

treating
YOURSELF
with



POCKET GUIDE

6

ELIZABETH CASSON TRUST



**treating
YOURSELF
with**

COMPASSION

Welcome to Treating Yourself with Compassion. One of a series of pocket guides created to support the wellbeing of occupational therapists in their first year of practice.

Year One: Thriving not Surviving is a grass roots initiative. Over the course of several months, we engaged with many occupational therapists in their first year of practice and asked a core question, "How has the first year of practice impacted on your wellbeing?" The answers have informed the pocket guide that you are now reading.

As an occupational therapist you will already have a range of excellent tools that you can use to support you. Think of this as an addition to your toolbox. A kind voice that reminds you to, 'Stop for a moment and take some time to focus on yourself because your wellbeing is important'. It is designed to not only make you stop and think but, as importantly, take action. All of the guides are designed so that you can dip in and out and pick the tools which resonate most with you.

The tools are designed to support your wellbeing but are not a replacement for specialist support if you are experiencing significant challenges to your mental health. If this is the case, you are advised strongly to seek support via your GP or through your occupational health department.

By reading the insights of other newly qualified occupational therapists we hope that you get a sense that others are having similar experiences. You are not alone. You are part of a community finding its feet and sense of identity, a process which can feel a bit like being on a roller coaster but ultimately is a great ride.

Instead of seeing ourselves as a problem to be fixed, self-kindness allows us to see ourselves as valuable human beings who are worthy of care. Kristin Neff

Introduction

In the first year of practice you are thrown into new situations and challenges often. It would be a miracle if, at some point, something didn't go quite according to plan, you made a mistake or were on the receiving end of some 'constructive' feedback.

It's important to remember that this isn't unique to newly qualified Occupational Therapists (NQOTs), even though it can feel like this most of the time! You put pressure on yourself to always get it right because it really matters, and when things don't go to plan you can become a very harsh self-critic.

We asked NQOTs what made a difference to their first year of practice and being kind to yourself was a consistent theme:

Recognising that you're not expected to know everything. It's ok if you're still learning - everybody is! Being kind to yourself is so important!

Reframing my self-expectation and inaccurate perception that I should know everything and how to carry out ALL the parts of my role immediately! I spoke kindly to myself and reassured myself that it's OK to take one day at a time to learn the skills required. This reduced the self-created pressure immensely!

When everything is new, it can feel challenging and, at times, overwhelming. It is therefore easy to go into a spiral of negativity: You convince yourself that you're the worst occupational therapist ever. You may keep revisiting and reliving certain situations and even avoid putting yourself in similar situations because you are convinced that you know the outcome. You tell yourself to, 'suck it up and get on with it.' This is where the developing your skill in self-compassion comes in.

"Having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness" Kristin Neff

What do we mean by self-compassion?

Something important to clarify is the difference between self-care and self-compassion, as they are often confused. Take a moment to jot down in the box below what comes to mind when you think about each.

Self-care

Self-compassion

The World Health Organisation describes self-care as:

The ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider. (WHO 2020)

To bring this down to an individual level, it can be described as anything we do specifically to take care of our physical, mental, or emotional health. It's a broad concept which includes exercise, eating healthily, relaxation, regular health checks and mindfulness.

Self-compassion is more specific. Dr Kristin Neff, a leading researcher on self-compassion, describes it like this:

"We know how to be kind and compassionate to others when they're feeling bad about themselves or are suffering in some way. We know what to say and do. We just have to remember to do it for ourselves"

(Kristin Neff 2016)

So, self-compassion is about how we respond to ourselves when we are experiencing some kind of suffering or distress, or when something goes wrong.

Donning the green trousers (or shirt in my case) carries with it times of stress and that's ok. Making sure that these times do not last, and are used as development opportunities, is what's important.

Through her extensive research Kristin Neff identified three elements to self-compassion:

- **Self-kindness**
- **Common Humanity**
- **Mindfulness**

Self-kindness

In this context, it means really wanting to comfort yourself when you are suffering emotionally. Wanting to wrap yourself in the love and care that you would give your closest friend if they were having a hard time. It is also giving yourself permission to do all that you can to feel supported and comforted rather than engaging in negative self-judgment.

Common Humanity

In our more rational moments, we recognise that everyone makes mistakes, is rejected or has had bad things happen to them. It is part of being human. However, in the midst of a moment of suffering, it's easy to turn inwards and see the situation as unique to ourselves. We can isolate ourselves, try to cover up what we're feeling and cut ourselves off. It feels like we are the only person in the world to have experienced a rejection or messed up. Our perspective shifts to 'Nothing like this has happened before and if it has it's not been as bad as this'.

As summarised by a therapist we spoke to:

The best advice I received when in a tricky work situation was, 'This is a moment in your life, it won't be like this forever.' It's something I think back too often.

Mindfulness

In this context, this means not only being aware of our suffering but being with it. Occupational Therapists are great problem solvers and it's easy to jump straight into problem solving mode, without pausing to acknowledge and validate the situation we find ourselves in. By recognising and being with our emotions, we can ask ourselves important questions including: What do these feelings tell me about myself? What do I need to do right now? How can I help myself feel better?

As a human being, you are perfectly imperfect, gloriously flawed, your story forever unresolved. You will never reach a state of perfection in time, and that is why you are so lovable and human. Your flaws give you character, your quirks make you unique, your wrinkles and battle scars sing of a life fully lived, a world fully tasted, a song fully sung, a long road, traveled well. you are so imperfect and that is exactly what makes you so perfect.

Jeff Foster Your Perfect Imperfection

Here are four reasons:

1. A consistent finding in research is the strong link between self-compassion, anxiety and depression. The more self-compassionate people are, the less they experience anxiety and depression. (Kristin Neff 2016).
2. As a health professional you need to care for yourself before you are in a position to support other people. The more you feel supported the more you can support someone else.
3. Developing self-compassion is a central component of increasing your resilience.
4. Increasing compassion towards yourself enables you to be more compassionate towards other people. If you view yourself through the lens of 'toughen up and get on with it', it is easy to see other people through the same lens.

'If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete'

Buddha

Self-Compassion (Developed by Kristin Neff.)

This tool is something that you can use in a challenging moment: it doesn't take long and is useful if you find yourself in a difficult situation and need to develop some perspective. Alternatively, you can use it to reflect on a situation that may have occurred.

1. Think of the situation that is causing your stress. Really connect with it and see if you can actually feel the stress inside your body.
2. When you have made the connection say to yourself, 'This is a moment of suffering' or 'this hurts' or something similar (**mindfulness**)
3. Remind yourself, 'suffering is a part of life', or "other people feel this way', or 'I am not alone in feeling this, we all struggle at times' (**common humanity**)
4. Put your hands over your **heart or wrap your arms around yourself to give yourself a hug, or stroke your arms, whatever feels soothing (**self-kindness**) and say to yourself something soothing for instance:

'May I be kind to myself.'

'May I be gentle with myself.'

'May I give myself what I need.'

If you can, try to be more specific and find words that describe what you need in that moment for example:

'May I be strong.'

'May I forgive myself.'

'May I be patient.'

'May I learnt to accept myself as I am'

*The physical act of putting your hand on your heart, hugging or stroking yourself is an important part of this exercise. Connection, touch and physical warmth release oxytocin and opiates which lower our levels of cortisol and activate the parasympathetic system which calms us down.

How Would You Treat A Friend (developed by Chris Germer)

This takes about 10 - 15 minutes and draws on the idea of treating yourself as you would your best friend.

1. Think about times when a close friend has felt bad about themselves or has struggled in some way. How would you respond to them? What would you typically do and say? Take notice of the tone in which you talk to your friends.
2. Now think about an instance when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Write down the kind of self-talk you typically engage in and note the tone in which you talk to yourself.
3. Was there a difference between the two voices? If so, what was it and why? What factors or fears come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others differently?
4. Write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you're suffering.

A space for your response

Writing a self-compassionate letter

(developed by Chris Germer)

This is another 10-15 minute exercise:

1. Identify something about yourself that makes you feel insecure or 'lacking' in some way. It might be something about your personality, the way you behave in certain situations, something about your abilities.
2. Once you have found something to focus on, think about how it makes you feel.
3. Now write a letter to yourself, expressing compassion and understanding and (importantly) acceptance for this aspect of yourself.

Here are some things to think about as you write.

- Imagine what someone who loves you unconditionally, would say to you about this.
- Remind yourself that everyone has things they don't like about themselves.
- Think about how things that have happened in your life may have contributed to this negative aspect of yourself
- In a compassionate way, ask yourself if there are things you could do to improve or cope better with this negative aspect. Think about how constructive changes could help you to feel happier and help avoid judging yourself so harshly.

The thing I'm focusing on is

A space for your letter

When you have finished, put the letter to one side. Come back to it later and read it again. Keep it to read whenever you're feeling bad about this aspect of yourself as a reminder to be more self-compassionate.

How much we know and understand ourselves is critically important, but there is something even more essential to living a wholehearted life: loving ourselves.

Brené Brown

Reflection

This page had been included so that you can use it in your CPD File to evidence your learning

Date:	Impact on my practice
Description of what you have done	
	Follow-up actions or further development.
Summary of my main learning points	
Relevance to my practice	

References

Kristin Neff 2016. Compassion for the self-critic in The Self-Acceptance Project. How to be kind and compassionate towards yourself in any situation. Edited by Tami Simon. Sounds True Boulder Colorado

Jeff Foster. 2016. The Way of Rest. Finding the Courage to Hold Everything in Love. Sounds True Boulder Colorado

Dr Chris Gremer is a clinical psychologist and lecturer on psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He co-developed the Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) program with Kristin Neff. A range of resources and meditations can be accessed via his site: <https://chrisgermer.com/meditations/>

World Health Organisation (2020) <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-interventions/definitions/en/> Accessed 26.8.2020.

Resources to Explore

There is a wealth of resources available on the internet to support well-being. Here are just a few that you might wish to explore further. They have been chosen because they are varied in their approach to well-being.

Becoming Who You Are

Hannah Braime is a creative coach who blogs about self-care and personal growth and has developed a range of resources which can be downloaded or purchased through her website. www.becomingwhoyouare.net

Brené Brown

Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston. She has spent two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy and is an internationally renowned author and speaker. Her website contains a wide range of resources including podcasts, blogs, downloads and guides. <https://brenebrown.com>

Jen Gash

Jen Gash is an occupational therapist and personal coach and her website contains information about coaching, a series of blog posts related to personal development and links to other occupational therapists working as personal coaches <https://otcoach.com/about-us/>

Lynne Goodacre

Lynne Goodacre is an occupational therapist and personal coach who blogs on a regular basis on topics related to personal development and well-being. She has created a mini-series of free eBooks which can be downloaded from her site. www.lgpersonaldevelopment.co.uk

Greater Good Science Centre at University of California, Berkley

An extensive online resource comprising blogs, podcasts, videos, tools and educational programmes informed by research. The tools are focused on creating a happier life and more compassionate society. Well worth checking out. <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>

Gretchen Rubin

Author of The Happiness Project, and internationally renowned author this website contains a wide selection of blogs and podcasts about creating a happier, more productive and creative life. <https://gretchenrubin.com>

Kristin Neff

Is one of the world's leading experts on self-compassion. Her website contains a range of exercises and tools focused on developing self-compassion and a comprehensive list of recommended reading. <https://self-compassion.org>

Life Coach on The Go

Life Coach on The Go is an online resource providing a wide range of self-coaching tips, tools, articles and resources. <https://lifecoachonthego.com/about/>. It is merging with the Fierce Kindness Blog <https://fiercekindness.com/page/2/>.

Mind Tools

Provides access to several thousand resources including articles, videos and podcasts to support you in learning management, leadership and personal effectiveness skills. www.mindtools.com

On Being

The On Being Project is a non-profit media and public life initiative making radio shows, podcasts and tools for 'the art of living'. It explores the intersection of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, community, poetry, and the arts. <https://onbeing.org>

Positive Psychology

A community of practitioners who have built an online science-based resource of courses, techniques, tools and tips to help you put positive psychology into practice every day. <https://positivepsychology.com>

Tara Mohr

An expert on women's leadership and wellbeing, author of *Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak up, Create and Lead*. Tara Mohr also developed the global *Playing Big Leadership Programme* and is a Certified Coach. Her website includes a range of resources and blogs. www.taramohr.com

TED

Several of the people mentioned in the pocket guides have given TED talks. A place where you can explore short powerful talks of 18 minutes or less from some of the worlds most inspiring thinkers on a wide range of topics from science to business to global issues. <https://www.ted.com>

Tiny Buddha

The sites feature blogs, articles and insights on a wide range of personal development topics. Whilst it has it's root in Buddhism it is not a site about religion. <https://tinybuddha.com>

End Note

The Year One: Thriving Not Surviving pocket guides have been funded by the Elizabeth Casson Trust. We would like to extend our thanks to the Trust and to everyone who has contributed to the project. Without the insights that have been shared by the occupational therapy community, with honesty and compassion, this resource would not have been possible.

The Project was led by Dr Lynne Goodacre (an occupational therapist and personal coach) and Rob Young (a writer and artist who helps NHS leaders to communicate).

The project team comprised: Andrew Bates, Stephanie Exley, Joanna Hunt, Bethany Morgan-Davis, Deborah May, Ryan McClure, Rebecca Power, Siobhan Scanlon, Paul Wilkinson, Katy Williams. All of whom were in their first year of practice as occupational therapists.

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The Elizabeth Casson Trust is excited to have commissioned this work by Dr Lynne Goodacre and Rob Young and is proud of, and grateful to, the first-year occupational therapists who committed their time and energy for the success of the project. The Trust aims to further the profession of occupational therapy and offers a range of support and development opportunities.

Please visit our website (elizabethcasson.org.uk) and follow us on Twitter (@elizabethcasso1) for more information.

This is one of a series of pocket guides which includes:

- **Becoming Your Own Cheerleader**
- **Building Your Network of Support**
- **The Book of Blogs**
- **Finding Perspective in Tough Situations**
- **Finding Balance**
- **Questioning Your Inner Critic**
- **Treating Yourself with Compassion**

All are available freely from the Elizabeth Casson website.

