



Building Self-Compassion

Module 7

Self-Compassionate Living

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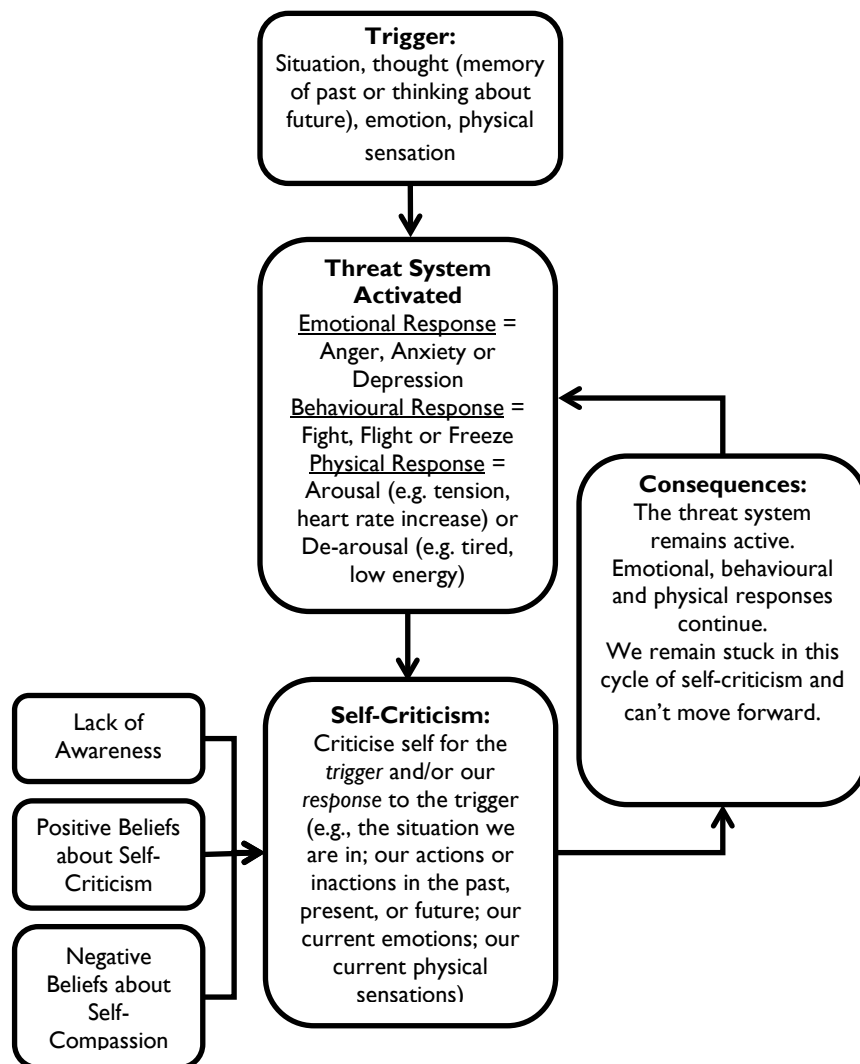
Introduction

As we have said, building self-compassion is not a quick fix. It is likely that by now you are well on your way to developing a more compassionate side to yourself, and you are able to activate and recruit this part of you to help out when you are struggling with life. However, it is likely that this is still a work in progress. It is likely that you are still experimenting with this new compassionate way of talking to and treating yourself, and some days it will work well and other days will be more difficult. All of this is normal and natural when we start to make changes to our usual way of being.

So for our final Module, we will consider how to maintain and further the self-compassion you have been developing, and over time strengthen this new part of yourself. Self-compassion is something we all constantly need to work at. During times when it is harder for us to take a compassionate tone with ourselves, it is important that we are clear about exactly what we need to do to get back on the self-compassion track, to get back to self-compassionate living.

From Self-Criticism to Self-Kindness

If you remember back to Module 1, we looked at the cycle of self-criticism which looked like this:



Through the work we have done over this series of modules, you are now in a position to be able to reverse this cycle, and take what was initially an unhelpful self-critical cycle and turn it into a healthy cycle of self-compassion.

To make this transition we have done a number of things. We have dealt with some of the factors contributing to our tendency to criticise ourselves. Firstly, we have addressed the positive beliefs about self-criticism and negative beliefs about self-compassion that can hinder giving up self-critical ways and embracing self-compassionate ways (Module 2).

We have also increased our awareness of our own suffering and self-critical responses, via mindfulness-based attention retraining exercises (i.e., *Mundane Task Focusing and Meditation* in Module 3). With this increased awareness, we are now in a better position to choose to respond differently when our threat system is activated. We are now in a position to choose a more self-compassionate response.

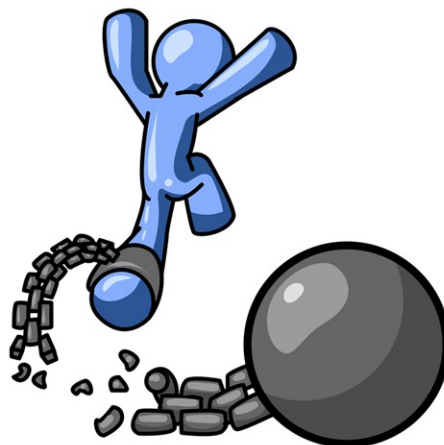
Responding self-compassionately involves a number of steps, which are shown in the Self-Compassion Cycle on page 4.

Firstly, we use our **Slow Breathing** (Module 3) and **Compassionate Image** (Module 4), as our 'key' to turning on a compassionate mindset within us, and **activating the soothe system**.

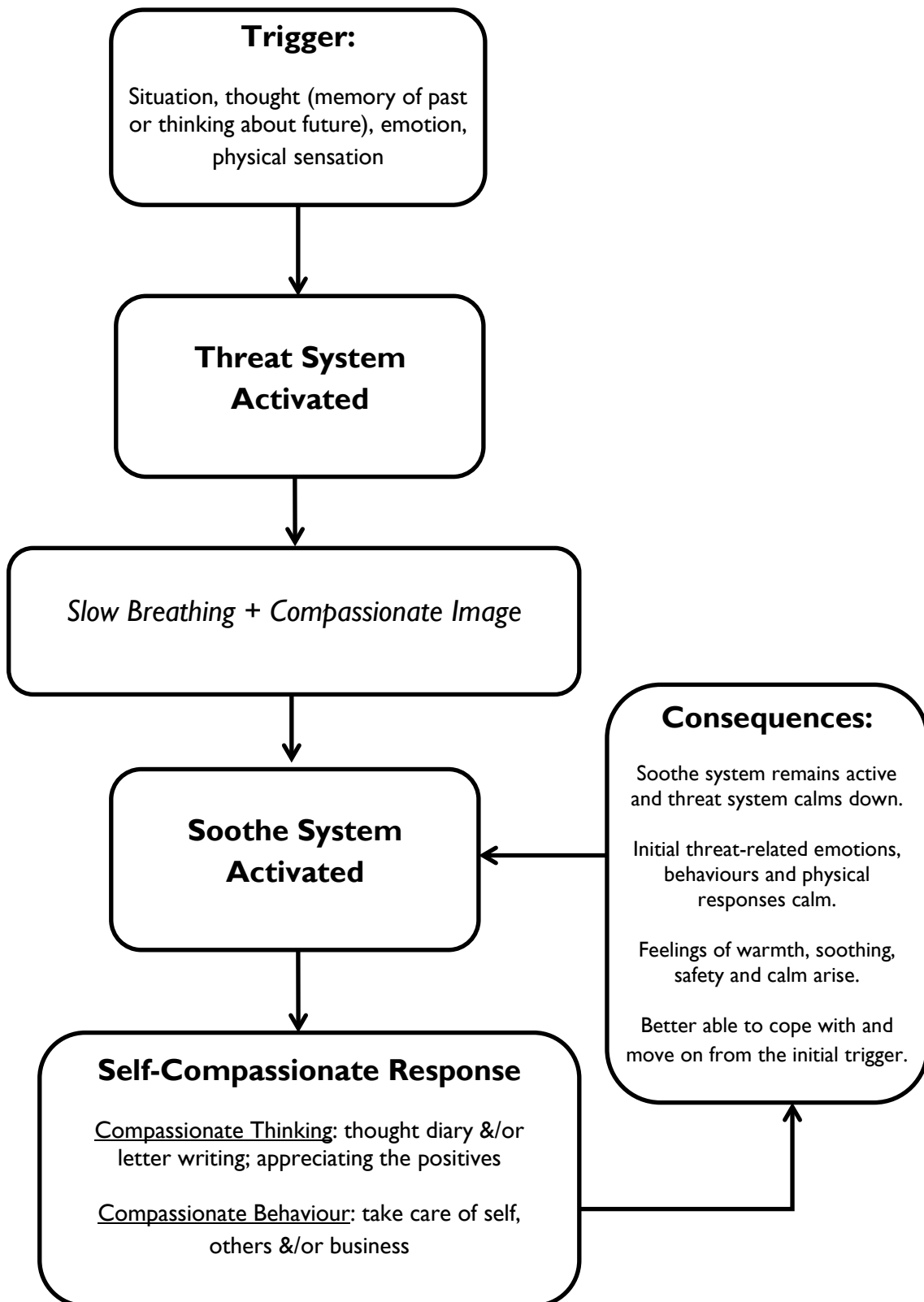
With the soothe system active, we are then in a better position to be able to **think in more self-compassionate ways**, using *Compassionate Thought Diaries* and *Compassionate Letter Writing* when we are struggling with something in particular, and more broadly *Appreciating the Positives* in our general day to day life (Module 5).

We are also in a better position to **behave in more compassionate ways** by *taking care of ourselves* in self-soothing ways, *taking care of others* by being actively kind to people close to us as well as strangers, and *taking care of business* and facing the problems or situations in our life that need to be dealt with (Module 6).

The self-compassion cycle then shows the **consequences** of responding in this new self-compassionate manner. Remember, the threat and soothe systems can't be active at the same time as they are incompatible experiences. By responding in self-compassionate ways, the soothe system that was kick-started with our slow breathing and compassionate image, is then able to remain active and hence calm the threat system and all of its emotional (i.e., anger, anxiety, depression), behavioural (i.e., fight, flight, freeze) and physical responses (i.e., arousal or de-arousal). In doing so, we start to make room for feelings of warmth, soothing, safety and calm. Being in soothe mode, and hence being able to think and behave in self-compassionate ways, then allows for better coping. With better coping we can then move on from whatever triggered our threat system in the first place, rather than staying stuck.



The Self-Compassion Cycle



My Self-Compassion Action Plan

Stepping out of the self-critical cycle and stepping into the self-compassion cycle, will happen relatively easily at times and at other times will be more difficult. With this in mind, it is important to plan for the difficult times, when self-compassion isn't happening naturally for us. Developing a *Self-Compassion Action Plan* that details what to do at those difficult times can be really helpful. It is important to fill in the blanks below, and then place the action plan somewhere that you can access it easily whenever you need it, to remind yourself of what to do to get your self-compassion back up and running during hard times.



My Triggers (What are the sorts of things that trigger distress, suffering, pain, or self-criticism for me? These can be specific situations, problems or people, thinking about the past or the future, or experiencing certain emotions or physical sensations that I might struggle with.)

My Warning Signs (What are the signs that indicate I am suffering and/or criticising myself and need to be more compassionate towards myself? These could be the typical self-critical phrases I say to myself, particular unpleasant emotions or physical sensations, or how my behaviour changes and becomes unhelpful when I am having difficulties.)

My Action Plan (These are the things I need to do when I am struggling):

1. *Slow Breathing*
2. Use my *Compassionate Image* which is _____
3. Keep doing steps 1 & 2 until I start to feel a sense of calming
4. Practice brief compassionate thinking by saying something like the following comforting statements to myself (feel free to reword these to something you like more, as long as it is offering general words of comfort/encouragement):
 - *This is really hard and I am sorry this is happening*
 - *What I am feeling is ok, everyone experiences this, I am not alone*
 - *I need some compassion right now, focus on being kind to myself now*
5. Take care of myself by doing one of my *Self-Soothing Activities* such as _____

6. If I am still struggling practise more compassionate thinking by using a *Compassionate Thought Diary* and/or *Compassionate Letter Writing* to deal with whatever is bothering me.
7. If I am still struggling, ask myself if there is a problem I need to address and use '*Opposite Action*' to deal with this. This generally means breaking down the problem into steps and facing it rather than running away from it.
8. If I am still struggling, keep doing my breathing, compassionate image and self-soothing activities to help me get through this tough time.

My Self-Compassion Maintenance Plan

Your *Self-Compassion Action Plan* is really about what to do in times of struggle. In addition to this, it can be helpful to be clear about what you can do in your general day-to-day life when you aren't struggling, that might help you to maintain your ability to be self-compassionate when needed. Developing a *Self-Compassion Maintenance Plan* can help to make sure that self-compassion continues to be a priority in your daily life. Check in with your maintenance plan regularly to make sure you are still on the road to self-compassion and haven't drifted off track.



My Maintenance Plan (These are the things I need to do on a regular basis):

1. Regularly practice my **Slow Breathing** and **Compassionate Image** so that I can call on them whenever I need. A good time to do this daily practice is _____
2. Find something (an object, picture, song, etc.) that represents my compassionate image, and find a way that it can be regularly incorporated into my daily life as a reminder of being self-compassionate. I can do this by _____

3. Appreciate the positives on a daily basis.
 - My *Pleasure Focusing Tasks* will be _____
 - A good time to fill out my *Appreciation Logbook* is _____
4. Regularly practice my attention-retraining exercises:
 - *Mundane Task Focusing*. Tasks I will use to practice are _____

 - *Meditation*. A good time to do this practice is _____
5. Regularly plan *Self-Soothing Activities* throughout my week like _____

6. Regularly plan ways to *take care of others* and show kindness to people in my life like _____

7. If any *business needs to be taken care of*, make sure I am continuing to work on it over time, planning each week how I can make some progress on it, like _____

A Final Note...

Being self-compassionate involves an acceptance of human imperfection. Acknowledge that you can never be perfectly compassionate towards yourself or others all the time. Instead, the more time you spend in compassion mode with your soothe system in charge, the more your mental health and well-being will thank you.

As already mentioned in Module 1, this series of modules may have been enough to deal with whatever struggles you are facing, or they may complement modules in other Infopax available that cover other more specific problems. You may have already done these other modules or you may now go on to do them. Whatever your situation, these *Building Self-Compassion* modules come from the perspective that it is not just what you think and do that is important, but also the attitude you adopt when you are thinking or doing anything. We would recommend that before using any other helpful thinking or behaviour strategies that you already know of or may go on to learn...first things first. Always first focus on your slow breathing and bring your compassionate image to mind.

Your slow breathing and compassionate image are your key to self-compassion, and your key to switching on the soothe system. With the soothe system 'on' and a compassionate attitude in your mind and heart, whatever you go on to do should then be maximally effective and helpful to you. Bringing an attitude of self-compassion to anything we do in life can help us experience more general contentment, and make any struggles that we may face that bit easier to weather.



Module Summary

- Responding to our triggers with self-compassion rather than self-criticism involves using our *Slow Breathing* and *Compassionate Image* to activate the soothe system. With the soothe system active, we are then in a better position to be able to think and behave in more self-compassionate ways. The consequence of this self-compassionate response is that the soothe system can then remain active, calming the threat system, generating feelings of warmth, soothing, safety and calm, and helping us to cope and move forward from our suffering.
- It is important to use your *Self-Compassion Action Plan* to help you through difficult times, and your *Self-Compassion Maintenance Plan* to make sure that self-compassion is a priority in your daily life.
- Congratulations! Well done on making it through these Modules. Now all it takes is practice, practice, practice. So, go ahead and continue to live a compassionate life!



The End!

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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“BUILDING SELF-COMPASSION”

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