Taking the Palouse Mindfulness course with others

The Palouse Mindfulness online course can be very effective when done alone (see the Palouse Mindfulness Learning Gallery), but it is very challenging to stay with the course when done individually. Doing the course with others will increase the likelihood that people complete the course, thanks to the commitment you each make in doing it together. Many others have done this, with some just meeting once to do an introduction to the course, using the materials and videos from the Introduction page, then touching base via email. Others have an intro meeting, a mid-course, and end-of-course meeting, and still others meet weekly.

For those who would like to do the full eight-week course with others (nine counting the introduction), what follows are some ideas that might be helpful, based on the experience of other groups who have done this:

Due to the way the Palouse Mindfulness MBSR course is structured, and the availability of the videos and written materials, a group can be led by someone without formal MBSR teacher-training, but it does require some comfort and skill in working with groups and organizational ability. What follows is very brief and likely leaves out important considerations, and these are only suggestions – you’ll want to make it work for your situation and your group.

It’s good to have an introductory meeting so that participants can be at choice about doing the eight-week program, which requires considerable commitment, especially considering the 30 minutes of practice each day (which is important to really learning mindfulness). This could be done in an hour or so, with a short experiential component from you, guiding them in a short breath awareness practice, maybe 5 minutes, and showing some of the videos taken from the Introduction.

For the weekly classes, I’d suggest at least two hours (my live classes are 2 hrs. 45 min.). This would allow time to do one of the practices together with the guidance provided on the site, view one or all of that week’s set of videos, and time for discussion. It’s best to have a regular time and place where the main set of videos can be viewed together at one sitting (the video set for each week is about 45 minutes). It’s helpful to have a facility with a big screen and a good web connection so the videos can be shown directly from the website using a connected laptop or desktop computer. The videos are set up on a YouTube playlist, so starting with the first will automatically queue the others behind it.

If possible, it would be nice to have manuals printed up using the instructions on the MBSR Manual page, and you can give them each week’s materials at the beginning of the class. This is how I do it with my live classes. Knowing they will be getting the printed materials each week is an incentive to come. I wouldn’t print them, though, until after the introduction and you know how many people will be continuing with the course.

So, the class structure for each of the eight weeks could be: Welcome from you, do a guided practice together from the website, then a short check-in on how they are doing with the practices, maybe a break at that point. After the break, you could show one or more of the videos for the week, then discussion and practice assignments for the coming week (their handouts would include practice sheets), then closing.

It’s fine to use any of the materials you find on the site. It’s even fine with me if you charge something to cover printing costs, any rental costs of a meeting room, and I don’t even have an objection for you charging something to compensate you for your time in organizing the meetings. The only thing I ask is that you let people know the source of the materials you use, palousemindfulness.com, and that everything there is available at no cost, so there is transparency about the source and so that they can know there is more material there for them to access. My intention from the beginning was to make all the materials freely available to anyone. See Can I use Palouse Mindfulness materials for more about the policy of use, and for directions about how to access WORD documents for worksheets and practice sheets, should you want to modify these for your own use.

Don’t be too discouraged if not everyone follows through with the practices. The course is very powerful, but also very challenging to do in its entirety. It’s good to recognize that people will get out of it what is right for them at the time. For some, it will be life-changing, but for others, they may simply learn a few helpful ideas or practices.

Good Luck!

PS – For some general guidelines in starting a meditation group, see tarabrach.com/starting-meditation-group/