

Mindfulness for Adult ADHD

THANKS TO THE PIONEERING EFFORTS of Lidia Zylowska, MD, an increasing number of adults with ADHD have successfully incorporated mindfulness practices into their day-to-day lives and are enjoying an improved quality of life as a result. *Attention* magazine first highlighted her work over ten years ago, when this column described her eight-session evidence-based mindfulness model for adults with ADHD. Known as the Mindfulness Awareness Practices (MAPS) for ADHD Program, the model was being implemented at UCLA.

Interest in how mindfulness practices can help adults with ADHD improve the quality of their lives has grown substantially since then. John Mitchell, PhD, an associate professor at Duke University, is among the experts who study the potential benefits of mindfulness practices. Recently he joined forces with Dr. Zylowska, now an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, to create an updated step-by-step guide to MAPS for ADHD. The newly revised guide can be found in their recently published book, *Mindfulness for Adult ADHD: A Clinician's Guide* (Guilford Press, 2021).

The MAPS for ADHD approach

The MAPS model can be implemented by clinicians from any number of different healthcare disciplines that specialize in helping adults with ADHD. Drs. Zylowska and Mitchell recommend, however, that practitioners who wish to incorporate it into their clinical work have personal experience using mindfulness practices in their own daily lives.

The authors divide their mindfulness trainer's guide into three parts:

- Overview: Knowing the “Why” before the “What” (chapters one through four)
- MAPS for ADHD Program: Seeing the Forest for the Trees (sessions one through eight—see below)
- Beyond Initial MAPS for ADHD: The End May Be Just the Beginning

The eight MAPS sessions described in part three include:

- Introduction to ADHD and Mindfulness: Reframing of ADHD
- Mindful Awareness of ADHD Patterns: “*What is My ADHD Like?*”
- Mindful Awareness of Sound, Breath, and Body
- Mindful Awareness of Body Sensations

- Mindful Awareness of Thoughts
- Mindful Awareness of Emotion
- Mindful Awareness of Presence and Interactions
- Mindful Awareness as a Life Journey

Following each session, participants are asked to complete homework assignments that include using formal and informal mindfulness practices throughout their day.

The book concludes with an appendix that includes session summaries and session handouts, followed by references and an index.

Mindfulness and attention

According to mindfulness experts, through mindfulness we develop “meta-awareness,” or the ability to not only be aware of our attention, but to monitor and remember where it goes. The ability to notice where our attention wanders, and to do so nonjudgmentally, actually increases our ability to redirect it to where we want it to be.

“Even when lost in the moment, with mindfulness you usually won’t stay lost too long,” says Dr. Zylowska. “You’ve trained yourself to become more aware of your attention, and so you’ll be better able to recognize these moments of distractions. Once you do, you can shift your attention back to the intended priority. Mindful awareness gives you that choice.”

Experts in the field of ADHD, including Russell Barkley, PhD, view ADHD as a self-regulation disorder. Experts in mindfulness training view mindfulness practices as self-regulation training. Perhaps this is why experts in mindfulness training feel that individuals with ADHD stand to benefit from mastering mindfulness practices. Healthcare and other providers now have a guide for how to help individuals with ADHD learn to master these mindfulness practices, thanks to Drs. Zylowska and Mitchell. 

*A clinical and consulting psychologist, **Mark Katz, PhD**, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego, California. As a contributing editor to *Attention* magazine, he writes the Promising Practices column and serves on the editorial advisory board. He is also a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.*

FOR MORE INFO

To learn more about Dr. Zylowska’s work, go to <https://lidiazylowska.com/>. To learn more about Dr. Mitchell’s work, go to <https://www.dukehealth.org/find-doctors-physicians/john-t-mitchell-phd>.