

Shame, self-attacking and compassion
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Exercise 1: Your Intuitive Wisdom of Shame

To help you recognise the complex nature of shame and that you already have intuitive knowledge of shame, we would like to you to engage in a short imagery exercise.

Let's take a *hypothetical* situation: Imagine that as part of this workshop you will be asked to describe something you feel ashamed about, and would rather keep hidden, to the person sitting next to you. We would like you to explore this in a series of steps. Rest assured this is hypothetical, but try to imagine it as if it were to be the case.

1. Can you think about a shame related event, feeling or fantasy and imagine it?

Now think about speaking about this

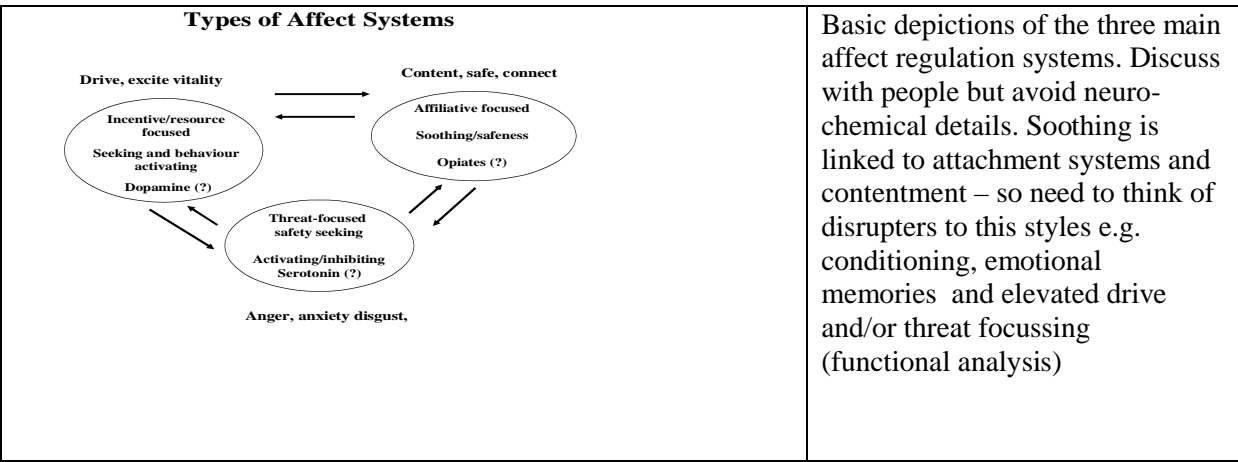
2. My first automatic *feelings* would be?

3. Fill in the spaces below

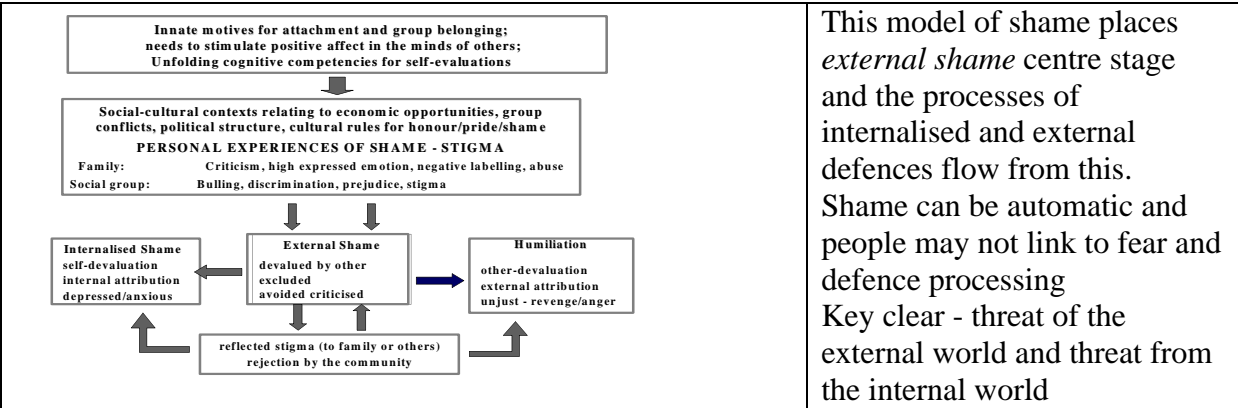
Thoughts about what others will think/feel about you and how they will behave towards you	My own thoughts and feelings about myself
They will think/feel.....	I think I am....
1.	1.
2.	2
3	3
My key fear is that they will:	My key fear is that I will

Given these key fears - what are your main coping behaviours – how might you cope with these?
 What might you do to stop any possible feared outcome?

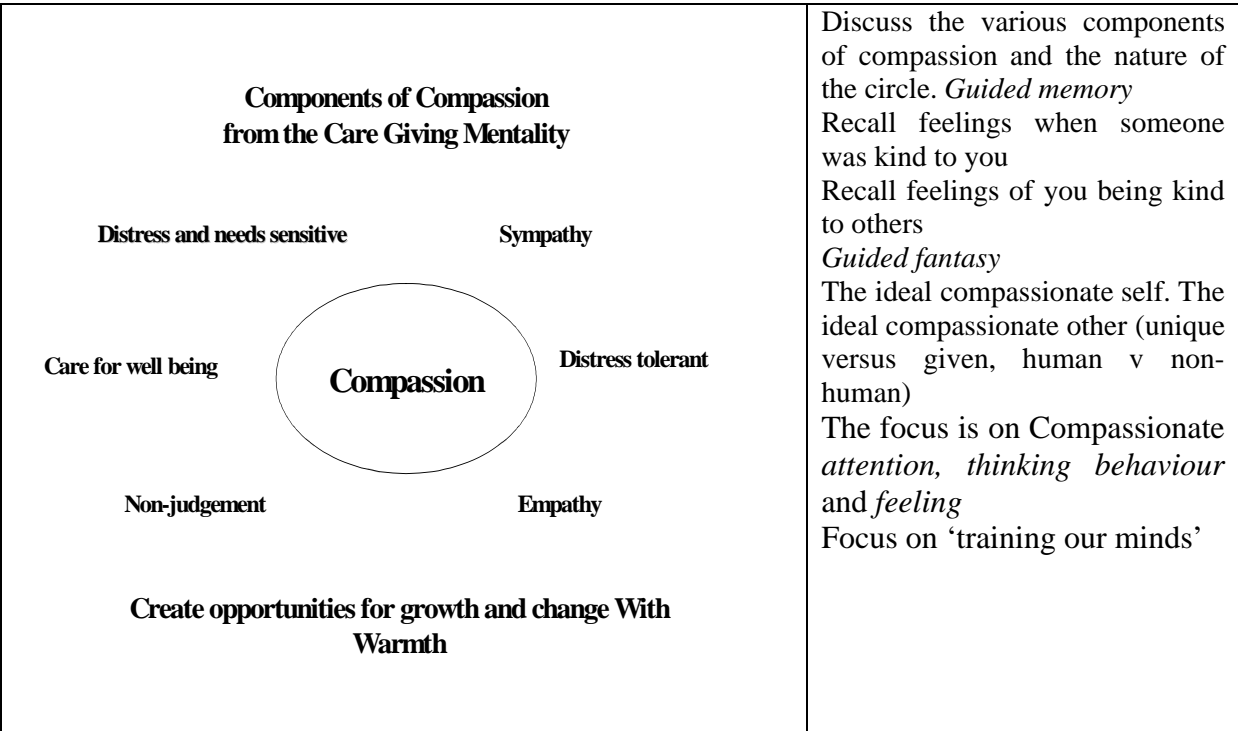
What have we learnt from this exercise?



Basic depictions of the three main affect regulation systems. Discuss with people but avoid neuro-chemical details. Soothing is linked to attachment systems and contentment – so need to think of disrupters to this styles e.g. conditioning, emotional memories and elevated drive and/or threat focussing (functional analysis)



This model of shame places *external shame* centre stage and the processes of internalised and external defences flow from this. Shame can be automatic and people may not link to fear and defence processing Key clear - threat of the external world and threat from the internal world



Discuss the various components of compassion and the nature of the circle. *Guided memory* Recall feelings when someone was kind to you Recall feelings of you being kind to others *Guided fantasy* The ideal compassionate self. The ideal compassionate other (unique versus given, human v non-human) The focus is on Compassionate attention, thinking behaviour and feeling Focus on ‘training our minds’

Developing Qualities of Inner Compassion (Client Handout)

As we have seen from our work together, being self-critical can be very stressful and make us feel worse. One way of coping with disappointment and our 'inner bully' is to learn to be compassionate to the self. This requires a number of things of us:

1. Valuing Compassion. Some people are worried that if they are compassionate with themselves they may somehow be weak or lack the drive to succeed. Thus, they don't really value compassion. However, if we think about people who are renowned for their compassion, such as Buddha, Jesus, Ghandi, Florence Nightingale, and Nelson Mandela, they can hardly be regarded as weak or 'unsuccessful'. Learning to be compassionate can actually make us stronger and feel more confident.

2. Empathy. Empathy means that we can understand how people feel and think, see things from their point of view. Similarly, when we have empathy *for ourselves* we can develop a better *understanding* for some of our painful feelings of disappointment, anxiety, anger or sadness. This can mean we may need to learn when to be *gently sensitive to our* feelings and distress – rather than try not to notice them or avoid them. Sometimes we tell ourselves that we shouldn't feel or think as we do, and try to deny our feelings rather than working with them. The problem with this is that we don't explore them to understand them and then they can be frightening to us.

3. Sympathy. Sympathy is less about our understanding and more about feeling and wanting to care, help and heal. When we feel sympathy for someone, we can feel sad or distressed with them. Learning to have sympathy *for ourselves* means that we can learn to be sad, without being depressed e.g. without telling ourselves that there is something wrong or bad about feeling sad. We can also focus on feelings of *kindness in our sympathy*.

4. Forgiveness. Our self-critical part is often very unforgiving, and will usually see any opportunity to attack or condemn as an opportunity not to be missed! Learning the art of forgiveness however, is important. Forgiveness allows us to learn how to change; we are open to our mistakes and learn from them.

5. Acceptance/tolerance. There can be many things about ourselves that we might like to change, and sometimes it is helpful to do that. However, it is also important to develop acceptance of ourselves as human beings 'as we are' with a full range of positive and negative emotions. Acceptance isn't passive resignation, such as feelings of being defeated, or not bothering with oneself. It is an *open-heartedness* to all our fallibilities and efforts. It is like having the flu and accepting that you have to go to bed perhaps, but also doing all you can to help your recovery.

6. Developing Feelings of Warmth. This requires us to begin to experience and practice generating *feelings* of warmth for the self. To do this we can use images and practice feeling warmth coming into us. When we are depressed this feeling may be very toned down and hard to generate – so we will have to practice. It can seem strange and sometimes even frightening - so we can go step at a time.

7. Growth. Compassion is focused on helping people grow, change and develop. It is life enhancing in a way that bullying often is not. When we learn to be compassionate with ourselves, we are learning to deal with our fallible selves, such that we can grow and change. Compassion can also help us face some of the painful feelings we wish to avoid.

8. Taking responsibility. One element of compassionate mind work is taking responsibility for one's self-critical thinking. We can learn to understand how and why we became self-critical, often because we felt threatened in some way. Becoming empathic means coming to see the threats that lay behind self criticism. To do this we can learn to recognise when it's happening and then use our compassionate side to provide alternative views and feelings.

9. Training: When we attack ourselves we stimulate certain pathways in our brain but when we learn to be compassionate and supportive to our efforts we stimulate different pathways. Sometimes we are so well practiced at stimulating inner attacks/criticisms that our ability to stimulate inner support and warmth is rather under-developed. Hence, now that we have seen how we can generate alternatives to our self-attacking thoughts, we can explore ways to help them have more emotional impact. It does not take away painful realities but it can help us to cope in a different way. The training part can be like going to a physiotherapist, where you learn to do exercises and build up certain strengths. The compassion systems in your brain are the ones we are trying to strengthen with our exercises.

Exercise 2

Building a Compassionate Image

This exercise is to help you *build* up a compassionate image for you to work with and develop (you can have more than one if you wish, and they can change over time). Whatever image comes to mind or you choose to work with, note that it *is your* creation and therefore your own personal ideal - what you would really like from feeling cared for and cared about. However, in this practice it is important that you try to give your image certain qualities. These will include:

Wisdom, Strength, Warmth and Non- judgement

So in each box below think of these qualities (wisdom, strength, warmth and non-judgement) and imagine what they would look, sound or feel like.

If possible we begin by focusing on our breathing, finding our calming rhythm and making a half smile. Then we can let images emerge in the mind –as best you can – do not too try too hard - if nothing comes to the mind, or the mind wanders, just *gently* bring it back to the breathing and practice compassionately accepting.

Here are some questions that might help you build an image: would you want your caring/nurturing image to feel/look/seem old or young; male or female (or non-human looking e.g., an animal, sea or light)? What colours and sounds are associated with the qualities of wisdom, strength, warmth and non-judgement? Remember your image brings compassion to you and for you.

How would you like your ideal caring-compassionate image to look/appear – visual qualities?

How would you like your ideal caring-compassionate image to sound (e.g., voice tone)?

What other sensory qualities can you give to it?

How would you like your ideal caring-compassionate image to relate to you?

How would like to relate to your ideal caring compassionate image?

Threat/Safety Strategies Formulation

Historical influences

(Emotional Memories)
Self As Other As

Key Fears

Safety/defensive behaviours

Unintended Consequences

Self-to-self-relating

Pointers: Try to stay simple to start with:

Focus on sharing and understanding together; encourage the person to reflect and develop their own formulation. Part of the focus is understanding our difficulties in 'not our fault' way.

Avoid language of cognitive *distortion* or *maladaptive* schema as this can be shaming for high shame patients.

Focus on 'your defence system has tried to keep you safe; better safe than sorry' etc. One's defences are natural efforts to adapt to challenges and threats but with unintentional drawbacks/consequences – e.g., little new learning, not able to disconfirm basic threat beliefs, few opportunities for exploration.

Key questions: What do you see as key background experiences to your depression? What key fears and concerns do you think these created for you (keep in mind to explore external fears and internal ones)? Looking back how you think your mind has tried to protect you (again think about protecting self from *external* threats such as rejection and also *internal ones* such as overwhelming feelings). Recognise that some people may close down on threat and may not be able to reflect on painful experiences or memories. They simply are unable to or don't want to 'go there'. Spend time enabling people to be empathic to their safety strategies as 'best efforts.' What have been the unintended consequences (disadvantages) of these safety strategies? What do you think about yourself when you run into these unintended consequences?