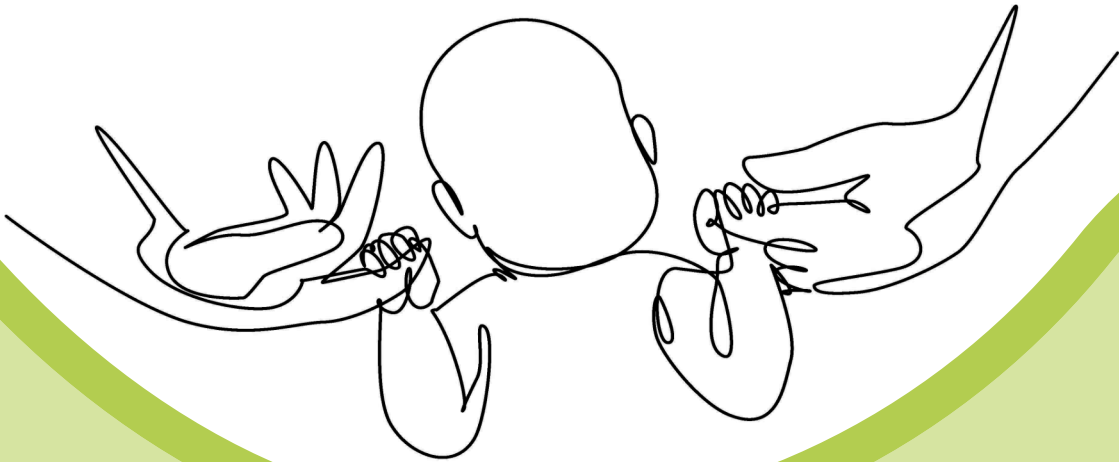


# The Compassionate Mind Handbook

for parents of young children  
and the people who support them



written by  
**Michelle Cree**

Funded by Birmingham Start for Life and Family Hubs Programme in  
partnership with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust

*Graphics and design by Freya Roberts*

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**To the parents of young children in the Birmingham area and those who support them:**

This book has been devised and developed as a gift to you from the Parent Infant Relationships and Perinatal Mental Health Workstream; Birmingham Start for Life and Family Hubs Programme in acknowledgment of the great importance of the time around pregnancy, birth and bringing up young children. Particularly the first few years of life.

It can be a wonderful time but also a very difficult one and parents and the people supporting them strive to do the very best they can. It has been noted that things have been particularly hard for young families and also the people supporting and working with them in recent times.

This book has been written in response to parents who have found the compassionate mind approach particularly helpful. It is hoped that this little handbook will provide enough information and practical tools so that parents and those who support them can use it for themselves, and for working together to be able to bring the compassionate mind approach to the babies and young children too.

This means that our young children will also be starting off in life with the makings of their own compassionate mind too. This will bring them all sorts of benefits down the line in terms of confidence, ability to manage the stresses and difficulties of life, being able to think and problem solve well, and to be able to understand others and operate well in our highly social world.

Hopefully, despite its small size, this handbook will have a very widespread and important impact.

It is divided into chunks designed to be covered in a one-hour session. However, this will depend of course on how quickly you go through it and what discussion points it brings up. Hopefully it will start off many helpful conversations.

Within each session there are one or more modules. Each module follows a roughly similar format with information on one side and exercises and practices to try on the other. Over the page might be further detail and explanations if necessary. The session then finishes with ideas of what could be tried at home. This book is designed to be photocopied. A digital copy can be accessed using this QR code:



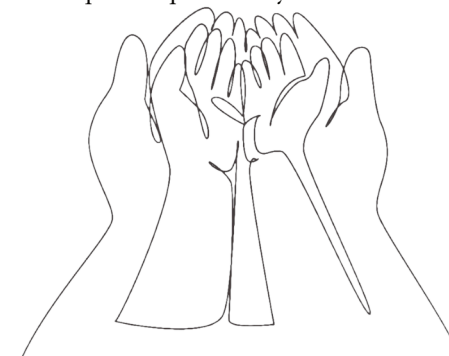
or this link: <https://www.bsmhft.nhs.uk/our-services/specialist-services/perinatal-mental-health-service/resources/>

We hope you enjoy this little book and find it helpful.

**Michelle Cree and Cathy Coombs**

(Michelle is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist specialising in perinatal mental health, a Compassionate Mind/Compassion Focused Therapy trainer and supervisor, and author of *The Compassionate Mind Approach to Postnatal Depression*, and *The New Motherhood Workbook*.)

Cathy is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist in the Perinatal Service working across Birmingham and Solihull, specialising in supporting parent-infant relationships and previously in child and adolescent mental health.)



## **With thanks to Professor Paul Gilbert**

The compassionate mind approach, compassionate mind training and compassion focused therapy are the result of a life's work by clinical psychologist Professor Paul Gilbert. He set about trying to find a way of helping with the immense suffering that he came across whilst working in mental health services.

The approach that he has developed brings together the latest science on the ways we have evolved, how our brains and bodies work and what best helps us manage the suffering and difficulties of life. But not just this, it is also about what helps us to live joyful lives where we and our children can flourish.

This handbook draws on his incredible work. If you would like to explore the compassionate mind approach and its application in the perinatal period in more detail, see 'Resources' section at the back of this handbook.

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## Who Might Find this handbook useful?

### **Parents (and their supporters) who:**

- would like to understand more about how we can be at our best as parents.
- struggle with feelings such as anxiety, anger, sadness, shame or guilt.
- are self-critical.
- struggle to be kind and compassionate to themselves,
- would like to be less critical of, or more compassionate to others
- find it hard to allow themselves to accept the kindness, compassion and help from others.
- would like to feel steadier, calmer and more confident particularly now they have a baby.
- who would like to parent with calmness, compassion and confidence.
- who would like to help their child to become as steady, confident and compassionate as possible

## The Compassionate Mind Approach (CMA) on a page

As humans we have minds that make us easily feel anxious or angry (our ‘threat system’). This is not our fault. We have evolved to react quickly to threat as this is what has given us the best chances of survival over the thousands of years of being human.

However, we have another system that is designed to help us rest, digest and recover, and which settles and calms us when we feel safe (our ‘soothing and safeness system’).

We also have another system called the drive system that gives us the energy and motivation to go and get the things we need in life, such as food, a partner, a job, new skills and so on.

We need to be able to access all three systems to function well. However sometimes we can find that our threat system dominates particularly when we don’t feel safe or when we are in a high threat situation. Our drive system can also be affected by factors such as depression.

The soothing system calms the threat system and is the basis for giving care to our baby and of a kind, wise, courageous compassionate mind. The compassionate mind approach helps build this system so we, and our baby, can approach the inevitable challenges and disappointments of life with steadiness, courage and compassion, and build a life for ourselves and others of flourishing and joy.

## How will this handbook help me to build the compassionate mind of me and my family?

It will teach us how to increase our sense of safeness, calm and steadiness in two main ways, firstly by decreasing any shame and self-criticism. And secondly, by increasing our ability to switch our body and mind into a pattern which calms our threat system and enables us to think and behave in a calmer, steadier and more helpful way.

This pattern helps us to move into a part of our brain that helps us to think better, come up with more solutions and to be better at understanding the minds of our baby (and others).

We become better able to tune into and understand our baby to provide them with a steady and secure attachment. This ultimately helps them to grow the pattern within their brain needed for becoming steady, confident, sociable people who can cope with whatever life throws at them.

This handbook does this in two main ways:

1. Teaching us how our minds and bodies work which helps us to understand that our struggles are not our fault.
2. Teaching us how to develop and switch into our soothing/safeness system.

## What will I have to do?

1. Work through each section to build your understanding.

(Go to the 'If short on time...' section at the end of the book if there is not enough time to go through all the sessions.)

2. Practice the exercises as much as possible.

This is just like going to the gym or taking up jogging. Although people can teach us how to do it, to actually change our body we have to do the exercises.

As we exercise our soothing/safeness system, we are literally changing and strengthening the wiring of our brain so that we have more, and faster connections in our soothing/safeness system. It impacts upon other areas of us too including our immune system and even our genes.

Over time we will find that we become naturally calmer and steadier, and when we do feel anxious or angry, that we can calm and cope with difficulties much more quickly and easily than before.

But this takes a lot of practice. And like physical exercise, if we stop, we lose the gains.

The Compassionate Mind Approach (CMA) is something we will be working on for our whole lives, although it will get easier and the gains will become greater and greater, for ourselves and our family, like pushing a snowball down a hill.

## Session 1

### Module 1: 'Old' brain, 'new' brain

Let's jump into this by beginning with what it is to be human.

Our human brain has evolved over millions of years in circumstances often quite different from how we live today but *which gives us a brain shaped for us not by us.*

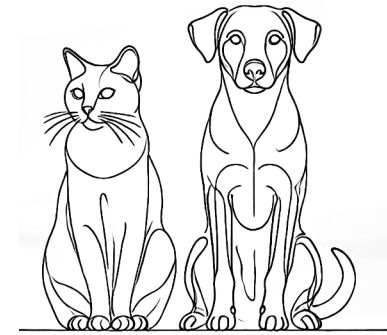
We have evolved to have a number of motivational systems to help us do the tasks of living. For example, we have three basic motivational systems which we share with other animals too. One is concerned with keeping us safe from threat (threat system), another drives us to go and get the resources such as food, protection and shelter needed for ourselves and our children to survive (drive system), and a third motivates us to rest, digest, recuperate and heal (soothing/safeness system).

We have more 'social' motivational systems too, that help us to care for our baby and others, to receive care from others ('care-giving/care receiving' system, and also to compare ourselves to others and compete with them.

We refer to this for simplicity as the tasks of the 'old brain'.

We also have parts that have evolved more recently and that many other animals do not have. We call this the 'new brain' and will look at this in a moment.

## To Try



Imagine you could read the diary entry of a pet cat or dog. What is it likely to say for their typical day?

*Today I:*

A day in the life of a human

*Today I:*

A day in the life of your baby:

*Today I:*

## Module 2: Tricky Brain

We probably saw from that exercise that a pet dog or cat has a much simpler and more straightforward life than humans. They spend a lot of time sleeping. They enjoy eating and playing. They will fight, flee, be scared, want protection and soothing. They like company. When the time is right, they want to reproduce and then they look after their young.

As humans we do all those things. But we also have our new brain as well as this old brain, which means we can imagine, we can think into the future and into the past. We can invent incredible things, learn amazing and complicated skills which we can teach to others, and deal with phenomenal challenges through history so that we can inhabit many difficult areas on earth and even get off our planet and go into space.

We are also highly social which appears to be the secret of our success as a species, so we are very skilled at understanding the minds of others and thinking about what they might think of us.

But as we also have this very threat focused old brain, our imagination tends to focus us on our worst fear rather than wonderful possibilities, what we remember tends to be about the thing that went wrong rather than what went right, and what we think others think about us might be very negative rather than positive. Unlike our cat or dog, we can also criticise ourselves as well as criticise others. It can be wonderful but also very tough to be human. None of this is our fault.

## To Try

### When our mind gets caught in loops ('Tricky brain')

What might the diary entry of the cat or dog look like if they suddenly had our new brain part added to their old one?  
(E.g. Cat: "I hope they saw that perfect leap onto the shelf", Dog: "I just stepped on that pup; there are just so many of them. I bet they think I'm a rubbish new mum").

What might our day look like if we suddenly lost our new brain part and just had our old brain like a dog or cat?  
(E.g. "Feed the baby, sleep loads to recover from the birth, go for a wander to stretch my legs without the kids, feeling hungry so look for some food.")

What might our day look like if our brain was to go back to the same stage that our baby's is at?  
(E.g. "I like looking at the ceiling. That person smells nice and feels soft and warm. I am feeling nice and sleepy...").

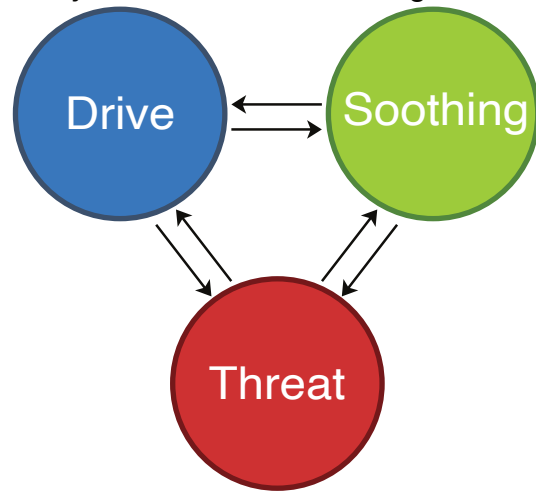
What are some examples of when your old brain and new brain get caught in

(E.g. We get embarrassed (new brain), go red (old brain threat response), worry that people can see our red face (new brain), go even redder (old brain increasing its threat response).



## Module 3: The Three Circles

The Three Systems of Emotional Regulation: (by Paul Gilbert)



We (and our pet dog, cat) and baby, have three sets of emotions that serve three basic life tasks.

Starting from the **threat system (red circle)** as this is the one we are often struggling the most with, the function here is to detect and respond to threats. We feel emotions such as anger, anxiety, sadness and disgust and we engage in behaviours such as fight, flight, freeze, and disgust (spit out food that could harm us).

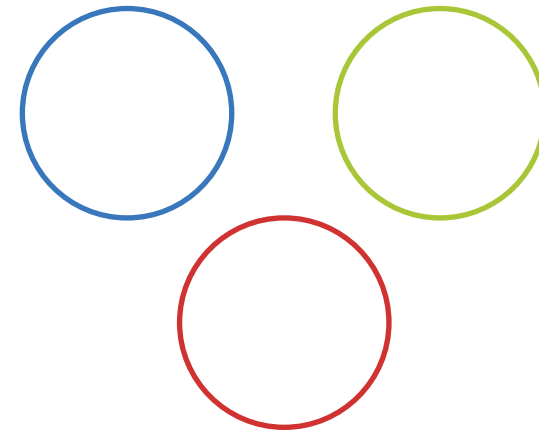
Then the **drive system is next (blue)**. Its function is to help us seek out what we need in life such as food, shelter, a mate, skills. We feel positive emotions such as joy, and excitement and we feel focused and energetic to help us achieve our goals.

Finally, we have the **soothing/safeness system (green)**. Its function is to help us to rest, digest, connect to others and calm the threat system. In this system we feel calm, safe, secure, settled, contented and playful.

## To Try

### What would you put in your three circles?

*(For example threat might be worries, ill health, baby fears, things that make you cross. Drives might be: to parent well, to get the food shop done, to learn to drive, getting a new house. Sources of soothing/safeness might be: partner, pet, family member, a friend, a warm home on a cold day.)*



### In your life at the moment which circle is the biggest? smallest? In between?

*(Draw out the relative sizes of them here):*

## Module 4: The importance of the soothing system

Imagine a baby sat playing happily with their mum in a clinic and a loud fire alarm suddenly goes off. How might the baby react?

*They will probably startle, perhaps cry and probably turn to Mum.*

Which circle is the baby in?

*Probably threat (red).*

What would Mum do?

*She would probably pick baby up, cuddle and soothe them.*

What will the baby do?

*Probably settle, be a little more cautious, then may eventually want to get down to play again.*

Which system is the baby now in?

*Soothing/safeness (green).*

What would happen to the baby if the fire alarm stopped but the baby wasn't picked up?

*They would probably stay unsettled and hyper vigilant for quite a long while and may not be able to go back to playing for the whole time at clinic.*

So, we see that it is the soothing/safeness system being switched on which turns down the threat system. And *even when the threat is removed*, the baby stays in threat, until his soothing system is activated.

**As humans, social safeness (green system) is our main regulator of our threat system.**

## To Try

Looking at the sizes of your three circles that you had drawn, what is it like, living your life as you?

How do you manage your anxiety or anger?

Some people have to use their drive system (e.g. working too hard, being a perfectionist, cleaning a lot, over-exercising, buying things they don't need) if their soothing system is small. (Sadly, our early lives or the environment or culture we live in can have grown large threat and also large drive systems within us, but little in the way of soothing and safeness. This is not our fault but can create understandable problems for us through our lives.)

### Two Wolves (A Native American Indian Story)

Grandad to Grandson: *There are two wolves within me. One is anger, one is compassion.*

Grandson: *Which wolf will win Grandpa?*

Grandad: *The wolf that I feed.*

**In the compassionate mind approach, we shift our focus from threat, to feeding our soothing system, in order to make it big enough to calm our threat system ('grow the green').**

## End of Session Practice

### (‘Switch Systems’)

Now we know that ‘growing the green’ is a key focus in the CMA we will look at all different ways to do this. As with any skill we start with something that is easy but that pushes us a little, so we are constantly learning and growing. (Like exercise, to grow our muscles and fitness we always need to push ourselves a little beyond what’s easy).

So, if any of the exercises are too difficult or too easy, they can be re-ordered or adapted, or you might have your own ideas to try.

It is worth trying these practices a number of times - each time will be different. All have something important to offer so don’t discard any. ***Often the one we find the hardest is the one we need the most.***

## Practice



### Practice: Mindfulness to Sounds

- Sit upright with feet hip width apart.
- Close your eyes or settle your eyes gently on an object.
- Tune in to the sounds around you. Allow whatever sounds arise to come into your ears, as if your ears are satellite dishes.
- You might be aware of sounds inside the room, outside the room, from your own body. Bring an attention of looseness, warmth and interest.
- Your mind will drift away from sounds. This is just what our minds do. When you notice this, just gently guide your mind back to sounds in the manner you might guide a toddler or puppy. The more you notice and return your mind, the more you build the connections in your brain.
- You might find you want to hold on to some sounds and resist or become annoyed with other sounds. Just notice your reaction with this same ease, curiosity and warmth. Allowing your reactions to arise and disappear without resistance,
- Then return your mind to sounds.
- If you can, do this practice for slightly longer than when you decide to stop. It helps us to manage discomfort and to know we can still come back to stillness and calm.

*End of Practice.*

## To Try at Home

Partners old and new brain loops.

Yours that you notice.

Add to your three circles

Your partners' three circles (what goes in them and their relative sizes)

Your baby's three circles

How do you help you baby to move into their green system?

- Mindfulness practice (do practice for at least 2 minutes every day between sessions). The more you practice, the more your mind and body will change and the more benefits you will begin to experience.
- Make a sparkle jar for you and your baby:

Glass jar or clear plastic bottle with lid that can be firmly tightened (or glued on)

Glitter

Glitter glue/PVA glue

A few drops of washing up liquid

Warm (not hot) water.

Put in jar and mix up.

Shake. Watch the glitter swirl and settle.

The glitter represents anything that we want to mindfully observe eg sounds, thoughts, physical sensations, tastes, smells, interactions...



- Mindfulness to drinking your cup of tea



## End of Session

### Module 5: Why focus on compassion?

Try starting session with a practice rather than check in and see how that feels. This 'switches systems' into the soothing/safeness system and starts the session with a different mind and body.

Use the practice that you have been trying at home since last session so you can have two opportunities to be guided in the practice and to then discuss the experience together. (Therefore 'mindfulness to sounds', see p.21 for exercise).

We are only alive for a short while, and as for most animals, life as a human was (and still is for many) fraught with suffering, illness, survival and loss of loved ones, particularly of our babies and during childbirth. As humans however, we have evolved to be particularly good at

**a) spotting suffering in others (and ourselves) and  
b) being motivated to try to alleviate and prevent that suffering.**

*This is Paul Gilbert's definition of compassion*

Compassion underpins our ability as humans to not just get through difficult times by helping others (and ourselves) but often to come out the other side having developed our skills even further. We are also able to take joy in seeing ourselves and others flourish.

Imagine you are struggling with trying to get your baby and pushchair up a kerb. People look but seem not to see your struggle and just walk on past. What is this like for you?

What is it like if somebody notices, stops, and with a kind face and voice says "Do you need a hand?" and helps you?

How do you feel if you notice somebody struggling with their pushchair but for whatever reason you have to walk on by?

How do you feel if you are able to help?

If you are struggling with dealing with your baby, how is it for you when you are harsh and self-critical towards yourself compared to understanding, kind, and encouraging?

When we give and receive compassion (including to ourselves; *the three flows of compassion*) it has an important short- and long-term impact on our bodies and mind. We feel calmer, relieved, settled and safe.

*(However, our experiences in life can lead us to have fears, blocks and resistances (FBRs) to any or indeed all three flows which can lead to difficulties for us - more on these later.)*

## Module 6: Why ‘compassion’ and not just soothing/safeness?

The skills of detecting suffering and then trying to help (compassion) require:

- 1) The motivation of our old brain soothing/safeness system to want to care for others and be cared for. (This is the same system that is usually (but not always) switched on when we have children. Our baby is born ready to receive our care).
- 2) Plus the new brain skills of wisdom, empathy, courage, ability to tolerate distress and consciously deciding what kind of person we want to be.

Together these give us the best chance of helping the particular person that we are directing our compassion to.

‘Old brain’ rest and digest/soothing system (care-giving/care-receiving)  
+  
‘New brain’ empathy, values (the person I want to be), wisdom, courage  
**= compassion**

We don’t see compassion in our dogs or cats (although many people might argue otherwise!) even though they have the soothing system and its motivation to give and receive care. Our baby cannot be compassionate either despite also having a soothing system, because their ‘new brain’ isn’t developed enough yet. (Although they do become moved by the distress in others and want to help from a surprisingly young age).

## To Try

What examples have there been recently of somebody showing compassion to you? (These might be just tiny acts eg bringing you a cup of tea when you look tired, or an encouraging smile when you look scared, but you know they have seen you struggling and their actions show they want to help).

What examples have there been recently of you being compassionate to others? (They can be tiny acts - as above)

What examples have there been recently of you being compassionate to yourself?

Did you notice any fear, blocks or resistances (FBRs) coming up for any of these? If so, what were they? (It might just be a physical feeling rather than words).

These FBRs are very common for many people. They can be as simple as “I am just too busy at the moment” to “I don’t feel worthy of compassion” or “I can’t trust people being kind to me” or “Compassion make me feel vulnerable”. These are important to note and rather than blocking the CMA these will become the gentle focus.

## Practice

### Mindfulness to Thoughts ('Leaves in the Stream')



- Sit with your bottom back in your chair, feet hip width apart, head facing forwards, eyes gently closed or resting on an object.
- Imagine you are sat by a stream on a warm spring day, watching the sun sparkling on the water, hearing the birds and the sound of the water babbling, feeling the warm sun on your skin, smelling the freshness in the air.
- Tune into your thoughts. Imagine each thought appearing written on a leaf that swirls and bobs down the stream. Watch the thought pass by with a warm, interested but loose mind that doesn't try to hold onto particular thoughts or push others away. Your mind has the ease of an open hand that allows a butterfly to land on the open palm and then to fly away again.
- You might initially think that you are not having any thoughts or that you are doing it wrong for example. These are thoughts. Place them on a leaf and watch them float away down the stream.
- If you get caught in a 'story' of thoughts as if you have fallen in the stream and are floating down it like the leaves, as soon as you notice this, imagine getting back out of the stream (amazingly you are always totally dry) and carry on with watching the next thoughts float on leaves down the stream.
- You might notice how you feel in your body as you observe the thoughts on leaves compared to when you get caught in the thoughts.
- When you are ready, bring your mind back to the sense of yourself here in your room. Hear the sounds. Move your hands and your feet. Stretch.

*End of practice.*

## To Try at Home

- Mindfulness to thoughts - five minutes every day. Make a commitment to daily practices.
- Notice the many tiny acts of compassion you do for your baby/child. Write them down.
- Notice kindly, with warmth and curiosity, any fears, blocks or resistances to any of the three flows of compassion (to others, to self, from others). Make a note of these. (These are not our fault and help to explain why we might have some of the struggles we do)

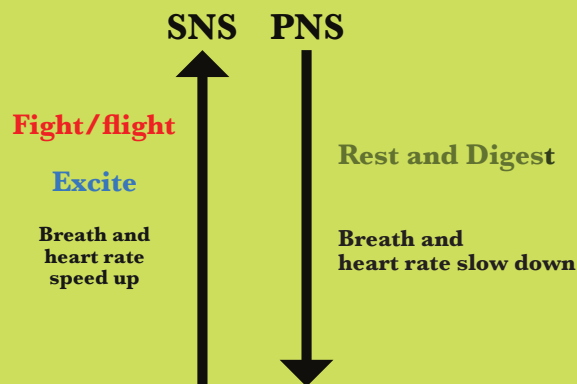


## End of Session

### Module 7: The five stepping stones from threat to soothing

For many of us, we live our lives bouncing between our threat and drive systems with little time in our soothing system. Yet we now know how vital the soothing system is in helping us to heal, recuperate, rest, digest, calm our threat system, and be able to problem solve and learn better. It is also important in helping us to understand the mind of our baby, children and others better. We know we need to ‘grow the green’ (the soothing system). So how do we do it?

There are many ways, some of which we will cover in this book. Firstly, let’s introduce ourselves to our **autonomic nervous system (ANS)**. This a network of nerves throughout our body that control unconscious processes such as heart rate, breathing and digestion. There are two main parts which work together to keep us steady and balanced. One is the **sympathetic nervous system (SNS)** which gets activated in times of need such as fight/flight and excite (threat and drive system). It speeds up our heart rate and breathing and prepares us for rapid action. It is regulated by the **parasympathetic nervous system (PNS)** which slows down our heart rate and breathing, allowing us to rest, digest, calm and recuperated (soothing system). We will be focusing on the PNS as this is key in the soothing system.



Stand up. Dangle down with head down as if someone’s let all the air out of you.

How does that feel?

*(You might find you feel heavy and even a bit down)*

Now stand up slowly. How does that feel?

*(You might find you feel brighter and more energetic)*

Stand with your feet together. Imagine someone pushes you. What happens to you?

*(Did you fall over or stumble?)*

Now imagine they are going to push you again. How do you prepare yourself?

*(Have you put your feet hip width apart?)*

In some research, they measured testosterone levels in men and women and then asked them to either a) cross their arms and legs with head down or b) stand or sit wide legged with hands on hips, back and head upright. What do you think happened to their testosterone in a) and b)?

*(In a) it went down, and b) it went up). This is because a) was a submissive posture and b) a dominant one. The more down or unconfident we get, the more we tend towards a).*

To move into our soothing system, we need to find a posture that is not submissive or dominant, but grounded, steady, open and confident.

Try this now - sitting ‘like a mountain’.

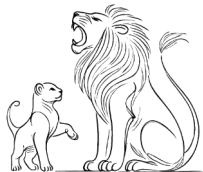


## Five stepping stones - Posture (continued)

In the experiment where we dangled down, some people prefer dangling down to upright as they feel safer. This can be because of experiences of having to protect ourselves from dominant, aggressive or critical people (a 'safety strategy'). Sometimes we are just shy, and this is part of our personality. However, with head down we might feel protected, but we also lose sight of any kind, compassionate faces ready to help us so we may end up feeling alone ('unintended consequence' - see section on formulation, (p.76) for further information about safety strategies and their unintended consequences).

If we stay in this submissive posture too long, this is thought to be a factor in depression and anxiety. We can experiment with trying out a more confident posture - little by little and seeing how it feels.

We see this dominant-submissive strategy in our pets and on nature programmes. It is vital to survival - after all a small lion needs to know not to take on the 'alpha' male as it is likely to get hurt or killed. This is such an important strategy that we still have it within us too. We have the ability to compare ourselves to others and to know when to 'stand down' or compete.



It is not our fault that we constantly compare ourselves to others, operate in our rank system and compete. Indeed, as we will see it is also part of parenting - in times of hardship we do whatever it takes to ensure our child survives and to make sure they get the best resources.

## To Try - posture

- With baby - how do they stand when learning to walk?  
*(You might notice their wide legged 'toddle')*
- Imagine you are playing an anxious, then an aggressive, then a confident, kind and compassionate character from a children's cartoon, TV series or film.
- How does each feel? What do you notice? (Try this - it is more powerful than you might think):

Each 'persona' switches us into a particular pattern which affects how we move, breath, think, even what we notice around us what pops into our imagination and even the memories that come up - we will return to this idea of different patterns or 'selves' throughout the book. When we don't feel confident, we can act 'as if' we are - this actually changes our body and our mind.

- If your child were to play act them, what would you notice?
- Imagine a family member made a comment about your parenting. How might you respond in
  - Your anxious, submissive posture?
  - Your aggressive, dominant posture?
  - Your steady, confident, kind and compassionate posture?
- Which posture would you like to mostly parent in?
- Which posture would you like your child to spend most time in when with others?

## Five Stepping Stones - Stepping Stone Two: Breath

We spent a long time on posture as this will form the start of every practice. Posture is profoundly important and a very rapid way of switching systems from threat to soothing. Now we move to trying out the power of breath.

- Sit with your feet hip width apart, your bottom back in the chair, back upright, head facing forward. Gently close your eyes or focus softly on an object. Bring your shoulders up to your ears, then drop them down and back, feeling the openness and space in your chest. ('Toggle' your shoulders back and forth if your body feels a little too open, until your body settles).
- Breathe down into the base of your lungs or your diaphragm. (Place your hand on your stomach to feel the gentle rise and fall with your breath). Feel the pause and then breath all the way out from the base of your lungs., slow, smooth and gentle. Feel the pause, and then breathe all the way in again to the base of your lungs. Imagine gently blowing a candle flame.
- Try slowing down the out-breath until it is longer than the in-breath.
- On your next out-breath in your mind imagine saying slowly 'Breath. Slowing. Down.' On your next out-breath imagine saying 'Body. Slowing. Down'. Feel your body becoming steadier and more stable as it finds its own soothing rhythm.



## To Try - Breath

How did you find that?

Some people find that suddenly it becomes harder to breathe even though our body sorts out our breathing for us day and night. If so, there are many techniques that can help. Eg:

**Tracing up and down the fingers of your hand:** up a finger on the in-breath and down on the out-breath.

**Use imagination** e.g. sitting by a mountain lake watching ripples come and go, breathing in with a gentle wave coming up a beach, and then out as it washes out again, breathing with a long, slow pendulum or swing, gently blowing a candle flame so it flickers but doesn't go out.

**'Milkshake' breathing** - (try this with your child - it is a wonderful skill for them to have). Imagine (or actually get) a glass filled with milkshake or milk. Put a straw all the way in to the bottom. Gently blow so it makes bubbles but not so hard they spill out.



**There are also breath-works apps and help on the internet.**

Our breath is a powerful way of changing the pattern we are in, and we always have it with us.

## Stepping Stones 3,4, and 5 (Face, voice, mindfulness)

- Sit with your feet hip width apart, back upright in a ‘dignified’ posture (“*Body like a mountain*”). Close your eyes or rest them gently on an object.
- Imagine a sensation of warmth or energy bubbling up through the soles of your feet, flowing up your legs, into your spine. Imagine your spine unfurling like a fern in the Spring.
- Bring your shoulders up to your ears. Drop them down and back, feeling the space in your chest.
- Bring your attention to your breath, just noticing it without judgment (mindfulness - “*Breath like the wind*”). Now slow down your in-breath, breathing all the way in to the base of your spine. And really slow down your out-breath. Breathe smooth, slow and rhythmically. As you do your body might begin to feel more steady, stable, sturdy.
- Now bring a warm, friendly expression to your face, either inside or out. Notice how this feels.
- Now bring a neutral expression to your face. Notice how it feels. Now back to warm and friendly, then back to neutral.
- Now bring a neutral tone of voice to yourself. Imagine saying “hello” [your name] in a neutral voice. How does that feel? Now, saying ‘hello’ to yourself in a warm, friendly voice. How does that feel? Now in a neutral tone again. Now a warm, friendly tone.
- Choose which face and voice to settle on.



## To Try - face and voice

These five ‘stepping stones’ are known as Soothing Breathing Rhythm (SBR). They form the foundation for all of the practices we will be doing.

- How did this feel?  
What did you notice?
- Was there a difference between neutral and warm, friendly face and voice?

Sometimes it’s hard for the smile to feel genuine. If so, try imagining you see something or someone in the distance that you are pleased to see e.g. your dog, a good friend, a special tree.

- Flip your phone camera around so you see yourself. Hard as it might be, try to genuinely smile at yourself. Perhaps imagine sending a heartfelt wish to yourself. How does that feel? (This takes practice, but research shows this has a powerful impact especially if you struggle to be compassionate to yourself):

The five stepping stones that make up Soothing Breathing Rhythm can be remembered as:

*“Body like a mountain.  
Breathe like the wind.  
Mind like the blue of the sky.  
And a kind, warm face and voice.”*

## Practice

### Soothing Breathing Rhythm (SBR)

Let's pull these five stepping stones into one practice. Although we went through each step in detail, the whole practice can be done quickly.

- Sit with your feet hip width apart, back upright in a 'dignified' posture like a mountain. Close your eyes or rest them gently on an object.
- Imagine a sensation of warmth or energy bubbling up through the soles of your feet, flowing up your legs, into your spine. Imagine your spine unfurling like a fern in the Spring. Bring your shoulders up to your ears. Drop them down and back, feeling the space in your chest.
- Bring your warm, kind, face and voice to your breath. Perhaps imagine greeting it with delight and gratitude "Hello breath!". Now slow down your in-breath, breathing all the way in to the base of your spine. (Rest your hand on your belly to feel the rise and fall). And really slow down your out-breath. Breathe smooth, slow and rhythmically. As you do your body might begin to feel more steady, stable, sturdy.
- Enjoy the feel of your body and mind settling a little as you find your own soothing, breathing rhythm.
- When you are ready, bring your attention to the sense of yourself back in your room: the sounds, the feel of the chair supporting you. Move your feet, and your hands. Open your eyes. Stretch.

*End of practice.*

## To Try at Home

- 1) Five minutes of Soothing Breathing Rhythm every day.
- 2) See what it is like to meet yourself in the bathroom mirror in the morning with a neutral face compared to a warm, friendly face.

***(We are wired to feel safe when we detect a warm, friendly face and voice. Even our own).***

- 3) See if Soothing Breathing Rhythm has any impact, by trying activities with and without doing SBR first or during them:

E.g. Walking around supermarket, driving, walking in street, sitting with baby, watching child play, changing baby, feeding baby.

- 5) Work out how to set reminders for, and look forward to your daily practice such as setting up a space for practice that you enjoy being in.
- 6) Work out how to set reminders to try SBR during particular activities e.g. smiley stickers on bathroom mirror, on washing up liquid bottle, on buggy, on car steering wheel.
- 7) Make a note of what you are discovering with SBR:



## End of Session

## Session 4

### Module 8: Safety or Safeness?

Start session with Soothing breathing rhythm.

We often use the words 'safety' and 'safeness' to mean the same thing. Safety however is when we are in the threat system, and we do something to prevent the threat from happening such as locking the front door at night or moving our baby away from a hot radiator. Like the baby in the clinic with the fire alarm, even when it stopped, they were still in their threat system. This is safety - the threat had gone. It is not until they were picked up that they calmed down. This is safeness. It is when we detect cues of safeness (even memories of safeness) that our vagus nerve and parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) is switched on which in turn acts as a 'brake' to slow down and settle the threat system.

**Safety** means that we may still be a bit 'on red alert' even when there is no threat. **Safeness** is a completely different system which enables us to calm, settle, rest, digest, be at peace.

Sometimes we seek safety hoping for safeness for example avoiding something difficult or hiding away at home when we feel shy. However, we still feel 'on edge' rather than feeling at ease, relaxed, breathing out.

Our aim is to put more safeness cues into our lives in order to grow the green (soothing/safeness) system

Safeness



Safety



What for you are examples of *safety*?

*(Your body will often let you know what is safety and what is safeness for you)*

What for your baby or child are examples of *safety*?

What for you are examples of *safeness*?

What for your baby are examples of *safeness*?

What in this room are examples of *safety*?

What in this room are examples of *safeness*?

What cues of safeness can you start bringing into your life?

*(These might be things you touch, smell, look at, sounds, tastes, contact with particular people, activities that settle you...)*

## Module 9: How our own thoughts and images affect us

In the last module we looked mainly at threats and safeness coming from outside of us. But we can also experience threat or safeness from within ourselves, such as our own thoughts, images, memories, body sensations, urges, even our body and gut health and fitness.

Think about when you go out for a meal, and you are hungry. As it arrives your body gets ready to digest by producing saliva and making your stomach 'growl'.

What happens when you *imagine* that delicious meal?  
*The same thing. We salivate and our stomach rumbles.*

What about if we see somebody on TV or in the street that we fancy?  
*Our body, behaviour and thoughts change and respond.*

What about if we *fantasise* about that person?  
*The same thing - our body, behaviour and thoughts change and respond.*

How do you feel when someone is critical or bullying towards you?  
*You probably feel anxious, perhaps ashamed, angry.*

How do you feel when you are critical of *yourself*?

As with the other stimuli, our brain has the same systems to respond to internal, as external stimuli. So, **we can create fear, shame, and anger within ourselves just by how we relate to ourselves.**

How do you feel if someone is kind, warm and caring towards you? Following the other examples, **we can create feelings of safeness by how we are with ourselves. And these become memories within us that shape our brain.**

## To Try

**Think about a nice day out that you had.** What made it a nice day out? Who was there? What happened? What were the colours, the sounds?  
How do you feel in your body as you remember this?

**Now think about a day out that didn't go so well.** What happened? Who was there? What were the colours? The sounds?  
How do you feel in your body as you remember this?

We can change how we feel, what goes on in our body, our thoughts etc, just by focusing on different memories.

Now close your eyes and put out your hand, palm up (or imagine this). **Imagine a lemon** is placed in your hand. You feel the weight of it, the temperature, the feel of the lemon skin against your hand. You imagine tracing your fingers over the lemon, feeling the texture of it, looking at the changes in colour, light and shade. You imagine putting it on a chopping board and slicing it in half. You look at the juice and the pattern of the cut surfaces, the colour, and the light and shade. You lift the lemon and smell the cut surface. Then you stick out your tongue and lick it.

What happened?

*You might have salivated and had that strange reaction at the corners of your jaws - the power of the imagination to cause a physical reaction and make saliva when there was no lemon!*



## Module 9: How our own thoughts and images affect us (cont...)

So, we can create experiences within ourselves of both threat when we criticise ourselves, but also of soothing and safety when we are kind, warm and compassionate to ourselves.

We can create experiences and even memories from how we relate to ourselves even if we'd not had such experiences from others in our past. Remember the 'Two Wolves' tale - (p.19) which 'wolf' do we want to feed?

The compassionate mind approach uses imagery as one of the ways of stimulating the soothing/safety system, giving us all the many benefits of this system just by imagery - including helping us to understand the mind of our baby, children, others, and ourselves, which underpins a secure attachment.

Our compassionate mind becomes our inner attachment figure and provides us with a **secure base** (encouragement to go out and explore, learn and try difficult things, play and take joy in life) and a **safe haven** (the ability to calm and settle when we've become distressed) for ourselves and also our baby and children.



## To Try

Thinking about your child, what kind of internal voice would you want your child to have towards themselves?

And what kind of external voice towards others?

What might your child's life be like if they have a harsh, critical voice towards themselves?

What might your child's life be like if they have a warm, encouraging, supportive voice towards themselves?

Thinking about yourself, what voice do you find unhelpful when you are struggling or disappointed?

What voice do you find helpful when you are struggling or disappointed?

The compassionate mind approach helps us to develop a compassionate voice towards ourselves, even if we still have a critical voice on the 'other shoulder'.

*(This is not as easy as it might seem, and we can resist this for many reasons. We will look at this in more detail later in the book).*

## Practice

### Compassionate/special/calm place

- Sit with your feet hip width apart in your 'dignified' posture (*'Body like a mountain'*). Gently close or settle your eyes. Bring your shoulders up, then drop them back and down.
- Bring your warm, kind face and voice to your breath. Perhaps imagine greeting it: 'Hello breath!'
- Allow your in-breath to come deep into your lungs, feel the pause then breathe slowly out. Slow and smooth. Just notice your breath slowing down, body settling.  
(*'Breath like the wind. Mind like the blue of the sky'*).
- Imagine that you find yourself in a place where you can breathe out, where you feel totally at ease, where you can be just as you need to be. It is an imaginary place. It might have elements of real places, but it can be however you need it to be.
- Look around and see what is here. Notice the season you are in, the time of day or night, the colours.
- What can you hear? What are the quieter sounds?
- Become aware of the smells, and then the subtle more delicate smells.
- Notice what you can feel with your hands, under your feet. The feel of the air on your skin feels just right.
- Notice any tastes in your mouth.
- How do you interact with this place? Are you sitting, walking, lying down, flying, cartwheeling, dancing?
- You become aware that this place is *your* place. It seems to welcome you and be glad that you are here. You feel deeply connected to it. Notice how this feels to be so welcomed in.
- When you are ready bring your attention back to the sounds back in your room. Move your hands, feet, stretch.

*End of practice*

### Reflection on Compassionate/special/calm place

What was this practice like for you?

What were some of the things that struck you?

Where was your place?

*Some people take a while to settle on a place and it might change according to what you need. It might also not be a clear image (some people are unable to imagine things). Instead, it is the feeling that is important.*

Were you alone?

*Some people feel bad when they realise that their baby or child wasn't with them. Imagine what it might be like if they were? Our brain intuitively creates a place where we feel at ease. We don't often feel completely at ease with our baby - even when we, and our baby are asleep we are slightly on 'red alert'. As this place is completely for you it may well not have your baby or particular people there.*

What might have happened if you were guided to imagine that this place is 'safe'?

*Often the word 'safe' sends people into their threat system and out of their soothing/safeness system. Then we check whether or not it is safe. (Remember the difference between 'safety' and 'safeness'.) So, the word 'safe' was deliberately not mentioned. See if the word 'safe' might be helpful to you or not.*

What was it like to feel this place welcomes you?

*This can feel a little strange but can make the practice more vivid, powerful and helpful. For some it is sadly an unfamiliar feeling to be welcomed and can cause sadness, but is worth persisting with as this creates new memories of safeness.*

Note that this place is not just soothing - it can be joyful, energetic, playful. This is part of the safeness system too, and of having a baby. Sometimes sadly we might not have experienced much of this growing up. Here we can introduce it in our imagination and see how it feels.

## To Try at Home

□ Practice compassionate place daily. (See if it changes or stays the same.)

□ Begin to notice with a warm curiosity, how you talk to yourself, especially when things have gone wrong, when you are disappointed, or when you are struggling.

*(If you notice a tendency towards a more critical voice then there are ways of working with this explored later in the book.)*

□ Make a note of people you encounter, perhaps on TV, in books, or in real life who come across as kind, compassionate, supportive, encouraging.

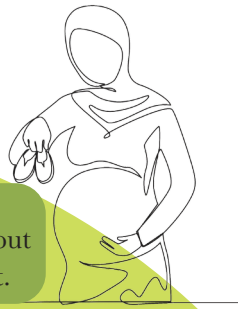
□ Notice what makes it easier and what makes it harder to be kind, warm and compassionate to your baby.

*(For all of us compassion comes easier when we are not tired, worried, hungry, busy, depressed, anxious, scared... This is not our fault, more an indicator that we need to care for ourselves too.)*



## End of Session

### Module 10: Motherhood and the brain



Across the course of pregnancy our brain changes to such a degree that a pregnant brain can be reliably picked out on a brain scan from a brain that hasn't ever been pregnant.

The pregnant brain appears to shrink but in fact it has become more specialised in areas related to being able to understand the mind of the forthcoming baby and to finding the baby rewarding. The degree of change appears to be related to the strength of positive feelings towards the baby and to the sensitivity of interactions with the baby postnatally (the 'dance' between parent and baby). In CMA terms it is therefore the drive (blue) system that sees the greatest changes (this is the reward system).

The changes are not the same in all women. This may be due to aspects such as chronic stress during pregnancy, and also depression which affects the very system (drive/reward) that is so important for parenting. (In fact, when we do interact with the baby this seems to alleviate postnatal depression.) This can mean that some women find it much harder to bond and interact with their baby and this is not their fault. This is why it is important that early treatment is given to help women during pregnancy and postnatally.

Once the baby has arrived then further rapid brain changes occur, this time increasing the connections in the brain through new learning from caring and interacting with the new baby. This occurs in all those closely involved in the care of the baby. We can also deliberately learn how to carry out these sensitive, attuned interactions even when they are unfamiliar or difficult, and in fact this seems to help alleviate postnatal depression when we do despite not being focused on the depression.

Have you noticed any changes in you that you may think are due to brain changes in pregnancy or postnatally?

Has your partner or any other involved carer for your baby noticed any changes in themselves?

*(Sometimes the changes can surprise us. We can also feel like the person we knew ourselves as is different as the brain changes are significant - like going through puberty or a major head injury but unlike a brain injury we rarely have the time or expectation that we need to get to know our new selves)*

#### Practice: Smoothing and Soothing for a frazzled brain

- Sit in a 'dignified' posture ('body like a mountain'), eyes gently closed. Slow down your in-breath, then really slow down your out-breath. Breath slowly and smoothly for a few minutes feeling your body slowing and steadying.
- Imagine a coloured light or mist appears in front of you. You have a deep sense of it being kind, warm, and arriving here to help you.
- It gently flows in through the top of your head, 'smoothing' and settling your brain, your forehead, your eyebrows, your jaw, your cheeks, your neck, your shoulders.  
You might feel them loosening, easing, relaxing.
- You might find your face gently smiling with the relief and delight of this.
- Stay with this as long as you wish. When you are ready, gently come back into the room.

*End of practice*

## Module 11: The parent and baby “dance”

We have seen that our natural brain ‘wiring’ to want to interact with others is given a huge boost by brain changes during and after pregnancy. As well as being able to find our baby rewarding, other changes include the motivation and ability to understand the minds of others, particularly our baby. This is called **mentalisation**.

A form of this in parents has been termed *mind-mindedness* where parents are interested in getting to know the mind of their baby. It enables parents to respond more and more accurately to their baby over time. We see it in the ‘dance’ or the ‘conversation’ between baby and parent where the baby ‘talks’, the parent listens and tries to understand, then responds. The baby then listens then responds - like the ‘serve and return’ of a tennis match

It also involves the parent beginning to name what the baby might be feeling. This all forms the basis of a secure attachment and the ability of the baby in time to be able to learn to understand their own emotions and those of others.

This secure attachment enables a baby to be able to move out and explore (secure base), and also know that this is a person who can settle and regulate them when they are upset (safe haven).

For us to be able to mentalise our children, which leads to this secure attachment and the subsequent building of their social and compassionate mind, *our* minds need to feel safe, settled and soothed. This is another reason why the compassionate mind approach is so crucial in parenthood.

- What are you beginning to understand about the mind of your baby? How might you describe their personality?
- How does your baby ‘guide’ you in conversations by ‘telling’ you when you are on track and when you’ve veered off track?

*(These might be very tiny cues, but ones that you are responding to without realising - it can be helpful for others to notice these for you too. Some places offer a video intervention which might sound scary but is extremely powerful and helpful, especially if we are struggling with, or have lost confidence in our bonding or interactions with our baby - particularly common for those suffering from depression or anxiety.)*

- Note some times recently when you’ve been the **secure base** for your baby (e.g. helping them reach for something, carrying them over to see something they are pointing at, encouraging them to try a new skill)
- Note some times recently when you’ve been the **safe haven** for your baby (e.g. when they’ve become scared or too overstimulated and you’ve picked them up and cuddled them or settled them back down in some way).

*(Again, it is sometimes easier for others to spot this, particularly if you have depression or a strong self-critical voice - we need to ‘switch systems’ to look for these things through our compassionate mind rather than our critical mind).*



## Module 12: Mothers and 'the village'

Humans are unusual in that they are one of only a few great apes who share the care of their offspring. It is a key evolutionary adaptation as, unlike most animals, it means that a mother doesn't have to wait until her child is independent from her before she can have another baby. Instead, she can be helped by others in the 'tribe' or group. This is thought to be why involved grandmothers increase the likelihood of their grandchild surviving until they can reproduce. Invested group members can help find food, offer protection and the teaching of life skills for both mother and child.

This means that when we become pregnant and have a baby, we are 'wired' for our social support to become more vital and important to us, even if we now live in a way where we could theoretically look after ourselves and our baby alone.

Often women describe an urge to have their mothers in their lives when they become pregnant and have a baby, even if their mother has died or they have a difficult relationship with her - there appears to be an evolved need for an ideal of a mother, which can be upsetting for those who don't have such a person in their lives.

This can also be difficult for women who have learned not to trust or rely on others, as now there seems to be an evolved, and also practical urge to have others in their lives. This is where learning to accept compassion and help from others can be crucial but particularly hard.

## To Try

Have you noticed any changes in your relationships with family and friends since becoming pregnant and having a baby?

What have you found particularly valuable or helpful in terms of relationships?

What would you wish for your child or for others when they become a parent in terms of support and relationships?



## Module 13: Shame and guilt

The terms 'shame' and 'guilt' are often used to mean the same thing. In fact in CMA terms, they arise from completely different systems. **Guilt** is where we feel bad about something that we've *done*, and our urge is to repair and apologise. It comes from our care-giving motivational system which is the soothing/safeness 'green' system. An example is if we accidentally nick our baby's skin when trying to cut their nails. We feel terrible and cuddle them and say sorry, and are mindful of this the next time we cut their nails.

**Shame** on the other hand is where we feel that an action, urge or thought means that we *are* bad. The urge here is one of a kind of submissive collapse with head down, and an urge to hide away and retreat rather than reach out and repair. It is an awful and aversive feeling. It comes from our threat rather than our soothing system. So instead of apologising to our baby and cuddling them, if we felt ashamed, we might be more focused on trying to hide the nick from others and believe that this indicates that we are a terrible parent. We might even lose confidence in our parenting.

People often notice that parenting seems to come with guilt - and indeed it does, as it is an important part of the care-giving system where we need an ability not just to *want* to be caring, but to be able to detect when we've got it wrong and to then adjust and repair. This is why Paul Gilbert's short definition of compassion is not just "To be helpful" but instead is "**To be helpful and not harmful**". In the CMA we work with shame in order to help people to understand and accept how humans work and to bring compassion to themselves, so that the shame begins to lift, perhaps turning to guilt instead. This enables them to reach out, make amends, reconnect with others - particularly vital in motherhood where we are wired to need others more.

## Practice

### Compassionate Image/Other

- Sit in your 'dignified' posture, feet hip width apart, lift shoulders up to your ears, drop them down and back. Feel your body steady and stable 'like a mountain'.
  - Bring your warm kind face and voice to your breath, perhaps greeting it in your mind "Hello breath!". Breathe deeply into the base of your lungs, pause then breathe slowly and smoothly all the way out. Pause. Then repeat. As your breathing slows you might notice your body becoming steadier and more stable.
  - Imagine that some distance away a being appears perhaps initially as a mist or a coloured light. You sense that this being is deeply kind, wise and compassionate. They have arrived here just for you, to help and guide you. They may take a clearer form perhaps of a person, or an animal or a tree for example. They have deep wisdom, and they know, understand and accept you inside and out. There is nothing you need to try to explain or tell them. They know just why you may struggle, even with their presence because they understand just what has come together to make you, you.
  - They have great courage and strength, and you sense they can manage anything you may bring to them.
  - Notice how they are with you - just as you need them to be - perhaps sitting or standing at a distance, walking with you, 'having your back', sitting with you, holding you, whatever you need.
  - If they speak you are aware of the warmth and compassion in their face and voice. You notice how they move and how they interact with you, and any others in your life.
  - Notice how it feels to have them here with you, helping you, guiding you, encouraging you, supporting you. They will never leave you. They are *your* compassionate other/being/image.
  - Before you come back in the room, they may say some words or give you a gift. Hear these words, or know or take this gift.
  - When you are ready, tune in to the sense of yourself back in your room. Allow the sounds to come into your ears. Feel the chair supporting you. Move your feet and your hands. Open your eyes. Stretch and move.
- End of practice*

## Compassionate Image reflections

What was this practice like for you?

What aspects particularly stood out for you?

What might you like to think about in terms of future practices of compassionate image?

**I didn't get a clear image** - *many people don't and sometimes it take practice and the trying of different images. The aim is to feel supported, calm, helped and encouraged in its presence.*

**I didn't know if I can trust it** - *this is common especially if this has been your experience in life. This may well be your most important, but most difficult practice. It can help to do compassionate self first, and then imagine that this compassionate part of you appears in front of you. It can also help to imagine them further away initially as a kind of supportive presence in the distance. Practice this like you would any fear that is important to overcome - slowly, gently, step by step.*

**Can I use someone I know in real life?** - *This can be hard as we may find we can't really show them everything about us, or worry we might let them down. (One person used her Gran until she realised that she could never swear in front of her like she does on her own!)" We can use aspects of them though as part of an imaginary image that we could show every aspect of ourselves to and know they will understand, accept and help us.*

**I felt so unbearably sad that I didn't want to do it** - *This often happens, especially if we think of someone who is no longer part of our lives or if we didn't have anyone like this. Grief is an important part of the CMA. Our compassionate mind or compassionate image is here to help us with our grief and help us through it rather than avoid it. We will need to take it gently, step by step, and with courage and strength. In time we will get through.*

## To try at home

- 'Compassionate image' each day - experiment with different images eg from book, films, TV. (Images people have used include: animals e.g. big, courageous and compassionate bears or lions, angel type figures with enormous wings, a kindly but assertive and protective grandma figure, an ancient, wise tree, people who are both, or neither, male or female.) See what needs tweaking or changing for them to become more and more your compassionate image.
- Put your image/being 'to work' e.g. imagine having them with you sharing in your pride, delight or happiness as you parent. Imagine asking them something when you are struggling, or supporting you, or encouraging you when you are trying something difficult. Imagine them helping you with your baby.
- Try drawing or painting your image or finding images or objects that help to make your compassionate image clearer to you.
- Find a smell and a sound that help you bring them to mind.
- Give them a name or a way of referring to them in your mind.
- Look around at compassionate people that you encounter in your life or on TV, in films or books, and add in to your image anything you wish from them.



# End of Session

### Module 14: Our different selves

(Start session with short compassionate place practice or soothing breathing rhythm. The whole “multiple selves” exercise continues to p. 64 and needs plenty of time. It is important it is completed in one go. Although it takes time, it can create real change. It is one of the key exercises in this work, so it is worthwhile doing.)

When something happens to us, we might be asked ‘How did you feel about that?’ assuming one feeling. In reality, we can have multiple feelings and responses to one event. Sometimes these reactions can pull us in opposite directions. Imagine you are trying to leave a parent and baby group quickly because your baby is crying, and you are late for an appointment. Your buggy is blocked in by other buggies. You might begin to feel panicky, but also angry, imagining yourself throwing the buggies out of the way. You might even get tearful as the panic and anger rises. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed, like our brain can’t function properly. This is often an indicator of a number of different responses all firing off at the same time.

Identifying the different patterns that occur within us can be incredibly helpful in many ways, particularly the realisation that when a particular pattern takes hold of us, that it affects the entirety of our body and mind acting like a mini ‘self’ or ‘part’. It also offers clarity as to what is happening within us, slowing down the process. It is like learning a language. The string of strange sounds then turns into understandable words. We can then also learn how to help and ‘settle’ each part or self.

### Multiple Selves

Take an A4 sheet of paper. Fold it in half, then half again. Open it out. You should have 4 rectangles. In the middle write ‘Argument’. Imagine now a recent minor argument that you’ve had with someone you care about - nothing too serious.

In the bottom left rectangle write the title ‘Angry Self’.

Bring to mind what the angry part of you would like to say, or shout at the other person. What thoughts are coming to mind angry self? *(write your answers to each of the following 7 questions in the rectangle).*

- 1) **Thoughts?**
- 2) What is happening in your **body?** *(including heart rate, breathing etc)*
- 3) If these feelings were to grow and grow, what is the **urge (action)** in your body. What does your body want to do if you let it?
- 4) Where is your **attention** focused?
- 5) What are the **images** that flash into your mind (e.g. as if you are watching a cartoon of yourself from above.)
- 6) What **memories** are coming up? How far back might these go?
- 7) What does this part need in order for it to settle?
- 8) Now imagine stepping out of the angry part and letting it go for a cup of tea. Now imagine stepping into the anxious part. Write this in the bottom right rectangle. Repeat as for the angry part for the anxious, and then sad part (top right hand rectangle), leaving the top left rectangle blank for now.

## Multiple selves (continued...)

Now imagine that angry, anxious, and sad selves are all having a cup of tea together in the café. If you were to listen in, how might this interaction be going?

- 1) How does angry self feel towards anxious self?  
And toward sad self?
- 2) How does anxious self feel towards angry self?  
and towards sad self?
- 3) How does sad self feel towards angry self?  
and anxious self?

*(Our different 'selves' can trigger off other 'selves' eg when we get angry, we can then feel anxious about our anger. We interact with our own selves like we would if they were a real person outside of us)*

- 4) Which self felt easiest to be in and which the hardest?

*Often our past experiences mean some feelings feel much harder or scarier to have than others. For many of us, one particular emotion is the one we stay away from at all costs eg anger or sadness. If we imagine having that emotion as a child, it becomes clearer how people around us reacted to it. If it was in a negative way (or no-one responded) then we learn, even as young children, to tuck it away. The way we do this is called a 'safety strategy'. (We will come back to these later in the book.)*

Now write the title '**Compassionate Self**' in the top left hand rectangle and do the Compassionate Self practice (p 63). (Changing to compassion take time and practice. This is not our fault: our threat system is designed to act fast to save our lives. Compassion is slower but helps us to take wiser and more courageous decisions and actions.)

## Multiple selves (continued) Practice: Compassionate Self

- Sit upright in your 'dignified' posture, feet hip width apart. Close or gently focus your eyes. Bring your shoulders up to your ears, then drop them down and back. Feel the openness in your chest.
- Bring your warm, kind face and voice to your breath. Perhaps imagining greeting your breath in your mind ('Hello breath!').
- Breath deep into the base of your lungs, feel the pause, then slowly, and smoothly breath all the way out. Feel your breath, and your body, slowing down.

Bring to mind a part of you that tries as best as it can to be caring and helpful. A part of you that has gained great wisdom from all that you've been through, all you have learned, been trained in, gathered from all the people you've met. A part that has a surprising amount of courage, that has strength and commitment to being as helpful as it can.

### Now bring this part of you to the argument.

What does this compassionate part

- 1) **Think** about the argument?
- 2) What does it feel in its **body**?
- 3) What is its **urge** if this feeling were to grow?
- 4) Where is its **attention** focused?
- 5) What **images** come into its mind?
- 6) What **memories** come up?

Come back to the room and open your eyes.

### What are your reflections on this?

*(People often report that the argument didn't seem quite so important now, that both people could be held in mind and understood whereas the other selves were very narrow focused, that there was a feeling of warmth and wanting to help and find a solution.)*

### What does the compassionate self feel about the angry self? The anxious self? The sad self?

*(People often notice that the compassionate self understands and accepts all the parts, and in fact can bring them in as all parts of our sense of self, like a mother hen tucking all her different chicks under her wing.)*

## Multiple selves: End of session reflections

We see there is no one main part of us - we just move in and out of 'selves' like changing weather patterns. But we can come to see which part has taken hold of us, and whether we want to stay in it, or intentionally move to another - in the CMA we try to move to the compassionate self as much as we can.

Which was the main 'self' that you came to the session in?

Which was the main one that you ended the session in?

Which self would you like driving your car, pushing the buggy, changing and feeding your baby?

How come?

What would it be like if your angry, anxious or sad self carried out these activities?

How might your compassionate self help you if (and when) any of these selves were in the 'driving seat'? (as inevitably they will)

## To Try at Home

- 'Compassionate self' practice every day
- See what it is like with, and without doing a (maybe very brief) compassionate self practice:

Before you get out of bed to respond to your baby.

Before you go to sleep.

When you change your baby.

When you sit with your baby asleep on you.

When you are having to do a hard chore.

Before you have to do something that makes you anxious.

When saying 'hello' or 'goodbye' to your partner.



# End of Session

### Module 15: Working with our inner critic

We have introduced the idea that we can have a relationship with ourselves as well as others, and that how we relate to ourselves has the same impact on our mind and body as an actual person treating us that way. So, what is it like living with a self-critical voice? Would we want to get rid of it if we could?

Imagine that a parcel came in the post, and it contained a big red button with a message saying that if you pressed it then your self-critic would be gone for good. **Would you press it?**



Initially most people say they would but usually people then start getting a little worried about losing their self-critic forever.

**What might be people's fears be if they didn't have a self-critic anymore? What might your fears be?**

People often say things like "I might tell people the truth and then they might not want to be around me anymore", "I might become lazy, never try and not be bothered to look after my baby", "I might become a horrible person", "I might become really angry with people".

And if you ask the follow up questions to each of these fears - "and if that were to happen?" then usually people arrive at "then I would end up alone". We know that this is our greatest, most ancient fear, that for most of our human existence we lived on the African plains and other places at the mercy of other tribes, animals, starvation etc. So being cast out from the group would almost certainly have resulted in death. We still carry that primal fear of being alone with us today, even if rationally our 'new brain' tells us we could survive.

This is why we are always checking the minds of other to see if we are valued by them and that we are not putting ourselves at any risk of being 'cast out'.

When we become pregnant and have a baby, we are even more dependent on others for the survival of ourselves and our baby. In addition, we, and our baby would have been able to secure better care and resources the more we were valued by the group. So, we are even more hypervigilant to being held positively in the minds of others at this time.

Interestingly the brain changes during pregnancy help us not just better understand the minds of our baby, but others too- perhaps so we become even better able to ensure our belonging in the group at this more vulnerable time?

**Have you noticed any changes in your sensitivity to criticism since becoming pregnant/having your baby (more/less)?**

**What have you noticed in terms of people trying to become part of new groups or making sure they are valued and seen positively once having a baby?** *(Social media, social comparisons between parents, trying to find 'your people' etc)*

## Working with our inner critic (cont...)

So, if we have a sense that somehow ultimately our self-critic stops us from being rejected, our most primal human fear, then we can understand how we might, even unconsciously, try to hang onto it. So, does our self-critic really help us in the ways that we might think?

*Imagine that you have done something minor that brings up that self-critical voice, nothing too serious eg you open the fridge in the morning in a hurry and knock the milk all over the floor. Tune in to how your inner critic might react. Now imagine that it appears in front of you.*

1. **What does your inner critic look like? What shape and colour is it? What is its size in relation to you?**
2. **What is the expression on its face?**
3. **How does it relate to you?**
4. **If it speaks, how does it sound?**
5. **How do you feel in relation to it?**
6. **If that feeling were to grow and grow inside of you, what would your body like to do if it could?**
7. **How would your inner critic be with you if it discovered that you had messed up?**
8. **How would it be with you if it discovered that you had done well at something?**

## Working with our inner critic (cont...)

These are some of the answers that people often give to the above questions:

1. *“A really tall, thin cross woman wagging her finger at me”, “a small, red angry imp”, “a version of me looking down at me, disappointed”. “A black, scary mass”. Colours are often dark red, black, brown, dark green, grey.*
2. *“Disappointed”, “angry,” “contemptuous”, “derision”, “can’t bear to look at me.”*
3. *“Wags its finger at me”, “Shouts at me”, “Just looks disappointed”, “walks away in disgust”, “Wants to shake me in frustration”, “Slowly shakes its head”.*
4. *“Cross”, “Furious”, “disappointed”, “pitying”, “doesn’t even waste words on me, just looks disgusted in me”.*
5. *“Small”, “scared”, “ashamed”, “anxious”, “tearful”, “angry but scared to show it”.*
6. *“Wish the ground would swallow me up”, “curl up”, “collapse”, “cry”, “hide”.*
7. *“Even angrier.” “Just going “Well what did you expect?”” “laughing in a horrible way”.*
8. *Saying, “what do you want a gold medal, just for that”, “What? Do you think I’d be impressed”? “So?” “Well that was just luck. You will mess up like usual next time”.*

## Working with our inner critic (cont...)

We see here, that even though we think our inner critic might drive us to work harder, be better and so on, actually we feel beaten down by it, we lose energy, feel more depressed, ashamed, anxious, and actually less likely to get on, achieve and do things better.

We also see that we might think that by doing well we will get its approval, and it will be pleased and proud, but actually, it is just even more contemptuous, even ridiculing us. This is because it comes from the threat system, so the inner critic can only use the strategies available within the threat system e.g. look on the worst side, look at our failings, make us worry about being proud and then being laughed at by others, or worrying by being proud we will forget to check whether we are messing up again.

Imagine that someone you care about, perhaps your child, or a relative or good friend is struggling to be able to read.

**What kind of teacher would you try to find for them?**

**Would you decide that your inner critic would be the best one for the job? If so, why? If not, why not?**

**What would you be looking for in this teacher?**

## Working with our inner critic (cont...)

Qualities people have often listed include:

*Look for what you are doing well as well as errors.*

*Kind and warm - "Like Miss Honey from Matilda", "Like Mrs Doubtfire"*

*Working out how you best learn.*

*Enthusiastic*

*Pleased when you do well, helpful, supportive and encouraging when you struggle.*

*Wise - really knows their stuff and what helps people to learn this.*

*Strength - keeps helping even when you get frustrated and want to give up.*

*Commitment - feels like are with you for the long haul if necessary, making thoughtful lesson plans specifically for you.*

*Patient*

*Funny*

*Helping you to look into the future to what life might be like when you can read well - create hope, inspiring*

What we have constructed here is actually our compassionate image. What would it be like to have someone like this as the person with you when you struggle, when you are disappointed, when you need help, when you've done well? Rather than your self-critic?

The final part of our work with our inner critic is to bring this compassionate image or being **to our inner critic:**

## Working with our inner critic (cont...)

What might happen if you were to shout at, humiliate, try to beat down, cast out your inner critic? *(Like a critic or bully in real life it may well just get worse, bigger, scarier, as we are just bringing our threat system to bear on our threat system, stimulating it even more.)*

Instead, how might this compassionate being, that has great strength, courage, wisdom, commitment to being helpful and not harmful, be with that inner critic?

If you could imagine your compassionate being could draw back the ‘curtain of criticism’ and see what is really behind it, what might it find? **What might the fear of the critic be for you** if you were to tell it that you were going to press the red button in a minute, and it would be gone forever from you?

How might the compassionate being try to help the critic with this fear? *(after all the inner critic only has the tools from the threat system to work with - so now the compassionate mind brings a whole new set of very powerful and helpful tools from the ‘new brain’).*

How might the compassionate being and inner critic work together as some kind of team for you? *(eg the inner critic raises the alert that you might be running the risk of being cast out of the group or messing up, but the compassionate being then steps in to act as your compassionate teacher, guide or coach.).*

## Practice

### Focusing the compassionate self on yourself: Looking from a distance

Sit quietly, in an upright, alert position, with your eyes closed or looking down. Spend a few moments focusing on your breathing.

- 1) Imagine yourself filling up and expanding with strength, wisdom, and kindness. Remember that it is the intention and desire to be kind and helpful that is important.
- 2) Focus on your facial expression of warmth, kindness, strength and wisdom. Notice how your body feels.
- 3) Imagine that you are watching a video of yourself, through your kind, wise eyes. So, you see yourself get up in the morning, and, holding your position of kindness and compassion, watch yourself moving around in your room and then slowly getting on with your day.
- 4) Notice how the person that you're watching (i.e. you) is troubled by self-critical feelings or thoughts about themselves, perhaps fears of their relationships with others or of being criticised.
- 5) Be in touch with the struggle of the person you're watching, but just hold your position of inner calmness and wisdom, looking out through the eyes of your compassionate self with the intention of being kind and helpful.
- 6) If that sense of the compassionate self wanders, or you lose it in any way; just let the imagery fade, go back to your soothing breathing rhythm, your compassionate expression, sitting up straight in a confident posture, and begin again.
- 7) This exercise can also be carried out as if you are a big, wise, kind mind looking down from above, watching yourself as you get on with your day.

*This exercise helps us take a wider view of our difficulties and begin to see our own wisdom and abilities to help ourselves feel better and move forward. Once we no longer fight with or shame and criticise ourselves but become more accepting, helpful and encouraging, seeing this as a common struggle of being human, it becomes easier to see a way forward.*

## Baby note

This practice can be a helpful technique to use when we have been struggling in our relationship with our baby. We can imagine looking down from above or watching as if on a television as we go about our day with our baby. We watch with kindness and wisdom as we see ourself and our baby together, with a real understanding of just why we come to struggle sometimes with our baby. Our distance and our position of warmth and kindness can help to offer up solutions about what might help at this time and what might move us forward in the future.

## To Try at home

- Become aware of how you tend to talk to yourself - is it different when you do something well or when you make a mistake?
- Notice how other people whom you regard as compassionate are with themselves, when they make a mistake, and when they do well.
- What fears might your inner critic have for you if it were no longer part of your life?
- How might your compassionate mind help it with those fears?
- Add anything from the 'compassionate teacher' to your compassionate image/other/being.
- When your critic comes up, see if you can notice this, and then shift to your compassionate being (image/other) or compassionate self instead. What is that like? What do you notice when you swap?
- **Practice 'compassionate being/image/other' each day.**



# End of Session

## Session 8

### Module 16: Bringing our experiences together (Formulation)

Start session with short SBR to switch systems

Imagine yourself in a kind of fairy story where you are a big wise person looking down on your land as if from the top of a mountain or castle. You can see people far below going about their day. You watch a woman with her baby going about her day.

You see how she is with the baby and how the baby responds to her. You see all the things that happen to the baby and how the baby learns to respond. You see how the baby grows up and how they as an adult then respond to those around them, including their own baby.

You have a real understanding of how the baby turns into the adult you see; how they have been influenced by the old and new parts of their brain, by their genes, the country they have been born into, the experiences they had particularly when young, none of which they chose, how that adult could have been a very different version of themselves if they had been brought up in a different family.

You accept the adult this baby has now become, just as they are without judging them.

You feel kindness and warmth towards them as they go through life as best they can. You can also see what might help them now, and what might help them to develop, grow and prosper in the future.

What this wise person sees can be put together into four parts sometimes called a 'formulation', comprising:

1. **Background** (key childhood experiences)
2. **Fears** (key fears arising from these experiences - these can be external fears about how others might be with us, and internal fears about our own thoughts, feelings, images, urges etc.)
3. **Safety Strategies** (ways of trying to prevent the feared event from happening again).
4. **Unintended Consequences** (what happened through life as a result of the safety strategies).

Here is an example of what this might look like:

| Background                           | Fears   | Safety Strategies   | Unintended consequences  |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Angry, violent, unpredictable father | External:<br>Other people can be scary. Other people can hurt you.                              | Watch others closely for any small signs of anger                                 | Don't notice your own feelings or what you need. Lose your sense of self eg what you like/dislike                          |
|                                      |   | Be good, never upset anyone.  | Get 'walked over'. Don't get your own needs met.   |
|                                      | Internal:<br>I am filled with rage which could hurt others or make them hurt me if I let it out | Keep your own anger in, in case you hurt others or get hurt or rejected yourself. | Never get to learn how to handle your own anger. Scared of getting close to people in case you get angry.<br>Become lonely |
|                                      |   |   |  |

- Imagine looking at this with a judgmental, critical mind.
- Now imagine looking at it with a kind, warm, accepting, wise mind.

What do you notice?

## Bringing our experiences together (cont...)

### Your own formulation

It can be helpful to write down some of your key experiences that you had as you grew up (**background**), listing the **fears** that these created in you and some of the **safety strategies** you developed to try to prevent your fear from happening again. Then list some of the **unintended consequences** that came about as a result of the safety strategies.

| Background | Fears | Safety Strategies | Unintended consequences |
|------------|-------|-------------------|-------------------------|
|            |       |                   |                         |
|            |       |                   |                         |
|            |       |                   |                         |

Examples of safety strategies include:

- *Use my self-critic to make sure I'm not too 'big-headed' or too happy and 'making a show of myself'*
- *Use my self-critic to make me submissive in case I get angry and hurt others or make others furious with me and reject me.*
- *Use food/painkillers/drugs/alcohol/cleaning/overexercising to stop me feeling angry or sad as people got angry or walked away from me when I expressed these.*
- *Be a perfectionist so I don't make mistakes so no-one can criticise me.*
- *Mould myself to whatever anyone else wants me to be so they don't criticise, get angry or reject me.*

Now imagine that you are looking at this from that warm, wise, kind, accepting, helpful part of you.

What might this part feel towards you that you have been through all this, trying to manage as best you could?

How would it be with you?

What might it say to you?

How might it help you and support you in moving forward from here?

Or imagine a very wise, kind friend was looking at your formulation with you. What might your friend say?

Imagine this was a dear friend's formulation: How would you be with them on reading it?

We can't change the experiences we have had, but we can change how we look at and feel about them. If we can see ourselves with compassion rather than criticism and shame, then we can understand and accept the way we have tried to manage our worries and fears as best we can.

Not only that but our compassionate mind uses a part of our brain which is also the most helpful system in trying to find solutions and moving us forward in life in new, more helpful ways.

## Practice

### Compassionate letter writing

- 1) Take your pen and paper and then spend some moments using your soothing rhythm breathing.
- 2) Next move into your compassionate self, imagining yourself at your best, at your calmest, at your wisest, at your most caring. Imagine yourself as you would ideally like to be in terms of being powerfully compassionate.
- 3) As you focus on it, feel yourself expanding slightly and feeling stronger. Imagine you are a compassionate person who is wise, kind, warm, and understanding and wishes to write you a letter.
- 4) Think about your kind facial expression.
- 5) Remember, it doesn't matter if you actually feel you are like this, just focus on the ideal you would like to be.
- 6) It is this warm, kind, wise part of you that will write the letter. Imagine that this part now picks up the pen.
- 7) Don't worry about how you *should* or *shouldn't* write it, just let it flow as if the pen is writing itself from the warm, kind part of yourself rather than thinking too much about how you are writing it.
- 8) You could start by imagining that you are writing to a very dear friend who is struggling just the same as you, write to yourself; "Dear [your name]....."

These letters can be difficult to write and can take a number of attempts before they feel warm, kind, and genuinely wanting to help.

### An example compassionate letter:

*Dear [your name].....*

**Notice, sympathy:** *"I can see that this is really hard and upsetting for you."*

**Wisdom, empathy:** *"It is understandable that you feel so upset about this when you think about how important this is to you, and particularly when you consider what has happened to you in the past. You didn't choose to feel this way."*

**How to help:** *"We have got through difficult times like this before, and together we will work through this one. It might feel hard at the moment but I will be with you all the way through this one and we will get through it."*

**Compassionate action** *"You might feel like just curling up in bed right now, and perhaps this is what you need, but in the past you have found this just makes you sink down further. What usually helps you more is to take a bit of time, make yourself a hot drink, then phone your partner, or your friend. Remember that they might not be able to talk right now, so it might help to have another plan if they can't. Perhaps it might help to write down now what you might say to your dearest friend if they were struggling like you. What might help them move through this? What might help them in the long term as well?"*

When you have finished, read through your letter. Change any parts where your critic has crept in.

**Now read it through with a warm, slow, kind voice, as if your compassionate image is reading it to you.**

How does this feel? Does it feel different to the first read through?

## Baby Notes

When you have had a difficult time with your baby, perhaps for example when you are struggling with your feelings towards your baby, it might be helpful to **write a compassionate letter to both yourself and your baby.**

- First spend a few moments getting into the compassionate part of yourself or imagining that your ideal compassionate person or very good friend is writing to you and your baby as in “Dear ----- and -----”.
- It might start with noticing just how painful this has been for both of you and how you hadn’t chosen to struggle in this way.
- The letter is written with wisdom about the struggles and upset that *both* of you might have experienced and a deep and kind understanding of just why it has come to be difficult at this time.
- It might note what connects both you and your baby eg your shared experiences, things you both enjoy, similarities between you both.
- It might also suggest what might help at this time and what might help in the future.

Remember to read the letter through slowly with a warm, kind face and voice.

## To try at home

- Think about whether there is anybody you would like to share your formulation with.
- Have a go at writing out a formulation as best you can for important people in your life eg partner, mother, father, sibling. (These could be people who are no longer around but still influence you). It can be really helpful to think about them in this way. You might also be able to see how their formulation intersects with yours e.g. how their safety strategies set off your safety strategies for example.
- Look at the formulation through your inner critic and through your compassionate mind and notice the difference.
- Write a compassionate letter or postcard to yourself, or your partner, baby, member of your family (decide what to do with it once you’ve written it).
- Write a compassionate letter to your future self and put it somewhere where you might come across it in a few months e.g. in the Christmas decorations box or put with any clothes you wear in a different season.
- Post your compassionate letter to yourself (it can be very powerful to receive it as if from another person)



# End of Session

### Module 17: Compassionate attention

Attention can be thought of as like a a beam of light from a torch. You can move the beam of light about as you wish and choose what you want to illuminate.

**Exercise: Moving the torchlight of attention** Close your eyes and direct your attention to your left big toe. Notice how it feels, the sensation of it being in contact with your shoe or the floor, whether or not you can feel anything of it at all.

Now direct your attention to your right big toe. Just notice any sensations, or whether or not you feel anything.  
Now direct your attention to your lips. The feel of the air on your lips, your lips against your teeth, sensations within your lips.  
As you attend to your lips what happened to your attention to your right toe, to your left toe?

As you move your attention about, the focus of your attention seems to expand to fill your awareness. The things you have previously focused on seem to fade into the background. So attention really is like a beam of torchlight; as soon as you move it away then those parts now “in the dark” are no longer in your mind.

When you move your attention to threat focused memories, for that moment you lose sight of the compassion focused memories and your mind can only see threat. But this also works the other way; when you move your attention to compassion focused memories, you are no longer ruminating on threat focused memories and your mind is filled with compassionate memories.

What is more, whatever we focus on affects our body too, and how we think and imagine, so having control of where our attention lands is important and powerful.

Building up the compassionate mind involves consciously trying to direct your attention to sources of soothing, kindness, and warmth, no matter how small, as often as possible each day.

The threat mind is designed to grab our attention like a magnet. When this happens the aim is to note this with compassion (e.g. “This is hard when that happens but it’s not my fault, this is what our threat minds are designed to do”), then we try to move our attention deliberately to what makes us feel soothed, steady and stable instead.

#### To Try

What happens when you focus on a difficult aspect of your baby (e.g. when they cry in public, their nappy rash, trying to potty train them). How do you feel inside? What kind of thoughts pop into your mind?

What happens when you focus on aspects of your baby that bring you joy? (e.g. a sound they make, their smile, their excitement, the first sleepy cuddle when they wake up) How do you feel inside? What kind of thoughts pop into your mind?

What happens when you focus on all the things that you used to enjoy but can’t do now that you have your baby. How do you feel? What thoughts begin popping into your mind?

What happens when you focus on all of the things that you are really looking forward to doing with your baby in the near future but also as they grow up, and into adulthood?

## Module 18: Compassionate thinking

When we feel worried, angry, or down then our threat system automatically takes control. When this happens, it is hard to pull ourselves out of thinking in a worried, angry, or depressed way. (See multiple selves section)

Compassionate thinking involves switching systems from threat to soothing by changing our posture to open and steady (*“body like a mountain”*) slowing down our breathing (*“breathe like the wind”*) and becoming more aware of how our threat emotions direct our thoughts without our choosing (*“mind like the sky”*). We can then choose to think with warmth and kindness instead, about what is helpful. We have now switched from the old brain to the prefrontal part of our new brain where we can problem solve, be creative and also learn and integrate new information.

### To Try: Compassion Focused Thought Balancing

- 1) Using the thought balancing sheet (opposite page) first write down what has triggered off the feelings you are struggling with.
- 2) Second, write down the thoughts associated with the difficult feelings you are experiencing.
- 3) Now, just focus on your soothing breathing for a moment and then imagine your compassionate self or your compassionate image coming to you. Think about them being with you with warmth, kindness, wisdom and strength and a real desire to help you. Notice what they might say to you in their warm, kind, wise voice. Write these down in the ‘Helpful/compassionate thoughts’ section.

## Thought balancing form

| Trigger                                    | Unhelpful / distressing thoughts | Helpful / compassionate thoughts (try to create warm tone)  |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Example:</i><br>Got angry with my child | I am useless                     | It is awful to feel like this. I didn't set out today to get angry with my child.<br>Now I think about it, I am really tired, and just need a bit of quiet time for myself, so it is understandable that I am feeling short tempered.<br>It is sad for me and my child that I feel so worn out at the moment. I think I would like a bit of looking after myself actually, but I hate asking for help.<br>What I need right now is to try to take a few soothing breaths and to smile kindly to myself and my child even if I don't really feel like it; this isn't the fault of either of us, it is just difficult at the moment. Then I think I will just get us out of the house, even if it is raining, for some fresh air because that gives us both a bit of peace and calm. I can then think a bit more clearly about what will help me. |
|  |                                  |   |

Read through the right hand column, then read it through again, this time really slowly and with your warm, kind voice and facial expression, as if your compassionate image/other is reading these out to you. Is there a difference between each read through?

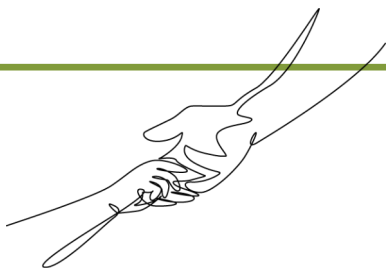
## Module 19: Compassionate Behaviour

Compassionate behaviour is about doing things to help when we, or others, are suffering, and also helping ourselves to develop, flourish, and improve. It can involve thinking about what would be best for ourselves and making a commitment to doing these things.

It can be helpful to think about how we might like to be in six months or a year, or how we would like our children to describe us in the future, and then think about some tiny steps we could make that would get us a little closer to how we would really like to be. Think about this with warmth, kindness, and your compassionate mind.

Sometimes it takes a great deal of **courage** to do what we know would help us to move forward and flourish, such as asking for help when we fear we might be rejected or when we might not be able to return the favour, or going out and talking to people when we feel very shy.

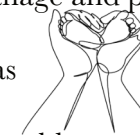
At times like this we really need our compassionate self by our side to help us when we find this difficult (as we probably will) and to help us to **get up and have another go when we struggle**.



### To Try

Here are some examples of compassionate behaviour that you could try:

- 1) Notice what you are doing already to help you, your baby, or others to have a flourishing future, and to manage and prevent any suffering as best you can.
- 2) Attend to self-care in as caring manner as you can e.g. how you clean your teeth, put face cream on, brush your hair - as tenderly as you would your child.
- 3) Note the courage required by some of what you do.
- 4) Note your strength and commitment in keeping on doing important things even though they are hard.
- 5) Do one thing, no matter how small, that you think will help you to reach a longer term goal.
- 6) Do one thing, no matter how small, which is specifically designed by you to be enjoyable.
- 7) Set time aside to practise some of your compassionate mind exercises.
- 8) Spend five minutes remembering moments that made you feel warm or joyful that occurred in the day. Note in as much vivid detail as possible (*This makes positive changes to our brain wiring which we can draw on in the future*).



### Practice and Practice and Practice

Changing our behaviour can be hard and takes a great deal of practice. Our usual ways of imagining, thinking, feeling, and behaving have often developed over many years and are like well-worn paths. It is easier to carry on walking down these paths and it takes deliberate effort (and often courage) to start to make a new path. With practice this new path will become easier to walk along and will hopefully take us a bit closer to the place we really want to be.

## To Try at Home

### Gratitude diary

Write down three new things each day that you were grateful for. (Don't repeat any.) Note and set aside any threat memories of "you should be grateful...". Instead redirect your attention to genuine gratitude. *Examples people have put include - "my partner bringing me a coffee", "that all these people were involved in making my favourite cup", "the ability to feel joy", "hot water coming out of my tap", "that I can walk easily", "that I am able to give my baby clean clothes to wear"...*

**Daily diary of Compassionate Moments** Set aside time each day to spend bringing to mind, or writing down, moments that occurred when you felt a spark of warmth, kindness, or soothing (no matter how tiny or fleeting). To get into the habit of doing this, identify a time when this would be easiest to do. Imagine yourself doing this exercise, then place this diary somewhere where it will remind you to complete it.

*Strengthening the soothing system or Compassionate Mind involves directing attention to things that make **you** feel soothed, warm, and safe. These could be memories, images, thoughts, behaviours, feelings, pictures, smells, textures and so on.*

### 'Zooming in'

1. **Guide** your attention to memories of a time when you felt warmth and love for your baby or partner, or when you felt you had a moment of kindness with your child, friend or even a stranger.
2. Really intensify your attention as if you are zooming in through binoculars or a camera zoom.
3. Focus on how you imagine the expression on your face and the tone of your voice to be in that memory.
4. Draw your attention to how you felt inside.
5. Then move your attention to the facial expression and voice tone of your child or other person as they receive your kindness or warmth in the memory.

### Exercise 7: Focusing on Kind Faces

When we are in our 'threat mind' e.g. when we are feeling self-critical, angry, or anxious, then our minds will draw our attention to faces that confirm our feelings. At these times we are more likely to notice people with cross, critical, or hostile facial expressions.

We may even misinterpret other people as having hostile faces when that isn't the case because our minds tend to have a 'better safe than sorry' policy; 'if in doubt, assume a face is hostile'.

When practicing compassionate attention, we intentionally try and pull our minds to seeking out kind, compassionate faces. This takes practice, and also kindness when our focus inevitably slides back to hostile (or indeed neutral) faces. When this happens, we can try to just notice with a gentle smile that our attention has moved to hostile faces and then gently move our attention back to looking for kind faces.



We can practice this by looking through magazines or on the internet, or when we are out and about in the supermarket or in town for example, for all the kind faces.



## End of Session

## Session 10

### Module 20: Looking Forward: Building a compassionate life

With any good intention we inevitably have setbacks and times when we haven't been as we wanted. This is particularly so when we are tired, exhausted, hungry, physically and mentally at a low ebb and have a number of competing needs to manage, all very common when we have had a baby. As we build our compassionate mind then this can help us hold ourselves in a helpful, understanding rather than critical, shaming way when this happens. We see that, as humans this is what happens because we have such tricky brains which are wired to be hijacked by threat.

As we practice mindfulness, it becomes easier and easier to spot those moments when we've not been as we hoped, and then we can bring in our compassionate guide to help us back on course.

Where backgrounds have been full of threat, with little by way of safeness and soothing, then our very brains, memories, and safety strategies have all been shaped in a particular way. Changing this takes time, dedication, courage and strength. But we now know that our brains can change until the day we die. This is called 'neuroplasticity'.

It may also be that the huge changes that occur to our brain during pregnancy and postnatally make the perinatal time one when our brains are particularly malleable (like plasticine that we've warmed in our hands.) Indeed, this is often a time when women seek to make changes, frequently prompted by "not wanting to repeat patterns for my child".

When we have a baby, we see our compassionate mind also developing their compassionate mind. This can be a very helpful motivation for making changes for ourself. We can also think how we would help our child get back on track when they are disappointed and cross with themselves.

## Practice

### A day in the life of me at my compassionate best

This is an exercise that is hopefully both enjoyable and incredibly powerful.

- Sit in your dignified posture ("body like a mountain"), bring your warm, kind voice to your breath, slow down your breathing, finding your own soothing breathing rhythm.
- Imagine that time has rolled forward to a point at which you have become you at your compassionate best - this might be a year, 5 years, 60 years, 150 years for example. You imagine that it is morning and you open your eyes and look around your room.
- Where do you find yourself?
- Where is this place? (you might be in a house, a tent, a camper van for example).
- Notice the bedding you have, the colours and texture.
- Notice how the room looks, how it is decorated, what is in it, the colours.
- Imagine getting out of bed. Notice how you walk, how you are feeling and the feel of what is under your feet.
- You go to a window and look outside. What do you see? Where are you? What country are you in? What do you see as you look left, as you look right, as you look straight ahead?
- Notice how it feels to look out on all this.
- Is there anybody else in this place? People? A pet? Are they here now in another part of this place, gone out for the day?
- How does it feel when you think about them with your compassionate mind?
- What do you do next? How do you go about doing it?
- What will you do later today?
- How does your evening look?
- How do you spend your time now?
- What do you really enjoy?
- What do you look forward to in this life?

Write in as much detail as you can. Research has shown that this exercise can help people to identify more consciously, just what is important to them. They are then more likely to take steps to make it a reality.

## Reflections on your compassionate mind journey

What changes have you noticed over the course of working to build your compassionate mind?

What are you glad you have learned? What aspects have stood out as particularly helpful?

What changes do you think your partner might have seen in you?

What would you like to pass on from this to your baby?

What would you like them to pass on to other people as they grow up?

What would you like your baby to pass on to their children if they have any?

What would like to commit to doing that will be helpful to you:

In the next week  
In the next month  
Over the next year?

What will help you commit to it? (use your compassionate mind to help you with this):

*(See the next section for working with any fears, blocks and resistances, further practices, and summary sheets)*

***Thank you for all your courage and commitment in doing this work.***

**Your notes on what you would like to hold onto from this work and your plans for going forward:**



# End of Session

## Extension session: Fears, Blocks and Resistances (FBRs) to compassion

For many people the idea or process of developing a compassionate mind brings uncomfortable feelings. For example, some may believe compassion is ‘softy and fluffy’ when in fact working to alleviate and prevent suffering takes great strength and courage. For others, the reasons may be hard to put into words, instead there is more a feeling of discomfort, anxiety, anger, sadness or even nausea.

For many of us, working with the causes of their FBRs is the focus of the work. Without addressing these we will, often unconsciously, pull away from or sabotage any work on developing our compassionate mind in order to protect ourselves.

When uncomfortable feelings arise we can use mindfulness to help us notice, pause, and rather than avoid, we can notice the resistance, and then think with kindness, warmth and wisdom about what might be the fear behind it. This can help in developing an understanding that this resistance or fear has not been chosen by us but has arisen for a reason that we did not choose and is not our fault. Whether it is because that is how our particular brain works or perhaps because of the need to protect ourselves as a result of our life experiences.

As the fear of compassion becomes clearer we can use our compassionate mind to help us to think about what might help us to move forward from here.

As with all fears, like we would helping our child with a fear, we would do this gently, step by step, always with our compassionate mind with us, encouraging us, supporting us, picking us up during the inevitable set-backs and sharing in our joy as our life opens up.

- Think about the three flows of compassion (to others, from others, to ourselves). Put them in order of easiest to hardest for you.
- Have a look at the Fear of Compassion Scale (Available free on internet). This gives lots of ideas of common fears associated with each flow. Which resonate with you?
- Make a note of any thoughts that come to mind with regard to these flows. Wonder with a warm, curiosity what might be behind these thoughts (typically these are fears arising from our experiences).
- Use the formulation process from earlier in the book to help shed some light on these fears and struggles.

Carry this all out using that strong, wise, caring, courageous part of you as this can be illuminating and profoundly helpful, but difficult work.

## Extension session: Fears, Blocks and Resistances to compassion (cont...)

This section looks at common struggles that people encounter when working with compassion.

### 1) I Don't Deserve to Be Kind to Myself

Some people have a sense that if anybody really got to know them, they would discover that they are not very nice or are bad in some way. If we have this sense of being unlikeable or bad then it can be difficult to believe that we are worthy of kindness, from anybody else, and certainly not from ourselves.

- One approach to this is to simply note that these beliefs are common, but to practice anyway. It is like taking up running or swimming to keep fit, or gently exercising an injured leg through physiotherapy. We do these things because we need to do them rather than because we deserve it. We can adopt the same attitude to being compassionate to ourselves.
- Another way is to think about where the idea of not deserving to be kind to ourselves has come from. We all have brains that are designed to need kindness and attachment to others, just like we are designed to pull away from something hot without thinking about it. It isn't something we choose; it is just how we are made. The practice 'Focusing the Compassionate Self on Yourself: Looking From A Distance' (P.73) is a way of using the wise, kind, accepting part of our minds as if we are looking down from above upon our whole life. We can see ourselves from the time we were in our mother's womb, right through to now as if watching a speeded up video.

This can help us understand how we have come to *believe* that we do not deserve kindness and compassion.

- Sometimes the belief that we do not deserve kindness has developed as a way of protecting ourselves (a safety strategy); "If I don't expect kindness then I won't get hurt if I don't get it", or "I will punish myself before you can" or "You don't need to attack me, I will do that myself".

We then use our compassionate mind to help us firstly validate the pain and struggle of having lived with this belief which if we were brought up in a different family, we may well not have had, and then to help us begin to test out if these feared consequences still apply (which takes much courage). We can then find new ways of living our lives where we can, step-by-step be free of these fears.

- Sadly, sometimes children can develop a sense of themselves as bad and therefore undeserving of good things. This can feel like it is the absolute truth about them and that they are bad to the core. Again, the above can be helpful here; using the wise mind to look down on just how it came to be that a baby grows up to believe he or she is bad. This can sometimes happen to a child living with a parent or caregiver who is scary, neglectful or critical. A child is dependent upon their caregiver for their survival, particularly in the early years. The caregiver is powerful and can withdraw their care so the child has to find a way of surviving this as best they can.

It can be dangerous to a child to become angry at their caregiver, and instead a child has to find strategies to try and keep the caregiver as happy and available as possible; this includes taking on the belief that they themselves rather than their care-giver are bad and undeserving of kindness.

## Extension session: Fears, Blocks and Resistances to compassion (cont...)

In a strange way, taking the responsibility for bad things happening to us sometimes gives us a sense of some control over an unpredictable situation. We might believe that If our parents treat us badly because we are being bad then all we need to do is be good and they will be loving and kind. However ,if we believe our parents treat us badly because *they* are bad then nothing we do will change that: we are powerless. We might rather believe that we are bad than to accept our powerlessness against our 'bad parents'

The key point here is to understand with kindness and compassion how this very sad position, of believing we don't deserve kindness, is not something we have consciously chosen to take on, but has arisen out of a way of trying to make ourselves as safe as possible.

- Another method is imagining that an ideal imaginary compassionate person, even a kind of fairy Godmother, was looking down on your life from birth to now. Notice how they might relate to you, how they speak to you, and what they might say, with kindness, warmth, wisdom, strength and acceptance, about what you need right now, and what you need to help you move forward, develop, and flourish from here.
- Or imagining that you had been taken at birth and put into a warm, loving, kind household. How might you have grown up? How might you feel about yourself and others now?

## 2) Fear of Kindness Triggering Overwhelming Emotions

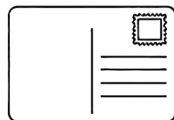
For some people kindness can make them feel sad, tearful, full of grief or full of anger. This is because it touches on our inbuilt need to be cared for, cared about, and connected to others. When we feel distressed, depressed, anxious or lonely, being kind to ourselves can open us up to that loneliness and yearning inside for connectedness. We can feel a great deal of sadness and anger if there wasn't much in the way of kindness or caring available to us. When we do experience this it can sometimes feel like a tidal wave of sadness comes with it. If possible, stay with these feelings and allow them to come through. This will be hard to do but you will find that, like a tidal wave, the feelings flow through you and then eventually flow away, as all feelings do. These are some techniques that people have found helpful when feelings seem too much:

- **Compassionate/Safe Place Imagery** - Imagine yourself walking into your compassionate place where you feel soothed and at peace. This place helps your with your feelings.
- **Leaves in the Stream** - imagining the feelings and thoughts being placed on leaves and floating past you on a stream.
- **Distancing (Standing Next to Yourself)** - Imagine standing next to the very sad, or angry, or worried part of yourself and relating to that part of you with real warmth, strength, kindness and compassion. Notice the expression of kindness on your face and your warm, kind voice as you relate to that struggling part of yourself.

## Extension session: Blocks and Resistances to compassion (cont...)

- **Distancing (Noting where you physically feel the emotion)** - Scan your body and notice how you know that you feel sad or angry or worried. Notice the physical sensations that indicate to you that you feel tearful or sad, for example “I can feel a prickling behind my eyes and heaviness in my chest”.
- This can help us to feel more separate from the feelings rather than being pulled into them. It also helps to see that although it can feel unbearable and overwhelming, it is in fact just a physical feeling, which will pass in time, just like all other physical feelings.
- **Soothing Breathing Rhythm** - Focus on your breathing, and gently bring your attention back to it each time your mind wanders. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your ribs as you breathe and becoming aware of your body settling into its own soothing rhythm.
- **In an hour, a day, a week...** Saying to yourself that like all thoughts, feelings and physical sensations - in an hour, a day, a week you will no longer feel this way.
- **Compassionate Ideal Person** - Imagine being held by, or just sitting with, your compassionate ideal person for as long as you need to until you feel better.

These techniques can be useful to put on a postcard to have with you for times when you are struggling with your emotion.



### 3) Where Kindness Feels Horrible

Some people find that kindness makes them feel strange, uncomfortable, sick or scared, because when they were children, their parents could be kind one minute but horrible the next. Feelings of kindness and horribleness become mixed up together. This is called “emotional conditioning”. (An example of this is if we had a sickness bug after eating pizza. After that we might always feel sick at the thought of pizza.) This means that as we begin to feel kindness, we can also experience the feelings of horribleness coming back as well.

We need to then build new, more positive associations to kindness, updating our knowledge eg bringing our warm, compassionate mind each time we struggle with kindness, consciously note that now as an adult, kindness no longer comes with that horribleness (doing what ever you might do for a puppy or a baby who had come from a previous difficult home, with all the commitment, courage, strength and compassion that would require).

The aim is to let the associations between kindness and feeling horrible weaken, like using a path less and less, and creating new paths between kindness and feel soothed and safe. By focusing more and more on these new paths, you use them more and wear them deeper, so making stronger and stronger connections in your brain.

## Extension session: Fears, Blocks and Resistances to compassion (cont...)

### 4) **Compassion Might Make Me Vulnerable**

Where some of us have grown up in a difficult environment, we may have had to develop safety strategies to protect ourselves, such as shutting off and not hoping for or expecting care and kindness. Or it may have been very unpredictable, where if we relax for a minute then we may be caught off guard. Here it can be very scary to start to allow self-compassion or compassion from others. It can feel like taking off our armour.

Compassion is in fact far from 'soft and fluffy'; it requires courage and strength, for example standing firm when we believe someone is treating someone else unfairly, or deciding that if we are scared to leave the house then the compassionate thing to do is to help ourselves, step by step, to leave the house rather than stay curled up in our duvet.

This involves deciding what part of us we want to grow (think back to the tale of the grandpa to his grandson - "There are two wolves in me, anger and compassion". The grandson says "Which one will win Grandpa?" "The one that I feed" replies the grandpa. Making the commitment to feed the compassionate part of ourselves takes a great deal of courage, particularly where in the past it has made us vulnerable. It is like trying to get back on a horse that has thrown us off, or crossing a road after an accident; it takes lots of tiny steps, courage, determination, but also a kindness and understanding when we struggle (as we probably will) and a kind encouragement and support.

### **Baby Notes**

For those of us who have been brought up in a difficult environment, or still live in a difficult environment, it can feel risky to bring up a baby with kindness and love in case they become 'soft' and vulnerable. We might think that because life is hard, and people are not kind, it is better for the baby to be 'toughened up' so that she or he doesn't get hurt.

To discover if we are indeed afraid of making our baby vulnerable it is worth thinking about how we are teaching our child to view the world and other people - what views are we hoping they will learn others in relation to themselves?

We can also look to understand with a warm curiosity, kindness and compassion why this may be our fear. For example, it might come from a deep sense of wanting to protect our children; an attempt to keep our children safe in what can be a scary environment.

Then if there are difficult people along the way, what makes a child feel strong, confident, and able to cope with difficulties - a withdrawal of kindness, or lots of kindness and compassion? It is interesting that research has found that the children who are cuddled more, feel safer, and are more confident, adventurous, and able to get help from others when they need it.

## Practice

### Developing the Compassionate Self - Acting 'as if'

Sit quietly and comfortable in an alert position. Start with your soothing breathing rhythm.

Imagine that you are going to **act** the part of a deeply compassionate person in a play or a film, and that you have been practicing getting into role as that person.

So imagine that this person that you are going to play act is a very **wise** person who understands that we just find ourselves here with genes and a brain that has evolved over many millions of years neither of which we designed or have chosen. We also struggle with emotions and memories that we haven't chosen to have. This person knows that is not our fault but something we need support and kindness to move through. Imagine your facial expressions and tone of voice as you play this person. Imagine the size of your body, whether you are male or female, or perhaps you find yourself as an animal or tree for example. Imagine your posture and how you move as you play this compassionate person.

This person that you are play acting is also very **strong with great courage**. Imagine your facial expression and voice tone as you play the person who has such strength, who can face and heal suffering, who might be moved in the face of distress or anger, but never cracks or breaks. Imagine your posture and how you might move and walk.

You also have great **warmth and openness** and also **commitment** to work on helping as best you can. Imagine yourself growing into this part, playing this person who is wise, strong, warm, responsible and accepting. Imagine yourself walking along. Notice how you relate to anyone you come across, perhaps smiling at them with real kindness and warmth, real wisdom and strength and acceptance

### Extension to Compassionate Self Exercise: Relating to the sad/angry/distressed part of ourselves

Now imagine that as you walk along you come across the sad/anxious/angry/distressed part of yourself. Notice how that part of you looks, the expression on their face and how they might sound if they spoke.

Feel yourself grow with strength and wisdom and courage, with the knowledge that no matter what that part of you says or does you can bear it and stand firm with kindness and compassion. You can understand with kindness and wisdom just why that part of you is the way it is and why it struggles, and just what it needs from you right now.

Imagine yourself walking up to that distressed part of you and relating to them with kindness and warmth, strength and wisdom. Stay with them as they become soothed and calm. Notice what happens to the distressed part of you as you stay with them with kindness, warmth, strength and wisdom.

If you feel yourself becoming pulled into their emotions just take yourself back a bit and anchor yourself, imagining yourself becoming even more solid and strong, warm and wise, before going back and being with them once more until they calm.

Holding on to those feelings of wisdom, strength, warmth, and kindness, in your own time just gently bring yourself back into the room, becoming aware of the sounds in the room, the feel of your feet on the floor, and gently open your eyes when you are ready.

#### **Baby notes:**

You might like to try this exercise where you imagine coming across your upset, angry or worried child rather than yourself.

You then imagine relating to your child with warmth, wisdom, strength, acceptance and kindness and notice how your child responds to this.

## Extension session: Fears, Blocks and Resistances to compassion (cont...)

### To Try at home

1) Role play compassionate self - bring to mind a compassionate image from books, cartoons, children's programmes, tv, films. Imagine you have been studying them for months like an actor studies a part - how they move, what they wear, how they relate to people, and to themselves, their facial expressions and how their voice sounds. Then imagine stepping into their body and clothes, pulling them up so you are now 'in role' as them. Walk around the room, noticing how you move, how you feel, what you attend to, the thoughts that pop into your mind. Imagine then coming across a part of you that has been struggling a bit (perhaps the tired, headachy part) then just simply be with them, keeping in role as the compassionate being.

Contrast this with stepping into an *anxious* character from TV, children's programmes, cartoons etc.

2) Put your compassionate self or being or the compassionate character you are acting to work - start with smaller difficulties e.g. to a headache, to your tiredness, then bring it to harder and harder difficulties e.g. when you feel worried, frustrated or sad.

3) Note any changes that you are beginning to see in yourself now that you have been doing this compassionate mind work (don't forget to switch systems so you are looking through your compassionate mind rather than critical/threat mind).



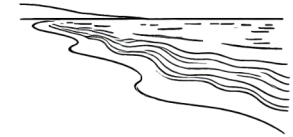
# End of Session

## Anxiety busters:

### Ways of getting from threat to soothing quickly

- 1) Place hand on or over heart (we are wired to respond to physical comfort).
- 2) ‘Butterfly hug’- cross your arms across your chest then tap alternately on your shoulders.
- 3) Milkshake breathing - breath slowly out as if you are making gentle bubbles in a full glass of milkshake.
- 4) ‘Taming the horse’ - imagine your anxiety is a scared horse, dog, rabbit (an animal you care about) in front of you. You are just spending time with it, as long as it takes, settling and soothing it however you can.
- 5) Toning - Make a deep sound in your chest like a fog horn, ships horn or deep humming. Keep the sound going for as long as you can on each out-breath. Feel the vibration in your chest (this is soothing and regulates our heart rate and our breath. It can also be very settling for a distressed baby as we hold them against our chest).
- 6) Soothing Breathing Rhythm
- 7) Change posture, to upright, confident, stride about, stand steady like a mountain.
- 8) Use movement - dance in a silly way with your baby, pretend you are a ballerina, follow an introductory yoga or Tai chi video (taking care of your body), do deep squats or step-ups trying to use your large leg muscles.

- 9) “Soften, soothe, allow” ( Chris Germer’s practice): notice where you feel your anxiety in your body as if you could draw around it. Imagine softening around its edges. In your mind repeat ‘soften, soften’. Then imagining soothing this area as if you are gently laying a hot water bottle on sore muscles. In your mind say “oothe, soothe”. Now just let the sensation of anxiety come and go, flow and shift, like gentle waves on a beach. In your mind say “Allow. Allow. Soften. Soothe. Allow. Soften. Soothe. Allow”.



- 10) Use smells that you really like.
- 11) Put on music, the radio, an audiobook, bird sound - any sounds that you enjoy or might shift your attention.
- 12) Changing your view – go to a different room that you don’t normally go in, step outside, stand higher e.g. on a stool (keeping steady), sit somewhere you don’t usually sit, view the world from your baby’s perspective, follow your baby as they move about, from their perspective, look upside down. Go for a walk in the rain with your baby. Jump in puddles. Be silly.
- 13) Put on warm, heavy clothes e.g. a winter coat, wrap in a weighted blanket, hold a large, warm drink.



# Further Practices

## Practice

### Compassionate Colour

1. Start with your soothing rhythm breathing and, when you are ready, imagine a colour that you associate with compassion, or that gives you a sense of warmth and kindness.
2. It might only be a fleeting sense of colour, but when you are ready, imagine your compassionate colour surrounding you.
3. Then, imagine this entering through your heart area and slowly flowing through your body.
4. You may prefer to think of the colour like a mist or light that just flows through you.
5. As this happens try to focus on this colour as having wisdom, strength and warmth, with a key quality of total kindness.
6. Now, as you imagine the colour flowing through you, focus on the feeling that the sole purpose of this colour is to help you, to strengthen you, and support you.

*End of practice*



## Practice

### Becoming a mother: bringing compassion to your 'new' body

Our bodies and brains change when we become pregnant, even if sadly we lose that baby. This is a practice that brings appreciation and tenderness to our changed body).

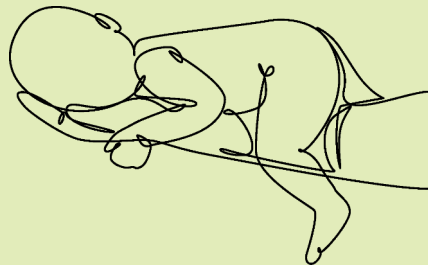
- Sit with your 'body like a mountain, mind like the sky, breath like the wind', bringing your warm, kind, face and voice to your breath ("hello breath"). As you begin to slow it down, feeling your body becoming steadier and more stable.
- Shift your attention to your feet that have grown wider having carried you and your baby. Bring your warm appreciation to them. Notice how they feel to be seen and appreciated in this way.
- Bring your warm, compassionate attention to your legs, their muscles and changes to their skin and veins from carrying a baby.
- Then shift to your pelvis, and the changes and work it's been through in adapting to your pregnant body and delivering your baby. Regard it with warm appreciation, gentleness. Focus on the your internal organs, your womb, your bottom, your bladder, your cervix. How do they feel to have your compassionate mind settle on them, appreciating all they have been through, being attended to in this way?
- Shift to your belly, it's muscles, skin and any marks remaining from pregnancy and birth. Perhaps laying your hand tenderly on it, sending in compassion perhaps as a colour or light.
- Shift to your breasts which have changed to give milk and may be feeding still. Imagine how they might feel to receive this warmth, kindness.
- Now to your arms that carry, that help your child into the world, welcome them back, miss a lost child.
- Then to your face, jaw, tongue, eyes, brow, mouth, neck, forever communicating with your baby. Then your brain, forever changed, evolved by nature for you in the service of parenting, that here, right now is reflecting upon itself.
- Shift to regarding the entirety of your body, then connecting with all the other mothers throughout history, across the world, in the future, whose bodies have been shaped for them by nature and have carried a baby even if for a short while. Imagine sending out compassion to all of you, to you, and all these other mothers.

*End of practice*

### Mindfulness to your sleeping baby

1. Sit with your “body like a mountain, mind like the sky, breathe like the wind”, bringing your warm, kind face and voice to your breath - “hello breath!”, slowing it down, feeling your body increasing in steadiness.
2. Shift your attention to your baby asleep. Your attention is one of warm, loose, curiosity, accepting with warmth, non-judgment and compassion all that passes through your mind.
3. Notice their eyes perhaps moving under their eyelids, their eyelids, their nose, their mouth. Then their whole face and the expressions that come and go like weather patterns as they sleep.
4. Let any thoughts arise, be noticed with a light touch, then let them pass on by, bringing your attention back to your baby (you will likely need to do this many times).
5. Shift your attention to their hands, their fingers, their fingernails.
6. Then the movements of their body, the rise and fall of their chest.
7. If they are lying on you, feeling their weight, their warmth against you. Notice their smell.
8. Notice the feel of them against your skin if you touch or stroke them.
9. Notice how it feels in your body as you to be do this practice.
10. Carry on for as long as you wish.

*End of practice*



### Imagining Compassion Flowing Out

1. Sit quietly, in your steady posture, with your eyes closed and just focus for a moment on your breathing, slowing it down.
2. Imagine yourself filling up with kindness, warmth, strength, and wisdom. You might imagine it as a light or colour that flows through your whole body, filling you up and making you grow.
3. Imagine this kindness, warmth, strength and wisdom, flowing out of you, and into each of the other people in your house, to your next-door neighbours, to all the people in your street, to the whole town, to the whole country, and then flowing across the sea and across the whole world.
4. Then imagine it flowing all the way around the world back to where you are, and then flowing to you too.

You might notice that it is harder to send the feelings out to some people than others, but just notice this with curiosity and kindness, and without judging it. Just continue with your intention to send out this kindness, warmth, strength, and wisdom to everybody, no matter their relationship with you

*End of practice*

## The compassionate mind approach to perinatal: Key Steps

*This is a summary of the key steps of the Compassionate Mind Approach.*

### 1. The soothing system can calm the threat system (see 'The Three Circles')



Threat feelings (anger, anxiety, disgust) flush through us without our choosing. They exist to keep us safe.

- Threat can be calmed by the soothing system.
  - We are wired up to respond to kindness and compassion. The drive system guides us to what we need to survive in life such as food, shelter, a mate. It gives us a 'buzz' of excitement as a reward for searching for them. When we get them, we can then 'rest and digest' (our soothing system).
2. **We switch on our threat system when we criticise ourselves,**
  3. **But we can also switch on our soothing system when we are kind and compassionate to ourselves**
  4. **We have an in-built fear of criticism and shame.**
    - We have evolved to experience rejection, or being ignored, or forgotten by others, as terrifying – for thousands of years this was a great risk to our survival.
    - We criticise ourselves ultimately to keep ourselves safe from being rejected by others.

### 5. We have developed safety behaviours to keep ourselves safe but these can have unintended consequences.

(see formulation)

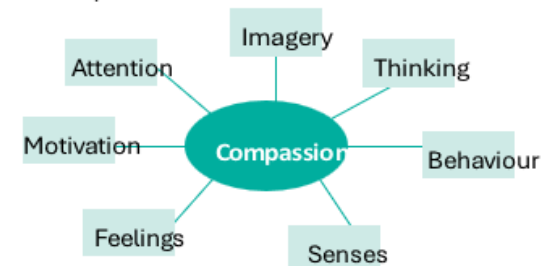
| Background | Fears | Safety Strategies | Unintended Consequences |
|------------|-------|-------------------|-------------------------|
|            |       |                   |                         |

From being babies, we learn safety strategies to keep us safe from things we fear. But as we get older these safety strategies can cause us difficulties (unintended consequences). They can stop us from developing and moving forward.

- The way out of this loop is through looking at ourselves with a kind, warm, wise, strong, and accepting mind – The Compassionate Mind.

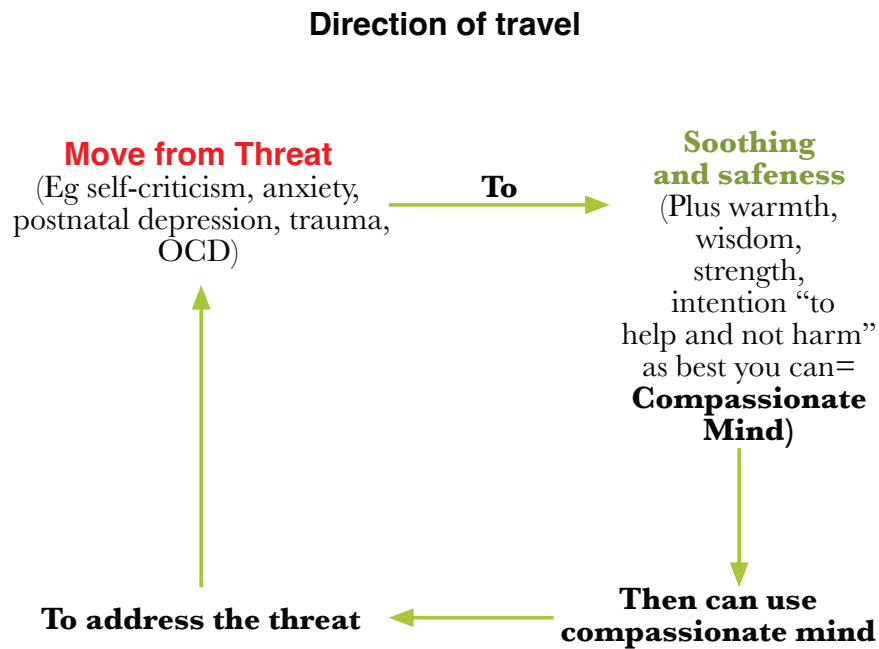
**6. Moving into our compassionate mind takes effort and practice.** Our threat mind is designed to take hold instantly and keep us there like a magnet. Pulling away from it towards the compassionate mind becomes easier with practice.

**We can build up our compassionate mind by shifting our focus to compassionate thoughts, feelings, behaviours, images, memories and using our senses.**




## The compassionate mind approach to perinatal: Overview

## Overview (cont...)



| “It’s complicated”   | “It’s not your fault”   | “Switch systems”   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Perinatal period shaped by millions of years of evolution.</p> <p>Much of which we aren’t aware of but will influence us.</p> | <p>We have a mind evolved to seek safeness</p> <p>and to be alarmed by the risk of being cast out of the group or forgotten.</p> <p>Our human mind is able to criticise and shame ourselves, and others, when we fear disconnection.</p> <p>But criticism and shame create a narrow-focused pattern of threat in our mind and body.</p> <p>It makes it hard for us to solve problems, and to get out of states of anxiety, depression or anger.</p> <p>But this is not our fault.</p> | <p>We are wired to be highly responsive to signals of safeness, compassion, warmth, kindness.</p> <p>This regulates threat, changing the way our mind and body function enabling:</p> <p style="color: green;">Open attention, creative solutions, integrating new information, rest and digest, healing, reducing inflammation.</p> <p>We can learn to deliberately switch into this pattern when we find ourselves in threat.</p> <p>Then we carry on with what we were doing; problem solving, nursing, therapy, caring for baby etc but from a pattern of safeness and compassion, rather than threat.</p> |

## The compassionate mind approach to perinatal: A detailed summary

| "It's complicated"  | "It's not your fault"   | "Switch systems"   |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>1) Evolved brain:</b><br/> <b>Old brain:</b> Dealing with threat, getting what we need to survive, rest and digest.<br/> <b>New brain:</b> Problem solving, imagination, aware of other minds, mindfulness<br/> <b>Three emotion regulation systems:</b> Threat, drive, soothing</p>  <p><b>2) Experiences</b><br/>           E.g. if brought up by 'drug gang'/family next door.</p> <p><b>Own experiences of being a child</b> (eg attachment strategies, memories, emotional conditioning/body memories eg to oxytocin).</p> | <p><b>Eg</b> Tricky brain - old and new brain gets 'caught in loops'.</p> <p>Respond to our own face and voice as if it outside of us. Has neurophysiological impact on us.</p> <p>Yearning for connection</p> <p>Fast track to threat</p> <p><b>We develop safety strategies to try to prevent further harm coming to us.</b><br/> <i>E.g. to stop people hurting me I will keep them at a distance</i></p> <p>E.g. self-criticism - triggers evolved dominant-submissive algorithm so we lose physical and psychological confidence in face of dominant attack (evolved highly effective safety strategy)</p> | <p>Need to be able to :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Pause</b></li> <li><b>2. Notice the 'pattern' or system' we are in.</b></li> <li><b>3. Choose whether to change it.</b></li> </ol> <p>To change 'pattern' - 'Five stepping stones from threat to soothing':<br/> <b>Soothing Breathing Rhythm</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Posture</li> <li>2. Breath</li> <li>3. Mindfulness<br/> <i>"Body like a mountain, breath like the wind, mind like the sky".</i></li> <li>4. Kind face</li> <li>5. Kind voice</li> </ol> <p><b>Compassionate Mind:</b><br/>           First engaging with the suffering.<br/>           Second - movement/ action - doing something to alleviate and prevent the suffering.</p> <p>(Continued →)</p> |

## The compassionate mind approach to perinatal: A detailed summary (cont...)

| "It's complicated"   | "It's not your fault"  | "Switch systems"  |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>What learned about others</b><br/>           (especially external fears eg "People abandon you".)</p> <p><b>What learned about ourselves in relations to others</b><br/>           (Especially internal fears eg "I am unloveable", "My emotions are harmful to others".)</p> <p><b>3) Genetics and epigenetics</b><br/>           (eg temperament) (Experiences can turn genes on and off.)</p> <p><b>4) Evolved perinatal changes</b><br/>           Eg brain changes, hormonal, body. Increased need for help from others/ mother?</p> <p><b>5) Perinatal Experiences</b><br/>           eg pregnancy, birth, support, environment</p> <p><b>6) Baby</b><br/>           eg temperament, premature, unwell</p> | <p><b>But these can have unintended consequences</b><br/> <i>(Now I am alone. This is hard for humans especially when we have a new baby)</i></p> <p><b>These are not our fault</b><br/>           (Create different way forward through our compassionate mind)</p> | <p><b>Compassionate Mind qualities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1) Strength</b><br/>           (body+'benevolent authority')</li> <li><b>2) Wisdom</b><br/>           (evolution, experiences, "not your fault", our "intuitive wisdom".</li> <li><b>3) Motivation</b> - "heartfelt wish", intention, to help and not harm, to alleviate and prevent suffering.</li> </ol> <p><b>Can train compassion, which changes the brain</b> (Compassionate mind Training):<br/>           Practice 3 flows: to others, from others, to selves:<br/> <b>Practices</b><br/>           eg: using all senses - touch, smell etc<br/>           Compassionate place<br/>           Compassionate colour<br/>           Compassionate image<br/>           Compassionate self<br/>           Compassionate letter-writing<br/>           Compassionate attention<br/>           Compassionate behaviour<br/>           Compassionate thinking<br/>           Body eg dance, yoga, martial art, singing</p> |

## If short on time...

Often, we don't have the time to work through all of these sessions particularly if we have just had a baby or only have a short time to work with somebody. This section is a guide to core sections to cover if you are short on time. You can always explore this further when things get a little easier.

### If there is only one hour:

All of Session 1 (this provides all the core education):

Module 1: 'Old brain', 'new brain'

Module 2: Tricky Brain

Module 3: The Three Circles

Module 4: The importance of the soothing system

Plus the **soothing breathing rhythm practice** at the end of session 3 (this is a powerful stand alone practice which enables us to change our physiology).

### If there are two hours:

As for above for one hour but include:

Module 7: The five stepping stones from threat to soothing

to give the detailed background behind Soothing Breathing Rhythm and the importance of 'changing our body to change to our mind'.

Spend one hour on the session 1 psycho-education (modules 1, 2, 3, and 4) and then one hour on module 7

## If short on time...(continued)

### If there are five hours:

#### **Hour One**

Module 1: 'Old brain', 'new brain'

Module 2: Tricky Brain

Module 3: The Three Circles

Module 4: The importance of the soothing system

#### **Hour Two**

Module 7: The five stepping stones from threat to soothing

**Practice: Soothing Breathing Rhythm** (*From session 2*)

#### **Hour Three**

Module 5: Why focus on compassion?

**Practice: Compassionate/safe/joyful/your place**

Module 10: Motherhood and the brain

Module 11: The parent and baby 'dance'

Module 12: Mothers and 'the village'

#### **Hour Four**

Module 14: Our different selves

**Practice: Developing the Compassionate Self - Acting 'As if'**

#### **Hour Five**

Module 15: Working with our inner critic

**Practice: Compassionate Image/Other**

**If any further time:** Module 16: Formulation

and **Practice: Compassionate letter writing**

Have a look through the brief and also the more detailed summaries (found above at the end of this handbook) to guide you to any other modules or practices that you think would be helpful.

# Resources

## Further reading

- The Compassionate Mind Approach to Postnatal Depression: Using Compassion Focused Therapy to Enhance Mood, Confidence and Bonding Paperback (2016 by Michelle Cree)
- Audiobook version of above book (2025)
- The New Motherhood Workbook: Developing a compassionate mind for you, your baby and your family (Compassion Focused Therapy) (2025) by Michelle Cree

## Websites

- Birmingham Perinatal Resource: <https://www.bsmhft.nhs.uk/our-services/specialist-services/perinatal-mental-health-service/>
- Best Start for Life: <https://breathe-edu.co.uk/resources/best-start-for-life/>
- Overcoming Depression (downloadable audio practices):<https://overcoming.co.uk/1553/The-Compassionate-Mind-Approach-To-Postnatal-Depression---Cree>
- Netmums Compassionate Mind Approach:

<https://www.netmums.com/support/the-compassionate-mind-approach>

- Short CFR videos (developed for neonatal staff but applicable to all staff working with parents of babies):<https://padlet.com/NeoLeaP/compassionate-mind-approach-for-neonatal-staff-ozdll1omgy63q0u0> (Blocked by some Trusts)

## Podcast Episode

- Gentle Birth Podcast: Compassion Focused Therapy - An Exciting New Approach to Pregnancy & Postpartum Emotional Wellness: <https://podtail.com/en/podcast/gentlebirth-the-gentlebirth-podcast-positive-birth/compassion-focused-therapy-an-exciting-new-approac/>

# Glossary

## CMA (Compassionate Mind Approach)

A way of being with oneself or others that focuses primarily on trying to be helpful, and on alleviating and preventing suffering. It uses the body and the mind to create feelings of safeness which then have an impact on how we think and behave and even what we remember, imagine, and attend to.

## FBR (Fears, blocks and resistances)

We can develop these for various reasons including our experiences through life. They can affect one or more of the three 'flows of compassion', so our ability to be compassionate to ourselves, to others, or to being able to accept compassion from others. They are an important focus of this approach.

## Mentalisation

The ability to understand the mental state of oneself or others.

## Mind-mindedness

A caregiver's tendency to view their child as an individual with their own mind along with an intention to try to understand their child's perspective and to put it into words.

## SBR (Soothing Breathing Rhythm)

A five-step process to settling and steadying our body (a confident, stable posture, a long slow, smooth breathing pattern, mindfulness, a kind warm facial expression and a kind, warm voice tone). It can be used on its own or to start off any of the Compassionate Mind practices. We would use it to change ourselves from a pattern of threat to one of feeling settled, steady, soothed and able to think more clearly and creatively from a wider perspective. It also helps to give us confidence and courage.



This book has been written in response to parents who have found the compassionate mind approach particularly helpful. It is hoped that this little handbook will provide enough information and practical tools so that parents and those who support them can use it for themselves, and for working together to be able to bring the compassionate mind approach to the babies and young children too.

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**compassionate**



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