



Compassion Focused Therapy Group

12-week Group Workbook

to be used in conjunction with group sessions

Contents

Sessions;

<u>Setting the Scene</u>	(Page 3-5)
<u>Tricky Brain</u>	(Page 6-12)
<u>3 Circles</u>	(Page 13-23)
<u>Compassion; What it is</u>	(Page 24-25)
<u>Multiplicity</u>	(Page 26-27)
<u>Compassion; Fears, Blocks, Resistances</u>	(Page 28-34)
<u>Compassionate Kitbag</u>	(Page 35-37)
<u>Embodying</u>	(Page 38-42)
<u>Internal Critic (x2 Sessions)</u>	(Page 43-49)
<u>Fears, Blocks, Resistances</u>	(Page 50-53)
<u>Compassionate Future</u>	(Page 54-59)
<u>Reading List</u>	(Page 60)

Definition of compassion for our group

“To have a sensitivity to suffering in self and others and a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it.”

Practice and practise

As with any new skill or hobby we need to practice. We can spend hours talking about riding bikes and understand the theory, but it is not until we get on a bike and have a go (and fall off!) that we can truly cycle.

In the CFT group we will suggest and advise people to practise the imagery and breathing exercises and try to build them into their routine.

However, we know that weeks are busy, life is not straight forward and with the best of intentions things sometimes just don't happen. In these instances, breath, be compassionate towards yourself. Think about your caring commitment to yourself and decide how you could try again next week.

There will often be what we call spontaneous practice, those times when you notice your critic or the need to use your breath. These are invaluable and a good example of becoming more compassionate.

Everyone will feel fears, blocks and resistances at time to practises. It is important to have noticed them. You will work on them in the group but remember you can also speak to your key worker about it.

Core principles of CFT

1.

Genetics

We all have genetic inheritance we did not choose

2.

Environment

Environment influences the person we have become

3.

Brain

Our brains and emotions are much more difficult to regulate than we think

4.

Responsibility

It is not our fault but it is our responsibility.

5.

Compassionate

The knowledge in principles 1-4 enables us to understand and treat ourselves better.

6.

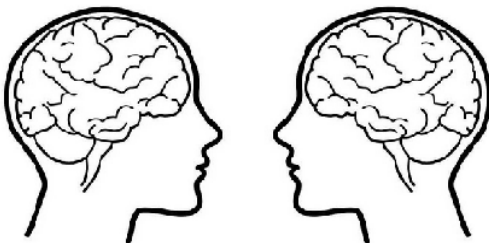
Compassionate

We can purposefully generate changes in thoughts and feelings.

Tricky brain

FLOW OF LIFE

Like all living beings, we are part of a greater whole



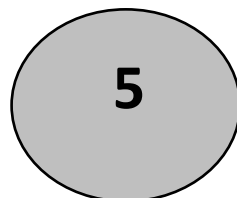
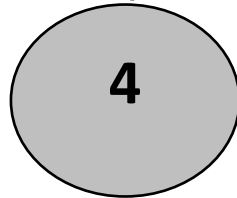
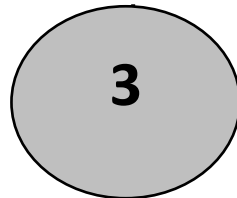
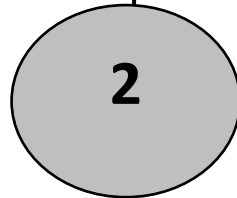
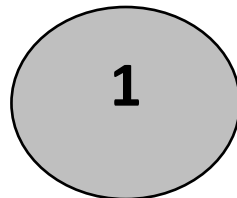
NEW BRAIN CAPACITY

Our brains have the capacity to imagine, have complex language and be creative-but also the ability to ruminate and



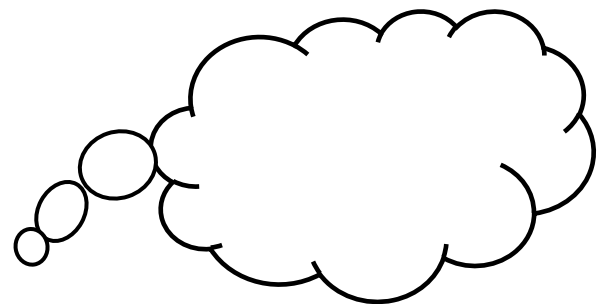
NOT YOUR FAULT

The brain is tricky because it can get caught in anxious or depressive loops. However, we can take responsibility for it



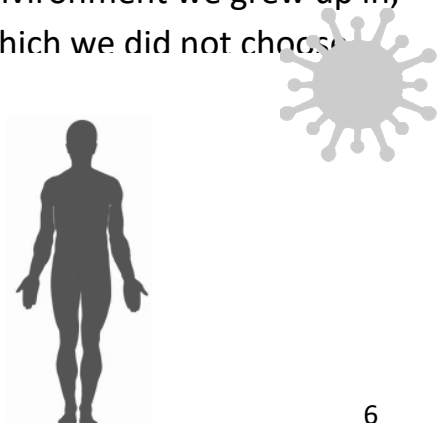
HUMAN BRAIN

We have a brain we did not design, but which was developed through thousands of years of evolution.



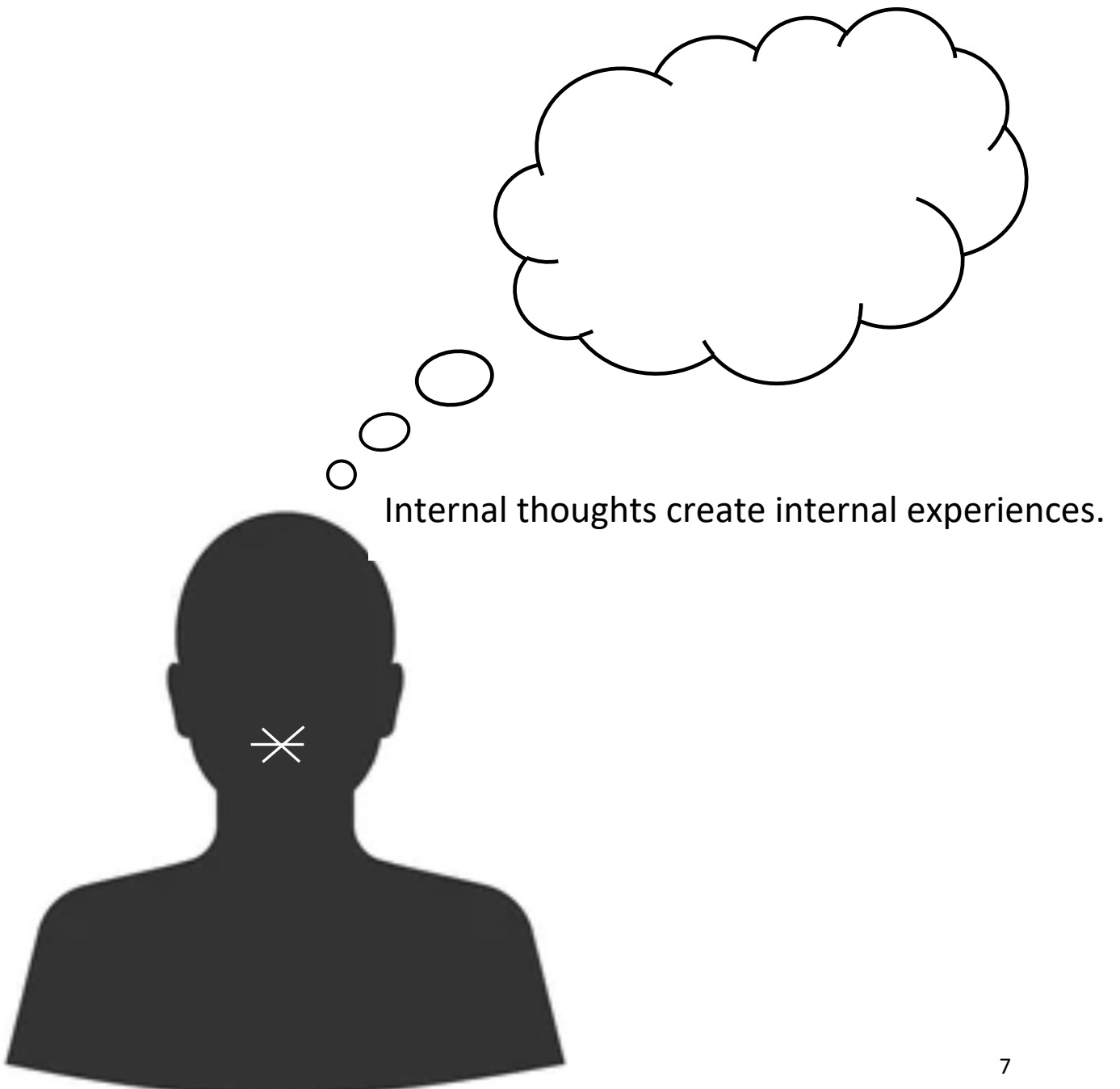
SHAPED

We are shaped by the environment we grew up in, which we did not choose

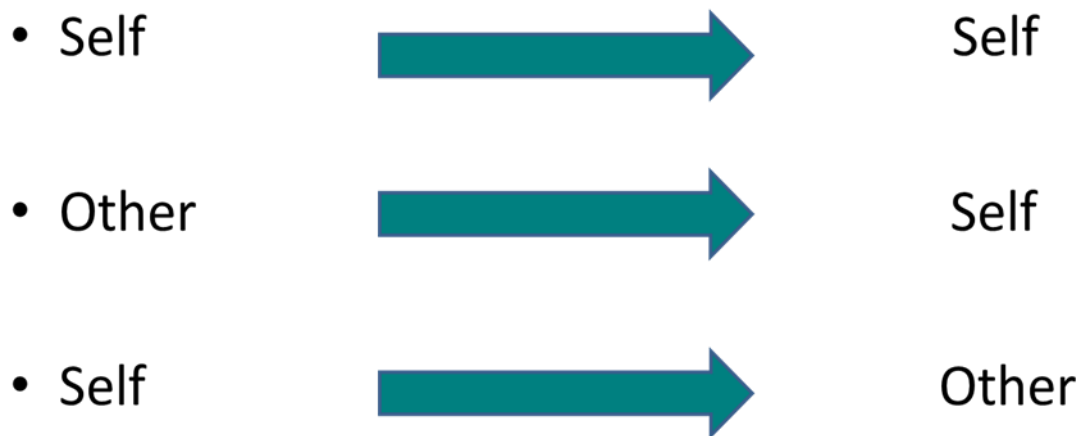


We bring the external world into our internal world

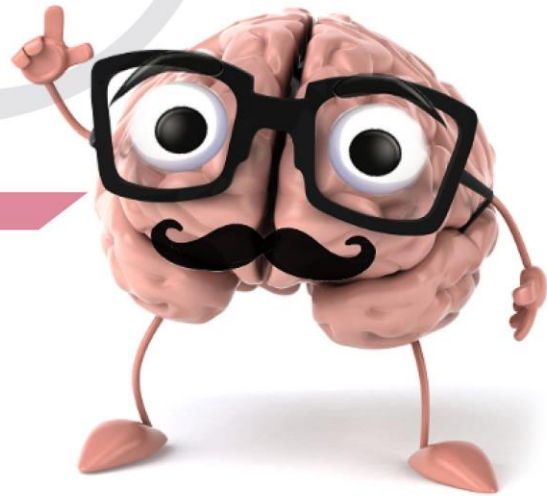
What we create in our mind will impact our body



Flows of compassion

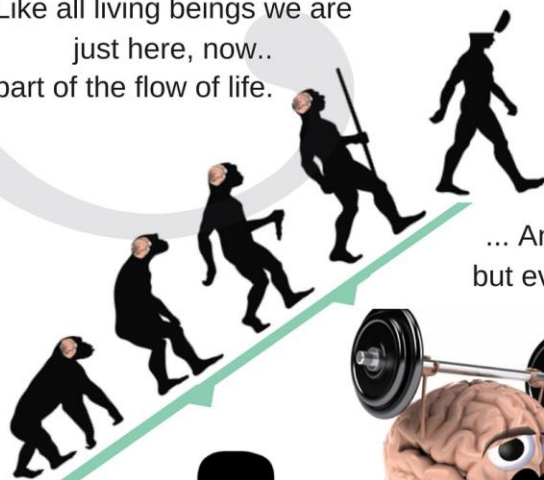


The Tricky Brain



The Flow of Life

Like all living beings we are just here, now.. part of the flow of life.



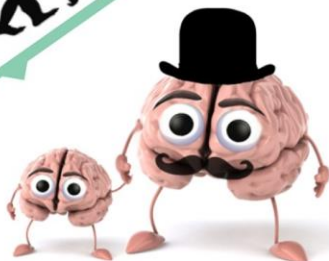
The Human Brain

... And with a brain we did not design, but evolved through thousands of years of evolution.



New Brain Capacity

Our brains have the capacity to imagine, have complex language and be creative. But they also have the capacity to ruminate and worry.

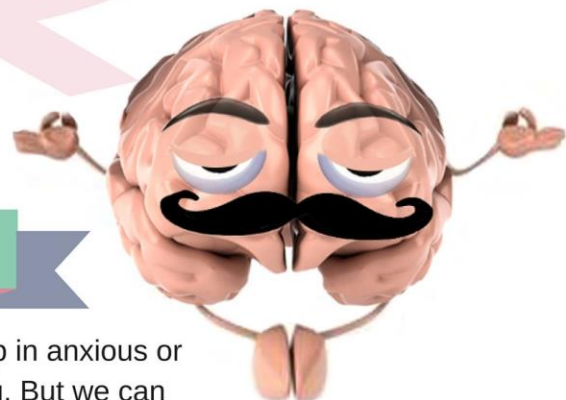


Shaped

We are shaped by our family, which we did not choose. Ask yourself: *would you be the same person if you had been kidnapped as a three day old baby and raised by the Mafia?*

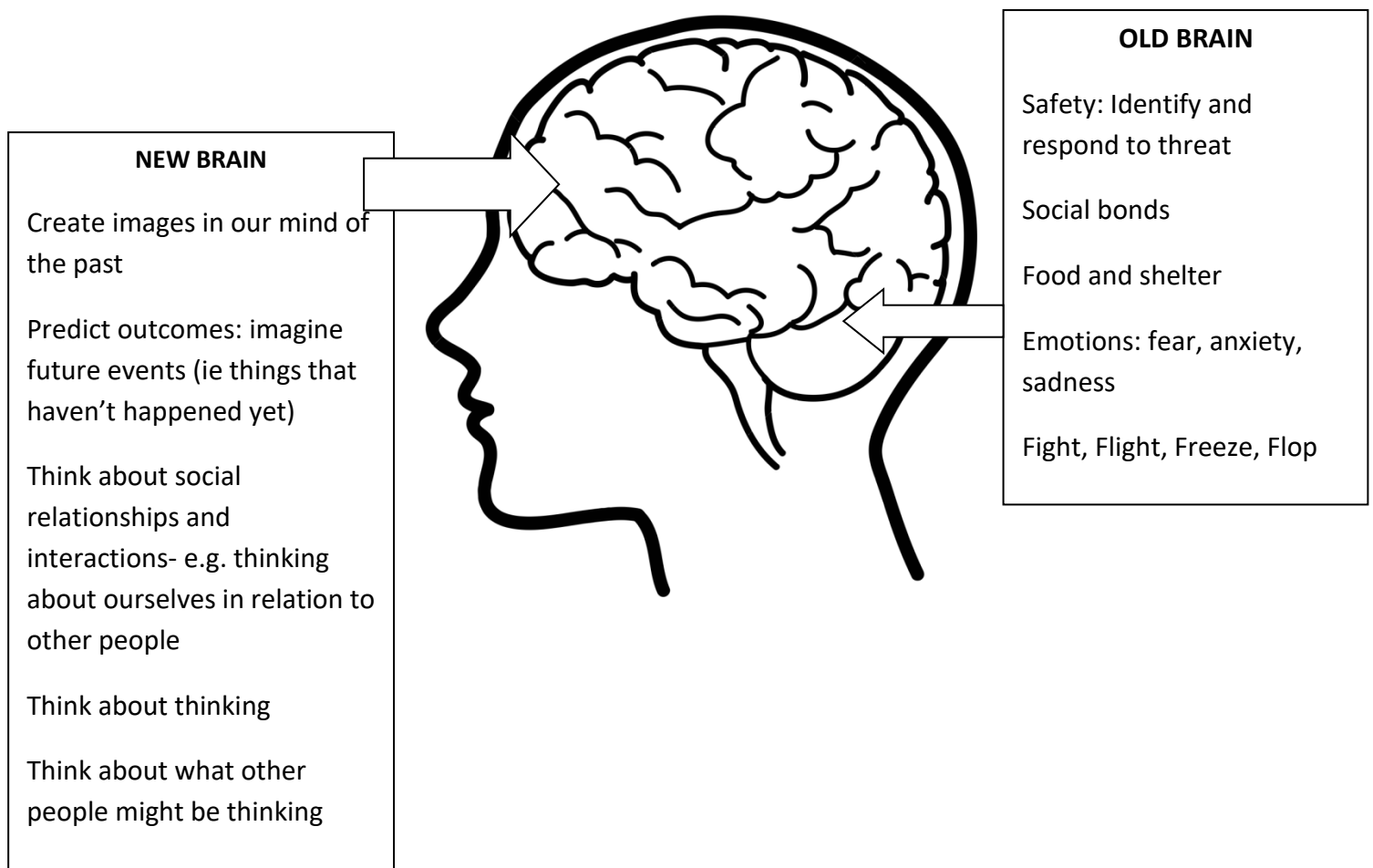
It's Not Your Fault

It's not our fault that our brains get caught up in anxious or depressive loops. Our brain is a tricky thing. But we can begin to address those loops using compassion.



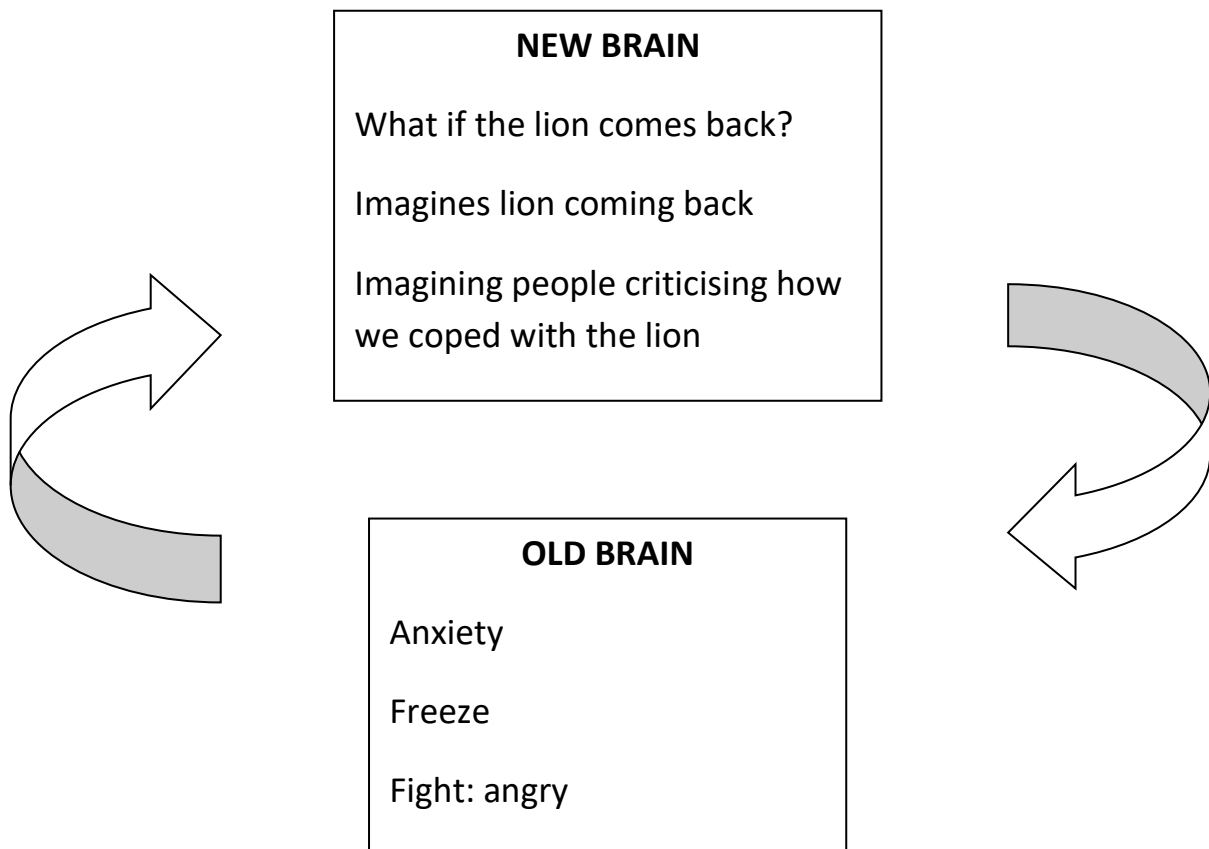
The tricky brain

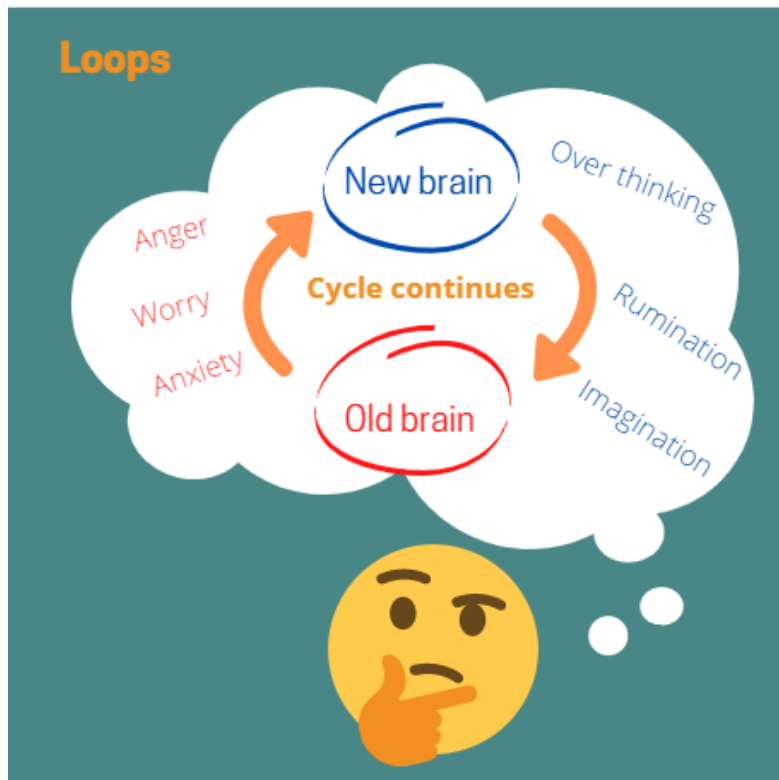
In CFT we are largely interested in parts of the brain we are going to call the **Old brain** and the **New brain**.



The old brain and new brain talk to one another to make sense of situations. However, there is a danger of getting stuck in unhelpful loops.

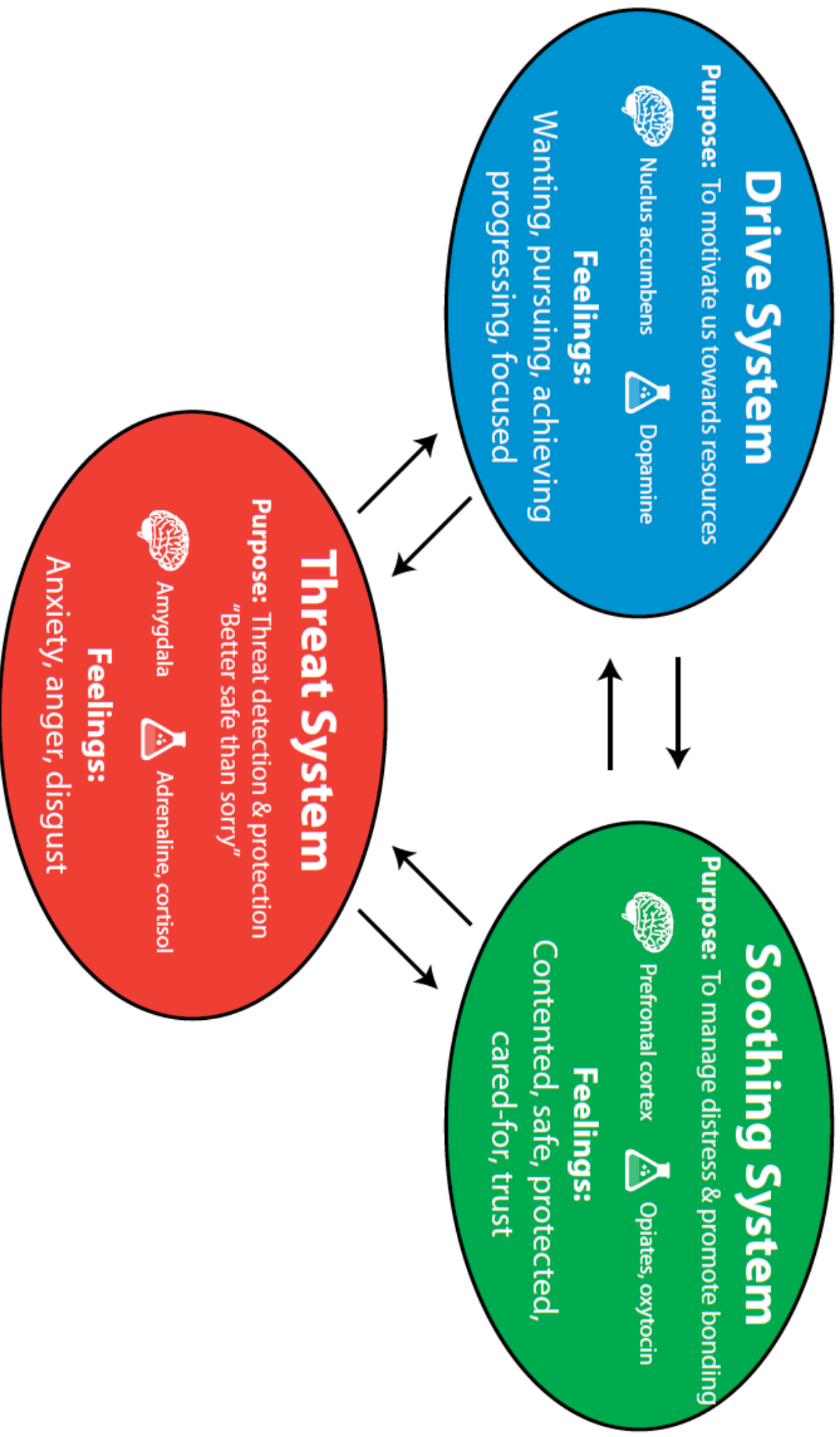
Let's think about the Zebra example. The zebra only has the old brain so after the danger is gone, it continues to eat grass and do other zebra-type things. For us in that situation we can find ourselves, ruminating (new brain) which triggers more feelings of anxiety (old brain) which makes us think about it more and so on





The Perfect Storm

These loops in our thinking affect the balance of our emotional systems (3 circles).



The threat system (our red system)



Our threat system is our keep safe system. It is quick, it is powerful and it can get us to pay attention to anything it believes to be threatening. It will then get us to respond really quickly.

It has done a good job for humans and that is why we have hung onto it whilst other parts of our brains have changed and adapted.

The threat system works on a “better safe than sorry” principle- it would rather mistakenly identify something as threatening then risk not noticing a threat. You can have lunch many times, but you can only be lunch once. So it is quick, but it is not particularly accurate. It also relies on information from past experiences.

If you have had lots of experiences which have been unsafe or unpredictable your threat system is likely to have been on a lot and it is likely to have become very sensitive.

Our threat system will affect all of the parts of the diagram below



Sometimes people think that the threat system is “bad” because of the way we can feel when we are in it. This is not the case. It is extremely important.

However.....

Because of the “better safe than sorry” principle our threat systems can become really sensitive. When you have had had lots of experiences of not feeling safe and being in danger your threat system becomes heightened and will be ready to switch on in situations where we actually don’t need it any more.

Tricky brain and threat

The threat system gets it’s information from our environment and people around us- we call them **external** threats. It also can experience memories, images, thoughts and emotions as threat – we call them **internal** threats.

The threat system can respond to the internal threats (worries about what other people think of us for example) as if it were a serious physical threat (like that tiger). Social threats are things like criticism, rejection, and exclusion. They are threatening because and are perceived as dangerous because as humans we prefer to live in groups, like the hunter gatherer societies in the past, because from an evolutionary point of view it is less dangerous.

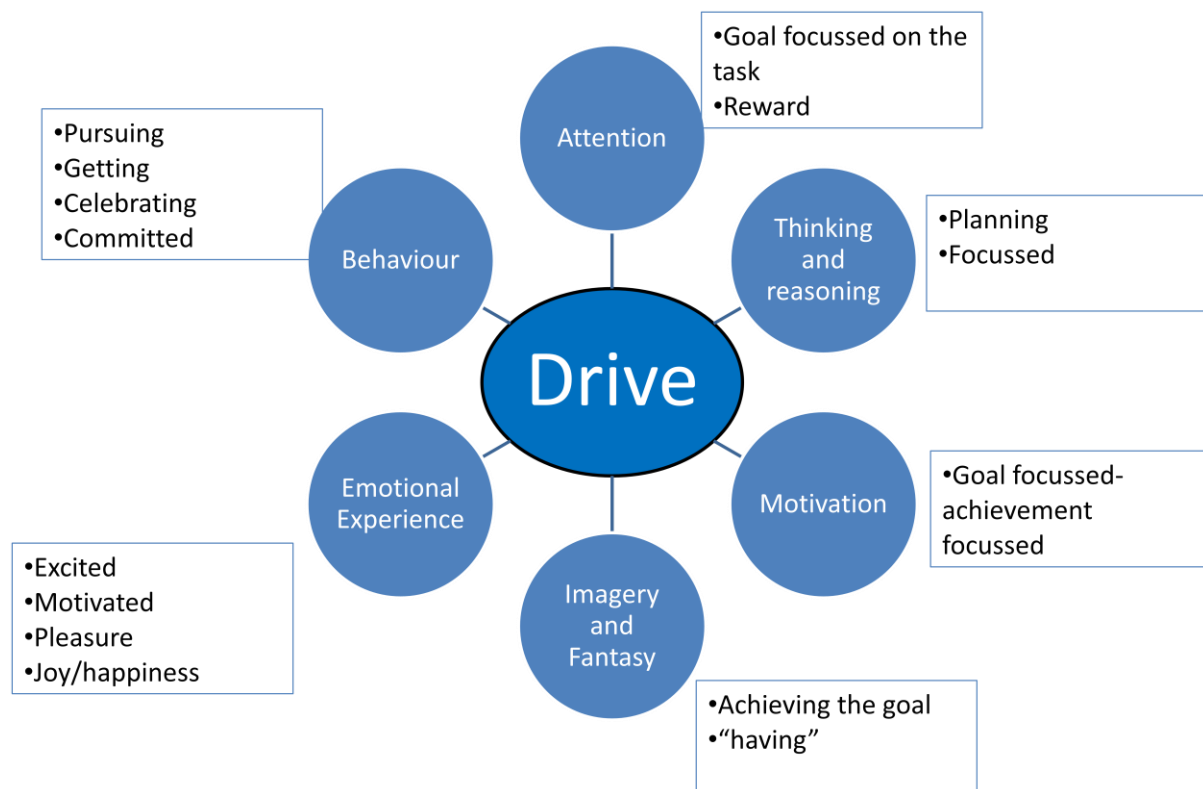
We can often find our tricky brain loops get caught up in threat, because of the way our brains have been designed for us and not by us.



The drive system (blue system)

The drive system is the system which gets us to “do”. It motivates us and organises our minds to focus on key survival goals: food, shelter, social relationships.

When we achieve, we feel good- we feel happy, excited and we want to seek out more of the pleasurable feeling. We get a release of the hormone dopamine.

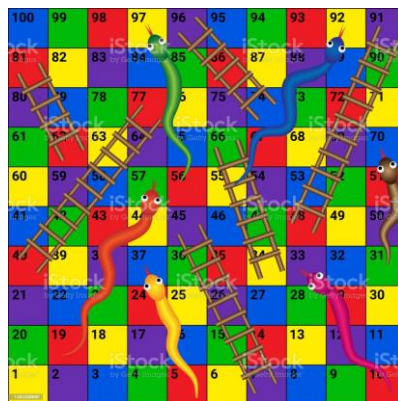


Often because of our life experiences we can feel a pressure to do things “perfectly” and especially where failure was met with criticism or disappointment. In these situations we can find ourselves striving *to avoid*

feelings of disappointment, stress or even fear associated with when things don't go to plan. Many people will use their drive system to avoid threat. This tends to work in the short-term. For example, you feel anxious about going out, you don't go, you feel relief (dopamine). However, in the longer-term this leaves no room for learning how to cope/how to deal with failure, which is an inevitable part of life.

An unintended consequence is also that we can also become dependent on our inner critic (threat system) to seemingly "motivate" us to do something. The inner critic begins to dominate and all the while it is actually feeding us messages which are not good for us and then we find ourselves in a tricky loop.

Threat based drive – snakes and ladders



When your drive system is fuelled by threat it can feel like a game of snakes and ladders. You feel that you are nearly at the top of the game, achieving, striving and then something goes wrong- you land on a snake and there you go back down the bottom again. When your drive system is fuelled by threat

(your critic or avoidance of threat) it leaves no room for mistakes or imperfections which as well all know are part of life: nobody gets through life without making mistakes. There are so many parts of life that we have no control over, but when we try we often end up blaming ourselves for things that aren't our fault and end up at the bottom of the board.

In CFT we want to work on activating your drive system and using it to be helpful, not harmful for ourselves and others.

We want to begin to draw into focus the things that aren't our fault and activate our drive system to make changes to prevent suffering because of our **compassionate motivation not to avoid threat**. This way we get the true feeling of drive, which is really good for us.



The soothing system

Our soothing system, is what we call our green system. It is our rest and digest system (parasympathetic nervous system). We often forget how important it is to slow down, rest and recuperate. It is a state of contentment and is the system responsible for hormones which are associated with a sense of wellbeing, recuperation and connection. The soothing system is all about slowing down and a sense of steadiness.

The soothing system helps us to connect with positive feelings which are quiet and help us to look after and balance our threat based feelings. The soothing system balances out drive and threat. It allows for clarity of thought and flexible thinking. The soothing system helps us to turn towards others for connection, support and reassurance.

The soothing system is highly sensitive to signals of kindness, caring and affection from others. As with our other systems, our life experiences will shape our soothing system, and this is where it gets tricky. If you have been lucky to experience a lot of containment and care when growing up then we will tend to associate other people with sense of safeness. These emotional memories will also help us to make sense of our feelings and calm our own distress. These experiences help to build the platform for exploring the world, and feel safe around others. The soothing system helps our drive system seek out pleasurable activities.

However, if you were raised in a family which were unable to offer you care and affection, this can mean that your soothing system has not been developed to help with managing emotions. It can also mean that we can experience soothing situations as threatening. In CFT we are aiming to build our soothing systems to help to balance out the threat and drive systems and to help you to connect with the feelings such as contentment in a way that is safe for you.



11 Common myths about compassion

1. Compassion is OK for others, but I don't deserve it.
2. Compassion will not last and it will be taken away from me so what's the point in starting it.
3. Compassion is like wallowing in your own self-pity.
4. Compassion is far too self-indulgent and selfish
5. Compassion is for weaklings and "wusses".
6. "Real men" don't do compassion.
7. Compassion is fluffy, soft, airy-fairy and "group huggy".
8. Compassion makes you vulnerable to others who will take advantage of you.
9. Being compassionate means that I will never be allowed to be cross, angry, raging or to run away from anything or be totally selfish again.
10. I cannot have any bad or negative thoughts when I am compassionate.
11. Being compassionate lets me off the hook and I don't need to take responsibility for anything that goes wrong in my life.

Why does breathing matter?

The way we breathe can tell us a lot about how we are feeling. What do you notice about your breathing when you are stressed, anxious, worried vs when you are calm and relaxed?

It is possible for us to use our breathing to change the way we feel in our bodies. By practising a type of breathing called **Soothing Rhythm Breathing** we are able to tap into our nervous system and adjust it so that we can begin to feel calm and a sense of safeness- also known as our **Soothing system**.

We can use our body to help our minds through breathing. Through breathing we can change gear and mindset into a compassion and helpful one.

We will practise this in the group and you can access the recording for this exercise here:

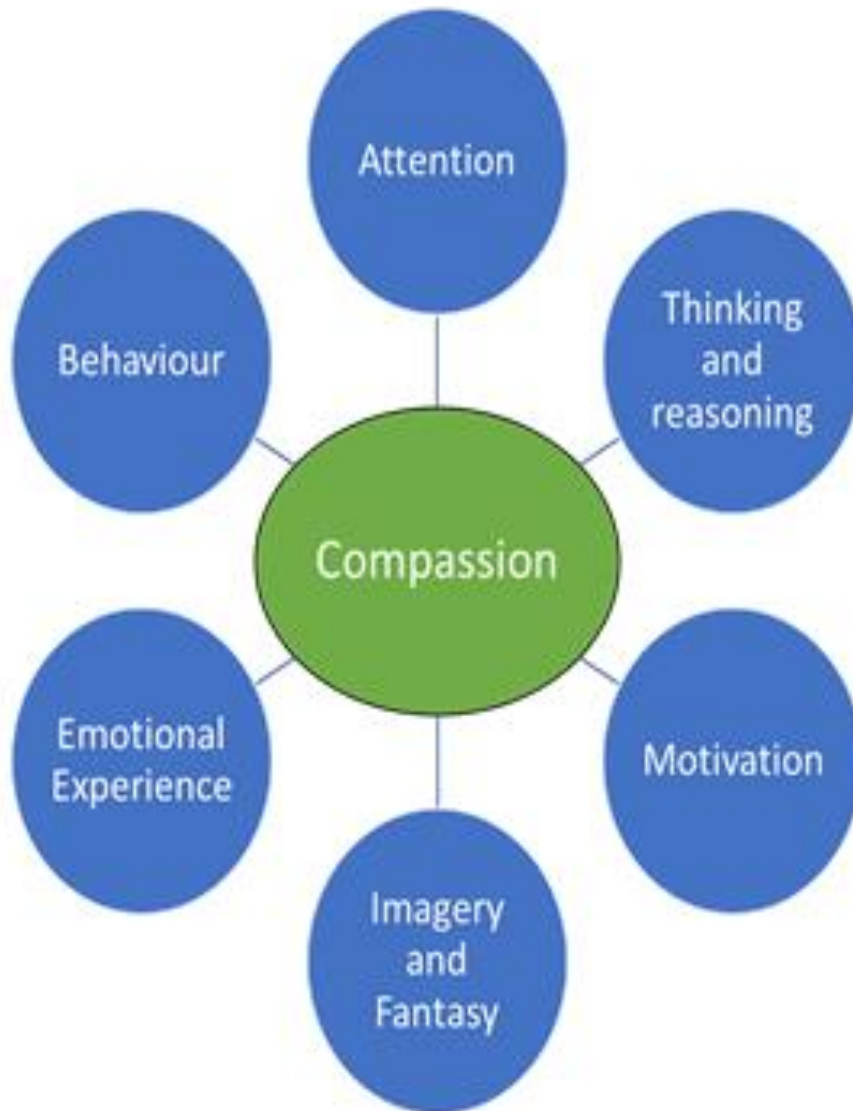
Helpful sayings to stay connected with your intention :

“just this breath in, just this breath out”

“Mind slowing down, body slowing down”

“May I be helpful, not harmful for myself and others”

Multiple Selves/Patterns	
Angry self	Anxious Self
Motives	Motives
Thoughts	Thoughts
Felt/Body	Felt/Body
Behaviours	Behaviours
Memories	Memories
Settle	Settle
Sad Self	Compassionate self
Motives	Motives
Thoughts	Thoughts
Felt/Body	Felt/Body
Behaviours	Behaviours
Memories	Memories
Settle	Grow



Beliefs about emotions

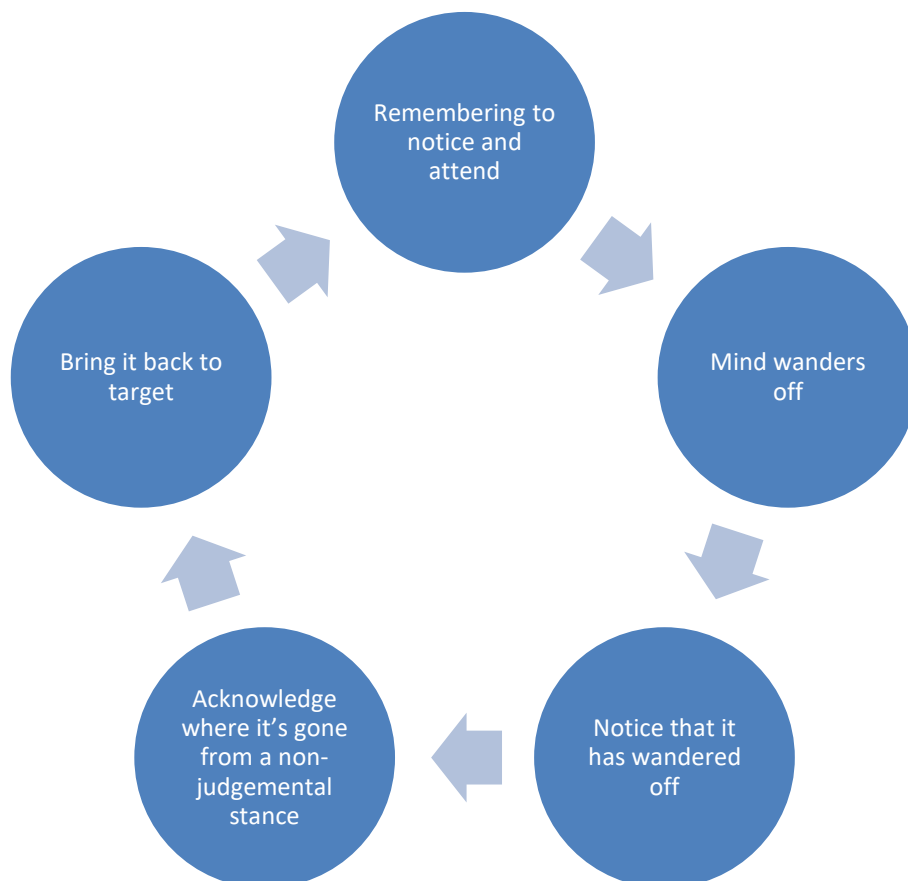
Common beliefs about emotions	Compassionate self's beliefs about emotions
1. Certain Strong emotions are dangerous and easily get out of hand.	
2. Other people don't feel strong emotions the way I do.	
3. My emotions are inappropriate.	
4. If you love somebody, you shouldn't have times when you are angry or even want to leave them.	
5. If other people love you, they should not be selfish, thoughtless, or have times when they want to leave you.	
6. You shouldn't have mixed emotions because you should know your mind.	
7. If people knew what I feel, they would not like me.	
8. I don't like me because of my feelings.	
9. I just want to get rid of these feelings.	

My personal blocks to developing self-compassion

Myths about compassion	Applies to me	Does not apply to me
Compassion is ok for others but I don't deserve it		
Compassion will not last and it will be taken away from me what's the point in starting it.		
Compassion is like wallowing in our own self-pity.		
Compassion is far too self-indulgent and selfish.		
Compassion is for weaklings and "wusses".		
"Real men" don't do compassion.		
Compassion makes you vulnerable to others who will take advantage of you.		
Being compassionate means that I will never be allowed to be cross, angry, raging or to run away from anything or be totally selfish again.		
I cannot have any bad or negative thoughts when I am compassionate.		
Being compassionate lets me off the hook and I don't need to take responsibility for anything that goes wrong in my life.		

Mindful awareness in CFT

- Attention is like a flashlight.
- When we are mindful, we act with intent. We respond, not react.
- Be aware of your body posture, facial expressions and voice tones: what happens externally impacts on what we experience internally.
- A compassionate body posture, facial expression, voice tones can help put us into a compassionate state.
- How we pay attention to the flows of compassion is important-notice those who are helpful or smile at you- “social mindfulness”



Just as our attention can focus on threat, we can also move our attention to opportunities for soothing and compassion.

Imagery

In CFT we use imagery for lots of different reasons; it can help us to access and activate our **soothing** systems and it can help us to stimulate our bodies and minds into states that are compassionate. By using imagery we create the correct state for your brain to begin to access compassion. It is a powerful way of changing our emotions and mental states.



A quick example of how we can use imagery is to imagine a lemon. Close your eyes or take a soft gaze and for a few minutes image a lemon, the colour, the smell, the weight, the feel of it in your hand. Now imagine cutting into the lemon and notice how the smell changes, it feels more intense. Now if you are willing imagine taking a bite or a taste of the lemon.

Reflection: what was that like? How did your body react?

Most people will have either noticed their mouth to salivate or their body to react as if the lemon were right there in front of us. That is the power of imagery and we want to use this super skill to our advantage in CFT.

Imagery is not always easy for everyone and will take some time to develop. It is not about having a 100% clear image. For some images come and go or can be very vague. We are just working towards a vague sense or impression – that is all we need to do imagery work.

People can often be surprised by the emotions that come up, or by their initial responses when asked to imagine certain things. It would be unhelpful and have the opposite effect to try to force yourself to “*feel calm*”, so to begin with, if you notice any resistances coming up, we are simply ask you to be curious- *what might it be like if I had somewhere I felt calm? What might someone look like if I had a compassionate other.*

Each of the imagery exercises will have a recording to listen to and follow whilst you get used to developing the exercises.

Calming place imagery

The calming place exercise is especially helpful if you experience feelings of fear. In this exercise we are bringing to mind a place where we feel a sense of safeness, calm and contentment. It is somewhere we can relax and connect with. This can be a real place or somewhere that is imagined, or it might be somewhere you have seen a photo of or a seen on the TV.

To begin with thinking about what sort of places make us feel safe- it might be somewhere you hadn't thought of. Try to begin this with the spirit of curiosity and interest, it might feel strange to begin with. If nowhere comes to mind it might be that you need to think about where you *might* be able to feel safe over time.

If you are using a real place, trying not use somewhere with any feelings of grief or sadness, we are looking at changing gear into compassion and soothing and away from threat.

It is a good idea to have a think about what senses you engage when you think of this place-

- Sight- colours, textures, light, objects, movement
- Touch- under foot, in hand, air temperature
- Taste- slight taste in your mouth,
- Sound- birds, the wind, silence, murmur in background

Be mindful that this is a place of *calm and connection* rather than a place of *safety*. So for example, some people might want to pick a room which shuts people out with big locked doors. This is understandable, but doesn't give a sense of freedom and connection. If you did pick somewhere like this, over time we would start to think about whether we could open a window to allow connection with others.

Compassionate other

This is an opportunity for you to describe everything you would want from a compassionate other, doing this first will help when it comes to practise it.

The basic key qualities of the compassionate other are:

Wisdom to know that everyone has a brain designed for them, not by them, what we call our tricky brain; and that a lot of the things that happen to us are not our fault but we do have a responsibility for how we react.

Caring commitment and desire to help you get what's best for you. The compassionate other values and supports you and does not judge you.

Strength to support you, to hear your distress and help you find a way through. The compassionate other helps you connect with the courage you need to make changes. They are strong, courageous and grounded.

How would you like your ideal compassionate caring image to appear? They can be human like or non-Human - the more detail you give them, the easier it will be to feel connected. Are they by your side, or in front of you? Remember, you may not have clear images, just a sense of something.

How does your ideal compassionate other sound (e.g. the volume and texture of their voice)?

What other qualities would you like them to have (e.g. is it peaceful, firm, enveloping, flexible)?

How would you like this compassionate image to relate to you? E.g. Talking, just being together, supportive gestures

How would you like to relate to your compassionate image? E.g. Talking, just being together

The compassionate kitbag



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When climbers and mountaineers go exploring they bring with them what they call a Kitbag.

A Kitbag is the bag that keeps the things they need to nourish themselves on their journey. It holds the things that you need to keep you going. This is not the same as an emergency kit. This is something you go back to throughout all stages of your journey.

In the CFT group we would invite you to think about developing your own kitbag for your journey with compassion. This is going to be an actual bag or container, something you can hold, look at and experience.

We want to fill it with things that are helpful for your drive and soothing system; things that are motivating and encouraging, as well as soothing. As we know, soothing is only one part of developing our self compassion and we want to engage your drive system too.

These are things that mean something to you. They can be inspiring, empowering, calming, and soothing. When you experience them they bring you feelings of confidence, strength, calm composure and wisdom. Perhaps they bring up a positive memory, or represent something that is important, inspiring, motivating or gives you a boost in some way.

If you physically cannot put the item in the bag or box, then perhaps use a reminder of the item, for example, a picture of an iPod, mp3 player.

Start small. You may have some items that you immediately know would fit in this compassionate kit bag.

Examples:

- Music

- Pictures

- Smells

- Reminder of compassionate image (self or other)
 - Book, poem, quotes

- Letter from your compassionate self
 - Objects with meaning

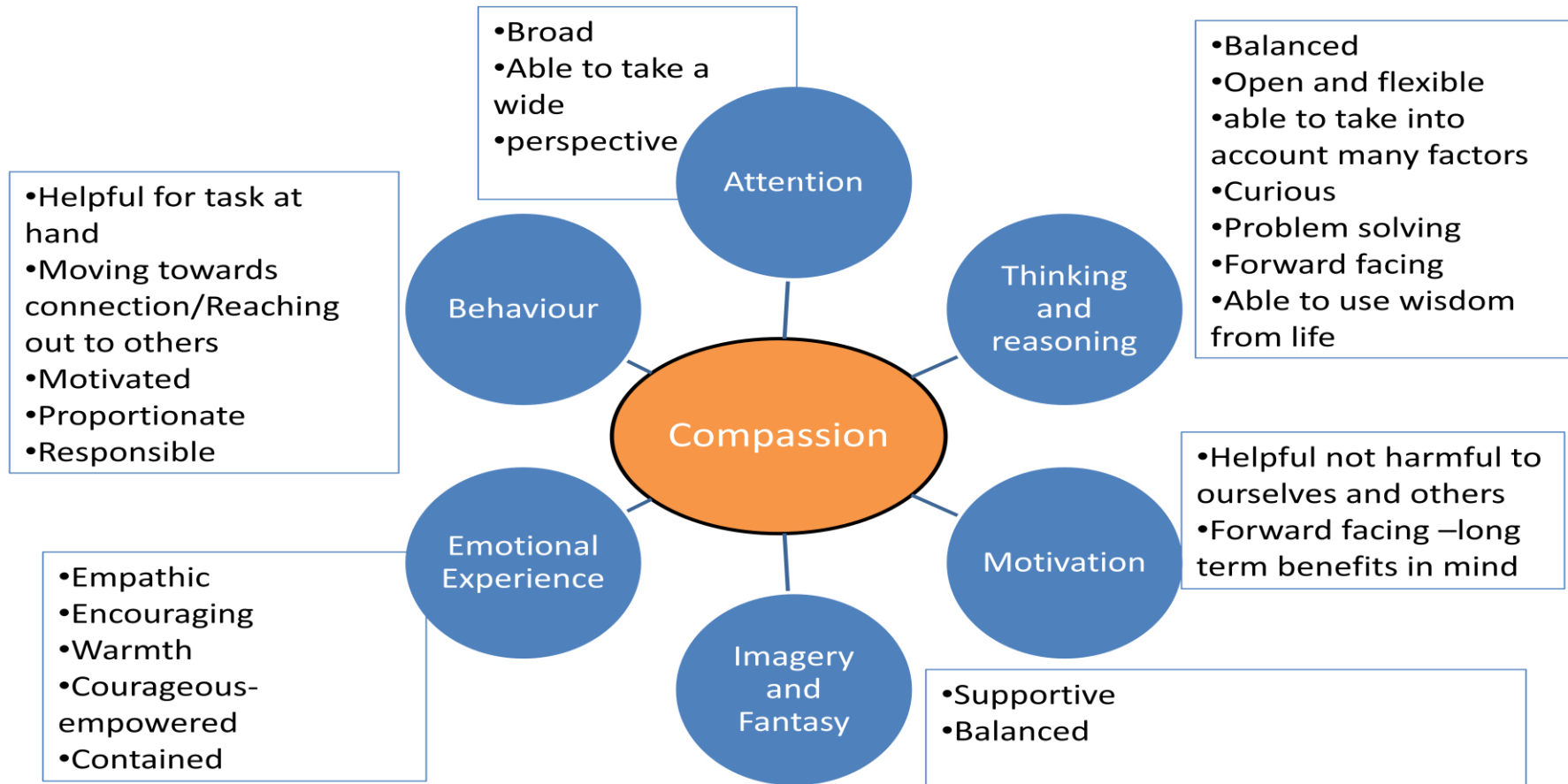
 - Reminders of your strengths

 - Grounding or soothing object

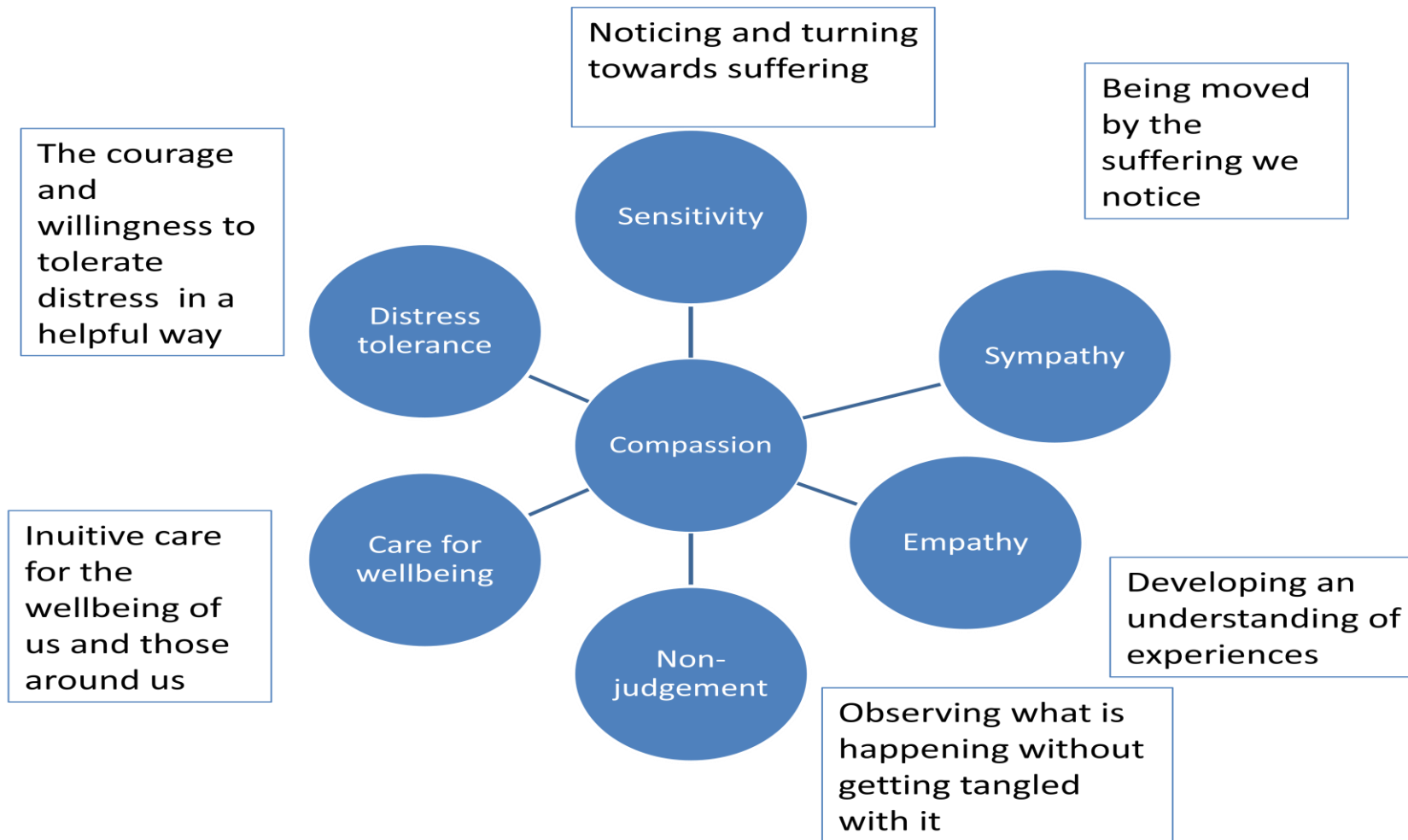
- **Objects which represent the qualities of compassion**

We are going to share one of these items in the group and we will explore them in a thoughtful and curious way.

Compassion in action



Qualities of compassion



Compassionate letter writing

1. Think about something that makes you feel shame, insecure or not good enough
2. Notice how it makes you feel
3. Activate your compassionate self through your breathing before you start

The following principles may be useful whenever you write a compassionate letter to yourself:

- Be sensitive to and validate the emotions you experience.
- Convey understanding, acceptance and caring.
- Validate the reason you may be struggling with certain things.
- Recognise that human beings are a complex species, and this means we often struggle.
- Recognise that we are all prone to self-criticism, and although your self-critic has your best intention at heart, listening to it is not the best way to feel better.
- Remain non-judgmental.
- Reflect on which of the emotion regulation systems it would be helpful for you to work on at the moment.
- Remind yourself that you are not on your own. Millions of others struggle to build their self confidence.
- Recognise that life can be hard and sometimes other people can do things that hurt us.
- Rather than avoid difficult situations, allow yourself to be moved by your own experience.

Theses could be compassionate wishes

- I know you and accept you deeply, exactly as you are , in this very moment.
- I'll never abandon you, and I'll be here with you until your feel better and until we find together a way to go through this storm.

- My deepest intention and desire will always be that you can feel good and you can flourish.
- I'll always be here for you. You can always count on me especially when you feel the worst. It's when I really want to be there with you. It's where I want to feel I'm there with you
- My deepest desire is that you really feel how not alone you are in this, and I also know how difficult this search could be. There is pain, this is why I am here with you.
- Maybe you could.....(suggest way to meet emotional needs).
- But overall, I just want to let you know how deeply I care for you and how much I desire to be close to you in all your ups and downs in life.
- I want to help you find a way to meet your deepest needs.
-

<p>Acknowledge, without judgment, the pain of your suffering</p> <p><i>Example starting sentence: I see how anxious you feel being around others. It is has been that way for a long time.</i></p>	<p>I acknowledge the difficulty of.....</p>
<p>Engage in empathic acceptance and understanding</p> <p><i>Example starting sentence: I understand why that is, and how it feels when you are in that moment and your tricky brain starts up</i></p>	<p>I understand</p>

Commit or re-commit to alleviate suffering and desire to look for resources that support and strengthen (Care and Wellbeing)

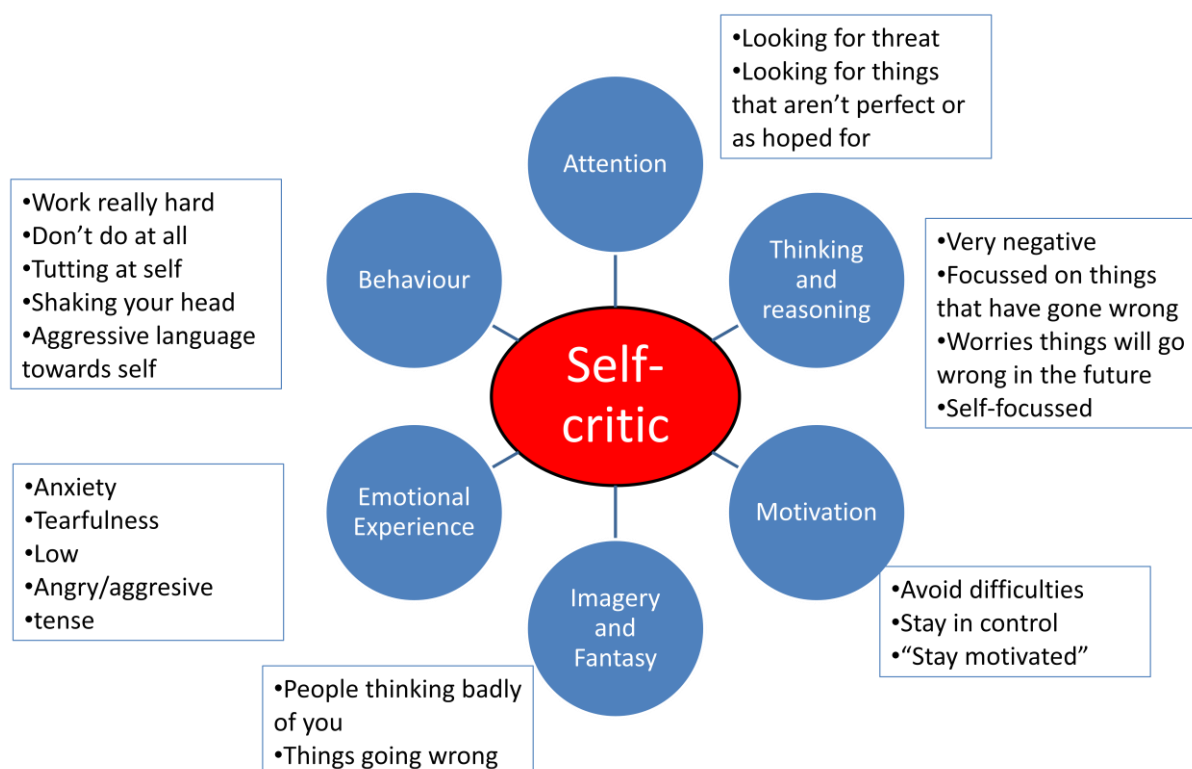
Example starting sentence : I want to tell you that you can do it, I believe in you and you can start with a just opening the front door and breathing

I want to tell you that.....

Understanding our self-critic

As part of having a tricky human brain, we can also develop what we call a self-critic. That inner voice that is critical and offers a commentary or evaluation of things that you do and things that you don't do. The inner critic is often focussed on what other people think about you, and is very threat focussed.

Self-critic in action



Everyone's self critic will look a bit different but might tap into some of the stuff above.

Let's get to know it

The temptation with the self-critic is to look away from it, avoid it, do what it says so it leaves you alone. Unfortunately that is a snakes and ladders trap, and often although we get short-term relief it will come back.

In CFT as part of our first psychology, we are going to start turning towards our critical parts and offering it compassion. Our first job is understanding it.

We all have spent a lot of time with our critics so our first task is working out what it does.

Write a job description for your self-critic

We would like to invite you to imagine that you are recruiting a new self-critic.

We would like you to use the space below to write out/draw a job description for the job, one that makes sure that you get the right critic for the job.

Now that we have a rough sense of it's jobs let's explore it a bit more using the table below.

What is my greatest fear of letting go?			
What does your inner critic look like? What is its inner form?	What does it say to me?	What does it feel about me?	What does it want to do to me/with me?
What do I feel now?			

Is there a more helpful part to use other than the critic?

In lots of ways, the self-critic wants to help and protect you and goes about it in the best way it knows how.

However, when we understand our critics better and begin use our compassionate parts to meet these needs then we see the shift from self-critic to self-correction.

Shame-based self-criticism	Self-correction
A desire to punish and condemn	Desire to improve
Backward looking	To move towards one's best
Linked to Disappointment	Forward Looking
Focusing on errors, deficits	Linked to building on the positives and abilities-cultivation
Emotions are : angry, anxiety, contempt	Validation of setbacks and encouragement

Working with our critic and shame using our compassionate other

When we start to work with our self-critic and shame it can be helpful to have practised and prepared some phrases to use to start the process. Below are the 6 stages that we would like to work towards with some examples.

It is important that you use your own words or language so have a think and make whatever tweaks you want in the boxes below.

1. Start by breathing, use your Soothing Rhythm Breathing as a solid platform to work from and come back to it as you need it. Then bring in your compassionate other and their wisdom, curiosity, courage and kind intentions for you. **What would the compassionate other say/d?**
2. **See it. Witness it rather than turning away.**

I can see you are feeling/thinking.....

I can hear from the tone of voice that you are really angry

I see you

What I can hear my compassionate other saying

3. Seek to understand what is it telling you. What does it need?

It makes sense that you shut down/freeze/fight in because that's what you needed to do in the past

What I can hear my compassionate other saying

4. Share your motivation and feelings (what do you want for this part?)

What I want for you is to feel heard and to find a way to help this part of me

What I can hear my compassionate other saying

5. Key Message (if you could tell it anything what might it be)

I want you to know that I can see you pain and want to help you to see that you are safe now

I am not going to listen to this part anymore, I can see a different way to respond now

What I can hear my compassionate other saying

6. **Broaden our awareness/caring suggestions to try:** *It might be helpful to remember or focus on your breath to get your green zone on so we can think about this together/then I will use my kitbag to help in this moment.*

What I can hear my compassionate other saying

Forgiveness

The most essential part of forgiveness is letting of the angry desire for retaliation and vengeance. This is partly because holding onto these interactions is not good for our bodies or our brains and keeps us in a threat focussed, competitive system.

Imagine that you had a stone in your dominant hand that you carried around all day and night. Consider how much that stone would get in the way of activities, of engaging with other people, how much focus it would take up. Now imagine letting go of that stone. Now imagine the stone was all the things you are angry about. Forgiveness is like letting go of the stone.

There are different levels of forgiveness. The more we are able to recognise that we are all caught up with this rather tricky brain and that humans do all kinds of things because of their brains, the more likely we can move forward. The following are some ideas on what forgiveness is and is not.

Forgiveness is....

How we deal with vengeful feelings and desires

Part of developing closeness in a relationship

More likely to happen if we are have good assertiveness and conflict resolution skills

Something that we do for ourselves -not for others

Forgiveness is not....

Condoning the behaviour of somebody else

Reconciling with the other person

Forgetting

Automatically liking the person or needing to be friends with them

A way to stop hurting

Forgiveness for people does not mean you have to be friends with that person

Compassionate communication

When we think about communication, we often talk about verbal and non verbal.

Verbal: The things we say and the way we say them.

Non-verbal: Body language, facial expressions, facial expressions, noises

Non-verbal is particularly useful to think about in CFT because of the flows of compassion. When someone frowns when you are talking or do a lot of sighing what is it communicating?

We also think about communication styles. Typically people talk about

Passive: Compliant, submissive, talks little, vague non-committal communication, puts self down “I don’t mind...that’s fine....yes alright”. Trying to disappear and not be seen.

Aggressive : Harsh, always right, superior, know it all, interrupts, talks over others, critical, put-downs, disrespectful of others “This is what we’re doing, if you don’t like it, tough”. Competitive in nature.

Passive Aggressive: Sarcastic with critical undertones, patronising, back handed compliments, suggestive that the other person is some how wrong, “silent treatment”. “fine, I mean, I guess we could do it that way, whatever” . Competitive in nature.

Assertiveness : Actions and expressions fit with words spoken, firm but polite and clear messages, respectful of self and others. Compassionate in nature

In CFT we want to work towards **Compassionate Assertiveness.**

Compassionate Assertiveness

Essentially, compassionate assertiveness is trying to understand clearly our own minds and the minds of others

Spend some time considering what gets in the way of your assertive communication? Do you tip into threat and aggressive or passive? Consider what are your blocks to assertive communication and how can your compassionate wisdom and skills help you in this moment.

- Is confidence
- Is clear
- Uses “I am feeling” statements not “you made me...”
- Is the ability to express dissatisfaction, concerns and upsets
- Is recognizing that our interpretations may be the source of our hurt rather than what was actually said or intended
- Allows us to acknowledge and admit our limitations or mistakes without feeling shame
- Allows us to take the lead in praising others and acknowledging their helpfulness
- Allows us to be open to helpfulness from others
- Is being genuinely empathetic to ourselves and others
- Is mindful of non-verbal messages through our face and posture

A quick trick to keep in mind.....

Acknowledge. We acknowledge our feeling and needs and those of who else is involved

Breathe. We stop, breathe and change gear out of threat and into our soothing and caring mindset.

Compassion self. How can your compassionate self help you to use your wisdom, commitment and courage to express your needs and recognise someone else's.

General Communication tips

1. **BREATHE.** Use your breath to pause and ground yourself at any point in the conversation, use it as many times as you need.
2. **Choose your moment-** if you are not used to being assertive in your communication pick a few times to try it out, build up gradually and reflect on your experiences from a mindful position
3. **Practice.** If you know there are specific situations which you would like to be assertive in but aren't practice some lines that you could say, have them ready for when you need them.
4. **Body Language:** Face the other person, stand or sit straight, don't use dismissive gestures, be sure you have a pleasant, but serious facial expression, keep your voice calm and soft, not abrasive.
5. **Use "I" statements.** Keep the focus on the problem you're having, not on the other person. Take ownership of your thoughts and feelings, **Example:** "I feel under pressure to eat when I don't want to instead of "You are always making me eat!!"
6. **Use facts,** not judgments.
7. **Make clear, direct, requests.** Be as specific as you possibly can be as to what you want the other person to do.
8. **Broken record:** Keep repeating your point, using a low level, pleasant voice. Don't get pulled into arguing or trying to explain yourself.
9. **Be aware of the process, notice if** you have moved off topic, use it when someone's not listening or trying to use humor or a distraction to avoid the issue. **Example:** "You're getting off the point, can we come back to ..."
10. **Defusing:** Letting someone cool down before discussing an issue. Be prepared to walk away if that's what is needed in the moment and come back to it another time.

Remember- you are not responsible for how the other person chooses to react! You take responsibility for your feelings so allow the other person to do the same. Some people might initially be resistant to this change- but keep going, it is a totally acceptable thing to do.

Swamp and Mountain



Suppose you begin a journey to a beautiful mountain which you can clearly see in the distance. You really want to climb the mountain because it means you will be in touch with nature, you have been working up to climbing this mountain as part of self-development and you are also looking forward to spending time with your fellow climbers.

So you get all packed up. You establish a base-camp at the bottom of the mountain. Then you set off. And you walk for a while, enjoying the journey.

But then you reach a swamp. The swamp spans for as far as the eye can see. And it is muddy. And it is wet. And there is no doubt in your mind that the swamp is in your path. So you think to yourself- *this wasn't on the map! I didn't realise I was going to have to go through this swamp. It smells terrible and I am going to get muddy and my feet are going to get wet*

You have a look at the swamp and you dip your toe in to check, and yes, your shoes are instantly covered in mud.

So at this point you consider your options:

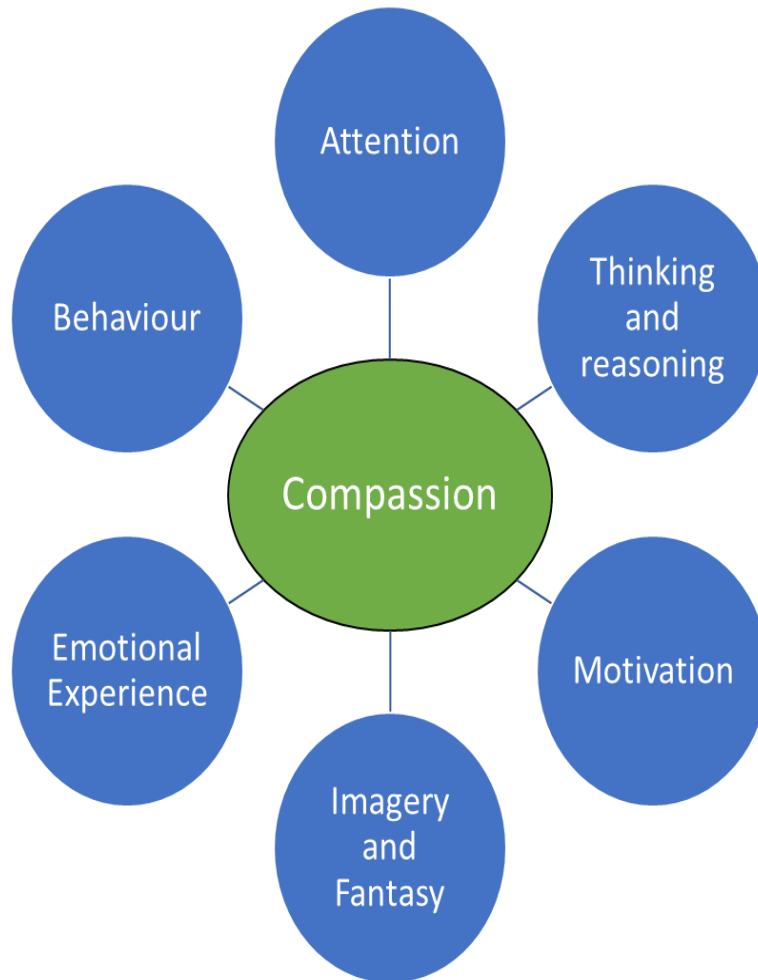
1. You can return to base-camp and wait for the swamp to go away (but knowing full well, the swamp is not going anywhere!!),
2. Or you could go home.
3. Or you could walk through the swamp and continue with your journey and everything that goes with it!

Options 1 and 2 do not take you any closer to the mountain and mean you are avoiding the temporary discomfort that the swamp brings.

If you choose Option 3 you are making a commitment to living your life in line with values. Everyone reaches swamps of some kind on their journey throughout life. We go into the swamp, not because we want to get muddy, but because the swamp stands between us and where we are going.

Your compassionate -self knows that your tricky brain will lead you in different directions. In fact, we are not expected to stay on track constantly as our tricky brains will likely get in the way. Writing some ideas down can bring us back to our compassionate-self and serve as an “emergency backup plan” to help us feel ready to challenge such resistance. **Don’t forget your kitbag!!!**

Start by slowing your breathing and activating your compassionate-self. As you are engaged with your compassionate-self, think about the diagram below.



What are my swamps?

How might the swamp effect my:

Attention:

Thinking/reasoning:

Emotional Experience:

Imagery:

Motivation:

Behaviour:

Which are the situations in which I might need compassion for others the most?

Which are the situations in which I might need to be able to accept compassion from others the most?

How can I use the session content to support me?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Endings and Janus Gate

As with the start of the group, many people worry about the group coming to an end; which is understandable as it will have been a part of their routine for a long time.

That is why it is important to think about what other “endings” we have experienced in life. Often when people have had difficult, abrupt, unexpected or traumatic endings we can hold anxieties about the same things happening again. Spend some time offering compassion to the part of you that holds concerns about the group coming to the end.

Janus Gate

In the group we will do an exercise to mark our journey through the group called the Janus Gate. “Janus” is the two headed Roman God; one head looking to the past, and one head looking to the future.

In our exercise we will use the idea to look at our journey from the start of the group to now, and the things we want to take with us (or indeed leave behind) as we move forward in our lives.

Scrap book

As the CFT groups continue we will invite you to write a message to the next group about to start. Please make this anonymous so as to maintain our safe space agreement.

Recommended Reading

- The Compassionate Mind Workbook by Chris Irons and Elaine Beaumont
- The Anxiety Workbook by Dennis Tirch
- Building your Self Confidence using Compassion Focussed Therapy by Mary Welford
- Recovering from Trauma using Compassion Focused Therapy by Deborah Lee
- The Compassionate Mind Approach to Difficult Emotions using compassion Focused therapy by Chris Irons

Websites:

Both these websites have videos, exercises and information about compassion focussed therapy.

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/>

[Compassion Focused Therapy \(CFT\) & Self-Compassion Resources \(balancedminds.com\)](https://www.balancedminds.com/)