Tending the Garden:

An Experiential Mindfulness Workshop for Parents and Caregivers of Young People with Autism

Joe Kreiter, Social Work LEND Trainee

**I. Welcome & Introduction (20 minutes)**

* **Welcoming participants** (3 minutes)
  + Waiting for people to join, encourage introductions in the chat
* **Opening Grounding Practice** (5 min): Guided breathing meditation
  + Invite participants to share about experience in chat or on mic
* **Workshop introduction** (5 min):
  + Introduction to facilitator
  + Overview of the workshop goals & structure
  + Discussion guidelines/group agreements
* **Group Discussion** (5 min):
  + Icebreaker: “What brought you here today?” Invite participants to share about caregiving challenges and/or interest in mindfulness. No mandatory participation.

**II. Demystifying Mindfulness & Caregiving (35 minutes)**

* **Introduction to Mindfulness** (5 min):
  + What is mindfulness? What is meditation?
  + Mindfulness myths/misconceptions
  + Example mindfulness practices
* **The Science of Mindfulness** (5 min):
  + Empirical evidence of mindfulness benefits
  + Parasympathetic nervous system
* **Mindfulness & Autism** (10 min):
  + Challenges faced by youth with ASD and their caregivers
  + How mindfulness can support both caregivers & autistic individuals
  + The importance of co-regulation & attunement
  + Parents/caregivers as teachers of mindfulness
* **Experiential Practice: Body scan** (15 min):
  + Guided meditation practice
  + Encourage sharing of experiences
    - Notice differences between meditation practices
    - What thoughts and feelings are arising around the material that has been shared?

**III. Recommended Mindfulness Practices (30 minutes)**

* **Self-Compassion and loving-kindness (5 min)**
  + Discussion on self-compassion & its importance
  + Example practice: Guided loving-kindness meditation for self & child
* **Grounding & Emotional Regulation Techniques (5 min)**
  + Example practices: body scan, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding sensory/noticing techniques
* **Mindfulness during challenging times (10 min)**
  + Practicing mindful pauses; RAIN meditation
  + Reflection prompt: personal stress triggers & mindful responses
* **Experiential Practice: mindful movement/stretching exercise (10 min)** 
  + Chair yoga

**BREAK – 10 Minutes**

**IV. Mindful Interacting (30 minutes)**

* **Practicing mindful interactions (10 min)**
  + The power of presence & attunement
  + Practicing curiosity & acceptance
  + Mindful listening & nonverbal connection
  + Person-centered adaptations
* **Experiential practice: mindful communication (20 min)**
  + Mindful listening exercise
    - Speaker prompt: share thoughts and reflections about mindful caregiving including potential challenges, potential applications, personal success stories, etc.
    - Partner A speaks for five minutes while partner B listens; then partner B speaks for five minutes while partner A listens. Both partners then have 5 minutes to share reflections with each other.
  + Sharing reflections with the larger group

**V. Closing & Integration (25-40 minutes)**

* **Integrating mindfulness into daily routines (10 min)**
  + Practical tips for integrating mindfulness throughout the day
* **Final Silent Meditation & Reflection (15 min)**
  + Collective reflection: “What am I taking away from today’s workshop?”
  + Sharing
* **Optional Q&A (15 minutes)**