

## **Module Self-compassion:**

### **CARE ABOUT YOURSELF: SKILLS**

#### **WHY?**

If someone is in pain, the way in which they react to themselves plays an important part in deciding how much suffering they will experience. Research shows that people who can apply self-compassion can deal better with stress and recover more quickly from difficult events. For some people self-compassion is easy or normal. Maybe their parents or other caretakers taught them. For others it is difficult, they can get stuck without having the possibility to be friendly and full of compassion towards themselves. Often the ones who have had many problems and could therefore profit the most of self-compassion are the ones who are most probable to apply it the least. You could think that self-compassion is threatening and/or cannot be learned. We all try to help each other to go forward and to have compassion with ourselves and others. Some people believe that as long as they are hard enough on themselves, they are more probable to do something and to change. They can say things to themselves as: 'I am just lazy', 'just get over it'... This kind of reactions will probably increase fear, decrease motivation and over time increase hopelessness. Though it may enable you to let yourself directly do something in the short run, it will cause passiveness and doing nothing in the long run. Fortunately, the self-compassion skills can be learned en applied in daily life, even for those who have very little compassion for themselves. It is important to be patient when learning and applying skills, and to see it as a process. When you imagine that you move from a judging and blaming-yourself position to a more aware and loving-yourself position, it is important to notice the small and gradual changes during the entire process.

#### **HOW**

Self-compassion skills group.

1. Use of self-compassion skills to decrease emotional suffering
2. Practice self-comforting compassion
3. Interpersonal compassion skills (VALUABLE SELF)



## **Caring about yourself: Handout 1**

### Use of self-compassion skills to decrease emotional suffering

Everyone is to a certain extent critical of him/herself and experiences painful feelings because he/she has problems and makes mistakes. This circle of problems/mistakes that lead to painful feelings and self-judgment results in continuous suffering. This is a normal process, but not a helpful one. What is needed, is to provide yourself an alternative process, one that teaches you to take better care of yourself and to forgive yourself more, but also helps to focus on something else than your problems, pain, and mistakes.

As with every skill it may cost time to learn and apply self-compassion, but it is certain that hitting and criticising yourself barely helps.

Radical acceptance of the problem: Accept that something you don't like has happened. Maybe you have made a mistake or done something you shouldn't have done. You don't need to avoid thinking about what happened.

Being mindful of pain and self-criticism: observe (be aware of) and describe (only the facts) your thoughts and feelings.

Withhold yourself of self-criticism: notice the critical thoughts that you have about yourself. If you notice that you are thrashing yourself, try to focus on a more friendly/kind approach.

Acknowledge that you are just human: you can remind yourself that everyone has problems and makes mistakes. No one does everything correctly: everyone experiences failure or not getting what they want or need.

Remind yourself that your problems and failures do not make you: you and your experiences have many sides. Problems and failures are only a part of the whole image.

Cultivate a feeling of friendliness and care towards yourself: try to experience a feeling of compassion towards yourself while you are in the midst of your problems and pain.



## Caring about yourself: Handout 2

### Practicing self-comforting compassion

Self-criticism and shame are rooted in fear. We have reactions out of fear because they protect ourselves. These skills are about training our mind to decrease the intensity that we experience when it is about problems or mistakes. With the help of these exercises we work to decrease the reactions of our body and mind that continue the fear, critical thoughts, and painful feelings.

Develop and use a compassionate image: Use an image that you personally find comforting. It can be a place, a person, an animal, or an object that you can picture in your mind and use to relax, feel calmer, and therefore feel more focused.

Pay attention to your breath: pay full attention, as much as you can, to your breath. Keep your attention with your breath. If you are distracted, friendly let go of the distraction and go back to your breath.

Distance yourself of your self-criticizing part: imagine that part of yourself that is angry and criticises you. See that part as separate from you. Distance yourself from the image and remind yourself that you are more than this part of you.

Develop and use an image of the wise mind: imagine that part of yourself that is characterised by wisdom, power, affection, care, and impartiality. Allow that part of yourself to talk to you or look at you full of affection.



## INTERPERSONAL COMPASSION SKILLS

### VALUABLE SELF

**Be kind** towards yourself. Respect yourself. Be gentle with yourself.

Notice when you are uncharitable for yourself with your words or acts and agree to be more gentle. If you notice that you are criticising yourself take a step back and say something that is encouraging. Don't enact any self-harming behaviour. Practice touching yourself in a friendly and loving way.

Example: softly put your hand beneath your chin or gently rub your tired arms.

Imagine that you are trying to comfort someone who is afraid and overwhelmed, and do this by means of touching and with your voice.

The **five positive characteristics**

Search for 5 things that you always like about yourself. Make sure they are things that you know from wise mind are true about you and about which you cannot doubt even if everything around you falls apart (it can be physical characteristics, personality traits, things you have accomplished, relationships, everything that you imagine that reflect you in a positive way). Think of these aspects when you are truly fighting with negative self-judgements.

Ensure a **friendly environment**

Try to spend time in the company of people who are friendly and kind. Avoid people who are inclined to blame you, who are sarcastic, attack you or in any other way enforce your negative self-judgements. Make your living space in such a way that it is a positive reflection of yourself, be aware of what you like and what you dislike and acknowledge respectfully your own taste. Place photos who support you on your desk at work or school, in your locker, in your bag, or in your wallet. Makes plans with yourself that are special and can be executed.

**Unleash radical self-acceptance** towards yourself

Use radical acceptance and willingness as part of all fragments of yourself.

Remember that acceptance does not always mean approval or agreement but just is acknowledgement of what is. 'Acknowledging that you are worthless, bad, or hopelessly insane is not accepting yourself. Accepting that you are human, that you have experienced both failures and success in your life and that you have specks and are gifted is what radical acceptance means. Practice accepting insights with both what you like and what you dislike, with an open heart. Compare your self-acceptation with how you would accept someone else in comparable circumstances. Notice when you are not giving yourself enough space. Notice how you do accept the 'specks' or facts of others, but not of yourself. Accept yourself completely with whole your heart without fear that it will make you worse.

**Love for yourself.** Care truly and deeply about yourself.

When you notice hatred or intolerance towards yourself, turn around your mind towards commitment to like yourself. Notice thoughts and feelings that hinder liking yourself; 'I don't deserve friendliness,' 'I am not to be loved,' 'I am ashamed if I say nice things to myself,'... and distance yourself from them. Remember that liking yourself is a step in the direction of truly recovering, and that it is worth it to actively work on it. It will not make you selfish, instead, on the long-term it will increase your skills of helping and liking other people. Consider yourself unique and therefore valuable.



## Self-compassion Homework sheet 1

(Please answer to the question by giving suggestions to yourself of what you can practice.) Check your DBT diary card to find skills that can be useful. Think of special things that you can practice every day.

1. Being mindful: (emotions are in balance. I can see things from two sides because my way of looking is broad and clear. I am curious and open towards myself. I can act spontaneously instead and am no longer impulsive).  
How can I be more mindful?
2. Over-identified: (I am obsessed by and aimed on what is wrong. I am being eaten away by feelings of being incompetent, I am being carried away by my feelings. My behaviour is rigid and self-conscious. I cannot trust myself.)  
What can I do to take a step back and become less 'obsessed'?
3. Just human: (I can see that everyone sometimes experiences troubles. I know that others can feel as bad as I do, and I can imagine that the feeling of not being adequate is shared by everyone sometimes. I believe failure is a part of being human.)  
How can I remind myself that I am part of a greater whole?
4. Isolations: (I feel separate of the rest of the world. I think that most people are a lot happier than me. I imagine that other people have it a lot easier. I feel alone.)  
What can I do to decrease the isolation at this moment?
5. Friendliness towards myself: (am I loving towards myself, am I tender and caring towards myself. I tolerate my weaknesses and inabilities, and am understanding and patient towards myself.)  
What can I do to enlarge friendliness towards myself?
6. Self-judging: (I disapprove of myself and judge myself, I am hard towards myself, I am intolerant towards myself and do not have patience with myself. I can be cold towards myself.)  
What can I do to decrease my self-judgement?



## Self-compassion Homework sheet 2

Practicing interpersonal compassion skills: VALUABLE SELF

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week starts on: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe how you have practiced **Being Kind** towards yourself by means of talking to and touching yourself:
2. Describe the **5 positive characteristics** of yourself. What are the 5 things that you appreciate of yourself and of which you know in your wise mind that they are real/true.
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Describe that you have done this week in creating a **friendly environment**:
4. Practice **unleashing radical acceptance**. What have you practiced?
5. Describe how you have practiced turning around your mind towards **Love for yourself** (e.g.: how have you changed your way of looking from negative self-judgement towards a compassionate fact):



Dialexis