



Integrating the Fragmented Self using CBT principles: When less is more

The link between trauma or stress and dissociation is well established across a range of psychological disorders. In some instances, sense of self becomes fragmented and normally integrated aspects of self-knowledge and being seemingly dissociate in time, or with regard to affect or even identity. Sometimes the experience is short-lived, sometimes it is chronic, but it is frequently distressing.

CBT “first principles” reflect common psychological and neuropsychological processes and as such are pan-diagnostic and flexible (Beck & Haigh, 2014). This, rather broad, knowledge base can provide a foundation to understanding both why and how a fragmented sense of self evolved, which in itself can create a compassionate conceptualisation. This, in turn, can inspire ideas for recovery, present possibilities for integration and strengthening of a sense of self, but only if the conceptualisation is relatable and explored within a therapeutic relationship that is founded on warmth and empathy.

Therapy involves more than the application of strategies -the art of our work lies in creating a therapeutic milieu that is safe and containing for the work to take place (Beck et al, 1979). And therapy involves creating a blueprint for treatment that is personally relevant and simple enough to speak to the patient: this means knowing when less is more.

This workshop aims to demystify dissociation of the self and guide clinicians in formulation-driven treatment by addressing:

Understanding processes relating to psychological trauma and dissociation,

Making this accessible to the patient

Using formulation-based interventions to enhance integration of a fragmented sense of self.

Key References

Kennerley, H (1996) [Cognitive Therapy of Dissociative Symptoms Associated with Trauma](#), *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 35: 325-341

Kennerley, H & Kischka, U (2013) The Brain, Neuropsychology and Dissociation *In* Kennedy, F., Kennerley, H. & Pearson, D. (eds) [Cognitive Behavioural Approaches to the Understanding and Treatment of Dissociation](#) Routledge

Kennedy, F., & Kennerley, H. (2023) Taking CBT Forward: Focusing on the self in [CBT CBT Today](#), February 26-29



This workshop will weave together current research and practice related to loss and grief with the principles and practice of CFT, including material that will explore personal as well as collective experiences and responses to loss. An emphasis will be on differentiating a model of companioning grief versus an interventionist model of treating pathology, and the role of therapist self-practice as a way to cultivate the compassionate base that forms the heart of grief therapy.

Introductory Concepts

- Current thinking and research related to grief and loss
- Support versus intervention
- When grief goes awry

The Therapist's Compassionate Stance in Grief Therapy

- Current challenges in grief therapy
- The Role of compassion training for therapist and clients
- Shame-based self-criticism versus compassion based self-correction

Challenges in Grief Therapy Practice

- The social context of compassion and grief
- Approaching unique scenarios of grief
- Compassion and disenfranchised grief
- Prolonged Grief Disorder and its implications

Applying CFT to Grief

- Addressing shame and guilt with compassion
- Applying the flows of compassion to situations of loss and grief
- Compassion-based practices with grieving clients
- Use of energy and imagery
- Summary and discussion

Key References

Harris, D.L. (2024). Compassion-focused grief therapy. *In* K.D. Elzen; R. Neimeyer & R. Lenggelle (eds) [*Living with Loss: From Grief to Wellbeing*](#). Routledge; pp.195-205

Harris, D.L. (2023). [An exploration of Compassion Focused Therapy for grieving individuals](#). *OBM Integrative and Complementary Medicine*, 8(4), 1-31.

Harris, D.L. & Ho, A.Y. (eds) (2023) [Compassion-based approaches to loss and grief](#). Routledge.

Harris, D.L. (2021) [Compassion-focused grief therapy](#). *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 49(6), 780-790.

Harris, D.L. (ed) (2011) [Counting our losses: Reflecting on change, loss, and transition in everyday life](#). Routledge.

Harris, D.L. (ed) (2020). [*Non-death loss and grief: Context and clinical implications*](#). Routledge

Harris, D.L. & Bordere, T.C. (Eds.). (2016). [*Handbook of social justice in loss and grief: Exploring diversity, equity, and inclusion*](#). Routledge.

Harris, D.L. & Milman, E.V. (2026) [*Principles and Practice of Grief Counseling. Fourth Edition*](#). Springer.



This workshop is for people who are interested in learning about the applications of compassion focused therapy to the problems of harsh self-criticism.

Scientific background and outline

Our newly evolved brain, with its multiple competencies, enables us to naturally, consciously and unconsciously monitor many aspects of our functioning and experience. Not only do we monitor them, but we can also judge them. When we judge ourselves negatively, we can become harshly self-critical. That stimulates unhelpful processes in our brain. CFT helps people see important distinctions between compassionate self-correction where we are open and honest about errors and setback but can feel encouraged to make changes. In contrast the motives and emotions of harsh self-attacking undermine us and deplete our confidence, making us more vulnerable to mental health difficulties. Learning how to identify harsh self-critical brain states

investigate their underlying origins and functions and switch to compassionate brain states is key to promoting compassionate well-being.

CFT is a brain state theory and therefore therapists can identify the different characteristics of a particular state (e.g. attention thinking behaviour etc) and how to generate alternatives as shown in the diagram.

In this workshop, we will explore

- The basic conceptual framework of CFT
- Distinguish different types and functions of self-criticism and explore functional analysis of self-criticism.
- How and why generating compassion brain states operates his antidotes to our self-criticism

Key References

Gilbert, P & Simos, G (eds) (2022) [*Compassion Focused Therapy: Clinical Practice and Applications*](#), London: Routledge

(see in particular chapters 'Internal Shame and Self-Disconnection' and 'From Harsh Self-Criticism to Compassionate Self-Correction and Guidance')

Löw, C. A., Schauenburg, H., & Dinger, U. (2020). [Self-criticism and psychotherapy outcome: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#). *Clinical Psychology Review*, 75, 101808.

Petrocchi, N., Ottaviani, C., Cheli, S., Matos, M., Baldi, B., Basran, J. K., & Gilbert, P. (2024). [The impact of compassion-focused therapy on positive and negative mental health outcomes: Results of a series of meta-analyses](#). *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 31(2), 230–247.

Zaccari, V., Mancini, F., & Rogier, G. (2024) [State of the art of the literature on definitions of self-criticism: a meta-review](#). *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 15, 1239696.



Complex trauma is associated with pervasive disturbances in affect regulation, self and interpersonal functioning. Individuals with a history of complex trauma frequently struggle with difficulties in understanding their own and others' mental states, while also experiencing intense shame, self-criticism, and threat-based responses that maintain psychological distress across diagnostic categories.

This workshop explores the integration of mentalizing and compassion as complementary processes in the treatment of complex trauma. In this workshop I will first provide an overview of key principles of Trauma-Focused Mentalization-Based Treatment (MBT-TF), a treatment approach that aims to restore and strengthen mentalizing capacities and epistemic trust, two psychological capacities that are often compromised in the context of traumatic experiences and attachment disruptions. Core treatment principles, including the maintenance of a mentalizing stance, regulation of arousal, and the gradual exploration of traumatic experiences within a relational framework, will be discussed.

Building on this foundation, the workshop will examine compassion as a transdiagnostic therapeutic process that may enhance trauma recovery. Drawing on principles from Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), we will consider how cultivating compassion for self and others can address shame, self-criticism, and persistent threat responses. Conceptual links between mentalizing and compassion will be explored, highlighting how both approaches may promote mentalizing, epistemic trust, emotion regulation, interpersonal connectedness, and a more coherent sense of self.

Clinical examples and practical applications based on participants' own therapeutic work will be used to illustrate these principles.

Key references

Luyten, P., Campbell, C., Allison, E., & Fonagy, P. (2020). [The mentalizing approach to psychopathology: State of the art and future directions](#). *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 16, 297-325.

Luyten, P., Campbell, C., & Fonagy, P. (2020). [Borderline personality disorder, complex trauma, and problems with self and identity: A social-communicative approach](#). *Journal of Personality*, 88, 88-105.

Smits, M. L., de Vos, J., Rüfenacht, E., Nijssens, L., Shaverin, L., Nolte, T., Luyten, P., Fonagy, P., & Bateman, A. (2024) [Breaking the cycle with trauma-focused mentalization-based treatment: theory and practice of a trauma-focused group intervention](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, 1426092.