

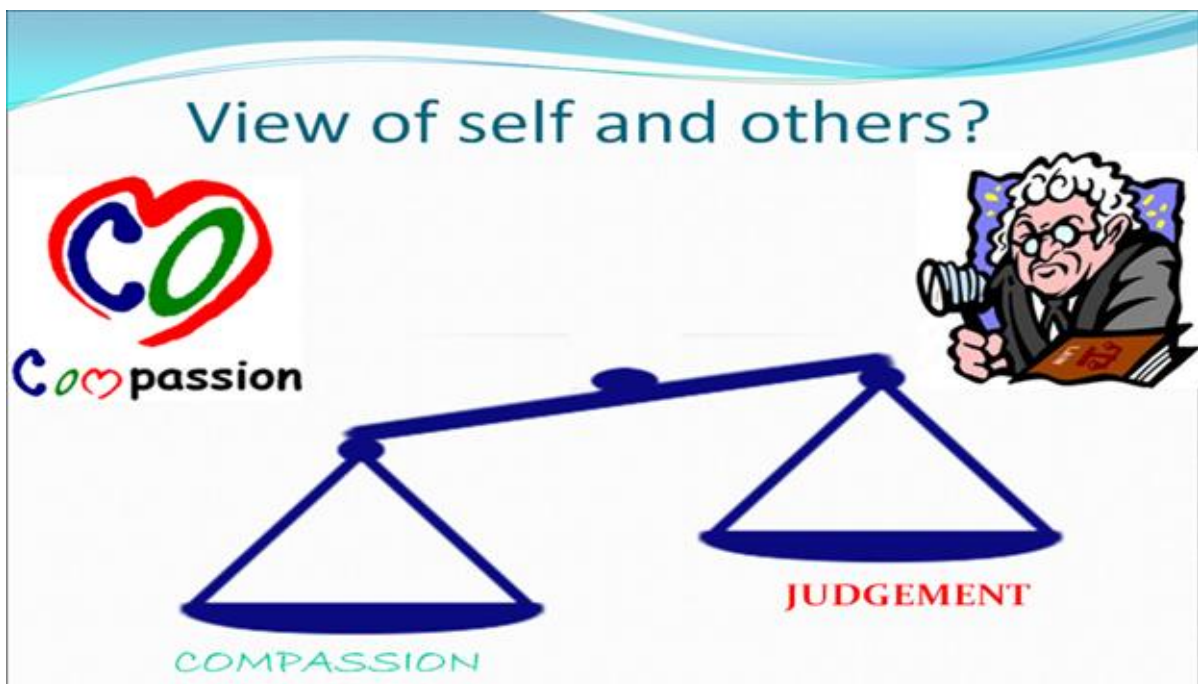
Developing Self-Compassion

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The way our lives have changed in recent months has both been both a collective and an individual experience. The restrictions placed upon us and the changes in our workplaces may have been similar, however the way that we experience these changes is personal to us. We may have had to live and work in a way that is not in keeping with our personal values, and whilst this has been a necessary part of the response to Covid-19, there may now be some challenging emotions arising from what has happened to us.

One useful approach can be to express gratitude for what we have in our lives, for example our family, friends and colleagues. Noticing nature, the space around us and the sky above may bring awareness of our connection to the earth, providing an opportunity to “ground” ourselves. It can also help to pay attention to our inner voice and the relationship we have with ourselves, and the way that this can impact on our thoughts, how we “see ourselves”, and the quality of our lives and wellbeing.

To help manage difficult feelings or emotions, we can try paying attention to our compassion for ourselves and how we feel when offered compassion by another, as opposed to being compassionate to others. Noticing our thoughts and the tone of voice we use with ourselves may give us some clues about how compassionately we view our self.



We all have this set of scales – if we are viewing our self (or others) with judgment, we cannot be compassionate. Similarly, if we are being compassionate to our self, we cannot be judgmental. The impact of developing greater self-compassion is that we are not then judgmental or unkind to ourselves.

Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” Among emotion researchers, it’s defined as the feeling that arises when you’re confronted with another person’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

To be judgmental is defined as tending to form opinions too quickly, especially when disapproving of someone or something.

Developing self-compassion

Self-compassion has three main elements (ref. Kristen Neff):

1. Self-kindness or having the ability to refrain from harsh criticism.
2. The ability to recognize your own humanity or the fact that each of us is imperfect and each of us experiences pain.
3. The ability to maintain a sense of mindfulness or non-biased awareness of experiences, even if they are painful.

When we are able to bring more self compassion into our lives, it can have a positive effect: reducing getting “caught up” in self critical internal thoughts, recovering more quickly from our mistakes and learning from them, realising that we are all human. Accepting this about ourselves also makes us more supportive and accepting of other folk.

What might help now?

- Noticing what we are grateful for can lessen some of the challenging emotions and sensations that we’re experiencing these days. Trying to keep a record at bedtime of things that have gone well each day, can be very useful.
- Becoming more aware of what is going on for us in this moment. Recognising the “layers” of our experience at present: what we’re feeling through our senses; sight, touch, smell, sound, the sensations in our bodies; temperature, comfort, pain, itch, our thought patterns and mindset, our emotions now.
- For some people mindfulness can be helpful, however for people who are new to the concept, becoming more aware of difficult emotions can be unsettling initially and care should be taken in this case. Self-compassion can grow out of practicing mindfulness; for some people, starting to focus on compassion for others first, can then evolve and lead to greater self- compassion.

Being more compassionate to ourselves is very individual, however it might include:

- ✓ Drinking plenty of water
- ✓ Getting sufficient sleep – 7-8 hours
- ✓ Eating as healthily as possible (as close to living)
- ✓ Taking regular physical activity

- ✓ Connecting with the natural environment
- ✓ Finding fun and laughter
- ✓ Listening to music
- ✓ Expressing emotion with a trusted person
- ✓ Finding creative activity
- ✓ 5 Ways To Wellbeing

