



OPEN  
SEAT



mindful  
meals

JULY 2024





# what is a mindful meal?

*Mindful Meals is a dinner event where participants are invited to engage in meaningful conversations about being mindful rather than reactive while navigating personal or communal challenges. The focus of these gatherings is not on the specific conditions that give rise to problems, nor on finding solutions for these problems, but on identifying and developing healthy mental responses.*

## INTRODUCTION

A Mindful Meal is a dinner event where participants are invited to engage in conversations about being mindful rather than reactive while navigating personal or communal challenges.

This guide offers hosts a suggested approach and meal protocol designed to create an intimate, conversational space for participants to reflect on their mental and emotional responses to problems, and where able, to discuss the mindfulness techniques they have found beneficial. Ideally, the facilitator of a Mindful Meal will have researched mindfulness techniques in order to bring a more theoretical, less anecdotal perspective to the conversation.

By focusing on the mental and emotional aspects of dealing with problems, each Mindful Meal is aimed at fostering a sense of community and mutual support, encouraging participants to identify counterproductive mental habits in the face of challenges, and share practices that promote mental well-being and resilience. Talking about issues together at the table helps in finding solutions that might not have been apparent when tackled individually, and highlights the importance of social or community support in overcoming challenges – mental or otherwise.



# mindful meal guidelines

## HOW TO PLAN A MINDFUL MEAL

*Please use the following as a blueprint for your own Mindful Meal, but we encourage you to adapt it to a specific theme that is relevant to your community and the participants who are likely to attend.*

## GENERAL APPROACH

### Hosting

- Ideal number of hosts per meal: 2 (one activity host, one food host). For meals with two tables, up to 4 hosts. Be careful not to overburden yourself by attempting to oversee meal logistics and attending to guests' needs.
- Ideal number of guests per table: 6 to 10 people. We find that any more guests can compromise the conversation, as there are simply too many people in the conversation.
- Length of meal: ~2 - 2.5 hours.

### Conversation Facilitation

- Participants should be encouraged to share their experiences and insights into unhealthy mental responses when facing problems. The aim is to create a supportive environment where individuals can openly discuss these responses.
- Try to model, as hosts, a willingness to be vulnerable. This involves sharing one's true thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement or shame. This practice can help participants feel more connected and understood, as well as share their burdens with others which helps lighten the weight and reduce shame or stigma, which is essential for mental health.
- By being open and honest – honest even with themselves – individuals can build deeper connections with others, breaking through the superficial layers of everyday conversation.



## SUGGESTED MEAL FLOW

### **Preparing the Meal and Props**

- Create an inclusive menu for the meal to ensure it will cater for as many people as possible, given your local community context and dietary requirements.
- (Optional) Print out napkins or create a paper table runner, and ensure that you have enough pens available for guests to jot down their thoughts or notes on the table while the meal is occurring.

### **Arrival and Welcome:**

- Greet participants as they arrive. Ask guests who arrive early to act as helpers in making sure they and remaining guests all receive name tags.
- Offer a welcome drink and light appetisers.

### **Introductions and Opening Reflection:**

- After a brief period of mingling, gather participants around the table.
- Begin with introductions and ask each guest to share one word describing their current feeling. Alternately, ask participants to share in a sentence what they think the largest issues are in their personal and communal life.
- Provide a brief overview of the event's purpose and structure:
  - Purpose: being mindful in the context of navigating personal or communal challenges
  - Structure: a) discussing things that trigger negative mental and emotional responses, b) what those responses often look like and lead to, and c) the practices that help regulate and empower people to be more mindful and less reactive in the face of adversity.
- Explain the use of props (if used)

### **Starters and Mains: Conversation about Responses and Practices**

#### *Starters:*

- Ask people to focus less on the issues per se and more on how they respond to the issues.
- As participants enjoy their first course, guide the conversation towards identifying trigger issues and typical negative reactions.



- Use the prompts: "What are some common triggers in your life that lead to unhealthy mental or emotional responses?" and "How do you typically respond mentally and emotionally to these triggers?" or "What thoughts or feelings tend to arise when you are confronted with persistent problems?"
- Encourage sharing of recent examples and their impact.

#### *Main Course:*

- During the main course, delve further into discussing mental and emotional responses and where present, the practices that guests use to regulate and manage their responses (if they have any).
- Use a prompt like: "Do you have any ways of achieving a more mindful state when responding?"
- Follow up by asking participants to share the personal practices they have come up with to be more 'mindful' in the context of stressful situations.

#### **Dessert: Mindfulness Techniques**

- As dessert is served, shift the focus to mindfulness techniques.
- Use the prompts: "What mindfulness practices have you found helpful in managing your mental and emotional responses?" and "Can you describe a specific technique or practice that has made a significant difference for you?"
- Encourage participants to share resources and demonstrate techniques (if comfortable).

#### **Tea/Coffee and Closing Reflection**

- With tea or coffee, allow the guests to continue earlier conversations informally or to continue mingling.
- As the evening comes to its end, conclude with gratitude sharing: "What is one insight or piece of advice you are taking away from this meal?"
- Say thank you to guests, fellow organisers, and formally end the dinner.