



# MINDFULNESS & STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

*"Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."*  
Jon Kabat-Zinn.

As we travel from moment to moment through the unfolding of our lives, there is always a choice between living in our thoughts and living in the moment (whether we realize it or not). For example, I could be actively listening to you, completely taking in your verbal and nonverbal messages, OR I could be in my thoughts formulating a rebuttal or thinking about the next task on my to-do list. The choices we make between living in the moment through our senses and living in our thoughts will significantly impact the quality of our experiences. Research has shown that mindfulness not only allows us to "savor" life's pleasurable moments, but it is also highly effective in managing life's difficult moments, reducing stress, and improving self-care.

When it comes to dealing with stressful situations, such as a loved one who is addicted, we can find ourselves lost in our thoughts, unaware of how much time we are spending stressing ourselves out with "stinking thinking," preventing us from sleeping or relaxing, ultimately harming our health and potentially leading to physical and/or mental breakdown.

To a greater degree than we realize, anxiety, depression, anger, and stress are fueled by our own thoughts. Often we have little control over the stressful events outside of us – the poor economy, the weather, a death, an addicted loved one - but we can control what we CHOOSE to pay attention to. If we choose to live 24/7 in our thoughts about the stressful event, then we will become chronically angry, anxious, depressed, and/or stressed. It would be like going to a gruesome horror film and watching it over and over again. We would become stressed out and emotionally overwhelmed.

## MINDFULNESS

**OFFERS A SOLUTION.** We can learn to intentionally and nonjudgmentally pay attention to the present moment with openness. This means that despite the fact that our addicted loved one is suffering, we can choose to allow ourselves to savor a beautiful spring day, a wonderful meal, or an inspirational concert. We can let go of living in our worry, anger, and sadness. We can lose our mind (thinking) and come to our senses (the present moment) to recharge our batteries for coping with the stressful situation we are facing.

**NOT ABOUT AVOIDING DEALING WITH PROBLEMS.** On the contrary, it is about recognizing and accepting what we can and can't control and then focusing on what we can control. Living in the moment by letting go of rumination allows us to de-stress and recharge our batteries on a regular basis so that when the present moment arrives that we are dealing with our addicted loved one, we will bring greater calmness, focus, energy, and awareness to a most stressful situation, which, of course, will result in better decisions.

**IS INTENTIONALLY AND NONJUDGMENTALLY PAYING ATTENTION TO THE PRESENT MOMENT WITH OPENNESS SO WE CAN SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE, INSTEAD OF HOW OUR REACTIVE MIND NEEDS OR TENDS TO SEE THEM.** Mindfulness allows us to bypass the denial and distortions of our reactive mind so we can make better decisions for ourselves. Mindfulness allows us to stay grounded in the present moment instead of lost in the thinking that fuels worry, anger, and sadness. Mindfulness reduces stress and improves health. Mindfulness allows us to respond to life instead of react.