

Notice, Name and Be Kind

A practical three-step approach to emotional awareness: notice what is happening, name it as clearly as you can, and respond to yourself with kindness rather than criticism.

Why these three steps?

When something difficult happens, many of us move straight from feeling to reaction. We may snap, withdraw, overthink, people-please, shut down or criticise ourselves before we have understood what is happening. Notice, Name and Be Kind creates a small space between experience and response.

The goal is not to control every emotion. It is to become more able to recognise your internal state and respond in a way that supports you. This can be especially helpful when feelings arrive quickly, when you have learned to ignore your needs, or when emotion words are difficult to access.

Step 1 - NOTICE

- **Body:** What sensations are present - tightness, heaviness, heat, shakiness, numbness, restlessness, nausea or fatigue?
- **Thoughts:** Is your mind racing, looping, blank, catastrophising, replaying or becoming self-critical?
- **Behaviour:** Do you want to escape, argue, hide, fix, scroll, eat, drink, work harder or seek reassurance?
- **Environment:** What happened just before this? Is there noise, conflict, uncertainty, rejection, pressure or too many demands?
- **Capacity:** Are you responding to one event, or is this the final demand after a day of carrying too much?

Notice without immediately judging

Observation is different from evaluation. 'My chest is tight and I want to leave' gives you information. 'I am ridiculous for feeling like this' adds a second layer of distress. Try describing what is happening as though you were gathering useful data rather than building a case against yourself.

Step 2 - NAME

Naming an experience can make it easier to work with. You do not need the perfect word. Start broad if necessary: pleasant, unpleasant, activated, flat, overwhelmed, unsettled. Then see whether a more specific word fits.

- Anxious, worried, uncertain, fearful or panicked.
- Angry, irritated, resentful, frustrated or violated.
- Sad, disappointed, lonely, grieving or hurt.
- Embarrassed, ashamed, guilty or exposed.
- Overloaded, trapped, pressured, exhausted or numb.
- Relieved, content, hopeful, excited, proud or connected.

Carl Rogers and acceptance

A person-centred approach begins with the person's lived experience rather than forcing it into what it 'should' be. Acceptance can reduce the need to hide from ourselves and create more room for genuine choice.

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." - Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person (1961).

Step 3 - BE KIND

Kindness does not mean telling yourself everything is fine. It means responding without unnecessary cruelty. Ask: If somebody I cared about felt exactly this way, what would I want them to know? What would I offer them? What would I stop demanding of them?

From Self-Criticism to Useful Support

What self-criticism can sound like

- "I shouldn't be this upset."
- "Everyone else manages."
- "I'm too sensitive."
- "I always ruin things."
- "I just need to get over it."
- "Why can't I be normal?"

Try translating criticism into information

Instead of: 'I'm too sensitive.' **Try:** 'Something has affected me strongly. What is it touching?'

Instead of: 'I'm lazy.' **Try:** 'Starting feels unusually difficult. Am I tired, overwhelmed, unclear or under-stimulated?'

Instead of: 'I shouldn't need help.' **Try:** 'This is costing more capacity than I have available alone.'

Kindness can still include accountability

Being kind to yourself does not mean excusing behaviour that harmed someone. You can acknowledge that you were overwhelmed and still apologise. You can understand why you reacted and still work on a different response. Shame tends to say 'I am bad'; accountability asks 'What happened, what was my part, and what can I do next?'

Neurodivergence: when naming is difficult

Some autistic and ADHD people experience alexithymia or interoceptive differences, making internal states difficult to identify or describe. A question such as 'How do you feel?' can therefore be too broad. Start with concrete observations: Are your shoulders raised? Are you talking faster? Has sound become painful? Do you suddenly need to leave? Have you forgotten to eat? Are decisions becoming impossible?

You can use a colour, number, picture or body sensation instead of an emotion word. 'Red and buzzing, 8/10' is useful information even if you cannot identify whether the feeling is anxiety, anger or overload.

A neurodivergent-friendly check-in

- **NOTICE:** What has changed in my body, behaviour or sensory tolerance?
- **NAME:** Can I give it a colour, number, image or approximate word?
- **BE KIND:** What demand can I reduce or what support can I add?
- **REGULATE:** Do I need quiet, movement, pressure, food, water, headphones, body doubling or transition time?
- **COMMUNICATE:** Is there something another person needs to know?

When kindness means a boundary

Sometimes the kind response is not an affirmation; it is a limit. It may be leaving a conversation, saying no, asking for more time, reducing contact, requesting an adjustment or deciding that you cannot continue carrying something. Kindness towards yourself can be practical and protective.

When kindness means doing the difficult thing

At other times, kindness is making the GP appointment, opening the letter, having the conversation, attending therapy, eating something when anxiety says not to, or taking one step towards a task you have avoided. Kindness asks what supports your longer-term wellbeing, not only what brings immediate relief.

The 3-minute practice

- **Minute 1 - Notice:** scan body, thoughts, behaviour and environment.
- **Minute 2 - Name:** choose one or two words, a number or colour.
- **Minute 3 - Be kind:** choose one supportive response you can realistically make now.

Worksheets & Reflection

Notice - Name - Be Kind worksheet

NOTICE	What am I observing in my body, thoughts, behaviour and environment?	_____
NAME	What word, colour, number or image fits this experience?	_____
BE KIND	What would a supportive response look like right now?	_____

Build your kindness language

Generic affirmations do not work for everyone. Create phrases that feel believable rather than forced.

- "This is difficult, and I can respond one step at a time."
- "My reaction is information. I can work out what it needs."
- "I can be disappointed without attacking myself."
- "Needing recovery does not make me weak."
- "I am allowed to ask for clarification or time."
- "I can make a mistake and still repair it."
- "I do not need to solve everything while I am overwhelmed."

Pattern tracker

Situation: _____ **What I noticed:** _____

What I named: _____ **Intensity 0-10:** _____

My first impulse: _____ **What I actually chose:** _____

What kindness looked like: _____

What I learned: _____

Weekly reflection

- What feeling was hardest for me to name this week?
- Where did I notice my body before my thoughts caught up?
- Which self-critical phrase appeared most often?
- What happened when I responded more kindly?
- Did kindness mean rest, action, connection or a boundary?
- Where might I need more support rather than more self-discipline?
- What is one phrase I want to carry into next week?

When the feeling is very strong

If you are highly activated, shut down or dissociating, do not force deep emotional exploration. Prioritise safety and regulation. Reduce stimulation, orient to the present, use familiar grounding or sensory strategies, contact somebody safe and postpone non-urgent decisions. If you are unable to keep yourself safe, seek urgent professional or emergency support.

When to seek more support

- Low mood, anxiety, panic, trauma symptoms or emotional distress are persistent or worsening.
- Your daily functioning, sleep, eating, work or relationships are being significantly affected.
- You are increasingly using alcohol, substances or harmful behaviours to manage feelings.
- You are experiencing frequent shutdown, dissociation or overwhelming emotional episodes.
- You are self-harming, having suicidal thoughts or feel unable to stay safe.

UK urgent support

In an emergency, call 999 or attend A&E.; For urgent NHS help, use the appropriate local urgent mental-health route or NHS 111. You deserve support before a crisis becomes unmanageable.

A Message From Maggie, Books & Resources

A message from Maggie

I think many people have spent years being much kinder to everyone around them than they are to themselves. We can understand another person's tiredness, fear or mistakes and then speak to ourselves in a way we would never speak to them.

Notice, Name and Be Kind is deliberately simple. Notice what is happening before you rush to judge it. Name it as best you can - even if the best you can manage is 'something feels too much'. Then ask what kindness would actually look like. Sometimes it will be rest. Sometimes a boundary. Sometimes asking for help. Sometimes taking responsibility and doing something uncomfortable because it matters.

You do not have to earn kindness by coping well. You do not have to wait until you have the perfect explanation for why you feel the way you do. Start with curiosity. Your experience is worth listening to.

And if you notice that the same pain keeps returning, please do not turn that into another reason to criticise yourself. Repeated patterns may be a sign that something needs attention, support or change.

Recommended reading

Carl R. Rogers - *On Becoming a Person*. Foundational person-centred writing on acceptance, congruence and psychological growth.

Kristin Neff - *Self-Compassion*. Explores ways of responding to difficulty with greater kindness and less self-judgement.

Russ Harris - *The Happiness Trap*. ACT-based strategies for making room for thoughts and feelings while choosing meaningful action.

Marc Brackett - *Permission to Feel*. Practical exploration of recognising, understanding and regulating emotion.

Further support

Support may include your GP, NHS talking therapies or mental-health services, a qualified counsellor or psychotherapist, neurodivergent-affirming support, occupational health, workplace reasonable adjustments, bereavement or trauma services, and specialist services where relevant. Coaching can support reflection and practical change but should not replace clinical treatment when treatment is required.

Clinical notes & references

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person*. Houghton Mifflin. • Neff, K. (2011). *Self-Compassion*. • Harris, R. (2019). *The Happiness Trap*, 2nd ed. • Brackett, M. (2019). *Permission to Feel*. • NICE guidance for relevant mental-health conditions should be consulted alongside individual clinical assessment where appropriate.

Note: This resource provides coaching reflection and psychoeducation. It does not diagnose a condition or replace medical, psychological or emergency care.

Space to Breathe Therapy - Maggie's Coaching