



School of
Professional Studies

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Teacher Training Handbook

Policies & Guidelines

Updated 2023

TEACHER TRAINING CERTIFICATION PATHWAY

Brown University's Certificate in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Teaching is a sequential, three step training pathway of six courses and one final review. Each step involves coursework along with personal practice and progressively more advanced teaching practice. Included in these three steps are silent retreats and teaching requirements that are necessary to complete the training.

Prerequisites		MBSR TEACHER TRAINING PATHWAY				
2 years personal practice		Qualified Level I MBSR Teacher		Qualified Level II MBSR Teacher		Certified MBSR Teacher
PROGRAMS	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) 8 Week Program	Foundations with MBSR	Teacher Advancement Intensive (TAI)	MBSR Curriculum Study Group and Skill Building Workshop*	Individual Mentoring	Teacher Certification Review
			Dialogue and Inquiry for MBPs**			
			Ethos of MBPs**			
RETREATS***	One 5-7 Day Retreat or Two 3-day Retreats	One 5-7 Day Retreat or Two 3-day Retreats	Insight Inside Us Retreat**			One 5-7 Day Retreat or Two 3-day Retreats
Teaching Requirements			Teach a minimum of 3 introductory programs	Teach 1-3 MBSR cycles	Teach at least 4-6 MBSR Cycles	

*Take this workshop during the time when you are teaching your first three MBSR programs

**May be taken at any time during the sequence.

*** All retreats must be silent and teacher-led.

PREREQUISITES TO BEGIN MBSR TEACHER TRAINING

There are four (4) prerequisites before beginning MBSR Teacher Training:

1. **PERSONAL PRACTICE:** Maintain a personal daily meditation practice of at least two years (less experience may be considered). We define "Daily practice" as consisting of 30-45 minutes of formal meditation practice, which may include sitting meditation, walking meditation, body scan, and yoga. This reflects the practices and timeframe that we ask MBSR participants to take up; the ethos of MBSR is that we do as much or more than we ask participants to do.

2. **A GRADUATE DEGREE OR EQUIVALENT:** A graduate degree (in medicine, healthcare, education, or business preferred—others considered) is preferred. Equivalency in experience is considered and must be demonstrated through completing equivalence documentation, which is included in the application process for MBSR Foundations.
3. **COMPLETING MBSR:** Taking the 8-week MBSR class, taught by a qualified MBSR teacher, is a prerequisite to starting MBSR teaching training. The class—whether in person or online—needs to meet the Standards of Practice: 8 weekly classes of 2.5 hours each, an all-day session that lasts 7.5 hours and occurs after week 5 or 6. The program happens in real time with interaction with a teacher (i.e., not a self-paced course, and not a static, recorded course).

Before deciding to take up MBSR Teacher Training, engaging with the 8-week MBSR program offers a potential teacher the critical experience of being a full participant. This process gives a potential teacher an organic, close-up, first-hand experience of the program as it unfolds week to week: including the themes, practices, and group dynamics, along with one's own patterns and insights that emerge.

Through the experience of taking MBSR, you can then make a more informed decision about whether to begin training to become an MBSR teacher. Both the MBSR program and the teacher training are rigorous and require a significant commitment.

4. **COMPLETING THE FIRST RETREAT REQUIREMENT:** Participation at a qualifying silent, teacher-led meditation retreat of at least 5 consecutive days or participation in two 3-day silent retreats. Please review the section on retreats within this document for more information.

BEGINNING YOUR TRAINING:

WHY MBSR FOUNDATIONS INCLUDES AN MBSR CLASS

As part of the MBSR Foundations program, trainees engage in a second MBSR class that is paired with a particular Foundations section. While it will be the second time a trainee experiences the curriculum, there is often a lot of surprise at how unique this “repeat” experience is!

While trainees may have some familiarity with the practices, topics and weekly flow, the group is different, the instructor may be different, it is a different time, the trainee is different, and the world is different. In this process, along with participating fully in MBSR, the trainee also brings awareness to what is happening in the class. *Where is there resonance? Where*

is there resistance? How is the group coming together? Why did the teacher say this one week—and something seemingly different the next? In this way, the weekly MBSR class becomes a key part of each Foundations seminar as the trainee cohort explores what is arising: In relation to the practices, the group, the interactions in small groups as well as the larger group dialogue. In addition, the underpinnings and critical frames of the program are introduced. This “inside out,” or *in-vivo* learning is a powerful way to engage with first-person experience in a group environment of examination and discovery.

BETWEEN FOUNDATIONS AND TEACHER ADVANCEMENT INTENSIVE

Timing between MBSR Foundations and MBSR Teacher Advancement Intensive (TAI)

After a trainee completes Foundations, there is a required timeframe of at least 4 months before engaging in the TAI. During this time, trainees:

- Offer at least 3 introductory mindfulness programs to communities or groups (arranged by the trainee)
- Participate in another silent, teacher-led retreat of at least 5 days or two 3-day silent retreats.

These requirements support integration, deepening of personal practice, curriculum study, and practice teaching. The MBSR Foundations instructor will speak more on the importance of this as the course finishes.

MBSR TEACHER ADVANCEMENT INTENSIVE PRE-REQUISITES

- Successful completion of MBSR Foundations program (or equivalent)
- Participation in a 5-7 day silent, teacher-led retreat or two 3-day silent, teacher-led retreats. Please review the section on retreats within this document for more information.
- Offering at least 3 introductory mindfulness programs or workshops presented to the public, based on the MBSR curriculum. These could be 1.5 - 3 hours in length, and can be stand-alone offerings or a series based on various topics from the MBSR curriculum (e.g., the role of mindfulness to interrupt automatic, habitual stress reactivity or the role of body awareness in stress reduction). The offerings should reflect the qualities of an MBSR class: Interactive, with some practice, dialogue, and thematic cohesiveness, while being appropriate for the audience.

- Trainees are encouraged to connect with workplace and community organizations to hold these programs, and both online and in-person options are welcome, depending on current public safety recommendations.
- Wherever possible, the minimum group size should be 6, with encouragement for larger groups, up to 20, depending on the trainee's comfort.

MBSR CURRICULUM STUDY GROUP AND SKILL-BUILDING WORKSHOP

The MBSR Curriculum Study Group and Skill-Building Workshop (also referred to as Group Mentoring) is a required component of the MBSR teacher-training pathway.

Prerequisites for Group Mentoring include:

- Successful completion of the TAI
- Beginning to teaching the full 8-week MBSR program (cycles 1, 2, or 3) or
- Are planning to begin teaching the full 8-week MBSR program within 3 months
- Group Mentoring **MUST** be taken before a teacher teaches their 4th cycle

It is not necessary to be teaching MBSR *while* you are engaged with Group Mentoring.

INDIVIDUAL MENTORING REQUIREMENTS

To apply for individual mentoring, the preference is a class size of 10 or more, with a minimum of 8 participants. (Class size minimums also hold true for Certification.) This ensures a core group, taking into account any weekly absences and the possibility of those who drop. The minimum class size also supports a robust group process, which is a key factor in MBSR teaching. Individual mentoring is only done when teaching solo. Co-teachers should wait until they are teaching on their own to participate in individual mentoring.

Note: Occasionally organizations only deliver co-taught MBSR classes. If this is the case, please register for an Advising session [here](#) to explore options.

Timing for Individual Mentoring

Individual mentoring is recommended during cycles 3, 4, or 5, depending on when a trainee participates in Group Mentoring. The process of individual mentoring (filming classes, review and reflection, and engaging weekly with the mentor) offers opportunities to:

- refine self-reflection and reflective analysis skills

- deepen comprehension of MBI:TAC domains and key learning features
- consolidate curriculum knowledge
- increase fluidity, ease and confidence in teaching

In general, individual mentoring films should not be used for certification. The intention is for individual mentoring to be completed and serve as a training in self-reflection, analysis and review of teaching that supports the recordings for Certification. The learning in individual mentoring is often significant, and this gives the teacher time and space to refine and put into practice what has arisen in mentoring.

REQUIRED NUMBER OF CYCLES FOR CERTIFICATION

The requirement for teacher certification submission is:

- A total of 6 or more teaching cycles of the full 8-week MBSR curriculum—whether teaching online or in person with at least 5 cycles taught solo
- 1 cycle of co-teaching is allowable as part of the 6 or more cycles
- 1 cycle will have been accompanied with a mentor whose recommendation for your readiness to move onto certification is also required

All other submission requirements (retreats, submission materials, etc.) can be found [here](#) on our website.

CO-TEACHING

If you are interested in co-teaching, we encourage you to co-teach one or two cycles and then branch out to teaching on your own. We recognize that for newer teachers, co-teaching offers a space to build confidence and receive peer feedback, build skills and ensure care for the group. Many teachers choose to periodically co-teach for a variety of reasons. A single cycle of co-teaching may be applied to the certification requirement of having taught at least six cycles.

Please note that as a sole-teacher, you are welcome to invite another teacher to co-teach the all-day session.

CLASS SIZE

Note that the preferred group size is 10 participants or more, with a minimum of 8. This is the same for Certification submission as it is for individual mentoring.

IN PERSON AND ONLINE TEACHING

Currently (Dec '22), many new MBSR teachers and trainees have only experienced MBSR online. There is an awareness that as more in-person teaching opportunities become available supporting teachers with best practices for in-person teaching will be critical, in the same way that supporting teachers to move online was critical. As we attune to what is needed, we may update program offerings and/or content to meet the needs of new teachers and teachers-in-training.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR SELF-REPRESENTATION IN TEACHING

Due to the ubiquity of online marketing and promotions, as well as the challenges in clearly stating training and qualifications, it is important and timely to add an aspect covering the ethics of online and/or website presence in the trainings. This begins in the TAI and continues in MBSR Curriculum Study Group and Skill-Building Workshop and individual mentoring.

A NOTE ABOUT TIME ZONES and LIVE ONLINE PROGRAMS

While we are primarily based in the Eastern Time Zone, we serve a global community. To the best of our ability and availability, throughout the year we offer the teacher-training programs at a range of times: morning, afternoon, and evening, to meet the various scheduling needs of trainees. However, there are limitations for all programs, chiefly the TAI, as this is a multi-day program over several weeks.

The timing for the TAI means that those in Asia or Australia are a full 12-13 hours ahead of East Coast time. This has necessitated staying up through the night to participate, which while doable, requires a change in one's sleep schedule, which is not ideal for learning or one's health.

We want to strongly protect the health and well-being of trainees, and so careful consideration is imperative. For this reason, and at least for the foreseeable future, we do not recommend beginning the MBSR teacher-training path if this is a potential issue for you. Some regions are well-represented by [Global Mindfulness Collaborative](#) (GMC) members or other well-regarded training centers. While we do not offer equivalency with these centers it is an important component to factor into your planning. It may make the most sense to explore

other training options to align with best practices, wise methods, and support of one's own health.

We continue to review optional formats for the TAI, and this takes long-range planning.

A NOTE ABOUT TEACHING IN NATIVE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The language used to teach MBSR and guide practices is invitational, precise, and clear. Teachers are often supporting participants to reflect on inner experiences that are subtle, and individuals may never have been asked to speak to what is arising in their own experience in this particular way. For this reason, training in your own language is highly recommended, even if you're considering teaching in English as well. This supports a fuller integration of the MBSR language principles including comprehension and articulation of nuances in both the cognitive and experiential realms. This aids learning and assimilation of the practices and themes, as well as encouraging greater collegiality with your training peers.

We recommend researching other training centers, either those represented by the [Global Mindfulness Collaborative](#) (GMC) members or other well-regarded training centers. While we do not offer equivalency with these centers it is an important component to factor into your planning.

If you have questions about language at any level of training, please consider scheduling an advising session [here](#) to discuss options.

RETREATS

Guidelines for Mindfulness Meditation Retreat Requirements

Retreats provide a way to deeply cultivate, explore, and strengthen sustained mindfulness practice. Held in silence and relative simplicity, a retreat can open a space for connecting with and learning from one's inner life. Retreats are a key aspect of deepening in mindfulness practice, which we consider essential for anyone interested in teaching mindfulness and MBSR.

For those training to teach MBSR, the initial retreat requirement may be one of the following to begin the training program:

- Two 3-day retreats; or
- One 5-day retreat; or
- One 7-day retreat.

All retreats must be silent and teacher-led.

There are three additional retreat requirements during the MBSR teacher training. While online retreats provide greater access and a safer option with regard to COVID, there are significant benefits and support for deepening one's practice during in-person retreats. For this reason, teacher trainees are strongly recommended to take at least one in-person retreat, if feasible, given personal health and safety needs.

Guidelines for online and in-person retreats:

- 3-day retreats include 16-18 hours of practice and cover a span of 23 total hours (see the 3-day schedule below for more details)
- 5 day retreats are 4 or 5 nights in duration
- 7 day retreats are 6 or 7 nights in duration
- One of the 4 retreats is the *Insight Inside Us* Retreat
- We strongly recommend retreats (either in-person or online) with two teachers; this creates an environment of greater safety
- Retreat teachers should be experienced in leading mindfulness retreats specifically, and should have received validation to teach retreats through their meditation lineage

Guidelines for live on-line retreats:

- In addition to guidelines above, specific conditions for online retreats include:
- Each retreat day includes a minimum of 12 hours of retreat time consisting of a rhythm of sitting, walking, mindful movement, and informal mindfulness practices, primarily in silence with guidance from the teacher(s)
- During the 12-hour day there is a minimum of 8 formal practice hours interspersed with informal practices and time for self-care
- Open practice periods (when not engaged online) are no more than 2 hours in length at any one time, to support personal focus and group cohesion
- Depending on the length of the retreat, each retreat will offer one or two brief group or individual practice discussions, to talk with a teacher about practice

3-Day Retreat Daily Schedule

Includes 16-18 hours of practice and 23 total hours

- Day 1: Opening Day: 12:30 PM - 9:30 PM
4-5 hours of practice, 2 1-hour breaks, 1 talk/Q&A
- Day 2: 9:30 AM - 9:30 PM
8 hours of practice, 1 2-hour break and 1 1-hour break, 1 talk
- Day 3: Closing Day: 9:30 AM - 5:30 PM
4-5 hours of practice, 2 1-hour breaks, closing/sharing/Q&A

Meditation Retreat Centers

For retreats, Brown works collaboratively with the [Mindfulness and Health Institute](#) (MHI), Providence, RI, which offers the *Insight Inside Us* Retreat and other multi-day retreats.

There are also many other retreat centers, some of which are listed below. It is not exhaustive, nor does every retreat held at the listed centers meet our requirements. The list can be used together with the guidelines above to find appropriate retreats.

- ❖ Awareness and Relaxation Training
- ❖ Bhavana Society, High View, WV, USA
- ❖ Big Bear Retreat Center (Insight LA), Big Bear, CA, USA
- ❖ Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre, NSW, Australia
- ❖ Boundless Way Zen Center, Worcester, MA, USA
- ❖ Cloud Mountain Retreat Center, Castle Rock, WA, USA
- ❖ Copper Beech Institute, Hartford, CT, USA
- ❖ Gaia House, Devon, England
- ❖ Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, Marin, CA, USA
- ❖ Karme Choling, Barnet, VT, USA
- ❖ Insight Meditation Society, Barre, MA, USA
- ❖ Insight Meditation Center, Redwood City, CA, USA
- ❖ Insight Retreat Center, Santa Cruz, CA, USA
- ❖ Meditation Center, Beatenberg, Switzerland
- ❖ Middle Path Healing
- ❖ Mindfulness and Health Institute, Providence RI
- ❖ San Francisco Zen Center, San Francisco, CA, USA
- ❖ Shambhala Mountain Center, Red Feather Lakes, Colorado, USA
- ❖ Southern Dharma, Hot Springs, NC, USA
- ❖ Spirit Rock, San Francisco, CA, USA
- ❖ Spirit Fire, Vermont, USA
- ❖ Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, Carmel Valley, CA, USA
- ❖ Zen Community of Oregon, Clatskanie, OR, USA
- ❖ Zen Mountain Monastery, Mount Tremper, NY

Please note: Some of the teachers in these retreat centers also teach in different venues or teach alone. Silent retreats taught by teachers affiliated with any of these centers are acceptable as long as they have a mindfulness practice theme and adhere to the guidelines above. If a retreat center or teacher is not listed please feel welcome to ask.