

Adult Mental Health Services  
Stabilisation Workbook 1

# Developing self- compassion: Learning to be kind to yourself



## Introduction

Self-compassion is about learning to feel **kind** and loving towards **yourself**.

We can think about and remember the different qualities associated with self-compassion using **SAFE**:

- Sympathy:** Wanting to care for and help ourselves, especially if we are feeling low, scared or vulnerable. Sympathy means being kind to ourselves rather than being hard on ourselves.
- Acceptance:** Recognising ourselves for who we are. Acceptance is about self-awareness, getting to know and like ourselves with our unique differences. This is more helpful than wishing we were a different kind of person with different feelings and characteristics.
- Forgiveness:** Recognising that we make mistakes and can learn from them. Forgiveness allows us to change if we need to, instead of getting stuck in self-criticism.
- Empathy:** Empathy is about being in touch with how others feel, and in turn being more able to accept and understand our own feelings.

Developing self-compassion can be difficult, especially if we have experienced difficult and / or traumatic events in our past. This is because we learn from our experiences, and negative experiences can teach us to treat ourselves in negative ways.

As with any new skill, developing self-compassion may feel strange or scary at first and will need practice.

### Exercise

- Think about each of the above **SAFE** qualities of self-compassion.
- Do you know anyone who seems to fit with these descriptions? For example, a friend or relative, or perhaps someone you have read about?
- Can you think of times when you have behaved compassionately towards others?
- How could you begin to be more like this towards yourself?

## Compassionate acts exercise

One of the most important ways of building self-compassion, is by making changes to the way we behave towards and treat ourselves. Without even realising, we can fall into patterns of treating ourselves in harsh, negative and punishing ways. This can enforce unhelpful ideas that we may hold about ourselves as unimportant and undeserving of compassion. Carving out time every day to engage with at least one self-compassionate act is an important way of telling ourselves that we are deserving of love and kindness.

Examples of self-compassionate acts might include:

- Taking time out for a relaxing bubble bath with candles
- Treating yourself to a nice dinner
- Going for a massage
- Watching an enjoyable movie
- Visiting a favourite place
- Buying yourself a bar of your favourite chocolate to enjoy after dinner.

Use the diary below to plan how you will treat yourself with compassion every day.

	Compassionate act
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

## Compassionate image exercise

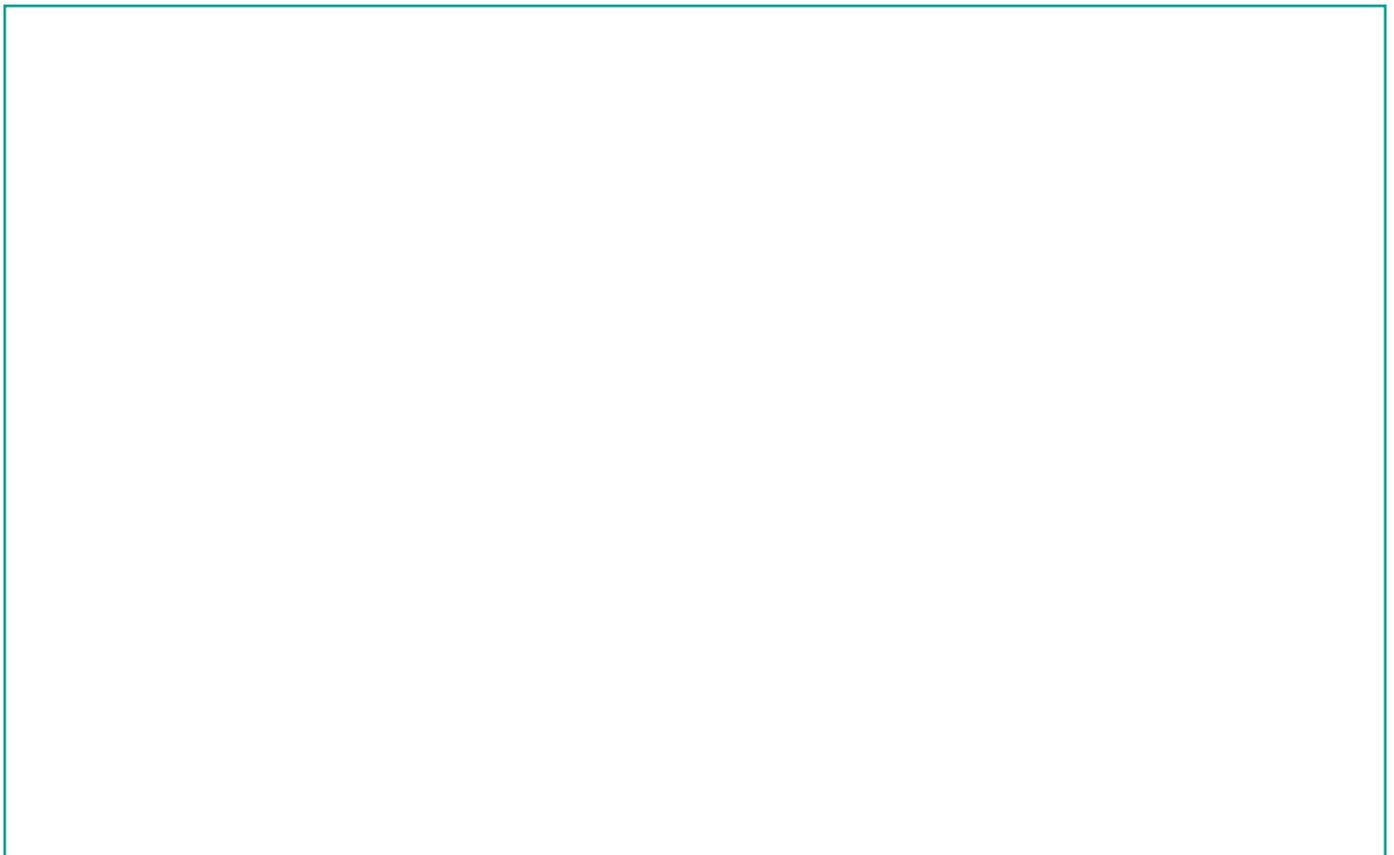
One way of developing skills in self-compassion is to create your own compassionate image. Some people may find this difficult and it may take some practice.

You can use this image when you are feeling sad, lonely or self-critical, and to soothe yourself in times of distress. Examples of images some people have found helpful include an angel, a rainbow, a beautiful animal of some kind, and so on.

Here are some questions to help you to start to develop your compassionate image:

1. What would you like your compassionate image to look like?
2. What would they sound like?
3. How would they smell or feel?
4. How would you like your image to relate (respond) to you?
5. How would you like to be able to relate (respond) to your image?
6. Does your image have a name? What would you call your image?

You may find it helpful to use the space below to write down a description of your compassionate image or draw the image, to help you to remember and bring your image to life.



## Compassionate object exercise

It can be helpful for people to carry something with them as a reminder of self-compassion, e.g. a photograph, a cross, a picture of a Buddha or a soft toy. Take some time to think about what could be a compassionate object for you, and once you've decided write it down in the box below.

Whenever you practice being compassionate towards yourself you can hold this object or look at it. This will gradually help you to anchor a new set of compassionate responses to the object, which you can then call upon when you are feeling judgemental or critical towards yourself.



## Compassionate voice exercise

A very common way that we can lose self-compassion is in the way that we talk to ourselves. Our internal dialogue (the way in which we speak and relate to ourselves) can easily become very harsh, blaming and self-critical. Often this critical voice can become so automatic that we are hardly aware of it, and how much it is there, repeatedly criticising in the background of our mind. Holding a negative and critical internal dialogue can bring up all sorts of difficult feelings and emotions, and intensify our levels of distress.

The following exercise has been developed to support you to start to acknowledge your critical voice and challenge it with a more compassionate one. Every time you notice your critical voice coming up, pause, take a step back and write down what it is saying. This will support you to start to get some distance from the voice. Now practice speaking back to it in a more compassionate voice.

If you are struggling to think of compassionate responses to the critical voice, why not imagine how the following may respond to the critical voice to help you:

- Imagine how your compassionate image may respond to the critical voice
- Imagine how a friend, family or staff member may respond to the critical voice
- Imagine how you may respond to a friend if it were their critical voice.

Below are some examples of a critical and compassionate voice. Overleaf, is a blank worksheet for you to complete.

Critical voice	Compassionate voice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "You are such a failure."</li><li>• "You did a rubbish job at that."</li><li>• "You are so stupid, why do you mess everything up and get everything wrong."</li><li>• "Everyone hates you and thinks you are an idiot."</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "You are doing the best you can."</li><li>• "You did well enough."</li><li>• "You tried your very best and are making great progress."</li><li>• "Everyone always says kind things about you, and knows you are trying your best."</li></ul>

<b>Critical voice</b>	<b>Compassionate voice</b>



This manual has been developed by the Harrow TIA Team (Faye Nikopaschos, Gail Burrell, Sheelagh Holmes, Nick Rhodes and Cleo Boado) from the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board – Psychological Therapies Department  
Stabilisation Pack