

## Background

### Introduction to Mindfulness



- Mindfulness: an intentional and non-judgmental awareness of the present moment
- Pioneering research by UMass demonstrates efficacy in managing Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, chronic pain, and many other conditions
- Need for mindfulness: anxiety/depression rates are growing in prevalence, especially in children
  - 25.1% of children affected by anxiety disorders with average age of onset 7 years old, according to the (Anxiety and Depression Association of America)

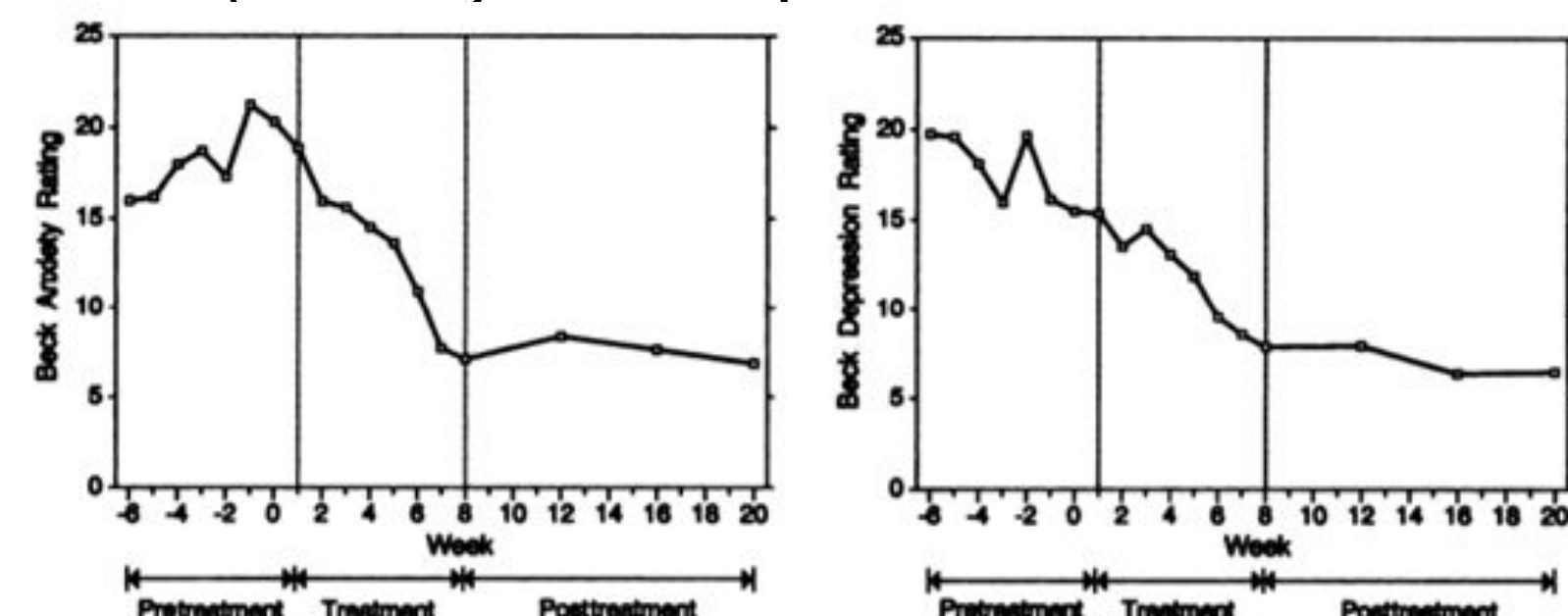


Figure showing how a mindfulness stress reduction program reduced rates of anxiety and depression (Kabat-Zinn et Al., 1992)

### Introduction to Recreation Worcester



- Recreation Worcester: free public recreation program for children ages 7-13 in 10 different Worcester parks
- Demographically, the two most prevalent ethnicities of participants are African American and Hispanic children

## Project Objectives and Goals

- Introduce mindfulness to children at Recreation Worcester as a tool to manage difficult emotions
- Form positive associations with mindfulness through entertaining short practices
- Long term goal: prevention and decrease in the prevalence of psychiatric disorders such as depression and anxiety

## Methods

- Traveled to 10 different Worcester parks to introduce mindfulness and lead several short practices per visit
- Exercises included: breath awareness through visualization, mindful walking, body scan, Zen counting exercise, mindful listening, mindful eating



## Results and Outcomes

- Successfully introduced mindfulness and led mindfulness activities with children in all 10 Recreation Worcester parks (approximately 200 children)
- Mixed results at different parks
  - Many children reported feeling “calmer”, “relaxed”, and more attentive after sessions
  - Some reported boredom and resistance to mindfulness
- Lessons learned: mindfulness is difficult in a chaotic park setting with dozens of children
  - Controlled settings easier, like school classroom
  - Smaller groups work best

## Future Plans

- Work with Dr. Mattie Castiel (Worcester department head of Health and Human Services)
- Investigate the impact of cultural differences in responses to mindfulness, particularly in the Hispanic community
- Plans include:
  - Literature review
  - Lead mindfulness sessions for recovering addicts at the Hector Reyes House
  - Develop and conduct a capstone project to report on findings