

## Taking a Compassionate Approach

Taking a compassionate approach with ourselves can help to overcome feelings of shame and self-criticism. Compassion is described as a *deep sensitivity to the suffering of the self and others and a commitment to try to alleviate it*. A compassionate person would therefore need to be warm, strong, non-judgemental and wise in order to meet the criteria of having compassion and would act in a way that is consistent with these qualities. This can be a difficult approach to take with yourself in times of distress, especially when you are feeling the powerful emotion of shame. To overcome this, it can be helpful to generate an image of an *ideal compassionate other*. The image may then be able to support you and guide you in difficult situations enabling you to surround both yourself and others with love, acceptance, and compassion.

### **Here is an exercise to support you to create an *ideal compassionate other* image**

Sit comfortably, with your feet on the floor and your back in a straight posture and gently focus on your breathing. Follow the breath as it comes in and follow it as it comes out.

Start to think about what an ideal compassionate image might look like, let the image emerge in your mind and gently notice what comes up. Remember that the image must have the qualities of wisdom, warmth, strength and non-judgement.

Some questions to ask yourself might be:

- What would I want my image to be; old or young, male or female, human or non-human?
  - What would their tone of voice be? How would they sound?
- How would they relate to me? What would help me to sense their commitment and kindness to me?
  - How do they show that they wish to make me feel safe and cared for?

Experience what it is like to focus on the feeling that another being values and cares for you unconditionally. Focus on the idea that your compassionate self is looking at you with warmth and kindness, and imagine that they have the following desires for you:

That you be well  
That you be happy  
That you be free from suffering

## **Compassion Flowing Into Oneself: Using Memory**

Memory can be a great tool for provoking and practicing compassion.

Begin with your soothing rhythm breathing and practice this for a minute or two. Once you feel that your body has slowed down a bit, prepare for the exercise by allowing your body posture and facial expression to become compassionate.

Feel free to play around with postures and facial expressions, but whatever expression and posture you go with, they should be gentle.

Once you are ready, think of a time when someone was kind to you.

Try not to think of a time when someone was kind to you because you were in distress; the point of this exercise is not to focus on your distress, but on the desire to be kind and to help others.

Remember the compassion you received. Recall how it felt to receive that kindness.

Spend a minute thinking about the expressions of the person who was kind to you and mimicking them, if that helps. If you're having trouble remembering them, imagine the person moving toward you with a smile on their face or their head tilted to one side.

While recalling the memory, focus on the important sensory qualities of your memory. Try the following steps:

1. Focus on the kinds of things this person said, as well as the tone of their voice when they spoke.
2. Next, focus on the feeling of the emotion in the person – what they really felt for you at that moment.
3. Focus on the entire experience. Think about whether they touched you in a friendly or comforting way, or whether they helped you in some other way.

Allow the experience of gratitude and joy in being helped to grow in you. Remember to keep your expression as compassionate as you can.

When you are ready, let the memory gently fade. Come slowly out of the exercise, and take some notes about how you felt before, during, and after the exercise.