



Simply Mindful
CANBERRA MINDFULNESS CENTRE

Self-Compassion

‘The first beneficiary of compassion is always oneself.

*When compassion or warm-heartedness arises in us and our focus
shifts away from our own narrow self-interest,
it is as if we open an inner door.*

*It reduces fear, boosts confidence and brings us inner strength.
By reducing distrust, it opens us to others and brings us a sense of
connection to others, and a sense of purpose and meaning in life’.*

~ His Holiness, The Dalai Lam

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Welcome to the 6-week Self-Compassion program

*‘A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day.
A string of such moments can change the course of your life.’
~ Christopher Germer*

We will be developing **mindfulness** (steadiness of mind and attention) at the same time as **self-compassion** (warm-heartedness and care towards oneself).

Like the two wings of a bird, mindfulness and compassion enable and balance each other.

Without compassion, mindfulness practice can become arduous, rigid or strained. Without mindfulness, in our attempts at self-compassion we can easily become distracted, drawn into rumination or overwhelmed by suffering.

Self-compassion helps us remember our intrinsic worthiness and shared humanity. When experienced deeply, this can free us from ‘the trance of unworthiness’.

It helps us cultivate greater capacity to recognise, allow and even enjoy our innate goodness, beauty, resilience and kindness whilst recognising our growing edges. It also helps us realise **experientially** that we are all flawed, that we all feel inadequate in some ways, that we all fail AND that this shared and inescapable reality is part of the human condition.

Self-compassion helps us to let go of unrealistic or harmful expectations and learn true self-acceptance.

Our difficulties and failings as human beings, and our beauty and goodness are not mutually exclusive. Self-compassion practices train us to truly meet ourselves, in our most difficult moments, with the kindness, understanding and love that we would bring to a dear friend, a vulnerable child or animal.

This means we become less defensive, engage in less avoidant behaviours and can relax into being present. When we can open and meet our own needs in this way it is easier to address difficulties and move through hurt and pain. We do not need to reject parts of ourselves in order to be acceptable, and we can increasingly accept and even enjoy being who we are and being alive.

Self-compassion is 'coming home' to yourself

Self-compassion is both an attitude and an outcome.

It is an attitude of an inner friend, help or coach rather than an inner critic or inner bully. It is a sense of warm-heartedness and care towards ourselves. It resources us from the inside out with a sense of support, which translates into feeling safer, more supported, more ok in ourselves and more connected.

How does Self-Compassion help?

Peer reviewed research points to a range of benefits from self-compassion. People who practice self-compassion are:

- generally more emotionally resilient
- more motivated to achieve their goals,
- happier and healthier mentally and physically and
- have more compassionate, satisfying relationships with others

Self-compassion is a powerful tool for healing our relationship with ourselves, with parts of us that are fractured or wounded.

How? Self-compassion practices help us to learn how to meet ourselves with a constructive, supportive inner voice rather than a harsh, judgemental or critical inner voice. This is a practical way of transforming patterns learned from previous life experiences which now limit or harm us.

Self-compassion transforms our inner world as we practice it. In neuroscientific terms, it helps us to practice responding to ourselves differently. Over time new neural pathways develop which change our inner talk, perceptions of ourselves and the way we experience life.

This brain training literally helps us to feel more at home in our own skin, safer, more supported and more connected. The practice builds inner resources which are particularly helpful when facing difficulties and pressures.

Sometimes people fear that practicing self-compassion will make them more self-absorbed, arrogant or selfish. Actually, the opposite is true. Self-compassion helps us to stay connected with ourselves and our experience, fill up our inner tanks and tolerate difficulties without shutting down or closing off. It frees us up to be more present, creative and responsive in our relationships with ourselves, others and the world. It means that we use up less internal resources protecting, defending, ruminating and judging ourselves or others.

The more connected and present we are, the more energy we have for fully engaging in our lives. This leads to inner calm, reduces inner tension and helps us feel both cared about and caring. This naturally flows into our relationships with others and the rest of our lives. There's no need to believe anything in particular. It can be compatible with any belief system.

Kindness

*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.*

*How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.*

*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread
only kindness that raises its head*

*from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.*

- Naomi Shihab Nye

Mindfulness

is about making what you're doing now, the most important thing.

This matters because the present moment is the only one in which we can act, learn, create, problem solve, change or influence.

Mindfulness is about being awake and aware – living in the present – rather than being stuck in the past or worrying about the future. The kind, observing, non-judging perspective inherent to mindfulness allows us to consciously respond with clarity and focus to life.

Mindfulness is developed by purposely paying attention in a non-judgemental way to what is going on in your body, your mind, your emotional life and the world. It sounds simple, but it's not necessarily easy because many of us are very practiced at the opposite: being busy, judgemental, distracted, critical and avoidant.

Mindfulness meditation is also about learning to approach each experience in life with curiosity and openness, without trying to change it – whether it's joy, sadness, grief, anger, pleasant or unpleasant.

This is quite a different approach to the western idea of trying to be a good person and trying to improve oneself. It is based on accepting, embracing and coming to know all the aspects of yourself, without pushing away any parts. Interestingly, this embracing attitude can lead to profound shifts in our relationship with ourselves, others and the world.

The formal practice of mindfulness happens by making space and time daily. In the practice you'll be guided to bring your awareness to what is happening right now. The focus of this practice can be the breath, body sensations, emotions, thoughts. When you do this regularly, you are regulating the nervous system and training your mind so that you are increasingly able to focus on what you choose to focus on – in the present moment. This takes time, so do not be discouraged if it seems almost impossible at first.

By allowing, accepting and getting to know yourself, you become more skilled at managing disruptive and reactive thought patterns and emotions and learn how to respond creatively to stressful situations rather than reacting out of a habitual pattern. As Baruch Spinoza says, *the more clearly you understand yourself and your feelings, the more you become a lover of what is.*

This is about truly inhabiting your life. Being fully and completely alive to each moment may sound a little corny. It actually requires courage – a willingness to see clearly what is actually going on. When practiced in many small ways, mindfulness builds equanimity (balance and calm), resilience and a greater sense of engagement, aliveness and joy in life.

Learning to stay present can bring healing, clarity and freedom...and it takes **practice**.

Mindfulness is

*'Moment to moment non-judgemental awareness
cultivated by paying attention
in a specific way
in the present moment
and as non-reactively,
non-judgementally and
open-heartedly as possible'*

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

Why am I here? Setting Intentions

*‘Your relationship with yourself sets the tone
for every other relationship you have’ ~ Robert Holden*

Having a vision or strong sense of purpose as to why you are doing this practice in the first place is helpful. There will be times when the practice feels nourishing and wonderful and there may also be times when it doesn't.

What will keep you coming back “again and again” so that you can keep cultivating these inner resources of mindfulness and self-compassion? Your intentions set the stage for what is possible and they ‘incline the mind’ in this direction. Reconnecting with intentions over time helps us not only to head in the right direction, but to come back when we lose track or forget. Over time intentions can set our lives on a very different course.

Reflect on your hopes and intentions for this course and your life

Why am I here?

What is calling for my attention in my life? My relationship with myself? My health? My relationships with others?

What difference would it make if I had more self-compassion?

What is it that I really, really want? (Or, in other words, what is my heart's desire?)

What am I willing to bear to make space for the self-compassion practice, to give myself the time to explore and learn new ways of being with myself in the next 6 weeks?

Week 1

Settling

‘The body always leads us home...

*if we can simply learn to trust sensation
and stay with it long enough
for it to reveal appropriate action,
movement, insight or feeling.’*

Pat Ogden

Somatic Psychotherapist, author of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy

Self-Compassion starts with the body

Attend first to comfort as best you can. This allows us to more readily relax and be present.

It is very difficult to be present and open to learning something new when there is pain. At the beginning of each practice, take time to address tension, pain and discomfort as best you can. Check in with habitual places of tension, for example, the face, neck, shoulders, chest and back. See if you can soften and release them a little. Take time to stretch and move until you feel ready to settle.

Pain and discomfort

There may be areas of physical or emotional discomfort you can't address easily or immediately and that's ok too. Even if there is pain, simplifying things by letting go of tasks, adopting the most comfortable or supportive position and allowing yourself to soften can ease discomfort considerably and make it easier to tolerate. Pain can even become the object or focus of practice. Meeting discomfort and pain with compassion is also a key approach we will be practicing through this course.

*'Be strong then and enter into your own body;
there you have a solid place for your feet.
Think about it carefully!
Don't go off somewhere else!*

*Kabir says this: just throw away all thoughts of
imaginary things,
and stand firm in that which you are.'*

Kabir – extract from 'The Wanting Creature Inside Me'

Learning Self-compassion

To cultivate Self-Compassion, we will use 5 main steps in the practices.

The 5 steps help the learning to be a full embodied experience which registers in our nervous system rather than just cognitive learning (an idea).

If we want to experience greater ease, contentment and compassion we need to experience it or live it as an emotional and somatic and sensory reality and then repeat that event (remember the brain gets better at what it repeatedly does). Top down or intellectual 'management' is a good start and it's not enough. It is vulnerable to will-power fatigue. We aim to engage bottom-up embodied learning (in much the same way as we would learn a sport or to paint, knit or fix something).

5 steps for embodied learning

1. Have experiences of self-compassion – feeling cared about and caring, ease, support, warmth, understanding, goodness, gladness, feeling seen, heard, listened to, valued, appreciated
2. Stay with the experience 10 - 30 seconds (a few deep slow breaths)
3. Feel it in the body (experiential)
4. Focus on what's rewarding and helpful about it (what's relevant, intensify it)
5. Repeat

*'Form a new habit and it will form you
in its own image'
~ Goethe*

Saint Francis and the Sow

*The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
as Saint Francis
put his hand on the creased forehead
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down through the great broken heart
to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath them:
the long, perfect loveliness of sow.*

*Galway Kinnell, "Saint Francis and the Sow"
from Three Books. Copyright © 2002 by Galway Kinnell.*

Week 1 home practice

- Compassionate body scan practice daily. Use the guided recording on the Simply Mindful website:
<https://simplymindful.com.au/resources/self-compassion-and-compassion-meditations/>
Track 1 is the Compassionate Body scan.
The password is: **warmhearted**
- One act of kindness, care, friendliness or soothing (helpful & lifegiving) towards yourself this week.

Compassionate Body Scan

Home practice record sheet

Day, Time	Your experience during the practice and how you felt afterwards

Acts of Self-Compassion in daily life

This course is focused on developing mindfulness and self-compassion in everyday life. That means firstly to know when you're suffering or under stress (mindfulness) and secondly to be able to respond with care and kindness (self-compassion). One approach which can be easier than doing the daily formal meditation practices is to reflect on ways you already care for yourself and then remind yourself to do those things when life gets challenging. (Adapted from Centre for Mindful Self-Compassion 'Self-Compassion in daily life')

PHYSICALLY - soften the body	How do you care for yourself physically? Exercise, a warm bath, massage, a cup of tea, a bush walk, time in the garden, time with pets, comforting smells Can you think of new ways you'd like to try to release tension and stress in your body and engage your senses?
EMOTIONALLY – soothe and comfort yourself	How do you care for yourself emotionally? Pat the dog, journal, sing, talk with a friend, engage in an activity that settles your emotions Is there something new you'd like to try?
MENTALLY – allow and open, reduce agitation	How do you care for your mind and reduce agitation, especially when you're under stress? Meditation, reading something inspiring – a book, poetry, listening to music, exercise, watch something funny Is there a new strategy you'd like to try to let your thoughts come and go more easily?
RELATIONALLY – connect with others	How or when do you relate to others in ways that bring you genuine happiness or comfort? Meet with friends, play a game together, do an activity together, send messages Is there a way you'd like to try and enrich or extend these connections?
SPIRITUALLY – connect with and commit to your values	What do you do to care for yourself spiritually? Meditate, pray, bush walk, garden, read or write, poetry, music, helping others If you'd like to enrich your spiritual side further, is there anything you'd like to remember to do more often?

Notes

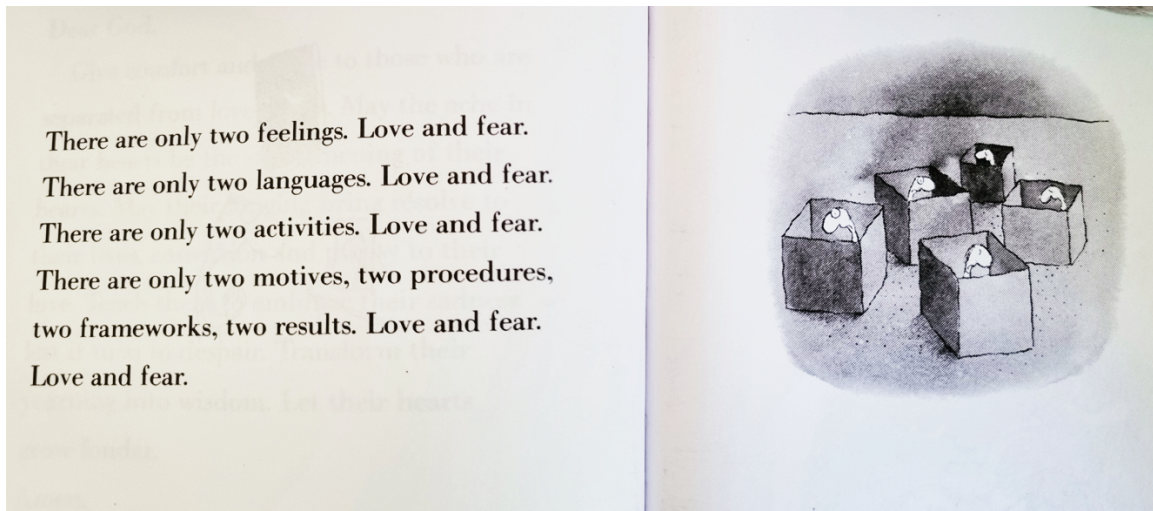
Week 2

Soften

*‘Mind creates the abyss,
the heart crosses it’*

*~ Sri Nisargadatta
from ‘I am That’*

Softening the heart: love and fear



Michael Leunig, 'Love and Fear' in *A Common Prayer*, 1990

As we feel increasingly resourced from the inside out with a sense of being safe, cared about and caring, we can increasingly soften, let go of our armouring, allow ourselves to experience rest and live in the 'Soothe' or Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS). There is less and less basis for chasing things outside us in order to feel ok. There is less drivenness, grasping or craving.

Then when we are in relationship, we come with a sense of being basically okay internally, rather than needing someone else to meet our needs in order to be okay.

Developing Mindfulness and Self-compassion together

Mindfulness helps stabilise attention, reduces reactivity and cultivates equanimity (the ability to let experience arise and pass away without resistance or clinging). Without steadiness and this training of attention, we are easily distracted and less aware when we are drawn into suffering, reactivity and the 'story-telling mind'.

Compassion is necessary as it is not easy to settle the mind and body when suffering is present, especially suffering which comes from being hard on yourself, repeated worrying which creates pressure or an attitude of dismissal. Self-compassion enables us to be present to suffering without having to turn away or reject some part of ourselves.

Self-compassion enables us to stay present to ourselves when we are in pain (physical or emotional). This is the heart of 'resilience' and helps build courage and trust – an inner knowing that we can be with whatever comes without having to abandon ourselves.

'If you are not for yourself, who will be?'
~ Rabbi Hillel? (110 BCE)

Self-compassion is an attitude and an outcome

It is an attitude of warm-heartedness and care towards oneself, an inner friend, helper or coach rather than an inner critic or bully.

It resources us from the inside out with a sense of support, which results in us feeling safer, more ok in ourselves. This is particularly important when facing difficulties.

Self-compassion also involves in some way, opening to and receiving into yourself that which is beneficial, enjoyable, pleasant, supportive, easeful, beautiful, wholesome.

Compassion definition

‘Sensitivity to suffering in ourselves and others with a deep motivation and commitment to alleviate and prevent it.’

- His Holiness, the Dalai Lama

‘Compassion is the wish that a being not suffer, usually along with feelings of sympathetic concern. Our compassion is sincere even if we cannot relieve the suffering.’

Self-compassion simply applies this attitude towards oneself. It requires that we are touched by our own suffering and are able to step outside of it enough to see that it is part of the human experience. It is different from self-pity.’

~ Rick Hanson

Compassion and Empathy



Matthieu Ricard

Neuroscientific investigation of the difference between empathy and compassion, (Kimlecki & Singer et al, 2012, 2013)

Compassion is more than empathy

Definitions

Empathy: feeling with another, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Compassion: empathy + action, the feeling that arises when confronted with suffering (in another or oneself) and feel motivated to relieve that suffering

Self-compassion research shows

- Feeling cared about makes us feel more caring
- Anchoring in self-compassion lowers stress and self-criticism
- Makes us stronger, more resilient, less self-absorbed, more able to extend compassion towards others
- The cultivation of self-compassion reduces craving/clinging, drive states fall away – this is a very powerful ally when seeking to change
- People who practice self-compassion develop different (healthier) coping strategies
- People who practice self-compassion have more positive experiences (= happiness)

Home Practice

a) 5 steps: internalising a warm, kind, wise, encouraging inner voice

1. Posture – upright, dignified, open
2. Breathing – deep slow and steady
3. Eye gaze, eye contact
4. Message/Words such as: 'you're doing the best you can' or 'may I be a good friend to you'
5. Emotional tone to match the meaning you wish to convey

b) Self-Compassion Practice part 1

c) Being a good friend to yourself – small act or gestures of kindness

Try one act of kindness, care, friendliness or soothing (helpful & lifegiving) towards yourself each day. What acts of warm friendship will you make a priority this week?

Example acts of kindness towards yourself

- ♥ Giving yourself time to do something you really enjoy for the sake of enjoying it
 - ♥ A warm bath, or refreshing bushwalk
 - ♥ Mindfully cooking and eating something special
- ♥ Mindfully using a comforting smelling lotion, candle, flowers
 - ♥ Mindfully taking in the warm sunshine
 - ♥ Taking a break and resting
- ♥ Encouraging yourself with kind words as in the 5 steps practice above
- ♥ Spend time really looking at something beautiful or uplifting, or practicing gratitude
- ♥ Giving yourself permission to not do something perfectly or giving yourself permission to say no

See page 13 for more ideas

☺ Remember to meet yourself with kindness in moments of difficulty, pain & hurt

To internalise self-compassion: a sense of inner ease, friendliness, kindness, contentment, warmth, support and care, we need emotional and somatic learning.

- ♥ Have experiences of self-compassion – care, support, understanding, goodness, gladness
- ♥ Stay with them 10 seconds or more (a few breaths)
- ♥ Feel it in the body (experiential)
- ♥ Focus on what's rewarding and helpful about it (relevant, intensify it)
- ♥ repeat

Week 2 recommended home practice

- Self-Compassion practice Part 1 daily
- 5 steps practice daily for 1 or 2 minutes.
You can use a mirror or imagine looking at yourself and making eye contact like you really mean it. If it feels awkward at first don't worry.
- Informal practice: each day undertake an 'act of friendliness or kindness' towards yourself.

Self-compassion practice part 1 and 5 steps practice

Home practice record sheet

Day, Time	Your experience during the practice and how you felt afterwards

Notes

Week 3

Soothe

When we plant a Rose Seed in the Earth

“When we plant a rose seed in the earth, we notice that it is small, but we do not criticize it as ‘rootless’ and ‘stemless’. We treat it as a seed, giving it the water and nourishment required of a seed. When it first shoots up out of the earth, we don’t condemn it as immature and underdeveloped; nor do we criticize the buds for not being open when they appear. We stand in wonder at the process taking place and give the plant the care it needs at each stage of its development. The rose is a rose from the time it is a seed to the time it dies. Within it, at all times, it contains its whole potential. It seems to be constantly in the process of change; yet at each state, at each moment, it is perfectly all right as it is.”

~ Timothy Galley

Practicing Soothing

When we feel threatened, disturbed or disconnected we tend to revert to whatever habitual reactive patterns we already have.

To change those patterns, we need repeated internalised experiences of calm, kind, soothing AND of connection with a resource (internal or external but internal is most reliable) which enables us to have some degree of agency over the situation. This helps us to know that history is not just repeating itself, that different outcomes are possible. Self-compassion practices actually help generate this sense of agency and resourcing.

Self-compassion practices help us to recall, generate and have a felt experience of **Soothe**. Repeated experiences of **Soothe** help us to increasingly dwell in this place of relative safety, contentment and connection.

Cultivating Self-compassion

We are developing 4 skills to help us cultivate Self-Compassion: Settle, Soften, Soothe and Allow. This is a simple and effective process to make it easier for us to engage with self - compassion. It sounds simple, but is not always straightforward, hence the need to practice and address obstacles as they arise.

In terms of the evolution of the human brain and nervous system and the way we deal with perceived threats, these steps address our fundamental needs roughly in the order in which they evolved. So, we begin with addressing safety needs first, then move into connection.

- 1. Settle helps us come home to the body, become present and inhabit this body.** Getting 'out of our heads' and into our body is often the first step towards self-compassion. Tuning into the body at the beginning of practice by stretching, noticing contact, bringing attention to posture, attending to any discomfort and meeting it as best we can by making adjustments.
- 2. Soften continues to settle the BODY, taps into and creates safety,** so we can let go, relax and get out of the 'threat' or stress state (the Sympathetic Nervous System). It is focused on our felt experience in the body, on reducing tension, tightness and holding in the body which is activated by the SNS in Fight/Flight. When we become aware of tension, we can allow it to soften or flow away, not by forcefully striving for relaxation, but by allowing softening to enter.
- 3. Soothe helps us to meet and settle emotional distress or painful feelings.** It helps us befriend our painful emotions instead of rejecting, fighting or ignoring or suppressing them. Seeing ourselves from the perspective of someone who has our best interests at heart can be very helpful. We can learn to honour and acknowledge emotions without

needing to fix them or make them go away and in a way that allows them to inform us rather than hijack us.

- 4. Allow shows us a way of working with all of our experience (sensations, emotions, thoughts, behaviours/impulses) and is particularly helpful when working with the thinking which accompanies distress, stress or pain.** We can allow our thoughts to behave in whatever way they are behaving in this moment without fighting or resisting them AND without believing them or feeding them. When the mind is racing and thoughts are hijacking us, we can take a step back and just look at them.

We tend to take the contents of our mind very seriously and believe our thoughts. With practice we can also hold them lightly and ask ourselves ‘*is that so?*’ or observe ‘*The story that I’m telling myself is...*’ or ‘*I notice that I’m having the believed thought that...*’. With awareness and mindfulness, we can practice seeing how transient thoughts are. How thoughts are not facts. We can practice letting them go. We can rest in the ‘Big Mind’ or ‘Big Sky Mind’ where we are reminded that our thoughts are as different from ‘us’ as the sky is from the weather passing through it.

More on Mindfulness and Self-compassion

‘Of all the skills that will help you in your development of compassion towards yourself and others, becoming mindful is one of the most valuable’
~ Paul Gilbert

Mindfulness and Self-compassion together are the 2 antidotes to suffering and distress.

Mindfulness, or sustained present moment awareness, develops the ‘mindful muscle’, the ability to pay attention in the present moment. It helps us to notice when we’re caught in mind-wandering (the Default Mode Network) and bring our attention back. It enables us to choose more and more what we give our attention to, which thoughts to cultivate or follow and which to let go of.

Mindlessness: or The Default Mode Network is what the mind does on autopilot.

It has 4 main occupations:

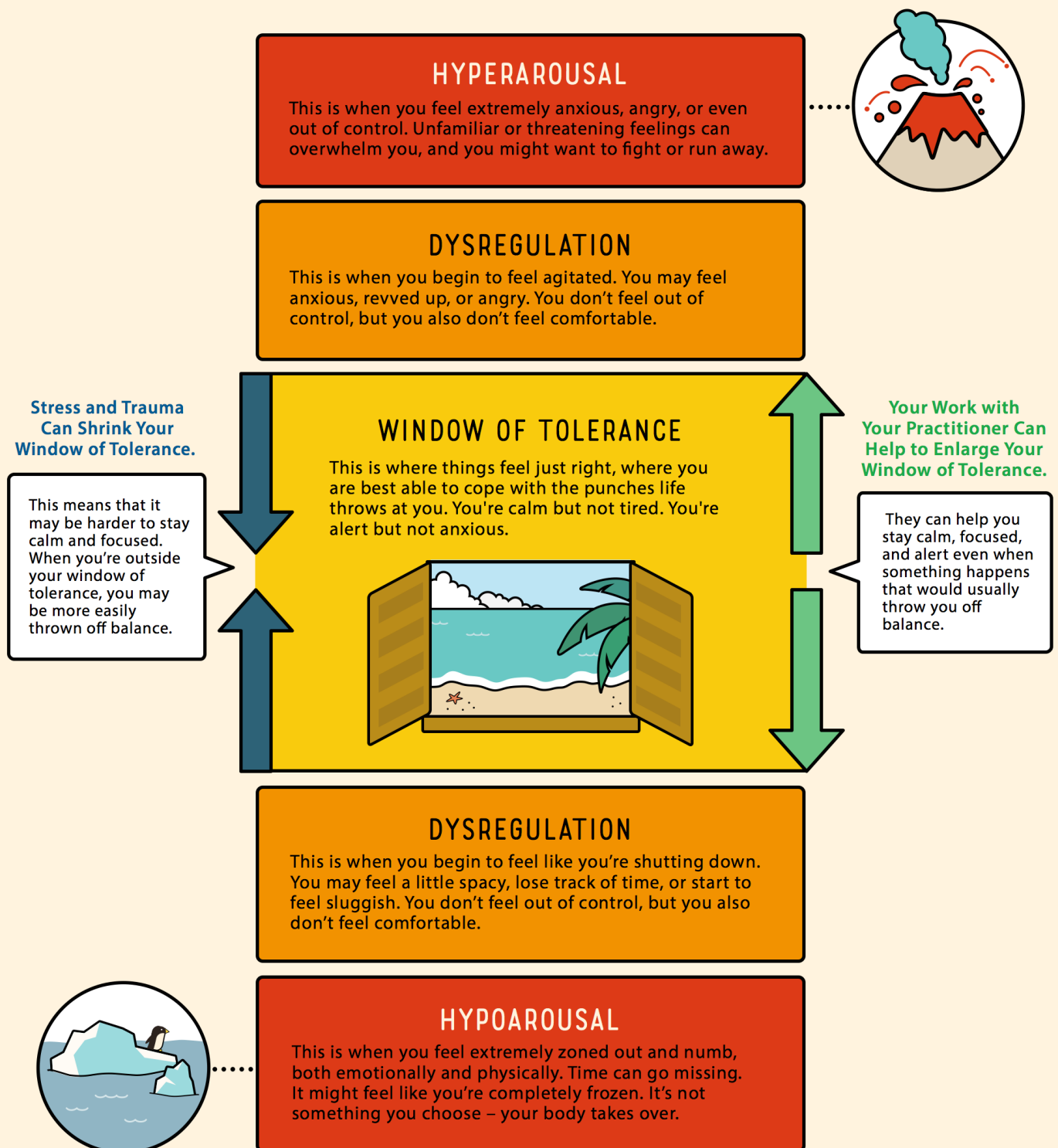
- Time travelling (past or future)
- Social referencing (often comparing, competing)
- Self-referential processing (I, me, my) – ego looms large
- Commentary

The Default Mode Network evolved to be continually active. Its mission is not inner peace – it is survival. The brain evolved to be continually active, for survival. Honour the effort it takes to progress in practice. Often there's a background habit of rumination, the default mode, which can be verbal or non-verbal.

Mindfulness helps us to notice when we're in the DMN caught in rumination, drawn in to something and getting reactive. Mindfulness is the awareness that recognises we're caught and is actually different to and able to see the 'caught' part and come to our aid. Sometimes called the 'Observer' or 'Witness', it's this ability to **not identify with thoughts or feelings, to know that we're experiencing them as they happen, and also** hold or create some space between our thoughts, our experience and ourselves.

Self-compassion or 'Metta' can also be understood as good will, loving kindness, kindness, friendliness. It is not sentimental, but rather an act of steadfastness and courage. The willingness to hold steady, to face and be with difficulty rather than abandon ship, turn on ourselves or drown.

How Trauma Can Affect Your Window of Tolerance



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Developing our 'Soothe' response

There are 3 main emotion regulation systems. These three emotional regulation systems make sure we survive.

Human beings are hard wired to:

- avoid threats - **THREAT**
- to make things happen and to explore and investigate in order to get needs met - **DRIVE**
- and to get soothing in the company of others - **SOOTHING** and **ATTACHING**.

Our history (experiences) and constitution determines how we operate in these systems.

We need Soothe (the Parasympathetic Nervous System activation) in order to Rest, Heal and Digest. This is our HOME BASE, the part of the nervous system we're evolved to be in most of the time.

We are the most social creatures on Earth and as we evolved most soothing was in relationship with others. The good news is that our relationship with ourselves can equally soothe or threaten us. So, effectively, we are in control of this and can change it with practice. That's where self-compassion practices really help.

If we can learn to meet our suffering with calm, kind reassuring support internally, we can activate the PNS Soothe system very effectively. This has been highlighted in Dr Dan Siegel's work (Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA), Paul Gilbert (evolutionary Psychologist, Researcher and author of The Compassionate Mind, UK) and others.

Sympathetic Nervous System Arousal (SNS)



Parasympathetic Nervous System Arousal (PNS)

Working skilfully with Obstacles to Self-compassion

Self-Compassion is natural: Why doesn't it feel natural?

Self-compassion is giving ourselves the care and kindness that we would also give to loved ones. There is nothing artificial about it. It is a deeply rooted natural tendency in the old mammalian brain and the soothing system.

Culture and nature are constantly interacting. In many western cultures, the attitude towards emotional pain seems rather hostile, and therefore our threat system often over-rides the soothing system when we are confronted with emotional pain.

Emotional deprivation and psychological trauma should automatically lead to practicing self-compassion. Yet we quickly react with self-blame, self-isolation or self-absorption. We experience problems as our fault, we think we are the only ones, or identify with victimhood.

In cultures where compassion for self and others is actively practiced, posttraumatic stress syndromes appear to be less prevalent; an example is the remarkable resilience found in Tibetan exile communities (Lewis 2013). Monks who were tortured in Chinese prisons remained compassionate towards themselves AND their torturers (Gyatso & Shakya 1998). In western culture there is often more self-pity than self-compassion. When there is self-pity the world contracts around us and we can only perceive our own suffering. Self-compassion, on the other hand, opens us up to the world and to the universal suffering of humanity.

(Adapted from Erik van den Brink & Frits Koster, Mindfulness Based Compassionate Living)

Common obstacles to practicing & experiencing self-compassion

- 1) Suffering – any kind of suffering agitates us and makes it difficult to stay present.
- 2) Flooding or overwhelm - from intense suffering, from the hurts and wounds whenever you go near or are triggered or open the door a crack
- 3) Self-attack or Shame – known as 'the trance of unworthiness' this is an internalised global feeling of being bad, unworthy or somehow less than. It usually has its origins in early experiences.
- 4) Not feeling any compassion or self-compassion – 'I can't feel it'. Hyper arousal (high agitation, anxiety FIGHT/FLIGHT) and hypo arousal (numbness, shutting down or 'FREEZE'). See the information on the Window of Tolerance and Dysregulation

1) Ways to help yourself be with suffering without being overwhelmed

1. Practice Mindfulness regularly – make it a part of your daily routine so you can develop the attentiveness and awareness to be present to suffering and hold suffering skilfully
2. Come back to the present – use sensations in the body, sounds, sights to ground in the present
3. Ground yourself in the breath and the body
4. Touch and go “shuttling” your attention between the place in the body where you feel the pain/intensity or distress and another place in the body that feels neutral/ok or soothed
5. Breathe into the place of intensity, letting the breath soothe and support.
6. Breathe into the place of intensity and as you do so gently repeat the phrases below (or similar)
7. Mindful movement – yoga, walking or another form of gentle mindful movement
8. If you repeatedly experience flooding or overwhelming around an issue, get some help. Practicing compassion with the support of an experienced therapist or counsellor can help keep us safe enough

Mistrust

We have no reason to harbor any mistrust against our world, for it is not against us. If it has terrors, they are our terrors. If it has abysses, these abysses belong to us. If there are dangers, we must try to love them, and only if we could arrange our lives in accordance with the principle that tells us that we must always trust in the difficult, then what now appears to us to be alien will become our most intimate and trusted experience.

How could we forget those ancient-myths that stand at the beginning of all races - the myths about dragons that at the last moment are transformed into princesses. Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are only princesses waiting for us to act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants, our love.

So, you must not be frightened if a sadness rises before you larger than any you've ever seen, if an anxiety like light and cloud shadows moves over your hands and everything that you do. You must realize that something has happened to you. Life has not forgotten you, that it holds you in its hands and will not let you fall. Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any miseries, or any depressions? For after all, you do not know what work these conditions are doing inside you.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Home practice

A kind wise friend practice

Imagine visiting a dear friend, who loves you unconditionally and only wishes the best for you. They can't wait to sit with you and listen. You share with them your worries and after listening deeply they share their heartfelt wishes for you, their wisdom, kindness and compassion.

Safe calm place practice



Safe calm place practice

Bring to mind a safe calm place. It can be real or imaginary, or a combination, it can be inside or outside. As vividly as possible bring to mind what you can see, hear, feel, touch, taste, smell. You can invite others to join you anytime and spend time just on your own anytime. You can come back here anytime– it's yours.

Take a mental picture, like a postcard of your safe calm place and give it a name.

Week 3 recommended home practice

- A kind wise friend (or the 5 steps exercise from week 2) for a few minutes daily
- Safe calm place practice a few times this week (guided recording on website)
- Alternate Compassionate body scan or walking with Self-compassion practice part 1
- Continue practicing being a good friend to yourself with one action or gesture of kindness daily

Home practice record sheet

Day, Time	Your experience during the practice and how you felt afterwards

The Unbroken ~ Rashani

*There is a brokenness out of which comes the unbroken,
A shatteredness out of which blooms the unshatterable.
There is a sorrow beyond all grief which leads to joy
And a fragility out of whose depths emerges strength
There is a hollow space too vast for words
Through which we pass with each loss,
Out of whose darkness we are sanctioned into being.
There is a cry deeper than all sound
Whose serrated edges cut the heart as we break open
To the place inside which is unbreakable and whole while learning to sing.*

Week 4

Allow and Open

*‘The heart of meditation is compassion.
The heart of compassion is self-compassion’
~ Pema Chodron*

*‘Self-compassion promotes a lasting sense of self-worth
that is independent from the esteem of others.*

*It is nurtured by a sense that we are okay as we are, including our vulnerabilities.
Self-compassion is accompanied by the acknowledgement that none of us is perfect and
that in our imperfection we all need recognition and compassion. This understanding of
our common humanity increases social connectedness.’*

Eric van den Brink MBCL

Self-compassion: Opening to our basic goodness

A common characteristic in all ways to self-compassion is that they 'open the heart'.

The heart can be extremely sensitive and we're able to deepen and cultivate this sensitivity through compassion practice. As we practice over time, we literally 'warm up' the neural circuitry of compassion.

It helps us stay in *Soothe* when confronted with suffering - our own and the suffering of others.

What are you noticing about the felt experience and qualities of compassion as you practice?

When you are in touch with this basic goodness (compassion) what is it like?

How does it feel in your body? Your heart?

How does it change your perspective? Your thoughts about yourself and others?

Your behaviours?

Trust in our basic goodness – the story of the Golden Buddha

There is a well-known story of a very modest Buddha statue in Thailand which was thought to be made of clay until one day in the 1950s cracks in the surface revealed bright gold underneath. Monks and historians believe it was covered over hundreds of years earlier to protect it from a violent invasion. This was successful as the statue was largely ignored for hundreds of years. The statue is now beautifully preserved and housed in a purpose-built temple. Whilst accounts vary, the metaphor it offers us is priceless. No-one remembered that it was gold and it passed unnoticed for hundreds of years.

In the same way we forget or don't see past our 'clay coverings' to our own innate gold and goodness. These coverings come in many forms: habits, addictions, attitudes, self-limiting beliefs, beliefs about the world, ways of avoiding, withdrawing or hiding, ways of lashing out, ways we construct our identity or image, our professional life, our roles.

We develop protective coverings, armouring to meet difficulties in our lives. These protective coverings serve a very important purpose and are the best ways we can come up with at the time to meet challenges that would otherwise overwhelm us, particularly as children and young people.

The trouble is we then identify with those coverings, and they come to define us and then limit us. Suffering comes when we identify with our coverings. We think we are our successes, our failures, defences, addictions and so on and we forget the gold.

Training in mindfulness, self-compassion and awareness starts to loosen our identification with our coverings over time. We begin to contact and trust in our basic goodness and to recognise that we are not the coverings. The coverings become more porous, and we start to inhabit a larger sense of being.

Self-compassion practices cultivate enough support and safety internally for us to risk seeing through the cracks, to loosen our grip on tightly held protective strategies and relax into a warmer, less constructed sense of self. That gold is a larger sense of being which often connects us to a sense of pure presence, belonging, of not being so alone or 'alien' in the universe, of being part of nature and held in the web of life.

Einstein stated that there is a fundamental benevolence in us, in the living world and he claimed that if you trust and perceive this benevolence, it gives rise to activity that serves the collective, serves peace and wellbeing. He also contrasted this and said that when we mistrust and don't sense basic goodness it leads to armouring, defensiveness and aggression.

*"A human being", wrote Einstein, "is a part of the whole, called by us, the
Universe,
a part limited in time and space.*

*He experiences himself, this thoughts and feelings as something separated from
the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind
of prison for us.*

*Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of
compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty.
Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is
in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation of inner security."*

Self-compassion practices

Walking/moving/stretching with compassion and connection

Find ways of moving that feel good, that help to settle, soften and soothe your body, heart and mind.

Take time to take in the goodness in you and around you.

Find places of rest and ease in the body

Find forms of support (floor, chair, blanket, cushion, air, socks, pet) and let them land. Spend a few breaths taking them in and then tapping into gratitude for them.

RAIN

1. Recognise – name the distress, discomfort, difficulty, suffering.

Allow – witness and allow whatever somatic experience comes with it. Sensations, emotions, (anger, fear, anxiety, shame, jealousy etc). Just let it be as it is, let it be like waves in the ocean

Investigate – noticing and sensing into what's happening in your body. When you're in touch with this distress how does it show up in your face, your posture. Notice what you're believing in these moments, what might happen that is bad. Try for example saying to yourself: 'The story that I'm telling myself is...'

Notice what it's like when you judge, the contraction in you

Nurture – Ask yourself, what do I need right now? What do I need to remember?

Perhaps it's trust, perhaps there are words that you can use to gently remind yourself.

Try meeting the place of suffering in you with a gesture, putting your hand on your heart and as sincerely as possible offering some care.

2. Notice what shifts. Notice the difference between who you are now, versus who you are when you are stuck in the story of a flawed self. Who are you when you're feeling that? Sense how you feel and who you feel like. Remind yourself right in this moment what it feels like to be in touch with your basic goodness – your gold. What does this compassionate heart, this connected heart, this moment of homecoming feel like?

This is what Tara Brach says we really long for – to feel really at home in ourselves, to trust our goodness. Trust reduces stress partly because it reduces the amount of energy we need to put into armouring, defending ourselves, constructing ourselves. It has huge implications for stress, anxiety and the way we carry ourselves through our days.

Mistrust

We have no reason to harbor any mistrust against our world, for it is not against us. If it has terrors, they are our terrors. If it has abysses, these abysses belong to us. If there are dangers, we must try to love them, and only if we could arrange our lives in accordance with the principle that tells us that we must always trust in the difficult, then what now appears to us to be alien will become our most intimate and trusted experience.

How could we forget those ancient-myths that stand at the beginning of all races--the myths about dragons that at the last moment are transformed into princesses. Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are only princesses waiting for us to act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants, our love.

So you must not be frightened if a sadness rises before you larger than any you've ever seen, if an anxiety like light and cloud shadows moves over your hands and everything that you do. You must realize that something has happened to you. Life has not forgotten you, that it holds you in its hands and will not let you fall. Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any miseries, or any depressions? For after all, you do not know what work these conditions are doing inside you.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Week 4 recommended home practice

- Main practice: this week R.A.I.N
- Continue with one of the exercises – whichever resonates for you:
 - safe calm place
 - kind wise friend
 - 5 steps (posture, breath, eye contact, message, emotional tone to match the message)
- Being a good friend to yourself – a small action or gesture daily

Feel free to substitute any of the other main practices:

- Compassionate body scan
- Walking/moving/stretching with compassion and connection
- Self-compassion practice part 1

Home practice record sheet

Day, Time	Your experience during the practice and how you felt afterwards

Week 5

Deepening Self-compassion

*Perhaps everything that frightens us is,
in its deepest essence,
Something helpless that wants our love'*

~ Rainer Maria Rilke 1875-1926 'Letters to a Young Poet'

Self-compassion is 'suffering with ourselves'

Compassion literally means 'suffering with'. Self-compassion is 'suffering with ourselves' and involves a special kind of acceptance, namely acceptance of ourselves as we are, of our pain and our reactions to the pain. Self-compassion is giving ourselves the care and kindness that we would give to loved ones.

Self-Compassion and Perspective – moving beyond pain into freedom

As we practice over time, this loosens our identification with the pain and suffering, the 'coverings'. We become our own trusted friend and begin to sense and know that we are more than the pain. We begin to trust.

A Great Wagon ~ Rumi

*“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.*

*Ideas, language, even the phrase “each other”
doesn't make any sense.*

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

*People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.*

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep.”

Backdraft – how self-compassion can evoke old hurts

It is not uncommon for people to experience pain, aversion and increased emotional reactivity when practicing self-compassion. Paul Gilbert, Christopher Germer and others have identified this as a common reaction especially for people who are strongly self-critical, who have not experienced secure attachment, or have experiences of abuse and neglect. Highly self-critical people who are asked to self-soothe have response patterns to self-compassion practices more consistent with threat. Christopher Germer coined the term 'backdraft' to describe a strong adverse reaction to self-compassion. It can be very difficult when closed off old pain or sadness suddenly resurfaces.

It is important to know that there is nothing wrong with you if you experience this. This is actually quite normal and a sign that something important is happening, that you are healing by connecting more intimately with parts or areas in yourself that were previously inaccessible. **Mindfulness practice is extremely helpful here; you can use your practice to note the pain, to allow the fire to simply burn itself out whilst being present to and witnessing it.**

It can help to adjust the 'dosage' of kindness to an amount that can be handled. Let the warming up process happen slowly, in small manageable doses.

If our upbringing lacked kindness and compassion, we simply may not have learnt how to let it in. If the soothing system has been underdeveloped, every time we begin to experience kindness, our threat system is activated, and this might stop us from practicing.

We need an inner helper rather than an inner critic at these times, but the inner helper can be viewed internally with suspicion and fear because it is unfamiliar and not the model we have internalised from early experiences. **We need to proceed slowly and with gentleness, to gain our own trust.**

If the meditation practices are counter-productive and lead to defensiveness, a lot of discomfort or even more self-criticism, then try focusing on 'behavioural' compassion (acts of compassion which respond to your need with care) rather than the more internal and reflective practices (which we'll call 'mental exercises' here). Think of ways you already care for yourself and try applying them more consistently. See pages 11 and 15 for ideas. This helps establish a sense of safety and once you are feeling safe – where you feel you won't be attacked and there's less aversion – then it might be time to revisit the practices.

5 Stages in dealing with suffering & pain

Aversion – can be in the form of active resistance or anxious avoiding

Curiosity – we begin to turn towards the pain with interest

Tolerance – peacefully enduring the discomfort

Allowing - letting the painful feelings come and go

Befriending – embracing the pain and recognising deeper needs and values

(Christopher Germer 2009)

I am not I.

I am this one

Walking beside me whom I do not see.

Whom at times I manage to visit,

And whom at other times I forget;

Who remains calm and silent while I talk,

And forgives, gently, when I hate,

Who walks where I am not,

Who will remain standing when I die.

~ Juan Ramon Jimenez, 1973

Inner Patterns - Befriending Obstacles to Self-compassion

1. **The inner bully** (inner critic, inner controller, inner doubter)

A strongly self-critical mentality can develop when our threat system is frequently triggered because we 'fell short' in the opinion of significant others and there was a threat of aggression, abandonment or rejection (Gilbert 2009, 2010, 2005). When we practice mindfulness or compassion the inner bully is quick to comment, 'there are more important things to do...try harder, you're hopeless...' The inner bully fuels threat and drive systems.

Meeting the inner bully with compassion

Acknowledge the inner bully as an expression of our deep longing for survival

2. **Shame and shyness**

We were born with the need to receive care from others. To increase our chances for that care we developed the capacity to constantly evaluate the image that others might have of us. Because social connectedness is crucial to our survival, we've developed a strong self-consciousness and need for others to see us in a positive light. When that's not the case we feel unsafe, and the threat system is triggered.

Shame and guilt are self-conscious emotions; they are messengers indicating that we might be ostracised.

Where excessive shame, shyness and guilt occur, particularly due to experiences of being criticised and shamed at a young age we become highly sensitised to the negative attitudes and opinions of others – real or imagined. It can often lead to a vicious cycle of trying to live up to expectations so that we can be accepted, placing high demands on ourselves, not being able to meet them and feeling shame, which reinforces and increases our sensitivity to shame and fear of not being accepted.

3. **Guilt**

Guilt is a younger emotion in evolution than shame, when not only receiving care but also giving care became increasingly important. Shame is mainly concerned with 'what do others think of me'. Guilt is linked with empathy, 'what have I done to the other', and responsibility 'how can I make amends'. Shame is feeling 'I am bad' whereas guilt is feeling 'what I did was bad'. Guilt can help to mend social relationships and is a very useful emotion when it is embedded in a caring mentality.

However, guilt can also be very destructive when it repeatedly triggers the threat systems. This happens when we have learned to be afraid of our mistakes (often a result of experiences). Then instead of judging our unskilful behaviour as a rectifiable mistake, we judge ourselves as being a bad person. Instead of seeing a mistake as a challenge to learn from we see it as proof that we're not good enough. Small mistakes can get blown up into big ones and it becomes more likely we will fail to repair the damage. This gives the inner bully plenty of ammunition. When shame and guilt constantly trigger alarm bells, life can become hell. Self-criticism can grow into self-hatred.

Meeting guilt and shame with compassion

Just as a self-critical approach developed through repeated practice, we can develop a caring and compassionate approach to ourselves when we make mistakes or are worried about making mistakes or being 'bad'. In this way we begin to grow an inner helper or wise kind friend.

When we criticise ourselves for events, problems or experiences that are outside our control Paul Gilbert's work has shown that simply repeating the phrase '*it's not my fault*' or '*it's not your fault*' can effectively 'deprogramme the brainwashing of the inner bully'. It can be very healing to repeat this in the moments we want to blame ourselves for the things we have no control over. This can include the emotions, reactions and behaviours of others.

Taking responsibility and appropriate remorse

When we do recognise appropriately that we have some responsibility for an event then instead of reacting automatically, we can consciously choose the most skilful response we are able to.

Bringing mindfulness and compassion into this process is extremely helpful, as it enables us to:

- a) See clearly where our responsibility lies
- b) Draw on the courage to take responsibility for what is ours
- c) Meet ourselves with compassion, understanding and courage rather than blame and shame
- d) Meet others involved with compassion, understanding and appropriate remorse
- e) Find the courage, dignity and self-respect to make repairs
- f) Let go once we have done what we can and forgive ourselves
- g) Learn useful lessons from the experience and move on, 'find the growth that is in this moment'

Recognising inner patterns

This exercise helps us to become aware of inner patterns, resistance and desires. It helps to open the door to old wounds by compassionately embracing the pain that is at the root of the old patterns as well as the pain that is still arising from these patterns. This can be particularly helpful for dealing with strong self-criticism, shame or feeling 'I don't deserve compassion'.

Beliefs or Schemas

We develop inner beliefs about ourselves and the world, both positive and negative, as we go through life. Negative Inner beliefs formed during intense periods of difficulty often get buried under more adult cognitions and consciously chosen values and can show up or hijack us when we're under stress. For example, an inner belief that 'I am not good enough' or 'I let people down' might develop if as a child there was repeated criticism or shaming or comparing to others who were 'better'. As an adult my chosen values might be quite different, such as 'all humans have inherent worth'. However, in a situation where I'm being scrutinised, evaluated (like a job interview) or feel I'm letting people down, this negative belief can show up.

Inner Patterns Exercise

1. Complete the following table.

Read the sentences and give a score for each statement 'or 'belief'. Score between 1 & 5 for how strongly you recognise this statement as 'true' for you.

This is not about whether you agree with it, but whether you recognise it operating in your life.

It might help to pay more attention to the sphere around these sentences than the actual words.

Feel free to add statements at the bottom.

1 = I don't recognise this at all in my life

2 = this I recognise somewhat

3 = this is reasonably recognisable for me

4 = this I recognise well

5 = this I completely recognise

Table 1: Inner patterns

Statement	Recognisability (1 low-5 high)				
1. My close relationships will end because people are unreliable and unpredictable	1	2	3	4	5
2. I expect that others will hurt me and take advantage of me	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can't seem to get what I need from others (warmth, attention, understanding, protection, support)	1	2	3	4	5
4. I'm defective, bad, not okay, and don't deserve to be loved by others	1	2	3	4	5
5. I'm alone in this world, different from others. I do not belong.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I'm boring and totally uninteresting to other people; they don't want me in their company	1	2	3	4	5
7. I'm not capable of living my life; I need help to take care of myself and to make decisions	1	2	3	4	5
8. A disaster might happen any moment, and I won't be able to cope	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel empty; confused, lost without guidance from others	1	2	3	4	5
10. I'm a failure, I'm stupid, inept and will never be successful compared to others	1	2	3	4	5
11. I deserve whatever I need; others need to take my wishes into account	1	2	3	4	5
12. I'm easily frustrated, react impulsively or throw in the towel	1	2	3	4	5
13. I adapt to what others want from me, out of fear for their anger or rejection	1	2	3	4	5
14. I suppress my own needs and emotions in order to be of service to others	1	2	3	4	5
15. For me everything revolves around getting recognition and appreciation from others	1	2	3	4	5
16. I presume that whatever can go wrong will go wrong, and that my decisions won't work out	1	2	3	4	5
17. I prefer not to show my feelings (positive or negative) to others and would rather take a more rational approach.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I'm a perfectionist	1	2	3	4	5
19. I need to spend my time efficiently and abide strictly by the rules	1	2	3	4	5
20. I'm impatient with others and with myself, and insist that people should be punished for their mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
21.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	1	2	3	4	5

(Adapted from 'My schemas'; Germer 2009)

2. After scoring, select one sentence with the highest score or which resonates most strongly.
Read this sentence again, then bring mindful awareness to it.
Connect with the body and breath, slow down, recall a recent situation where this was clearly present.
Recall the sensations, emotions, thoughts, behaviour, and impulses.
What did you do or try to do or try to avoid?
What did you say or keep inside?
What did you long for, what did you resist?

If you'd like to explore further, ask these questions, like dropping a pebble into a pond and just observing the ripples – the sensations, emotions, thoughts, impulses that arise

- Can you remember when this pattern arose in your life? Is it recently or were you a child, teen?
How old do you feel when you tune in to this pattern?
- Is there a specific situation you remember?
- How has this pattern evolved in your life? How and when does it manifest itself?
- Which of the 3 emotional regulation systems (threat, drive, soothe) can most clearly be sensed?
- This may seem a strange question, but did you purposefully develop this pattern? Or was it an attempt to cope with a difficult situation or threat?
- Has the inner pattern helped you in your life? How so?
- How many other people on this planet do you think you share this pattern with?
- To help you recognise this pattern next time it comes on stage, could you give it a playful nickname? Just see what arises. Let it be a name that evokes an inner smile.

3. We can bring kindness to the pattern (and its carrier – you). The inner pattern may limit you in many ways, but it also may have supported you in some important ways. You might like to use the self-compassion phrases to meet it. Try thanking it for the ways in which it has tried to help and protect you (even though there have been difficulties and suffering associated with it):

This (name pattern) is an example/a moment of suffering

Inner patterns are a part of life; we all experience them.

May I be kind to myself and with this inner pattern.

(Optional extra step)

Thank you for trying to help me, protect me.

You can take a seat now, step back a little, relax. It's ok, I've got this

See what this feels like. You may notice that the pattern can relax a little. This is like calming down the guard dog, patting and reassuring it that things are actually safe, that there's no need to be on guard.

If resistance arises then meet that also with compassion and curiosity. Then use the kind phrases and intentions to meet it also. You may need to do this many times with resistance until there is no longer aversion, until it no longer triggers a sense of threat.

Mindfulness is recognising a pattern is present.

Self-compassion is to look at it with kind, friendly eyes and seek understanding.

Remember that these patterns or 'schemas' are not truths or immutable characteristics, but mental constructs, survival strategies developed in difficult situations. If they have outgrown their usefulness, they can be softened and loosened in the light of mindfulness and the warmth of compassion.

Self-compassion is a healthier response to emotional pain than blocking, drowning, clinging or craving

Kristen Neff distinguishes between 3 qualities that are the **antidote** to the psychological equivalent of fight/flight/freeze.

The antidote to self-criticism is self-kindness

Tenderness, and loving kindness towards ourselves

The antidote to self-isolation is common humanity

Awareness of connection with the whole of humanity, or even more broadly, the whole web of life.

Our suffering may differ in detail, but it is part of the universal human condition, and we are not alone in it.

The antidote to self-absorption and over-identification is mindfulness

Open, kind and non-judgemental attentiveness to the emotional pain and our reactions to it without identifying with any judgements which may arise. By mindfully staying present with that which was frozen, we can thaw again.

(Adapted from Erik Van den Brink & Frits Koster, Mindfulness Based Compassionate Living)

THREAT		ANTIDOTE
<u>PHYSICAL</u>	<u>PSYCHOLOGICAL</u>	<u>SELF - COMPASSION</u>
<i>FIGHT</i>	<i>SELF-CRITICISM/SELF-ATTACK</i>	SELF-KINDNESS
<i>FLIGHT</i>	<i>SELF-ISOLATION (OFTEN A FLAVOUR OF SHAME SELF-LOATHING OR SELF-REJECTION)</i>	COMMON HUMANITY
<i>FREEZE</i>	<i>SELF-ABSORPTION, OVER-IDENTIFICATION</i>	MINDFULNESS

(Chris Germer 2009, Kristen Neff 2011)

The Self Compassion Mantra (adapted from Kristen Neff, 2011)

Every time we experience emotional pain, we can remind ourselves to have compassion for ourselves by saying the following phrases. Repeated practice helps them to internalise and become habitual. You may wish to place one or both hands on your heart area or the place where you feel pain. Feel free to adapt these and use words that are meaningful for you. You could add for example 'May I give myself the compassion I need' to remind yourself that you, just like every other human being, cannot live without compassion.

<i>This is a moment of suffering</i>	(mindfulness = attentiveness to what's here, awareness & presence)
<i>Suffering is a part of life</i>	(common humanity, remembering that it is not 'personal')
<i>May I be kind to myself</i>	(kindness, care, tenderness)

Meet yourself with kindness in moments of difficulty, pain & hurt

Reminder, to cultivate Soothe - a sense of safety, ease, contentment, warmth and compassion we need emotional and somatic learning. We need to:

- Have experiences of self-compassion – care, support, understanding, goodness, gladness
- Stay with them 10 seconds or more (a few breaths)
- Feel it in the body (experiential)
- Focus on what's rewarding and helpful about it (relevant, intensify it)

With that Moon Language ~ Hafiz

Admit something:
Everyone you see, you say to them, "Love me."
Of course you do not do this out loud, otherwise
someone would call the cops.
Still, though, think about this, this great pull in us to connect.
Why not become one who lives with a
full moon in each eye that is
always saying,
with that sweet moon language,
what every other eye in
this world is
dying to hear?

Recommended home practice: Deepening Self-compassion

Which self-compassion practices will serve you best this week?

- Self-compassion practice part 2 (or combine 1 and 2 and 3)
- **Self-compassion mantra** when you recognise an inner pattern
- A daily act of care or kindness towards yourself

Feel free to substitute RAIN or Compassionate Body scan and to use any of the exercises as you need to:

- safe calm place,
- kind wise friend
- 5 steps (posture, breath, message, emotional tone, eye contact)
- 'forgive'

Self-compassion practice (Part 2)

Part 1: Settle, Soothe, bring to mind sources of support, care and nurturing for you and take them in, then bring to mind a difficulty present in your life, which you don't necessarily blame yourself for. As you sense into this and the suffering, locate the sensations & emotions in your body which go with this. Allow them to be – holding them in awareness, witnessing them.

Let your own good heart be moved by how difficult your experience is. Bring the intention of cultivating compassion towards yourself for the fact that you're an imperfect being. You try your best, but we all make mistakes, we all fail, we are all inadequate in some way. This is the human experience, the human condition. It's ok. Repeat the phrases which resonate in words that are meaningful to you & feel free to generate your own:

May I be safe
May I be peaceful
May I be kind to myself
May I accept myself as I am
May I have a sense of ease
May I know my intrinsic worth

As you repeat these see if you can get in touch with the intention behind these words. The intention to offer yourself kindness, understanding, forgiveness, acceptance, warmth, so that you can be whole.

Part 2: Bring to mind a difficulty which you feel responsible for in some way

Part 3: Widen the compassion to include others. Move through all or some of the steps of the classical compassion practice:

- Self
- A loved one - someone you find it easy to feel compassion for
- A neutral person
- A difficult person
- A collective (group you belong to, neighbourhood, community, or all beings)

Self-compassion mantra to meet an inner pattern or obstacle

This (name pattern) is an example/a moment of suffering

Inner patterns are a part of life; we all experience them.

May I be kind to myself and with this inner pattern.

(Optional extra step) Thank you for trying to help me, protect me.

You can take a seat now, step back a little, relax. It's ok, I've got this

Self-compassion practices

Home practice record sheet

Day, Time	Your experience during the practice and how you felt afterwards

Notes

Week 6

Self-compassion as a Life Practice and Path for Healing:

Integrating and Transforming pain

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,*

*still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

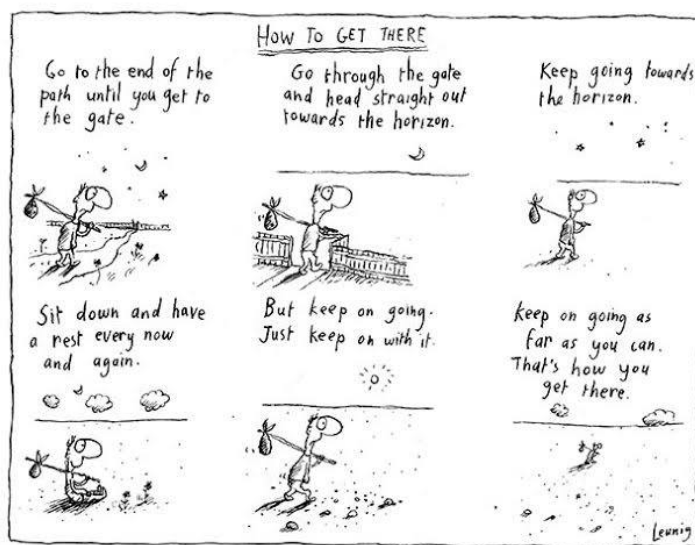
*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

- Rumi (From Barks and Moyne. Copyright 1995)

Self-compassion as healing

Compassion is an empowering response to threat, stress and distress. Self-compassion and compassion practices help us learn how to make compassionate action (internal or external) in response to our own pain or another being's pain our natural mode as we move through life. Practice offers the opportunity to release past hurts, meet current difficulties with courage and wisdom and cultivate peace.

We'll explore 2 different approaches to healing through compassion, which come from different traditions and end up in the same place. Poems also help us to understand and remember compassion



The natural movement of our being (the body, heart, mind, spirit) is towards healing

We have a core 'self' or consciousness that wants and knows how to heal.

Buddhist teachings on Self-compassion

In the mindfulness tradition and Buddhist teachings, wisdom and compassion are often compared to two wings of a bird. In order to soar freely, we need both wings to be fully developed and strong. We need wisdom or clear seeing (a result of mindfulness or 'awareness') to deconstruct the illusion of being a separate self, and we need compassion to bravely open our hearts to ourselves and each other.

The way Compassion works – a key to wellbeing

Thupten Jinpa says Compassion is a powerful way to build resilience. Thupten trained as a monk and has been the Dalai Lama's interpreter since 1985. He also has a BA in philosophy and Ph.D. in religious studies from Cambridge University. He developed Compassion Cultivation training whilst at Stanford University. He states that:

'Every single study on wellbeing ends up showing that compassion is key'. 'Compassion has a broader energy; it creates more space in our hearts so that there is more capacity to be with challenges and problems. When we choose compassion, we are not just responding emotionally. It has a strong emotional component; however, it is also an attitude. We can choose it as a perspective, a philosophy of life and this changes our outlook on life on a fundamental level.'

This 'attitude', along with the 'practice' of generating a felt sense of compassion is what builds our capacity.

When we're feeling fragile or vulnerable, this leads to a kind of brittleness, which builds up and leads to irritability. When we're in that space the tiniest things can interrupt our equilibrium. This is a universal human experience.

Compassion is understood as an important way to turn our own mind into an ally. To move us towards healing and connection and away from fragility and isolation. The good news is that compassion is a natural human quality. It is the capacity to care, to take interest in someone, to connect and love. It is a universal, biologically given trait that is part of our evolutionary make up.

The Dalai Lama says that when compassion arises, your inner door opens.

When that happens, it's easier to reach out and there's nothing to hide. There is no 'hidden agenda'. At the core is your connection with yourself and another human being. Compassion nurtures the most important human need which is connection. Connection is what gives us the ability to cope with difficulties. In many cases we don't need the problem to be fixed, the calming and soothing impact of connection is often enough to help us bear it a little longer.

The Four Immeasurables

In Buddhist practice there are '*four Immeasurables*' or '*four boundless qualities*' which are related and inter-dependent aspects of compassion:

Love or lovingkindness, friendly care (*Metta*)

Compassion – also involves ethical behaviour and generosity (*karuna*)

Joy or appreciative joy - experiencing joy from being alive (*mudita*)

Equanimity or balance, no resistance or clinging, including a sense of connectedness and similarity with all living beings. Recognising all seek happiness, none seek suffering (*upekkha*)

These qualities are understood to literally have no measure; they have unlimited capacity. They expand our capacity for compassion, joy, love and happiness and dissolve the boundaries that constrain us, and they lead to joy.

Joy and Compassion

Bishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama had a series of conversations about joy (published in 'The Book of Joy', also a movie). They explored in depth the things that hinder and the things that contribute to joy. They concluded that if you are serious about joy, then you need to be serious about compassion.

Joy and happiness are not things we can consciously make happen. They are a by-product of living a good life, helping others, bringing kindness, caring and nurturing. This is not surprising from a Buddhist point of view. The Dalai Lama says when you have compassion in your hand, all the other virtues will come to your hand.

Compassion also acts as a powerful antidote to what Thupten Jinpa calls the 'narrow confines of our own self-imprisonment' and fosters the 2 main attributes of resilience explored in research:

- 1) ego-resiliency – ability to manage and steer through a problem/challenge and bounce back
- 2) hardiness or stress-hardiness – your ability to view problems as a challenge with a sense of not having lost all of your control. Less element of powerlessness. In this case compassion is like a prophylactic – it prevents stress and harm.

*If you want others to be happy, practice compassion
If you want to be happy, practice compassion*

~ H. H the Dalai Lama

Loving Kindness (from the Metta Sutta)

May all beings be happy and secure
May all beings be happy at heart
Omitting none, whether they are weak or strong, seen or unseen, near or distant, born or to be born, may all
beings be happy
Let none deceive another or despise anyone anywhere
Or through anger or ill will wish for another to suffer
Just as a mother would protect her only child with her own life, even so, cultivate a boundless heart toward all
beings
Cultivate loving kindness toward the whole world with a boundless heart
Above below and all around unobstructed without enmity or hate
Whether standing walking sitting or lying down, as long as you are alert, you should be resolved upon this
mindfulness
This is called a sublime abiding, here and now

My Balm - Jane O'Shea

*I close my eyes and sigh, and here I am lying in the hammock in my heart. Moving gently, with
the soft air of my breath.*

*When I fall from my head past my words, I'm caught lovingly by the hammock of my heart
and rocked to its rhythmic beat.*

*It is my peace, my rest, my quiet, cradled in the hammock of my heart. It is constant; it is safe
to be held in the hammock of my heart. No place to go.
Nothing to do. Nobody to please.*

It is my altar, my blessing, my balm, here in the hammock of my heart.

Welcoming all parts of ourselves – Internal Family Systems

Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy was developed by Dr Richard Schwartz who was working as a family therapist at the time. He recognised that we have many internal parts, which can end up in tension or conflict. Parts that arise to protect younger more vulnerable parts during times of threat or overwhelm, are forced into more extreme roles if threats are not able to be processed, integrated and appropriately soothed at the time. Recognising these protective parts in us, and learning to become curious about them, learn from them and about them, helps us to meet them. When they are fully met and understood, they soften, relax and become less extreme and are integrated. This process frees them up to be more productive and frees up the more vulnerable and often hidden parts of us to re-emerge, which often leads to a stronger connection with experiences of joy, delight, exploration, and a creative and playful energy (which can be thought of as innate, innocent, childlike).

In summary - we have multiple parts in us:

- vulnerable parts,
- parts that protect
- parts that try to manage threats and the vulnerable parts of us
- parts that love, nurture, care and heal

Importantly, we all have a 'core Self' that actually knows how to heal us.

The way compassion works in IFS

The 'Self' – known by different names in schools of psychology, philosophy, religions, cultures and spiritualities such as: 'consciousness, flow, self-actualisation, the Self or 'Self-energy' in IFS and psychotherapy or 'awareness' in mindfulness traditions.

The Self is the kind, wise, knowing part of us, that can observe, witness and meet our pain with the qualities of compassion, calm, clarity, curiosity, courage:

- We are all born with it (it is inherent in us) and does not need to be developed, cannot be damaged
- Can become obscured (but not damaged) by parts of us playing extreme roles (protective parts)
- This part of us that knows how to be understanding, kind, compassionate, how to embrace – has all the qualities of internal 'healthy leadership'.
- Is an undamaged clear calm essence
- Protective parts take over when they do not trust the self – these parts are **'valuable, have good intentions and want to play a positive role in our systems'**
- Symptoms occur when parts take on extreme (feelings, beliefs) roles due to threatening, overwhelming life experiences, especially early ones (such as attachment injuries & trauma).

The Self = the seat of consciousness. Its characteristics are:

Calm
Clarity
Curious
Creative
Confident
Courageous
Compassionate
Connectedness

'Even the worst impulses and feelings – the urge to drink, the compulsion to hurt oneself, the paranoid suspicions, the murderous fantasies – spring from parts of a person that themselves have a story to tell and the capacity to become something positive and helpful to the client's life.'

The point of therapy [practice] isn't to get rid of anything but to help it transform'

- Richard Schwartz Ph.D.

Your Self-compassion Life Practice

- Which self-compassion practice would you like to make a regular part of your day/week at the moment? Which would serve you best?
- How would you like to integrate it into your life?
- When will you do it, how will you remind yourself of this?
- Remember new habits are vulnerable to begin with and need regular practice and positive reinforcement in order to grow stronger and more habitual

Tips

- Let the practice become part of your daily life
- Choose a primary and/or small practice to do regularly – it's more important for it to be regular, than big. So, choose a small practice if that's more realistic
- During or after you finish the practice, tap into gratitude for the practice and the fact that it is helping you. Gratitude 'turbo boosts' any benefits you are experiencing
- Thank yourself for being a good friend each time you do a practice, no matter how small
- Remember the 5 stages when dealing with pain in the week 5 handouts: Aversion, curiosity, tolerance, allowing, befriending. It is ok if it doesn't feel natural to begin with. Try to approach it gently, in manageable doses so it doesn't activate a sense of threat. If you feel pressured, tense or any sense of force around it, ease off and see if you can find a smaller gentler way to engage with the practice.

Week 6 Home practices for life

- Self-compassion practice part 1, 2 or 3 (or all 3)
 - Part 1: recognising and bringing compassion to a difficulty in your life (which you don't blame yourself for – something going wrong in your life that you don't necessarily blame yourself for)
 - Part 2: recognising and bringing compassion to a difficulty in your life which you feel some responsibility for (a mistake, miscommunication, perceived flaw or shortcoming etc)
 - Part 3: extending compassion to others – use any of the 5 steps of the classic Loving-kindness practice you wish:
 - oneself
 - a loved one
 - a 'neutral' person
 - a difficult person
 - all beings
- Self-compassion mantra when you recognise an inner pattern
 - This is a moment of suffering (mindfulness)*
 - Suffering is a part of life (common humanity, not personal)*
 - May I be kind to myself (kindness)*
- Self-compassion short practices/exercises – whichever resonates for you:
 - safe calm place
 - kind wise friend or
 - 5 steps
 - 'forgive'
 - 'It's not my fault'
- Body based practice
 - Bring compassion and connection to walking practice, yoga, self-massage or other movement
 - Kindness to the Body Practice
 - Compassionate body scan
- Gratitude practice

Other phrases: Let your kind wise heart come up with the words you need, such as:

May you be strong
May you find courage
May you retain your hope
May you be free from suffering
May you find relief
May you find clarity, insight, understanding
May you be free from fear

Instructions for the journey

*The Self you leave behind
Is only a skin you have outgrown.
Don't grieve for it.
Look to the wet, raw, unfinished
Self, the one you are becoming.
The world too, sheds its skin:
Politicians, cataclysms, ordinary days.
It's easy to lose this tenderly
Unfolding moment. Look for it
As if it were the first green blade after a long winter. Listen for it
As if it were the first clear tone
In a place where dawn is heralded by bells.*

*And if all that fails,
Wash your own dishes.
Rinse them.
Stand in your kitchen at your sink.
Let cold water run between your fingers.
Feel it.*

Pat Schneider - *Poetry of Presence: An anthology of Mindfulness Poems, Grayson, 2017*

The Thing Is

*To love life, to love it even
When you have no stomach for it
And everything you've held dear
Crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,
Your throat filled with the silt of it
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat
Thickening the air, heavy as water
More fit for gills than lungs:
When grief weights you like your own flesh
Only more of it, an obesity of grief,
You think, how can a body withstand this?
Then you hold life like a face
Between your palms, a plain face,
No charming smile, no violet eyes,
And you say, yes, I will take you
I will love you, again.*

Ellen Bass - *Poetry of Presence: An anthology of Mindfulness Poems, Grayson, 2017*

Home practice record sheet

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'Studies show that the ways we intentionally shape our internal focus of attention in mindfulness practice induces a state of brain activation during the practice. With repetition, an intentionally created state, can become an enduring trait of the individual as reflected in long-term changes in the brain function and structure. This is a fundamental property of neuroplasticity – how the brain changes in response to experience.'

~ Dr Dan Siegel



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Resources

Kristen Neff self-compassion.org has many free resources, Insight Timer, Ted Talks

Christopher Germer, author of 'The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion'

Paul Gilbert Compassion Focused Therapy, book 'The Compassionate Mind'

Eric Van den Brink Psychiatrist, co-author with Frits Koster of 'Mindfulness Based Compassionate Living'

Pema Chodron teaches on Compassion regularly. Try her talk 'Good Medicine' on the practice of Tong Len

Tara Brach - RAIN practice

Thupten Jinpa The Compassion Institute

Dr Richard Schwartz – creator of Internal Family Systems – some meditations and talks on Insight Timer, author of 'No Bad Parts' and 'Internal Family Systems Therapy'

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama – numerous teachings on YouTube, books and publications