

Self-Care Strategies MIND: An Invitation to Accept and Let Go of Resistance

We can develop expertise in compassionate action and resilience through training, even changing our brain's neural responses to the suffering of others.¹ Just as the way to develop our bodies after years of inactivity is through gradually introducing exercise, cultivating compassion resilience is no different. And, just as the introduction of exercise inevitably leaves us feeling the soreness of our first steps, sometimes our steps towards becoming more compassion resilient can be uncomfortable. The good news is that the discomfort decreases as we incorporate what we learn and life satisfaction increases. Wishing the discomfort away is not helpful.

Resistance is when we wish that our current reality is different than it is. The truth is that often what we resist persists. For example, fighting sleeplessness can lead to insomnia or fighting anxiety can lead to panic attacks. Rather than resist we aim to accept who we are in this very moment, as much as we can.

Just as Pavlov's dog learned to associate the ringing of a bell with the arrival of food, some of us have learned to associate close relationships with the arrival of punishment, rejection, or compassion fatigue. After experiences of harsh treatment at the hands of friends, family or significant others throughout our lives, we can come to associate closeness or support with a pending threat. Or, we may associate times that we have offered compassion without boundaries and became fatigued or burnt out. This can lead to some difficult feelings, and it certainly can lead to resistance to the idea of compassion and compassion resilience.

When we notice "resistance" to compassion — in others or even in ourselves — we are watching a natural process of responding to expectations of threat. We can remember that it is not our fault that we experience such resistance. It may be helpful to remember that compassion becomes increasingly available to us as we become available to it. We will learn new ways to protect ourselves from the type of compassionate action that drains our well-being and see that such action turns out not to be compassionate after all.

Reflection:

What reactions did you have when you heard that your organization will be focusing on building compassion resilience over the next few years?

What experiences from your past do you think informed how you reacted to this news?

If you experienced resistance, practice accepting your resistance as being "what is for now." What will help you to shift from resistance to openness about this experience? Consider how you might communicate this to the toolkit facilitator(s).

If you felt "all in" when this experience was introduced, how might that be detrimental along the way? What do you need to sustain your openness? Consider how you might communicate this to the toolkit facilitator(s).



¹ Weng, H., Fox, A., Shackman, A., Stodola, d.,...Davidson, R. (2013). Compassion training alters altruism and neural responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*, 1-10.