The Compassionate Being

Imagery for Developing the Capacity for Self-Compassion

Estimated Time: 16 minutes

This imagery facilitates the development of an internalized Compassionate Being -- a figure whose defining quality is the capacity to be with suffering without turning away.
Self-compassion is not something we generate from nothing. It is an introjected capacity -- learned first through the experience of being seen with compassion by another. This script creates that experience in the imaginal space, then guides the person to borrow and embody the being's qualities.

Clinical Note:
This script is grounded in Kristin Neff's three components of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness) and in the attachment research showing that compassion is a relational capacity before it is an intrapsychic one. It is particularly useful for clients with harsh inner critics, chronic shame, or histories of emotional neglect.

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Script

[Instruction] The Compassionate Being may take any form -- a person, a spiritual figure, an animal, a quality of light or warmth. Some people develop beings that are very specific (a grandmother, a particular teacher). Others develop something more abstract (a warm golden light, a presence without form). Both are equally valid. The defining quality is: this being can look at suffering and not turn away.

Allow yourself to be comfortable...either lying down or sitting up -- with your back, neck and spine fully supported. Knowing that you will not be interrupted for the next little while, begin by gently closing your eyes.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now begin to bring your attention to your breath -- the direct experience of your breath -- however it is...and however it changes. Allow yourself to softly focus your awareness on the breath that is arising right now...the in-breath and the out-breath...the rising and the falling. If you can, try to follow one full cycle of the breath -- from the beginning of the in-breath, through its entirety...the beginning of the out-breath through its entirety. Allowing yourself the time and the space to be in direct contact with the breath throughout one entire cycle.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

As you continue to pay attention to the breath, you may notice distractions that arise. Just allow yourself to notice...those distractions...any bodily sensations...any thoughts that may arise. If possible, allow yourself to become aware of the separateness of those bodily sensations -- notice how those sensations are separate -- distinct from your thoughts, your ideas and your words.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

We'll begin now with a deep breath in through your nose...inhaling slowly and deeply. Exhale through pursed lips until all the air has been released.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now I would like you to imagine a being whose defining quality is compassion. Not pity -- compassion. The difference matters. Pity looks down. Compassion looks across. This being does not feel sorry for you. It feels with you. It has the capacity to be present to suffering -- yours, its own, anyone's -- without flinching, without turning away, without needing to fix.

[Pause — 15 seconds]

Allow this being to take whatever form arises. It may be someone you have known -- perhaps the person in your life who was most able to simply be with you when things were hard, without trying to make it better. It may be a spiritual figure. It may be an animal -- something warm and steady that simply sits beside you. It may be a quality of light or warmth without any form at all.

[Pause — 10 seconds]

When you have a sense of this being, I want you to do something that may feel uncomfortable. I want you to allow this being to see you. Not the version of you that manages and copes and holds it together. The version of you that hurts. The version that is tired. The version that carries things you have never shown anyone. Allow this being to see that version of you.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now notice the being's response. It does not flinch. It does not look away. It does not try to fix you or reassure you or tell you it will be okay. It simply stays. It sees what you are carrying and it remains present. Its expression does not change -- or if it changes, it softens. It moves toward you, not away.

[Pause — 15 seconds]

What allows this being to do that? What quality makes it possible to look at suffering and not turn away? Is it strength? Is it a deep knowing that suffering is not the whole story? Is it love -- not sentimental love, but the kind that does not require you to be anything other than what you are? Name that quality to yourself.

[Pause — 5 seconds]

Now imagine borrowing that quality. Feel it move from the being toward you -- through your chest, through your belly, through the places in your body where you hold the things you do not show. Feel yourself becoming, even slightly, someone who can look at your own suffering the way this being does. Not with judgment. Not with impatience. With the steady, unflinching willingness to be present to what is true.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now turn that quality toward yourself. Toward the part of you that hurts. Toward the part that is ashamed. Toward the part that believes it should be further along, or stronger, or less broken. Look at that part the way the Compassionate Being looked at you. You are not creating this from nothing. You are accessing what was given to you by others -- every

moment of genuine compassion you have ever received is in you, and it is available now.

[Pause — 20 seconds]

Before you leave, notice what has shifted. Is there a softness somewhere that was not there before? A warmth? A loosening of something that was held tight? Whatever you notice, that is the beginning of self-compassion -- not as an idea, but as a felt experience in the body. It was learned in relationship. It lives in the body. And it can be accessed again.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

And when you are ready, gently bring yourself back to the room by counting up from one to five. When you reach the number five, your eyes will gently open. You will be awake and alert, and feeling only peace. One....Two....Three. Take a deep breath....Four....And five.

[Instruction] Allow the person to sit quietly. Self-compassion exercises frequently produce tears -- not of sadness, but of relief. The experience of being seen without judgment, even in imagination, can be profoundly moving for people who have rarely or never had it.

"The Compassionate Being" by Linda Curran

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