

Self Empathy/Regulation Process

Eric Bowers

If you are aware that your amygdala is activated, that you are in fight/flight or freeze and struggling to stay connected and compassionate with yourself or another,

- You can connect to your prefrontal cortex, regulate your upset, and find a healthy response to the situation by observing your breath, thoughts, and sensations; feeling and expressing your emotions; and connecting to your needs (see the self-empathy process below).
- Or you can reach out for support (empathy buddy, counsellor, nature, etc.).

In order to better regulate/calm your emotions, you need to build your body and mind awareness. Regular self-empathy will help you better regulate your emotions as well as increase your body and mind awareness. If you are not aware of amygdala activation, you will react instead of responding with choice.

Note: Your Inner Leader (IL) is a part of you that can unconditionally accept you as you are. If the term Inner Leader doesn't work for you, find a term that is right for you. Your Inner Leader can also be someone or something else that you bring to mind holding you just as you are—a friend, family member, object, entity, etc.

The Self-Empathy Process

1. Write down a clear, judgment-free observation of the behavior that was upsetting for you. If your situation has more than one observation, start with the most difficult one.
2. Bring forth your Inner Leader (IL) and imagine yourself in a place where you feel supported and accepted—with a friend(s), in nature, with an animal, etc. From this place, have your IL say to you and all the parts of you that are activated, "I've got you." Or, "I'm with you." Or, whatever your IL's first-response phrase is. Each step below can include a nurturing statement from your IL.
3. Write out the thoughts/Jackals about your observation, including judgments, interpretations, blame, criticisms, stories, no matter how mean. Have your IL welcome all your Jackals.
4. If you have the privacy, say your thoughts out loud with their full intensity and notice the sensations and emotions in your body. Bring your full presence to the sensations and emotions in your body. Have your IL welcome those sensations and emotions. Breathe into them, and express them with words, sounds, movements, or however you'd like to. It can help to breathe in and out through the mouth when feeling and expressing emotions. If you become lost in thoughts, return to step 1.
5. Pull out your needs list and look for the needs that your thoughts, sensations, and emotions are pointing to. Ask yourself, "Do I need _____ (insert need guess here)?" Listen to how your body responds to each needs guess. When you feel a release or shift in your body, then your need guess has landed. Then ask, "If this need were met for me, what deeper need would be met?"
If you're having difficulty finding your need, ask yourself, "If the outcome I want

happened, what need would be met for me?" Keep referring to your needs list. Have your IL welcome your needs.

6. Connect fully to your needs and stay present with any emotions that arise. Stay with your breath too, as well as any expression that wants to continue. Often there is sadness that comes up as we get in touch with our needs, other times it's anger or fear. Embrace and express whatever feelings and sensations and needs arise. Breathe into and through them. Let your body move how it wants to move.
7. Once the emotions settle, explore all of the energy of this need. Ask yourself: What does this need feel like when fully met? How do I move my body when this need is met? Does this need have an image, sound, or color? Bring to mind a person, place, or thing that helps you meet these needs. See how much you can expand or amplify the energy of the need. From this energy of the need, see what you'd like to ask of yourself or the other person to meet your need.

If your emotions aren't settling and you don't feel an opening in your body, you may need support to fully express your Jackals and emotions and to connect more deeply to your needs.

8. Make some guesses as to the need the person was trying to meet with the behavior that upset you—the observation in step 1. Look honestly at your life and explore how you have met this need in ways that are painful for others. Don't get caught in comparing the frequency or severity of your actions to the other person's. The point is to acknowledge that you too have met that need in painful ways. If you truly can't find examples from your life, think about what life circumstances led this person to act this way.

Sometimes triggers resolve quickly with the above process; sometimes they take longer because of the degree of trigger and how much it relates to old pain and trauma. The sooner you notice you are triggered, the easiest it can be calm your emotions and connect to your needs. Stronger triggers can be very difficult to regulate with self-empathy and support from an empathy buddy or therapist may be necessary.