WORKSHEET 129 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

My compassionate self

Imagining the wisest, strongest, warmest version of me

AIM

Develop, through imagery, a “compassionate self” with wisdom, strength and warmth, which the person can turn to in difficulty (a core exercise in compassion-focused therapy).

WHO IT IS FOR

Self-criticism, shame, anxiety, lack of an inner figure that provides safety.

DURATION

10-15 min of practice, then 5 min a day

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Find a steady posture and slightly slower breathing (worksheet 15 or 42).
2. Invite the person to imagine that they are, for a few minutes, the most compassionate version of themselves, like an actor stepping into a role.
3. Explore each quality: wisdom, strength, warmth, commitment to help; voice, posture, facial expression.
4. From that self, look at a difficulty and note what they would say.

POINTS TO WATCH

> It isn’t about already feeling like that, but about practising imagining it. If imagery is hard, an external figure (a person, an animal, a place) can serve as a starting point. 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. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 53(1), 6-41.
Gilbert, P. (2009). Introducing compassion-focused therapy. Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 15(3), 199-208.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 129 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

My compassionate self

Like an actor stepping into a role, imagine for a few minutes that you are the wisest, strongest and warmest version of yourself. You don't have to feel like that: imagining it is enough.

1. Sit down and slow your breathing a little.
2. For each quality, imagine you have it: your voice, your posture, your face.
3. From that version of you, think about a current difficulty.
4. Note what that compassionate self would tell you.

Quality	How I imagine it (voice, posture, face)	What it would tell me

The sentence from my compassionate self that I want to take with me:

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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