

A Buddhist Teaching-based Intervention: Note, Know, Choose

Over the past decade, the professional field has been gradually moving away from the secularization and extraction of mindfulness into a treatment technique to a more encompassing integration of Buddhism into psychotherapy. Using Early Buddhism as a theoretical orientation, *Note, Know, Choose* (NKC) is developed as a psychotherapeutic intervention in congruence with core Buddhist teachings (Lee, 2021; Lee & Tang, 2021; Lee & Ong, 2019). This model has a structured way to assess, conceptualize, and intervention suffering of clients using a professional counseling framework. The research projects use this model as basis to conduct studies in order to develop an efficacious treatment of choice for individuals affiliated with Buddhism.

NKC adopts Early Buddhism as the main source of theoretical backbone. Early Buddhist teaching is contained in the collection of the Historical Buddha's Five Nikāyas and is perhaps the most widely accepted school of Buddhist teaching among all schools and lineages. In the possibly simplistic sense to conceptualize suffering in the Buddhist paradigm, we suffer because "what should be" does not align with "what is" in the world. Under this assumption, most of us are driven by an ignorant nature that fails to see and accept what is actually happening; instead, we are prone to our cravings and desires, expecting our needs to be satisfied, and we consequently tend to distort or deny actual happenings when reality fails to satisfy us, thereby resulting in temporarily satisfaction and, eventually, greater suffering. Perhaps one of the major differences between Buddhism and traditional psychological theories is the understanding of "what is." In Buddhism, the reality of "what is" can be described as suffering, non-self, and impermanence. In particular, a significant cause of suffering is the addiction to an ontological experience of self. Applying the Buddhist teaching of twelve links of dependent origination, the

NKC model uses craving, clinging, and expectations to conceptualize the process of self-addiction.

For intervention, NKC is an iterative three-phase mind training model. Applying the Buddhist ideal of mind cultivation, the Note, Know, Choose model aims to train the skilfulness of the mind by: (1) refining the level of concentration for the mind to notice its own habits and nature, (2) gaining insight into how its unrealistic expectations contribute to suffering, and (3) choosing wholesome thoughts and behaviours rather than attaching to specific judgements and thoughts.

In the first phase of *Note*, psychologist helps client develop mindful attention to bodily sensations and cognitive actions. By raising awareness through concentration practices, clients will increase mental distance from emotional reactivity and suffering-induced thoughts, thereby observing the interdependent relationships among stimuli and triggered physical sensations, perceptions, thoughts, innermost desires, emotional reactions, and behavioural consequences.

The second phase of *Know* helps clients gain insights into the discrepancy between reality and expectations as driven by one's clinging towards a constructed self and innermost desires. In other words, psychologist aims to cultivate client's capacity to see what, how, and why they are clinging onto something as well as how one may accept, reject, interpret, distort, or avoid reality as an attempt to meet one's inner needs. To *Know* is to realistically see, understand, and accept such innermost desires and external conditions, thereby opening up potentials for more skilful choices.

The third phase of *Choose* is the key to making skilful choices moment-by-moment. Mental activities occur in a flash and we may not be mindful of those moment-to-moment volitions. While the *Note* practices help to slow down mental activities and foster a clearer

perspective, and the *Know* practices help to develop a more accurate and realistic view of what to expect, the *Choose* practices help to see choice points in life and mindfully make decisions resulting in less suffering for self and others.

There are also a variety of Buddhist counseling techniques in NKC. In traditional Buddhist teaching, suffering roots from clinging onto the five aggregates (or the self) and liberation from suffering starts with easing such clinging. Under this theoretical framework, some Buddhist counseling techniques include: different types of mindfulness techniques, Four Immeasurables contemplation, detachment visualization, drawing out self-notion, good Kamma list, unlabeled, and many others.