MENTALIZING

Module 3
Agenda

1. What is mentalizing?
2. Characteristics of mentalizing
3. If someone isn’t mentalizing
4. A mentalizing attitude
5. Resolving conflict
Introduction

- Mentalizing: Taking both self and others’ states of mind into account
- Mindfulness (Module 2) is self-orientated, with the focus on our own mind
- Mentalizing is being mindful of another mind
- People with BPD are more likely to lose the ability to mentalize and make others lose theirs
- We need to be aware of thinking, emotions and actions in ourselves and others
What is mentalizing?

**Definition:**
To construct or picture in the mind, to imagine, or to give a mental quality to an action or behaviour.

Having the ability to imagine things and to develop ideas in our minds makes us human.

Two major aspects:
- Mentalizing of ourselves
- Mentalizing of others
How many cats in the picture?
What is mentalizing?

1. It is vital to maintain mentalizing
2. Non-mentalizing leads to more non-mentalizing
3. Step back, self-observe and reflect
4. ‘Self-reflection loop’
Self-reflection loop inside the experience enabling us to influence the outcome

Diagram:

1. Observe
2. Participate
3. Observe
4. Participate
5. Different action if wanted
When there is no mentalizing

- No true communication if we can’t understand each other
- No sense of security
- Inability to ‘read people’ makes us uncomfortable, suspicious and mistrustful
- Mentalizing is vital for mental health, social function and intimate relationships

Two very different views of the same situation:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSQYydXVaQ0
Characteristics of mentalizing

- Curiosity
- The stance of safe uncertainty
- Reflective contemplation
- Perspective-taking
- Forgiveness
- Impact awareness

- A trusting attitude
- Humility
- Playfulness and humour
- Willingness to take turns
- Belief in changeability
- Assuming responsibility and accepting accountability
If someone isn’t mentalizing

- May become unreasonably upset or angry, leading to more non-mentalizing
- Can become preoccupied with rules, ‘shoulds’ and ‘should nots’, deny involvement, blame others and focus on absolutes

Once considered, resume the conversation

If this happens, pause!

- Recognise your feelings
- Recognise your thoughts
- Think about what their feelings might be
- Think about what their thoughts might be
- Think about what might happen
A mentalizing attitude

PACTS for a Mentalizing attitude:

• **P**atience
• **A**ccepting different perspectives
• **C**areful avoidance
• **T**houghtfulness with humility
• **S**ensitivity

Notice face, eyes and voice – external mentalizing – but don’t make assumptions
Non-mentalizing traps

Common non-mentalizing traps:

- Making too many assumptions
- Needing to be right and to win an argument
- Telling people what they feel and why they are like they are
Resolving conflict

Revisit the situation later, then:
• Establish facts and try to understand perspectives
• Agree the problem
• Brainstorm how to resolve the problem
• Negotiate a joint solution

Establish your own level of tolerance, set boundaries, then:
• Choose a time when you are both calm
• Express your expectations
• Avoid threats
• Listen carefully
• State you’re seeking a joint solution
• Never make threats you can’t carry out
• If you make a threat, apologise and withdraw it
• Ultimatum decisions taken in ‘cool’ of the moment

Non-mentalizing may become a repetitive and reinforcing cycle