

The Perfectionistic Therapist – Opening Mindfulness Exercise

Start by closing your eyes or looking down towards the floor, placing your feet squarely on the ground and sitting up in your chair so that your back is straight, and your head feels supported on your shoulders.

Notice the feeling of your body resting on the chair, including all the parts of your body that are touching the chair. Notice how your feet are resting on the floor. Take three slow, deep breaths, and let your body sink imperceptibly into your space, feeling the support of the chair and the floor, holding you in place. Allow yourself to settle comfortably into your space. Give yourself permission to make any adjustments to be comfortable.

Consider your answers to the following questions. Allow your ideas to pass through your mind, without needing to hold onto anything tightly.

1. **What would you like to get out of this workshop?** Allow the thoughts to drift through your mind. Consider your **intention** rather than forming a specific plan. [PAUSE]
2. **Consider your personal struggle with perfectionism. How would you like to change this?**
[PAUSE]
3. **How would you know that your perfectionism becoming less of a problem? What positive changes might you notice?** [PAUSE]

Now take one further deep breath and allow a gentle smile to form across your face. In your own time, feel your feet resting on the floor and your body resting on the chair. Open your eyes, and let's get started.

The Passengers on the Bus - Mindfulness & Visualisation

Start by closing your eyes or looking down towards the floor. Begin by noticing the feeling of your body resting on the chair. Noticing all the parts of your body that are touching the chair. Notice how your feet are resting on the floor. Let your body sink almost imperceptibly into that space, feeling the support of the chair and the floor, holding you in place. Gently lengthen and deepen your breath. [PAUSE]

Imagine you are driving a bus down the road towards a life that you love. This life is full of all the things that are important to you, such as loving relationships, satisfying and challenging work, and making a contribution to others and the planet. Breathe in deeply and taste the sweetness of this life down the road. [PAUSE]

On your bus with you are a bunch of passengers. One of these passengers is your 'Perfectionistic Self-Critic'. It glares at you and comes right up to the front of the bus to insult and criticise you. It tells you what you can and can't do.

- Imagine your passenger in your mind's eye. What does it look like? Notice its posture, facial expression, and attitude towards you. [PAUSE]
- Notice the kinds of unhelpful and unkind things your passenger says to you. [PAUSE]
- Notice whether you believe what your passenger says. [PAUSE]

This passenger is so loud and horrible, that naturally you try to keep it quiet. There are several ways to do this. One way is to do exactly what it says. So, when it yells "Don't do that! You might make a mistake!" you do what it says. And in the short term it quietsens down. Yet while you are doing what your passenger says, how much progress are you making down the road towards your future, filled with the things that you value? [PAUSE]

Another way to keep the passenger quiet is to argue with it. Notice that to fight, you must take your hands off the wheel. What progress are you making towards your future when you are busy arguing? [PAUSE]

And if you check with your experience, have you ever won an argument with your passenger? Do they ever get tired or admit defeat? [PAUSE]

There is another way.

Despite your efforts, your passenger is going nowhere. It is not getting off the bus. You are aware that fighting or criticising your own self-critic perpetuates the problem – you're fighting fire with fire. What would it be like to allow your self-critical passenger to come along for the ride? [PAUSE]

Consider what lies behind its barrage of negativity. Underneath its shitty behaviour lies a good intention for you. After all, it's part of you. Maybe it wants you to be safe, free of suffering, or achieve great things, and it goes about this in an unhelpful way. [PAUSE]

Using a warm tone of voice, talk to your self-critical passenger in a caring way, saying:

- May you be well
- May you be happy
- May you be free of suffering [PAUSE]

Imagine compassion flowing from you to your self-critical passenger. If this is difficult, focus your intention on being compassionate to your passenger. [PAUSE]

Now allow these images to fade from your mind's eye, bringing with you this warm feeling of self-compassion. Feel your feet resting on the floor. Your body resting on the chair. And when you are ready, open your eyes and gently return to this workshop.

Loosely inspired by Dr Mary Welford: 'Self-Compassion for Dummies'