

Self Compassion: Sustaining the Ability to Care in Challenging Times

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Overview for Today

- Identify how losses at the personal, professional, and organizational levels affect caregivers.
- Describe the components of compassion and how they relate to professional practice and personal perspectives.
- Explore practices for the cultivation of self-compassion as a form of professional competence .

The pandemic has created a situation where we are acutely aware of how sociopolitical factors influence our personal experiences and assumptions about the world.

Increased life expectancy and an aging population means:

- We live longer.
- We are exposed to a greater number of life experiences.
- Increased chronic health conditions and needs for health care than previous generations.
- Exponential increase in the number of people needing care and support.
- Being “sandwiched” with multiple familial responsibilities is the new reality.

“The New Grief” (Okun & Nowinsky)

- Many illnesses that were once terminal upon diagnosis are now chronic conditions.
- As a result, the nature of care and the experience of grief are changing.
- Families often watch as their elderly loved ones slowly slip away through a prolonged process of deterioration-- a process that is often marked by extended, ongoing grief and ambivalence.
- The experience of COVID has complicated these issues, and there is the additional uncertainty of the impact of “long COVID.”

How do we make sense of things?

- Each of us has formed a way of seeing things and interpreting events that makes sense to us.
- The way we see the world helps us to feel a sense of predictability, consistency, and safety as we go through our daily activities.
- Most of our assumptions about the world, others, and ourselves are established when we are very young and are interrelated with our attachment system and attachment style.

Our Assumptive World includes basic/core assumptions centered around:

1. How we feel safe in the world.
2. How we believe things work and why events happen.
3. Our view of ourselves and how we fit into our social systems.

Exercise—Identifying your Assumptive World

1. How do you tend to view people? When you feel stressed or anxious, who supports you?

2. What does “justice” mean to you? What are your core views about why things happen?

3. How do you tend to think of yourself? What roles and attributes define you?

The Assumptive World and Grief

- Our basic assumptions about how the world should work can be shattered by life experiences that do not fit into our view of ourselves and the world around us.
- The result is a state of disequilibrium and a need to redefine ourselves in view of an assumptive world view that does not make sense anymore.
- We must “re-learn” the world in light of confrontation with a reality that does not match our expectations, assumptions, or previous way of being.
- Grief is the response to the loss of our assumptive world.

The Shattered Assumptive World

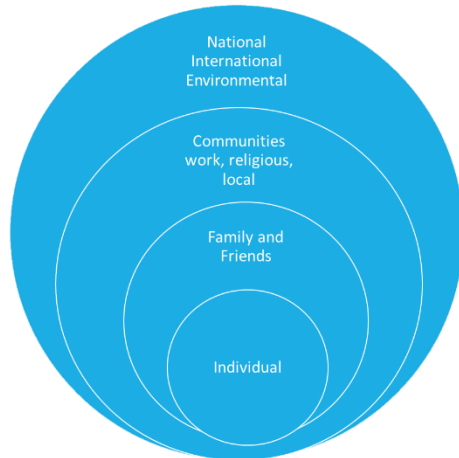
- We “relearn the world” after experiencing significant losses, which is a process of learning “how to be and act in the world differently.” (Attig)
- The world (or people) that we once thought existed is different from the reality of what we have now experienced.
- Grief enables us to rebuild our broken assumptive world; it is the process of re-learning how to be in a world that is different from what we had expected or hoped.

Shattered Assumptive World = Grief

Exploring our Experiences of Loss in COVID

- The COVID-19 pandemic has upended most of our assumptive worlds.
- Our previously held beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and plans no longer exist in the same way as before.
- While death from COVID has been a major concern, our everyday living became full of anxiety, fear, and a sense of being “closed in” as well.
- What died was the world as we had known it before and the future as we once imagined and anticipated it.

Layers/Contexts of Experience



The Social Context of Loss

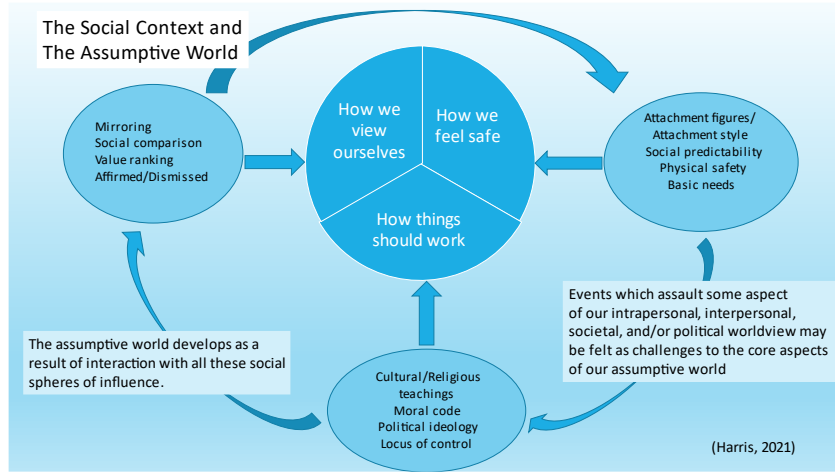
- We are basically social creatures, innately programmed to attach, with a need to belong.
- It is impossible to separate out the individual from the family, society, and culture in which they live.
- We are sensitive to social cues, which guide, shape, and mould our behaviors.
- We feel pain when we are rejected, shamed, or ostracized by our social group.

Layers of Human Experience

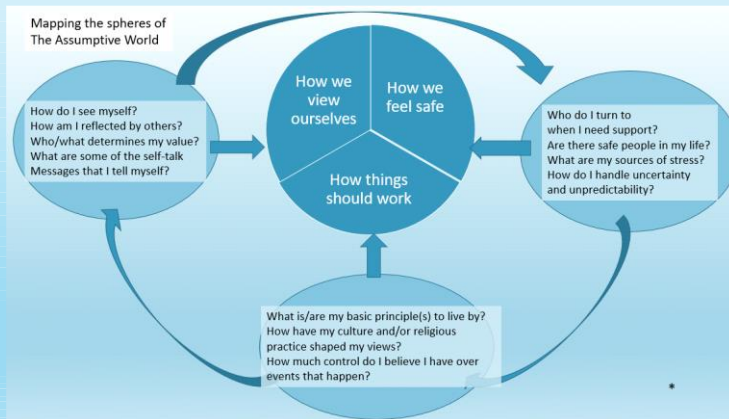
- The concept of the assumptive world has mostly been applied to the individual/personal level.
- However, many of our assumptions will be profoundly shaped by the social and political influences that we identify with.
- While loss experiences are typically appraised in individual terms, the social and political context determines how losses are perceived, validated/invalidated, and the support that is offered.

Clinician Self-Awareness

- When you consider the spheres of the assumptive world, pay special attention to how important it is for you to feel a sense of predictability and what you were taught about the degree of control you have over events and outcomes.
- Think about how your “helping” profession informs your view of yourself. Where/from whom did you learn what “helping” actually means?
- Consider the outcomes that you are expecting from working with your clients/those you serve.



Exercise



Take a moment and consider how your assumptive world has developed and is maintained.

What has changed for you in the past 2 years?

How are you different now?

What no longer works for you?

What have you had to let go of during this time?

Notes:

Important Points to Consider

- We need to understand and appreciate the social context of all loss experiences, recognizing the interconnectedness between individuals and the various levels of their experience.
- While a loss may be subjectively appraised by an individual, the origin of the loss itself might be from the outer layers that are uniquely social and political in nature. These losses may create profound feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.
- It is important not to place responsibility solely on individuals for issues that are sociopolitical in nature. The overarching, structural influence controls much of the individual's experience and ability to control outcomes.

Evolution of our Social Nature

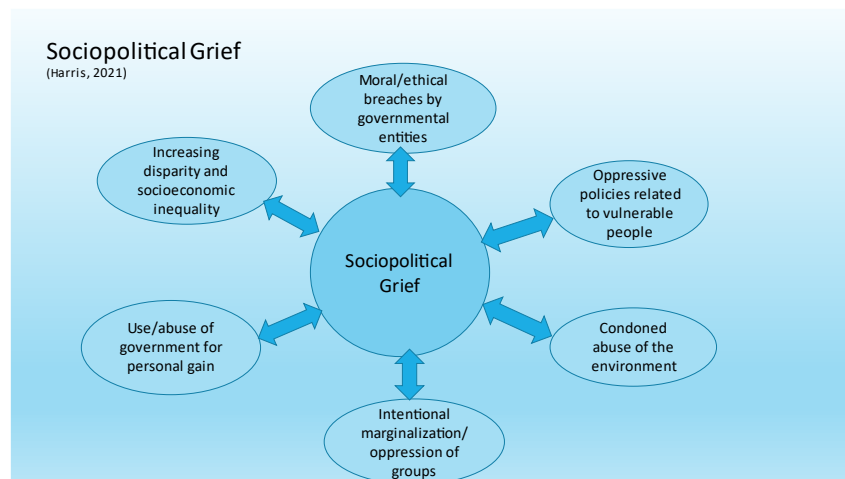
- In addition to caring for their young and the evolution of the attachment system that accompanied this, humans also learned to cooperate with each other for survival.
- The evolution of cooperative and affiliative behaviors forms the basis of our innate need for social connection, the need to belong, and the sensitivity that we have acquired to social cues.
- Shame is a uniquely social experience; its existence warns us when we may face the threatening situation of being alone in a world where collaboration and connection provide safety.

Impact of Social Messaging on Grief

- Social "rules" and norms govern what are considered "acceptable" responses
- Disenfranchised grief demonstrates the power of social messaging and expectations on grief
- We identify what is "normal" based upon our social/cultural teachings.

Emotions are often Stigmatized

- Western social norms tend to view feelings as primitive, irrational, weak, out of control, and pathetic-- *"This is highly inconvenient."*
- We are also very protective of ourselves when there are feelings around us that make us uncomfortable. *"Everybody seems so angry."*
- It's very hard to honour feelings when strong social messages imply that feelings need to be suppressed, contained, and managed. *"I don't have time to feel."*
- High Social Value Placed on Rationality and Intellect
- Experiences that make it difficult to access our intellect and reasoning capacity are threatening.



Healthy grief struggles with unhealthy social norms/rules

- The focus on efficiency and stoicism strongly influences how events and reactions are perceived and interpreted.
- Experiences with more emotional content tend to be devalued or dismissed; vulnerable emotions signify weakness and cause decreased productivity.
- Strong emphasis on minimizing the impact of losses in our lives or being “strong.” We are rewarded socially for minimizing our grief.

Why do these social rules exist?

- Social need to “control” what is threatening.
- People are generally uncomfortable with death and loss.
- We are taught that we need to “contain” our feelings and the rules assist us to do that.
- Keep us from feeling socially excluded at a time when we’ve experienced a wound to our attachment system.
- Serve as an attempt to maintain productivity and functionality in order to preserve social connections.

Certain losses highlight how little control we have in a society that expects us to be in control.

- The grief experience itself makes us feel incredibly vulnerable and out of control.
- Responses to grief are shaped by social messages that have nothing to do with the impact of the loss and the experience of grief.
- In a society that values productivity, stoicism, and efficiency, grief is perceived as the wrecking ball that smashes all that is valued and affirmed socially.
- Social Messages reflect the values of the dominant culture

Neuroscience of Shame

- When faced with shame, the brain reacts as if it were facing physical danger and it activates the sympathetic nervous system, generating the flight/fight/freeze response.
- The flight response triggers the feeling of needing to withdraw.
- In grieving individuals, this sets up a very difficult situation, as social support is one of the main predictors of grief outcome.

Shame

- Rooted in our evolved socially competitive motives, arising from us being self-aware, identity-forming, and highly social.
- Evolved to prevent us from being ostracized and isolated, which would lead to poor survival.
- Evokes appeasement strategies designed to limit social damage, restore one’s social reputation, de-escalate social conflict, and repair social bonds .
- One of the most powerful activators of threat processing systems that we have.

Social Pain (MacDonald & Leary)

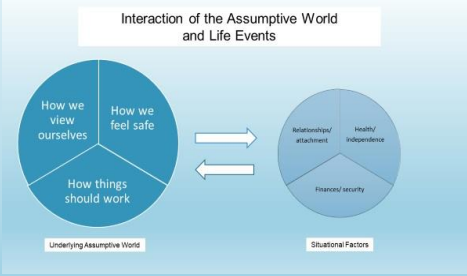
- The pain of social exclusion is felt along the same neural pathways that process physical pain (
- it has been suggested that, because of the importance of social connection for human survival, the attachment system—which ensures social connection—may have piggybacked onto the physical pain system, borrowing the pain signal to indicate when social relationships are threatened (Eisenberger, 2015).

Language and Social Pain

- We use words that have physical associations with them to describe our pain from relationships:
 - “He *broke* my heart.”
 - “She *hurt* my feelings.”
 - “What a *punch* to my gut.”
 - “I carry emotional *scars*.”
- Is the “pain” of social rejection truly comparable to physical pain or are individuals simply being metaphorical when they say that rejection hurts?

Implications of Social Pain Theory in Grief

- People will go through great means to avoid situations where they may experience shame or exclusion.
- People will often dismiss and minimize (self-disenfranchise) their own grief in order to not experience a further loss of the people they need around them.

| | |
|--|---------------|
| <h3>Exercise</h3> <p>Interaction of the Assumptive World and Life Events</p>  <p>Consider the events of the past two years...</p> <p>What has been the impact on you personally and professionally?</p> <p>How your work environment and feelings about work have changed?</p> <p>How have your relationships with friends, family members, and coworkers changed?</p> | <p>Notes:</p> |
|--|---------------|

Enter compassion...

- It is easy to get lost in the details and stress of everyday experience and to lose track of our intention and focus.
- Training in compassion does not take away the stressors or all the things clamoring for our attention, but it does help us to remain true to our intention in a way that is sustainable.

Compassion

A deep awareness of the suffering of self and others coupled with the wish to prevent it and/or relieve it.

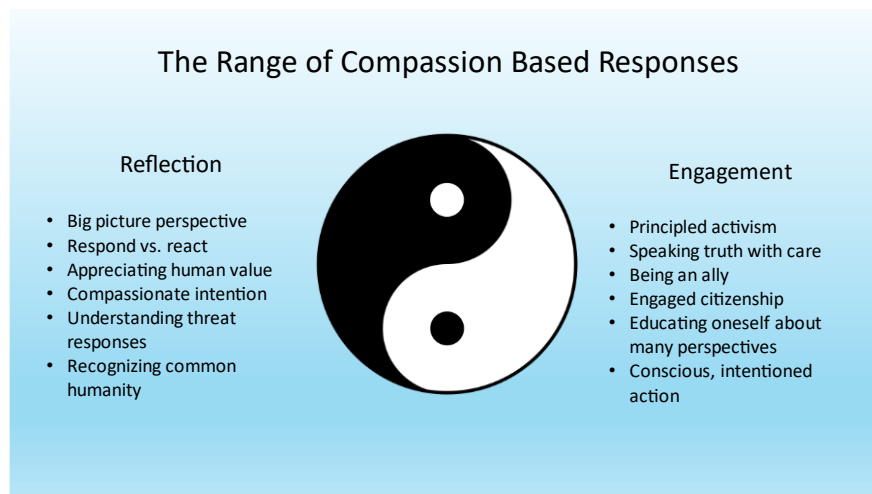
Compassion is a motivation and an intention, not just a feeling state. (Gilbert, 2009; 2014)

What Does Compassion Involve?

- The ability to recognize our common humanity.
- Willingness to see the pain of others; to allow yourself to be exposed to others' suffering.
- Choose to be an instrument of relief to that suffering in ways that are possible.
- Actively offering your full presence in situations of pain and suffering, regardless of the foreseeable outcome.

Courage and Compassion

- When people think of compassion, they tend to think of kindness. But research has found the core of compassion to be courage.
- The courage to be compassionate lies in the willingness to see into the nature and causes of suffering - be that in ourselves, in others, and the human condition.
- The challenge is to acquire the wisdom we need to address these causes of suffering in ourselves and others.



Clarification

- Compassion is sometimes misconstrued as kindness or empathy. Rather, it is a motivation and intention that is grounded in a multifaceted stance that requires practice, emotion regulation, and the ability to reflect.
- “Compassion fatigue” can be more accurately described as empathic overload or empathic distress fatigue, and results from a combination of factors. Most typically it is found in clinicians who are highly empathetic but who aren't able to balance their experiences with discernment, insight, and grounding.

Differentiating Compassion from Empathy

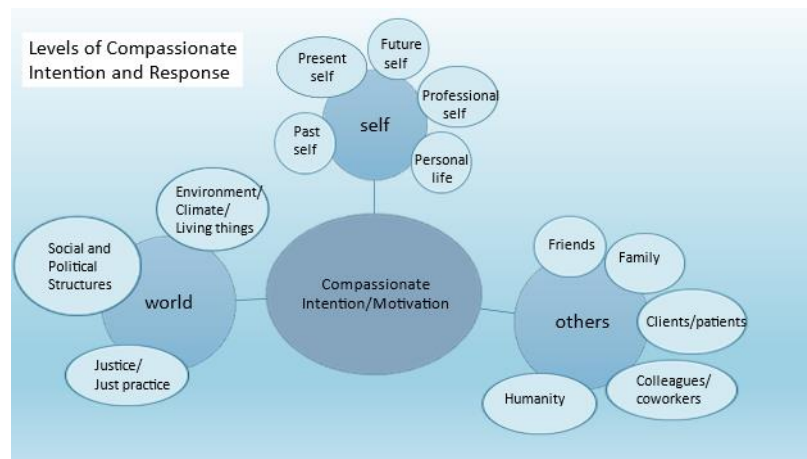
- Empathy—the ability to understand and accurately acknowledge the feelings of another, leading to an attuned response from the observer. Is a social processing competency.
- Empathy may or may not be associated with a desire to relieve suffering and is often not grounded in “big picture” awareness. May lead to flooding and sense of overwhelm.
- Compassion—ability to attune to both self and others with the desire to alleviate suffering; grounded in discernment and an ability to focus and tolerate distress without being overwhelmed. Is a care-focused motive.

Studies of Compassion Versus Empathy (Klimecki et al., 2014)

- Exposure to the pain of others stimulates areas of the brain responsible for perceiving and responding to pain/threat, often accompanied by aversion.
- Upon exposure to distressing images, compassion training was associated with activation of reward and affiliation centers in the brain; empathy training led to activation of pain centers.
- Responses of individuals who underwent compassion training changed to activation of reward and affiliation centers afterward.

Compassion Fatigue Misnomer (Hofmeyer et al., 2019)

- fMRI studies demonstrated that compassion fatigue should more accurately be called 'empathic distress fatigue.'
- Identified compassion training as the strategy to ease empathic distress.
- Compassion provides the necessary resources to respond to suffering in a grounded, sustainable way



Looking at the Levels of Compassionate Intention and Response,

- What areas might be the easiest for you to demonstrate compassion?
- What areas might be the hardest for you?

Notes:

Core Components of Compassion Training

Mindful awareness

- Increased ability to focus and hold attention
- Greater sense of “big picture perspective”
- Enhanced distress tolerance; able to remain present without turning away

Cultivation of Presence

- Attunement to self and others
- Ability to empathize and re-frame
- Openness and curiosity

Awareness of Common Humanity

- Awareness of suffering (our own and others')
- Acknowledgement of our interconnectedness
- Desire to relieve suffering when possible (our own and others')

Mindful Awareness

- Openness to what is happening without needing to control or “fix” what can't be fixed.
- “Big picture” perspective about the nature of life, the human condition, and the ability to be present in situations that are stressful.
- Frees us to respond in ways that are congruent with our intentions rather than reacting out of a place of being triggered.

Mindfulness exercise: Leaves on a stream (go to Youtube for examples)

Meditation and Compassion Apps

- Best overall: Calm
- Best budget: Insight Timer
- Best for Sleep: Headspace
- Best guided: Buddhify
- Best for beginner: Ten Percent Happier Meditation
- Best for focus: Unplug
- Best selection: Simple Habit
- Self Compassion App: includes ability to engage with CMT at your own pace.

Therapeutic Presence (Geller & Greenberg, 2012)

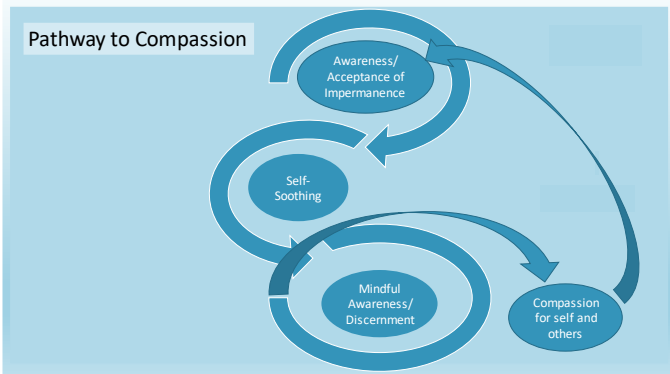
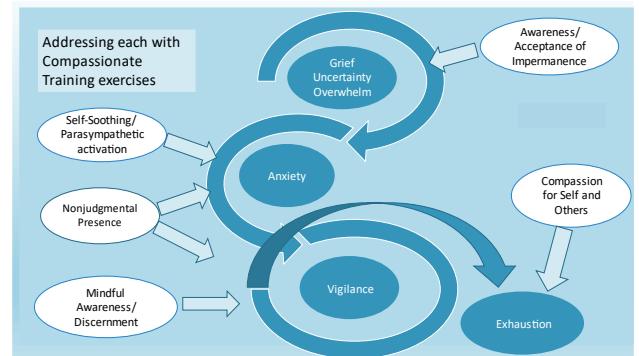
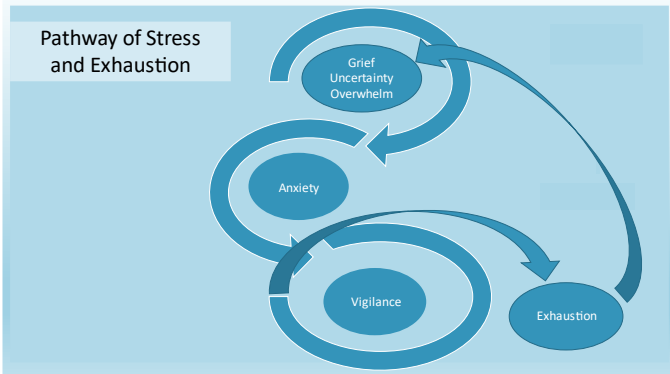
- Presence requires practice in order to develop familiarity with being grounded, being comfortable sitting with intense feelings and situations, and remaining focused in our intention.
- Therapeutic presence is not a technique, but rather, a foundation for enhancing attunement, attention, engagement, and awareness within therapeutic encounters.

Presence and Common Humanity Video: *Beyond Borders*, by Amnesty International <https://youtu.be/9Z68P9Gc77A>

Common Humanity Scenarios Promote Compassion in Healthcare Workers (Ling et al, 2021)

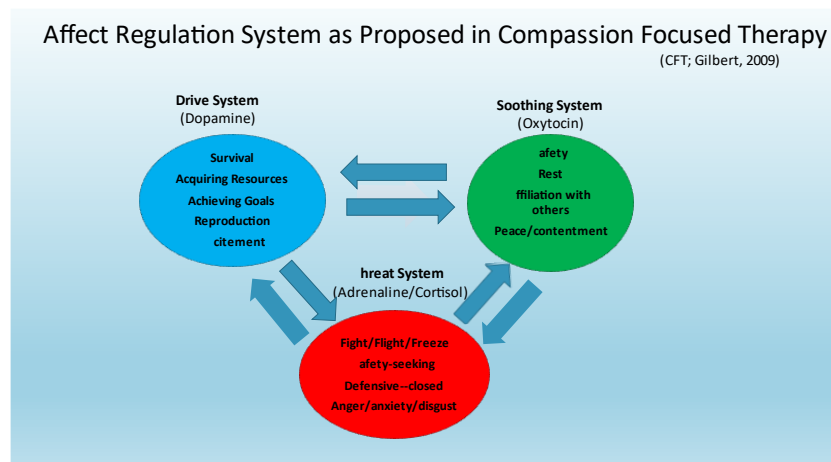
- Viewing common humanity scenarios led to enhanced feelings of connection to others and compassion.
- When people view others as similar to themselves, they are more positive and helpful to others.
- The strength of the perception of common humanity is that all humans become the in-group.

Common Humanity Video—TV Denmark: *All That We Share* <https://youtu.be/jD8tjhVO1Tc>



Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT; Gilbert, 2014)

- Compassion originates from the same capacities that primates evolved to form attachment bonds and engage in affiliative and cooperative behaviors for group survival.
- Compassion is an evolved motivational system designed to regulate affect.
- CFT draws upon evolutionary psychology, attachment theory, and applied psychology processes from neuroscience and social psychology.



Threat System

- This system is probably activated for many people. Significant losses will activate this system as well. Threats can be external to us or internal by our self-appraisals and perceptions.
- Designed to protect us from threat and keep us safe.
- By itself, does not allow us to think clearly and openly; it is the “emergency” response to a perceived threat.
- Makes us gravitate toward those who are like us, where we feel safe.

Consider threats to areas that may activate this system:

- Health
- Finances
- Safety
- Relationships

When the Threat System is activated, we gravitate toward those who are more like us

Drive System

- This system engages when we are concerned about lacking something essential or that is considered a necessity.
- Our “survival instinct” kicks in and we take stock of what we must have and what we need to get through a time when there is concern over lack.
- Like the threat system, this system is often “in the background,” out of our conscious awareness. It is a very strong motivator.

Consider what may activate this system:

- Financial insecurity
- Social isolation
- Fear of inability to obtain what is necessary and needed.

Soothing System

- When this system is activated, we feel comforted and open.
- We are able to reflect on our actions and values.
- We are able to think creatively, nurture ourselves and others, and replenish our need for love and belonging.
- The soothing system allows us to access our true intentions, providing a chance to respond and reflect rather than react defensively or aggressively.

Consider what activates this system:

- Connecting with others
- Selfless responses by those who care
- Gratitude and grounding practices
- Offers of others that are free of expectation and stress

Balance is Important

- We need each of these systems in order to survive. However, it is important to recognize the importance of balance between them
- Most psychological difficulties arise from an overuse of the threat and drive systems and an under-use of the soothing system.

Loss and the Affect Regulation System

- Significant losses threaten the attachment system/assumptive world, leading into a defensive and vulnerable place (the threat system). The grieving process itself may also feel threatening.
- While the threat system is meant to protect from harm and becomes activated to do just that, over a longer period of time, it can prevent the ability to be open to opportunities for healing, including sharing pain and receiving support from others.

Accessing the Soothing System

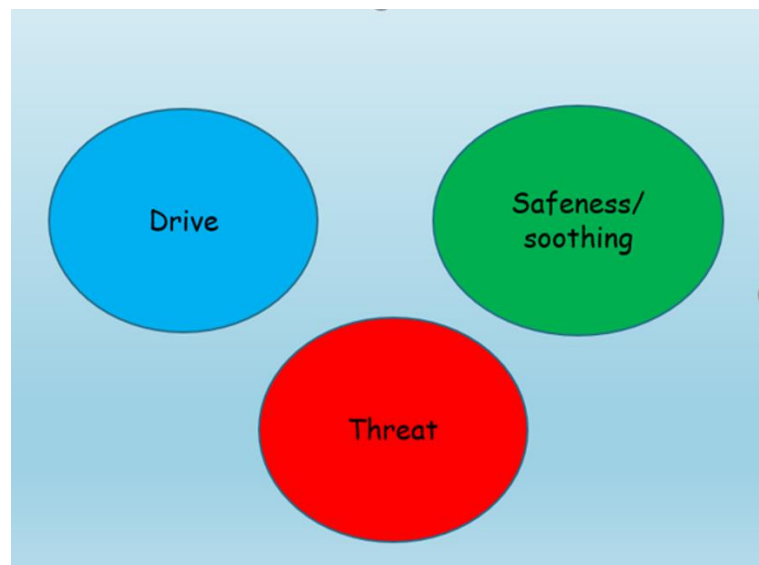
- A therapeutic relationship can act as a link to the soothing system, opening the door for social connection that feels safe, and for healing the wound that has been created by loss.

CFT, Emotion Regulation, and Grief

Being able to recognize emotions, how we experience emotions, how we express emotions, and identifying the purpose of the emotion.

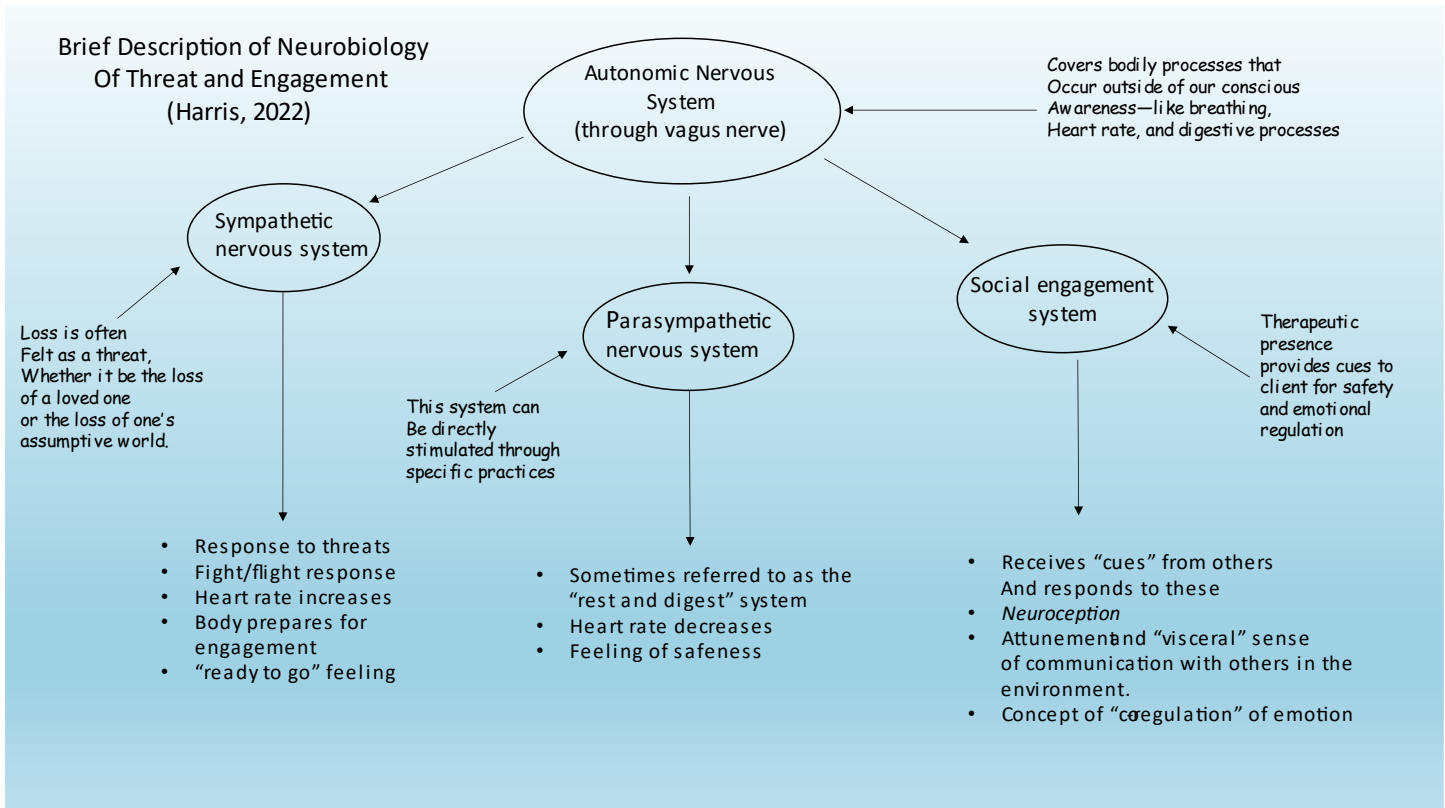
- Bring to mind a client or individual that you have worked with recently.
- Think of the ways that they experience each of these components of the emotion regulation system.
- On a piece of paper, draw the circles in relation to how they are experiencing them right now.
- Next, consider your own balance in these systems right now.

What are your thoughts about this?



Autonomic Nervous System and the Vagus Nerve

- The theory and practice associated with compassion-based approaches is rooted in neurobiology.
- Since most people get into difficulties when their threat and drive systems overshadow their soothing system, many of the practices focus on supporting the soothing system and the neurobiological processes associated with it.



- The clinician's compassionate stance serves as a foundation for the client to anchor and regulate their emotions.
- This is where compassionate mind training of the clinician is very valuable as a therapeutic skill.



Research shows that people who practice self -compassion are happier, less stressed, and more resilient.

Self-Compassion

- If our intention is to relieve suffering, we must include the relief of our own suffering within that intention.
- If our desire to relieve the suffering of others is a form of compensation for our perceived wounds, inadequacies, and need to prove ourselves, then we are doomed to repeat these wounds in others, perpetuate the suffering of others, and add our own suffering to that of the world.

How we see ourselves...

- May be hard to see the “bigger picture” when we’re stressed and tired.
- Easy to feel personally responsible and that you are not handling things “right.”
- Important to look realistically at our lives, our choices, and our situation.
- Our expectations of ourselves are often unrealistic and mired down by things that are out of our control.

It’s easy to feel...

- You aren’t doing enough for those in your care, or those you care about
- You have fallen short of your potential
- You have failed in significant areas of your life (or at least disappointed others significantly)
- You don’t have enough time to do everything that needs to be done
- That you “should” do or be something other than what you are...
- That you have a lot more control over life than you actually do.

And these feelings often weigh silently and heavily on our minds and hearts.

So, we get busy...busy...busier...

We tend to distract ourselves to avoid feeling bad or to feel better

We look for validation that feels empty when we receive it.

Best friends...

- Know your quirks and idiosyncrasies and still believe the best of you.
- Give honest feedback, but with the intention of supporting you.
- Are careful in their speech because they care about your feelings.
- Value you and consider your needs as well as their own.

Being our own best friend

- Means we treat ourselves with the same care and respect that our best friends would offer to us.
- We acknowledge our quirks and limitations with gentleness.
- We know that we are a work in progress.

Safety Outside/Safety Inside

- Most of us understand the concept of safety—physical security, freedom from threat, freedom from bullying, and we actively do things to preserve our physical safety.
- There is another form of safety that is rarely discussed—that’s the safety we have inside ourselves, reflected in our self-talk, beliefs about our worthiness and value, and how we handle things like shame and guilt.
- Consider the ways that you talk to yourself through the day. Ask your clients to do the same.

If we don’t create safety inside, we can’t listen deeply to what is most important.

- Not being able to reflect inwardly means we will continually be running, unfocused, and exhausted.
- We will also be dependent upon things that are external to us to define us, set our priorities, and determine our value...which leads to a great deal of stress and unhappiness.

Self-Compassion is a Key Component of Helping Work (Bluth & Neff, 2018)

- Not the same as Self-Esteem
- Not dependent upon success or outcomes
- Helps to connect by focusing on basic similarities and struggles
- Can be cultivated with practice
- Practicing self-compassion naturally spreads to compassion for others
- Provides a foundation upon which to face everyday life
- Is an important practice for both the clinician and the client

The Role of Self-Compassion

- Understand that everyone makes mistakes—and these are opportunities for us.
- Focus on what you can learn from your mistakes and foibles instead of shaming yourself.
- Evaluate yourself with gentle honesty. Be truthful-- there is no need to be harsh.

Self-Compassion Break (Neff)

The self-compassion break involves using a set of memorized phrases to soothe and comfort yourself when you're in pain.

1. Put your hands on your heart, pause, and feel their warmth. You can also place your hands anywhere on your body that feels soothing or comforting, such as your belly or face.
2. Breathe deeply in and out.
3. Speak these words to yourself (silently or out loud) in a warm and caring tone:

This is a moment of suffering.

Suffering is part of life.

May I be kind to myself.

May I give myself the compassion that I need.

Exercise

Think about a situation that you are currently experiencing that is painful or difficult.

Using the Self-Compassion Scale (short form), indicate how well each statement applies to how you are feeling toward yourself in the context of this situation.

State Self-Compassion Scale - Short form

HOW I FEEL TOWARDS MYSELF RIGHT NOW

Think about a situation you are experiencing right now that is painful or difficult. It could be some challenge in your life, or perhaps you are feeling inadequate in some way. Please indicate how well each statement applies to how you are feeling toward yourself right now as you think about this situation, using the following scale:

| Not at all true for me | | | | Very true for me |
|--|---|---|---|---------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I'm giving myself the caring and tenderness I need. | | | | |
| 2. I'm obsessing and fixating on everything that's wrong. | | | | |
| 3. I'm remembering that there are lots of others in the world feeling like I am. | | | | |
| 4. I feel intolerant and impatient toward myself. | | | | |
| 5. I'm keeping things in perspective. | | | | |
| 6. I feel like I'm struggling more than others right now. | | | | |

Reverse code items 2, 4 and 6 and then take a grand mean to calculate a total state self-compassion score.

The short scale has adequate psychometric properties and a very strong correlation with the long scale. It can be used when assessing the six components of self-compassion is not necessary.

Reference: Neff, K. D., Tóth-Király, I., Knox, M., Kuchar, A. & Davidson, O. (in press). The development and validation of the State Self-Compassion Scale (long and short form). *Mindfulness*.

Modeling the Language of Self-Compassion with Clients

| you are thinking... | Compassionate Reframe... |
|--|--|
| I feel so stupid right now. | Sometimes, my grief makes it hard to focus. |
| I need to stop wallowing in self-pity. | My grief reminds me of how much I have lost |
| I hate feeling so weak. | How I am feeling makes sense given what has happened. |
| I need to just get a grip and get over this. | This is really hard. I am doing my best given the circumstances. |

Compassion is separate from personal feelings

- Feeling positive toward ourselves and/or others is not a requirement for compassion.
- Think of clients/patients and family members that you didn't particularly like. Did that stop you from caring for them or trying to help them?
- Likewise, we may struggle with liking ourselves, but we can still engage in self-compassion.



Fears, Blocks and Resistance to Compassion

Fears of Compassion to Others

- Important to see these blocks as protective strategies and not a personal failure.
- People who have been very hurt, have experienced abuse, and/or who have been taken advantage of in the past will likely struggle with this flow of compassion.
- People who experience burnout often struggle with compassion to others because they are so depleted.

Fear of Compassion from Others

- The main theme behind fears in response to receiving compassion from others is mistrust.
- Our social imperative to be strong, independent, and stoic can hinder our ability to receive compassion from others, even though as humans, we have evolved to need each other.
- People with this block have often been repeatedly hurt, abandoned, or let down by others during significant times of need.

FOCS ITEMS

| Please use this scale to rate the extent to which you agree with each statement. | Do not agree at all | | | | | Somewhat agree | | | | | Completely agree | | | | |
|--|---------------------|---|---|---|---|----------------|---|---|---|---|------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1. Being too compassionate makes people soft and easy to take advantage of. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I fear that being too compassionate makes people an easy target. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I fear that if I am compassionate, some people will become dependent upon me. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I find myself holding back from feeling and expressing compassion toward others. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I try to keep my distance from others even if I know they are kind. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. Feelings of kindness from others are somehow frightening. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. When people are kind and compassionate toward me, I "put up a barrier." | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I have a hard time accepting kindness and caring from others. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I worry that if I start to develop compassion for myself, I will become dependent upon it. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I fear that if I become too compassionate toward myself, I will lose my self-criticism and my flaws will show. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I fear that if I am more self-compassionate, I will become a weak person or my standards will drop. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. I struggle with relating kindly and compassionately toward myself. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Fears of Extending Compassion (sum items 1–4): _____
 Fears of Receiving Compassion (sum items 5–8): _____
 Fears of Self-Compassion (sum items 9–12): _____

Note. This adaptation involves a limited selection of items from the FOC scale as well as additional summary items developed for this book. It was developed so that readers of this book could have a brief way of tracking their progress in working through the modules. As such, this selection of items has not been validated and is not appropriate for use in either research or clinical work. Readers can acquire a copy of the complete, validated version of the scale which is appropriate for research and clinical purposes at <https://compassionatemind.co.uk/resources/scales>.

Fears of Compassion to the Self

- Some people may have learned that their needs are not important and thus they have ‘switched off’ their awareness of their own needs.
- One of the most common barriers to developing self-compassion is our own “inner critic”, which often has origins in our developmental past.
- Many people think of compassion as weak, or “soft.” Compassion and Attachment
- People who experience blocks regarding self-compassion are generally also blocked about receiving it from others.
- Fear of compassion for self is linked to fear of compassion from others, and both were associated with self-coldness, self-criticism, insecure attachment, and depression, anxiety, and stress.

Several studies link self-compassion with grief outcome.

Self-Compassion and Grief Rumination/Psychopathology (Lenferink et al., 2017)

- The buffering effect of self-compassion on emotional distress may be explained by its dampening effect on ruminative thoughts related to the disappearance.

Low Self Compassion and Complicated Grief (Vara & Thimm, 2019)

- Found statistically significant relationships between low self-compassion (SC) and the severity of complicated grief (CG) symptoms.
- Being critical and harsh towards oneself was related to more severe grief reactions after a loss.
- Study Conclusion: Low self compassion is a vulnerability factor for developing CG.

Multiple Studies Conclude that Self Compassion is a Buffer to Burnout (see references at the end of this sheet)

Higher self-compassion associated with

- lower burnout
- higher job satisfaction
- better sleep
- better decision-making capacity
- Higher distress tolerance
- Better emotion regulation, stress reduction, and resilience

Note: several of these studies were during the pandemic

Compassion as Sustainability (Schabram & Heng, 2021)

- Compassion is an agentic action that enables employees to replenish their own depleted resources.
- Self compassion specifically remedied exhaustion.
- Compassion to others associated with reduced cynicism and depersonalization.
- Compassion has a restorative potential with different recuperative functions. It may also have preventative value in advance of distressing situations.

“Edge States” (Halifax, 2018)

- Situations where compassion is either blocked or not supported.
- These are the places where courage meets fear.
- These are internal and interpersonal qualities that are keys to a compassionate and courageous life, and without which we cannot serve, nor can we survive.
- Yet if these precious resources deteriorate, they can manifest as negative states that deplete and drain us of our ability to care and manifest compassion.

Altruism versus pathological altruism

- Physical and/or psychological harm as a result of ignoring one’s needs and placing needs of others above oneself to the detriment of yourself. Often stems from underlying unmet need to be valued or validated.
- Completely focusing on others without acting from a place of self compassion leads to an imbalance of caring behaviors.

Empathy versus empathic distress

- When we are able to sense into the suffering of another person, empathy brings us closer to one another, can inspire us to serve, and expands our understanding of the world.
- But if we take on too much of the suffering and identify too intensely with it, we may become harmed and unable to act.

Integrity versus Moral Distress

- Inability to act or being prevented from following through in a way that you know is right.
- Important to be able to distinguish between structural/organizational policies and issues and personal responsibility. All too often, the individual is blamed for situations that are out of their control.

Structural Violence

- An extension of systemic discrimination or oppression
- Often experienced as double bind between your personal values and a mandate, an institution, or system in which you are a part.
- Many forms of social privilege and oppressive practices are enacted through formal and informal workplace policies and exist outside of the awareness of the majority.
- Structural violence often leads to horizontal hostility, where co-workers enact forms of marginalization, bullying, and gaslighting in response to the overarching culture of the workplace.



Compassion Training

Will not...

- Miraculously change all the things about the system that have the potential to wound caregivers and clients alike.
- Make people who are difficult to work with less difficult.
- Make you “soft” or passive in situations where you need to be decisive or assertive.
- Make situations that are abusive or morally wrong be OK to tolerate.

Will...

- Help you to be able to respond instead of reacting to stressful situations.
- Allow you the opportunity to stay focused on your intention(s) in difficult situations.
- Help you to tap into a “bigger picture” perspective more readily.
- Provide you with discernment and clarity in your decisions and actions.

|  Self-Critical/Criticism |  Compassionate Self Correction |
|--|--|
| Punishing past errors; backward looking | Desire to improve; forward looking |
| Focuses on deficits and fear of exposure | Focuses on positives and emphasis on learning |
| Focuses on fear of failure and shame | Focuses on hopes for growth and success |
| Increases need for withdrawal and avoidance | Supports engagement and connection |
| Difficulty trusting self; looks outward for reassurance of value and worth. Others may be threatening | Ability to reflect and adjust; grounded self acceptance and realistic awareness guides relationships |
| Punitive, negative assumptions about one's motives | Open-hearted and honest self appraisal |

Compass Exercise

In this moment, at this time, what matters most to you?

If you were to stop everything for just a brief time—the chatter inside and the advice and noise from outside—what truth can you find deep inside yourself?

Take a moment to identify your deepest intention—what do you value most?

What is most important to you?



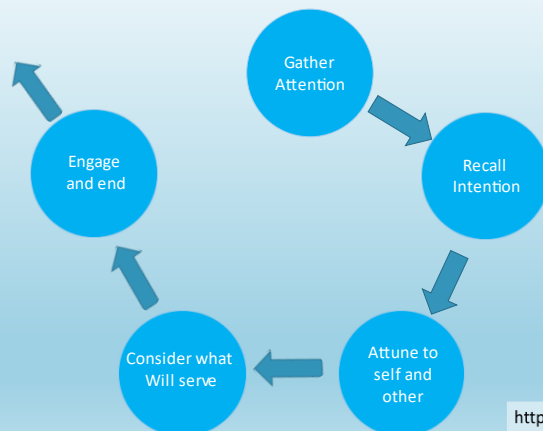
Self-Compassion Vs. Self Care

Both are important; self compassion needs to be the foundation for sustainability

| Self Compassion | Self Care |
|---|---|
| A practice that becomes the foundation of your work | An action that helps to cope with stress |
| Perspective of the true nature of life and the inevitability of suffering | Processing of feelings and concerns related to events |
| Ties into our shared humanity | Focuses on the individual experience |
| Grounded in motivation | Grounded in empathy |
| Provides sustainability in situations of intensity/pain | Provides relief from situations of intensity/pain |

GRACE Model of Compassionate Response (Halifax, 2014)

GRACE Model of Compassionate Response (Halifax, 2014)



<https://youtu.be/SWLmnHB4rLY>

Gather Your Attention

- Take a breath and focus on being in this current moment to become grounded and open to looking at the person(s) and the situation with “fresh eyes.”
- You may wish to focus on your breath, the soles of your feet, or a phrase that will ground you in the present moment.
- Be aware of any distractions and consciously choose to set them aside for this time.

Recall Your Intention

- Recall the compass exercise...remember what is MOST important to you—your values, motive, and what matters the most to you.
- Affirm your purpose and deepest motivation towards yourself and others.

Intention and Presence

- By bringing ourselves back to what matters most at any given time, we develop the ability to respond in ways that honor ourselves and others.
- Freedom from:
 - the need to fix others or their situations
 - feeling responsible for other’s responses and choices
 - the need to control others and outcomes
 - the need to categorize and label.

Attune to yourself and others

- Notice what’s going on in your own mind and body, and then sense into the experience of others in the situation and what they may be experiencing without judgment.
- Think about how they might be seeing the situation and experiencing you.
- Identify any biases you may have that could have an impact upon your interaction.
- Allow yourself to notice and experience empathy or affective resonance with the individual(s) in this situation.

Consider what will serve...

- As the encounter unfolds, notice what others might be offering in this moment. What are you sensing, seeing, learning?
- Ask yourself, “What will really serve here?” (not about doing or fixing)
- Draw on your expertise, knowledge, and experience while being open to seeing things in a fresh way.
- Be careful not to jump to conclusions; allow yourself to be informed by your intuition, prior experiences, and concerns—but not rigidly so.
- Remember the broad range of compassionate responses

Engaging and Ending

- Compassionate response emerges from the sense of openness, connectedness, and discernment you have created.
- Mark the end of the interaction with the other person; release, let go, and breathe out. Explicitly note that the encounter is over so that you can move cleanly to the next patient/client or task.
- Important: Leave it when you’re done. Refuse to ruminate and dwell on the situation when you finish with it.

- .If there are conflicts in goals and values, these must be addressed from a place of stability and discernment, always keeping in mind what is most important to you—what values you desire to guide your choices and responses.
- Important: Leave it when you're done. Refuse to ruminate and dwell on the situation when you finish with it.

Take away points...

- Don't devalue the importance of being present; it is easy to get caught up in expectations to "do" something.
- Being able to do something useful is good; however, the focus on doing shouldn't detract from the importance of learning how to sit and be fully present to what is right in front of you.
- Our full presence and compassion are true gifts to ourselves and others that can be cultivated with practice.

Summary for the day

- We are continually bombarded by situations that have the potential to completely wear us down and burn us out.
- Learning compassion practices can help serve as a buffer in these situations by providing us with the bigger picture perspective and tying us into our intentions rather than our shortcomings and stress.
- Self compassion is an essential component of sustaining and creating capacity in any form of helping profession.
- Recognizing our resistance to compassion helps us to reflect and choose how to be with ourselves and others in ways that honor our humanity.
- Practicing compassion on a regular basis enhances our ability to be in the world in a way that is congruent, realistic, and sustainable.

Resources

Compassionate Mind Resource Handout: <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/GILBERT-COMPASSION-HANDOUT.pdf>

Compassionate Mind Foundation: <https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/>

Kristen Neff—Self Compassion website: <https://self-compassion.org/>

Compassionate Mind Training information: <https://balancedminds.com/>

Mindful Compassion Resources: <https://mindfulcompassion.com/meditations/>

CCARE Program at Stanford University: <http://ccare.stanford.edu/>

The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Health Care: <https://www.theschwartzcenter.org/programs/schwartz-rounds/>

Upaya Zen Center Being with Dying Program: <https://www.upaya.org/program/being-with-dying-2022-online-clinician-training-program/?id=2403>

Upaya Zen Center GRACE training: <https://www.upaya.org/social-action/grace/>

Roshi Joan Halifax Standing at the Edge Google Talk: https://youtu.be/Ky1Xp_eJ4jc

Free downloadable book: Compassion: Bridging Research and Science (Singer & Bolz, Eds.) <http://www.compassion-training.org/en/online/files/assets/basic-html/index.html#1>

Tree of Contemplative Practices: <https://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>

Nowinski: The New Grief: <https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/magazine/article/352/the-new-grief>

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