Tending the Garden:

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

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**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)**