

Self Compassion

Intro

Welcome back to session four - this session we are going to think about what it means to be kind to ourselves!

Scripture

Psalm 85:10 NKJV

"Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed."

Question

*Following the last session, how have you got on with your thoughts this week?
Have you been able to challenge any, or change the way you felt about something
by working with your thoughts?*

Self compassion

What is self compassion?

Self-Compassion is the kindness, care, warmth and understanding we give ourselves when faced with shortcomings, inadequacies and failures.

It is the care we offer ourselves when we make mistakes, embarrass ourselves or do not reach a goal we are trying to achieve. It is loving and accepting ourselves.

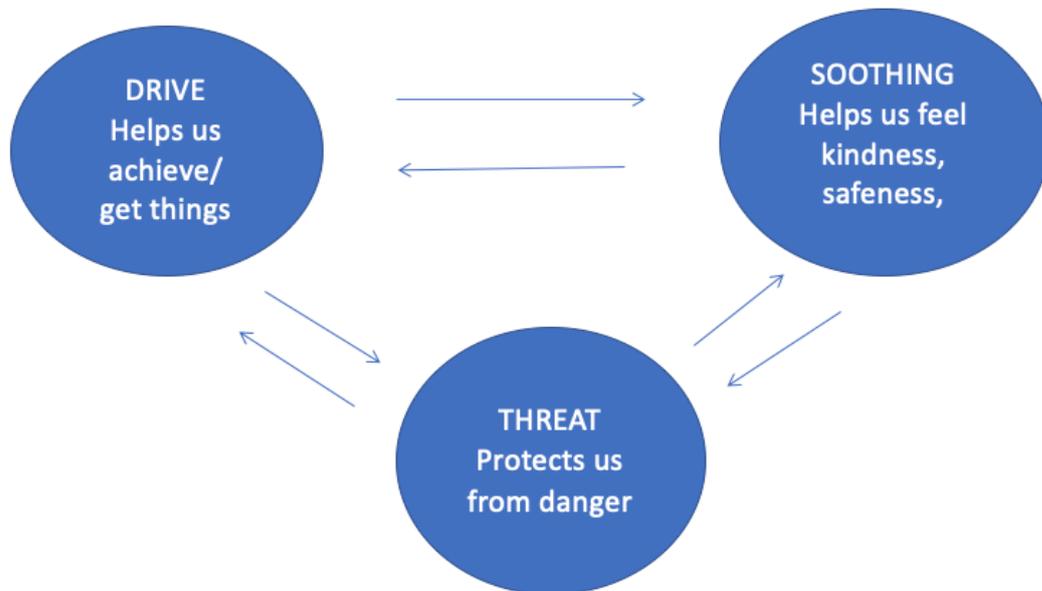
People who are self-compassionate are less likely to experience anxiety during stressful events, and are less likely to avoid challenging tasks.¹ They are less likely to be critical of themselves, anxious or depressed and in turn more life satisfaction.²

Understanding Our Brains

Professor Paul Gilbert who developed Compassion Focussed Therapy proposed that we have three main types of emotion regulation systems in the brain.³ Please see diagram below.

We regularly switch between these systems to manage our emotions and if the systems become imbalanced, it can cause distress. Difficult life experiences such as trauma can lead to an imbalance between these systems as we can learn to operate more in our threat and drive system and less in the soothing system. When we experience this imbalance, we can be more sensitive to fear and anxieties, more likely to be critical of ourselves and often have deep feeling of shame about things we may have done or experiences out of our control.

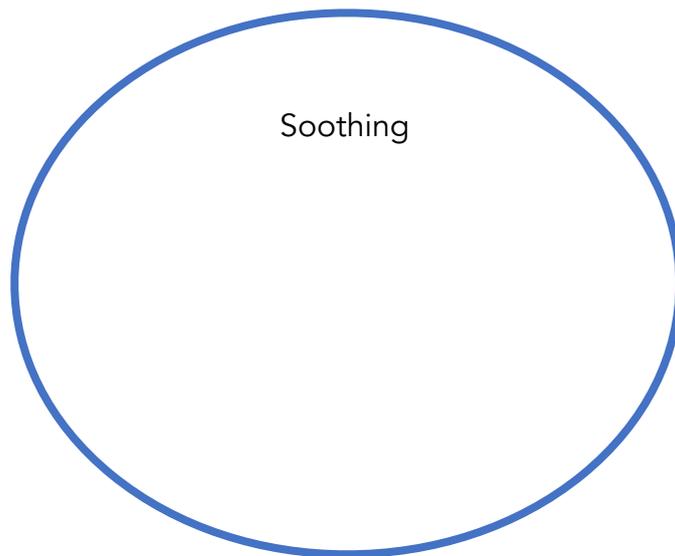
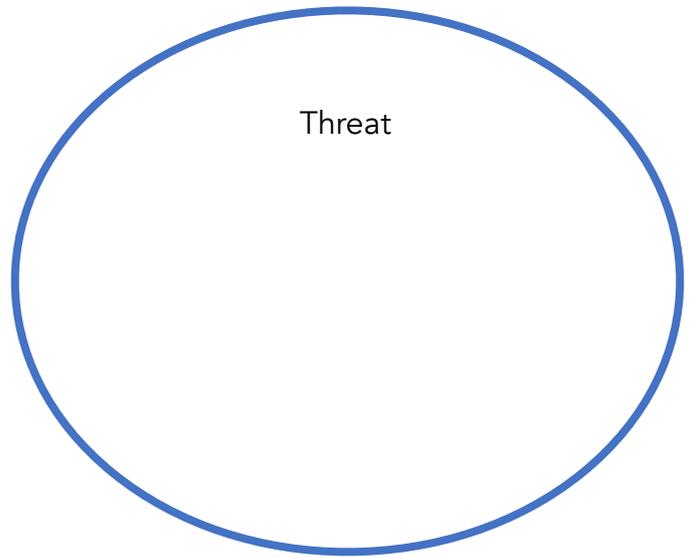
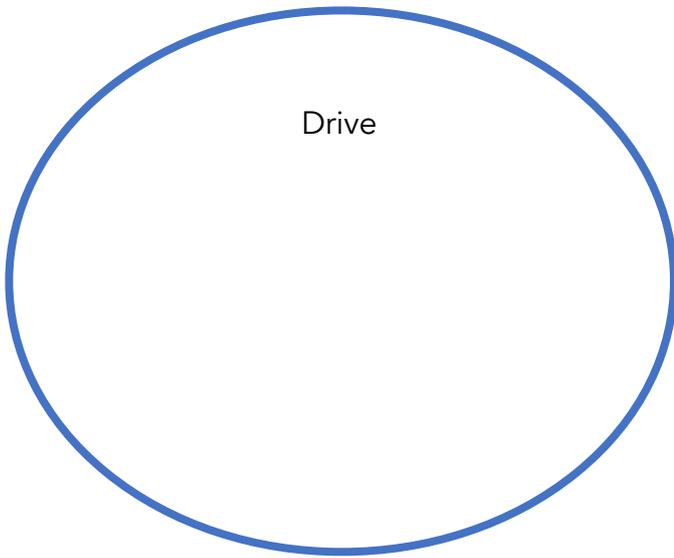
We need to activate our soothing system to help calm us down and bring us back into balance.



Activity

Can you think of a time when you felt threatened? How did that feel? Can you recognise when your threat system is making you feel more in danger than maybe you actually are?

Have a think about the different systems in your brain and what every day situations you think might activate each system. In the box below try drawing you own emotional regulation systems and fill out the different situations that activate your drive, threat and soothing system. This will help you to find ways to activate your soothing system if you are feeling anxious or distressed.



One way we can all activate the soothing system is by learning about compassion and the different ways to generate it. One of the way compassion can be generated is by being kind to ourselves, especially when we don't get things right.

What does the Bible say about Self Compassion?

Jesus said " Love your neighbour as yourself" Matthew 22:39

Jesus is teaching that we need to love ourselves, his assumption is that we should our love neighbour in the same way we love ourselves - so we must have love for ourself! How easy do we find it to love ourselves? How might we demonstrate that love towards ourselves?

The bible makes it clear that we all make mistakes and have sinned

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3 vs 23.

The bible also emphasises that we are completely set free from sin and therefore there is no condemnation when we are found in Him.

"So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death"

Romans 7:21

Do we find it easy to walk in freedom, or do we treat ourselves harshly, or think unkind thoughts towards ourselves when we realise we have made a mistake?

Psalm 85:10 NKJV

Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

How might we apply mercy and truth to ourselves? What does it mean for righteousness and peace to kiss?

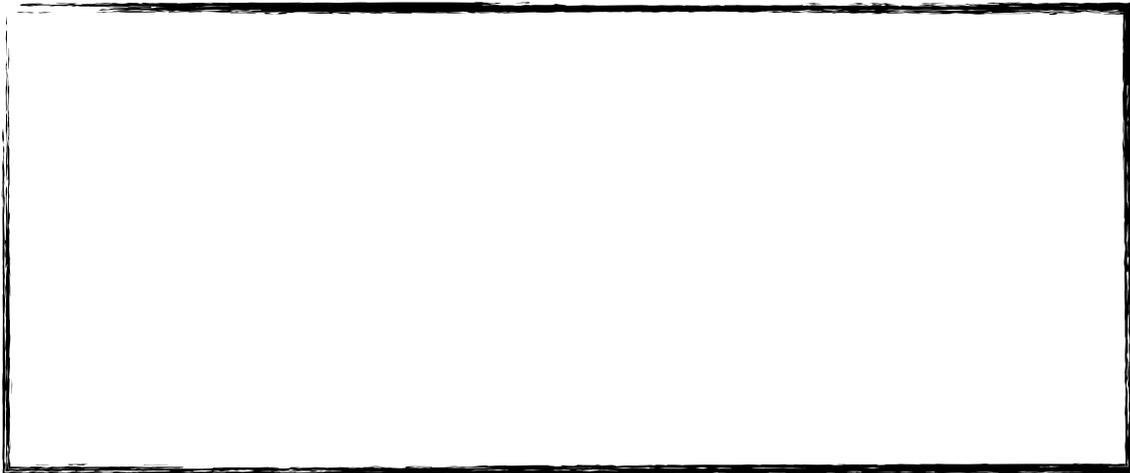
Activity

How can I show love to myself? Being kind to ourselves and showing our selves compassion can be really difficult for some people. Sometimes we think we don't deserve it, or we feel something bad might happen if we stop working really hard, or we stop trying to make sure we are safe and protected.

What kind things can you do for yourself to ensure your soothing system gets a chance to be activated?

How can you show love to yourself this week? Put some ideas below - and then if you are comfortable, share some of them with the group. Perhaps you might want to ask someone else from the group to check in with you during the next session to see how you got on with being kind to you!

My kindness list - this week to show myself love I will.....



What about when we get things wrong?

It can be really hard to be kind to ourselves, when we think we have made a mistake, perhaps committed a sin or failed in an area of our life. But this is the time when it is most important to show ourselves love and compassion. Self compassion is not self pity where we wallow in our problems. It is not self-complacency where we accept where we are. Showing compassion to ourselves acknowledges our mistakes but in Grace addresses these mistakes in our behaviour, without condemning ourselves as a person.

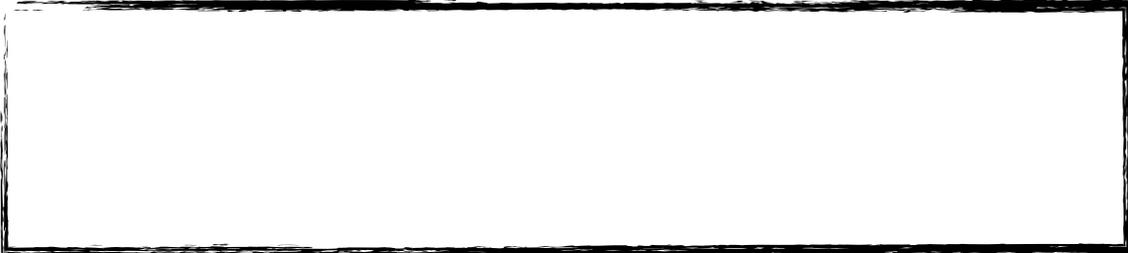
Self compassion is a balance of Truth (Yes I made a mistake) with Grace (I have worth and value and will address mistakes directly)

As Christians we know we are loved by God and have received his Grace. Therefore God's love and Grace is the root of self compassion.

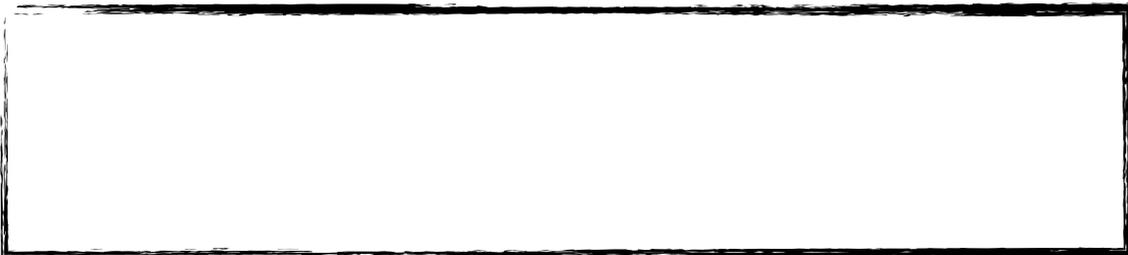
Often we find it easier to offer compassion to others when they get things wrong, sometimes when we are learning to be kinder to ourselves it helps to think - how would I respond if this was a close friend or a loved one?

Activity - Offering yourself Self-Compassion

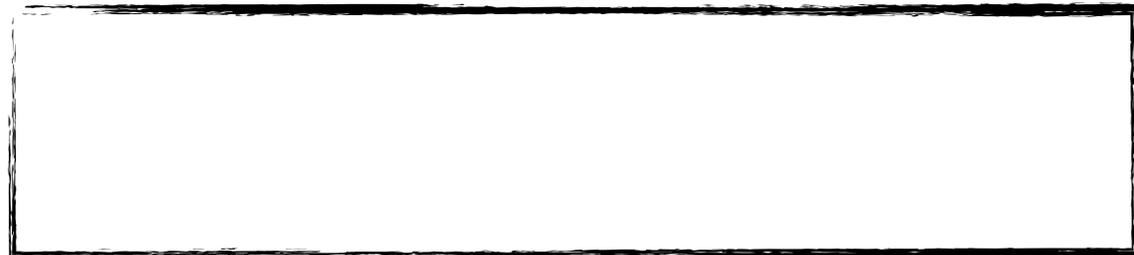
In the box below write down a mistake you have made recently.



How did you respond to yourself, what did you say about yourself? What thoughts did you have about yourself after you had made the mistake?



Now think about someone you love, a close friend or family member, if they made the same mistake - how would you respond to them, what would you think about them, what would you say to them?



Discuss with the rest of the group - what were the differences between how you responded to yourself, and how you would have responded to a loved one in the same scenario. You don't have to share the mistake, but often there is a difference between how we treat ourselves and others - how might we learn to offer ourselves the same compassion we would more readily offer to others?

How do we cultivate Self-Compassion?

Positive self talk- replace our negative voice with our positive voice. Reducing our self criticism also reduces the level of stress hormone cortisol. We can use the skills we have learnt in previous sessions to help deal with difficult thoughts, and replace negative thoughts towards ourselves with positive ones, and learn to practice gratitude for ourselves!

If you are still keeping a gratitude journal, try and find one thing a day about yourself you are grateful for!

Be kind to yourself through good self care, exercise, healthy diet. Care for yourself in the same way you would care for a close loved one. Book in some self care time and engage in activities you enjoy, giving yourself time to relax.

Spend time with loving affirming relationships. Ensure you spend time with people who build you up. Sometimes we need help from other people to remind ourselves of the positive things about us, and to remind us that we have value and are a person who should be offered love.

Recognise that all humans are the same. We have all fallen short of God's glory, we all make mistakes. No one human is created any worse than another, we are all made in God's image and we all need his grace.

Next Session

In the next session we are going to look at forgiveness, so we need to keep practicing being compassionate!

This week why don't you try:

- review session one, and next time you are feeling under threat - see if you encourage your brain to activate the soothing system
- revisit your gratitude journal from session two, and see if you can be grateful for something about yourself
- when you find yourself thinking harsh thoughts about yourself, see if you can use the techniques from session three where we learnt to challenge our thoughts, and combine them with offering yourself the kind thoughts from this session - what difference does it make to how you think and feel?
- try and notice what emotional system you are in at different points of the day?

Are you calm, driven or threatened?

Prayer

God I thank you that you are the God of compassion. I thank you that you have compassion on us and have given us your Grace. I ask that we can live in your Grace everyday and in the freedom of knowing who we are in you.

I pray by your spirit you'll help us to live by fruits of your spirit and have compassion on ourselves and others. In Jesus name.

Amen.

Try this at home

If you get extra time this week – why don't you start a self compassion journal.

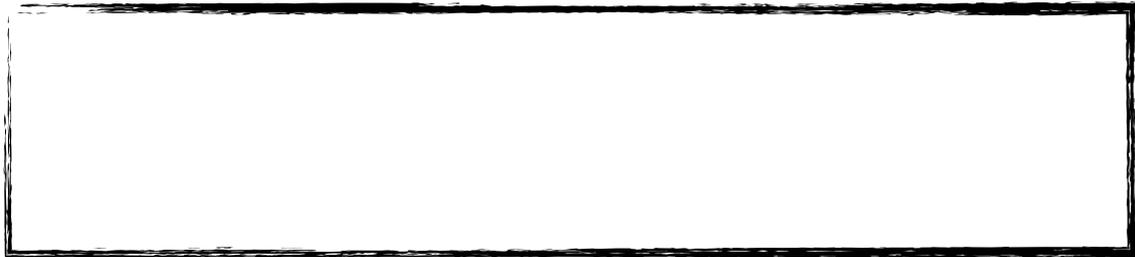
At Home Activity – Self Compassion Journal⁴

Building on the exercise above, a self compassion journal can help us learn to become more compassionate towards ourselves – a self compassion journal has three elements:

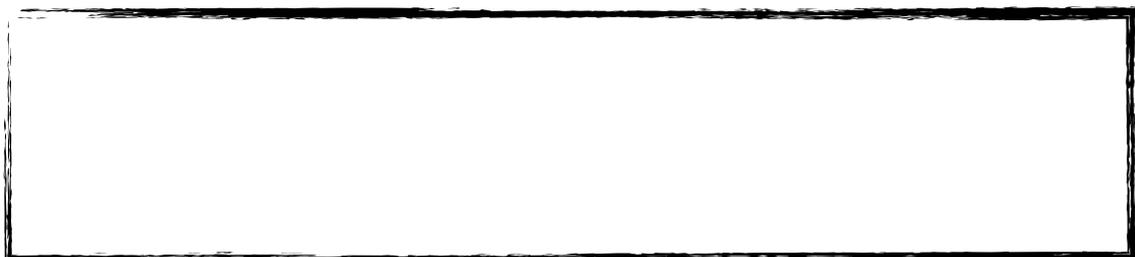
1. **Mindfulness.** Be aware and inquisitive as to how you are thinking and feeling – without judging yourself. Don't question whether you should think and feel as you do, just accept that you do.
2. **Common Humanity.** All humans make mistakes, as we saw above no one person is better or worse than another, we are all made in God's image, and yet we all fall short. How might others feel in the same situation – do other people make similar mistakes to you
3. **Self kindness.** Write yourself some kind, compassionate and understanding words, in a similar way as you would to a friend.

Using the same situation as you did in the previous exercise, or maybe a different one, try and have a go at writing a self-compassion journal

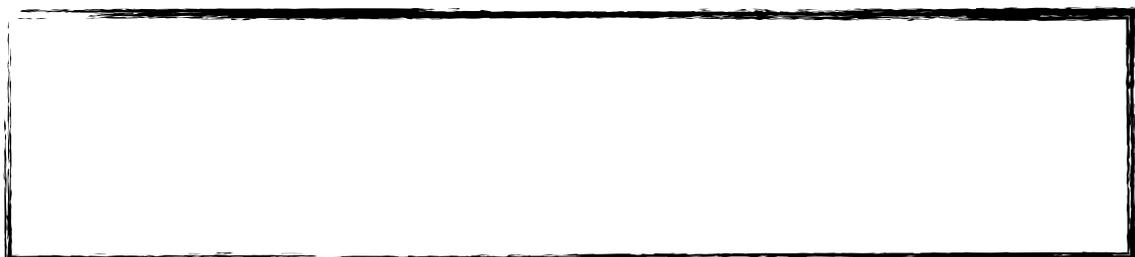
Being mindful. How did I think and feel about the situation?



Common Humanity. How might other people have felt? What might others have done in the same situation?



Self-Kindness. What kind words can I use to offer myself understanding and compassion about this situation?



References

1. Allen AB, Leary MR. Self-Compassion, Stress, and Coping. *Soc Personal Psychol Compass*. 2010;4(2):107-118
2. Kristin D. Neff K, Kirkpatrick K, Rude, S. Self-compassion and adaptive psychological functioning. *Journal of Research In Personality*. 41 (2007) 139–154
3. Gilbert, P. *The Compassionate Mind*. Croydon: Constable & Robinson. 2009
4. Adapted from: Self Compassion Journal. Neff, Kirstin. Available at <https://self-compassion.org/exercise-6-self-compassion-journal/>. Accessed 1st Nov 2020

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