An Improvisation, Mindfulness, and Stress Workshop for Incoming First-Year Students: A Pilot Study

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Avoidant coping strategies interfere with successful college adjustment. Mindfulness is negatively correlated with avoidant coping. The current pilot study investigated the feasibility of an improvisation- and mindfulness-based stress-management workshop during orientation week for first-year students. The workshop was held two consecutive years; 10 incoming students participated in each workshop. Workshop activities included improvisational theater games and discussions regarding stress and coping. Participants completed pre-session and post-session measures of mood, willingness to accept negative experiences, and willingness to take action. Participants showed a significant decrease in negative mood and a significant increase in willingness to take action. Participants perceived the workshop as effective in facilitating a smooth transition and enhancing interpersonal skills. For first-year students interested in stress management and improvisational theater activities, this type of workshop is a feasible option for helping students adjust to their first days of college and learn about effective coping strategies.

College students encounter numerous stressors, including exams, time demands, financial pressures, changes in eating and sleeping habits, new responsibilities, increased workload, new relationships, career decisions, fear of failure, and parental pressure (Robotham & Julian, 2006). Results from the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment (2010) showed that 50.7% of the 94,284 respondents rated their overall level of stress in the past 12 months as "more than average" or "tremendous."

The transition to college can be especially stressful for students as they leave their family homes and face the challenges of adjusting to college life (Robotham & Julian, 2006). College students experience changes in relationships with parents, religious beliefs, and sexual attitudes and behavior, and students earlier in their

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undergraduate careers are less likely to view these changes positively than are more advanced students (Lefkowitz, 2005). An annual survey of first-time, full-time, first-year students (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Palucki Blake, & Tran, 2010) suggested that incoming students experience worse emotional health than their predecessors: Self-reported emotional health was at its lowest point since 1985. In addition, results showed an increase in the percentage of students reporting that they had been overwhelmed with responsibilities as high-school seniors. There is clearly a need for preventive stress-management interventions for incoming first-year students. The current pilot study investigated the feasibility of an improvisation- and mindfulness-based stress-management workshop conducted during orientation week at a small, private college in the Midwest.

College students use a range of coping strategies to deal with the stressors they encounter. Coping refers to efforts to manage internal or external demands perceived as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies have been categorized in multiple ways, including classifying strategies as avoidant or approach types (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Avoidant coping includes strategies that allow individuals to escape, ignore, or distort threatening stimuli. For example, a first-year student experiencing homesickness might use avoidant coping strategies such as drinking alcohol to escape the emotional discomfort, or a student might go home each weekend instead of staying on campus. In contrast, approach coping includes strategies featuring direct engagement with the stressful experience, including direct action, acceptance, and cognitive reinterpretation (e.g., learning from the experience). A homesick student using approach coping would accept his or her negative emotions while staying on campus in order to make new social connections. Although avoidant coping can provide short-term relief from stress, especially when emotional resources are limited and the stressor is uncontrollable (Roth & Cohen, 1986), chronic use of avoidant coping strategies does not support health and well-being (Stowell, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 2001; Yi, Smith, & Vitaliano, 2005).

Avoidant coping strategies can interfere with overall college adjustment. In a study of 672 first-year students, Aspinwall and Taylor (1992) found that avoidant coping was associated with less successful adjustment to college, and that active coping (e.g., problem-focused coping, seeking social support) was associated with better adjustment. In a longitudinal study assessing adjustment at four time points during the first year of college, Gall, Evans, and Bellerose (2000) found that decreases in avoidant coping over the course of the year were associated with improved mental health. Gall and colleagues also found that first-year students used significantly more avoidant coping strategies upon entry as compared to later times during their first year of college. These results specify a need for stress-management interventions for college students that target effective coping strategies and suggest that interventions for reducing avoidant coping could be especially useful for first-year students.

One approach to stress management is through fostering mindfulness. Mindfulness is an attribute of consciousness often defined as "an awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and

nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Being mindful allows individuals to experience current sensory experiences, thoughts, and emotions, and accept them as they are without trying to change the content of those experiences. Some researchers have suggested that the ability to attend to experiences allows individuals to view their moment-by-moment experiences with greater clarity and objectivity (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006) and to potentially view situations in neutral terms rather than in stress-inducing ways (Baer, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007).

By observing mental events and addressing them with an attitude of acceptance, mindfulness prevents avoidant coping strategies (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009; Hayes & Feldman, 2004). Mindfulness also facilitates behavioral flexibility by allowing individuals to identify automatic behavior patterns (such as avoidant coping strategies) and, as an alternative, choose adaptive behaviors consistent with one's own needs and values (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006). Studies of college students show that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with more adaptive appraisals of potentially stressful events and less avoidant coping (Palmer & Rodger, 2009; Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). In one of four studies, Weinstein and her colleagues assessed mindfulness, coping, stress, and well-being in first-year college students over the course of their first semester of college. Students with higher levels of mindfulness perceived less threat associated with upcoming exams and used fewer avoidant coping strategies, and these processes, in turn, mediated well-being. In sum, mindfulness encourages individuals to accept rather than attempt to escape their negative experiences and to engage in action.

Interventions designed to help participants develop mindfulness usually employ mindfulness meditation training, often through Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The most common element of these programs is sitting meditation, which requires participants to engage in sustained attention to their breath or bodily sensations. MBSR programs frequently incorporate "non-sitting" practices as well, encouraging participants to bring mindfulness to their everyday experiences (Bishop, 2002). MBSR programs have been found to be effective in treating chronic mental and physical disorders (Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004) and producing stress reduction and enhanced well-being in non-clinical samples (Chisea & Serretti, 2009).

The efficacy of MBSR interventions for college students also has been examined. Shapiro, Schwartz, and Bonner (1998) tested an MBSR program for pre-medical and medical students and found significant decreases in anxiety and psychological distress. Findings from a similar study assessing a broader range of college students (Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008) investigated the effectiveness of MBSR and another meditation-based program. Compared to a control group, students in the meditation-based groups had greater reductions in stress. Results from this data set also revealed increases in mindfulness eight weeks after the end of the program, and further analyses showed that mindfulness mediated the observed reductions in stress (Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, &

Flinders, 2008).

There is increasing evidence that mindfulness-based stress management techniques are useful for stress management and mood regulation among undergraduate students. Although mindfulness-based stress reduction programs are nonsectarian (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), some students might be uncomfortable with sitting meditation because of its roots in the Buddhist tradition. Because there are demonstrable benefits of mindfulness for health and well-being, it would be useful to develop alternative methods for enhancing mindfulness. One study (Caldwell, Harrison, Adams, Quin, & Greeson, 2010) examined changes in mindfulness, mood, and stress among college students enrolled in movement-based courses that emphasized mind-body awareness (e.g., Pilates). The researchers observed an increase in mindfulness scores, and increased mindfulness was associated with decreased negative mood and decreased stress.

In the current pilot study, the use of improvisational theater games was examined as a method of increasing mindfulness. Improvisational theater games were initially designed as a basis for theater training (Spolin, 1999). Players are encouraged to "say yes" to the current situation by accepting the scenario presented by the facilitator or "offered" by other players (Johnstone, 1979). The goals of improvisational theater games are consistent with aspects of mindfulness—attending to the present moment, freeing one's self of interpretations, and choosing appropriate responses to the current situation (Spolin, 1999). Spolin, one of the pioneers of improvisational theater, stated, "Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it, and act accordingly" (1999, p. 15).

The researchers examined the feasibility of a stress management workshop as part of a first-year student orientation program. The program consisted of a mindfulness-based stress management training session using improvisational theater games as a way to enhance mindfulness. Although a number of studies have investigated the effectiveness of stress management training for undergraduate students (e.g., Shapiro et al., 1998; Oman et al., 2008), and some have specifically examined first-year students during the course of the first semester of college (e.g., Weinstein et al., 2009), the high levels of stress reported by entering first-year students and the stressors associated with college transition warrant even earlier intervention. Orientation programs present an opportunity to address stress and coping very early in the college experience. In addition to focusing on the issues of mindfulness, stress, and coping, orientation sessions in this pilot study addressed learning and development outcomes for orientation programs established by The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2008), including intrapersonal development (realistic self-appraisal, self-understanding, and self-respect), interpersonal competence (interdependence and collaboration), and aspects of practical competence (maintaining health and wellness).

The improvisation, mindfulness, and stress session was one of roughly 20 team-building activities incoming first-year students at a small, private liberal arts college could choose to participate in as a component of a week-long orientation program. In the three-hour session, students completed self-report measures of

mood, stress, and mindfulness. They participated in improvisational theater games and discussions about mindfulness, stress, and coping, with a specific emphasis on stressors commonly experienced by first-year students. We had two primary research questions. First, is the improvisation, mindfulness, and stress workshop a feasible orientation activity option? Second, is participation in such a session associated with changes in mood and mindfulness? Based on previous research on mindfulness intervention programs, we predicted that students who took part in the session would show a decrease in negative mood, increase in positive mood, and an increase in mindfulness.

Method

Participants

The participants included 20 incoming first-year students, (12 men and 8 women) ranging in age from 18 to 20 years (M = 18.35, SD = .59), who chose the improvisation and stress management session as a team-building activity during orientation week in the years 2009 and 2010. Ten students took part in the session held in 2009, and 10 students took part in the 2010 session. Fifteen of the students were White, two were Black/African American, two were Hispanic/Latino, and one was Native American. A majority (65%) had some theater experience, and 50% had previous experience with improvisational theater. In comparison to the first-year cohort from 2009 (N = 480) and 2010 (N = 484), the sample was similar in age (mean age for the cohort = 18.20, SD = .50). The sample overrepresented men (60% in the sample, 48% in the cohort) and had a slightly lower percentage of White students than in the overall cohort (75% in the sample, 78% in the cohort).

Measures

Perceived Stress Scale (10-item; Cohen & Williamson, 1988). The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a 10-item self-report measure of the degree to which participants have appraised situations during the past week as stressful. Sample items include, "In the last week, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?" and, "In the last week, how often have you felt that things were going your way?" Participants rate items on a scale of 0 (*never*) to 4 (*fairly often*). Four items are reverse-scored, and items are summed to create a scale score with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress.

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS, Brown & Ryan, 2003). The MAAS is a 15-item scale that measures mindfulness of physical experience, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts. Sample items include, "I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later," and, "I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past." Respondents answer on a 1 (*almost always*) to 6 (*almost never*) scale. Responses to individual items are summed and averaged to form a scale score. Scores can range from 1 to 6, with higher scores

indicating more mindfulness.

Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS is a self-report measure of current mood. It includes a list of 10 positive emotions (e.g., interested, alert, enthusiastic) and 10 negative emotions (e.g., upset, irritable, afraid). Participants respond on a 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*) scale. Scores are summed separately for positive and negative emotions, with higher scores indicating stronger positive or negative affect. Scores for each subscale can range from 10 to 50.

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ; Bond & Bunce, 2003). The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire measures the respondent's tendency to accept negative experiences and to engage in action. The questionnaire consists of 16 items, with two subscales. The willingness subscale is made up of seven items (e.g., "It's OK to feel depressed or anxious."). The action subscale includes nine items (e.g., "I am able to take action on a problem even if I am uncertain what is the right thing to do."). Participants answer on a 1 (*never true*) to 7 (*always true*) scale. Eight items are reverse scored. Each subscale is summed so that higher scores indicate greater willingness to accept negative emotions and greater tendency to engage in action.

Demographics questionnaire. Participants responded to several demographic questions regarding age, race and ethnicity, gender, and previous experience with theater and improvisational theater.

Assessment questionnaire. As part of the orientation program assessment process, participants completed questions regarding the effectiveness of the activity in getting to know other students, making a smooth transition to the college, enhancing leadership skills, learning and practicing cooperative group skills, keeping an open mind when working with people who have different approaches/background than their own, and enhancing communication skills. Participants responded on a 1 (*ineffective*) to 5 (*very effective*) scale.

Procedure

During summer registration sessions, incoming first-year students registered for a three-hour team-building session that would take place on the second day of a six-day orientation program before the fall term began. Students could choose from among 20 or 21 options, including service projects, campus ministry activities, a ROPES course, and special team-building activities for music organizations. The improvisation and stress management activity was described as an ongoing research project on stress management featuring improvisation activities and discussions that could help participants learn more about stress and stress management techniques.

On the second day of the orientation program, students participating in the improvisation, mindfulness, and stress workshop met in a campus classroom. The 2009 session was facilitated by two undergraduate psychology majors and a graduate student in psychology; the 2010 session was led by one undergraduate psychology major and a faculty member in psychology.

After arriving at the classroom, the facilitators introduced the session and the nature of the research. The facilitators relayed to the participants that the purpose of the study was to investigate the use of improvisational activities as a stress management technique. Workshop participants were informed that they could take part in the workshop without participating in the research. The facilitators distributed a consent form that outlined the purpose and procedures of the study and informed participants that their data would remain confidential and that they were free to withdraw participation at any time without penalty.

After completing the consent form, participants received a questionnaire packet that included the PSS, MAAS, PANAS, AAQ, and demographics questions. After all participants had completed the questionnaire packet, the facilitators began the improvisation activity and discussion portion of the workshop. As an introduction to the topic, facilitators presented information about stress and coping. Facilitators also presented information about mindfulness and the benefits of approach versus avoidant coping. Participants then played eight improvisational games, which were adapted from those described in Spolin's (1986; 1999) works on improvisation. Games included warm-up exercises designed to help participants learn one another's names, general improvisation games, and stress-specific improvisation games. The session was structured with each improvisational theater game followed by discussion about the thoughts and feelings participants experienced during the activity and ideas regarding how participants could use mindfulness to cope with stressful experiences they might encounter in college. A sample agenda is presented in Appendix A. Examples of a general activity and a stress-specific activity are presented in Appendix B.

After completing the activities and discussions, participants completed a post-session questionnaire that included the PANAS and AAQ. They then completed the assessment questionnaire. The facilitators distributed an information sheet that listed resources on mindfulness and stress, campus counseling resources, and information regarding how participants could receive results of the study.

Results

Because there were no significant differences between the 2009 and 2010 samples on any of the measures, the researchers have combined the data for further analysis.

Initial Measures of Stress and Mindfulness

Scores on the PSS have a possible range from 0 to 40. The mean PSS score in the current sample was 15.39 (*SD* = 5.07). Scores ranged from 7 to 26. Mindfulness scores, as measured by the MAAS, have a possible range from 1 to 6. The mean score in the current sample was 3.66 (*SD* = .66). MAAS scores in the sample ranged from 2.73 to 5.13.

Changes in Mood and Mindfulness from Pre-session to Post-session

To examine potential changes in mood and mindfulness from pre-session to post-session, the researchers conducted paired samples *t* tests for four measures: the positive PANAS subscale, the negative PANAS subscale, the willingness subscale of the AAQ, and the action subscale of the AAQ. Cohen's *d* was calculated as an indicator of effect size. The alpha level was set at .05. Results are presented in Table 1. There was no change in positive affect, but participants showed a significant decrease in negative affect from pre-session to post-session. There was a marginally significant effect of time on willingness to accept negative emotions, with scores increasing from pre-session to post-session. There was a significant increase in AAQ action subscale scores.

TABLE 1

Changes in Mood and Mindfulness from Pre-Session to Post-Session

Measure	Pre-Session M (SD)	Post-Session M (SD)	t	p	d
PANAS Positive	34.20 (6.20)	35.65 (7.60)	1.26	.22	.29
PANAS Negative	18.70 (6.21)	15.20 (4.84)	3.28	.004	.76
AAQ Willingness	28.45 (7.86)	46.95 (5.23)	2.05	.055	.46
AAQ Action	43.15 (5.71)	46.95 (5.23)	2.81	.01	.63

Note: df = 19 for all tests.

Assessment Results

Participants reported that the activity was effective in a number of areas. A majority of the 20 participants gave a rating of 4 or 5 (*very effective*) when assessing how effective the activity was in helping them get to know other first-year students (18), make a smooth transition to college (15), enhance their leadership skills (17), learn/practice cooperative group skills (19), keep an open mind when working with people who have different approaches/background than their own (19), and enhance their communication skills (18).

Discussion

The current study was designed to address two research questions. First, the

researchers investigated the feasibility of an improvisation, mindfulness, and stress workshop as a first-year orientation activity option. The workshop appears to be a viable activity for orientation. The workshop attracted an adequate number of students (10 each year), a group size optimal for improvisational theater games. The three-hour time frame was sufficient to meet the workshop objectives. In addition, advanced undergraduate students could serve as workshop facilitators, which could make larger workshop sizes or concurrent sessions possible.

There are challenges associated with this workshop that orientation professionals should note when considering it as a possible orientation activity. As part of the assessment questionnaire, participants responded to an open-ended question regarding the worst part of the experience. Four participants perceived the discomfort associated with the improvisation activities as the worst aspect of the workshop; this comment was not surprising given that the activities were chosen in part because they produce stress. Three participants thought that the session was too long, and the most common criticism (from five students) was that the questionnaires took too much time to complete. During days filled with activities designed to immerse students in their new community, a three-hour session might seem exceptionally long. Incorporating the workshop early in the orientation process could reduce the problem of fatigue. Furthermore, a majority of the questionnaires included in the workshop were associated with the current research project and could be omitted from the protocol.

The second research question addressed the possible effects of the workshop on mood and mindfulness. Results from the current study indicate that the workshop decreased negative affect and increased positive attitudes toward taking action in the face of negative emotions. Participants maintained their relatively high levels of positive affect over the course of the session, and positive affect, along with an immediate decrease in negative affect could help students cope with stress during the first, hectic days of college orientation. Enhanced readiness to take action even when experiencing negative thoughts and emotions could provide a longer-term effect of fostering approach coping and discouraging avoidant coping.

A mindfulness-based stress management workshop is especially well-suited for incoming first-year students. Many traditional stress-management workshops focus on strategies to prevent stressful situations from occurring (e.g., improving time management skills) or emphasize cognitive-behavioral strategies to change negative thoughts and emotions. The goal of mindfulness-based approaches is not to change the *content* of experiences, but to change how one views experiences. Instead of eradicating stress completely, a mindfulness-based approach encourages individuals to observe experiences and accept them, while engaging in behaviors consistent with their values. There are many strategies incoming first-year students can employ to prevent stress, but regardless of a student's study skills, social support networks, and health habits, stress during the first year of college is inevitable. Accepting the stress associated with new experiences will allow first-year students to pursue new challenges, to engage more fully with their experiences, and to persevere during difficult times.

Although there are advantages of mindfulness-based stress management

programs over other types of programs, some students might be uncomfortable with sitting meditation. In addition, while engaging in quiet reflection during orientation week might be calming for some students, others might find it difficult to concentrate on meditative practice during such an exciting time. Thus, using improvisation as a tool for enhancing meditation could be a useful option for many students, as improvisation promotes a playful approach to what otherwise might be daunting new experiences. Another advantage of using improvisational theater games in a stress-management workshop is their utility in promoting interpersonal connections. Workshop participants noted that the workshop helped them get to know other students, learn and practice cooperative group skills, and keep an open mind when working with people who have different backgrounds from their own.

The results from this pilot study should be interpreted with caution due to important limitations. Although conducting the study over the course of two years improves our ability to generalize the results, the sample size is small and is not representative of the general college student population. A majority of this self-selected group had theater experience, and half had experience specifically with improvisational theater. However, the range of mindfulness scores was large, and the average MAAS score was similar to that found in other college student samples (Brown & Ryan, 2003), indicating that our sample did not differ in mindfulness than the general college student population.

The researchers did not assess a control group or comparison group as part of this study, which is another important limitation. It is possible that the effects of the workshop were not due to the improvisation and discussion activities *per se*, but instead due to social support and humor provided by the experience—characteristics common to many types of team-building exercises. Future studies should include comparison groups to assess effects unique to the workshop and to investigate potential pre-session differences between students who register for this type of activity and students who register for other types of team-building sessions.

The researchers informed participants of the purposes of the study, and this could have created demand characteristics—in other words, it is possible that participants changed over the course of the workshop not because their moods and attitudes changed, but because they responded in a way they assumed was "correct." Future studies should include measures that tap into participants' tendencies to respond in a socially desirable manner. In addition, although the initial results of the study are promising, it is impossible to know if the change in attitudes toward taking action continued after the workshop ended. Follow-up measures administered throughout the students' first year would provide useful data regarding the longer-term effects of the session. Because many effective mindfulness-based stress management programs include multiple sessions, booster sessions during the course of the semester could be a useful addition.

Despite these limitations, the results of the current study suggest that a mindfulness-based stress-management workshop that utilizes improvisational theater activities is perceived positively by participants and can contribute to decreased negative mood and more positive attitudes regarding taking action.

At institutions where small-group team-building activities are possible, this type of workshop is a feasible option for helping students who are interested in improvisational theater activities to adjust to their first days of college and learn about effective coping strategies.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Agenda for Improvisation, Mindfulness, and Stress Workshop

Activities and discussions take 3 to 5 minutes, but facilitators can adjust the time depending on participants' level of engagement in the activities and discussions.

1. Introduction of facilitators, description of session, description of research
2. Informed consent form distribution and collection
3. Pre-session questionnaire packet
4. Improvisation activity: Exposure (6 minutes)
5. Discussion of exposure activity (Thoughts, emotions, physical reactions, definition of stress)
6. Improvisation activity: Introductions and remembering names
7. Discussion of introductions (Problems with remembering others' names while we are busy thinking of how to introduce ourselves)
8. Break
9. Improvisation activity: Names in a circle
10. Discussion of names in a circle (Thoughts, emotions, physical reactions; definition of stress; stressors experienced during orientation so far; the utility of stress and anxiety; common strategies people use to escape stress and anxiety)
11. Improvisation activity: Telling a story one sentence at a time
12. Discussion of telling a story (Introduction of mindfulness and acceptance—we can't plan for everything)
13. Improvisation activity: What are you doing? (2 minutes)
14. Discussion of what are you doing (The internal critic; attending to and accepting negative thoughts and experiences in the present moment)
15. Improvisation activity: What are you doing: Part 2 (2 minutes)
16. Discussion of second round of what are you doing
17. Improvisation activity: YES!
18. Discussion of YES! (Acceptance of the present moment; how can saying yes can be applied to new experiences, specifically those encountered as one enters college?)
19. Break
20. Improvisation activity: Taxi cab
21. Discussion of Taxi Cab (Using mindfulness to cope with negative thoughts; the advantages of mindfulness and acceptance over avoidance; use challenging homework as an example)
22. Improvisation activity: Your faithful companion, stress
23. Final discussion
24. Post-session questionnaire packet and evaluation forms
25. Distribute debriefing form

APPENDIX B

Sample Improvisation Activities and Discussion Questions

General improvisation activity: Telling a story one sentence at a time (objectives: mindfulness and acceptance). The group stands in a circle. The facilitator suggests a scenario, and the first person contributes by saying a sentence to begin the "story." The next person builds on the sentence of the previous contributor by saying, "Yes, and . . ., " and the story progresses one sentence at a time. Once the story has completed a sufficient progression (as determined by the facilitators), the activity will end.

Discussion questions. How did it feel to be unable to prepare ahead? Were you able to do the activity even if it was stressful or anxiety-provoking? What situations have you encountered in which you didn't know what was going to happen and you couldn't plan ahead? What are some examples of situations in which you've experienced stress or anxiety and you've done what you needed to do anyway? How could the strategy of "Yes, and . . ." be used to help you deal with new situations?

Stress-specific improvisation activity: Your faithful companion, stress (objectives: mindfulness and acceptance). The facilitators assign participants to pairs. Participants take turns acting out the roles of "person" and "stress." "Stress" should generate negative thoughts and describe negative emotions about a college-specific situation. The "person" should respond in a kind way to the stress, accepting it for what it is, but continuing to engage in behavior that will help the person reach his or her goals.

Discussion question. How do you think you could use this as a technique to manage stress? Discussion continues with a review of the issues of mindfulness, acceptance, the role of language in stress, and continuing to pursue one's values and goals in the face of a stressor.

List of common stressors for use in "your faithful companion, stress" activity:

- Strange food/food not like at home
- Worries about making new friends
- Living with a stranger (living in a co-ed situation)
- Maintaining existing friendships/relationships
- Romantic relationships
- College course workload
- Time management concerns
- Participating in class
- Balancing work/classes/co-curricular activities/social life
- Financial concerns
- Maintaining good health
- Wondering if this school was the right choice
- Wondering if chosen major/career is the right choice
- Values crises: Confronted with questions about religion; diversity; decisions about sex, drugs, alcohol; feelings of inadequacy/inferiority