



Building Self-Compassion

Module 6

Self-Compassionate Behaviour

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Introduction

Ideally you are now able to think in more compassionate ways, which is hopefully having a positive impact on how you feel emotionally, how you feel physically, and may also be having flow on effects to how you behave. In this module we will take a closer look at the 'doing' side of things, looking at what it means to be more compassionate in your behaviour.

Now this is a tricky one. There is no single behaviour that goes with being self-compassionate. Depending on your circumstances, very different types of behaviours will be helpful. So, to try to simplify this, we have divided self-compassionate behaviours into three categories, and it is likely that a little bit from each category will be needed by most people. These three categories of self-compassionate behaviours involve: taking care of ourselves, taking care of others, and taking care of business (i.e., attending to things that we need to, or have to, do). Let's look at each in turn now...

Taking Care of Ourselves



The idea of being kind and caring towards yourself, in how you treat yourself and how you spend your time, is probably the most obvious self-compassionate behaviour that comes to mind. Doing kind things for ourselves regularly can act as a sort of prevention or buffer when it comes to experiencing emotional pain. Doing kind things for ourselves particularly when we are struggling, just as we would do to try and help a friend in need, can help us to cope and move through difficult emotional experiences.

Taking care of ourselves by being very considered about the activities we engage in, is often referred to as self-soothing or self-nurturing. Self-soothing tends to involve purposely participating in activities that provide a sense of warmth and being cared for, and that help us to get through tough times.

People will differ greatly in terms of what they find self-soothing. One person's idea of treating themselves well could be someone else's nightmare. The idea is to experiment with various activities to find out what feels good to you, and find out what feels like you are showing care and kindness towards yourself. On page 3 is a list of possible self-soothing activities. The idea is not that you have to use each activity on the list, but that some may appeal to you to try and others won't. Also, by having a large list, it may help you to brainstorm other self-soothing activities that may work for you.

Look at the list and underline any activities you may like to experiment with generally or when you are next struggling in some way. Also feel free to add other activities that come to mind in the space provided. **The aim of these activities is not to take your emotional pain away or to solve the problem at hand, but to see what happens when you choose to be kind to yourself by involving yourself in self-soothing activities.**



| SELF-SOOTHING ACTIVITIES: | |
|--|--|
| Make a nice meal or snack for yourself Go out for a nice meal or snack Enjoy a favourite drink (non-alcohol) Go to a favourite cafe Have a picnic Meet with a friend for coffee, lunch, a walk, etc. Phone a friend to chat Take a walk in lovely surroundings Look at beautiful art or scenery Go to a beautiful place Enjoy time in the sunshine Go to the beach Light a candle Watch the stars Put on soothing or enjoyable music Enjoy the sounds of nature Sing Use a favourite perfume or lotion Enjoy the smells of nature or flowers Have a bubble bath Have a long shower | Have a massage Pamper yourself Soak your feet Gently brush your hair Do your nails Read a good book or magazine Watch a good movie or TV show Pat your dog or cat Hug yourself Hug someone else Imagine a relaxing scene or safe place Do some relaxation or meditation Do some slow breathing Smile to yourself Laugh out loud Take a break (enjoy staying in bed for 20mins) Others: |

When we try to change our behaviour by trying new activities, it is important to come up with a specific plan of what we are going to do and when we are going to do it.

Ideally it would be great to plan one specific self-soothing activity that you can try each day. Not every activity has to be time consuming, and some should be quite easy to incorporate into your day, it just requires a bit of planning. However, if one activity per day seems like too much at this stage, then pick whatever is manageable for you at the moment, and then build on that over the coming weeks.

At the end of this module you will see a weekly activity schedule that you can use to assist you in planning your new activities for the week. Have a look at the activities you underlined from the list of *Self-Soothing Activities*. From those that you underlined, start slotting some of these activities into your schedule for the coming week - these then become your **pre-planned self-soothing activities** for the week ahead.

Whilst it is very useful to have pre-planned self-soothing activities in your day, it is also helpful to have another relatively easy activity that you can use as required. That is, a self-soothing activity that you can try whenever you notice you are going through a tough moment throughout the day, and need to show yourself a little compassion. An example might be having a favourite song or meditation track saved on your mobile phone that you can play any time you need, or carrying a favourite hand lotion with you that you can apply at any time.

Identify which **as required self-soothing activities** you would consider experimenting with over the coming weeks whenever you need some compassion.

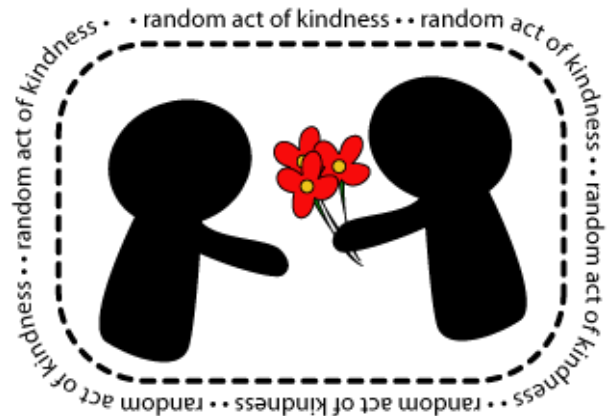
Try to remember that taking care of yourself is about showing yourself the same care and kindness you would show a friend who was upset. It is likely that if it was a friend who was struggling, you would try to comfort them and try to do something nice for them, to cheer them up. This is about behaving in that

same way towards yourself. Now the only way to get over the initial 'yuk' factor that can sometimes arise for people when they first try to treat themselves kindly, is to keep trying. Initially, treating yourself this way will be unfamiliar and therefore may feel a bit weird. But like anything, if you keep doing it you'll eventually get used to it. Hey, you may even like it at some point. So give it a go, what have you got to lose?

Taking Care of Others

Building our own self-compassion can also be helped along by showing compassion towards others. The more time we spend being compassionate, whether that be directed internally towards helping ourselves or externally towards helping others, the more our soothe system is active, and hence the better it is for our general mental health and well-being.

Now, let's think specifically about how we might show kindness and gratitude towards the people around us, both close loved ones and also perfect strangers. It is important to clarify that the idea of 'taking care of others' should never come at the expense of 'taking care of ourselves', both are equally important. It is often important to take care of ourselves, so we then have the energy and capacity to be able to take care of others. You know when you are on a plane and you hear the safety message about putting the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping others, well the same goes here. Make sure you have prioritised those self-soothing activities from the last section, and then you will be in a good position to show that same kindness to others.



Another important point to consider is that 'taking care of others' isn't the same as just being passive, unassertive, or submissive to other people's demands. It isn't just doing what others tell you to do. Taking care of others should be motivated from a kindness within us that we want to show others in some way through our kind behaviour. It is not about just surrendering to others and doing things others tell us to do, that we don't really want to be doing.

When thinking about the different ways we could go about taking care of others, below are a few ideas to help get you started. You may be able to think of other ways you could show kindness to a partner, family member, friend, or stranger, that aren't on the lists below.

- **Thank someone close to me for the things they do for me.** For example, giving a hug and telling the person how much I appreciate them for... making meals for me/ driving me places/ helping around the house/ listening to me/ spending time with me, etc.
- **Plan a kind act or gesture for someone I care about.** For example, making or organising a surprise dinner, an outing, or a pampering session, etc.
- **Do something caring to cheer-up someone I care about.** For example, making them a gift, or taking them for a picnic or beach walk or movie, or spending time showing interest and listening to their troubles, etc.
- **Compliment someone I care about.** For example, telling them what I like or love about them...their sense of humour, their caring nature, their intelligence, their loyalty, their integrity, their patience, their tenacity, etc.

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- **Show kindness to strangers.** For example, offering to help someone struggling with heavy bags, offering my seat to someone on the bus, telling someone in customer service how helpful they have been, etc.

First think of specific people in your life you would like to show kindness towards (i.e., your partner, particular family members, particular friends, work colleagues or classmates, or certain strangers you tend to encounter in your daily life). When you have some people in mind, then list the things that you would like to do for these people more often over the coming weeks. Now, some of these things may need to be spontaneous as the opportunity arises (e.g., next time you see someone who needs a seat on the bus). But some will be able to be pre-planned into your week. Again where possible, use the weekly activity schedule at the end of this module to get more specific with what you will do, and also plan when you will do it.

People I would like to show kindness to are:

What I can do to show kindness is:

Once you start to do kind things for others, pay attention to the impact your compassionate actions have on yourself and on the people around you. How do you feel when you do kind things for others? How do people respond to you? What does it do for the quality of your relationships? Whilst we can certainly do with more compassion for ourselves, the world more broadly could do with a bit more compassion too, and your kind actions towards others will contribute to this.

Taking Care of Business



As we have said in earlier modules, compassion is not just about the warm and fuzzy kind stuff, which is of course very important and not to be underestimated. But being compassionate also involves some hard stuff, like courage and strength to face our struggles, and doing what is needed to alleviate our struggles.

This is where the idea of 'taking care of business' comes in.

This really relates to if there is a problem, then facing the problem rather than running away from it, and doing what we

can to try to overcome it. This doesn't mean that all problems can be overcome, and under those circumstances, taking care of ourselves with self-soothing activities and self-compassionate thinking (see Module 5), will be particularly important to help us cope through a difficult time that we can't do much about.



However, with many problems there may be things we can try, actions we can take, and doing these things may lead us to feel a bit less helpless and a bit less hopeless.

Different circumstances and different problems will call for different compassionate actions. But as a rule of thumb, a guiding principle that can sometimes help is the idea that if the situation is objectively safe (i.e., others do it with no real harm to them), then try '**acting opposite**' to what your threat system is telling you to do. That is, opposite to what the anxiety or anger or depression is telling you to do. See the following 'Acting Opposite Guide' to give you a few ideas...



'Acting Opposite' Guide

| Threat System says... | Instead Do the Opposite... |
|--|---|
| * Avoid things I need or would like to be doing, because it makes me anxious | Don't avoid situations that make you anxious. If it is realistically a safe situation, then find ways to gradually face these situations and stay in them, until you have ridden through the anxiety. By repeatedly doing this, you will slowly build confidence that the situation is safe and you can cope with anxiety. |
| Give up because there is nothing I can do about this problem | Don't give up, try problem solving . Be clear about what the problem is, and then think up all the possible ways of solving the problem. Shortlist a few of the best solutions and think through the pros and cons of each. Then pick one of the solutions you would like to try, and break it down into the steps involved in implementing the solution. Start with the first step and keep going. If it doesn't work, return to one of your other solutions and give that a try. |
| * Procrastinate and put off things that need to be done because it is too hard, too scary, too boring, etc. | Get started . Break the task down into steps. What is the first smallest step that needs to be done? Start with that no matter how you feel. Once you get going you may find things get easier. |
| Escape or numb the problems and my feelings by using alcohol or drugs,* restricting my food or binge eating, self-harming, etc. | Instead show yourself compassion by thinking compassionately (e.g., compassionate thought diary or compassionate letter writing) and taking care of yourself (i.e., self-soothing activities, reduce alcohol and drugs use, healthy regular eating, etc). |
| Isolate myself from everyone and everything so I don't get hurt | Instead take care of yourself (i.e., self-soothing activities) and take care of others (i.e., connect with others by doing kind things for them). |
| *Be passive to others' demands or be aggressive towards others | Communicate with others assertively . Express your needs clearly and calmly, hear the other person's point of view, and then work together to negotiate a good outcome where your needs are considered and often met. |
| Don't forgive people, because they will just hurt me again | If not forgiving someone is causing you a lot of pain, consider accepting and letting go of past hurt. Thinking compassionately (e.g., compassionate thought diary or compassionate letter writing) might help you work through this past hurt. Remember, you can forgive yet still put boundaries in place to protect yourself from being hurt again. |

***Note:** This module gives some very general ideas about how to overcome general avoidance behaviours. If you identify very strongly with your avoidance being specifically related to social situations, or fear of having a panic attack, or fear of having a serious health problem, then you may want to look at the 'Shy No Longer', 'Panic Stations' and 'Helping Health Anxiety' Information packages respectively to target these specific problems. In addition, if you need further help with some of the acting opposite behaviours mentioned, there are other Infopax available that may be of assistance (e.g., 'Assert Yourself', 'Put Off Procrastinating', 'Overcoming Disordered Eating').

Now, let's think about how these 'Acting Opposite' ideas apply to you. What business do you need to take care of? Is there a certain problem or situation you need to be facing or addressing in your life? Is there something you need to deal with and overcome to make life better for you?

Here is an example of how to get clearer and more specific about what needs to be done. Have a read through and then have a go for yourself.

The problem area for me is:

Socialising with people my age

The threat system tells me:

Don't do it, they won't like me, I won't fit in

To act opposite I need to:

Socialise more with people my age even though it scares me. It is the only way I will start to overcome this, and I really want to make some more friends.

The steps involved in starting to overcome this problem area are:

- 1) Accept invitations from my existing friends to go to social events*
- 2) Start making small talk more with the people at work*
- 3) Make an effort to talk more to general strangers when I am out and about, at the shops, etc.*
- 4) Research a social/hobby/sport group I could join*
- 5) Go along to a group and talk to at least 2 people*
- 6) Go along to more groups and talk to the people I meet.*

The problem area for me is:

The threat system tells me:

To act opposite I need to:

The steps involved in starting to overcome this problem area are:

Now plan at least the first step into your weekly schedule. If this step feels like too much too soon, see if you can break this step down even further to make it more manageable.

If you are struggling to know what the compassionate behaviour is for a particular situation, slow your breathing and get in touch with your compassionate image, and then see what advice your compassionate image would give about how to handle the situation or problem you are facing.

We understand that acting opposite is often challenging, and can bring up your self-critical thinking especially when things do not go as planned. Be aware if this is occurring and remember to use your slow breathing and compassionate image to activate a compassionate attitude when approaching the tasks you've set for yourself.

Weekly Activity Schedule

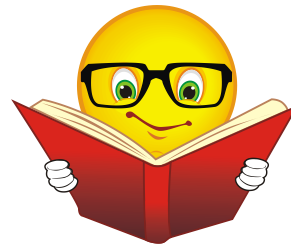


Use the schedule below to plan your activities for the coming week. Make sure self-soothing activities that are aimed at taking care of yourself are a priority. Also schedule any activities that involve taking care of others or taking care of business. Be clear about what you will do and when you will do it. If for some reason you don't end up completing a planned activity, don't criticise yourself. Instead treat yourself with compassion, and make a plan for when you will reschedule the activity.

| | Mon | Tues | Wed | Thur | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|-------------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| 8 to 9am | | | | | | | |
| 9 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 10 to 11 | | | | | | | |
| 11 to 12pm | | | | | | | |
| 12 to 1 | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 2 | | | | | | | |
| 2 to 3 | | | | | | | |
| 3 to 4 | | | | | | | |
| 4 to 5 | | | | | | | |
| 5 to 6 | | | | | | | |
| 6 to 7 | | | | | | | |
| 7 to 8 | | | | | | | |
| 8 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 10 to 12 am | | | | | | | |

Module Summary

- There is no single behaviour that goes with being self-compassionate. Depending on your circumstances, very different types of behaviours will be helpful. To simplify, we can break compassionate behaviours into three categories: taking care of ourselves, taking care of others, and taking care of business.
- Taking care of ourselves by purposely engaging in self-soothing activities is a priority when it comes to self-compassion. Self-soothing involves participating in nurturing activities that give us a sense of warmth, being cared for, and can help us get through tough times. It is important to pre-plan these regularly into our week, and have specific activities in mind that can be easily used as required when we are struggling emotionally.
- Behaving compassionately by taking care of others can also strengthen our compassionate side. Think of how you can show kindness to a partner, family member, friend or stranger, and notice the impact that your kindness has on you and the other person.
- Behaving compassionately can also require courage and strength as we need to take care of business. This means facing problems and taking action rather than avoiding, giving up, procrastinating, escaping or numbing our feelings, isolating ourselves, being passive or aggressive, and not forgiving others. As a rough guide, when the threat system is being unreasonable and oversensitive, try acting opposite to what it is telling you to do.
- When making changes to our behaviour it is important to plan what we are going to do and when we are going to do it. Use the Weekly Activity Schedule to help you with this process.



Coming up next ...

In Module 7, we will wrap things up and look at how you can maintain living a compassionate life over the long term...

About The Modules

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BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in these modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Compassion Focused Therapy, which is an extension of and adjunct to Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy. These modules particularly draw on the work of Paul Gilbert and Kristen Neff.

REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references that informed the development of modules in this information package.

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