

An Introduction to Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)

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Workshop Outline

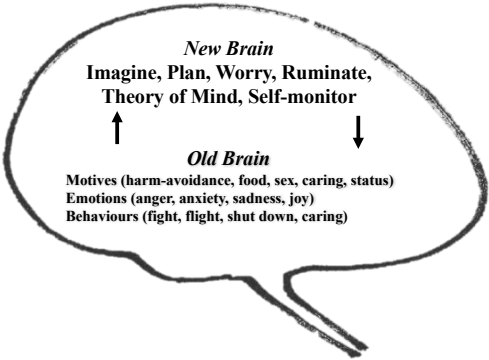
- **Introduction to the model**
- **Psychoeducation – ideas about how and why we suffer**
- **What is compassion?**
- **Can we develop or cultivate compassion?**
- **What are the different flows of compassion?**
- **Brief experiential practice**

Compassion begins with a reality check

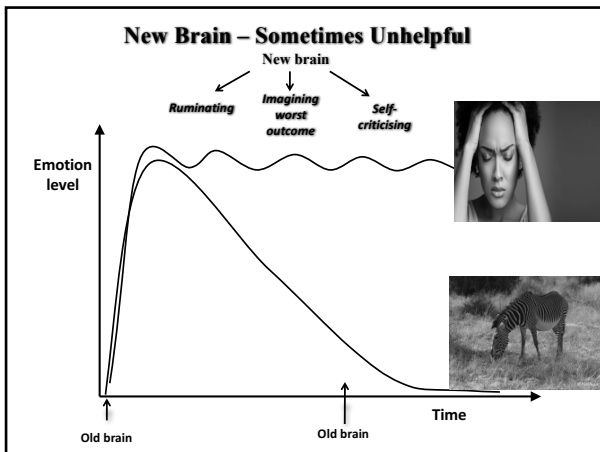
1. **Evolution has shaped us - we are an emergent, species in the 'flow of life' so our brains, with their motives, emotions and competencies are products of evolution, designed to function in certain ways**
2. **We are biological, gene built creatures - our lives are short (25,000-30,000 days), decay and end, and are subject to various malfunctions and diseases – in a genetic lottery. Everything changes – the nature of impermanence – the nature of tragedy**
3. **We are socially shaped - the social circumstances of our lives, over which we have limited control, have major implications for the kinds of minds we have, the kind of person we become, the values we endorse, and the lives we live**

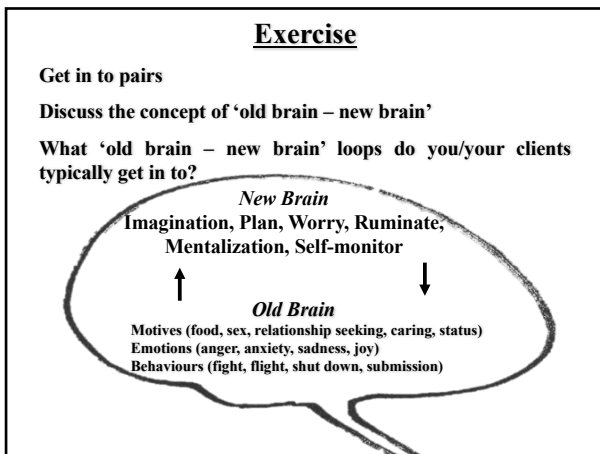
The brain itself is our biggest challenge!!!

Tricky Brain and its problematic loops



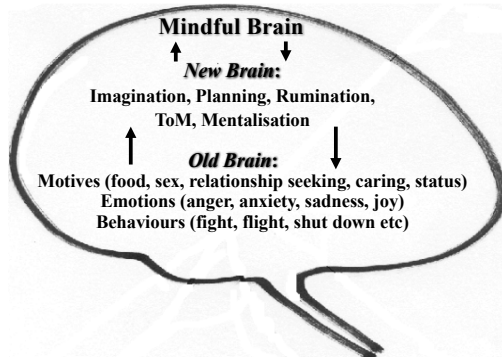






**Bringing Compassion:
What might help?**

What Helps? Mindfulness



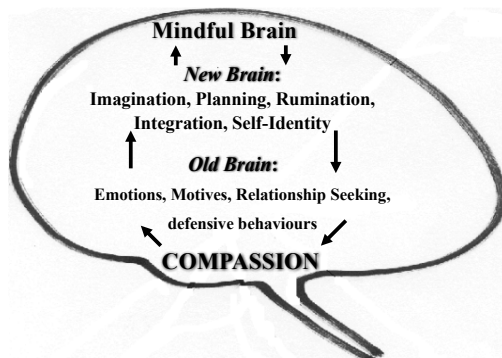
Mindfulness

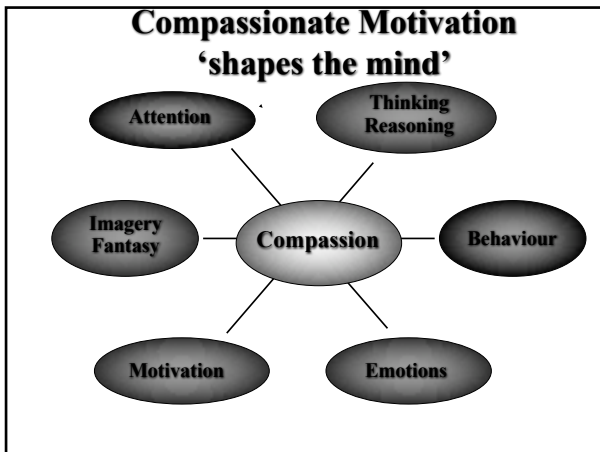
“Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment”, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Holding the attitude of observant curiosity - with acceptance of what arises

Mindfulness – can help to understand the “nature of mind” by studying and observing it – but this also helps to understand “nature’s mind”

Mindful Compassion Brain





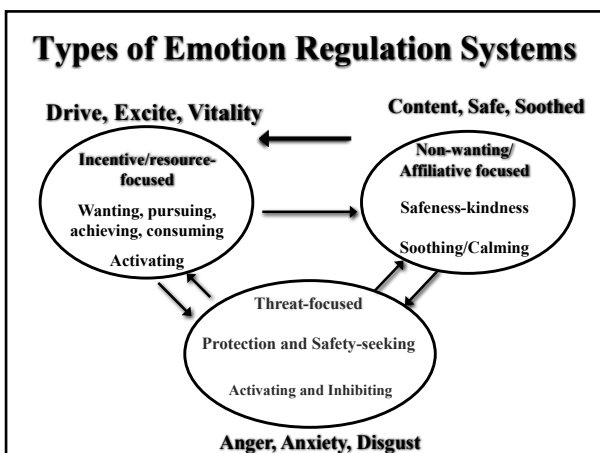
How are our motives and emotions organised?

Motives evolved because they help animals to survive, seek out things that are important (e.g. food, shelter, relationships, status, reproduction etc) and leave genes behind

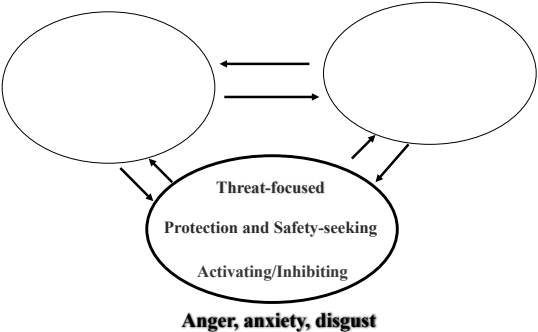
Emotions guide us to our motivations/goals and respond if we are succeeding or threatened

There are three types of emotion regulation systems

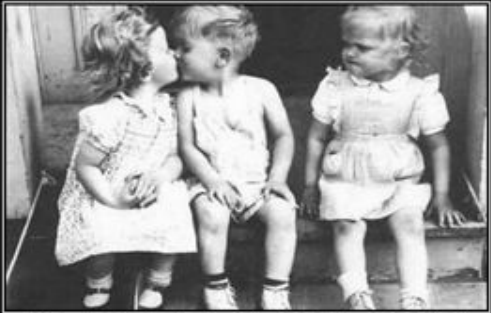
- 1. Those that focus on threat and self-protection**
- 2. Those that focus on doing and achieving**
- 3. Those that focus on contentment and feeling safe**



Types of Affect Regulator Systems

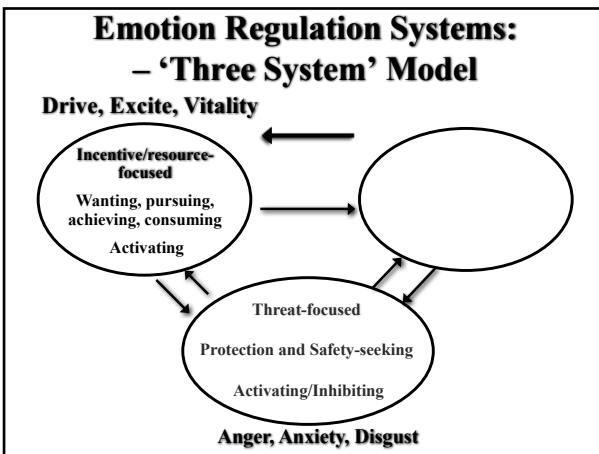






REJECTION
It starts from an early age. Get used to it!

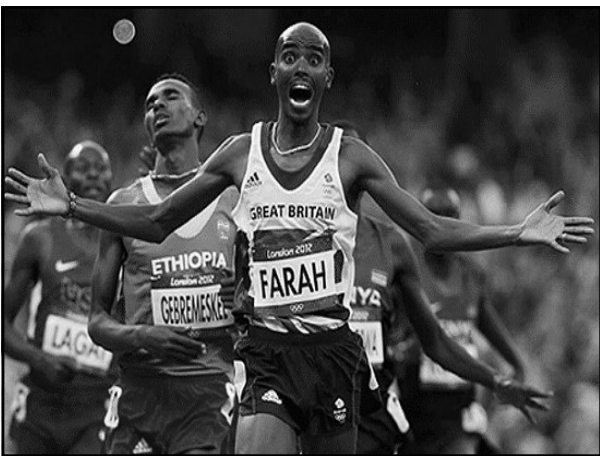




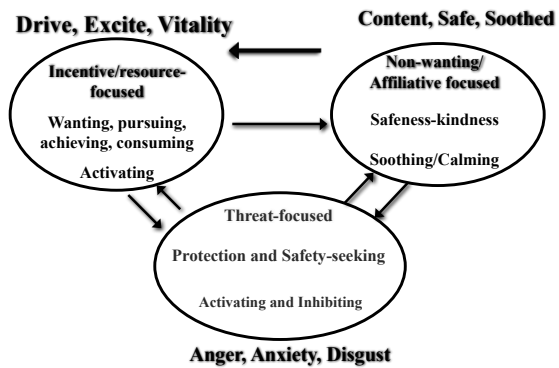




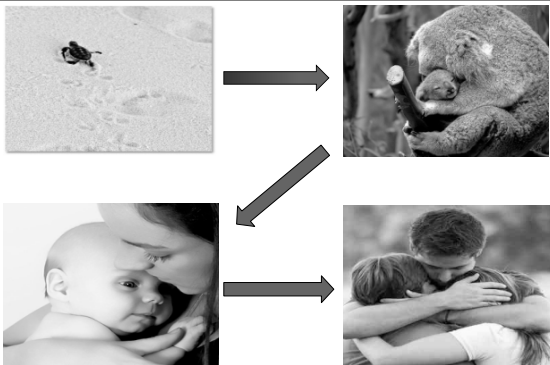




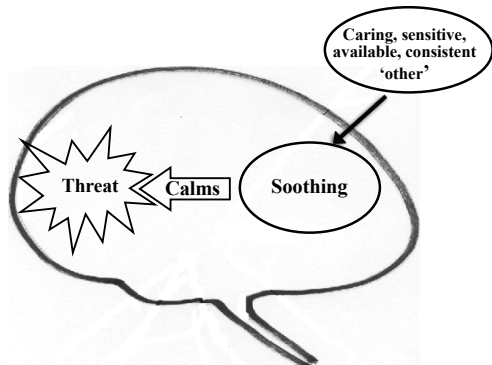
Types of Emotion Regulation Systems

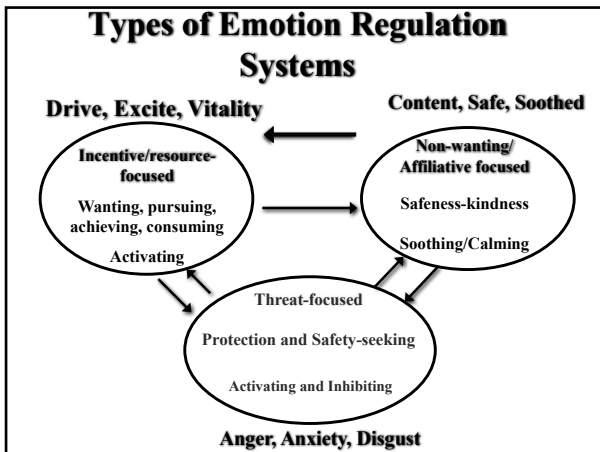


From dispersal and avoiding others...



Relationship between Threat and Soothing

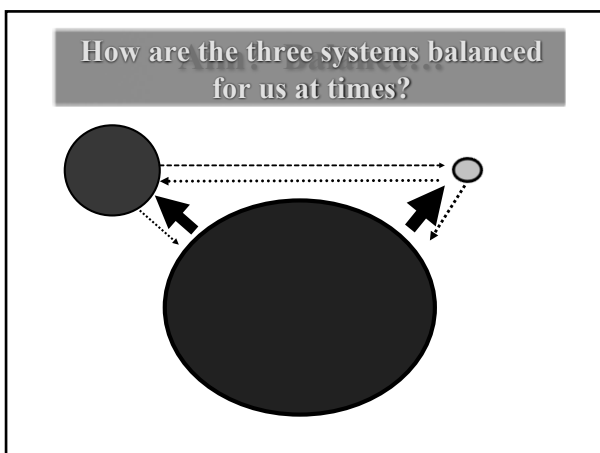




Exercise:

Get in to pairs

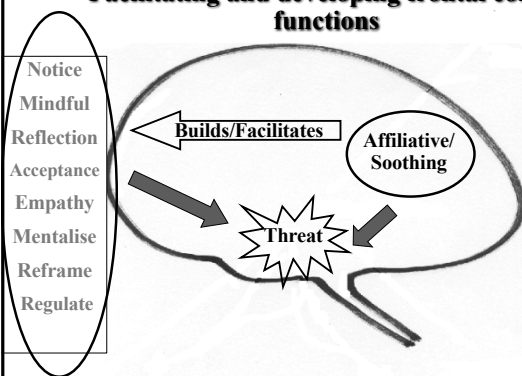
Discuss what experiences you/your clients have with each system



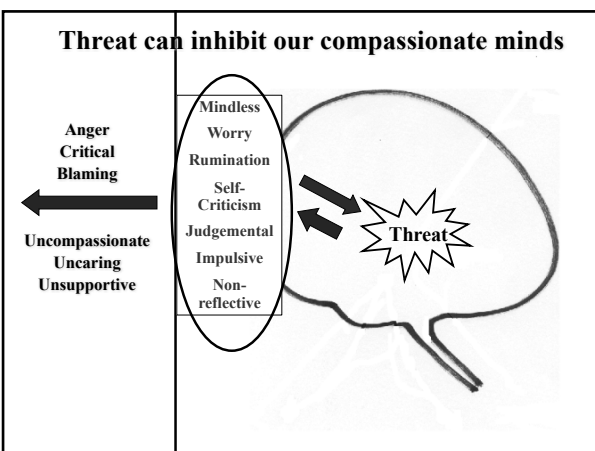
Exercise:

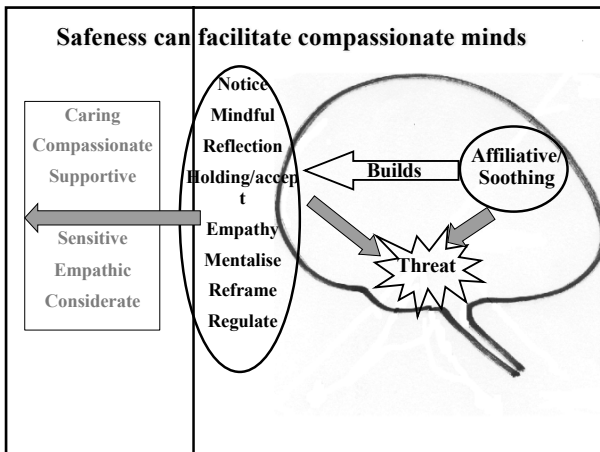
**Soothing Breathing Rhythm
and Soothing System Imagery**

**Facilitating and developing frontal cortex
functions**



Threat can inhibit our compassionate minds





So, basic philosophy is that...

We all *just find ourselves* here with a brain, emotions and sense of (socially made) self we did not choose but have to figure out

Life is difficult - involves dealing with tragedies (threats, losses, diseases, decay, death) and people do the best they can

All in the same boat – different genes/experiences could have led to different ‘version’ of ‘me’

Much of what goes on in our minds is not of ‘our design’ and not our fault – our experiences sensitise our old brain/threat system and new brain (e.g. self-criticism/rumination) leading to distress and suffering

Evolution has made our brains highly sensitive to kindness, and neuroscience is revealing that there are specific brain areas focused on detecting and responding to kindness and compassion

It can be helpful to try and train our minds to learn how to cope with this distress and suffering – the wisdom to not blame but a desire to take responsibility – cultivating compassion for ourselves

Compassion

from the Latin *com* - with
+ *pati* to bear, suffer

What is Compassion?

Compassion definition:

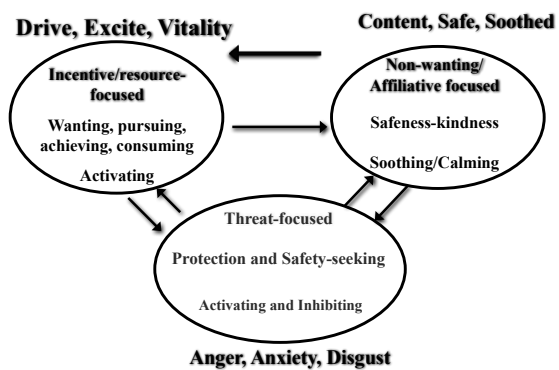
a sensitivity to the suffering of self and others (and its causes)
with a commitment to try to relieve it and prevent it

From CFT perspective, compassion linked to two very different psychologies, which we aim to develop:

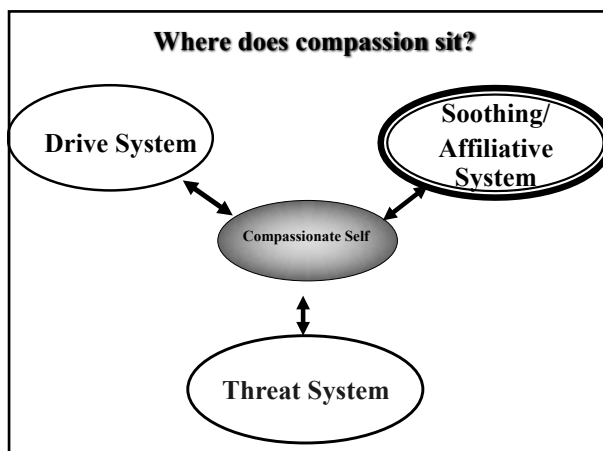
(1) the ability to *understand, approach* and *engage* with suffering and distress - **COURAGE**

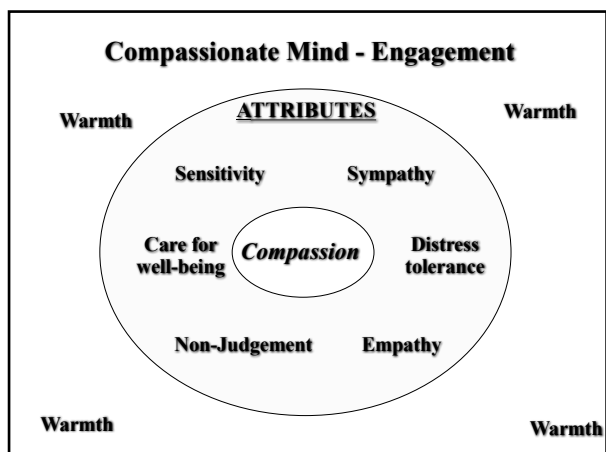
(2) The desire and motivation to *alleviate* suffering, uproot its causes and seek to prevent suffering in the future – **DEDICATION & WISDOM**

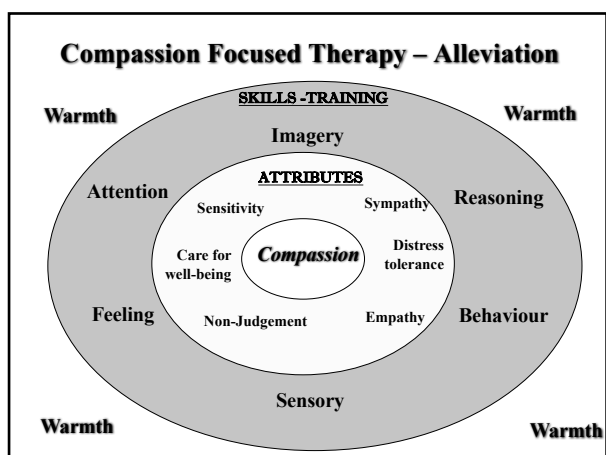
Types of Emotion Regulation Systems



Where does compassion sit?







Skills developed via therapy interventions	
Attention:	On what is/was helpful and what is needed – movable, ‘zoom in’ and ‘zoom out’ perspective
Feelings:	Cultivation of loving kindness, warmth, open affiliation, patience, slowing
Reasoning:	Evidence, alternatives and ‘not my fault’ understanding
Behaviour:	Commitment to practice, effort, courage – action
Imagery:	Different forms (based on memory, or creating ‘fantasy’ image) bringing into mind, using to integrate
Sensory:	Breathing, body posture, voice tones, Yoga

The Science of Compassion

Research

Mood/Mental Health/Therapy

CFT – effectiveness of therapy – depression, PTSD, ED, psychosis

Physiological/Biological

Practice of imagining compassion for others produces changes in frontal cortex & immune system (Pace et al, 2009)

Emotions

Loving-kindness meditation (compassion directed to self, others, & strangers) increases positive emotions (Frederickson et al, 2008)

Self-compassion associated with significantly lower levels of depression and anxiety symptoms, along with shame & anger (Gilbert, 2005; Neff et al., 2007)

Thinking

- Self-compassion and self-criticism $r = -.65^{**}$ (Neff, 2003)
- Self-compassion and rumination $r = -.50^{**}$ (Neff, 2003)
- Self-compassion and worry $r = -.62^{***}$ (Raes, 2010)

Behaviour

Breines & Chen (2012) found self-compassion group, in comparison to self-esteem group, had:

- greater motivation to make amends for a moral transgression
- more time studying for a difficult test following an initial failure
- greater motivation to change a perceived weakness

Condon et al (2013) – mindfulness & compassion meditators 5x more likely to direct compassion to a stranger in need than control group

Relationships

Neff and Beretvas (2012)

- people high in SC reported by partners to be more caring, higher in acceptance and allow greater autonomy
- those low in SC reported as more detached, domineering, controlling and verbally aggressive
- higher SC linked to greater relationship satisfaction

**Developing a Compassionate
Mind**

Training: Imagery

Compassion as Flow
Different practices for each

Self \longrightarrow **Other**

Other \longrightarrow **Self**

Self \longrightarrow **Self**

Flow of Compassion
Compassion from Another

Creating a Compassionate Other

Act of creating an ideal compassionate other (what one would like for oneself) can be an important step in cultivating a compassionate mind

Helps to spend some time finding the type of image and form of relationship that fits for you – images often change

This can be an Inner: Nurturer, Guide, Friend, Mentor, Fellow Traveller; Bodhisattva - Ideal Compassionate Other

Consider what key qualities are important to you that your ICO has

Developing Compassion Images

Ideal caring and compassionate image - define ideal as everything you would want or need

Caring as a genuine desire for one's well-being – commitment and motivation to be helpful and supportive

Wisdom a sentient mind who understands the struggles of humanity and of you. Empathic stance, wise and non-blaming – understands we have a 'tricky brain'

Strength as 'calm authority' fortitude, endurance, complete benevolence – strong and courageous

Exercise:

Creating your Ideal Compassionate Other

Flow of Compassion

Self → **Other**

Developing the Compassionate Self

Why try and create a 'compassionate self'?

Evidence that imagining & practicing of a particular 'self' shapes the mind

Practicing Compassionate Self associated with increase in compassion & positive emotion, self-criticism, depression and stress (Matos & Gilbert, submitted)

Practicing 'best possible self' and relating to difficulties from this associated with increased ability to cope and optimism (e.g. Meevissen et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2010)

Increases motivation to engage in difficulties (Breines & Chen, 2012; Condon et al., 2013)

Linked to physiological benefits (Weng, 2013; Pace et al 2009)

Compassionate goals linked to increase in feelings of closeness, increased trust and social support over duration of semester – a 'supportive environment' (e.g. Crocker & Canevello, 2008)

Unique qualities of the compassionate self

Caring Commitment arises from seeing clearly into the nature of suffering and cultivating a heartfelt wish to alleviate suffering and conditions that give rise to suffering – desire to be supportive and helpful

Wisdom – arises from insight into the *non-personal* nature of the flow of life. How our genes and social conditions shape us – give rise to our inner experience. We don't choose much of what goes on in our mind – but take responsibility for what we can

Strength and a sense of inner confidence and authority that arises from body grounding, inner stilling and wisdom.

Exercise:

Creating your Ideal Compassionate Self

Other-Focused from the Compassionate Self

Sit comfortably in chair with soothing breathing rhythm. Work on getting into the compassionate self. Now imagine focusing on the 'heartfelt wish for somebody you love to be happy and at peace' (this can later extend outwards to eventually all beings).

Use the mantra on the out breath "May you find peace; may you be happy"

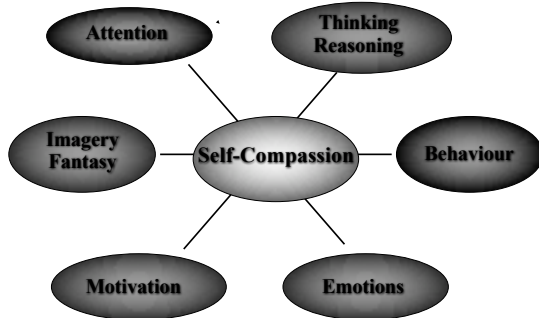
Have a focus start work on the *joy* if this could be true

Notice any blocks, resistances or fears that emerge (i.e. look out for threat system)

Flow of Compassion

Self → **Self**
(self-compassion)

Expressing Self Compassion – Different Ways



Exercise:

Directing your Compassionate Self

Self-Compassion

Self-Focused from the Compassionate Self

Sit comfortably in chair with soothing breathing rhythm. Work on getting into the compassion self. Now imagine focusing on your own desire to be happy. Use the mantra on the out breath "May I find peace; may I be happy". Sometimes it helps to use your name.

Have a focus on the joy - if this could be true

Explore people's experience - reflection/meditation and fears, blocks and resistances

Some therapy 'interventions' (with a CFT twist!)

- Compassionate letter writing
- Compassionate thought forms
- Compassionate chair work
- Compassionate voice tones
- Behavioural experiments (via CS)
- Gratitude focusing
- Joyfulness focusing
- Taking an interest in others & working for their benefit
- Acts of kindness

Care For Well-Being: What Do You Wish to Be?

Don't worry if can't get the 'feeling' - the wish (desire, motivation, intention) comes first, and then the feeling

There is a story attributed to Native American wisdom, that links nicely to how we might 'see' different parts of us:

One evening a grandfather was teaching his young grandson about the internal battle that each person faces. "There are two wolves struggling inside each of us," the old man said. "One wolf is vengeful, angry, resentful, self-pitying and scared...the other wolf is compassionate, faithful, hopeful, and caring..."

The grandson sat, thinking, then asked: "Which wolf wins, Grandfather?"

His grandfather replied, "The one you feed."

The
Compassionate
Mind
Workbook

A step-by-step guide to
developing your compassionate self



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