

Week 6 - Dealing with Difficult Emotions/Sensations
Soften, Soothe, Allow



The most intimate relationship we will have in our entire lifetime is with ourselves. No one hears our hearts the way we do. No one knows our hurts the way we do. We are the sages of our soft spots and our edges. Self-compassion is showing up to that relationship with honesty and with love.

- Jamie Ridler

Mid-way assessment

We are now at the halfway point, and this is a good time to reflect on what's been happening so far for you in doing the practices and in your daily life.

Taking the time now for reflection will help you to notice and appreciate any positive changes that may have resulted from the practices.

It can be helpful to actually write down your thoughts at this point, reflecting on your personal learnings as well as the things you may still be struggling with. As you do this, you may recall a specific incident in your life that stands out, that somehow relates to the work you have done so far in this course.

Dealing with physical and emotional discomfort

This week's topic has to do with dealing with discomfort, both physical and emotional. We normally react to pain or discomfort in one of two ways:

Blocking: We try to block or deny the discomfort by pushing through it through force of will, by distracting ourselves, or by self-medicating with food, alcohol or drugs. This is ultimately unsatisfactory since as soon as you stop "pushing through" or your distraction or self-medication wears off, it can come back even stronger..

Drowning: We become overwhelmed by it, drowning in the discomfort and its associated fears or judgments ("I can't stand this!", "What if this continues or gets worse?", "How could they/I have been so stupid?!?", etc.). This leads to incapacitation and a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness.

It's bad enough that neither of these strategies are very effective or satisfying, but a continuing reliance on them usually makes things even worse than they already are. There is a middle ground, a place where you are neither pushing away difficult feelings/situations, nor being subsumed by them.

This "middle way" involves learning to feel the sensations or emotions, but not being swept away by them. A surprising and counter-intuitive result of staying with something in this way is that the "I've got to get out of here" component of the discomfort often lessens, or sometimes can even disappear.

Videos

In **Turning Toward Difficulty**, Vidyamala Burch of **Breathworks** describes this counter-intuitive "middle way". Her mindfulness teaching is primarily concerned with chronic physical pain, but this presentation applies just as well to emotional pain. In **The Three Components of Self-Compassion**, Kristin Neff talks about the importance of dealing with difficult emotional and physical issues with self-kindness and gentleness. Finally, in **Awakening Self-Compassion**, Tara Brach describes RAIN, a particular way of tapping into this "middle way", again emphasizing the importance of self-compassion.

Readings

The readings for this week include **Thinking with the Heart**, by Chris Germer, which describes the origination of the *Soften-Soothe-Allow* process. **The Soften, Soothe, Allow process** is a one-page description of the process that will be used for the informal practice this week.

If you or a loved one is dealing with pain, **The 5 Step Pain Process** is a must-read.

Daily Practices

For the **formal practice**, we focus a little more on the sitting meditation, alternating it with your choice of one of the other practices. On the first day, though, if you have something that happened that is mildly difficult, try the **Soften, Soothe, Allow Meditation** (see it on the menu to the left). The situation doesn't have to be a major issue, in fact, it's best if it's mild or moderate. For instance, it could be impatience while waiting in line or being mildly annoyed by some minor event.

The **informal practice** will be to try the **Soften, Soothe, Allow process** at times when you are experiencing an unwanted emotion. As mentioned above, it's best not to start with the most pressing issue in your life. *If, at the end of the day, no unwanted emotion comes to mind, take the time to feel gratitude for something that happened that day.*

Below are your materials for this week:

Video

Turning Toward Difficulty by Vidyamala Burch [10 min]

The Three Components of Self-Compassion by Kristin Neff [6 min]

Awakening Self-Compassion by Tara Brach [23 min]

Reading

Thinking with the Heart: The origin of *Soften, Soothe, Allow* by Chris Germer

The Soften, Soothe, Allow process one-page description of the Soften, Soothe, Allow process

The 5 Step Pain Process by Vidyamala Burch

Practice sheets

Formal Practice [PDF] - Various (*Soften-Soothe-Allow Meditation on 1st day*)

Informal Practice [PDF] - see **The Soften, Soothe, Allow process**