thinking about your patient or your decisions.
5. Anger loop: You get frustrated or angry and lash out at your patient, staff, or family.

Recognizing the loop is the first step in stepping out of it.

The home practice of module 1 is recognizing when you are in a habit loop and in which one you are and mapping its 3 elements: cue (what activated your behavior), behavior and reward (the result of your behavior). You can use the habit mapper to help you map these loops out.

► Module 2: Throwing the rope of compassion instead of getting swept away in the river of suffering.

A way to feel patients' suffering and not be consumed by it is to not take it personally, by removing the "me" element: not getting stuck in their story (i.e. throwing them a rope instead of jumping in the river). Compassion allows us to be with the experience of suffering while keeping patients' story separate from our own so we can be moved to help. Empathy and compassion are siblings with different patterns of activations in the body and mind. Empathizing with someone's pain feels contracted and closed, whereas compassion feels more open.

There are two home practices for module 2:

- (1) Exploring the difference of being in an empathy habit loop or compassion habit loop and noticing the feelings of being contracted, closed or expansive and open.
- (2) The 3-step process to step out of the empathy loop and go into compassion action.

1. Take a first deep breath and see in which loop you are in.
2. Take a second deep breath and name the loop and acknowledge the behavior.
3. Take a third deep breath and step out to the empathy loop and go into compassionate action, focusing on the fact that your patient is in pain, without entering in their story.



GUIDED MEDITATIONS

- H.A.C.K. – Habit, Awareness, Curiosity, Kindness Meditation
- Self-compassion Meditation

Continued ►

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► **Module 3:** Hopping off the intrusive thought train

We have no control over our thoughts. One thought can lead to another until we are overwhelmed by a train of thoughts. The harder we try to stop these thoughts, the more the mind fights back and keeps going. But we can control how we relate to our thoughts. By naming or noting these thoughts, we can choose to get on the thought train or not. In that way physicians can manage more skillfully intrusive thoughts during their clinical practice and life.

The home practice for module 3 is noting thoughts and seeing what happens when we get on or we step off the thought train and come back to the present moment.



GUIDED MEDITATIONS

- Anchoring In The Present Moment Meditation
- Sitting Meditation
- Working With Thoughts
- Reboot meditation

► **Module 4:** Substituting the sweetness of kindness for self-judgment

Self-judgment gets in the way of being grounded in the present moment, being connected with ourselves or patients like intrusive thoughts and it contributes to exhaustion. Like in any other habit loop, we can be caught up in self-judgment because our brain thinks that punishing ourselves will help us learn for the next time. However, we can step out of the self-judgment loop by noticing and naming it. Kindness can be our at-home detox that makes us feel good and open like compassion.

The home practice for module 4 is noticing the difference between self-judgment and kindness loops and exploring how it feels in the body and mind when we judge ourselves or when someone is kind to us.



GUIDED MEDITATIONS

- Loving Kindness Meditation
- P.F.C. – Pause, Feel, Care Meditation
- P.A.C.E. – Pause, Acknowledge, Care & Expand Meditation

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► **Module 5:** Leaning into uncertainty to reduce anxiety

Information is like food for our brain. Uncertainty is like that hunger signal telling us that we don't have enough information, and need to gather it. Uncertainty can cause stress and anxiety. And these can be learned as habit loops. For example, anxiety tricks our brains into thinking that worrying is rewarding because it makes us feel in control of the situation or prepares us for action. As Seth Godin put it, "worry is not preparation, and anxiety doesn't make you better." Like any other habit, the anxiety loop can be unlearned when we are aware of its result.

The home practice for module 5 is noticing the anxiety loops and exploring how it feels in the body and mind when you are anxious.



GUIDED MEDITATIONS

- Working With Anxiety (4 min)
- Working With Stress (10 min)

► **Module 6:** Using curiosity to immunize yourself against emotional contagion

Emotions can be unconsciously spread from one person to another through facial expression, tone of voice and body language. Emotional contagion occurs everywhere, at any distance (e.g. through social media). Physicians can be infected by patients' or colleagues' emotions and overreact as well as they can infect patients and colleagues without being aware of the contagion. Compassion, kindness and curiosity can be an effective mental vaccination against anxiety, frustration or any other stressful feeling.

The home practices for module 6 are to recognize emotional contagion and to explore what happens when you inject curiosity into the moment. Turn "Oh, no!" into "Oh?!" with an upward inflection of the voice. Or hmmm your way into awakening your inner child: curiosity.



GUIDED MEDITATIONS

- Curiosity (5min)
- Curiosity (10min)
- Curiosity (20min)

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► **Module 7: The obstacle is the way**

Diagnosing and treating pain are not straightforward because pain is a complex and subjective experience composed of both physical and emotional dimensions. The way we perceive our own pain and others' pain is influenced by several factors, such as mood, emotional states, cognitive fatigue, sleep deprivation and ethnic and gender biases. Taking into account this complexity can lead to effective diagnosis and treatment. Recognizing this helps us learn to recognize how we unconsciously get in the way. And recognizing our own habits helps us step out of them. The obstacle becomes the way.

There are two home practices for module 7.

- (1)** Noticing the bias loops when you are diagnosing or treating pain in patients.
- (2)** Noticing and turning toward your own pain instead of running away from it via curiosity and kindness.

Don't forget: Curiosity and Kindness are superpowers! Just like washing your hands, rinse and repeat to build these healthy habits.



GUIDED MEDITATIONS:

- G.A.I.N. – Grounding, Acknowledge, Interest, Need Meditation
- Grounding Meditation