Workshop 5:
CFT and CMT as Support for Positive Psychology

Professor Ernst Bohlmeijer & Dr Chris Irons

Compassion Focused Therapy helps people understand that the human brain evolved in ways that can make emotion regulation difficult, especially in the context of certain social contexts (e.g. difficult early life histories; threat based social or relational experiences). While many therapies focus on threat processes, CFT also focuses on the importance of cultivating positive affect systems (‘drive’ and ‘soothing’), and how compassion can be an organizing principle in the mind for facilitating both reduction of distress and suffering, but also in the promotion of wellbeing and flourishing. Here, CFT has a natural overlap with Positive psychology, which focuses on the science of well-being and flourishing.

In this experiential workshop participants will be introduced to the core principles and evidence-base of positive psychology, and how this overlaps nicely with various aspects of CFT. Participants will be introduced to various exercises that help to cultivate the drive and soothing systems, and learn how these overlap with evidence based interventions from positive psychology. We will consider how, by developing different types of positive affect systems and exercises commonly used in positive psychology, this might help to regulate our threat systems, and help cultivate our compassionate self.

Professor Ernst Bohlmeijer bio:
Ernst Bohlmeijer is Professor of Mental Health Promotion at the Department of Psychology, Health & Technology at the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences at Twente University. He has a special interest in the development and evaluation of innovative interventions in mental health care. He developed eight interventions aiming at enhancing resilience and well-being and reducing distress based on positive psychology, acceptance and commitment therapy and compassion focused therapy.
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Dr Chris Irons bio:
Dr Chris Irons is a Clinical Psychologist working in the National Health Service (NHS), in London, UK. He has been working alongside Professor Paul Gilbert and other colleagues in the theoretical and clinical developments and adaptations of CFT (CFT; Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert & Irons, 2002; Gilbert & Irons, 2014) as a science based psychotherapeutic approach. In his clinical work, he uses Compassion Focused Therapy in working with people suffering form a variety of mental health problems, including persistent depression, PTSD, OCD, bipolar affective disorder, eating disorders and schizophrenia, along with a variety of personality disorders.

Chris is a board member of the Compassionate Mind Foundation, a charitable organisation aiming to “Promote well-being through the scientific understanding and application of compassion”. He regularly presents to academic, professional and lay audiences on CFT and more broadly, the science of compassion. He is interested in how compassion may improve individual well-being, relationship satisfaction, and facilitate positive group and organisational change. Amongst other things, he is currently researching the role of compassion and rumination in depression; the role of compassion and shame in psychosis; and the role of self and other compassion in relationship quality. He recently published a book on depression, and is currently writing two books on CFT.