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FORM 7.3

Self-Compassionate Letter Writing

This exercise will involve your writing a letter to yourself from the perspective of a deeply compassionate, wise, and unconditionally accepting person. If you feel comfortable, you can imagine yourself as this loving, kind presence. This voice within you is an expression of your innate lovingkindness and intuitive wisdom.

In preparation, set aside some time when you can engage in this exercise in an unhurried fashion. Find a space that feels private and safe. Bring a pencil and some paper with you, and make sure that you have a surface to write on.

As you begin, take a minute or two to engage in mindful awareness of the flow of the breath. Feel your feet on the ground. Gently, allow your back to straighten and feel yourself rooted to the earth. As much as you can, let go of judgments, analyses, and even descriptions, and bring bare attention to the flow of breath in and out of the body.

After a few minutes of mindful breathing, allow your attention to rest on the flow of your thoughts as you breathe in. Letting go of the attention to the breath, bring your current life situation to mind. What conflicts, problems, or self-criticisms come to mind? What is your mind beginning to tell you? What emotions arise within you?

As you breathe out, let go of these thoughts and feelings. On the next available in-breath, direct your attention to an image of yourself as a compassionate and wise being. In your compassionate mind, you possess wisdom and emotional strength. You are unconditionally accepting of all that you are, in this moment, and are completely noncondemning. Your compassionate self radiates emotional warmth. For a moment, recognize the calmness and wisdom that you possess. Take a moment to feel the physical sensations that company the arising of a compassionate mind. Recognize the strength and healing quality of a vast and deep kindness. Recognize that this lovingkindness, this powerful compassion exists within you as an abundant reservoir of strength.

As you begin, remember the simple act of self-validation. There are many good reasons for the distress you are currently experiencing. Your brain and mind have evolved and emerged through millions of years of life progressing on this planet. You were not designed to deal with the particular pressures and complexities of our current social environment. Your learning history has presented you with strong challenges and situations that have caused you pain. Can you open yourself to a compassionate understanding that your struggle is a natural part of life, and that it is not your fault?

In the next few minutes, allow yourself to compose a compassionate letter that gives a voice to your compassionate self. Allow yourself to compose a letter that will fill at least the remainder of this page. When you next meet with your therapist, if you feel willing, bring this letter to the session. Together, you and your therapist can read and reflect on the words and feelings that you have allowed yourself to express here.

(cont.)

MY SELF-COMPASSIONATE LETTER: