

# compassionate activism

**Sandra:** Hi, everybody. This is our first Q&A practice session for the three month training program for Compassion Activism. We have an hour together. It's been about two weeks, I'd say, since we did a training, where we covered all the model as well as the five practices of Compassion Activism. Hopefully you've been able to try it out in the past couple weeks. Since this is a practice, this was a new skillset for folks, there's going to be struggles. You're going to kind of suck at it in the beginning, and that's okay. That happens. You're not perfect at something the first time you do it, and that's really important to remember as we do this, because I guess I think a lot of folks try.

Especially as adults, we try something new for the first time. It doesn't work out 100%, and then we say, "Oh, we can't do it," and then just don't. This is why I really wanted to make sure that we had a longer program that goes beyond the two-day training, because it's really about how do we incorporate it into our everyday life, how do we keep practicing it, how do we build this muscle up so that we get stronger and we develop muscle memory so that over time it becomes more default. It becomes our go-to, actually.

I wanted to start out by just flagging one of the main things that we've seen people really struggle with, that if they focus there then it's very hard to do Compassion Activism. What this struggle is or what this challenge is is really when we focus on the other person first and foremost, primarily. A lot of people, when they come to Compassion Activism, they think that it's about being compassionate toward the other person, so in a situation where they said something problematic, something hurtful, something oppressive. Oftentimes our reaction is we just want to make them stop. We want to focus on them, and we ignore what's going on with us. We know we're upset, of course, but we're just playing out all of that but focusing on the other person.

They often want to know, "How could I be compassionate to the other person so I'm nicer, gentler, more peaceful in life? We could have hopefully more productive conversation." My response to that is that the compassion in Compassion Activism is not about the other person. It's not actually about the other person. It's about being compassionate to yourself. As I said before, compassion is used in all sorts of different ways in our society, and sometimes it's used to actually coddle and enable people who are being harmful. Sometimes it's used to make you feel bad, like you're a bad person if you're not feeling an overwhelming sense of compassion. Sometimes it's used the way I think it's what it's actually designed to

be, which is, for me the definition on compassion is in the presence of pain, you feel moved to do something to help alleviate it.

This is really not something that you can force to come up for yourself. Feelings like compassion, or happiness, or joy, or sadness, or anger, whatever it may be, feelings aren't things that we control. If we could control and make ourselves "feel something", have a certain feeling, we would feel happy all the time, wouldn't we? We wouldn't need this program. Clearly, it doesn't work to try to control our feelings. It's like controlling the weather. You can't make it be sunny. You can't make it rain. You can't make it snow. It just happens. At the same time, we try really hard to control it, and that's where you have to put the focus on. I say shift away from there because it's a futile battle. You're never going to win that one clearly.

Like I said, if we can control our feelings, we would all just be happy all the time. Instead, it's like shift the focus. Shift the focus to what is really going on with you. I say shift the focus to what's going on with you, because we have first and foremost a responsibility to ourselves, and when something harmful has happened to use, we've been wounded. Just like a physical wound, if we don't pay attention to that wound and all we do is focus on the other person who caused that wound, we're still bleeding. It might get infected. It might get gangrene over time. We are the only ones who can make sure that we take care of ourselves. The other person's responsible for their own well-being. We're responsible for our own well-being.

We are the only people who ... When I say we're the only people that can do something for ourselves, it's also an acknowledgement of the amount of ... We have power with ourselves, because we choose where to focus. With anybody else, we can just invite. We can only invite them to consider, consider thinking about things is a different way or doing something differently potentially, right? When we focus entirely on the other person, first and foremost we actually give up our power, because we make them responsible for how we feel. You can do that. There's no right or wrong to that, it's just not really effective. You're just giving up your power because you don't control the other person. You don't make their choices for them, and most you can do is invite them.

You can try to coerce them, too, but we're not really about coercion over here, so that'd be anti-oppression. That would not be aligned with social justice if we're trying to control people. I want to have people note that if that's your go-to gut reaction, just notice that. Notice that and be like, "Okay. I want to really focus on the other person, and I haven't really started with myself. I don't even know exactly what's going on really with myself except for this initial reaction to the situation," and being like, "Okay, let me unpack that," using the tools that I've

talked about in training, mindfulness and moving [through 00:06:56] the body. We'll be practicing that, as well.

I wanted to really highlight this struggle for folks, because it's just one of the most common ones that we encounter and knowing that is half the battle, knowing where you're going to want to go that's not helpful to being able to shift your focus back to yourself. Once you get good with yourself, and you've accessed the pain, and you've become aware of the need, you'll naturally feel called forth to do something. You won't be trying to just force yourself to do something. You'll be naturally called forth to do something actually, and that's how you know that you're there because this work is not about forcing yourself to get anywhere, it's just about being where you are, actually. Ironically, when you are just where you are, that oftentimes will allow it to be released, and you'll shift into some other places, actually. I just want to flag that for folks. If anybody has questions about it specifically, I can take that. Josette.

**Josette:** Other than the specific struggles people were mentioning, I didn't see any particular questions. I'm answering a question now that's unrelated to what you were just talking about, so I don't know if you want me to read some of the struggles people said they were having. I can do that.

**Sandra:** Yeah.

**Josette:** Okay.

**Sandra:** If you see one that's [crosstalk 00:08:39].

**Josette:** Yeah. One that a lot of folks tended to echo [inaudible 00:08:49] was one that was stated by Angela who said, "I feel apprehension when I deal with people who try to control and be manipulative. I have to be able to reassess my actions. I am not so emotionally responsible, but feel stuck in certain relationships." That was a common theme in a lot of the statements.

**Sandra:** Yeah. When we talked about the toxic swirl of the make-believe world, and just as a reminder, toxic swirl is basically when we are resistant to what's going on in the situation or what has happened, and we make either ourselves wrong or the other person wrong for what's going on. For example, something happens and I can be like, "How could this happen? I don't understand why." They should've been different. They should've known better. "Why did I let it happen? Why am I so weak? Why are they so wrong?" Judging, shaming, blaming, all that jazz and not acknowledging that it just happened. It happened. Yeah, it actually did happen.

Most of the time when we come from that toxic swirl of make-believe, and I call it make-believe, because it's literally ... All that happened was some stuff was said, some stuff was done, and we've made it mean ... One, we keep insisting that it should've been different when it's not, hence it's still make-believe, and we extrapolate huge things from it, like, "I'm a terrible person because this situation happened," or something. It happened, and I have some choices about how I want to react to it, what I want to do about it. This is why I call it the make-believe world, and when we stay in the make-believe world and we try to deal with the situation, it's incredibly emotionally charged for us.

The more we are caught up in the toxic swirl and we're like a dog with a bone but we're the bone and the toxic swirl's the dog shaking us around and not letting us go [inaudible 00:11:08] grips of it, when we try to approach the situation from that world, it is not going to work out for you. Yeah, there's going to be lots of apprehension, anxiety, stress, lots of frustration. It's the opposite of ease and spaciousness. That's another huge flag for you, saying that, "Hey, we're in toxic swirl. We're in toxic swirl." Nothing is workable from toxic swirl because you're literally throwing your time and energy into make-believe so you can't do anything about reality.

This is why to break free from the toxic swirl, from being in the grips of it because there's a difference between, "Hey, I'd prefer that this hadn't happened. I'd prefer for folks to not think that was perfectly okay to do. I'd prefer for me to have felt comfortable to say something in that situation," of course, we have these preferences, but that's different than when we feel like we're in the grips of it, and it consumes us and invades our thinking. That's a very different thing than just have a preference for something and wishing that was to be true. It's one thing to wish it and to hope for it and to work toward it, and it's another thing to have a coercive demand that it be so and we whip ourselves when it's not happening or whip the other person when it's not happening.

That's why it's not functional. It's not workable when you're there. You can do it if you want. I'm not saying you can't, I'm just saying you'll notice the impact, which is basically you're really stuck and it's not usually functional for you. You're not getting the results that you want. That's a moment for you to realize, "Okay, I'm in toxic swirl so let me start engaging in the five practices of Compassion Activism." The way you know that you're moving through Compassion Activism and you're ready actually to engage in the other person conversation is, like I said, you feel called forth to do. There's an ease about it, not necessarily that it's easy, but there's an ease about it. There's an openness to having the conversation. That's just really consistent with it. I won't go into exactly why right now, but that's a thing.

I think it would be helpful probably if I did an exercise for folks, because this is really where the rubber hits the road. I can talk and talk and talk about it, but it's really about the practice, and so I'm going to provide a guided exercise where I'm going to be going through the five practices ... I'm going to be helping you really getting to practice three, four, and five. Now, here's the thing I want people just to note as I do this is that, because it's a group of y'all, I'm going to be moving at a certain pace through the exercise, which doesn't mean that it's going to line up with where you are. If I'm somewhere in the exercise and I'm saying to acknowledge a certain feeling and then I move on to something else and you feel like you're not ready, you still feel like this is some place you need to be, you feel like you'd be forcing yourself to move on to where I'm talking, I'm leading the guided visualization, then just stay with where you are.

That's also part of the practice, is just acknowledging where you are and accepting this is where I am and staying with it. When you feel naturally called forth to move forward in a different way, then it'll happen. You'll naturally shift if you don't force a shift. Just be where you are. I'm going to be working people forward. Because I have a group, I have to go at a certain pace. I can't do it individually, of course. I will be coaching somebody individually in a minute, though, afterwards, so to have you know that. Wherever you are, if I move on and you're like, "Oh, I want to stay here," please do so and tune out my voice a little bit until you feel ready to shift.

Also, this is a practice. We're trying. We're practicing, and everything may not work out for you in this and you may not get through everything, and that's perfectly okay. It's not right or wrong, it's how far you got in the model. Hopefully that makes sense. One of the thing is just first I want folks to get comfortable and close their eyes. It always helps to close your eyes, get a little less self-conscious. Now I just want you to take a breath. Just breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. Notice the breath filling your body and your breaths coming out. Now, I want you to listen to your chatter in your head. It's probably saying something to you right now. Don't engage with it, but just notice what it's saying.

Maybe it's saying you have to do something. How come you don't get it? Maybe it's upset, or sad, or angry, or just trying to get you to feel like you should or you shouldn't have, have to, can't, why can't they, whatever it is. Notice as you're paying attention to that voice. What's coming up in your physical body, and just noticing where it is in your body as you're listening to that chatter in your head. Now, I want you to put your hand there. Just put your hand wherever you feel the sensation strongest in your body. If it's in multiple places, you've got two hands. Just breathe into it. Breathe in, and then breathe out. Breathe in, and then breathe out.

I want you to just notice what the sensation's like in your body. How big is it? How much space does it take up? Is it moving? Is it dense or is it spacious? Is it clogged up? Is it free? You're not trying to change anything. You're just noticing what's going on. Keeping your hand where you feel it strongest in your body, I just want you to say, "I see you." Breathe in, "I see you," breathe out, "I see you." Breathe in, "I see you," breathe out, "I see you." Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. I want you to just notice what it feels like to see it, to see that sensation, to acknowledge that in your body. Maybe nothing's happening for you, maybe something's happening for you. I want you to keep your hand where you feel it strongest in your body again, and just repeat, "I see you. I'm here."

Breathe in, "I see you," breathe out, "I'm here." Breathe in, "I see you," breathe out, "I'm here." Breathe in, "I see you," breathe out, "I'm here." Just notice, once again, observe what's coming up for you, maybe something nothing. Keeping your hand where you feel it strongest in your body and keeping your eyes closed, just repeat to yourself, "I see you, and I care. I see you, and I care. I see you, and I care. I see you, and you matter. I see you, and you matter. I see you, and you matter." Just notice again what's coming up for you, maybe something, maybe nothing. Maybe it's shifting. Maybe it's the same. I want you to ask it what does it need from you, what can you give to it. Maybe it says something, maybe it doesn't, but ask.

If it didn't tell you something, just say, "When you feel ready to tell me, I'm here." For the folks who gotten this point and they have something, we're going to move on. If you feel like you're not there yet to move on, that's okay, just sit with whatever affirmation that I mentioned that really felt resonating with you or you felt was good for you. Just repeat to yourself, breathe in, "I see you," breathe out, "I care," wherever it may be. If you're in a place where you have a feeling and you're not ready to care for it yet, just be like, "I feel sadness, and that's okay. That's happening." Stay with wherever you are right now. Keep practicing that.

For the folks who got to a place where they got in touch with the need, you were told something, we're going to move on. I want you to keep your eyes closed and thinking about doing the thing that was asked of you. Notice does it feel easy to do, does it feel like you have some opening there, does it feel stuck still, does it feel hard? There's no right or wrong, just notice as you envision doing what you've been asked you to. I want you to envision the other person now, which may or may not have been part of the action you took. I want you to envision the other person in the situation, and think about where they may have been coming from when they did that hurtful thing, not to justify it or excuse it, but just where might they have been coming from where that made sense to them. If they intend

to [think 00:26:06] that was harmful in the first place or wasn't that harmful, why might that be the case?

Based on what you know about this person and some speculations about why they may have done this thing, what's something that you have in common? Maybe it's just for both of you not to be hurt. Maybe it's both of you to be happy. Maybe you want a work project to turn out well. You want to do good at your job. You want there to be peace in the family. Just note what things might you have in common, and then when you have something, from there what do you have a shared value around? You want peace in the family maybe or you want the work to go well. What might you want to create with them? Just some ideas. Think about who you get to be when you create that with them. What kind of person do you get to be? Just notice what's coming up for you as you're visualizing this. Maybe it's something, maybe it's nothing.

I want you to thank yourself for giving yourself the time to do this exploration. Know what it's like to be here, wherever you are in the process. I want you to take a couple deep breaths, breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out, and start to wiggle your feet, move your hands, stretch, open your eyes, and come back to here and now. That was a little journey. I have no idea how it happened for y'all. Like I said, there's no right or wrong to where you got to. Maybe you're just at the first part, and you're just noticing and saying, "I see you," and that's it. That's great. Maybe you got as far as the need, and you felt like that was something you were ready to do. Maybe you got as far as the seeing [their 00:29:26] other potential reality, and you had a vision of what you all could do differently together once you dealt with the pink elephant in the room.

There's no right or wrong, just wherever you landed, you landed. It's cool. I am going to share a screen, the white board, and I want folks just to write what their feelings are right now. What the sense they have right now? Is it a sense of stress, relief, frustration, peace, anger, joy, sadness, whatever it may be? You can use the group chat, as well, if that's your preference. It's just noticing what, after we've done this little exercise, where are you? All those different feelings that I listed are perfectly valid feelings. One person shared relieved, something wants to get free, concerned I can't resolve things, joy mixed with sadness, fear of further humiliation. It's a range of stuff, and that's all part of the practice. It just means that wherever you were in the process, there's just more to go right there, not trying to force yourself to move forward, just sticking with it.

Someone's mentioned that this is also the furthest they've gotten with this exercise. That's important to know, because this is a skillset. It's a practice. It's something that, like I said, we suck at doing in the beginning because it's new, and in time, we get better at it. There are days where it's harder. There are days

when it's easier. I know that me myself, sometimes I'm still stuck in it, and then, one, I know that I can get in touch with it, and I know who I can turn to to ask for support when I need it so I'm not a lot alone. That's why it's important to do this work in community, with us, with me. It's a process. It's always a process, but we have the options now.

I want folks to also type in the chat box what did they learn as they were doing this, either noticing how far they got into it, maybe an insight they developed, or where they got stuck in. Like I said, there's no right or wrong to this. It just is what it is. Somebody shares, "I can see that the messages are not clear. I see the writing, but it's blurred. There's darkness with green [and 00:32:40] can't tell me." That just happened, right? We're not quite sure what's going on, but there's something there. Somebody shared, "I got far, and when I thought about the other person, I started feeling fear of being further oppressed by them or being rejected. That just means that you can pull back and go. You can be with that fear, or you can go to where you were before we moved on, and just being with yourself and addressing your own needs.

People are saying, "So many [occasions 00:33:22] this applies to, so I will need to take it slowly, one by one. Once I focus on being compassionate for myself, my true nature emerged as that of a helper. The toxic swirl impedes my ability to help others to co-create." People have very different experiences, and what's coming out for them are different. I'm going to keep saying the same message over and over again, which is, there's no right or wrong to this. It just is where it is. That's really, really important, because we live in a society that tells you you have to be perfect. You have to really fit into this little box, whether that's the woman box, the man box, or whatever box you have, or like the high-achieving box, whatever box has been imposed upon you, that we have to or else we're not good enough.

This work is shifting away from that and just being like, "Hey, this is where I am, and that's legit. It's legit where I am. It deserves to take up space, because that's where I am." We can acknowledge that and then choose what are we going to do about it. I want to take the time to coach somebody, whoever's willing to get some one-on-one support to help folks move through. Where we end up, we end up, right? If anybody wants to volunteer ... Robert wants to volunteer.

**Josette:** Yep, Robert is our first volunteer.

**Robert:** [inaudible 00:35:11].

**Sandra:** Do you want to share? Robert, hello?

**Robert:** Hello. Is this coming through?



**Sandra:** Yes.

**Josette:** Yes, I can hear you.

**Sandra:** Great, we can hear you. Why don't you tell me a little bit about the situation, not a lot, but just give me a quick little summary?

**Robert:** I don't really have much of a specific situation in mind. I don't really know how to say it. I think it's more a fairly regular thing that ... I'm sorry. I don't think I can explain it very well.

**Sandra:** Do you want to ... Is it less a situation and more just a feeling that you have that you want to talk about?

**Robert:** I think so, yeah.

**Sandra:** Okay. Tell me a bit about this feeling.

**Robert:** I think the best way I could describe it is, sometimes I feel like I don't get taken seriously. Yeah, that's really [inaudible 00:36:52], I think.

**Sandra:** Right. When this happens, where do you notice your reaction happening in your body?

**Robert:** Let's see. I think it was somewhere in the head last time.

**Sandra:** Do you have the feeling right now?

**Robert:** At the moment, no.

**Sandra:** Can you tell me a bit more about what it's like when you have that, when you were in situations where you feel like that's happening to you, where you're not being taken seriously? What messages are you hearing, either you telling yourself or other people are telling you?

**Robert:** I lost it, I'm afraid. Sorry.

**Sandra:** That's all right. Do you want to continue?

**Robert:** I think I would like to try and do get through this. Yeah. [inaudible 00:38:36] the messages I sometimes get, I think they're usually coming from within, rather than from without, things like, "You don't know what you're talking

about," and, "You've been wondering this for so long, why haven't you figured out by now?" Things like that.

**Sandra:** What types of situations does that sometimes come up in?

**Robert:** I think these usually happen ... Sometimes it's just a matter of when I'm alone with my own thoughts. Sometimes it comes up during one of my discussions. Sometimes I'll just overhear something that sets that off.

**Sandra:** Yeah. Are you having that feeling right now come up for you as you're talking about this?

**Robert:** I am getting a little bit of it, yeah.

**Sandra:** Where are you feeling it in your body?

**Robert:** I'm noticing it around the mouth area.

**Sandra:** Can you put your hand around your mouth but not cover your mouth, so I can still hear you at least somehow?

**Robert:** Is this okay?

**Sandra:** Yeah, I can still hear you.

**Robert:** Okay.

**Sandra:** Tell me a little bit more about the sensations or the feeling as it's manifesting around your mouth?

**Robert:** It's sticky. Yes, it's a mix of sticky and dry.

**Sandra:** How big is it? Is it covering from your cheek to cheek, your jaw, your entire mouth, beyond it?

**Robert:** It seems to be in the entire mouth.

**Sandra:** Mm-hmm (affirmative), the entire mouth? Is it making it hard? Is it hard to move then because it's sticky? What's going on with this stickiness? Is it moving sticky or is it stuck sticky?

**Robert:** It's not moving, no.

**Sandra:** It's like a stuck sticky, like in place?

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Sandra:** Does it have a color?

**Robert:** I haven't noticed one.

**Sandra:** That's okay, too. Is there anything else about this sticky thing that's covering your mouth?

**Robert:** Nothing about the sticky. I am getting something else elsewhere, though, in my other hand, the one that's not currently on the mouth. It's shaky.

**Sandra:** Is that feeling in your hand stronger than the feeling in your mouth, around your mouth?

**Robert:** I think it is, yeah.

**Sandra:** Okay. Why don't we shift over to your hand, then.

**Robert:** Okay.

**Sandra:** Is it your left or your right?

**Robert:** It's my right.

**Sandra:** What's going on? Tell me more about the feeling in your hand.

**Robert:** At the moment I just see the tremor.

**Sandra:** Can you speak up a little bit, too?

**Robert:** Sorry.

**Sandra:** No worries. If you had to put a feeling name to it, what would you name it?

**Robert:** I think fear.

**Sandra:** Fear. What are else are you noticing with the tremor? Is it like an internal feeling primarily, or is it actually physically externally your hand is trembling, too?

**Robert:** It started out externally, then when I moved my left hand onto it, it became internal.

**Sandra:** Is it through your arm, too, as well, or is it just staying in your hand?

**Robert:** It's coming up through the wrist, as well.

**Sandra:** Is a tight thing or kind of a loose thing?

**Robert:** It's very tight.

**Sandra:** Feel a little clinched?

**Robert:** I don't know if I'd say it's clinched, but it's definitely some sort of restricted.

**Sandra:** It's trembling and it's restricting you, tight?

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Sandra:** Okay. I just want you to put your other hand on it and [inaudible 00:44:57] breathe in, "I see you."

**Robert:** I see you.

**Sandra:** Breathe out, "I see you."

**Robert:** I see you.

**Sandra:** Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, "I see you."

**Robert:** I see you.

**Sandra:** Breathe out, "I see you."

**Robert:** I see you.

**Sandra:** Breathe in, "I see you."

**Robert:** I see you.

**Sandra:** Breathe out, "I see you."

**Robert:** I see you.

**Sandra:** What are you noticing now?

**Robert:** [inaudible 00:45:41] nothing yet.

**Sandra:** Can you speak up a little bit?

**Robert:** Sorry. Is this okay?

**Sandra:** Yes.

**Robert:** Okay. I'm not getting anything yet.

**Sandra:** Is it still trembling? Is it still tight?

**Robert:** I think I've got something. Now I'm noticing specifically in the fingers, there's a feeling of some kind. I think it's like the same as what I had in the wrist. Meanwhile, the one in the wrist [really 00:46:44] seems to have faded.

**Sandra:** It's moved, then?

**Robert:** I think so.

**Sandra:** Okay. It still feels like fear?

**Robert:** Yes.

**Sandra:** Okay. I want you to say ... How do you feel about feeling that fear?

**Robert:** I don't really know.

**Sandra:** Okay. I want you to say, "I feel fear, and that's okay."

**Robert:** I feel fear, and that's okay.

**Sandra:** Okay, remember, is just that it's happening. It's not like it's preferable. It's just [what's happening 00:47:35]. "I feel fear, and that's okay."

**Robert:** I feel fear, and that's okay.

**Sandra:** "I feel fear, and that's okay."

**Robert:** I feel fear, and that's okay.

**Sandra:** "I feel fear, and that's okay."

**Robert:** I feel fear, and that's okay.

**Sandra:** What do you notice coming up for you now?

**Robert:** Something has changed. I now have a cold feeling in the fingers. [It's not 00:48:23] the trembling, and it's now more of a cold thing.

**Sandra:** Is it like a comfortable cold, a freezing cold, a cool cold?

**Robert:** I think I'd describe it as a cool cold.

**Sandra:** Like a positive cool cold, or like a [brr 00:48:47] cool cold?

**Robert:** I don't know that it's either of those. It seems almost like it's sort of tingly.

**Sandra:** Okay. I want you to keep exploring it. We have five minutes left from the hour, so I want you to keep noticing and naming it, and then when you notice new, just sit with it, and then if you could put a name to it, like a feeling, like, "Okay, I feel blank, and that's okay." Repeat that five times, and just see where it naturally takes you. Does that sound good, Robert?

**Robert:** I think that sounds good, yeah.

**Sandra:** All right, good. I'm sorry that we can't go further, [I know 00:49:42], it's just there's the time constraint. [inaudible 00:49:44] interesting thing with doing these one hour things. Thank you, though. Thank you so much, Robert, for sharing that with us. It's not easy to come and talk in front of everybody else. I want to acknowledge that.

**Robert:** Thank you. [inaudible 00:49:59]

**Sandra:** Great. What I want people to notice in what happened, both when I was doing guided visualization as well as with Robert, is that it's really just about where you are and [inaudible 00:50:14] in there, and noticing, and listening. I say sometimes that to summarize the whole Compassion Activism is just three words, breathe, listen, invite. You apply that to yourself. You apply that to the other person. Breathe, there's a reason why I focus so much on the breath, is

because that just helps us pause and get out of the toxic swirl by re-grounding yourselves in the body, and then listening.

This is really what I'm asking folks to do over and over again is just really listen to yourself, listen to where you're at, because the toxic swirl, it's chatter in your head, all that stuff. That's normally what's going on consciously or subconsciously for us, and it's driving us. It's not necessarily what's underneath everything else, really. It's toxic messages from society. Listening not to the toxic messages, not to the toxic swirl or the chatter, but really just listening deep to yourself and then giving yourself that acknowledgement, which in some ways is so basic but just so hard for so many of us, because we've been taught to ignore, erase, deny, minimize, blame, judge, shame whatever it is that we're actually feeling, just listening, just keep listening and being with wherever you are. Then, you can invite it. [inaudible 00:51:54] these affirmations are actually invitations to ourselves.

We invite it. We're shifting our focus. We're saying, "I see you, and I care. Is there something you need from me? Can I give you something? These are all invitations, and the reason I focus so many and say, "Is it this? Is it that? It can be something. It could be nothing." This is because I want folks to really feel like it is true. You can be wherever you are. You don't have to be at some bar in order to be enough, just wherever you are is where you are. If it's sunny, it's outside. That's it. It's cold, it's cold. It's not preferable, but it is what it is. When we can have that type of, "Okay, that's what's going on, and what do I [want to 00:52:49] do?" It's not like I'm angry at the weather gods for making it snow today, and I'm going to put all my time into that, and therefore not deal with the fact that I'm getting snowed on, I'm getting really, really cold, I might get hypothermia.

Instead, it's like, "Oh, it's snowing. Yes, it's snowing. Okay. I don't want to be cold, so I'm going to get a jacket. Oh, I don't have a jacket. Let me ask somebody if I can borrow their jacket." When you shift from the toxic swirl of make-believe and you move into focusing on what's actually there through listening, then what you can do becomes more clear, but if it's not clear in the moment, that just means that you got to do some more listening to where you are right now. A lot of people's questions were basically that, some variation on that. They were trying to move forward when they weren't ready to. That's not right or wrong. You're just not ready to move forward. Just be with where you are, then. Don't engage in that conversation with the other person yet. That person will be there.

These situations will arise in the future anyways. It's got plenty of time to do that in the future. Right now, it's good to focus on yourself, because that's where you are. That's where you're being called to stay. If you feel stuck, it's because you're being called to stay in this position, stay in this place, not through the toxic swirl,

though. If we stay through the toxic swirl, that's just unhappy land. That's just not working, so getting back in touch through listening to yourself, listening to your body, where it's showing up, and just engage in that exploration. Wherever you end up, you end up.

I want folks to take a minute or so and think about, in this short time that we had together, what's one thing you want to make sure that you remember moving forward for the next couple weeks until our next session? I want you to put it in the chat box. If there's one main takeaway that you want to make sure you remember from this conversation, what would it be? It could just be where you want to focus in on, or it could be something to remember when you come across that obstacle that maybe came up today, or maybe it's that you learned some insight about yourself. People are saying self-care, compassion to yourself first, I'm not perceived as saying [fuck it 00:55:52], I say, "I see you, and you matter. What do you need?" Don't skip any steps. Really critical.

That's the thing that most people do. They jump to practice four and five of having the conversation with the other person and creating something different with them. If that's not naturally flowing for you, it just means that you're stuck in being where you are with your own self and need to get in touch with your internal reality before you can get in touch with somebody else's reality. That just means you've got to do some work with yourself first. Go back to my body, really taking seriously what's happening in me, I think that's really a great way of thinking about it, is that what is going on with you really does matter. Yes, what's going on with the other person is important, and you want to check in with them and try to do something different with them and have them behave differently. Yeah, I get that, but you are still the most important person to yourself.

No one's going to check in on you except for you. Even though somebody else asked you, you still got to figure it out for yourself. You've still got to listen to yourself if you want to share it with somebody else. It's the same thing, and really listening to yourself as you would want to be listened to by somebody else, by a friend of yours is creating emotional support. Give that kind of acknowledgement, no judgement, just being with you, just holding the space for your feelings to arise, not rushing you, not trying to change you, not trying to make you feel better. It's just being with you wherever you are. Be that good listener for yourself.

People also said, "Remember that it's hard for me to have conversations with my emotions, and that's okay, but I should still do it." [Shoots 00:57:53] are sometimes coercive, are oftentimes coercive, so I would reframe [this as 00:57:57], "It's hard for me to have conversations with my emotions, and that's okay, and I choose to have them. I can choose to have them." That's an



important re-framing from, "I should still do them," because that's a coercive demand that makes you wrong as a person if you didn't do it because you should do it. It's just, I can choose to do it. I can choose not to, right? That's when it's invitation. "I want to ask myself what I want, take time to do that, keep asking, keep the pain in my chest and heart by using affirmations and not ignore them."

If you do the affirmation work and you ask yourself, "What do you need?" And you don't get anything, that's okay. Keep asking the question, like poking and prodding at it. It's not there yet. It's not ready yet. Just say, "When you're ready to share, I really want to hear, so I'll be here when you're ready." It's that invitation again. Just go back to being there with it. You can think of it as like a wild animal that you're building that relationship with. It's skittish in the beginning, but you keep putting food out. The food you're doing is just this gentle attention, acknowledging its existence. That's your focus. When you're focused, that attention, that is like food for this wild animal that is your emotions. Think of it like that. You can make them. You can't tell at them. They'll just run away.

"When the sensations I'm focusing on seems to go, look out for other sensations coming up somewhere else." It's okay to not be okay. The struggle is real. All very true. These are all opportunities for us, and I say that pain provides a wonderful opportunity, and not because I love feeling pain. I don't, but what pain does provide is the opportunity to offer compassion, and acknowledgement, and care when it's most important. We have a choice when we feel pain. We can respond with fear and try to pretend it doesn't exist or try to run away from it, and that usually work out very well for us, but that's what we often do. When we feel pain, we can respond with compassion and take care of it, to the person who's most important to us, ourselves. If we don't do it, nobody else will.

Someone made a comment on the chat box that self-focus [and 01:00:59] selfish. I was like, "That's what I want to teach you." If everybody took care of their own house, what a different world this would be. If everybody could actually just be with where they are, and acknowledge that they too matter and how that would impact their ability to be with other people, and acknowledge that they too matter, it's actually the biggest thing that we could do for the world, is to take care of ourselves. On that note, I'm going to say thank you. I hope to see you next time. Thanks for everyone showing up.