

## Overcoming Destructive Anger

June 7, 2016

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### Anger is a Mind-Body State

- Triggered by a perceived threat, and
- A reaction to and distraction from inner pain such as anxiety, shame, frustration, and powerlessness

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### Anger is An Attempt at Self-Compassion

When our pain is managed constructively, we express "healthy anger."

But when our self-compassion goes awry, we express destructive anger.

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**"Healthy Anger" Consists of:**

- Recognizing anger as a signal to direct our attention inward
- Observing and experiencing anger without being overwhelmed by it
- Identifying unrealistic expectations that can make us vulnerable to anger
- Responding with compassion and self-compassion
- Developing strategies to let go of anger

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**Cultivating Healthy Anger encompasses skills from three broad areas of theoretical understanding and practice:**

- Self-awareness: regarding body, thoughts and emotions
- Mindfulness and Mindfulness Meditation
- Self-compassion (Compassion Focused Therapy and Theory: based on an integration of evolutionary, social and developmental theories; Buddhist psychology and neuroscience)

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**A Framework of Anger**

Triggering Event → Anger(1-10)

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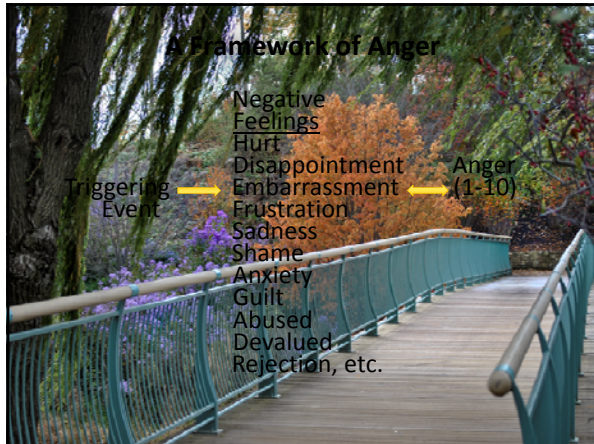
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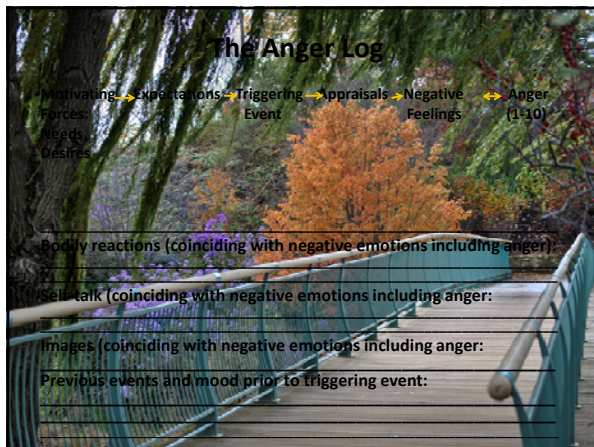
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### The Anger Log

Outcomes	Expectations	Triggering Event	Appraisals	Negative Feelings	Anger (1-10)
to feel confident, respect	she should respect my decision	Being told to go in the other lane She's criticizing me, it's happening again	She is overbearing, She's telling me what to do, devalued me, it's happening again	disrespected, anxious, criticized, attacked	(7-8)

**Body reactions:** tension in chest,  
**Self talk:** She can be so annoying and overbearing.  
**Images:** None  
**Previous events and mood prior to triggering event:** Past history of feeling disrespected and current mood

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### Mindfulness and Mindful Meditation

moment to moment, nonjudgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible. - Jon Kabat-Zinn

- Be alert to how clients practice meditation.
- Encourage discussion of judging observations.
- Emphasize informal practice as well as formal practice
- Discuss the difference between detachment and suppression

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### The Usefulness of Mindfulness Regarding Anger

- To recognize thoughts: expectations and appraisals
- To observe emotions without overidentification
- To observe body sensations
- To recognize alternative choices that can impact the trajectory of anger arousal

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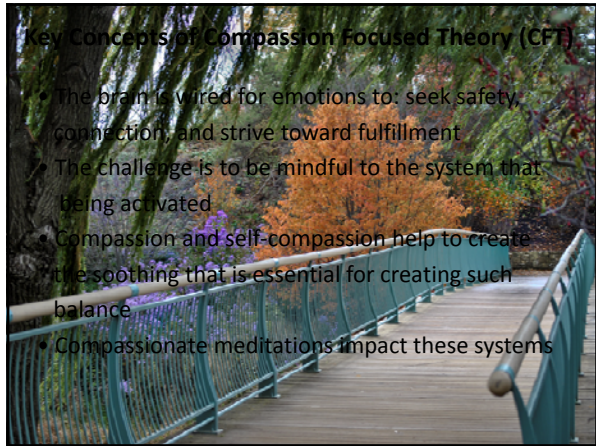
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**Key Concepts of Compassion Focused Theory (CFT)**

- The brain is wired for emotions to: seek safety, connection, and strive toward fulfillment
- The challenge is to be mindful to the system that being activated
- Compassion and self-compassion help to create the soothing that is essential for creating such balance
- Compassionate meditations impact these systems

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**Components of Self-Compassion**

Self-compassion entails (Kristen Neff):

- Kindness with oneself
- Non-judgment
- Recognizing and honoring our humanity
- Not over-identification with thoughts or feelings

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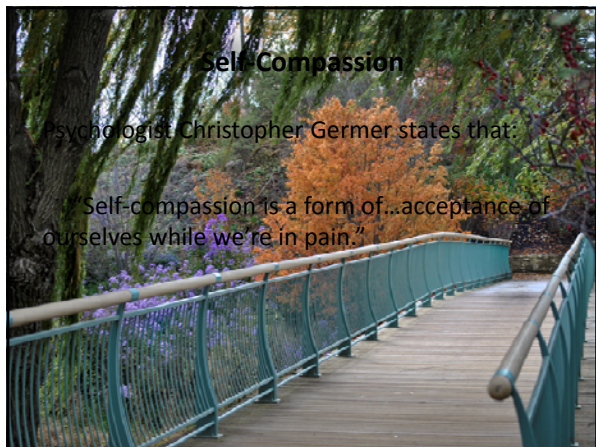
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**Self-Compassion**

Psychologist Christopher Germer states that:

"Self-compassion is a form of...acceptance of ourselves while we're in pain."

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**Physiological Reaction to Compassionate Meditations**

- Decreased cortisol levels
- Decreased adrenaline
- Increased Oxytocin
- Activation of Vagus nerve for calmness

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**Blocks to Self-Compassion**

- Opening heart for compassion includes opening the heart for past wounds
- Self-compassion is viewed as weakness
- Suppressing the need for compassion helped
- Revisiting the longing for compassion can potentially lead to vulnerability
- Fear of losing one's competitive drive

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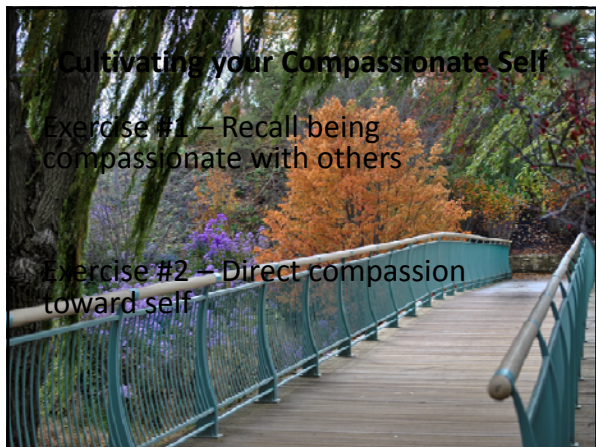
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**Cultivating your Compassionate Self**

Exercise #1 – Recall being compassionate with others

Exercise #2 – Direct compassion toward self

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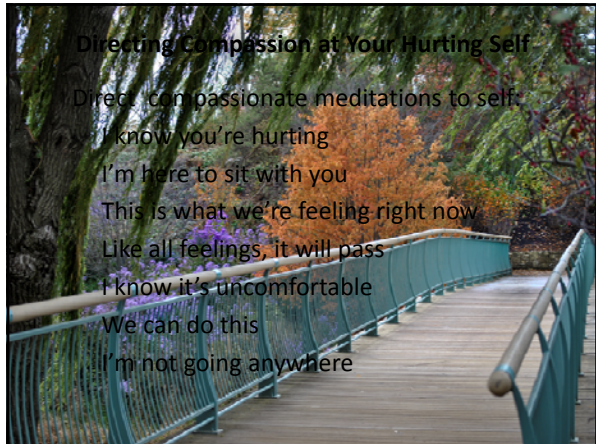
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**Directing Compassion at Your Hurting Self**

Direct compassionate meditations to self:

- I know you're hurting
- I'm here to sit with you
- This is what we're feeling right now
- Like all feelings, it will pass
- I know it's uncomfortable
- We can do this
- I'm not going anywhere

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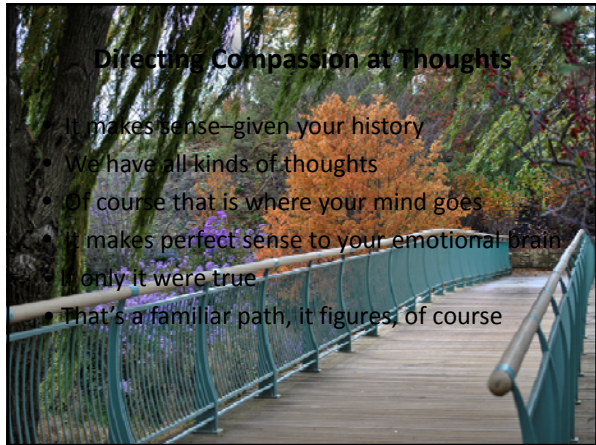
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**Directing Compassion at Thoughts**

- It makes sense—given your history
- We have all kinds of thoughts
- Of course that is where your mind goes
- It makes perfect sense to your emotional brain
- If only it were true
- That's a familiar path, it figures, of course

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**Practicing BEAR for "Healthy Anger"**

- B—breath deeply: Inhale and exhale deeply
- E— Evoke calmness in your body
- A— Arouse compassion for yourself and others
- R— Reflect on thoughts and feelings that trigger anger

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### Grieving and Mourning

- Grieving involves acknowledging the immediate pain
- Mourning involves letting go of it
- Addressing past hurts
- Mindfully and intentionally reinvesting in the present

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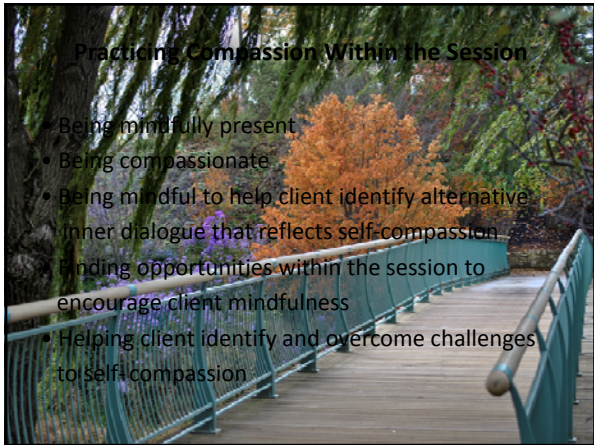
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### Practicing Compassion Within the Session

- Being mindfully present
- Being compassionate
- Being mindful to help client identify alternative inner dialogue that reflects self-compassion
- Finding opportunities within the session to encourage client mindfulness
- Helping client identify and overcome challenges to self-compassion

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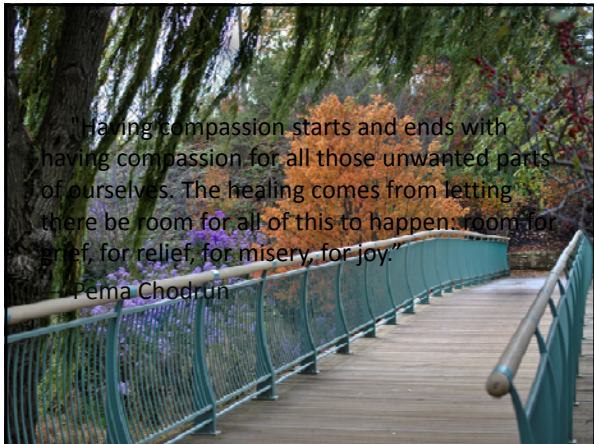
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"Having compassion starts and ends with having compassion for all those unwanted parts of ourselves. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy."  
— Pema Chodron

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