



In this section we will look at how to act with compassion in response to someone's distress. It turns out that coming from a mindset of compassion greatly adds to our ability to parent and our own life satisfaction. Our goal is to be able to lessen our child's distress while maintaining our wellbeing.

Simply put, compassion is concern for the wellbeing of others. It includes both the awareness of others' distress and a desire to lessen it. At the same time that we want to lessen another's distress, we also understand that we cannot "fix" another person's pain. This section helps us explore what compassion looks like in action.



[Distribute this document to all participants to explore prior to this session.](#)



### Circle Agenda

#### [Circle Agenda for Section 2, In-Person](#)

Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session in-person.

#### [Circle Agenda for Section 2, Virtual](#)

Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session virtually.

### Handouts to Support Content Covered in Circle Agenda

#### [Compassion Action Steps](#)

It is helpful to have a few copies of this visual in the center of the circle for every remaining section.

#### [Emotional Regulation Plans](#)

#### [Strategies to Keep Calm](#)

#### ["Just Like Me" Cards](#)

These are formatted so you can print four cards to a page. This format helps when printing these for a group of participants.

#### ["Just Like Me" Cards for Sharing Virtually](#)

This document has the "Just Like Me" activity formatted to a full page, best for when sharing this exercise with people virtually.

#### [Moving from Empathy to Discerning Best Next Action](#)

This is a supportive document can be provided to participants when explaining the Compassionate Action Steps. Included are examples of prompts caregivers can ask to help support others during setp number 5, discerning best action.



INTRODUCTION

In our circles we are exploring ways to maintain our compassion in our interactions with our children, family members, and those we count on to support us. It turns out that coming from a mindset of compassion greatly adds to our ability to parent and our own life satisfaction. Our goal is to be able to lessen our child's distress while maintaining our wellbeing, in other words, to grow our compassion resilience.

Simply put, compassion is concern for the wellbeing of others. It includes both the awareness of others' distress and a desire to lessen it. At the same time that we want to lessen another's distress, we also understand that we cannot "fix" another person's pain. This article helps us explore what compassion looks like in action.



INFORMATION

### 1. Notice – Be present in the moment and able to recognize signs of distress.

This may seem like an obvious and simple step. In our fast-paced lives it is probable that we walk by pain all the time without recognizing it. Noticing requires that our minds be present and mindful of our environment and the people in it. Being present is a choice. We can decide to be focused on the here and now. And, sometimes, the people raise up in such a way that we are brought into the present without our direct choice!



1  
NOTICE

### 2. Self-check – Be aware of your initial thoughts and feelings.

Once you become aware of someone else's distress, the compassionate next step is to turn inward! We do this to become aware of how our biases and past experiences are forming our first emotions and judgements related to the other person in that moment. Initial judgements are natural and, yet, often not accurate. This moment of turning inward allows us to set aside our initial ideas and emotions in order to gather helpful information.



2  
SELF CHECK

### 3. Seek understanding – Listen with curiosity to understand the other's perspective.

Once you have set aside your initial feelings and judgements, seek to understand what it might be like to experience the situation from the other person's perspective. As you listen (rather than speak!), you try to remain in a place of curiosity. You do not need to feel agreement. Your goal is to gain some understanding of how they see and experience the distress, focusing your attention on their feelings and strengths.



3  
SEEK UNDERSTANDING

Developed in partnership with:

**ROGERS**  
Behavioral Health

**wise** END STIGMA TOGETHER  
one story at a time

[compassionresiliencetoolkit.org](http://compassionresiliencetoolkit.org)

# Compassion in Action

## Section 2



### 4. Increase empathy – Genuine concern based on your connection to the feelings you have come to understand.

When you are able to understand something about what it might feel like to stand in another's shoes, you are experiencing empathy. Empathy leads to a growing desire and intention to help. Keep listening for understanding if empathy seems out of reach.

The goal of being compassionate towards others' suffering might lead us to believe that we need to first decide if what someone is feeling deserves the label of suffering. This process could put us in a place of judgment rather than openness and curiosity. As we step out of judgment, we become more open to understanding another's feelings and connecting to a place within ourselves when we experienced similar feelings. That is empathy. Empathy does not necessarily mean connecting to a similar experience that led to the feeling.

Many have found the following [3 minute video clip](#) to be a helpful and fun explanation of empathy in real-life terms. Thanks to Brené Brown for her work in this field of study.

### 5. Decide your next best action – Work with the person to figure out what would be helpful to them.

This step often requires us to go back to step number two – a self-check. Once we feel that we can relate to the other's feeling, it may be second nature for us to jump to offering advice. The hard truth, for those of us who want to fix the world or just reduce our child's suffering, is that our solutions very rarely are helpful to the other person. A better approach to compassionate action is to first offer support, not solutions or personal wisdom. You might ask, "How can I be helpful to you in this moment?" We can also ask, "What worked for you in the past when you experienced something like this?" If they seem out of solutions themselves and you want to share some advice, always ask permission first, "I have some ideas, would you like to hear them?"

### 6. Take action – Do what you promise and do not promise what you cannot do.

Once you have done the work of steps 1-5, you act on what you and the person have decided is the compassionate action that you CAN take and that the PERSON BELIEVES will be helpful to them.

*(These steps are from the combined works of Monica Worline and Beth Lown)*



### SELF-CARE



### STRATEGIES

In each pre-reading document, we will offer self-care strategies to support compassion resilience.

#### Commonalities Practice to Build Compassion

Try this five-step exercise when you are with your child, family member, or another person and feelings of compassion seem out of reach. Do it discreetly and try to do all the steps with the same person. You can begin by simply bringing someone to mind. Eventually you can do this when you want to bring yourself out of a place of judgment in a tough interaction with another person. At the root of it all, we are all human beings who crave attention, recognition, affection, and above all, happiness.

With your attention geared to the other person, tell yourself:

Step 1: "Just like me, this person is *seeking happiness* in their life."

Step 2: "Just like me, this person is *trying to avoid suffering* in their life."

Step 3: "Just like me, this person *has known sadness, loneliness and despair.*"

Step 4: "Just like me, this person *is seeking to fill their needs.*"

Step 5: "Just like me, this person *is learning about life.*"

Adapted from [this resource](#).



### WHAT'S NEXT

#### Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?

Parent & Caregiver



Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Planning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Send out electronic link to Kristin Neff's <a href="#">Self-Compassion Scale</a> to participants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Send out <a href="#">pre-read</a> for Section 2</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Type up Group Agreements from Session 1 and have printed for the center of the circle – either include group's values at the bottom of this list or keep notecards to spread around the circle at future sessions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Type up the group's family goals and have printed for the center of the circle</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare materials for Session 2</li> </ul>
<p><b>Purpose of Circle</b></p>	<p><b>Today you will:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explore the Steps of Compassionate Action.</li> <li>2. Apply the Steps to situations.</li> <li>3. Address the need for safety while trying to be compassionate.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Time/Materials/Preparation</b></p>	<p><b>Time:</b> 90 minutes</p> <p><b>Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Group agreements</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Group values and family goals – generated at first session</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Centerpiece</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talking piece</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fidgets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Name tags</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pens/markers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Flipchart paper with compassion resilience definition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Handouts: <a href="#">Compassionate Action Steps</a>, <a href="#">Emotional Regulation Plans</a>, <a href="#">Strategies for Keeping Calm</a>, <a href="#">"Just Like Me" cards</a></li> </ul>

# Compassion in Action



Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<b>Time/Materials/ Preparation</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>Preparation:</b> Cut “Just Like Me” cards – handout has four to a page. Prepare scenarios if not using one provided, arrange chairs in a circle without furniture in the middle. Hang definition of compassion resilience on the wall.
<b>Opening and Check-in</b> <b>(15 minutes)</b>	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome back! I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed or looking towards the ground. We are going to take a moment to pause. Take a few slow breaths. <i>(Pause)</i> Name in your mind what you want to let go of to be present in this circle and your personal reason for being here. <i>(Pause for 10 seconds)</i> I invite you to bring your attention back to the circle.</li> </ul> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will start our circle with an opening question for the group using the talking piece. As a reminder, when someone is sharing our only task is to listen to what they are sharing, and you always have the right to pass when the talking piece is passed to you. After you answer, please pass the talking piece to the person next to you.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) Share your name and one way you saw your family values in action since we last met.</li> </ul> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During our last time together, we discussed our values and group agreements – we have those posted here for us to reference throughout our group <i>(point out their location, either in the middle of the circle or on a wall nearby)</i>.</li> <li>• Today we are going to discuss what compassion looks like in action, how that applies to our lives, and ways to regulate our and our children’s emotions.</li> </ul>
<b>Guiding Questions</b> <b>(15 minutes – Steps to Compassionate Action Explanation)</b>	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As we touched on in our first session, compassion is being aware of another’s suffering combined with a desire to help alleviate it. Today we will be looking at what compassion looks like when you move from desire to action.</li> </ul> <p>Distribute Steps to <a href="#">Compassionate Action Steps</a> handout.</p> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am going to walk us through the Steps to Compassionate Action and include an example of how we may use it with one of our children. For the sake of this example, we’ll say the child is in 8th grade. After the walk-through, we will apply the steps to a scenario with another adult.</li> </ul>

Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Guiding Questions (15 minutes – Steps to Compassionate Action Explanation)</b> <i>continued</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Notice</b> – Be present in the moment so we can recognize signs of distress. This may seem like an obvious and simple step. In our fast-paced lives it is probable that we walk by pain all the time without recognizing it. Noticing requires that our minds be present and mindful of our environment and the people in it. We cannot be fully present for all the pain that potentially exists in our environment. Being present is a choice. We can decide to be focused on the here and now. And, sometimes, people around us rise up in such a way that we are brought into the present without our direct choice!</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Open mic) When is it hard for you to be present to notice your child’s pain? (<i>Notice</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> <i>Examples may be: when I am stressed about things happening at work, when I am not feeling well physically or mentally, when my child is being disrespectful.</i></p> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As this step highlights, it is important for us to notice when we are not able to be fully present for the person we are talking with. In these instances, it may be appropriate to set a boundary, asking the individual to connect with us later so we can give them our best selves. When setting this boundary is not possible, we need to do our best to ground ourselves in the moment so we can be as present as possible.</li> <li>• Now, lets think about how this applies to our 8th grader. We’ve had a long, difficult day at work and are just returning home. Before opening the door, we take a few deep breaths. Within a minute of walking in, our 8th grader yells at us from the couch. They immediately ask about dinner and start telling us about a conflict they had with their teacher. How unfair that teacher treated them today. We can tell they didn’t have a good day either.</li> <li>• <b>Self-check</b> – Our second step is that of self-check. In this step, we work to be aware of our initial feelings and thoughts. Once we become aware of someone else’s distress, the compassionate next step is to turn inward! We do this to become aware of how our biases and past experiences are forming our first emotions and judgments related to the other person in that moment. Initial judgments are natural and, yet, often not accurate. This moment of turning inward allows us to set aside our initial ideas and emotions in order to gather helpful information.</li> <li>• Thinking back to our 8th grader, our initial thoughts may be, <i>here we go again...you are always having problems with your teachers...if only you did as they asked, you wouldn’t have these problems...I really don’t like your teacher either... or...when I was in 8th grade I was much more respectful to my teachers...</i></li> <li>• We do our best to put these thoughts aside so we can engage in our next step.</li> </ul>

# Compassion in Action



Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Guiding Questions (15 minutes – Steps to Compassionate Action Explanation)</b> <i>continued</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Seek understanding</b> – Listen with curiosity to understand the other’s perspective. Once we have set aside our initial feelings and judgments, seek to understand what it might be like to experience the situation from the other person’s perspective. As we listen (rather than speak!), we try to remain in a place of curiosity. We do not need to feel agreement. Our goal is to gain some understanding of how they see and experience the distress, focusing our attention on their feelings and strengths.</li> <li>• Thinking back to our scenario, we ask our child, tell me more about what happened today? How did it feel to interact with your teacher? Our child tells us that they forgot to turn in an assignment yesterday and while the teacher has given extensions in the past, she’s not this time. Our child shares how unfair this feels and how much this is going to negatively impact their grade. We hear that our child cares about their grade, has completed the assignment and feels hurt that past practices have changed without their knowledge. They are scared about getting a poor grade and feeling sad and frustrated.</li> <li>• <b>Increase empathy</b> – When we are able to understand what it might feel like to stand in another’s shoes, we are experiencing empathy. We will never be able to completely understand what someone else is going through, since we all experience life differently, but we can connect to a time we felt the same feeling. Empathy leads to a growing desire and intention to help. Keep noticing and seeking understanding if empathy seems out of reach.</li> <li>• Just like our 8th grader, we can think of times we felt sad, frustrated, and hurt. We can most likely remember a time when an expectation changed without our awareness. Bringing this feeling to mind helps us remove judgments we may have about our child’s situation and helps us support them in our next step of compassionate action.</li> <li>• <b>Decide your next best action</b> – This step often requires us to go back to step number two – a self-check. Once we feel that we can relate to the other’s feeling, it may be second nature for us to jump to offering advice. The hard truth, for those of us who want to fix the world or just reduce our child’s suffering, is that our solutions very rarely are helpful to the other person. A better approach to compassionate action is to first offer support, not solutions or personal wisdom. We might ask, “How can I be helpful to you in this moment?” We can also ask, “What worked for you in the past when you experienced something like this?” If they seem out of solutions themselves and we want to share some advice, always ask permission first, “I have some ideas, would you like to hear them?”</li> <li>• For our child, we may say, I can see you care about your grade and it sounds like you have been in this position in the past. What do you think you could do tomorrow to help with this situation? And how can I best support you right now?</li> <li>• Though it may be hard at times to remember, our children certainly do have wisdom and can be supported to come to their own conclusions with what action is best for them to take next.</li> </ul>

Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Guiding Questions</b> (15 minutes – Steps to Compassionate Action Explanation) <i>continued</i></p> <p>(25 minutes – Application of Steps to Compassionate Action)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Take action</b> – Do what we promise and do not promise what we cannot do. Once we have done the work of steps 1-5, we act on what we and the person have decided is the compassionate action that we CAN take and that the PERSON BELIEVES will be helpful to them.</li> <li>• Perhaps in the situation of our 8th grader, this looks like us helping them write a letter to their teacher or organizing a calendar to help them keep track of future assignments. However we choose to support, the most important thing is that we follow through on that promise.</li> <li>• Often times when we practice compassion with others, we’re more likely to get it in return, though more so the case with adults than children.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Open mic) Next we’re going to apply the steps to a scenario with a friend. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the Steps to Compassionate Action?</li> </ul> <p>Read the following scenario or write your own scenarios to be more culturally relevant to the group. Be careful not to choose scenarios that are too complicated or controversial. You want ones that will clearly help the participants to get a good grasp on the steps.</p> <p><i>A friend tells you that she wants to ask her sister, who has no children, to take her children to raise them instead of her. She is sick of feeling like a failure when it comes to motherhood. She says that her kids treat her poorly and she finds herself treating them in ways her mother treated her. She says she thought she would be a better mom than her mom was. She says she hates parenting and wants relief. She looks really tired.</i></p> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) What emotions and initial judgments arise for you as I read the scenario? (<i>Self-check</i>)</li> <li>• (Open mic) Our next step is to seek to understand – what feelings do we think our friend is experiencing and what strengths do we hear in what they are sharing? (<i>Seek to understand</i>)</li> <li>• (Thumbs Up) After we seek to understand their feelings and strengths, we work to cultivate empathy. Can you give me a thumbs up if you have experienced feelings similar to what our friend in the scenario is experiencing? (<i>Cultivate empathy</i>)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Remember us tapping into that feeling helps us suspend judgment and be alongside our friend to help them discern their best next steps.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• (Open mic) What strategies do you use to help you not become a “fixer” for the other person? How do you invite them to share what they need in the moment and connect to their wisdom? (<i>Discern best action</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> Examples include, “How can I be helpful to you in this moment?,” “What worked for you in the past when you experienced something like this?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Pair share) Which step of compassionate action is typically easier for you and why do you think that might be? (<i>Take action</i>)</li> </ul>

# Compassion in Action



Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Guiding Questions</b> (25 minutes – Application of Steps to Compassionate Action) <i>continued</i></p> <p>(15 minutes – Emotional Regulation Plans)</p> 	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to supporting your family’s goals, there are two more benefits of acting with compassion.</li> <li>• When we focus on listening to understand, our youth learn to use their voice to communicate their feelings and experiences and learn from our modeling of respectful listening. These are skills they will use the rest of their lives.</li> <li>• Another benefit is when a child is approached with compassion, it helps to alleviate some of the pressure they may feel to never make mistakes or fall short of expectations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is very difficult to use the steps to compassionate action if we feel unsafe. When things begin to feel like they could become unsafe, we can be triggered into reacting instinctively to the perceived threat by fleeing, fighting, or freezing.</li> <li>• In those cases, our lower or “downstairs brain” is in control. The part of our brain that can rationalize, or our “upstairs brain,” cannot help us to decide about our best action.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) What have you found to help you access your “upstairs brain” (to choose a rational response) in the midst of your “downstairs brain” being triggered (fight, flight, or freeze) by your child’s words or actions?</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> <i>Examples include, taking a few deep breaths, walking away from my child before responding, saying some words of kindness to myself, such as this too will pass.</i></p> <p>Hand out the Emotional Regulation Plans for all three age groups and Strategies for Keeping Calm handouts.</p> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These plans can help you and your children learn and practice noticing your “downstairs brain” triggers and using strategies to engage your “upstairs brain.” This takes lots of practice!</li> </ul> <p>Walk through one of the plans with the group.</p> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Open mic) What might be a good first step for you to get started working on these plans with your family in the next week</li> </ul>
<p><b>Check for understanding</b> (10 minutes)</p>	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Next time we get together we will take a deep look at compassion fatigue; what it is, how it starts and grows over time, and how to become more aware of it so we can avoid it taking too much of a toll on us. To get us thinking a bit about it in the context of the Steps to Compassionate Action:</li> </ul> <p><b>Act</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) Which of the Steps to Compassionate Action sometimes actually adds to your feelings of frustration, overwhelm, or exhaustion?</li> </ul>

Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
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Self-care and Closing  
(15 minutes)



**“Just like Me” Exercise**

**Share**

- Do this exercise to develop grace for one of your family members when it is hard to do so. Close your eyes or look towards the ground and recall a time when you have found one of your family members more challenging. Maintain your focus on this person as I read these statements.
  1. “Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in their life.”
  2. “Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in their life.”
  3. “Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness and despair.”
  4. “Just like me, this person is seeking to fill their needs.”
  5. “Just like me, this person is learning about life.”

**Facilitator Tip:** After reading through the five steps one time, repeat the last part of each section – “is seeking happiness in their life, is trying to avoid suffering in their life, has known sadness, loneliness and despair, is seeking to fill their needs, and is learning about life” – then pause for five seconds before inviting participants to bring their attention back to the circle.

Hand out the [“Just Like Me”](#) handout to participants.

- Try this five-step exercise when you are with someone and feelings of compassion seem out of reach. Do it discreetly and try to do all the steps with the same person. You can begin by simply bringing someone to mind. Eventually you can do this when you want to bring yourself out of a place of judgment in a tough interaction with another person. At the root of it all, we are all human beings who crave attention, recognition, affection, and above all, happiness.

**Ask**

- (Go-around) For our closing today, I’d like to hear from everyone one more time, what is one thing that stood out to you today that you want to think more about between sessions?

**Share**

- Thank you for being here today. Our next meeting will be *(share next session date and time here)*.
- Same as last time, the facilitation team will be sending out a pre-read before our next session. It will give you some additional context for what we will be covering at our next group. If you didn’t get a chance to read the pre-read for this week and would like to learn more about the topic we discussed today, take a few minutes to review it.
- We look forward to seeing you next time.

Parent & Caregiver



Virtual Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Planning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Send out electronic link to Kristin Neff's <a href="#">Self-Compassion Scale</a> to participants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Send out <a href="#">pre-read</a> for Section 2</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Type up Group Agreements from Session 1 and have ready to put in chat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Type up the group's family goals and have ready to put in chat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare materials for Session 2</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Share handouts from Session 1</li> </ul>
<p><b>Purpose of Circle</b></p>	<p><b>Today you will:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explore the Steps of Compassionate Action.</li> <li>2. Apply the Steps to situations.</li> <li>3. Address the need for safety while trying to be compassionate.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Time/Materials/Preparation</b></p>	<p><b>Time:</b> 90 minutes</p> <p><b>Documents to Share During Session:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Compassionate Action Steps</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Emotional Regulation Plans</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Strategies for Keeping Calm</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">"Just Like Me" cards</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Items to Place in Chat During Session:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Group Agreements</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Family Goals</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Group Values</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Definition of Compassion Resilience</li> </ul> <p><b>Preparation:</b> Prepare scenarios if not using one provided.</p>

# Compassion in Action



Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Opening and Check-in (15 minutes)</b></p>	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome back! I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed or looking towards the ground. We are going to take a moment to pause. Take a few slow breaths. <i>(Pause)</i> Name in your mind what you want to let go of to be present in this circle and your personal reason for being here. <i>(Pause for 10 seconds)</i> I invite you to bring your attention back to the circle.</li> </ul> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will start our group with an opening question. Similar to our last time together, we will call out individual names to indicate whose turn it is to share. As a reminder, when someone is sharing our only task is to listen to what they are sharing, and you always have the right to pass.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Go-around) Share your name and one way you saw your family values in action since we last met.</li> </ul> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During our last time together, we discussed our values and group agreements – we have those posted in our chat box for us to reference throughout our group.</li> <li>Today we are going to discuss what compassion looks like in action, how that applies to our lives and ways to regulate our and our children’s emotions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Guiding Questions (15 minutes – Steps to Compassionate Action Explanation)</b></p>	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As we touched on in our first session, compassion is being aware of another’s suffering combined with a desire to help alleviate it. Today we will be looking at what compassion looks like when you move from desire to action.</li> </ul> <p>Share virtually the <a href="#">Compassionate Action Steps</a> handout.</p> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am going to walk us through the Steps to Compassionate Action and include an example of how we may use it with one of our children. For the sake of this example, we’ll say the child is in 8th grade. After the walk-through, we will apply the steps to a scenario with another adult.</li> <li><b>Notice</b> – Be present in the moment so we can recognize signs of distress. This may seem like an obvious and simple step. In our fast-paced lives it is probable that we walk by pain all the time without recognizing it. Noticing requires that our minds be present and mindful of our environment and the people in it. We cannot be fully present for all the pain that potentially exists in our environment. Being present is a choice. We can decide to be focused on the here and now. And, sometimes, people around us rise up in such a way that we are brought into the present without our direct choice!</li> </ul>

Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p>Guiding Questions (15 minutes – Steps to Compassionate Action Explanation) <i>continued</i></p> 	<p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Open mic) When is it hard for you to be present to notice your child’s pain? (<i>Notice</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> <i>Examples may be: when I am stressed about things happening at work, when I am not feeling well physically or mentally, when my child is being disrespectful.</i></p> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As this step highlights, it is important for us to notice when we are not able to be fully present for the person we are talking with. In these instances, it may be appropriate to set a boundary, asking the individual to connect with us later so we can give them our best selves. When setting this boundary is not possible, we need to do our best to ground ourselves in the moment so we can be as present as possible.</li> <li>• Now, lets think about how this applies to our 8th grader. We’ve had a long, difficult day at work and are just returning home. Before opening the door, we take a few deep breaths. Within a minute of walking in, our 8th grader yells at us from the couch. They immediately ask about dinner and start telling us about a conflict they had with their teacher. How unfair that teacher treated them today. We can tell they didn’t have a good day either.</li> <li>• <b>Self-check</b> – Our second step is that of self-check. In this step, we work to be aware of our initial feelings and thoughts. Once we become aware of someone else’s distress, the compassionate next step is to turn inward! We do this to become aware of how our biases and past experiences are forming our first emotions and judgments related to the other person in that moment. Initial judgments are natural and, yet, often not accurate. This moment of turning inward allows us to set aside our initial ideas and emotions in order to gather helpful information.</li> <li>• Thinking back to our 8th grader, our initial thoughts may be, <i>here we go again...you are always having problems with your teachers...if only you did as they asked, you wouldn’t have these problems...I really don’t like your teacher either... or...when I was in 8th grade I was much more respectful to my teachers...</i></li> <li>• We do our best to put these thoughts aside so we can engage in our next step.</li> <li>• <b>Seek understanding</b> – Listen with curiosity to understand the other’s perspective. Once we have set aside our initial feelings and judgments, seek to understand what it might be like to experience the situation from the other person’s perspective. As we listen (rather than speak!), we try to remain in a place of curiosity. We do not need to feel agreement. Our goal is to gain some understanding of how they see and experience the distress, focusing our attention on their feelings and strengths.</li> </ul>

# Compassion in Action



Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Guiding Questions (15 minutes – Steps to Compassionate Action Explanation)</b> <i>continued</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thinking back to our scenario, we ask our child, tell me more about what happened today? How did it feel to interact with your teacher? Our child tells us that they forgot to turn in an assignment yesterday and while the teacher has given extensions in the past, she’s not this time. Our child shares how unfair this feels and how much this is going to negatively impact their grade. We hear that our child cares about their grade, has completed the assignment and feels hurt that past practices have changed without their knowledge. They are scared about getting a poor grade and feeling sad and frustrated.</li> <li><b>Increase empathy</b> – When we are able to understand what it might feel like to stand in another’s shoes, we are experiencing empathy. We will never be able to completely understand what someone else is going through, since we all experience life differently, but we can connect to a time we felt the same feeling. Empathy leads to a growing desire and intention to help. Keep noticing and seeking understanding if empathy seems out of reach.</li> <li>Just like our 8th grader, we can think of times we felt sad, frustrated, and hurt. We can most likely remember a time when an expectation changed without our awareness. Bringing this feeling to mind helps us remove judgments we may have about our child’s situation and helps us support them in our next step of compassionate action.</li> <li><b>Decide your next best action</b> – This step often requires us to go back to step number two – a self-check. Once we feel that we can relate to the other’s feeling, it may be second nature for us to jump to offering advice. The hard truth, for those of us who want to fix the world or just reduce our child’s suffering, is that our solutions very rarely are helpful to the other person. A better approach to compassionate action is to first offer support, not solutions or personal wisdom. We might ask, “How can I be helpful to you in this moment?” We can also ask, “What worked for you in the past when you experienced something like this?” If they seem out of solutions themselves and we want to share some advice, always ask permission first, “I have some ideas, would you like to hear them?”</li> <li>For our child, we may say, I can see you care about your grade and it sounds like you have been in this position in the past. What do you think you could do tomorrow to help with this situation? And how can I best support you right now?</li> <li>Though it may be hard at times to remember, our children certainly do have wisdom and can be supported to come to their own conclusions with what action is best for them to take next.</li> <li><b>Take action</b> – Do what we promise and do not promise what we cannot do. Once we have done the work of steps 1-5, we act on what we and the person have decided is the compassionate action that we CAN take and that the PERSON BELIEVES will be helpful to them.</li> <li>Perhaps in the situation of our 8th grader, this looks like us helping them write a letter to their teacher or organizing a calendar to help them keep track of future assignments. However we choose to support, the most important thing is that we follow through on that promise.</li> <li>Often times when we practice compassion with others, we’re more likely to get it in return, though more so the case with adults than children.</li> </ul>

# Compassion in Action



Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Guiding Questions</b> (25 minutes – Application of Steps to Compassionate Action) <i>continued</i></p>  	<p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Open mic) Next we’re going to apply the steps to a scenario with a friend. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the Steps to Compassionate Action?</li> </ul> <p>Read the following scenario or write your own scenarios to be more culturally relevant to the group. Be careful not to choose scenarios that are too complicated or controversial. You want ones that will clearly help the participants to get a good grasp on the steps.</p> <p><i>A friend tells you that she wants to ask her sister, who has no children, to take her children to raise them instead of her. She is sick of feeling like a failure when it comes to motherhood. She says that her kids treat her poorly and she finds herself treating them in ways her mother treated her. She says she thought she would be a better mom than her mom was. She says she hates parenting and wants relief. She looks really tired.</i></p> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) What emotions and initial judgments arise for you as I read the scenario? (<i>Self-check</i>)</li> <li>• (Open mic) Our next step is to seek to understand – what feelings do we think our friend is experiencing and what strengths do we hear in what they are sharing? (<i>Seek to understand</i>)</li> <li>• (Thumbs Up) After we seek to understand their feelings and strengths, we work to cultivate empathy. Can you give me a thumbs up if you have experienced feelings similar to what our friend in the scenario is experiencing? (<i>Cultivate empathy</i>)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Remember us tapping into that feeling helps us suspend judgment and be alongside our friend to help them discern their best next steps.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• (Open mic) What strategies do you use to help you not become a “fixer” for the other person? How do you invite them to share what they need in the moment and connect to their wisdom? (<i>Discern best action</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> Examples include, “How can I be helpful to you in this moment?,” “What worked for you in the past when you experienced something like this?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Pair share) Which step of compassionate action is typically easier for you and why do you think that might be? (<i>Take action</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> Some online platforms let you to break groups into smaller groups allowing you to use a pair share for this question. If your online platform does not allow for this, facilitate the question above as a popcorn – taking 2-4 response from the group depending on group size and time remaining.</p>

# Compassion in Action

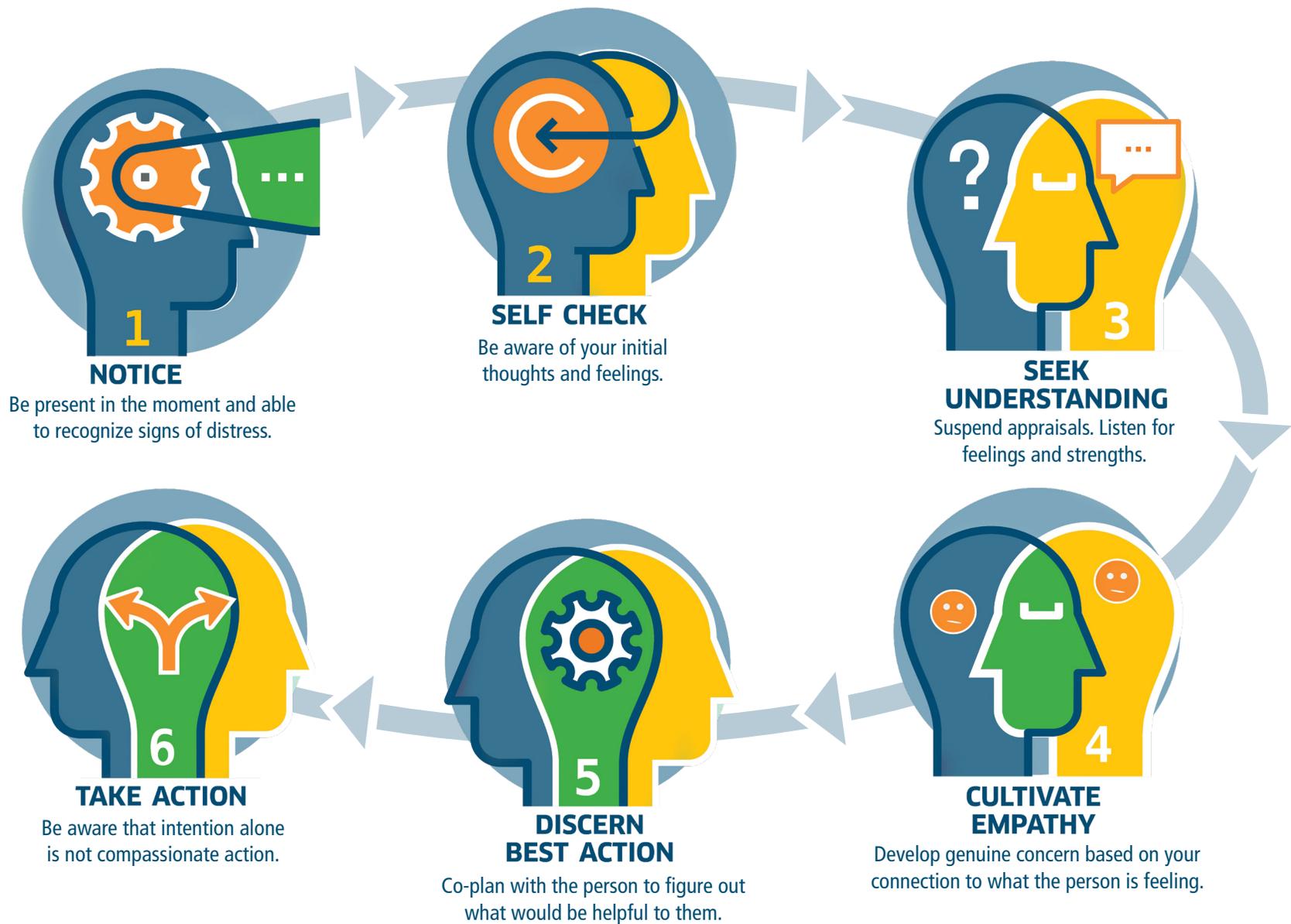


Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p><b>Guiding Questions</b> (25 minutes – Application of Steps to Compassionate Action) <i>continued</i></p> <p>(15 minutes – Emotional Regulation Plans)</p> 	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to supporting your family’s goals, there are two more benefits of acting with compassion.</li> <li>• When we focus on listening to understand, our youth learn to use their voice to communicate their feelings and experiences and learn from our modeling of respectful listening. These are skills they will use the rest of their lives.</li> <li>• Another benefit is when a child is approached with compassion, it helps to alleviate some of the pressure they may feel to never make mistakes or fall short of expectations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is very difficult to use the steps to compassionate action if we feel unsafe. When things begin to feel like they could become unsafe, we can be triggered into reacting instinctively to the perceived threat by fleeing, fighting, or freezing.</li> <li>• In those cases, our lower or “downstairs brain” is in control. The part of our brain that can rationalize, or our “upstairs brain,” cannot help us to decide about our best action.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) What have you found to help you access your “upstairs brain” (to choose a rational response) in the midst of your “downstairs brain” being triggered (fight, flight, or freeze) by your child’s words or actions?</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> <i>Examples include, taking a few deep breaths, walking away from my child before responding, saying some words of kindness to myself, such as this too will pass.</i></p> <p>Share virtually the <a href="#">Emotional Regulation Plans</a> for all three age groups and <a href="#">Strategies for Keeping Calm</a> handouts.</p> <p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These plans can help you and your children learn and practice noticing your “downstairs brain” triggers and using strategies to engage your “upstairs brain.” This takes lots of practice!</li> </ul> <p>Walk through one of the plans with the group.</p> <p><b>Ask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Open mic) What might be a good first step for you to get started working on these plans with your family in the next week</li> </ul>
<p><b>Check for understanding</b> (10 minutes)</p>	<p><b>Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Next time we get together we will take a deep look at compassion fatigue; what it is, how it starts and grows over time, and how to become more aware of it so we can avoid it taking too much of a toll on us. To get us thinking a bit about it in the context of the Steps to Compassionate Action:</li> </ul> <p><b>Act</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) Which of the Steps to Compassionate Action sometimes actually adds to your feelings of frustration, overwhelm, or exhaustion?</li> </ul>

Circle Topic	CR Section 2: What Does It Look Like to Act with Compassion?
<p data-bbox="118 380 367 449"><b>Self-care and Closing (15 minutes)</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="451 380 724 411"><b>“Just like Me” Exercise</b></p> <p data-bbox="451 428 521 459"><b>Share</b></p> <ul data-bbox="451 470 1503 819" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do this exercise to develop grace for one of your family members when it is hard to do so. Close your eyes or look towards the ground and recall a time when you have found one of your family members more challenging. Maintain your focus on this person as I read these statements.               <ol data-bbox="500 590 1268 819" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in their life.”</li> <li>2. “Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in their life.”</li> <li>3. “Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness and despair.”</li> <li>4. “Just like me, this person is seeking to fill their needs.”</li> <li>5. “Just like me, this person is learning about life.”</li> </ol> </li> </ul> <p data-bbox="451 846 1490 982"><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> After reading through the five steps one time, repeat the last part of each section – “is seeking happiness in their life, is trying to avoid suffering in their life, has known sadness, loneliness and despair, is seeking to fill their needs, and is learning about life” – then pause for five seconds before inviting participants to bring their attention back to the circle.</p> <p data-bbox="451 1010 1479 1079">Let participants know you will email a virtual copy of the <a href="#">“Just Like Me”</a> exercise with them after group.</p> <ul data-bbox="451 1094 1495 1270" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try this five-step exercise when you are with someone and feelings of compassion seem out of reach. Do it discreetly and try to do all the steps with the same person. You can begin by simply bringing someone to mind. Eventually you can do this when you want to bring yourself out of a place of judgment in a tough interaction with another person. At the root of it all, we are all human beings who crave attention, recognition, affection, and above all, happiness.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="451 1285 500 1316"><b>Ask</b></p> <ul data-bbox="451 1327 1463 1396" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Go-around) For our closing today, I’d like to hear from everyone one more time, what is one thing that stood out to you today that you want to think more about between sessions?</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="451 1423 521 1455"><b>Share</b></p> <ul data-bbox="451 1465 1503 1734" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank you for being here today. Our next meeting will be <i>(share next session date and time here)</i>.</li> <li>• Same as last time, the facilitation team will be sending out a pre-read before our next session. It will give you some additional context for what we will be covering at our next group. If you didn’t get a chance to read the pre-read for this week and would like to learn more about the topic we discussed today, take a few minutes to review it. We will also send you a copy of all the handouts we shared with you today.</li> <li>• We look forward to seeing you next time.</li> </ul>

# Compassionate Action Steps

## Section 2



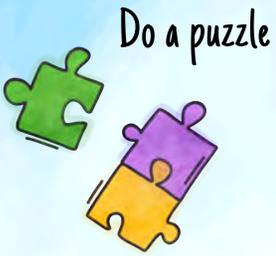
(Combined from works of Monica Worline, *Awakening Compassion at Work*, 2017 and Beth Lown, *The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare*, 2014)



### Activity:

## Department of Public Instruction's Emotional Regulation Plan

On the DPI website, there are [three emotional regulation plans](#) for different age groups of children. These plans are to be completed with youth about their emotional regulation strategies. These are helpful tools to share with your parents/caregivers to use with each child in their family. All adults can benefit from completing such plans for themselves and sharing them with those they would like support from when moving towards dysregulation. Suggest that parents/caregivers practice using the emotional regulation plans by completing their own!



# When I feel upset, worried or disappointed I can



Look at my glitter jar



### **“Just Like Me” Exercise**

Often our compassion resilience relies on our ability to step back from negative encounters. Try this 5-step mindfulness exercise when you are with a family member, friend or colleague and feelings of compassion seem out of reach. Do it discreetly. With your attention geared towards the other person, tell yourself:

- Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in their life.
- Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in their life.
- Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness, and despair.
- Just like me, this person is seeking to fill their needs.
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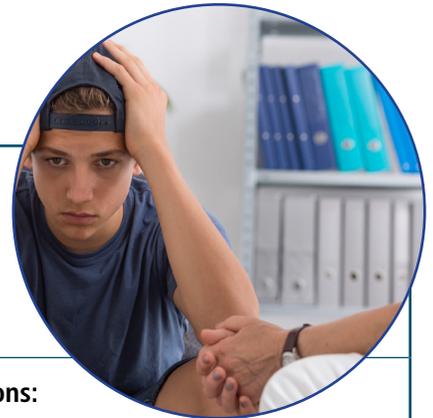
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## **“Just Like Me” Exercise**

Often our compassion resilience relies on our ability to step back from negative encounters. Try this 5-step mindfulness exercise when you are with someone you serve, colleague or family member and feelings of compassion seem out of reach. Do it discreetly. With your attention geared towards the other person, tell yourself:

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## Moving from Establishing Empathy to Engaging the Person in Discerning Best Action



### 1. Focus on the moment and what's manageable:

- a. "What seems like the next best step for you to do?"
- b. "What feels doable right now?"
- c. "How can I/we be helpful to you, right now?"

### 2. Listen for and reconnect them to their strengths to open their minds to solutions:

- a. "I heard your frustration and anger. I also saw your strength. You seem to have some ideas about what you'd like to do about this."
- b. "Who helps you see your strengths?"

### 3. Focus on the recent past, when the challenge was not a barrier for them:

- a. "I noticed recently that you were able to \_\_\_\_ (feel or act in a certain way). What was different about that time?"
- b. "Sounds like this has come up for you in the past. Is there anything about how you dealt with it then that would be helpful to remember now?"
- c. "When you felt this in the past, what was one of your strengths that allowed you to deal with it?"

### 4. Change perspective and focus on desire to change:

- a. "What do you see as the benefits of dealing with this challenge?" "What might be the effects if you do not?"
- b. "If you could have a clear head and light heart right now, what do you imagine you would do?"

### 5. Recognize when the person feels stuck and assist them to think about what it would take to become unstuck: (If you want to offer suggestions, be sure to ask for permission first.)

- a. "You seem stuck right now. Do you need some time before you can think about next steps?"
- b. "Who is 'on your team' that you trust to offer suggestions?"
- c. "You seem a bit stuck when it comes to ideas for what to do next. Would you like me to offer some options to get your own ideas flowing?"
- d. "We both have seen others face similar challenges, would it be helpful to talk about what we remember worked for them?"