

Audio Track 18: Motivating Yourself with Compassion

[00:00:00]

Try this: Motivating yourself with compassion.

This exercise has many parts, and it's often helpful to do it as a writing exercise. So please take a moment to gather pen and paper, if you like. And when you're ready, we can begin.

Let's begin by considering a behavior that you often engage in that really isn't serving you, and in fact, often gets in the way of your well-being. Something you would like to change. Perhaps you overeat at times or procrastinate. Or maybe you don't exercise or meditate as often as you would like. Maybe you're too reactive, often getting angry at people who are just trying to help you. Or perhaps you've been too flirty with others, even though you're in a monogamous, committed relationship. As with all of our practices, see if you can stay in the mild to moderate range in choosing something to work with here. Choose something important enough that you can feel it, but not something that's overwhelming for you. We learn best by building strength while staying within our window of tolerance.

When you have that behavior in mind, please write it down. And then take a moment and consider why you would like to change that behavior. What is continuing to behave this way costing you? And how do you imagine life would be better without this behavior? Why do you want to change? If you like, you can take a moment and write that down.

And then notice how you feel when you indulge in that behavior. What happens just before you indulge? In other words, if you didn't indulge, what would you be feeling? Is indulging in this behavior a way of changing your feelings? And also considering what happens while you are indulging, what does it feel like? Are these feelings the way you want to feel, your desired feelings? Is there any cost while you are indulging? And then considering what happens after you indulge, is there a price that you pay? Is there harm to yourself, your partner, your relationship? Please take a moment and write down what you find.

And then becoming aware of how you relate to yourself when you behave this way, is there an inner voice that charms and indulges you? If so, what does this voice say to you? "Go ahead, you deserve it." "It won't matter." "I'll start tomorrow." Or something else. If you have an inner voice that encourages self-indulgence, please write down what it says. And then consider whether this voice is actually helping you achieve your goals. Is it helping, or causing you harm? Even though this voice often leads you astray, please consider whether there's a kind intention underneath this voice. Is it trying to offer you ease, comfort, pleasure? Please write down any kind intention you find.

Or maybe you find that there's an inner voice that judges, shames or criticizes you. What does this voice say to you? "You can't do anything right." "You're a loser." "You're worthless." Or something else? If you have an inner critical voice, please write down what it says. And then consider whether this voice is actually helping you achieve your goals. Is it helping or causing you harm? Even though this voice may be causing you harm, please consider whether there's a kind intention underneath this voice. Is it trying to help you in some way? Does it want you to be

safe, healthy, lovable? See what it is for you. Please write down any kind intention that you find. It's important to know that sometimes this harsh voice isn't actually trying to help you, it's just a repetition of a harmful voice from someone in your life. In this case, it may be best to skip giving voice to this part and go directly to finding your compassionate voice.

As you become aware of the inner indulgent or critical voice or both and the kind intentions underneath, please take a moment to acknowledge the efforts of this part of yourself that has worked very hard to try to help you, even though the result has been harmful. If it feels right, freely and spontaneously write a letter to that part of yourself, acknowledging its efforts to be helpful and letting it know it doesn't have to continue in that role. We'll soon be finding a compassionate voice to support achieving your goals. You can stay here as long as you like.

And once the inner, indulgent and critical voices have been acknowledged, invite them to take a step back and allow space for the inner, compassionate voice to arise. This part sees you, understands you, and wants the best for you. It's concerned with your well-being and happiness, and it's willing to do what is needed to ensure your success in the long run. It can see how the behavior is causing you harm and it wants you to stop. It doesn't think something is wrong with you. Rather, it understands why you sometimes get caught in the behavior and it still wants you to stop, because you are worthy of being well. Happy. Healthy. Loved. Whatever you find you truly need. This inner compassionate voice comes from a place of love.

Please take a few moments and write a letter to yourself from the inner compassionate voice. Let the compassionate voice speak to the behavior you want to change, why it's important, and the

steps you'd like to take. Most of all, let the inner compassionate voice speak to you from a place of love as you write a letter to yourself. You can take as long as you like with this and when you feel done, you might take a moment to recognize how it felt to motivate yourself from a place of kindness and compassion rather than self-indulgence or self-judgment. You might also keep the letter handy and read it daily to support keeping yourself on the path to changing your behavior. We want to reinforce the capacity to relate to ourselves with true kindness rather than self-indulgence or self-judgment.

And please remember to take a moment to thank yourself for showing up, for caring about you, for being willing to offer support, encouragement, strong and soft compassion, as you tend to what's important to you in your life.

[00:12:22]