

What to Expect In Group Psychoeducational Skills Training as part of the Multidisciplinary Vulvodynia Program

As part of your acceptance into the MV Program, there are 3 psychoeducational sessions offered in group format. Psychoeducation involves a combination of education infused with psychological therapy aimed at exploring thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. This psychoeducational program involves three, 2-hour sessions, spaced two weeks apart. Sessions are facilitated by a Registered Psychologist, and on occasion, facilitated by an upper-level Clinical Psychology intern/trainee.

The goals of these sessions are: (1) To understand and therefore better manage pain from touch or pressure to the vagina due to vestibulodynia and/or pelvic muscle tension from a psychological perspective; (2) To understand vestibulodynia/pelvic muscle tension as a pain disorder that is influenced by, amongst other things, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, including those that are in response to both internal and external stress; (3) To be able to understand one's reaction to stress and pain, so as to better cope with pain (4) To capitalize on the therapeutic benefit of group exchange, modeling, and support; (5) to emphasize that these sessions are quite possibly the first step in the process/journey toward managing a waxing and waning condition. Most importantly, in this group you will be applying psychological skills learned in this and the educational seminar to actual situations in which you are anticipating or experiencing pain.

Throughout this psychoeducational group, the goal is to provide a safe and respectful environment for learning and psychological growth. You will be provided with handouts that will form the basis of homework exercises to be completed between sessions. There will be daily homework assignments between sessions. Commitment to attending all three sessions and complying with as much of the homework as possible is a requirement to be accepted into the MV Program. It is not a requirement that women disclose any personal information they do not wish to share during the group.

Specific skills that you will acquire:

- Learning about mindfulness, and how mindfulness can help with one's reaction to pain and stress
- Induction of the relaxation response and practice of mindfulness with the Body Scan
- Learning how to identify maladaptive or biased thoughts
- Learning about the components of the female sexual response cycle, and beginning to recognize the variables that may help or hinder your personal sexual response
- Understanding how the anticipation of pain influences the rest of the sexual response cycle
- Understanding how a psychological approach can be used to complement other modalities of treatment