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Welcome!

This short course offers practical ideas to help you recognise why you matter. Each of us is a unique human being, but difficult experiences and daily pressures can cause us to lose sight of our own worth. When we absorb negative messages or face challenges, it can become harder to navigate life with confidence. Sometimes we even become our own worst critic, believing harsh thoughts about ourselves as if they are facts.

This course explores ways to let go of self-limiting beliefs and negative self-evaluations so you can reconnect with the person you have always been capable of being. Changing long-established patterns can feel difficult, especially when those patterns once helped you cope. But recognising the benefits of change can help you move forward with more clarity and self-kindness.

Think of this course as your personal toolkit - something you can revisit and add to whenever you need. It is time to step out of the cycle of negative thoughts, feelings and actions, and begin a new chapter where you treat yourself with the same care and compassion you would offer a close friend.

Session One: Self-Reflection, Vulnerability & Self-Compassion

‘If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.’

Jack Kornfield

Purpose of the Session

This session introduces the idea of self-reflection as a powerful tool for understanding yourself with more kindness and clarity. You will explore how negative messages and past experiences can shape the way you see yourself, and how reflective practice can help you break old patterns and respond differently in future situations. You will also begin to explore vulnerability and self-compassion, learning how these qualities can support healthier relationships with yourself and others. By the end of the session, you should feel more aware of your thoughts and feelings, and more able to approach them with curiosity rather than criticism.

Self-Reflection

Being able to reflect on things that happen in life is a useful tool. Regularly practising self-reflection is a process of continuous learning—recounting experiences, noticing what went well, and identifying areas for growth. By reflecting honestly on your experiences, you can avoid repeating unhelpful patterns and keep learning day by day. It provides an opportunity to truly understand yourself in a judgement-free zone, where the aim is not to criticise but to be curious.

Engaging in reflective practice can improve your ability to respond differently in future situations. Instead of reacting on autopilot, you begin to notice your thoughts, feelings and behaviours and choose how you want to respond. At the end of each session, you are encouraged to reflect on what you have learned. You may want to expand this activity and keep your own Reflective Diary, using it as a place to explore what you’re thinking and feeling over time.

‘If you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always got.’

Self-reflection helps you break this cycle by adapting your actions based on insight rather than habit. It is not about finding fault—it is about understanding yourself better so you can make choices that support your wellbeing.

Sometimes it is helpful to allow time between an experience and the reflection process. You might begin by recording as much detail as possible without judging or analysing it straight away. Later—perhaps after a short break or the next day—you can return to your notes and reflect more deeply.

When you reflect, try to focus on your actions, feelings and thoughts, rather than only the outcome. Ask yourself what was happening for you, what you needed, and what you might want to do differently next time. This gentle curiosity can support self-awareness, self-compassion and positive change, and is one of the most powerful ways this course can make a real difference in your life.

Vulnerability

Brené Brown (2015) challenges the idea that vulnerability is a weakness. She suggests that when we spend our lives trying to hide the parts of ourselves that feel tender or uncertain, we don't just shut down our own emotions, we can also become less tolerant of other people's feelings. When we see someone else struggling or showing emotion, it can make us uncomfortable, because it reminds us of the feelings we try so hard to avoid. Instead of recognising the courage it takes to be open, we may slip into judgement or criticism.

Vulnerability is at the heart of all emotions. To feel anything - joy, sadness, fear, excitement, disappointment, hope - is to be vulnerable. If we label vulnerability as weakness, then we are also labelling our feelings as weakness, and that makes it harder to understand ourselves or connect with others. Difficult emotions such as shame, grief, fear or sadness are often the ones we try to hide, yet they are also the emotions that most need compassion and understanding.

Brown defines vulnerability as '*uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure*'. These experiences show up in everyday life: sharing something you've created, applying for a job, trying something new, asking for help, or letting someone see the real you. Each of these moments carries the risk of being misunderstood or rejected but they also carry the possibility of connection, growth and pride. When we shut down vulnerability, we shut down those possibilities too.

By shifting the way we see vulnerability, we can begin to recognise it as a strength. It takes courage to acknowledge your feelings, to be honest about your needs, and to show up as your authentic self. When you allow yourself to be vulnerable, you create space for trust, openness and genuine connection. You also give others permission to be themselves, which strengthens relationships and reduces the pressure to pretend everything is fine.

Learning to understand, manage and express your feelings is not about being dramatic or emotional, it is about being human. When we accept our vulnerability, we stop fighting ourselves and start building a healthier, kinder relationship with

who we are. This shift helps us move away from blame and criticism and toward solutions, understanding and growth.

Activity: Exploring My Own Vulnerability

Vulnerability is part of being human. It shows up in moments where we take a risk, tell the truth, show our feelings or allow someone to see the real us. Use the space below to explore how vulnerability appears in your life and how it can support your growth.

1. When do I feel most vulnerable? *Think about situations where you feel uncertain, exposed, emotional or unsure of yourself.*

2. What do I usually do when I feel vulnerable? *Do you hide it, push through, shut down, ask for help, pretend you're fine?*

3. What might happen if I allowed myself to be a little more open in these moments? *Consider connection, honesty, relief, support, courage.*

4. Who feels safe for me to be vulnerable with? *This could be a friend, family member, mentor, or someone who listens without judgement.*

5. How could embracing vulnerability help me grow? *Think about confidence, relationships, self-acceptance, emotional strength.*

This activity helps you recognise that vulnerability isn't a flaw, it is a doorway to connection, courage and personal growth. By understanding your own patterns, you can begin to respond with more compassion and authenticity.

Self-Compassion

We can often be incredibly hard on ourselves, telling ourselves we should have done more, done better, or handled things differently. Many people speak to themselves in ways they would *never* speak to someone they care about. Yet if a friend came to us feeling the same way, we would almost certainly respond with kindness, reassurance and understanding. We would remind them that they did their best, that mistakes happen, and that struggling doesn't make them a failure.

Self-compassion is about offering that same understanding to ourselves. When we cultivate self-compassion, we learn to soften the harsh inner voice that criticises everything we do. We begin to accept that no one is perfect, that everyone makes mistakes, and that being human means sometimes getting things wrong. Instead of attacking ourselves for not meeting impossible standards, we learn to respond with patience and care.

With self-compassion, when something doesn't go the way we hoped, we can pause and acknowledge our feelings without judgement. We can recognise the disappointment or frustration but also remind ourselves that we are doing the best we can with the resources we have. This shift helps us move away from constant self-criticism and toward a more balanced, supportive way of relating to ourselves.

Self-compassion doesn't mean avoiding responsibility or pretending everything is fine. It means treating ourselves with the same kindness and respect we would offer someone else. It means recognising our struggles without shame, and supporting ourselves through them rather than making things harder with harsh self-talk.

Learning to respond to ourselves with kindness and compassion is one of the most powerful steps we can take toward emotional wellbeing. It helps us build resilience, strengthens our confidence, and creates the inner safety we need to grow and change.

What does self-compassion mean to you? *Think about how you would treat a friend, and how that might look when directed toward yourself.*

What can help you be more self-compassionate? *Consider small actions, reminders, or ways of speaking to yourself that feel supportive.*
