

Compassionate Thought Diary



What is Self Criticism?

'Negative self evaluation that makes us feel worthless, guilty, a failure'. Sound familiar? Unfortunately many of us tend to be self critical, which can be extremely unhelpful, to say the least!

What is Self Compassion?

'Extending kindness, care, warmth, and understanding (instead of beratement and criticism) toward oneself' – altogether better (and far more helpful, allowing us to learn from our mistakes).

It can seem an overwhelming task to move away from excessive self criticism towards a more compassionate way of thinking. But it can most certainly be done – it takes work and practice, after all you are having to re-programme your way of thinking. But it is well worth the effort.

What is a 'Compassionate Thought Diary'?

A 'Compassionate Thought Diary' is a wonderful tool to help move away from excessive self criticism and towards a compassionate, far more useful and positive way at looking at things.

We go through this step-by-step with explanations first. At the end of the booklet (p6-7) is a 'diary' that you can use every time you become (or feel you might become) too self critical. Try it!

The Diary Explained

STEP 1: Find an Image

First find an image of someone, something, anything that makes you feel full of compassion for them

STEP 2: Analyse your Self Critical Thinking

Think about the last time you were overly critical of yourself:

- 1. Why did you start criticising yourself?:**
[eg a situation, an emotion, a thought about the past or the future]
- 2. What was the self-critical part of you saying?:**
- 3. Think about the way you criticised yourself .. what was the 'tone of voice'?:**
- 4. How did this make you feel?**
[rate intensity of the dominant emotion 0-100%]
- 5. What were the physical sensations or behaviors that went with those feelings?**
- 6. How much did you believe the self-critical thoughts?**
[0-100%]

Answering these questions will help you become more aware of how you think and feel when you are being excessively self critical

STEP 3: Shift to Compassionate Thinking

The second part of the process is about shifting your thinking to become more compassionate towards yourself. To do this, you will need the image you feel deep compassion for. This will help you to activate the 'soothe system' and calm the 'threat system', putting you in a much better frame of mind to bring a compassionate perspective to whatever you are dealing with.

1. **LOOK AT YOUR COMPASSIONATE IMAGE**

Breath slowly. Allow compassionate feelings to rise

2. **Now how are you feeling?**

[Your photo is a vivid reminder of how compassionate we can feel towards others]

3. **What would you say to a friend if they had done what you did that made you so self critical?**

[This can help draw out the compassion that we reserve for others and use it for ourselves ie 'Treat yourself as you would others']

4. **Are there other ways to view things that can be more realistic, kinder or more helpful?**

[This allows our critical thinking to be tempered by our compassionate side, making it helpful and positive and considered rather than an irrational, negative, knee-jerk response]

5. **How will you feel about what went wrong in 1 week, 9 month or 1 year?**

[If it won't matter then, can you let go of it now? This can bring a balanced perspective about the true importance of what we are dealing with]

6. What can you do to cope and look after yourself now?

A[compassionate response is always good at taking care of someone who is struggling, so it is important to shift our energy to do this for ourselves, recognising the ways we can cope and can look after ourselves when we feel vulnerable in order to help rebuild our strength.]

7. Now what would you say to yourself about what went wrong?

[Give a voice to your compassionate side - that may have been sidelined for too long. Your compassionate side may recognise that the self-critical side might be scared and is only trying to help, but it is it isn't!]

Step 4: A More Compassionate Way

The last step is to consider what is a new, more compassionate way to think. First, re-read all the compassionate thoughts you wrote down. Be conscious of *how* you are reading these to yourself. Make sure you haven't slipped from the warm and caring voice tone that goes with your compassionate image. If you lose a compassionate tone, just re-focus on your compassionate image to kickstart your self compassion again.

Having read through your compassionate thoughts, consider:

1. How can I replace self-criticism with a more compassionate, useful way of dealing with mistakes?

2. How much do I believe the self-critical thoughts now? Re-rate 0 to 100%

3. How intense is my initial main emotion now? Re-rate 0 to 100%

If you follow through with this, it is likely that you will experience a decrease in your belief in the original self-critical thoughts and decreased intensity of your original emotional reactions. If it has been useful in this way, then great, you can put your concerns to rest and use this technique in future!

Step 5: Not Yet Working?

If you are still struggling: firstly keep engaging with your compassionate image and re-reading the more compassionate thoughts to yourself. Bringing a compassionate perspective to things will be new and foreign to you and may require quite a bit of practice to get used to.

Also, focus your energy on the question **WHAT CAN I DO TO COPE AND LOOK AFTER MYSELF NOW?** Whatever you come up with, make sure you are putting these ideas into practice now. If you are not able to change your thinking on a struggle you are facing, then *taking care of yourself* is the most important place to channel your attention and energy.

[Worksheets created with thanks to Centre of Clinical Interventions]



Compassionate Thought Diary

Try going through these steps every time you are – or feel you might become – too self critical

Step 1: Analysing My Self-Critical Thinking

1. Why did I start criticising myself? [eg a situation, an emotion, a thought about the past or the future]:
2. What is the self-critical part of me saying?:
3. What is the 'tone of voice'?:
4. How does this make me feel? [rate intensity of the main emotion 0-100%]:
5. What physical sensations or behaviors go with those feelings?:
6. How much do I believe the self-critical thoughts [0-100%]?:

Step 2: Shift to Compassionate Thinking

1. Breathe slowly. Bring my Compassionate Image to mind. Allow compassionate feelings to arise

2. What does my compassionate image have to say?:

3. What advice would I give to someone I care deeply about who was thinking & feeling this way?:

4. What does the compassionate part of me want to say to the self-critical part?:

5. What are some other ways of viewing this situation that might be more realistic, kinder or more helpful to me?:

6. How will I feel about this in 1 week, or 1 month, or 1 year? (If it won't matter much then, can I let go of it now)?:

7. What can I do to cope and look after myself now?:

Step 3: Compassionate Conclusion

1. Re-read my compassionate thoughts, making sure I am using a compassionate tone of voice.

2. What is a more compassionate and helpful conclusion to replace the self-criticism?:

3. How much do I believe the self-critical thoughts now (0-100%)?:

4. How intense is my initial main emotion now (0-100%)?: