



Self-Awareness & Self-Compassion

Mental Health Mastermind

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.” Buddhist quote.

Choose a Situation to Explore

Before we get started, think of a recent challenge or painful situation to use as an example for the concepts we’ll cover today. Choose something on the mild end, perhaps something you’ve already had time to process. With practice you can apply these concepts to more challenging or painful situations. Feel free to change this as needed as we go.

My situation to explore today:

Beneath the Surface

Beneath the surface of our fears and frustrations are deeper questions like *what does this say about my identity, worth, connection, purpose, survival, livelihood*. Beneath even the small things, the things we believe we’re overreacting about, you will find a deeper meaning attached to the situation. It is these meanings that fuel our big emotions and these meanings we need to learn to be present with to make lasting change.

Psychological Safety: It Is Safe to Be Me

Does this statement feel true? Or have you ever wondered if it’s really okay to be you? When we don’t understand what lies beneath the surface or we fear our own inner experience, we send the message that who we are and how we are isn’t okay. We become both the threat and the threatened. This is why it’s so important to approach any of our suffering with nonjudgment and compassion.

What have you observed beneath the surface of your chosen situation?

How does the statement “it is safe to be me” sit with you in this situation?

Nonjudgment

First, it is important to recognize the difference between discernment and judgment in this context. It is important to be discerning in life. Discernment gives us clarity about who we are, what we need, and what we want. Discernment allows for boundaries and safety. So, as you practice awareness of your inner experience, it is hugely beneficial to practice discernment, as in How do I feel? How does that work for me? What is the name of this emotion? Is this thought true?

Judgment entails naming something as good or bad, allowed or not, likeable or unlikeable. And when applied to ourselves and our inner experience, it can create suffering. Think about a time you’ve felt upset and then judged that feeling and you know what that is like.

Nonjudgment allows for deeper self-awareness and, ultimately, change. When we can view ourselves and our inner experiences without deeming them good or bad, we can learn from them and gain deep insights into who we are.

Radical Acceptance

Radical acceptance is the term for choosing to acknowledge and allow whatever arises within us to arise. It’s not making a judgment about whether we agree or like whatever it is that we feel or made us feel that way. It’s simply allowing whatever inner experience we’re having to be there so we can learn and grow. The more you practice this, the more flexibility you have in your thoughts and emotions.

What have you observed about discernment, judgment, and radical acceptance in your chosen situation?

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is a way of being present, understanding, and kind to yourself when you're feeling emotional pain. It involves 3 components:

1. recognizing and naming that you're hurting
2. reminding yourself that this feeling is a shared human experience
3. choosing to do something caring or soothing for yourself

In practice, self-compassion can be easily summarized as treating yourself as someone worth caring about and taking care of. Many people find it helpful to think of how they'd talk to a dear, old friend when learning to speak to themselves with compassion. This can include how to speak to and treat yourself in good times and bad.

Parts of Self

Who you think of as you is made up of many parts. There are parts of you that remember challenges or traumas you've faced, parts that feel confident, parts that want to control things, parts that run around putting out fires. All of them, even those that seem unhelpful on the surface, are trying to serve you in their own way.

When you encounter a difficult emotion, think of that emotion as just one part of you. A helpful statement to make is, "Part of me thinks/feels/fears/believes/wants..."

And consider what this part of you remembers and how it may be trying to help you. See if you can communicate with that part of you, giving it validation that you get it and, of course, compassion. The more you try to quiet these parts of you, the louder they often become – because they carry an emotional burden and feel very strongly about the situation you're in. Thank it for carrying this burden.

What parts of yourself have you observed in your chosen situation? What do they want for you?

In what ways do you see this challenge and even these parts of you as a reflection of a larger shared human experience?

How have you shown yourself compassion or caring in this or a similar situation?

Backdraft

Backdraft is a term in the self-compassion literature for the rush of painful emotions one can face when they allow themselves to be present with their inner experience with compassion. Our lived experiences can send us the message that it is unsafe to be present with our feelings or unsafe to be who we are. While this experience can be intense, it is natural. If you experience this, call it what it is, breathe, and take a soothing action. You may choose to take a small break – go for a walk, take a shower, stretch. You may also choose to stay with it but ease up on yourself. While discomfort is a natural part of change, it does not need to be traumatizing.