

Worksheet B4.1: Compassionate writing

Read the information and complete the activity.

Directing compassion towards ourselves

For this exercise, it is important to remember the foundations of compassion: we do not choose to be born, we do not choose our families, gender or culture, and we do not choose many of our experiences. Yet, all of these have a big impact on how we think, feel and act. This means that our daily struggles are not our fault. Indeed, struggling and feeling vulnerable about struggling are a normal part of the human condition. Even though this is not our fault, it is our responsibility to courageously engage with our struggles and take action to move forward in helpful ways. This is the core of self-compassion.

In compassionate writing, we can reflect on a situation in our daily lives and try to address it with all the qualities of compassion: kindness, warmth, strength, courage and wisdom. This often allows us to see the situation more clearly and identify helpful ways forward. It may also help us to process difficult emotions and let go of unhelpful self-criticism, blame and resentment. To help with this skill, we may want to imagine what a compassionate friend or colleague might say as we are writing.

Compassionate writing activity

Think of a situation in your current work role that is causing you some distress or struggle. Take a few moments to reflect on this situation, exactly what you find difficult, and whether this is part of a pattern of difficulties. Then complete the following piece of writing on a separate piece of paper, using the sentence starters provided. Elaborate in as much detail as you can. Try to avoid any self-criticism or blame in your writing. If you find this hard, you could imagine that you are a much older version of yourself writing to your younger self with the perspective of time and wisdom.

- Summary of situation: ...

- In this situation, I feel...

- I am finding this situation difficult because...

- This is not my fault because...

- I can accept my struggle in this situation because...

- This situation reminds me of past experiences, such as...

- I can be kind towards myself in this situation by...

- I can be courageous in this situation by...

- I can gather strength to cope in this situation from...

- I have coped in difficult situations in the past, such as...

- A compassionate friend would help me in this situation by saying...

- I have choices in this situation, which are...

- My wisdom tells me that the most helpful way to move forward is...

- If there are setbacks, I will remind myself that...
