

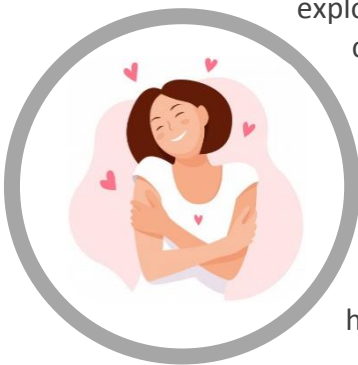


THE MATER
WELLBEING CENTRE

MINDING MOOD WITH COMPASSION

Self-care and self-compassion are key aspects of wellbeing and are worth

exploring how to grow. The opposite of self-compassion is self-criticism which can foster low mood and an internal sense of threat. When we are low in mood it can feel that the internal self-critic is the loudest voice and we can believe what it says is true. However, if we can develop a kinder internal voice as a response to the self-critic we can reduce our low mood, and are more likely to make positive changes. The greater our self-compassion the greater our wellbeing, mood and coping. As a result, we feel less overwhelmed due to stress, anxiety and depression. Self-compassion also helps us to cope better with certain health conditions and chronic pain.

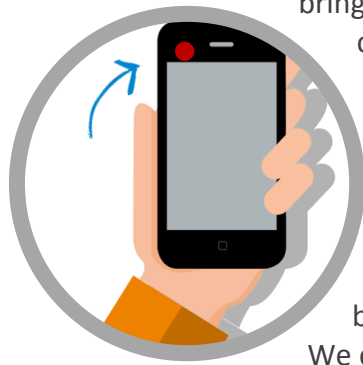


Our brains and bodies have evolved over millions of years to cope with the world we live in. We developed a survival response to threats and danger called the 'fight or flight' response and this has been very effective at keeping us alive. Our hectic modern world places many demands on us and we can feel overwhelmed and under attack. This can make it difficult to switch off this response. We have an automatic bias to look for the negative when we are operating in this mode. We have to learn how to actively override this to find the positive and build a compassionate response within us (Gilbert, 2009). We also have a drive system that helps us to achieve and acquire, as well as a soothing system linked to caring. In the drive mode we are often in 'doing' mode which can be difficult to switch off in a busy demanding world unless we actively do so. The soothing system helps us to nurture our young and can help us to switch out of threat or drive mode and to self-soothe. This helps to develop a sense of contentment, wellbeing and safety.



Being able to talk to ourselves in a soothing way helps to counter the negative self-talk we experience when that we are anxious, stressed or experience low mood. We may have learned to be self-critical or focused on our worries over years. This can make it difficult to switch out of this. Over time we can learn to notice how often we do this, to catch ourselves in the act of doing it and to pause and take a breath. Interrupting the cycle of negative self-talk, worry or 'doing' mode when stressed gives us a moment to choose a different response. We could choose to walk away, stop following the long list of 'doing' instructions in our mind or simply feel what it is like to be present in our bodies. Often, we automatically do or believe exactly what our mind tell us. If we practice stepping out of this automatic behaviour, we can view the world with a wider lens. This gives us greater choice of how to respond to what is happening to us. The more we practice this the better we get at developing a kinder more soothing approach.

We can learn how to regulate our mood better this way. We can do this by actively



bringing pauses into our day. We can use reminders to stop and pause and connect with ourselves in this moment rather than following the list of instructions in our mind. We still have to do the chores ahead of us but when we are calm or feeling soothed we can make choices about how to do these things in a more helpful way. Remind yourself to pause at regular intervals in the day as we often don't remember to do this so using cues can help. For example, you could put stickers on your phone or computer. When you see them, they could prompt you to take a breath, observe what you are thinking and feeling and pause for a moment.

We can do this while waiting in a queue, for the kettle to boil or waiting for someone to do something. The more we build this self-soothing present-moment awareness, the greater choices we have about how we live our day.

Actively talk to yourself in a kind way. Do the 'friend test'. Ask yourself if you would talk to your friend the way you are talking to yourself now. If not, then ask yourself if it is really ok to talk to yourself like this. We need to let go of some of the harsh self-talk.

Take time to complete a gratitude diary at the end of the day or try to remember three positive experiences you've had during the day. Going through them in detail in your mind or in your diary, even small moments, will help you feel positive. We often dismiss the positives that we experience and focus on the problems. It's a great benefit to us when we focus on the positives.



Say thank you to those around us for things they have done for us or for being there.

Smile. We can smile at ourselves and at those around us. Smiling and laughing help us to feel good even if we didn't feel like doing it when we started it can improve our mood.

Pay it forward. Doing a kind deed for another person or ourselves can enhance our mood and wellbeing.

Practice mindfulness or relaxation exercises to slow down and self soothe. Trying some loving kindness meditation (see the one we have on the Mater Wellbeing Centre).

Have a digital detox day, or have a family digital detox day (or half day if they can manage it). Only do things that do not involve a screen.

Acknowledge your suffering as part of the human condition and see yourself as part of the bigger picture. While our suffering is not all alike we all suffer. Remembering this can help us to feel more connected to others and less alone. Life is tough and it keeps changing and being kind to ourselves in the midst of this is sometimes the best that we can do.

Take care of your body! Eat well, have a good sleep pattern and exercise well.

Take a break. Don't overdo it and schedule too much into your day. Sometimes we are more efficient if we do this. Be kind with your schedule. Do one thing at a time. Make a list of pleasant activities that you enjoy and make sure you get to at least one a day.



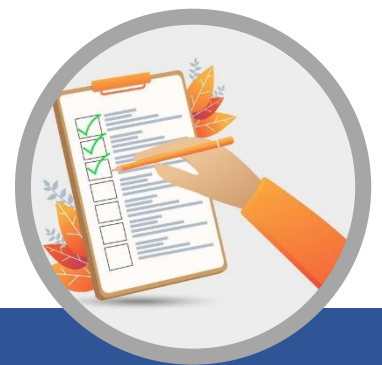
Write positive statements or mantras about life, people you care for or yourself and put them in a jar. These could include 'I am doing the best that I can'; 'this too shall pass' or 'I've survived so far, I can do this too'. When you are having a bad day, pick one out to read.

Make time to see or talk to people you care for or make you feel good.

Try to commit to making one small change with this and see what happens. There are many pleasant compassionate actions we can do or thoughts we can have that will enhance our wellbeing daily. Remember you can get as creative as you like.

Do things you enjoy and that give you a sense of purpose or meaning or satisfaction or connection to yourself. You may have to change these activities to the way you originally did them. That is ok, you can still get the same sense of meaning or enjoyment from them.

Take the next step and make one positive change from this list or from your own to improve your wellbeing. You have taken the time to read this so you have been curious about what this can bring to you.



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