

Self-Awareness and Self-Compassion

Mental Health Mastermind

Notes

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

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.

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.

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.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is a way of responding to our suffering with a heartfelt desire to find relief. It involves three components:

1. Mindfulness, or awareness of our suffering.
2. Acknowledgement of our shared human experience.
3. Loving-kindness, or a desire or intention to find relief, for yourself or all beings.

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.

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.

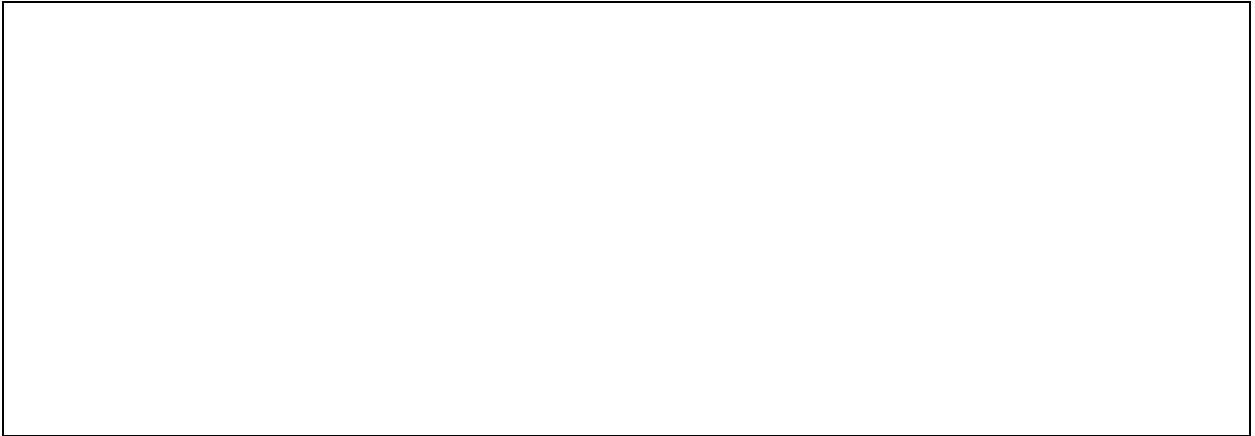
Work

What recent challenging emotions or thoughts have you experienced recently? What do you think lies beneath the surface?

If you were to think of that experience as a part of you, what do you think that part remembers or knows? What does it want? Does it have a message for you?

How does this experience reflect our shared human experience?

What would you say to a friend going through something similar?

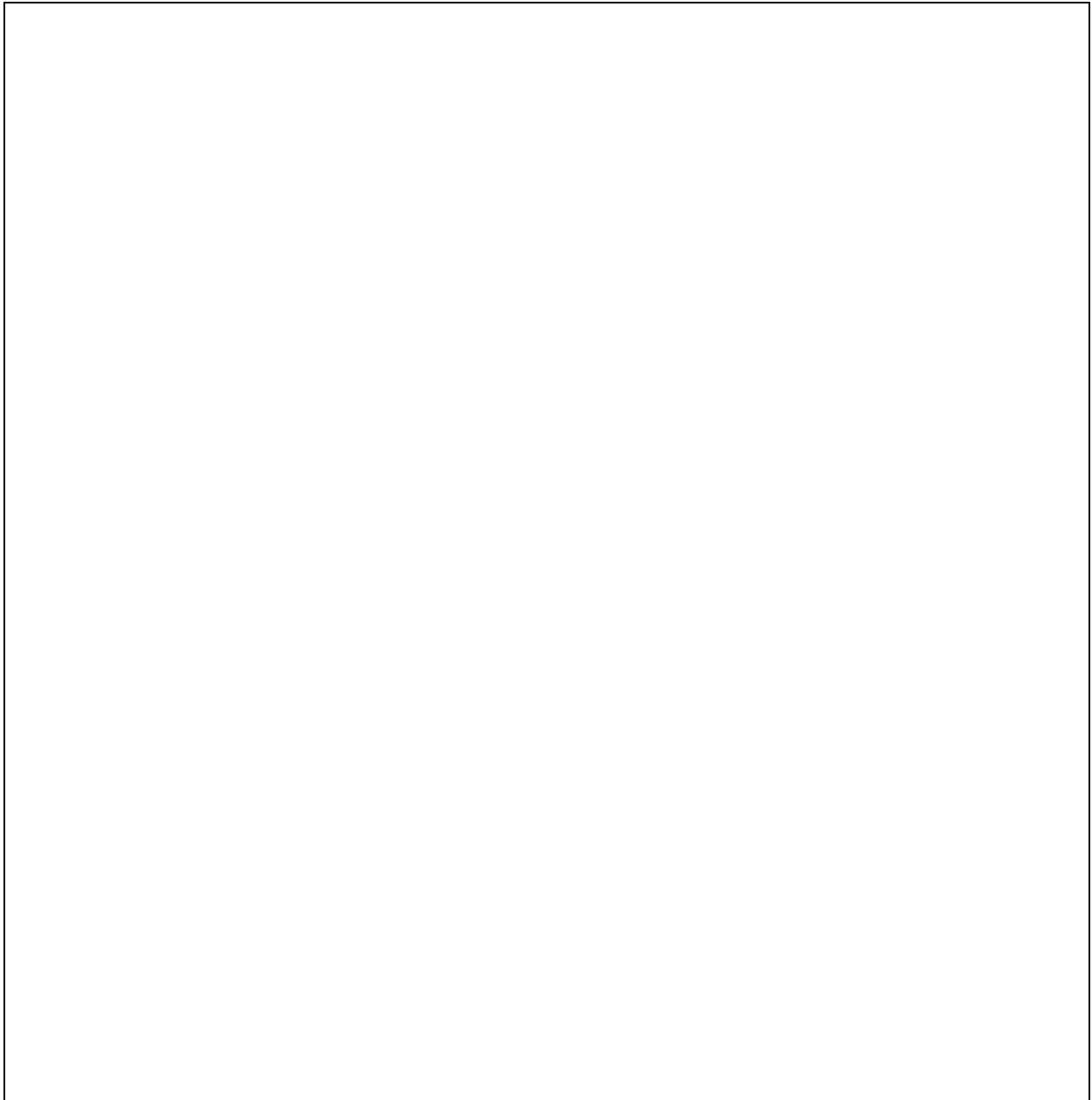
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Homework

A gesture of self-compassion.

When you experience a painful inner experience, practice viewing it with an attitude of nonjudgment and radical acceptance. Place your hands over your heart or hold your hands together in your lap. You might also like the sensation of giving yourself a gentle hug. Breathe and offer yourself this gesture of compassion. Ask what part of you needs your attention right now and try to be present with it without judgment. You may choose to finish by speaking to yourself or that part of you as you would a dear friend or child.

You can take notes on this experience in a journal or in the space below.

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