

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 compassionate intention setting.

Okay, now that you are sitting comfortably, place both feet flat on the floor about shoulders' width apart and rest your hands on your legs. Close your eyes. Or look down at the floor if you prefer. Allow yourself to have a gentle facial expression. Maybe even a slight smile.

Now let's focus on our breathing. Just noticing the breath coming down into the diaphragm, your diaphragm lifting and then the air moving out, through your nose. Taking a moment to 'ground ourselves in the moment'.

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

Firstly, for yourself. Silently, in your own mind repeat the following words: "I am coming here today to find ways to help and support myself". Or, if there are words that are better fitting for you, feel free to use those instead.

Notice what comes to mind and what that intention feels like.

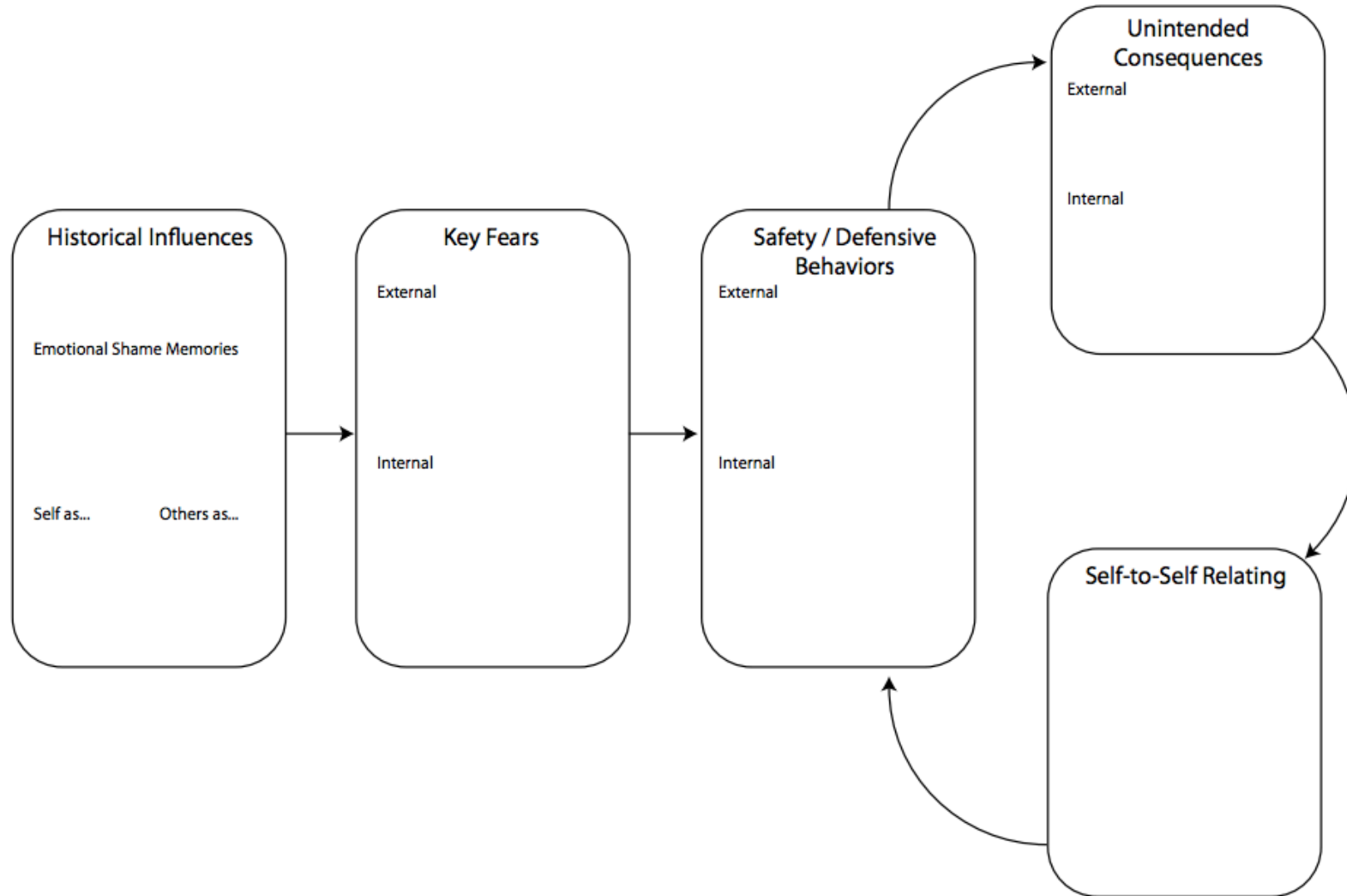
Now, our intention for others. Silently, in your own mind repeat the following words: "I am coming here today to find ways to help and support those here with me today". Again, if there are words that are better fitting, use those instead.

Notice what comes to mind and what that intention feels like.

Notice now that everyone in the room is wishing to be helpful and supportive of you today. Notice how that feels. Silently, in your own mind repeat the following words: "I come here today open to the help and support of others".

Notice what comes to mind and what that intention feels like.

Compassion Formulation



Compassionate Self

Okay so we'll start in the same familiar way – by assuming a comfortable upright position and take a few moments to slow down our breathing.

Now I am going to ask you to get a sense of what it would be like to be the most deeply compassionate person. I am going to describe different qualities of compassion and as I do, try to imagine what it be like if you possessed each of them. What would you feel, think and experience? If you struggle imagining this, you might bring to mind someone you think has these qualities and imagine how it might feel to be this 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 this kind wish building within you. Filling you with strength and purpose. Feel this deep wish to be helpful and supportive to others.

Now, 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. You're aware that difficult situations and emotions come and go. Imagine that you're able to keep from being captured by these experiences and that you can draw upon your life experiences in working with them. You understand that difficult experiences are just a part of life. You're able to keep from judging them or yourself. You 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. You have a deep sense of knowing that whatever arises you can work with. Feel this confidence and courage building within you, filling you with strength.

Extending the Compassionate Self to the 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.

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 to that vulnerable version of yourself in that situation. Notice how he/she is feeling, notice how hard it is for him/her in this moment.

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

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

The feelings of being moved by his/her struggle, that's compassion. Feel this compassionate wish to help him/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 him/her? How you might help him/her? How you might encourage him/her? You know him/her better than anyone else and you know what he/she would need.

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

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

Compassionate Image

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

The compassionate image is your own personal ideal of what you would like from someone who really cared for and about you. It is important that you try to give your image certain qualities. Those which embody a sense of compassion 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’.

As always, we begin by focusing on our breathing, finding a calming rhythm.

Then we can let images emerge in the mind - as best you can – do not try too hard to force anything. If nothing comes to the mind, that’s ok.

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 know, or once knew. Perhaps they resemble a public figure or religious figure.

Perhaps they aren’t human at all but rather, an animal or some other living being. Or even, an inanimate object.

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 your ideal image sound (e.g., voice tone)? What other sensory qualities can you give to it?

How would your ideal caring-compassionate image 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 valuing you and caring about you.

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 reexperience 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.

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

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

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 to 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?

A Self-Reflection on the Function of Self-Criticism

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 that 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. 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?

What are my greatest fears of getting rid of, or losing, self-criticism?

What does my critic look like?

What does my critic say to me?

What does my critic feel about me?

What does it want to do?

What am I now feeling and thinking about me?

We often have a belief that self-criticism is helpful. And, in fact, self-correction can be very helpful, depending on how it is delivered. But sometimes, 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.

There is an alternative approach, a more compassionate encouragement and self-correction. 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. 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.

The compassionate self is sensitive to suffering, with non-judgmental 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 wherever 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.

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 to 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, its 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.

What are the greatest wishes my compassionate self has for me?

What does my
compassionate self
look like?

What does my
compassionate self say to
me?

What does my
compassionate self feel
about me?

What does it want to do?

What am I now feeling and thinking about me?

Time	Location	Food/liquid consumed	Target behaviours	ED thoughts	Emotions	Compassionate response

