

# COMPASSIONATE FRIEND GROUP

How to be a good friend to yourself and so  
get life working better for you.

(Facilitator Version)

Isabel Clarke

# Compassionate Friend Group

The group hopes to give people the chance to build up their self-confidence and discuss their experiences with others in a similar position.

The idea is that

- People in crisis can often be very hard on themselves.
- What you need to get through a crisis is support and encouragement.
- You are the best person to give yourself support and encouragement.
- Often people are excellent at looking after others; but not so good at looking after themselves.
- This group is designed to do something about this situation by looking at practical ways in which you can make friends with yourself.
- The idea is that this will help you feel better about yourself, and so be better able to meet the challenges that life offers.

Format

- The group has 3 sessions lasting 45 minutes each
- People will be invited to join the group.
- People will choose what they talk about in the group. No-one will be pressurised into talking about things they don't feel comfortable sharing.

Some of the things we will be looking at:

- Things you say to yourself- are they encouraging or discouraging?
- Noticing the good things that happen.
- Seeing that they happen more.
- How do you treat yourself compared to how a friend would treat you?
- What gets in the way of good things? How you think about yourself? Do you tend to be more critical or more positive?

## Compassionate Friend Group: SESSION 1

### Introductions - names

#### Introduction for the Group:

This is a CBT group that looks at some of the critical and unhelpful ways we treat ourselves. It then helps to find ways to challenge this style of thinking so we can be kinder to ourselves. This will help us feel better about ourselves and improve self-confidence, and help to build the confidence needed to face and deal with difficult circumstances and emotions around the crisis that resulted in hospital admission.

Often we are very self-critical and so don't have a good relationship with ourselves. We become stuck in this situation and it becomes very difficult to change this way of thinking. It becomes a habit! Over the next three weeks/sessions we will have plenty of opportunity to practice new, more friendly, ways of treating ourselves, and lots of opportunity to support each other in this also. It is essential that you practice between the sessions to get the most out of the group.

### Group Rules

#### Introduce the idea of "The Bully"

Consider what it's like to live with someone who is critical, discouraging

#### FLIPCHART - generate examples of:

1. What might that sort of person say or do?
2. What might it feel like to experience that sort of behaviour?
3. What would it do to your self-esteem/confidence?

#### Introduce the idea of "The Good Friend"

Consider what it's like to live with someone who is supportive and encouraging

#### FLIPCHART - generate examples of:

1. What might that sort of person say or do?
2. What might it feel like to experience that sort of behaviour?
3. What would it do to your self-esteem/confidence?

Although we might not always be aware of it consciously, we talk to ourselves all the time

This is called 'internal dialogue'

- It is quite ok and normal - everyone does it!
- Give an example (e.g. I fancy a cuppa ... better finish this first)
- BUT ... sometimes the dialogue can become very critical and we can give ourselves a hard time about virtually everything
- Where does the critical voice come from? Possibly an important relationship e.g. parents, partner etc. But it is important to put the past in the past and be able to move on from this learned way of thinking.

### FLIPCHART - generate examples

Treating ourselves as a "Good Friend"

Revisit flipchart examples of how people criticise or put themselves down.

How might a good friend respond? (Refer to good friend flipchart to help)

Try friendly voice on yourself.

Practice!!!

Practice in pairs - One person gives an example of recent critical voice and the other helps to suggest a friendly alternative.

Change is Difficult!

Needs lots of practice so don't expect this to work straight away. It took lots of practice for the critical voice to get so good!!

Stages of change:

Notice the familiar put downs (e.g. "should", "ought", "must", "must not",

"never", "always", "stupid", "clumsy" +++)

- Ask yourself "What would I say to my best friend ..."
- Try the Friendly Voice on yourself

Homework

Notice critical voice experiences (use the DBT monitoring chart)

- Work out Friendly Voice responses and use these
- Could help each other out - often easier to come up with a friendly voice for someone else.

FACILITATORS - Type up flip chart material and distribute before next session

## Compassionate Friend Group: SESSION 2

### Review Homework

Examples of when people have experienced a critical voice, and replaced this with a friendly counterpart (write up on flipchart)

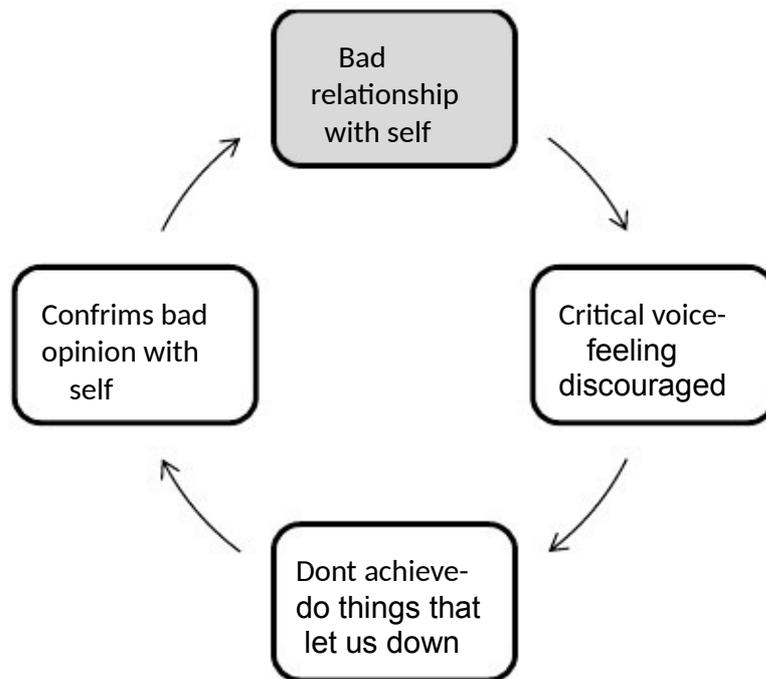
- Discuss any problems people have encountered with using the friendly voice, when / which situations was this difficult in?

'Friends and Honesty' – Although a good friend is supportive, they also have your best interests at heart

- Refer back to last week's ideas about a good friend (from brainstorm) - focus on HONESTY
- Being honest with yourself is important, as honesty also leads to trust, and this will help you to do what is best for yourself.
- So your friendly voice would NOT encourage you to do something that is bad for you (e.g. drink / self-harm)
- Instead of acting on impulse, he/she would encourage you to stop, think, and do something less harmful to you
- Discuss this idea - how easy would people find this? Examples on flipchart

### Breaking the Vicious circle

- Discuss the idea that we can often get stuck in a vicious cycle of using our critical voice, and consequently reinforcing a bad relationship with ourselves.
- Draw the cycle below on a flipchart and generate a discussion around this, can people identify with this?



- In order to move past this and develop a better relationship with ourselves, we need to break the vicious cycle.
- We can do this at any point during the cycle, by noticing our critical voice, challenging it, and replacing it with a friendly alternative
- Write up some examples of this onto the cycle

#### Pair work

Practice in pairs - One person gives an example of recent critical voice and the other helps to suggest a friendly alternative. Perhaps choose a situation where you need the friendly voice to stop you doing something that is harmful to you, or to encourage you to do something you are avoiding.

Feedback from practice - write examples up on a flipchart

#### Homework

Practice using the friendly voice in new situations. Use the monitoring chart to record when you notice the critical voice and practice replacing this with a friendly alternative (that encourages you where necessary, but also has your best interests at heart).

FACILITATORS - Type up flip chart material and distribute before next session

## Compassionate Friend Group: SESSION 3

### Review Homework

- Examples of when people have experienced a critical voice, and replaced this with a friendly counterpart (write up on flipchart)
- Emphasis on where this has made new behaviour possible - doing things that were avoided, or not doing things that let you down (eg. alcohol, self-harm, etc.)
- Discuss any problems people have encountered with using the friendly voice, when / which situation was this difficult in?

### What gets in the Way of using the Friendly voice?

- Thinking you are not worth it
- Critical voice is too powerful
- Anxiety making behaviour change difficult
- Long habit - difficult to notice in time.

### Ways of dealing with these:

- 'Not worth it' is just a thought. Do you weigh up other people and think whether they are worth it? A bad thinking habit - be aware of the thought and let it go.
- Next 3 can be addressed by using breathing for anxiety and simple grounding in the present mindfulness to note and let go.

### Discussion 1

What effects does using the friendly voice have? Brainstorm these on a flipchart.

- These may include:
  - easier to problem solve effectively
  - encouragement to try new things that feel difficult
  - allow yourself nice things / to be nice to yourself
  - stop you treating yourself badly
  - stop yourself doing things that are tempting but bad for you

## Discussion 2

What are the effects when we are unable to use the friendly voice?

Brainstorm these on a flipchart.

- Refer back to the vicious circle from session 2

## Pair work

Practice in pairs - One person gives an example of recent critical voice and the other helps to suggest a friendly alternative. Try choosing a more challenging example this time.

## Moving forward

In order to move forward we need to build up the strength of our friendly voice, and be able to use it in a variety of situations (when things go well, when they are more challenging, trying something new).

## Conclusion and Summing up

- Have a discussion about what changes people have managed to make since starting the group?
- Fuel a discussion about how people can keep the friendly voice gathering strength? What do we need to do and say in order for this happen?

## FACILITATORS

Take time 2 questionnaires and Type up flip chart material and distribute to group