

FORM 6.5: Compassion-Focused Exercises

(See Germer, 2009; Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert & Choden, 2013; Neff, 2011; Tirsch, 2012; and our website <http://www.treatingpsychosis.com> for more examples of compassion-focused exercises.)

In CFT, we develop warmth and soothing toward ourselves and others. For many, this can be very difficult to do at first. Talk with your clinician and go at a pace that is right for you. It is important to gradually try these exercises and make them a part of your everyday life and way of being. This takes courage, practice, and time. It can be hard to feel positive emotions, soothing, and self-compassion. If it is difficult for you, it can be helpful to start with exercises for developing caring and compassion toward others first. But remember: your compassion is not complete if it does not include *you*! Below we describe a number of compassion-focused skill development exercises you can do to develop and enhance your care and compassion toward yourself and others.

Compassionate Self Exercise

A good place to begin with compassion-focused experiences is this Compassionate Self exercise. Begin by grounding your body and doing belly breathing as described in the coping exercises (form 4.2). It can be helpful to place your hand over your heart and to do a very gentle half-smile. In addition, try to imagine yourself becoming a compassionate and wise being. It may be helpful to think of yourself at your best—those times when you have been kind and caring.

Try to practice each day in different ways and at different times, such as before you get out of bed, when having a bath, while on the bus, while waiting for an appointment, and so on. Put reminders about your compassionate self on a coping card. Remember to bring compassion to your compassion-focused exercises. Set the intention to practice and compassionately encourage your practice.

Compassionate Attention

- I will pay attention, in the present moment, in a caring way.
- I will focus on compassionate mindfulness.
- If I notice myself ruminating, I will refocus my attention through mindfulness or focusing on my strengths and my goals.
- I will focus on things that are helpful to myself and others.
- I will focus on what is supportive.
- I will pay attention to my “wise” mind and to the wisdom I have generated.
- I will notice when I am worrying and bring my attention back to the moment.
- I will use mindfulness to guide my attention to caring and compassion.

Compassionate Behavior

- I will talk to someone I trust and get the support and understanding I need.
- I will do self-care and pamper myself when I am going through a tough time.
- I will go at a pace that is good for me. No pressure. I will just gently move toward what is important to me.
- I will try to give people the benefit of the doubt and see if there is anything I can do to help.
- I will try smiling at others.
- I will help others out.
- I will do random acts of kindness!
- I will say kind things, not hurtful things.
- I will be mindful or imagine compassion flowing out to others.
- I will do mindfulness to bring compassion and caring to myself.

Compassionate Thinking and Reasoning

- I am okay. By being understanding and caring with myself, I can work toward my values and goals.
- I did not ask for the psychosis or my busy, tricky brain, but I can choose to take care of myself just like I would someone else.
- I am not alone. Other people have difficulties like this. I can be gentle with myself rather than judging or criticizing myself.
- I can do it. Through soothing and caring, I can get through.
- This feeling will not last. I've gotten through it before and I will again. Breathe!
- Instead of being self-critical, I can focus on my strengths and accomplishments.
- Instead of thinking about myself with judgment and criticism, I can be gently self-correcting in my thinking and learn from the experience.
- Instead of thinking about something over and over again in a judging or self-critical way (ruminating), I can refocus my thinking on caring, problem solving, or coping.
- I will reason through hurtful thinking by gently checking it out, examining the evidence, thinking about more helpful ways of understanding the situation, and so on.
- I will use the 4Cs—catch it, check it, and change it with compassion—for my thinking when it is not helpful.

- I will try to understand what it is like for others. They are probably dealing with tough stuff, too.
- I will try to think about putting myself in other people's shoes.

Compassionate Emotions and Sensory Feelings

- I will try to generate feelings of caring.
- I will create soothing feelings.
- I will remember what it felt like when I felt soothed and cared for.
- To enhance nurturing or positive emotions, I will use another 3Cs. The 3Cs are used to (1) compassionately catch or create the positive emotion, moment, or memory, (2) consolidate the emotion through savoring it, and then (3) connect the memory and emotion to neutral or distressing experiences to gently soften them.
- I will try using kindness to others so they can feel my caring.
- I will be understanding and supportive of others so they can feel cared for.

Compassionate Imagery/Fantasy

- Develop an image of my compassionate self using all my senses. I will use this compassionate self-image to help me when I notice I am worrying or ruminating.
- Develop an image of an extremely kind and compassionate being or object, such as an animal, plant, person, ideal, or something else.
- Use guided imagery to create a safe place.
- Imagine a compassionate color—that is, a color that is linked with a feeling of calmness and kindness.

Compassionate Motivation

- I will focus on the intention to be caring and compassionate.
- My intention will be to live my values of kindness and compassion.
- I intend to bring kindness to myself and to what I do.
- My intention is to be compassionate toward others in life. Life can be hard for all of us.