



# Compassion- Focused Therapy (CFT)



## **What is Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT)?**

Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) is a group programme run by the Department of Psychology in St Patrick's Mental Health Services (SPMHS). It is an evidence-based psychological intervention that aims to increase self-compassion and reduce self-criticism and shame.

As humans, we all experience pain and suffering in our lives. While the term “compassion” can mean different things, in this programme we understand it as a “sensitivity to suffering in self and others, along with a commitment to try alleviate and prevent future suffering” (Gilbert, 2010). This definition consists of two parts. First, moving towards suffering, that is, trying to understand our suffering and that of others with sensitivity and empathy and, second, committing to alleviating and reducing that suffering.

CFT recognises that feeling cared for, accepted, and connected with ourselves and others is important for our psychological wellbeing. When we experience these things, we tend to feel soothed and this enables us to live our lives in a healthy way. Some people experience strong internal criticism and feelings of shame that result in rarely ever feeling a sense of being at ease. This can make life very painful. The CFT programme aims to explore and teach ways to work with our pain and suffering, and to generate feelings of soothing and connectedness.

## **What is the structure of the CFT programme in SPMHS?**

The CFT programme consists of two phases. The initial phase is a six-week psychoeducation group. This is called Level 1 Psychoeducation Group. The second phase consists of a 16-week psychotherapy group. This is called Level 2 Therapy Group. If, after engaging in the psychoeducation group, you, the CFT team and your multidisciplinary team feel that engaging in the therapy group is a good fit for you, you will then be referred to the next available therapy group.

The CFT group takes place one day each week for three hours, with a break included. You will be invited to an individual reflection session at the end of the psychoeducation group and mid-way through the therapy group. Following completion of the therapy group, you will be invited to a final individual session to read through your therapeutic ending letter, which summarises your journey through CFT.



A list of dates and times will be provided to you before starting the group. If you are aware that you will be missing any sessions, it will be important to discuss this with the CFT team, as it is strongly recommended that people attend all sessions.

CFT is a closed group meaning that all participants begin and end the programme at the same time. This helps to build connection and belongingness. Our aim in group is to develop attributes and skills associated with compassion. These skills will involve working with imagery, attention, reasoning, and engaging in compassionate behaviour.

Being in a group like this may bring up memories of pain and suffering from the past. This group involves moving towards that suffering rather than away from it. In CFT, participants are invited to share as much as they are comfortable with, and the facilitators will support and guide you with this.

## **Who is the programme for?**

CFT is a transdiagnostic group meaning that those who attend may have different diagnoses, but they will all identify with longstanding, pervasive self-criticism, and experiences of shame. CFT is for people who struggle to feel relieved, reassured or safe, and for those who have difficulty receiving compassion from others, and offering self-compassion.

## **Who runs the group?**

Each group is facilitated by two psychologists and an assistant psychologist.

## **How are referrals made?**

All participants who attend CFT must be under the care of a multidisciplinary team in SPMHS. If you are interested in attending CFT, you can speak to your team psychologist who will help you determine if this group would be a good fit for your needs.

All referrals to CFT must come through the team psychologist. Once you have been referred, you will be placed on a waiting list based on the date of your referral. You will then be invited to a more detailed assessment for the group by a member of the CFT team. This may be some time after you have met with your team psychologist, depending on when a new cycle is starting and the length of the waiting list.

## More information

- **The Compassionate Mind Foundation UK:**  
[www.compassionatemind.co.uk](http://www.compassionatemind.co.uk)
- **Mindful Compassion.**  
Gilbert, P. & Choden, (2015).
- **The Compassionate Mind Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Developing your Compassionate Self.**  
Irons, C., & Beaumont, E. (2017).
- **Compassion-Focused Therapy: Exploring the effectiveness with a transdiagnostic group and potential processes of change.**  
Cuppige, J., Baird., K., Gibson, J., Booth, R., & Hevey, D. (2017). *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 57(2), 240-254.
- **Subjective changes in mind-body attunement associated with transdiagnostic group-based compassion-focused therapy.**  
Mernagh, M., Baird, K. & Guerin, S. (2020). *Mindfulness* 11, 2016–2026.

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