

Compassionate Mind Training or Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT)

Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) was developed by Paul Gilbert, specifically to reduce harsh inner self-criticisms and shame. It had been found to reduce anxiety, anger and depression to promote resilience, wellbeing and better relationships. CFT integrate knowledge from neuroscience, evolution and attachment theory.

The evolution of the brain

Our brains have evolved over the last 200 million years for our ancestors to survive not necessarily to be happy or contented. We have an old brain, part of which we share with the reptilian and mammals and a new brain which include the human function in the pre-frontal cortex. The way our brain is built and the context in which it has developed affect our experience, our behaviours and how we can live our lives.



The old brain is powerful and quick but not necessarily wise. It is rigid and emotional, with a narrow focus for protection from threat, reproduction(reptilian) and caring for the young, bonding, social communication, play and affection(mammal). **The new brain** has new functions such as analysing, imagining, visualising, anticipating and planning for the future, self-reflection, judgments and reminiscing on the past.

There are glitches in the way that the new brain and old brain interact with each other, creating problems for us such as attacking ourselves with inner criticism or ruminating over past unhappy events or worrying over our future.

Three emotional systems

We can understand our emotions via three systems. Each system has different motivations, focus of attention, thoughts, emotions and body feelings. Each system is associated with a different part of the brain and with different neurochemistry.

	Threat system	Drive system	Caregiving system
motivation	Survive	Achieve, win	Look after, soothe
attention	Threat focused,	Goal, gain, advantage	Empathy to distress
thoughts	About danger	Achieving	Caring, soothing
emotions	Fear, anxiety, disgust	Positive, motivated	Safeness
physiology	Highly aroused,	Aroused	Calm
behaviour	Fight or flight or freeze	Focused	Looking after, soothe

We are all born with a threat system that is impulsive and ready for actions. When our 3 emotion-systems are well developed and in balance, we use each system appropriately, in a flexible way, depending on the requirement of the situations that we find ourselves in. However, through no fault of our own, we may find ourselves stuck in one emotional system such as the drive or threat system because we did not have the opportunities for our care-giving system to develop. We may be more prone to being critical (anger-fight) or avoiding difficulties (anxiety-flight). With Compassionate Mind Training we can cultivate ways to deal better with stress and our struggles to use our new brain and caregiving system to gain perspectives, to regulate emotions and to adopt a better problem-solving mindset.

Developing compassion for a better life

The research has shown that when we increase compassion for ourselves and others, we experience more confidence and balance in our lives. We all experience pain and struggles in our lives. But the way we use our mind can increase or decrease our suffering. The goal in compassionate mind training is to promote wellbeing by developing neo-frontal abilities through mindfulness and self-compassion practices such as intentional breathing, soothing, grounding, visualisation, compassionate self/other images and so on. In this training we develop mindfulness and the qualities of self-awareness, non-judgment, strength, warmth, empathy, wisdom, kindness and courage.

This handout was written by Marie Bloomfield, Clinical Psychologist, M. Psychol., MAPS. August 2020.

Websites: www.bloomfieldpsychology.com.au and www.mindfulpath.com.au

For more information please email marie@bloomfieldpsychology.com.au