

## HANDOUT 1.2: WHAT COMPASSION IS AND IS NOT

***For me, Compassion is:***

***For me, Compassion is NOT:***

### **What compassion IS:**

Compassion can be defined as:

*“A sensitivity to suffering in self and others, combined with the desire to alleviate and prevent that suffering”*

There are therefore two parts to compassion:

- Sensitivity to suffering
- Desire to alleviate suffering

The desire to alleviate suffering can manifest itself in many ways. It must however start from an **intention: a wish to alleviate suffering, a wish for wellbeing** in the other or in the self.

Often, it is this very intention that creates the fertile ground for compassionate action. In some situations, the wish to alleviate suffering cannot immediately manifest in the form of helpful actions. At other times, it can and must be paired with a committed, courageous wise action. A wise action is one that is within one's personal limits (if I see someone drowning and I dive in to help them and only after realize that I cannot swim – it is not a helpful action).

Compassion does not mean avoiding suffering. Sometimes we are faced with difficulties that cannot be immediately solved, and obsessively searching a solution to eliminate the pain is what causes suffering. Compassion gives us the space to be with the uneasiness (or sometimes outright pain) in a way that is wise, brave, less self-critical and ultimately more accepting and grounded, and allows to navigate pain with greater ease.

**What compassion is NOT:**

- *Compassion is not just being nice*
- *Compassion is not just empathy*
- *Compassion is not avoiding pain*
- *Compassion is not just being polite*
- *Compassion is not just feeling sorry for people*
- *Compassion is not just being kind*
- *Compassion is not weak*
- *Compassion is not being submissive, in fact compassion can be quite assertive*
- *Compassion is not about liking everyone. Compassion simply means that we don't wish to cause people any harm. And if a person is suffering we would try to help them, but we might not like them and we might not want to be their friend or to see them again.*

What do you usually do when you are faced with suffering? Think back to some different difficult situations you have had to face in your life and write out how you reacted (remember

that avoiding suffering is an animal instinct – so it is not your fault); what would a compassionate approach to those difficulties have looked like?

NOTES/DRAWINGS/SKETCHES

# THE COMPASSIONATE SELF

Compassion is being sensitive to one's own and others' suffering, combined with a desire to alleviate and prevent that suffering.

Compassion encompasses several qualities; in Compassion Focused Therapy we focus specifically on three of these qualities: 1) wisdom; 2) strength; and 3) commitment. These three qualities make up what we call the Compassionate Self.



## WISDOM

We just happen to find ourselves here as part of the flow of life, with a tricky brain that can get caught up in angry or worry loops, and this is not our fault



## STRENGTH

Strength comes from our compassionate body posture, our breathing, which allows us to cultivate a sense of groundedness.



## COMMITMENT

We try whenever we can to be kind and compassionate to the suffering we experience and that we see around us; we try to prevent and alleviate the suffering in a wise way - this is a journey which requires our commitment.