



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) Groups

MBRP is a structured group developed at the University of Washington as aftercare following primary substance use treatment. It blends the cognitive-behavioral relapse-prevention skills of Marlatt and Gordon with mindfulness practices drawn from MBCT and MBSR. The core insight: relapse is often triggered by automatic, habitual reactions to internal discomfort, including craving, low mood, and stress, and mindfulness trains a different relationship to those states, one of awareness rather than reaction. By addressing the autopilot quality of addictive behavior, MBRP creates space between trigger and response so people can make deliberate choices.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A fit for people in later-stage treatment interested in mindfulness as a tool.
- Not a primary treatment for active use; it needs some stabilization first.
- If meditation worsens trauma distress, a modified approach may fit better.

What it's for

Adults who have completed primary treatment for any substance use disorder.

For deepening the ability to recognize and respond skillfully to triggers.

Complements 12-Step, SMART Recovery, and ongoing clinical care.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 Eight weekly two-hour sessions in groups of 8 to 12.

2 Practices include the body scan and SOBER space for high-risk moments.

3 30 minutes of daily home meditation is central to the benefit.

MBRP outperforms standard relapse prevention over the longer term.

- A trial of 286 adults found MBRP produced **lower substance use and heavy drinking at 12 months** than standard relapse prevention and usual care.¹
- A review of 13 studies found MBRP most consistently reduced **craving, frequency of use, and depressive symptoms**.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

Practice is the engine. Benefits depend on the daily meditation, not the group alone.

Give it a few weeks. Daily practice often shifts craving within two to three weeks.

A community of practice. Mindfulness is easier to sustain alongside others.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is the facilitator MBRP-trained with their own mindfulness practice?
- 2** Am I far enough into recovery for an aftercare group?
- 3** Can I commit to daily home practice across the eight weeks?

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Sources

Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Bowen, S., Witkiewitz, K., Clifasefi, S. L., et al. Relative efficacy of mindfulness-based relapse prevention, standard relapse prevention, and treatment as usual for substance use disorders. *JAMA Psychiatry* (2014), 71(5), 547–556.
- 2 Ramadas, E., Lima, M. P. de, Caetano, T., Lopes, J., & Dixe, M. dos A. Effectiveness of mindfulness-based relapse prevention in individuals with substance use disorders: a systematic review. *Behavioral Sciences* (2021), 11(10), 133.

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