


**Empathy and Compassion –**

**Strengthening Resilience in Service Providers and Caregivers**

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**Why This Topic?**

- Over the past few years, I've been asked about burnout and why I'm not burned out after 35+ years working with trauma and children...
- Meditation and compassion training are the only answers I can come up with...



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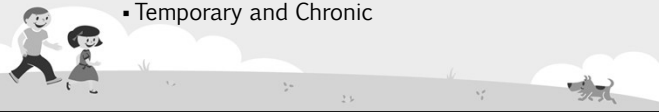
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**Burnout**

- Signs:
  - Overwhelming physical exhaustion
  - Feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job or the people – “Who cares?...”
  - A sense of ineffectiveness and lack of success – helplessness and hopelessness
- Temporary and Chronic



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### Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Score	Comment
15-18	No sign of burnout here.
19-32	Little sign of burnout here, unless some factors are particularly severe.
33-49	Be careful – you may be at risk of burnout, particularly if several scores are high.
50-59	You are at severe risk of burnout – do something about this urgently.
60-75	You are at very severe risk of burnout – do something about this urgently.



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### Don't Call it Compassion Fatigue

- It's Empathy Fatigue or Empathy Distress ... fatigue due to too much empathy
- It's Secondary Trauma... PTSD signs due to second-hand experiencing of traumatic distress
- It's Real but not True... It's real in this moment, but can change with the right intervention



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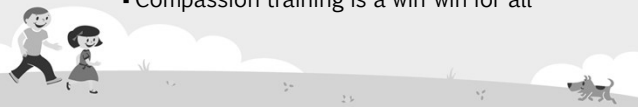
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### The Beauty of Neuroplasticity

- Our brains can heal themselves!
- Brains are built to change in response to new experiences.
- Let's choose wisely what new experiences we offer our brains.
- Compassion training is a win-win for all



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### Empathy v. Compassion

- The ability to feel what others are feeling.
- Associated with activation in the anterior insula and anterior midcingulate cortex, areas of the brain that process negative emotions.



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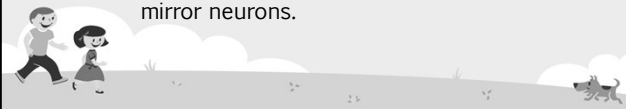
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### Empathy for Pain

- Evidence of 'shared neuronal networks' underlying empathic experiences of pain.
- Showing someone a video/photo of another person experiencing a physically painful event...
- The same regions fire in the brain of the observer as in the brain of the experiencer – mirror neurons.



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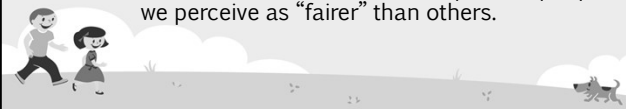
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### Empathic Responses Vary...

- Females v. males show more activation in brain pain regions when watching someone else experience physical pain.
- We all show more activation for people who look or sound like us.
- Our brains feel more vicarious pain for people we perceive as "fairer" than others.



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### Empathy Casts a Narrow Light

- Paul Bloom (Yale U. professor) wrote “The Case Against Empathy”
- Suggests that empathy has a narrow, exclusive focus
- It is offered only to those that are most similar in social status and appearance to us.



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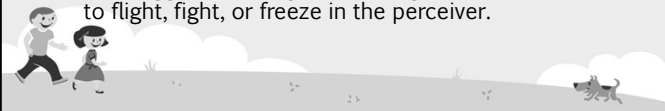
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### Empathic Responses Alone

- May not be enough to lead to prosocial or skillful helping.
- Can lead to empathic distress where the perceiver feels as bad as the person experiencing the distress first-hand.
- Can trigger the amygdalae (Danger Alarms) and lead to flight, fight, or freeze in the perceiver.



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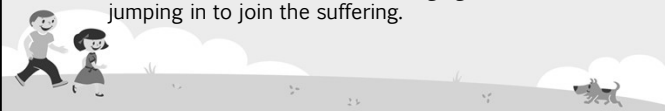
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### What is Compassion?

- Comes from the Latin words, “com” + “pati”= feel with someone
- Compassion is seeing/feeling someone’s suffering and then wishing them wellbeing or moving to help
  - Empathy + a motivation to help soothe suffering
  - You remain on the bank of the ‘raging river’ instead of jumping in to join the suffering.



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### Characteristics of Compassion

- Compassion is teachable.
- Compassion means that "I" = "Other"
- I want relief from my suffering just as others want relief from their suffering.
- We are perfect just as we are, right here, right now. There is nothing 'wrong' with the sufferer.



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- What is Compassion from Happify (2:43)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4a66aFaIME>



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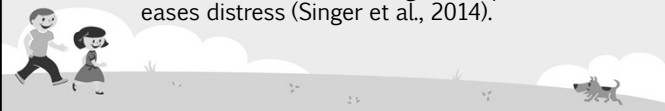
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### Compassionate Thoughts...

- Associated with activation of the medial orbitofrontal cortex and ventral striatus.
- These areas trigger feelings of warmth, concern, and positive emotions.
- While training in empathy can actually increase emotional distress, training in compassion eases distress (Singer et al., 2014).



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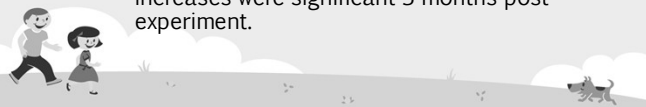
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### Intention to Help

- Setting an intention to help ‘primes’ the motor cortex to engage in helpful behaviors.
- Nelson et al. (2003) showed that priming students to think of the characteristics of a “superhero” increased the likelihood that they would volunteer to help others. Helping increases were significant 3 months post experiment.



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### Tania Singer’s Lab (2014)

Empathy	
Compassion	Empathic distress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other-related emotion</li> <li>• Positive feelings: e.g., love</li> <li>• Good health</li> <li>• Approach &amp; prosocial motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-related emotion</li> <li>• Negative feelings: e.g., stress</li> <li>• Poor health, burnout</li> <li>• Withdrawal &amp; non-social behavior</li> </ul>



Current Biology

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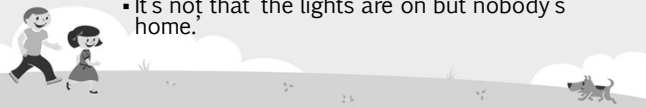
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### Elements of Compassion

- It’s already present in all of us... waiting to be seen and discovered.
- It rests on the idea that we are perfect, right now, right here. (Perfect is not the same as skillful).
- It is not zoning out or numbing out.
- It’s not that ‘the lights are on but nobody’s home.’



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### Compassion Begins Early

- Alan Alda and Felix Werneken at the Max Planck Institute with toddlers (2:26)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RK8rKKp-vPQ>




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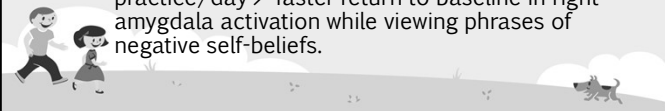
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### How Much Compassion Training is Enough?

- Hutcherson et al. (2008b) found that even only a few minutes of loving-kindness meditation could increase feelings of social connection and positivity toward novel individuals.
- Goldin and Gross (2010) reported that after 8 weeks of MBSR training and 20 minutes of practice/day > faster return to baseline in right amygdala activation while viewing phrases of negative self-beliefs.




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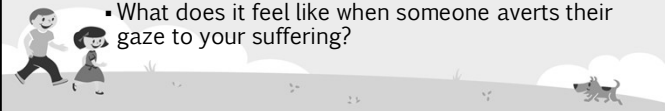
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### Compassion Training and Eye Contact

- Helen Weng (2018) found that compassion meditation made it easier to look more directly at pictures of suffering.
- The Compassion group also showed less activity in the amygdala and other brain regions involved in emotional distress.
- What does it feel like when someone averts their gaze to your suffering?




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### Compassion Training Boosts the Immune System

- Pace et al. (2009) found that compassion practice was positively related to decreased IL-6 production.
- IL 6 is a pro-inflammatory cytokine which triggers inflammatory processes in vessels and other cells.



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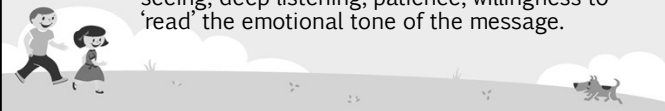
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### Compassion Leads to Kindness

- Kindness (3:05) puppy fishing
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Wi0UWLeT9I>
- Kind behaviors... kind eyes, kind voice, kind thoughts, kind words, kind pacing, kind/clear seeing, deep listening, patience, willingness to 'read' the emotional tone of the message.



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### Mindfulness Training Before Compassion Training

- Develops sustained focus
- Strengthens inhibition – the ability to “not do”
- Downregulates the Amygdala
- Improves functioning of Prefrontal Cortex



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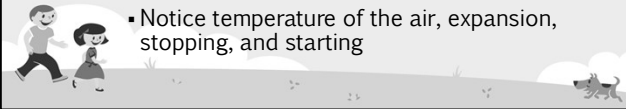
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## Focused Awareness

### Resting with the breath

- Bring awareness to your breath
- Notice how the body moves on the inhale and exhale
- The inhale creates space.
- The exhale invites relaxation and release
- Notice temperature of the air, expansion, stopping, and starting



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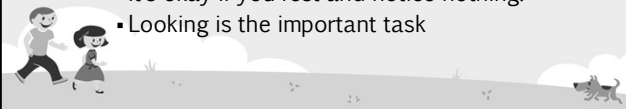
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### Body scan

- Notice body sensations like tension, softness, temperature, letting go
- Start at the crown of the head
- Move slowly down the body, resting to notice whatever sensations arise
- Use the exhale to relax each body location
- It's okay if you rest and notice nothing.
- Looking is the important task



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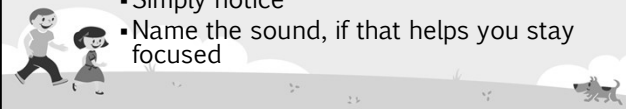
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### Awareness of Sound

- Rest with your breath for 4-5 breaths
- Open your awareness to the sounds around you
- Allow the sounds to come to you
- Neither reach out nor push away any sound.
- Simply notice
- Name the sound, if that helps you stay focused



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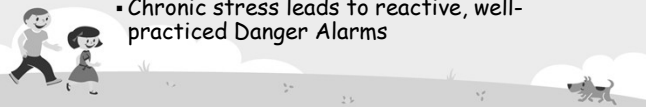
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### Neuroscience Refresher

- Perceptions of threat trigger the Danger Alarms.
- The Danger Alarms trigger body-wide preparation for flight, fight, or freeze, ie. survival
- The Hero Brain is slow to come online
- Chronic stress leads to reactive, well-practiced Danger Alarms



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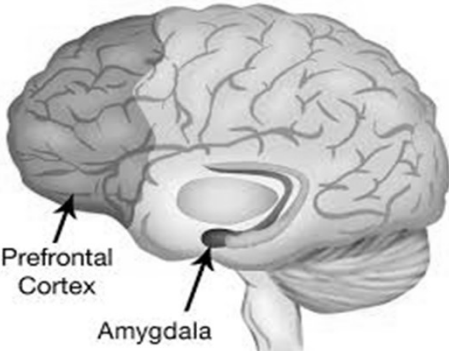
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Prefrontal Cortex

Amygdala



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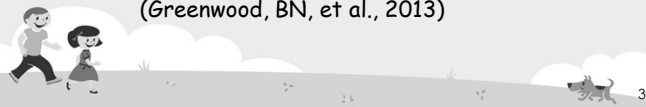
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### Meditation Strengthens the Hero Brain

- Increases the size and efficiency of the Hero Brain (PFC)
- Increases connections between the Hero Brain and other organelles like the Hippocampi and Amygdalae

(Greenwood, BN, et al., 2013)



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**Meditation Reduces Danger Alarm Reactivity**

8 weeks of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) with pre and post fMRI's showed...

- decreased volume in the right amygdala
- reductions in perceived stress

Compared to participants in the wait-list control group. (Davidson, et al., 2012).



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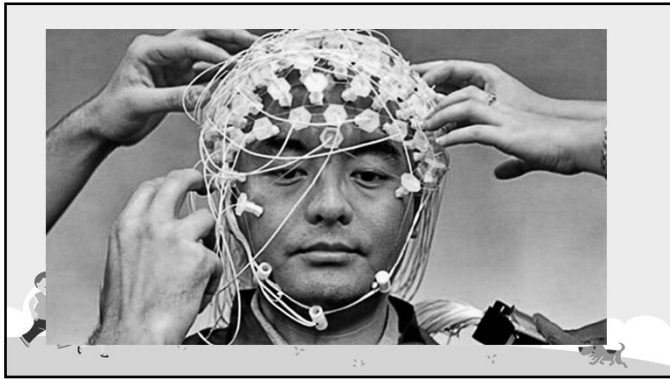
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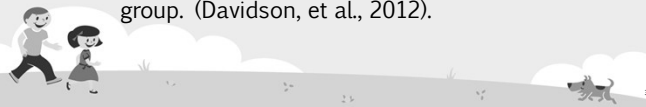
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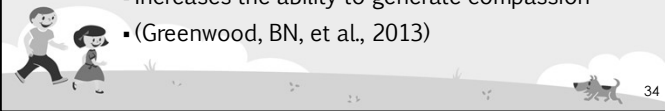
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### Mindfulness Meditation Strengthens the Hero Brain

- Increases the size and efficiency of the Hero Brain (PFC)
- Increases connections between the Hero Brain and other organelles like the Hippocampi and Amygdalae
- Increases the ability to generate compassion
- (Greenwood, BN, et al., 2013)



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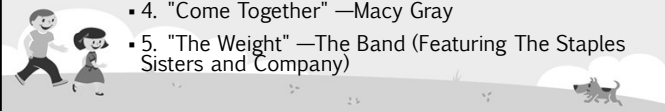
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### A Compassion Playlist

- Created by Christopher Bergland (*Psychology Today*, Posted May 23, 2018)
- 1. "Man in the Mirror" —Michael Jackson
- 2. "Lean on Me" —Bill Withers
- 3. "You've Got a Friend" —James Taylor & Carole King
- 4. "Come Together" —Macy Gray
- 5. "The Weight" —The Band (Featuring The Staples Sisters and Company)



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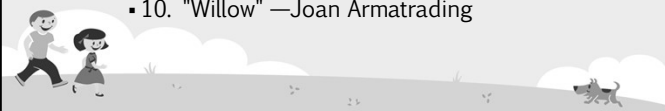
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- 6. "Get Together" —The Youngbloods (Includes "Woodstock" footage)
- 7. "Everyone Is Good" —The Roches
- 8. "Love Is the Message" —Arthur Baker & the Backbeat Disciples (Featuring Al Green)
- 9. "Pride (In the Name of Love)" —U2
- 10. "Willow" —Joan Armatrading



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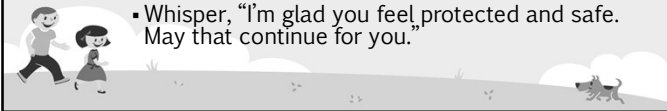
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### Compassion to Other

- Bring awareness to the breath
- Visualize a person you care about
- Imagine them smiling and happy
- Notice your own body sensations while watching them happy.
- Whisper, "I'm glad you're happy. I hope you feel easeful and joyful often."
- Whisper, "I'm glad you feel protected and safe. May that continue for you."



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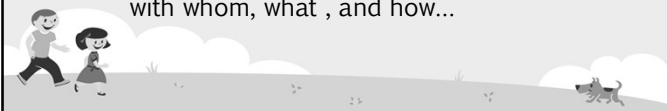
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### Compassion to self

- Bring awareness to the breath
- Relax into the body
- Bring to mind a time when you felt loved, happy, and relaxed.
- Savor this memory by noticing where, when, with whom, what, and how...



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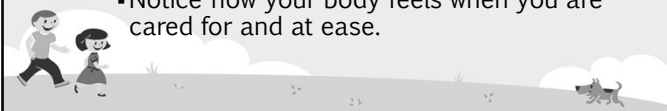
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- If that feeling hasn't happened lately, either look back in time and find a memory of feeling loved or create one now.
- Imagine giving yourself a gentle hug and whispering to yourself, "thank you for being my best friend. We are perfect just the way we are."
- Notice how your body feels when you are cared for and at ease.



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▪ Whisper, "may I remember this feeling throughout the day. It is real and true."

▪ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyQdeYjXU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyQdeYjXU<hE)



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**We Are Built to Be Kind**

▪ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsWs6bf7tvI&t=71s>



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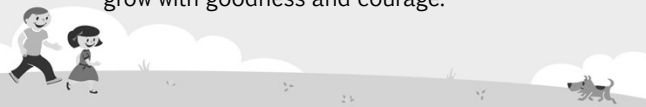
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**Compassion to a Challenging Person**

- Bring to mind a challenging person (as they are now or as a baby)
- Imagine them at their best – perhaps smiling or laughing or joyful
- Wish them... "May you have many more moments of joy. May you feel protected and loved. May you grow with goodness and courage."



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### Thank You

May you experience loving protection. May you feel moments of peace and joy. May you live with kindness, courage, and ease.



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