

Mindfulness and connection-building tools in adjustment to cognitive changes

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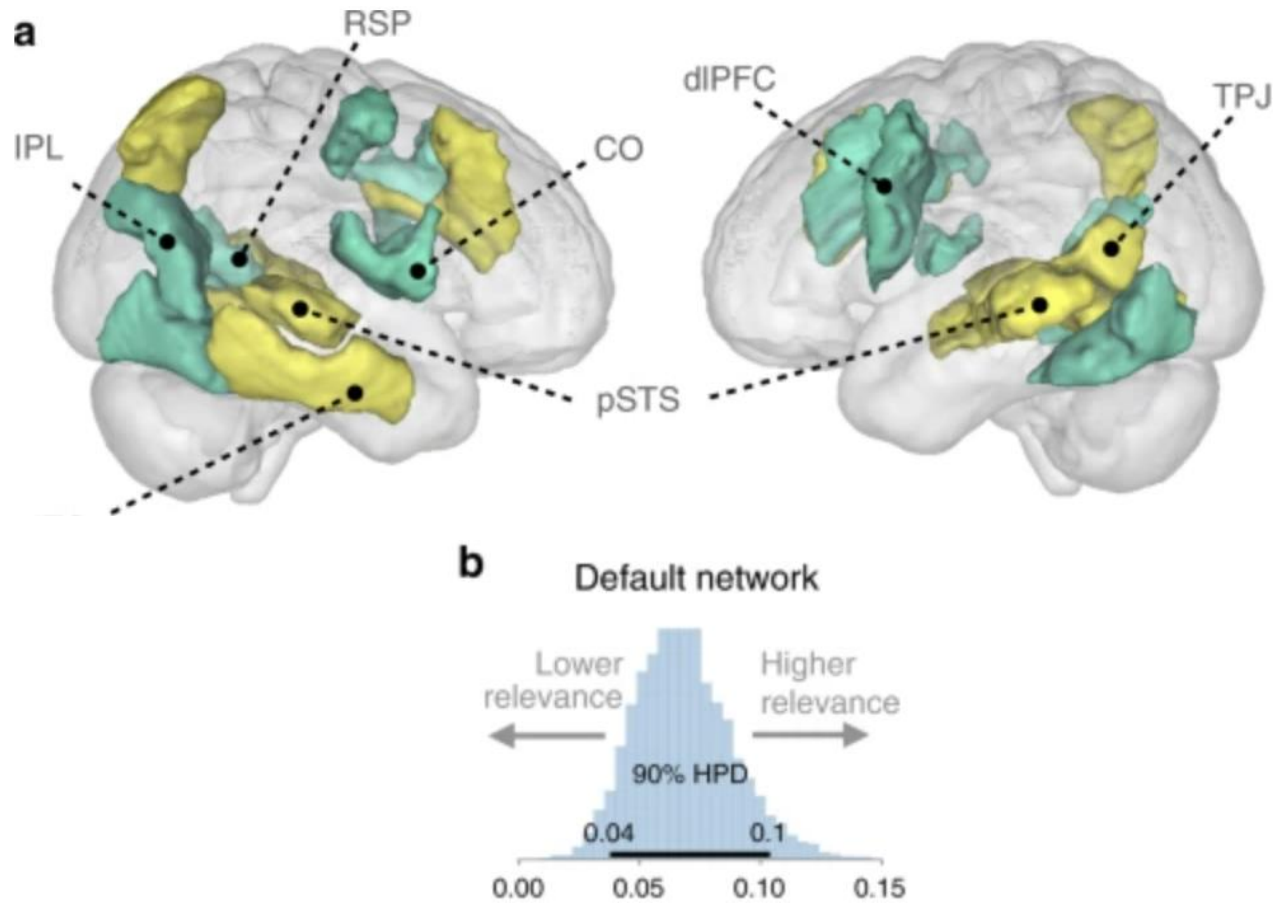
Social belonging and freedom
are stabilizing and enriching

Perceived loneliness reduces cognitive health

- Risk factor for dementia
- Predictor of lower cognitive performance



Loneliness increases self-reflection in brain



Spreng et al, 2020,
Nature Communications 11

Perceived control enhances health and well-being



► Langer & Rodin, 1976; Rodin & Langer, 1977

What happens when we are forced to manage unexpected cognitive changes?

When we cannot control what is happening to ourselves and our loved ones?

When we feel disconnected from the world at large?

Presentation Overview

- ▶ **Emotional connection-building tools for self-care**
 - ▶ Identifying mindfulness and its relevance
 - ▶ Identifying emotions related to memory changes and caregiving
 - ▶ Tools for managing challenging emotions
 - ▶ Resources for promoting mindfulness and connection in your daily life

Defining mindfulness

- ▶ Attention on present-moment
- ▶ Non-judgmental
- ▶ Observing experiences unfold over time

- ▶ “State of mind” and not always relaxing
- ▶ Different every time you do it!



Mindfulness is associated with well-being


- Mindfulness linked to mood, physical well-being, and increased longevity



(Haigh, Moore, Kashdan, & Fresco, 2011; Pagnini et al., 2015).

Avoiding or fighting discomfort....





Emotions and early memory changes

- ▶ Early cognitive changes can bring up many emotions
- ▶ Neglecting your feelings can contribute to
 - ▶ poor sleep
 - ▶ illness
 - ▶ depression
 - ▶ stress eating
 - ▶ substance abuse, etc.
- ▶ Being aware of your feelings can help you best express them, and manage them

Notice the emotion, even when we don't have the antidote

“When will things go back to normal, like before the diagnosis?”

“I’m not sleeping worried about what’s going to happen next”

“I hate that I never have any time to myself anymore”

Guilt

Identifying Guilt

- ▶ Guilt is feeling that it is your fault that something undesirable is happening
- ▶ Memory changes can lead families to experience many forms of guilt
 - ▶ “I brought this on myself”
 - ▶ “I’m not doing enough”
 - ▶ “I should know more”



Identifying Guilt- Poll

► Who on the webinar has been having thoughts related to their diagnosis, or the diagnosis of a loved one, in the past two weeks, like

► *“I should have done more”*

► *“this is my fault”*

Managing Guilt

- ▶ Coping Tip: Engage in self-compassion
 - ▶ “I am doing the best I can”
 - ▶ “I’m in a difficult situation and doing my best”
 - ▶ There is no such thing as perfect



Exercise:

5 minute self-compassion break



Resentment

Identifying Resentment

- ▶ Feeling like you have to do it all, and all by yourself
- ▶ When put in a situation not of our choosing, it's not uncommon to feel negative and resentful
- ▶ Little things easily bother us when we feel unappreciated and unacknowledged



Identifying Resentment- Poll

- ▶ Who has struggled with thoughts like in the past two weeks?
 - ▶ “it’s not fair that I have to deal with this”
 - ▶ “why is this happening to me?!”

Managing Resentment

- ▶ **Coping Tip: Join a support group**

- ▶ Discuss common feelings with others in similar situation
- ▶ Reminder that you are not frustrated alone- you are having a human response to change/shock



Managing Resentment

- Coping Tip: Lovingkindness meditation



Anxiety

Identifying Anxiety

- ▶ Feeling that things are not under control, and an overwhelming urge to get organized
- ▶ Anxiety can feel like
 - ▶ an impulse to run away
 - ▶ feeling constantly worried
 - ▶ racing heart
 - ▶ shortness of breath
 - ▶ need to cry



Identifying Worry/Anxiety Poll



- ▶ Who among us is currently experiencing the following feelings about one's diagnosis and/or the diagnosis of a loved one?
 - ▶ Uncertainty
 - ▶ Overwhelm
 - ▶ Worry

Managing Anxiety

- ▶ Anxiety is an important sign from the body that helps us leave dangerous situations quickly
- ▶ **Shallow, upper chest breathing** is part of the typical stress response
- ▶ Chronic anxiety is damaging to the body
- ▶ The stress response can be reduced by consciously **breathing using the diaphragm.**



Managing Anxiety

- Coping Strategy: 3 minute breathing space



Irritation



Identifying & Managing Irritation

- ▶ When we are stressed, little things can upset us, and we can sometimes lash out at loved ones
- ▶ It is often harder to control what we say when we are exhausted
- ▶ **Coping Strategy: Take a break**
 - ▶ Walk around the block
 - ▶ Take a nap
 - ▶ Drink a cup of tea
 - ▶ Take a moment to Breathe

Poll- Irritation

- ▶ Who among us is currently feeling short-tempered or frustrated over the past few weeks? With..
 - ▶ loved ones?
 - ▶ yourself?
 - ▶ the world?

Cognitive change is an emotional challenge

- ▶ Remember the tips we learned today for managing some of the difficult emotions involved
 - ▶ Identify what you are feeling
 - ▶ Self-compassion break
 - ▶ Attend a support group
 - ▶ Mindful breathing
 - ▶ Lovingkindness meditation
- ▶ If you try these strategies and feel you still need additional support, seeking help from a therapist, counselor, and support group can provide additional support



What if I need more support/cannot manage alone?

Older Adult Counseling Center (OACC)

Since 1977, the Older Adult Counseling Center has been providing expert quality services and programs to people 55 and over, and their families.

Located within the Psychology Services Center at the University of Southern California OACC is a non-profit counseling center serving the community.



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What services are available at the USC older adult counseling center?

Clinical psychology Ph.D trainees provide evidence-based individual and group therapy, supervised by licensed clinical psychologists.

- ▶ Available via Zoom and in-person at USC
- ▶ Presenting concerns include depression, anxiety, caregiving stress, insomnia, adjustment to cognitive and physical changes with age, grief, etc.
 - ▶ Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
 - ▶ Acceptance and Commitment therapy (ACT)
 - ▶ Behavioral activation, and more



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For more practice in valued-living and mindfulness for stress-management adjusting to cognitive changes...

Consider joining our Zoom **Boosting Resilience Support Group** through Alzheimer's LA

**September 2023 -
Every other Friday 10-11:30am on Zoom**

Sign up today, call 213-740-1600 or email brunamar@usc.edu to schedule an initial screening

Thank you so much for
participating and
listening...

Happy to answer any
questions!

