

Compassionate Intention

One of the central ideas is that compassion is rooted in intention. So, we are going to do a quick little exercise focused on compassion intention.

Become comfortable in your chair, sitting with a relaxed but straight posture, with your shoulders relaxed. Allow your hands to rest comfortably in your lap. Gently close your eyes. Or, lower them to the ground if you prefer. Allow yourself to have a gentle facial expression, may even allow a slight smile.

Now just gently focus on our breathing. noticing the breath coming down into the diaphragm, your diaphragm lifting and then the air moving out, through your nose. Now we can just ‘ground ourselves for a moment’.

Now, when you’re ready. We’ll focus on the three flows of compassion intention.

The first is for yourself. Silently, in your own mind, say the following phrase to yourself: “I am coming here today to find ways to be helpful to and supportive of myself (personally or professionally)”. If you have words that are better fitting for you, feel free to use those instead. Notice what comes to mind and what that intention feels like.

And now, your intention for others. Again, in your own mind, say the following words – or words that feel fitting for you - “I am coming here today to find ways to be helpful to and supportive of others (personally or professionally)”. Notice what comes to mind and what that intention feels like.

And finally, your intention in what you receive from others. Notice now that everyone in the room is wishing to be helpful and supportive of you today. Notice how that feels. Focusing on your intention of being open and receptive to the support and help from others, saying the phrase – or something along its lines of – “I come here today open and receptive to the help and support from others”. Notice what comes to mind and what that intention feels like.

Compassionate Image

Ok, so we always try to begin in the same way so as to set a pattern and establish a habit. So, become comfortable in your chair, sitting with a relaxed but straight posture, with your shoulders relaxed. Allow your hands to rest comfortably in your lap. Gently close your eyes. Or, lower them to the ground if you prefer. Allow yourself to have a gentle facial expression, may even allow a slight smile. We begin by focusing on our breathing, finding a calming rhythm.

This exercise is designed to help you develop an image of a compassionate ideal for you to work with and continue developing over time. You can have more than one image/ideal if you wish and they can change over time.

When you try to think of the most compassionate person, figure, or image, what comes to mind? This compassionate image is your own personal idea of what you would like from someone who really cared for and about you. See what comes to mind. There’s no need to try and force something or to try too hard. If nothing comes up straight away, that’s ok.

We want to give your image certain qualities - those which embody a sense of compassion. These include wisdom, strength, warmth and non-judgement.

Whatever image comes to mind that it is your creation and therefore you can shape and alter it however you would like to make it helpful for you.

It is not important that you be able to generate a clear and vivid image. Rather, we are aiming to have a 'mental experience'.

Here are some questions that might help you build an image:

What would you want your compassionate image to look like? Perhaps they have characteristics of people you knew, or once knew. Perhaps they resemble a public figure or religious figure. Perhaps they aren't human at all but rather, an animal or non-living thing.

Try to imagine what visual characteristics your image would have? Are they old or young? Male or female? How are they dressed? What facial characteristics and expressions can you make out?

How would you like your ideal caring-compassionate image to sound (e.g., voice tone)?

How would you like your ideal caring-compassionate image to relate to you? Remember your image really wants for you to be free of suffering, to be able to deal with the difficulties, and to flourish. It knows that we all just find ourselves here, living as we do, trying to make the best of our minds and lives. It understands that our minds are difficult, that emotions can run riot in us and that this is not our fault.

Practice experiencing what it is like to focus on the feeling that another being really values you and cares about you.

Functional Analysis

PART 1: Imagery.

I invite you now to sit comfortably, perhaps gently closing your eyes, or keeping your eyes open and letting your gaze stay on a spot just in front of you, and taking a few soothing breaths, creating a sense of grounding.

See if you can bring to mind something about yourself of which you are critical. Nothing too major to start with, perhaps something about which you feel mildly to moderately critical. It might be a specific thing or recent event. Try to bring something specific to mind.

Now, I'm going to ask you some questions about this self-criticism. As I do, just sit quietly, holding these questions in your mind and allowing yourself to reflect on your self-criticism. When we finish the exercise we will go back and see how that experience was for you.

So, now sitting quietly in your chair, breathing slowly and staying grounded, imagine that you could see the critic outside of yourself, as if that part of your mind that is self-critical could take a form of its own. What does your critic look like? What form does it take? Just keep this appearance of the critic in your mind.

Now that you can see or sense the critic has a particular form or presence, really listen to what it says. Let it speak to you, without interfering or challenging it. Let it say what it really wants to say about you and to you. Notice, too, how it says it, it's voice tone and general manner.

So now you can sense the critic's presence, what it looks like, and you have listened carefully to what it's saying and noticed its voice tone. Now, start to notice, what does the critic feel for you? What emotions is it feeling and expressing towards you? What does it want to do to you?

And now that you've thought of something you're critical about, you've seen the form that the critic takes, listened carefully to what it wants to say to you, and noticed the feelings it has towards you, what does this leave *you* feeling now? How does it leave you feeling in your body, in your mind?

Finally, sit quietly for a few moments, take a few last breaths, and when you're ready, you can once again gently open your eyes.

Ok, let's see what that experience was like for you. Use the table to record your thoughts.

PART 2: Reflection

First, how did your critic appear to you? What sort of form did it take? Describe their body, their posture, their facial expression. What words would you use to describe how the critic looks?

Second, what sorts of things did the critic say to you and about you? What did you notice about how the critic spoke to you, its voice tone?

Third, how did the critic feel about you? What feelings or emotions did it express towards you? What sorts of actions did it want to take? What did it want to do?

Now, given what the critic looks like, and says and feels about you, how does this leave you feeling? What words describe how you are feeling now?

Does this critic truly have your best interests at heart? Does it support and help you when things get tough? Does it encourage you when you are failing? Does it take joy in your success? Does it take joy in your well-being?

Does this part of you turn up before you do things? Does it warn you that you might not do them well, or does it encourage you?

After you've made a mistake, does this is part of you hang around and want to keep reminding you? Does this part encourage you and fill you with excitement for having another go?

We often have a belief that self-criticism is helpful. In fact, when we slow it all down and take a close look at self-criticism, we find that it can make things harder, and make us less likely to achieve our goals. Given what it says about us, how it says it, and how it feels about us, self-criticism can actually be an undermining process.

PART 3: Imagery.

There is a part of you that also wants you to have drive, motivation and aspirations, and wants you to live according to your values. This is a compassionate part, based on insight, wisdom, courage and strength.

Once again, I invite you to sit comfortably, back upright, shoulders back and chest open. Gently close your eyes. Take a few soothing breaths. Breathing in for a count of four and out for a count of four. With each breath, say silently to yourself, "mind slowing down, body slowing down." Let your mind and body settle into this present moment.

And now consider your compassionate self, that part of you that is kind, strong, wise and courageous. [pause] Attune to the wisdom that the human brain is really tricky. We have all kinds of thoughts and all kinds of feelings through no fault of our own. We have thoughts and feelings, urges and desires, struggles and discomforts that we would prefer not to have, and this is not our fault. You have this deep wisdom to understand the minds we've got, and they're tricky and difficult and life can involve a lot of suffering.

Notice how your body and its posture help to ground you, like a mountain, giving you stillness, strength and determination. Really feel that grounding in the body as you continue the soothing breathing pattern. In for four, out for four.

The compassionate self is sensitive to suffering, with non-judgemental acceptance and empathic understanding, feeling sympathetically moved by this suffering and motivated by a care for well-being to offer help, while also being able to tolerate our feelings of distress if or when they arise.

And the compassion self has a deep commitment to address suffering where ever you can, rather than turning away or avoiding, and finding the best way to be helpful. Sometimes it's not obvious and we have to learn and practice, seeking just what would be most helpful, in a curious, friendly way. The compassionate voice is a friendly voice and a helpful voice because you recognise that life is difficult.

Next, consider the perspective of your compassionate self. What are the greatest wishes your compassionate self has for you? What aspirations does the compassionate self have for you? What would it like you to achieve out of a genuine care for your well-being?

So, once again, bring to mind that same thing about yourself of which you are critical.

How would the compassionate self appear? Imagine that you could see the compassionate self outside of yourself, as if that part of your mind could take a form of its own. What does your compassionate self look like? Really try to sense that form.

Now that you can see or sense the form and presence of your compassionate self, listen to what it says. Allow it speak to you, and listen carefully to what it says. Let it say what it really wants to say about you and to you, maybe about the struggle you've had in your life, the difficulties or challenges. Notice too how it says it, it's voice tone and general manner.

So, you can sense the presence of your compassionate self, what it looks like, and you have listened carefully to what it's saying and noticed its voice tone. Now, start to notice, what does it feel for you? What emotions is it feeling and expressing towards you. What sort of relationship does it want to have with you?

And now, keeping in mind the issue you are critical about, and having seen the form that the compassionate self takes, listened carefully to what it wants to say to you, and noticed the feelings it has towards you, what does this leave you feeling *now*? In terms of your goals and aspirations, how are you feeling now?

Finally, sit quietly for a few moments, take a few last soothing breaths, and when you're ready, you can once again gently open your eyes.

Ok, let's see what that experience was like for you. Use the table to record your thoughts.

PART 4: Reflection

How did your compassionate self appear to you?

What did the compassionate self say to you and about you, and what was its tone? What would it say if things hadn't quite worked out the way you wanted?

How did the compassionate self feel about you?

Given what the compassionate self looks like, and says and feels about you, how does this leave you feeling? What words describe how you are feeling now?

And finally, does this compassionate self have your best interests at heart? How does the compassionate self support or encourage you?

The compassionate self is encouraging, supportive and caring. It genuinely wants to support you to achieve your goals and aspirations, and to live your life according to your values. We can find support in our compassionate self, and be the person we want to be.

Compassionate Self

Okay so we'll start in a familiar way. Let's assume a comfortable upright position and take about 30 seconds to slow down our breathing.

Now allowing the breath to return to normal comfortable rate.

Now I'm going to ask you to imagine what would be like to have different qualities. As I describe the qualities, try to imagine what it be like if you have them. What would you feel, think and experience if you were a deeply compassionate person who possess all these qualities? If you

struggle imagining this, you might bring tomorrow and someone you think has these qualities and imagine how might feel to be like that person.

Firstly, imagine that your body feels calm, peaceful, and safe. Filled with warmth and strength. Allow a gentle smile to cross your face.

Imagine that along with this warmth and strength you're filled with kind, committed motivation to help those who are suffering - both yourself and others. Imagine that is kind wish to help fills you and builds within you. Filling you with strength and purpose. Feel this deep wish to help.

Imagine that along with this committed motivation, you're filled with wisdom. Imagine you're able to think flexibly and see things from different perspectives. Aware that difficult situations and emotions come and go, you're able to keep from being captured by these experiences and can draw upon your life experiences in working with them.

Knowing that difficult experiences are just a part of life, you're able to keep from judging them for yourself and can look deeply to understand where these feelings and experiences come from, how they make sense, and what would be helpful in working with them. Imagine being filled with this wisdom.

Imagine that with this kind motivation wisdom arises a deeply felt sense of confidence. Feel this confidence filling you with courage. you're filled with the willingness to engage with difficult feelings and situations. it's a feeling of knowing that "whatever arises, I can work with this". Feel this confidence and courage building within you, filling you with strength.

Extending the Compassionate Self to Struggling Self

Now let's bring to mind that compassionate self. Allowing the sensations of calm, warmth, and strength to fill your body. Allow a gentle smile to spread across your face. Imagine what your body would feel like as this deeply compassionate person.

Imagine being filled with a deeply felt sense of kindness – a kind, committed desire to help yourself and all those who are suffering. Feel this kind commitment growing within you.

Imagine that with this kind motivation, you are filled with a deep wisdom and understanding. You are able to think flexibly, to see things from multiple perspectives and figure out what to do.

Imagine that alongside this wisdom, you experience a powerful feeling of confidence and courage - a deeply felt sense that "whatever happens I can work with this too". It's a sense of knowing - knowing that you can help.

Now bring to mind the situation that you've been struggling with. See if you can imagine that vulnerable version of yourself in that moment of struggle.

From this kind wise compassionate perspective, imagine looking in on that vulnerable version of you in that situation. See how she feeling, notice how hard it is for her.

From this kind, wise, confident perspective, see if it is possible for you to be touched by her suffering. To have compassion for this vulnerable version of you who only wants to be free from suffering like everyone else. Can you understand why she feels the way she does? Can you see how it makes sense that she would feel this way?

Seeing how hard it is for her and noticing how it's not her fault, is it possible for you to feel some warmth and compassion for her? To wish that you could somehow help her?

The feelings of being moved by her struggle, that's compassion. Feel this compassionate wish to help her.

Imagine this strong, compassionate version of you being there with the struggling version of yourself. Consider how you'd want to be there for her? How you might help her? How you might encourage her? You know her better than anyone else and you know what she would need.

Imagine yourself sitting there with her, sending kindness, understanding and support. You understand what she's going through. You get how hard it is for her. Allow yourself to feel good about being able to support her in this moment. Imagine her being filled with the kindness, support, and encouragement that you're sending to her. Now finally, from this compassionate perspective, what would you want her to understand?

Take a few moments, imagining being there with your vulnerable self, extending compassion and support to her.

Compassionate Letter-Writing

The idea of compassionate letter writing is to help you focus your thoughts and feelings on being supportive, helpful and caring of yourself. Your letter will be a way of practicing how to really focus on things that you feel help you. There are a number of ideas that you might consider in your letter. You do not need to cover them all.

Before you start your letter, try to tune into that part of yourself that can be kind and understanding of others. How you would respond to someone you really care about. Consider your general manner, your facial expressions, your tone of voice, and the feelings that come with your caring self. Spend a few moments really trying to get in contact with this kind and compassionate part of you.

As you write your letter, try to allow yourself to have sensitivity and understanding for your distress. For example, "I am sad you feel distressed..."

Validate your distress; "Your distress is understandable because....." Note the reasons, recognizing that your distress makes sense.

If you are having difficult feelings of frustration, anger or anxiety, then compassionately recognize these. Negative emotions are part of being human. We can learn to work with these feelings as part of our 'humanness' without blaming or condemning ourselves for them. Your compassionate mind will remind you that we often don't choose to feel the way that we're feeling.

Try to avoid telling yourself what you should or should not think, feel or do. There is no right or wrong to think or to feel. Your compassionate side is never condemning and will help you reduce self-blaming.

If you are being harsh on yourself, note in your letter that self-criticism is a way you have learned to cope with disappointments/mistakes but this is not a kind or supportive thing to do.

Once you have acknowledged your distress and not blamed yourself for it, it is useful if your letter can help you stand back from the distress of your situation for a moment.

If you could do that, what would be helpful for you to focus on and attend to?

It might be helpful to recall in your letter, times that you have coped with difficulties before?

Your compassionate side might gently help you see things in a less black and white, more balanced way.

Your compassionate side might like to remind you that you're not alone. Others can feel depressed with negative thoughts about themselves, the world or their future. These thoughts and feelings are very sad but they are far from uncommon.

It can be useful to think about what might be the compassionate thing to do at this moment or at some time ahead. How might your compassionate part help you do those things? Try to write down steps and ideas that encourage you and support you to do the things that you might find difficult.

When you have written your letter, read it through slowly, with as much warmth as you can muster. If you were writing to somebody else would you feel your letter is kind and helpful? Could you change anything to make it more warm and helpful?

Multiple Selves

Bring to mind the situation you are distressed about, trying to recall the details of the situation as vividly as possible. Recalling the situation, allow yourself to re-experience the emotions you were feeling in the moment.

Now, I'd like to invite your angry self to give its perspective on the situation. Try to get in touch with any feelings of anger in that moment or about the situation. Allow the angry feelings to come to the surface. Try to get a sense of how they feel in your body. Imagine the tension of your angry self building and building.

We want to give your angry self a voice, to hear what it has to say. What does this angry self have to say about the situation?

Now, if your angry self were in complete control, what would it want to do? How does your angry self feel about you? What does it want for you?

Now, let your angry self fade into the background. Coming back to your soothing rhythm breathing; slowing down the breath, slowing down the body, slowing down the mind.

Now, I'd like to invite your anxious self to the floor to give its perspective on things. Imagine the anxiety building in your body. How does your anxious self feel about the situation? Try to connect with the feelings of anxiety in your body.

Now, let's give anxious self a voice. What does it have to say about the situation? What are its thoughts?

If this anxious self were in complete control, what would it want to do? What are its intentions? What does it want for you?

Now, let your angry self fade into the background. Coming back to your soothing rhythm breathing; slowing down the breath, slowing down the body, slowing down the mind.

Finally, let's invite sadness to the room to hear what its perspective on the situation is. Letting the feelings of sadness come to the surface, feeling it well up in your body. What does sadness feel like? Imagine that heavy sinking feeling building and building, what feelings come up?

What does your sad self think about all this? What are its thoughts on the situation? If it had a voice, what would it say?

What is the intention of sadness? If it were in complete control, what would it want to do? What would it do?

Now, let your angry self fade into the background. Coming back to your soothing rhythm breathing; slowing down the breath, slowing down the body, slowing down the mind. In a minute, we're going to invite the compassionate self to the room. Before we do, let's thank these other selves for sharing their perspectives. They have done a good job in helping us to better understand the situation.

Now, allowing those compassionate qualities in yourself to rise up. The motivation to help yourself and others, the wisdom to look deeply and understand things from different perspectives, the confidence and the courage to work with whatever comes up.

Now, let's hear from the compassionate self. This is the part that we want to put in charge of all the selves. That doesn't mean we want any of them to go away as they have all served important and valuable functions, as difficult as they can be to experience.

Imagine the compassionate self approaches each of the other selves, one by one. What does the compassionate self say to your angry self? What does it say to your anxious self? What does it say to your sad self?

Multiple Selves

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| <div>Angry self</div> <div>Thoughts:</div> <div>Bodily sensations:</div> <div>Actions:</div> <div>Motives:</div> | <div>Anxious self</div> <div>Thoughts:</div> <div>Bodily sensations:</div> <div>Actions:</div> <div>Motives:</div> |
| <div>Sad self</div> <div>Thoughts:</div> <div>Bodily sensations:</div> <div>Actions:</div> <div>Motives:</div> | <div>Compassionate self</div> <div>Thoughts:</div> <div>Bodily sensations:</div> <div>Actions:</div> <div>Motives:</div> |

Loving kindness Meditation

Become comfortable in your chair, sitting with a relaxed but straight posture, with your shoulders relaxed. Allow your hands to rest comfortably in your lap. Gently close your eyes. Or, lower them to the ground if you prefer. Settle into awareness of the body...and the breath....noticing the wave-like movements of the belly...

In this practice, we'll be cultivating loving kindness. We all have within us, this natural capacity for lovingkindness. Lovingkindness is a natural opening of a compassionate heart...to ourselves and to others. It's a wish that everyone be happy.

We begin with developing lovingkindness toward ourselves...allowing our hearts to open with tenderness, Now, allow yourself to remember and open up to your basic goodness. You might remember times you have been kind or generous. You might recall your natural desire to be happy and not to suffer. If acknowledging your own goodness is difficult, look at yourself through the eyes of someone who loves you. What does that person love about you? Or, you may recall the unconditional love you felt from a beloved pet. And, as you experience this ...notice how you feel in your body. This is lovingkindness, a natural feeling that is accessible to all of us...always. Let yourself bask in the energy of lovingkindness...breathing it in...and breathing it out...inviting feelings of peace and acceptance.

So, beginning now to wish yourself well by extending words of loving kindness to yourself. I'll be offering as guidance the phrases that I've chosen to use in my own practice. You're invited to alter these phrases and choose whatever words express your wishes of loving kindness toward yourself and others.

May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease.

Now you can open the circle of lovingkindness by bringing to mind someone who is dear to you. Someone whom you care about. Reflect on this person's basic goodness, sensing what it is in particular that you love about him or her. In your heart feel your appreciation for this dear one, and begin your simple offering...

May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease.

Now bring to mind a "neutral" person. This is someone you might see regularly but don't know well...It might be a neighbor, a colleague, or even someone in this room. Bring this person to mind now, and repeat the words of loving kindness..

May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease.

And now, if it's possible for you, bring to mind someone with whom you've had a difficult relationship. Perhaps it's someone you don't like to feel sympathy or compassion for. Seeing if it's possible to let go of feelings of resentment and dislike for this person. Reminding yourself to see this person as a whole being...deserving of love and kindness. As someone who feels pain and anxiety...as someone who also suffers. Seeing if it's possible to extend to this person the words of loving kindness in your mind...

May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease.

Now, allow your awareness to open out in all directions...yourself, a dear one, a neutral person and a difficult person...and of all beings...humans and animals living everywhere...living in richness,

poverty, war, peace, hunger, abundance...Aware of all the joys and sorrows that all beings experience...

May all beings be happy. May all beings be well. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful and at ease.

Sitting for a while and basking in the energy of loving kindness that may have been generated here.