

Having empathy for ourselves

Welcome to the RelationKit Mindfulness series. Today we're going to take some time to tune into our feelings and develop empathy for ourselves.

So, let's begin by settling into a comfy position, either sitting or lying. If you're sitting, sit tall, in a wakeful and upright position but not too tense, choosing whether to close your eyes fully or just to soften your gaze to the ground. Soften your facial muscles, relaxing your jaw and allow the shoulders to settle down away from the ears.

Begin to come inwards towards your breath, aware of your in-breath and aware of your out-breath, sensing its flow in and out of your body. Your natural restful breath. No need to control the breath or change it in any way. Maybe you're feeling that flow through your nostrils, or down into your ribcage or belly.

You're not only aware of the breath but also awake to any physical feelings that go with your breath, that are directly connected to your breathing. Maybe the subtle movement of your ribcage or shoulders, or the stretching of your belly as you breathe in and the softening and falling back as you breathe out. Breathing in a calmness here.

As you continue to breathe, begin to gently scan your body from head down to your feet, taking your time, flowing your awareness through your body, and paying clear attention, noticing any and all physical feelings as you cast your mind all the way through, being okay with what you find on the way. Notice any areas of you that feel stiff, tense, any aches; notice them with a kindness, breathing and just noticing, and arriving at your feet.

Take a moment to feel your feet and how they connect to the ground, and knowing that you can come back to this feeling of the ground, the earth, holding you, supporting you in this moment, together with the calming breath at any time during the practice.

As you hold your body in awareness now, breathing with your body, begin to gently invite into your awareness a situation or a time where you felt upset, angry, sad, frustrated. Maybe a conversation you've had with someone, a loved one, your child's other parent or perhaps your child.

Maybe you have experienced a loss, or there's been some unfairness. Allow whatever feeling that comes, to be there, without getting caught up in the story, breathing with it and gently acknowledging how it presents itself in your body, any physical feelings coming up for you, nothing to do with them just noticing them.

And as you hold space for this feeling within you, begin to either silently or out loud say these words of kindness to yourself, creating a kinder inner dialogue, an empathic conversation with yourself:

"Right now, I am feeling [saying whatever the feeling is] irritated or sad, or angry.

Whatever it is you are feeling say it to yourself now: *"Right now I am feeling..."*

And in the next sentence acknowledge why you are feeling like that:

"Because when [and say whatever's happened]"

And then try and reflect on what need wasn't met for you in that moment, perhaps the need to be listened to, or the need for safety or reassurance, or respect:

"My need for [saying the need] wasn't met."

Acknowledge what happened and the reason why you are feeling the way you are and put that into words:

"Because when...my need for...wasn't met."

And then finish by saying to yourself: *"How very human of me to feel this way. How very human of me..."*

So, it might sound something like this altogether:

"Right now, I am feeling frustrated, because when I heard my partner say I am always nagging him to do more, my 'need' for 'support' and 'help' wasn't being met.

How very human of me to feel this. How very human of me..."

See what you come up with. Don't worry about getting all the wording right, just have a go.

As you say the words to yourself notice how you feel. Notice if anything softens, perhaps around your heart.

Understanding your own hurt - having empathy for yourself first - is key before you are able to fully understand and empathise with others.

If there is another person that caused this inner conflict, involved in this feeling that you were experiencing, notice your feelings towards them now. Maybe that feels a little different, less raw or sharp, softer maybe.

When we have empathy for ourselves it doesn't mean we aren't going to take action to sort out a problem or a situation if it's needed, it just allows us to approach it with much more understanding of why we need to and how to go about it. We might even begin to see the other person's suffering and offer them empathy as well, remembering we don't have to agree with them, we just need to understand where they're coming from. Making a healthy and wiser choice of how to approach the issue that created your hurt or suffering can make things feel better for both parties.

So, returning to your breath now, your calming breath flowing in and out of your body, and bring your awareness to the contact points where your body meets the seat or the ground, feeling that restful connection.

And then, when you feel ready, gently blink your eyes open back into the room.

See if you can offer yourself empathy a few times today when you need it most.

Take care 'til next time, and thanks for joining me as always.