

# Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

# What Is Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)?



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## Description

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Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) is a relatively new psychotherapy approach which was originally developed to work with shame and self-loathing (self-criticism). CFT is embedded within contemporary neurobiological understandings of the human mind. *What Is CFT?* is an information handout describing the key principles of compassion focused therapy (CFT).

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## Instructions

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This is a Psychology Tools information handout.  
Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – to provoke a discussion and explore your client's beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – to improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Supervision tool – to develop formulations and knowledge.
- Teaching resource – a learning tool during training.

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## References

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Gilbert, P. (2009). Introducing compassion-focused therapy. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 15(3), 199-208.

Gilbert, P. (2010). *The compassionate mind: A new approach to life's challenges*. New Harbinger Publications.

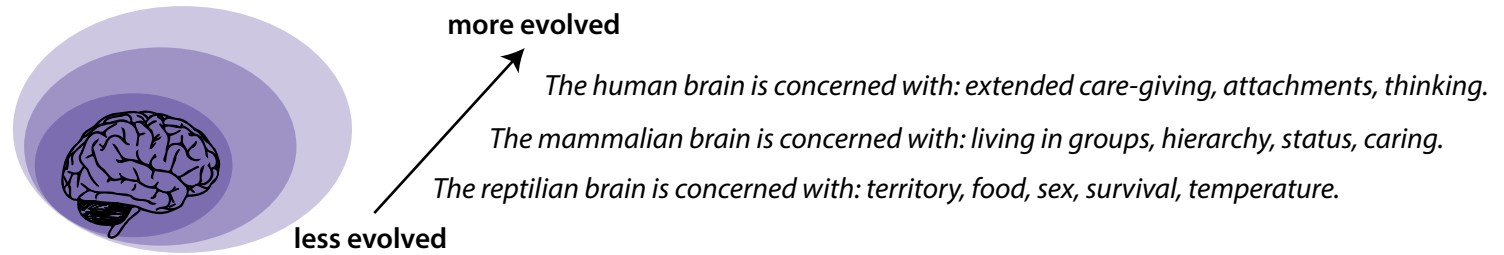
# What Is Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)?

## Background

Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) was developed to treat shame, self-loathing, and self-attack (self-criticism). CFT is transdiagnostic and is useful for working with diverse conditions such as depression, anxiety, trauma, and psychosis. CFT is a new model of psychological functioning - it draws upon the science of human nature, evolution, and attachment.

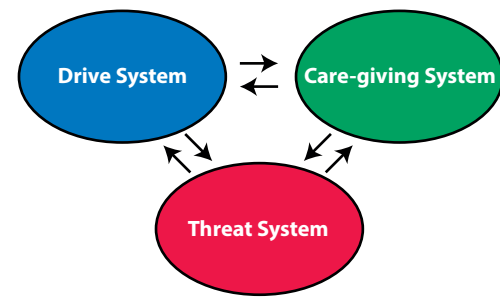
## Evolution and the brain

CFT builds upon the science of human nature. This means understanding that our brains are the product of evolution, and that we live with the legacy of brains that were not designed with our happiness and wellbeing in mind. Different parts of our brains have different motivations, abilities, and interests. The way our brains are built, and the context in which they have developed, affects our experiences and how we can live our lives.



## The CFT model

CFT proposes that human beings have three systems for managing their emotional states. Each system has different motivations, foci of attention, thoughts, emotions, and body feelings. Each system is associated with different parts of the brain, and with different neurochemistry.



	Threat system	Drive system	Care-giving system
<b>Motivation</b>	Survive	Achieve, win	Look-after, soothe
<b>Attention</b>	Threat-focused	Goals, advantage	Empathy to distress
<b>Thoughts</b>	About danger	Achieving	Caring, soothing
<b>Emotions</b>	Fear, anxiety	Positive, motivated	Safeness
<b>Physiology</b>	Highly aroused	Aroused	Calm
<b>Behavior</b>	Fight or flight	Focused	Look-after, soothe

We are all born with threat systems that are ready for action. If our other emotion systems are well developed we have choices about which system we use at any particular time. Through no fault of their own some people's childhoods were not as good as others – and so they have not had the opportunities for their care-giving system to be as well developed. This means they have fewer ways of coping with the stresses that everyone faces in life. People in the threat mindset are more likely to try and cope by fight or flight – avoiding things (flight) or being self-critical (self-fight).

## Alleviating suffering by developing compassion

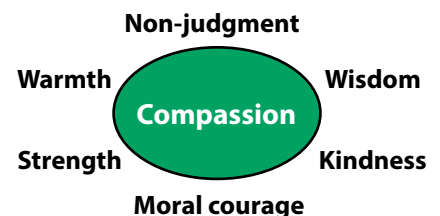
Everyone will experience pain in their lives, but suffering is a particularly human ability. Suffering is associated with the way we experience our own minds. The goal of CFT is to alleviate suffering by developing your care-giving (compassion) system – allowing you to live more comfortably in your own mind. The care-giving system has the qualities of non-judgment, strength, warmth, empathy, wisdom, kindness, and moral courage. Treatment using CFT involves: learning about human nature, learning skills to develop the care-giving system, practicing activating the care-giving system and using it in your life.

## Key messages

“The things that have happened to you in your life are not your fault, but it is your responsibility to alleviate your suffering”

“Compassion is about choosing to be the best version of you that you can be”

“You are living a life that was not of your choosing”



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