

# SELF COMPASSION WORKBOOK

*Part One:*

*Understanding your inner world*



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# A GENTLE BEGINNING



If you are reading this, there is likely a part of you that is tired of being at war with yourself.

Perhaps you are someone who holds a great deal of responsibility – for patients, clients, teams, family, or friends. Perhaps you function well on the outside, yet internally carry a harsh and relentless critic. Or perhaps life has shifted in ways that have unsettled your sense of who you are.

Wherever you are beginning from, I want to say this first:

There is nothing wrong with you for finding self-compassion difficult.

Many of the people I work with are thoughtful, capable and deeply conscientious. Yet they struggle to extend to themselves the same understanding they so readily offer others. Over time, self-worth can become tied to performance, productivity, achievement, or being needed. When that happens, rest feels undeserved, mistakes feel intolerable, and setbacks feel personal.

This workbook is an invitation to gently examine that inner narrative.

Not to silence the critical voice through force.

Not to replace it with forced positivity.

But to understand it – and gradually reshape it.

Self-compassion is not self-indulgence.

It is not lowering standards.

It is not ignoring responsibility.

It is the steady, grounded ability to relate to yourself with the same clarity, honesty and care that you might offer someone you respect.

Throughout these pages, we will explore:

- Where your inner critic developed
- How shame and threat responses shape self-worth
- The difference between achievement-based esteem and intrinsic worth
- Practical ways to build a more compassionate internal voice
- How to maintain self-respect without harshness

You do not need to complete this perfectly.

You do not need to agree with everything immediately.

You do not need to “get it right.”

You only need to begin with curiosity.

Take your time.

Pause when needed.

Return when you feel ready.

This is not a race toward becoming a “better” version of yourself.

It is a process of learning to relate to yourself differently.

And that shift – though subtle – can change everything.

WELCOME



## DEDICATION



To the clients who have trusted me with their most vulnerable selves.  
To the parts of you that once felt small, uncertain, protective, or unseen – and  
who allowed me to sit beside you as you began to understand them differently.

You continually remind me of the courage it takes to look inward.  
You challenge me to grow, to listen more carefully, and to honour the  
responsibility of being alongside someone as they reshape their story.

This work is shaped by you.  
With deep respect and gratitude.

*Sam x*

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# HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK



This workbook is not designed to be rushed.

You may choose to move through it chapter by chapter, or you may find yourself drawn to certain sections first. Both approaches are welcome. There is no correct pace, and no expectation that you complete it in a particular timeframe.

Some exercises invite reflection on early experiences, core beliefs, or moments of self-criticism. If something feels activating or overwhelming, I encourage you to pause.

Take a break. Ground yourself. Return when you feel ready.

You do not need to write extensively for this work to be meaningful. A few honest sentences are often more powerful than pages of analysis.

You may also notice resistance – particularly when practising self-compassion. This is common. For many people, self-criticism has functioned as a motivator, a protector, or a way of staying safe. We will approach that with curiosity rather than judgement.

If you are currently working with a therapist, you may find it helpful to bring reflections from this workbook into your sessions. If you are not, consider whether additional support would feel useful as you explore deeper material.

Above all, approach this process gently.

This is not about becoming a different person.

It is about relating to yourself in a different way.

Progress here is often subtle. It may show up as a softer internal tone, a slightly kinder response to a mistake, or a pause before self-criticism takes hold.

Those shifts matter.

Return to these pages as often as you need.

Self-compassion is not mastered – it is practised.

## **A Note on Emotional Safety**

Some of the reflections in this workbook may bring you into contact with thoughts, memories, or emotions that feel tender.

After completing an exercise, allow yourself time to decompress. Stretch, step outside, make a warm drink, or gently bring your attention to your surroundings.

If you feel unsettled, orient yourself to the present moment.

Notice where you are, the sensations around you, and remind yourself that you are safe now.

This work is most helpful when balanced with care and regulation. Take your time, and pause whenever you need to.



Self-compassion is the ability to respond to your own distress with understanding, steadiness, and care.

It involves three key elements:



## Self-kindness

Responding to yourself with warmth rather than harsh criticism.

## Common humanity

Recognising that difficulty, imperfection, and struggle are part of being human – not a personal failing



## Mindful awareness

Noticing your thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them or pushing them away.

Self-compassion is not about avoiding responsibility or minimising challenges. It is about creating the internal conditions that allow you to respond more effectively.



## Self-Esteem and Self-Worth

Self-esteem is often shaped by evaluation.

It can rise when things are going well, and fall when they are not. It is frequently influenced by achievement, comparison, feedback, and external validation.

Over time, this can lead to a sense that:

“I am only as good as what I do.”

Self-worth, in contrast, is more stable.

It is not dependent on constant proof.

It does not need to be earned repeatedly.

Developing self-compassion supports a shift from fragile, performance-based self-esteem toward a steadier sense of self-worth – one that can hold both strengths and struggles at the same time.





### **Why This Can Feel Difficult**

For many people, self-criticism has served a purpose.

It may have helped you to:

- Stay motivated
- Avoid mistakes
- Meet high expectations
- Gain approval or a sense of safety

Because of this, letting go of self-criticism can feel unfamiliar – and at times, even uncomfortable.

You may notice thoughts such as:

- “If I’m kinder to myself, I’ll become complacent”
- “I don’t deserve compassion”
- “This feels unnatural”

These responses are not a sign that you are doing something wrong.

They are part of the process.

We will approach them with curiosity, rather than judgement.

### **Closing Thought**

Changing the way you relate to yourself does not happen through force.

It begins with noticing.

With understanding the patterns that have developed over time.

And with creating small, consistent shifts in how you respond to your own experience.

We will build on this, step by step.

# NOTICING YOUR INNER WORLD: REFLECTIONS

**1. When does self-criticism tend to show up?**  
Think about recent situations where you noticed a shift in how you spoke to yourself.  
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**2. What does your inner voice sound like?**  
If your self-criticism had a tone, what would it be? Harsh, demanding, anxious, perfectionistic?  
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.....

**3. What does this critical voice say?**  
Write down a few phrases or familiar thoughts.  
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**4. What might this voice be trying to do for you?** Often, self-criticism has a protective intention (even if it doesn't feel that way). For example: keeping you motivated, helping you avoid mistakes, seeking approval.  
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.....

**5. How do you usually respond to yourself in these moments?** Notice both your thoughts and behaviours.  
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.....  
.....

**Gentle Pause:**  
Take a moment before moving on.  
What is it like to see this written down?



## *Chapter 2*

# MEETING THE INNER CRITIC

### **A Gentle Introduction**

Many people notice an internal voice that is far less kind than they would be to others. It often appears in moments of pressure, after a mistake, or when things feel uncertain. However it shows up, this part of you did not develop without reason. Before we try to change it, we begin by understanding it.

### **What Is the Inner Critic?**

The inner critic is a pattern of thinking that evaluates and often judges.

It might sound like:

“That wasn’t good enough”

“You should be doing better”

“You’ve got this wrong”

These thoughts can feel automatic – as though they are facts.

But they are learned responses, not the whole of who you are.



### Where Does It Come From?

Self-criticism often develops through:

- High expectations
- Early experiences of criticism or comparison
- Environments where mistakes felt unsafe
- The need for approval or stability

Over time, it can become a way of staying in control.

### The Protective Function

Although it can feel harsh, the critic is often trying to:

- Keep you motivated
- Prevent mistakes
- Protect you from judgement

It works on the belief:

“If I push hard enough, I will stay safe.”

The difficulty is that this can create pressure and self-doubt, rather than growth.

#### A Familiar Pattern

**You might recognise something like this:**

**A professional finishes a long day at work. They have managed complex responsibilities, supported others, and met expectations.**

**On the way home, their mind begins to focus on one interaction – something they could have said differently, a moment that didn't feel quite right.**

**By the time they arrive home, the internal tone has shifted:**

**“That wasn't good enough.”**

**“You should have handled that better.”**

**“Why do you still get this wrong?”**

**The rest of the day fades into the background.**

**What remains is a sense of having fallen short.**

**Despite evidence of competence, the inner critic narrows the focus – and the emotional impact feels real.**

### Creating a Little Distance

A helpful first step is simply noticing the voice:

- “I'm noticing a critical thought”
- “This is my inner critic speaking”

This creates space – not to argue with it, but to recognise it as one part of you.



## Threat System (Protection & Survival)

**Focus:** Detecting danger and preventing harm

- Self-criticism
- Anxiety or worry
- Urgency / pressure
- Perfectionism
- Comparing or scanning for mistakes

**Feels like:**

Tense, on edge, driven, unsettled

**Purpose:**

To protect you and keep you safe



## Soothing System (Safety & Regulation)

**Focus:** Creating safety and balance

- Self-compassion
- Calm and steadiness
- Rest and recovery
- Feeling connected
- Allowing “good enough”

**Feels like:**

Grounded, settled, supported

**Purpose:**

To restore, regulate, and sustain you

**You might naturally spend more time in the threat system – especially if you are used to holding responsibility or high expectations.**

**This workbook will help you strengthen your ability to access the soothing system, without losing your drive or sense of responsibility.**

### Gentle Reflection

- Which system do you notice yourself in most often?
- What tends to activate your threat system?
- When do you feel even briefly more settled or soothed?

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## THE STORY OF YOUR SELF-WORTH



### A Gentle Introduction

Our sense of self-worth does not appear fully formed. It develops over time – shaped by experiences, relationships, expectations, and the environments we move through. Often, these influences are subtle.

They are not always obvious or consciously remembered. Yet they can leave a lasting impression on how we come to see ourselves.



### Early Messages About Worth

As we grow, we begin to form ideas about what makes us “acceptable”, “successful”, or “enough”.

These messages may come from:

- Family and early relationships
- School or performance environments
- Cultural or societal expectations
- Experiences of praise, criticism, or comparison

Sometimes, worth becomes linked to being:

- Capable
- Responsible
- Achieving
- Helpful
- Easy to manage

Over time, these patterns can become internalised.

Not as something we learned – but as something that feels true.



### When Worth Becomes Conditional

For many people, self-worth becomes dependent on certain conditions being met.

You might notice beliefs such as:

- “I am only good enough if I get things right”
- “I need to be useful to be valued”
- “I shouldn’t struggle”

These beliefs are often quiet, but influential.

They can shape how you respond to:

- Mistakes
- Rest
- Feedback
- Uncertainty

And they can make it difficult to feel settled, even when things are going well.



## The Impact Over Time

When self-worth is conditional, it can create a sense of pressure:

- To maintain standards
- To avoid getting things wrong
- To keep proving yourself

You may find that:

- Achievements feel short-lived
- Rest feels uncomfortable
- Self-criticism feels motivating, but also exhausting

Over time, this can become less about what you do, and more about how you experience yourself.

## A Gentle Shift

The aim of this work is not to dismiss these patterns. They often developed for understandable reasons. Instead, we begin to notice them – and gently question whether they still serve you in the way they once might have.

This creates space for something more stable: A sense of self-worth that is not entirely dependent on performance.

### A Familiar Experience

Someone who has always been seen as capable may find it difficult to ask for help. Even when support is available, there can be a quiet belief:

“I should be able to manage this on my own.”

When this isn't possible, the response is not just frustration – but a subtle shift in how they see themselves.

As though needing support means falling short.



### Closing Thought

Your sense of self-worth has a history.

Understanding that history is not about assigning blame.

It is about making sense of patterns that may have once been necessary – but may no longer need to define how you relate to yourself now.

# MAPPING YOUR SELF-WORTH STORY: REFLECTIONS

**1. Early Messages About Worth**  
What did you learn (directly or indirectly) about being “good enough”?  
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.....  
.....

**2. What seemed to be valued?**  
(e.g. achievement, being helpful, independence, not making mistakes)  
.....  
.....  
.....

**3. What felt less acceptable?**  
(e.g. struggling, needing support, making mistakes)  
.....  
.....  
.....

**4. Current Patterns**  
When do you notice these messages showing up in your life now?  
.....  
.....  
.....

**5. Conditional Beliefs**  
Complete any statements that resonate:  
.....  
“I am only good enough if...”  
.....  
“I feel less worthy when...”  
.....

**Gentle Pause:**  
Whats it like to reflect on  
this?

# SHAME, THE BODY, & THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Chapter 4

## A GENTLE INTRODUCTION



Self-criticism and self-worth are not only shaped by thoughts. They are also experienced in the body. Moments of shame, pressure, or self-doubt often come with physical sensations – sometimes subtle, sometimes more noticeable.

### You Might Recognise:

- A tightening in your chest
- A sinking feeling in your stomach
- Tension in your shoulders
- A sense of wanting to withdraw or go quiet

These responses are not random. They are part of your nervous system's way of responding to perceived threat.

### Understanding Shame as a Response

Shame is a deeply human experience.

It often arises when someone feels exposed, not good enough, or at risk of judgement or disconnection.

Even small moments – a mistake, a difficult interaction, or perceived criticism – can activate this response.

When this happens, the mind and body begin to work together:

- The mind may generate self-critical thoughts
- The body may shift into tension, withdrawal, or urgency

**This is not a failure.  
It is a protective response.**

### The Nervous System in Simple Terms

Your nervous system is constantly scanning for cues of:

**Threat** (something is wrong), **Safety** (I am okay)

When threat is detected – even socially or emotionally – the body can move into a protective state.

### This may feel like:

- Anxiety or urgency
- Overthinking or self-criticism
- Shutting down or withdrawing

### When the system feels safer, you may notice:

- A greater sense of steadiness
- More balanced thinking
- Increased capacity to reflect rather than react

### Why This Matters

If your body is in a state of threat, it is much harder to respond to yourself with care.

This is why self-compassion is not just something you think.

It is something you experience – through both mind and body.

Learning to gently regulate your system creates the conditions for a different internal response.

# WORKSHEET: NOTICING YOUR BODY'S SIGNALS

1. When I feel under pressure or self-critical, I notice:

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.....

2. Where do I feel this most in my body?  
(e.g. chest, stomach, shoulders)

.....  
.....

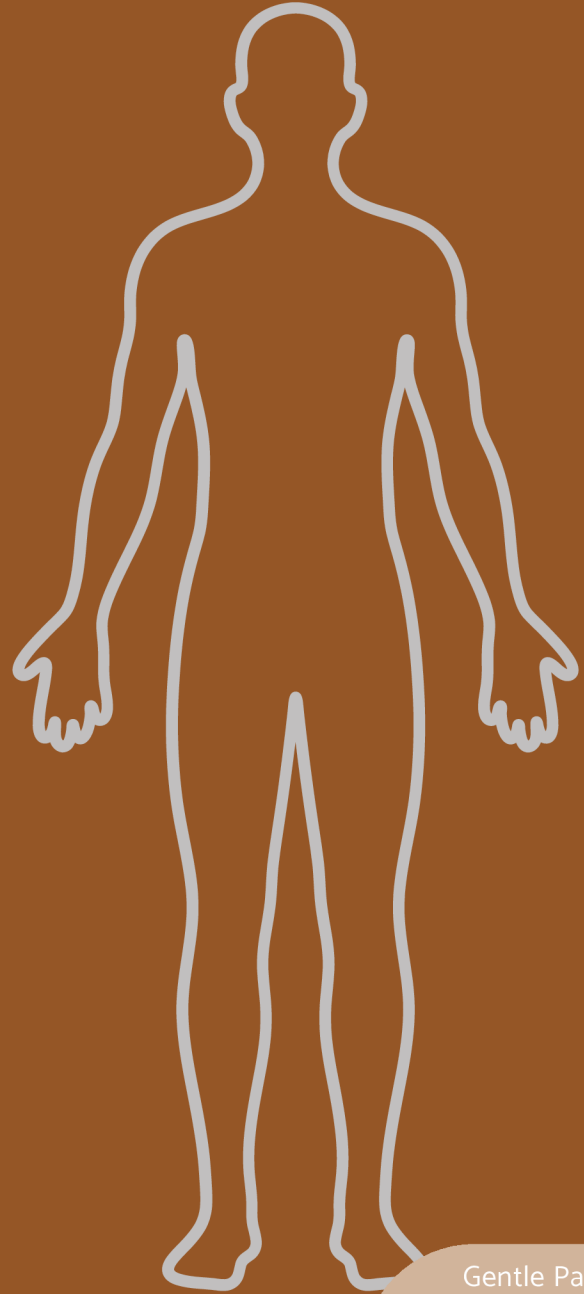
3. What do I tend to do in response?  
(e.g. overthink, withdraw, push harder, avoid)

.....  
.....

4. What helps me feel even slightly more settled?

.....  
.....

Circle or shade areas of tension:



Gentle Pause  
Take a moment now:  
Can you notice one  
small shift in your  
body, even if subtle?

### Closing Thought

Your responses make sense.  
They are not signs that something is wrong with you – but signs that your system has learned to protect you.  
As you move through this workbook, you are not only developing new ways of thinking.  
You are also creating moments of safety within yourself.  
And from that place, change becomes more possible.



# CLOSING REFLECTION



You have spent time beginning to understand your inner world.  
You may have noticed patterns in how you speak to yourself, how your sense of worth has developed, and how your mind and body respond under pressure.

This kind of awareness takes energy.

For now, there is nothing you need to change.

There is no expectation to have resolved anything.

Simply noticing is enough.

You may find these reflections stay with you over the coming days, in small and subtle ways.

Allow that gently, without needing to analyse or push for further insight.

Before moving on, you may wish to pause.

Take time to rest, reset, or return to grounding practices.



## Looking Ahead

In Part Two, we will begin to explore how to develop a more compassionate way of relating to yourself – gradually and steadily.

You can return to these pages at any time.