Workshop 2: The Compassionate Mind Approach to Recovering from Complex PTSD

Dr Deborah Lee

Those who have been repeatedly traumatised at the hands of others have many challenges to face as they discover a life without trauma and learn how to live in a mind that can flourish. Predominant issues of self-blame, self-loathing, lack of trust, interpersonal difficulties and struggles to regulate threat-based emotions are prevalent in therapy. These difficulties are often described as Complex PTSD.

Effective treatments of interpersonal trauma suggest phased based approaches for Complex PTSD (Cloitre, 2010) yet the precise ingredients of the phases are still debated. Key challenges for clients are to discover that their lives are not of their making, that they are not to blame for their traumas and that they can take responsibility to act and feel differently. Phased based treatments need to address these issues with effective therapeutic intervention that enhance affect regulation, develop self-acceptance, enhance interpersonal functioning, develop a coherent sense of self and contextualise fragmented memories.

Recent expert consensus (published by the UK Psychological Trauma Society 2017) recommends compassion focussed therapy as part of a phased treatment approach and this workshop explores the use of compassion focused therapy to treat those with Complex PTSD. Compassionate resilience can enhance affect regulation, interpersonal functioning, problem solving and the ability to hold trauma memories with a caring compassionate mind. Compassionate resilience enhances feelings of self-soothing and safeness in these memories and reduces self-critical maintenance cycles by developing compassionate self-talk. It helps the development of the capacity to self-soothe to those who feel deeply shamed about who they are and what they have been through. Being able to access and use compassion to develop new perspectives on life and past experiences can provide a helpful framework to work through trauma stories and to develop more helpful intra and interpersonal relationships.

This Workshop will present some key ideas and process involved in using compassion focused therapy with those who suffer from Complex PTSD.

Compassion focussed therapy was developed by Professor Paul Gilbert (2005, 2009). The explicit goal is to develop, access and stimulate positive affect associated with self-soothing in the mind and body of the patient in order to promote an inner sense of psychological safeness (Gilbert, 2005).

Bio:
Dr Deborah Lee is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Head of Berkshire Traumatic Stress Service and South Central Veterans Service. She is also an Honorary Senior Lecturer at University College London. She is author of the Compassionate Mind Guide to Recovering from Trauma and PTSD: Using Compassion-Focused Therapy to Overcome Flashbacks, Shame, Guilt, and Fear (2017) New Harbinger, New York.

Dr Lee has worked in the field of trauma for 25 years and specialises in the treatment of Complex PTSD. The particular area of clinical and research interest is in shame based PTSD and self-criticism. She has pioneered the use of developing compassionate resilience as part of a phased based treatment approach to complex PTSD. She has widely contributed to the dissemination of her clinical knowledge through writing and delivering over 100 clinical workshops and talks in North America and Europe.

Key references: