WORKSHEET 127 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

My three emotional systems

Threat, drive, soothing

AIM

Explain the three emotion regulation systems model from compassion-focused therapy (threat, drive/seeking, soothing) and identify their balance in the person's life.

WHO IT IS FOR

Anxiety, self-criticism, burnout (overactive drive and threat), difficulty resting or feeling safe.

DURATION

20 min

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Draw three circles: threat (protection, alertness), drive (motivation, achievement, wanting), soothing (calm, connection, safety).
2. Explain that these systems are normal and useful, and that soothing is often underdeveloped.
3. The person notes what activates each system in them and the current size of each circle.
4. Look together for concrete ways of feeding the soothing system.

POINTS TO WATCH

A simplified explanatory model, presented as a useful metaphor and not as a precise neurological description. In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

REFERENCES

Gilbert, P. (2009). Introducing compassion-focused therapy. Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 15(3), 199-208.

Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 53(1), 6-41.

PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 127 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

My three emotional systems

According to the psychologist Paul Gilbert, our emotions are organised around three systems: threat (protecting ourselves), drive (moving forward, achieving) and soothing (feeling safe and connected). When threat and drive take up all the space, we wear ourselves out.

1. Read the description of each system in the table.
2. Note what activates it in you these days.
3. Note how you recognise it in your body and your thoughts.
4. Estimate its place in your life: small, medium or large.

System	What activates it in me	How I recognise it	Its place (small, medium, large)

What could feed my soothing system this week:

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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