

EXERCISE:



Writing a compassionate letter to a voice

1. Identification

You can start the letter with a descriptive statement of what's been happening to help identify what it is that you'll be focusing on. This could be something specific that the voice has been saying to you, or a style with which the voice has been relating to you.

"Dear [voice],

You have been very active over the last few days, criticising me a lot and calling me 'useless' and 'pathetic'. You were particularly loud and critical on Tuesday, after my sister came round for coffee, and you ended up just shouting at me again for three hours."

2. Tuning in

You can then start focusing in on what emotions might be *behind* the voice, and the words of the voice. Again, this is a description, but this time connecting more with the emotions the voice is expressing.

"It sounds like you are frustrated, and you are feeling anger towards me. It feels like you have been particularly angry whenever I have had plans to do things or see people, and also when I don't stick up for myself."

3. Understanding

Now the Compassionate Self can start engaging with the possible functions of the voice, being empathic, and acknowledging the voice's emotions and concerns.

"It is understandable why you are frustrated. You don't want me to be weak, because you are afraid that if I'm weak then I'll get hurt. You want me to be stronger because you know how dangerous the world is. You want to protect me and keep me alert to all these threats out there – I get it, and I want that too."

4. Action

Having focused a lot on engagement in the previous sections, the Compassionate Self can now move towards a commitment to creating change that is more action-focussed. This might involve identifying areas in which you and your voices can work together towards your shared goals. However, it might also involve being assertive with the voice in some areas where the voice may be trying to help but is going about it in a way that is quite unhelpful.

"I understand why you feel you need to criticise me, but I think I would do better and be more likely to build up my strength if you didn't call me 'useless' all the time and if you were a bit more supportive of what I am doing, and the plans I am making. I want to be more confident too, the same as what you want, and I am working on it. For one, I am reading this CFT book, which is helping me with this. I have really started working on myself, and I'm making positive changes in my life. Over the next few weeks, my plan is to take more steps, like starting up swimming again, and I am going to set boundaries with my sister. I would like it if we could get on board with this plan together, [voice], I think we both want the same thing, but have just been going about it in different ways."

Your compassionate letter: