

compassionate activism

Sandra: Hello everybody. This is day two of the initial training for the online program of compassion activism, and this is the first session. We're going to be covering the third practice of gentle mindfulness and compassionate self-accountability. Today, the other session that you just watched was showing, experientially, more what that was like to do. Today, in this session we're going to be covering more what are the components of it? What is actually different in what I am showing you, how to be with your internal reality compared to what you often are doing?

Per usual, this is a application based program. I want you to choose a situation that is somewhat emotionally charged for you. On a scale of one to ten, ten being most severe, choose something from three to five. The reason why I say this is just because this is a practice, and we're not very good at it in the beginning. It's a skill like any other, so we want to deal with some stuff that's easier. Easier to handle than something more severely charged things because there's more stuff to work with. Having some easy work in the beginning I think is important when we do this work.

As I said, we're going to be talking about the third practice of gentle mindfulness and compassionate self-accountability. It's really critical to spend a lot of time on this practice because it is the linchpin for everything else. If you can just do this and you forget about everything else, you're going to be okay. Be good to remember everything else too, but this is really the most important one. From here flows literally everything because this is what gets you from a place of where you feel like the world is constantly just throwing salt onto your open wounds to you healing that wound where it closes up, and now the world is just throwing salt on broken skin and that's it. You're actually in your full power.

You no longer feel stuck, helpless, powerless, voiceless. You feel, as I've been talking about, I believe that we're naturally creative, resourceful, whole, and you get back to that place. You do that by getting in touch with your pain and taking care of it. This isn't something that we've been taught how to do. We've been taught the opposite. I want to spend some time on just what it is that we normally do. What I call this is toxic swirling. Toxic swirl in the make believe land. I've been talking about how we're very resistant in what is going on inside of us and around us, and the reason we do that is because it hurts. It hurts, and so we want to run away from it. We want to make it smaller, we make it go away, want to keep being like it

shouldn't be happening because it hurts. That's completely understandable.

Especially when we haven't been given tools about how to be with that pain. We also live in a society that says the pain that's happened to us, the harm that's caused pain is not real. It's systematic oppression that's constantly on your mind in peoples experiences and saying it's not real, that you're exaggerating, you're being overly dramatic. Don't be so emotional. We have a whole lifetime having been given these messages. What that does though is that it keeps us in this world of make believe because it's not actually the present moment. What I mean by that is that right now what's happening, if pain is what's happening right now and we want to run away from it, why is that? If this current moment right now isn't violated, because sometimes obviously it is. Sometimes we do have moments where there's physical violence happening to us of course. Unfortunately that does happen.

Much of the time though, that's not actually what's happening, which doesn't make it less real. It just means that it's not necessary about right now. What's really important to understand is being able to distinguish where the pain is coming from. Is it coming from what's happening right now with me or is it coming from the past? There's a different response that we can do. If something right now is violating, is happening to me but I assume it's about my past, I'm not going to deal with what's in front of me then. If something is actually more about my past and not so much about what's happening in front of me but I assume that it's not about the present, then that's not going to be appropriate either. Oftentimes, it's honestly a mixture of both. That's also true.

It's really about getting instead of running away from what we're feeling and focusing on how it should be different when we talk about resisting, we try and change and minimize it instead, what we can do is bring mindfulness to it, which means getting and staying grounded in the present moment. We talked about in a second practice about acknowledging just what is going on. That's it. If pain and fear from the past is coming up in the present, that's in the present moment right now. That's all it is. It's just acknowledging. We had some tools that I gave in the other session where I feel sadness, and that's happened. I feel guilt and that's okay. It's now when I say, "Okay." I talk about acceptance, I'm not talking about it being acceptable. I'm talking about it's something that's happening.

I constantly use the analogy of the weather. Weather's cold sometimes, it's hot sometimes, it rains sometimes. It's windy sometimes. There's no right or wrong to it, it just is. I could be mad at the rain and resist and be like, "How could you be raining. I can't stand the rain. I don't want it to rain."

Then when I do that and I focus all my time on getting mad at the rain and not dealing with the fact that it's raining because I want I to be different, then I'm getting rained on. Of everything I didn't want happening, which is getting rained on, is happening because it didn't occur to me to go get an umbrella. I was just resisting the rain instead of being like, "Hey, it's raining. That's happening." I don't want to get wet, let me go get an umbrella or let me stay inside.

We do this all the time. It seems silly when I talk about something physical like the rain. We do it all the time when it comes to our emotions. Say somebody in our family says something that upsets us, it happens a lot. The ones that are closest to us oftentimes have the greatest ability to make us upset because we love them so much. What happens when they say something? Instead of being like, "Hey, they said that, how do I want to be respond to that?" Other times we go and it's like, "How could they? I can't believe that, they shouldn't have. How come I didn't say anything back" or "Why did I react that way?" There's a lot of judging, shaming, blaming.

We wish people wouldn't say problematic harmful things, of course. That's why I'm here. That's why I do that work. What I'm saying is that though when we treat it like a coercive expectation of ourselves and other people, when we make people wrong as a human being, we start to dehumanize them, we villainize them, we demonize them and we write them off. We treat them like a disposable. That's not actually creating more love and justice in the world. Is that the impact that we want to have? I would argue that it's not. It's also toxic to us. When we are in that space, when we get like "Eh," and everything in our bodies, it's like a blood pressure shoots up and we get stuck and we don't know what to do.

That's very harmful to us, to our health. To our physical health, to our mental health. It's like I said, it's because a lot of times when don't know how to be with the pain of what happened in that conversation, that somebody that we love, somebody that we care about so much who loves us, just did this really horrible thing. We don't know how to reconcile the two and be where both are true. One of the simple ways to start to be able to be with the fact that this happened was just to be like, "This happened." There was no necessarily wrong or right to it. It had an impact. It had an impact that was harmful, and it happened. It happened. We need to just be like, "Yeah, it happened." He said that. They did this. I'm like, "Okay, well what do I want to do about it? Do I want to do anything?"

There's a real shift. I'll give this to you now. I learned this in one of my programs. Unfortunately I don't remember which one, but the differences between saying "Yes but" and "Yes and." I want you take the situation that you have thought of, and normally it's, in a situation of a family member,

saying something like, "Yes, they said this, but I just can't stand it, I can't believe it," I was like, "because it's so harmful," and shifting to a "Yes, and." It's like yes they said this, and I think it's harmful. I want folks to write down for themselves right now, create your "Yes but" and their "Yes and." I'm going to type it in the chat box so you see it say "Yes" X "But" Y, and "Yes" X, "And" Y.

As you write this out, I'm assuming most people have written this out now, I want you to say the, "Yes but" sentence three times, and just notice what is coming out for you. Now I want you to say the "Yes, and." Somebody asked me a question to model one. Yes their perspective but my perspective. "Yes, they think it's okay to say this, but I think it's harmful," something basic. Yes, they think sexist jokes are funny, but I think they're harmful." Then I want you to create "Yes and" which would be the same sentence, you just swap out the but with the and. It'd be, "Yes, they think it's funny to make a sexist joke, and I think it's harmful." I want you now to repeat to yourself the "Yes, and" sentence three times.

Just notice how you feel. What's coming up for you as you think about the situation? I want you to compare the two now. People can put in the chat box, one, put your sentence as well as what is the difference with the "but" versus the "and." Sam, you want to sharing as people, the first being Maya? Sam's going to be sharing so I can rest my voice a bit.

Sam: Let's see. Maya said "but" is angrier, "and" is more peaceful. P. Family says, "When I use and I feel judgment come up." [inaudible 00:13:50] says, "Yes, my sister is a prick but I love her. Yes my sister is a prick and I love her." Those are the responses so far. Did anyone else have anything to add? Sheri B. says, "But focuses on my reaction. And opens the possibility for respectful conversation."

Sandra: If you just want to focus on the difference, you can do that.

Sam: Valerie says, "Yes, he says victim blaming isn't a big deal, but I think he should know better. Yes, he says victim isn't a big deal and I think he should know better. Still feel like I'm judging." Diana [Mena 00:14:42], "I don't feel like shutting down when I use the and." Donna says, "I feel more grounded with the and." Monica says, "Yes seems and phrasing seems to encourage the conversation without being confrontational." Bernadina says, "But feeds my frustration and anger. And helps me understand that my feelings are fair and can be accepted." Crystal says, "This exercise reminds me of improv comedy when someone has to keep answer with questions with "Yes but" and "Yes and." It always starts with [inaudible 00:15:26], but also allows someone to raise objections at the same time."

JC says, "But feels like I'm not thinking much about what come after. And feels like an opening, and also more caught up in the language I am

choosing." Raina says, "Yes, I think it is funny and think it's appropriate to point out someone else being sexist to the only females in the office, and I do not." Do you want me to keep going?

Sandra: No, I think I've got a good idea. Thank you everyone for sharing. Obviously there's a range of what people noticed coming off for them. I think the pattern that stood out for many folks though is one where the "but" felt like it ended the conversation. There was a bit of "Yes but" and you're butting heads and it's stuck. Whereas for folks who you had the same sentence, so the components were still the same and you just put an "and." You say "Yes and," well then a lot of folks felt like there was an opening to continue that conversation. It's interesting because I think most of the time in our conversations, when we talk to somebody about something that we thought was harmful we engage the "yes but" much of the time, or we just do the "but". We don't do much even, "Yes, I acknowledge where you're coming from. It's just like, "No, but" blah, blah, blah. That's normally how we respond to things.

As we've been talking about, systemic oppression is one that inherently denies peoples realities, denies their experiences. It erases folks, the sheer vastness of humanity that there is and all the different ways that we live and are authentic. This is actually the dynamic that we have learned how to do. I see people and I understand where it's coming from. When our pain is so big, it pushes out other peoples realities. I get that. That just means that we got to take care of ourselves, and our own reality and our own pain so then we can have some space to acknowledge other peoples realities. What happens when we do the "Yes but," that's actually denying or minimizing other peoples realities oftentimes, just in the way we do our language. We switch to an "and", then it becomes both are true. Both take up space and they exist.

Then we can have a conversation about it. All it is is a simple linguistic tool. This is just one of those little hacks that you can use. Whenever you feel stuck between a hard place and a rock, switch from a "Yes but" to a "Yes, and", see what opens up. You'll notice that your energy shifts. Your energy shifts. As we've been talking about, we can't make ourselves feel something. If we could, we would have. We would feel happy all the time. If we could make ourselves feel something, we would do it, but we can't actually. What we can do is we can shift our focus. We can shift our focus the way we think about things, the way we respond to things. Like I talked about before, when we shift our focus to focusing on the pain, compassion will often naturally arise. When we shift our focus to there being an "and", to both being true, then an opening for that conversation, the desire, motivation and openness arises.

If we try to make ourselves like we intellectually want to have this conversation with the person that said the messed up thing, but we're in this place of where we really want to butt heads and we're in a lot of pain, you can't be in a place to have that conversation where it's not going to take a toll on you. It's not going to have this greatest impact on them either, the other person, because you're not really into acknowledging their reality either. That's why I'm saying forcing yourself to do these things, one, is harmful to yourself because anytime we force ourselves, just because it's you who's forcing yourselves and not somebody else that's forcing you, that does not mean that it's less controlling and abusive, when it's you versus somebody else.

This is why this work, people come to this program wanting to always focus in on the other person. I keep being like, "It's about you honey. It's about you because you owe a responsibility to yourself." How are you treating yourself, because we've all internalized this stuff. We've all internalized this systemic oppression saying that we're not worthy. We do not have a hand in self-worth. We are the ones who need to give it to ourselves the most first and foremost. Because then no matter what the society keeps throwing at us, there's going to be salt not on an open wound, but salt on broken skin. Then you model it after other people and it spreads.

I hope some people got some stuff out of that. Like I said, that's a quick little tool that you can do. Sam, can you see all, everything? Some of you can't see my entire ... is the third the last point on the screen? Yeah, there we go. I just moved it up one. Actually let me go back to this. I want to take questions on this actually. I'm going to stop and take some questions. I really need people noticing when this toxic swirl make believe is happening is critical. That's when you know that you need to start practicing. Whereas the first, second or third practice, it fries it for you. I want to take some questions from folks who are confused by it. Trust me, if you're confused by something about it, I swear so ain't other people. Please, I know I'm not one of those people who used to like to raise their hand in class when I was a kid, so I understand that feeling, and it's really helpful.

Sam: Becky had asked a lot earlier talk more about the toxic swirl of make believe. Becky, did you want to elaborate on exactly what's confusing you?

Sandra: You can also type it in the chat box if you prefer. If you're on the telephone, it's star six.

Sam: Perfect. Becky says the elaboration helped. Mary had asked, "What about repeating patterns of toxicity from the same person because that person keeps on exhibiting the same problematic behavior, that's a lot harder for me to not have any past connection to that."

Sandra: What I'm saying, both is true right? We're all capable of growing and changing. That's why y'all are here. Y'all want to grow and change, be more who we truly are and to free ourselves. Habits are hard. It's both. Both are true. The other person, if the other person is engaging in toxic behavior and abusive and controlling behavior your responsibility is to yourself. Your responsibility is to take care of yourself and listen to yourself and what you are telling yourself to do in those situations. We talked about this before, having compassion in that situation, be compassionate first and foremost to yourself. Know what the pain is happening to you by being with this person. Get in touch with your own pain.

Like I said, compassion will naturally arise. You'll see what needs to happen to relieve that pain and suffering, and then you can go and get support to do that. After you take care of yourself, if you choose to, if you want to, you can look at the other person and have that conversation with them, which we'll talk about in practice number four. They are responsible for themselves. The thing is us modeling is the best thing that we can do for folks to be quite honest. Us modeling how to be loving to ourselves, that's what helps people change and grow. We can talk until we're blue in the face to folks, but if we're not living it, how much are they really going to listen? Why would they? You're not doing it.

Energy is contagious. I think I read some article at some point how they've scientifically proven this, something that we've known. Energy is contagious. When someone comes to the room, people can be happy but if someone comes in the room all stressed out, it starts lowering the happy energy in the room. Sometimes the flip side happens. It depends on the level of energy and how receptive the other person is to that type of energy. Energy is contagious. I think what happens is that when we model that we have this loving energy, we can hold other people as being creative, resource and whole because we hold ourselves as naturally whole to. People start, it gets people thinking. I think the best thing we can do to help the world is really to heal ourselves.

Sam: Also have a question from P. Family. "Choosing or not choosing to engage feels like escaping activism by not speaking up. Can you please elaborate?"

Sandra: This is a practice. This is a skill. In the beginning it's going to take time for you to do this. You have to consciously think about it and take the time to intentionally engage in a practice. In time as you do it, it's going to come faster and faster and faster. It can happen in a split second. You can shift very quickly. At that point you can address a situation in real time. I have conversations where I actually think about where am I. I check in with myself. I was having conversations with one woman. She was a white woman and we were talking about white supremacy and about how I was

saying how there are a lot of white people who don't understand or don't know or agree the fact that white supremacy is still pervasive in our society. She was like, "Oh I can't believe that. I can't believe they wouldn't notice that. They wouldn't see that of course it's true."

Then I said something how I've experienced racism and she was like, "But you can't experience racism. You're white." I looked at her. This is in New York City. It's New York City, it's very diverse. It's not like Vermont where there are no Asian folks or anything like that and I can have a little different understanding sometimes. It's New York City, I had a moment. I thought about that for probably like three seconds. I could have gone either way. I could have gone and blow it, and just be like, "No conversation like this. I do not have time for this." To being like "How am I really feeling though?" Where am I? I'm very grounded. Not always, it depends how my energy levels are doing actually.

I can be very grounded and centered in myself and my wholeness when talking with people who have lots of unconscious privilege. In that moment I checked in. I was like, "I'm good," so I decided to have that conversation. It continued, she said some other stuff. I won't get into all that. I was able to dance in the moment with her and just respond and help her see what is going on. Then she realized at the end of that conversation, which was short actually, it was probably another few more minutes, she was like, "Oh wait, I'm one of those white people." I was like, "Yeah, you were." She was like, "Oh okay. Do you have some stuff I can read?" I was like, "Yeah, go to my website."

That's not something that I would have been able to do before, but because I've been practicing, I can get there really quickly, shift. I can notice where I'm at and I can make a choice. Like I said, this stuff is going to be happening all the time around you. It's like we take hits as we do this work. We're constantly taking hits as we do this. The more conscious you get of how pervasive systemic oppression is, the more you see it everywhere. We have to take care of ourselves along the way as we take the hits, and we do that by focusing on ourselves, doing things that rejuvenate us, reground us as well as taking care of the pain, and also being being in community. Community is why it's important. People have been commenting in the chat box that they love being in this space where people are being honest, and they feel like people have a great understanding [inaudible 00:30:39].

Do this work. Build your capacity. You got to take that time for yourself because you deserve it. The rest of the world is going to continue to get messed up, and you deserve to take care of yourself, to be good. That builds your capacity to also respond in kind. I think some people are asking to see the toxic swirl. Actually I have a better thing. I think I want to

talk a little bit more about shifting because I want to make sure we get to some other stuff. There's going to be some other stuff we talk about toxic swirl.

How do we shift from toxic swirl to gentle mindfulness? We're not just noticing and then not doing it. When you notice yourself resisting your feelings, you resist your feelings by trying to change it, make it go away, make it better. We do this all the time. If we feel upset, people are trying to be helpful. One of my things is I sometimes feel like I'm alone in the world, and I'm not important to other people. That's one of the stories I told myself when I was younger in order to make sense of the world. We all have these stories that we use to survive and make sense of the world. I'm talking to somebody about that, and they're like, "You know you're not alone. You know you're really important." I was like, "No helpful right now. I am where I am. I need you to just be with me right now."

Yes, that's true, but that's not where I am so just be with me now. Don't try to change it and make it better. That's something we like to do. We don't want people to be upset. We don't want to be upset, so we try to do everything to pretend like that's not happening. Well it is happening. It deserves to be honored. Our feelings have a right to take up space, to exist in the world. We also often draw shame or blame ourselves for the feelings we're existing. Being like, "How could I feel this? Ugh, again." Frustration. All understandable. It's not fun to be upset. I never said it was. Like I said, it has a right to exist. It's a red flag. Your emotional system is telling you something important is happening.

This is coming from somebody, I did not have access. I was not in touch with my feelings for the first two decades of my life. The first two decades of my life. Sorry. Because I wasn't in touch with it when that shit would happen to me, it wouldn't really register as such because I was not in touch with pain, fear, anger, sadness, any of that. Once I opened up those flood gates it was like, "Whoa." Then I would notice I would get upset sometimes about something, I wouldn't even know why. Then I would check in with myself. A lot of times it was from my past, but sometimes it was about what was going on in front of me. Then I could be like, "Wait, hold on. That wasn't cool. Let's talk about what you just did to me or what you just did."

They exist for a reason. It just means that there's something that's tender that needs our loving attention. It needs a little TLC, tender loving care. TLC, it's tender loving care, right? What we do instead we just bring mindfulness to it. Which in non-jargon terms just means sitting with what's present for us right now, acknowledging our feelings and being like, "Yeah, you exist. You matter." We practice that and we practiced some of those in the last session where it's like I feel sadness and that's okay, or I see you.

I see you and I care. These are very simple things. Just doing that, as people talked about. For many people, and not everybody because like I said, it's a practice and we're starting fresh for some people, where a lot of folks felt a lot release and they felt a shift.

A lot of folks won't notice that, that it starts out the initial reaction, maybe it's frustration, maybe it's anger, when you validate that it gets released and you go down to the next layer, which may be sadness. You release that. It may be fear, you acknowledge and release that. Go to pain, and then you can do something about pain. Once you get in touch with the underlying pain, that's actually something you can take care of. Do you get that? People spend all their time running away from pain because it hurts. No doubt. It hurts, so they don't want to be in touch with it. Here's the thing, when you know what hurts then you know what you can take care of.

It's like if I got my arm cut off, that's a terrible thing obviously. If I stayed in the toxic swirl of make believe, I would be like, "I can't believe it. My arm got cut off. It shouldn't have got cut off. I can't do without an arm. What am I going to do? I might get gangrene. How could I let myself get cut like this in my arm? How could I have done this?" All understandable and that's a natural reaction. My fixation on it, there's a difference between having a preference and having a fixation, a coercive expectation, an attachment to that degree. It's just like that's the only thing we can't think of. Of course if I got my arm cut off, I would have those other thoughts being like, "Well it shouldn't have happened," being pissed off, "How could you? What am I going to do without an arm?"

I'm not going to be in the grips of it. Toxic swirl has you in the grips of it where that's the only thing that you can see. It's like you're a dog with a bone and you are the bone, and the dog is the toxic swirl. What mindfulness does to you, and you also have a mindfulness or a meditation practice, is that you've been taught that that's come in. You can just let them go. They're like clouds, they can just kind of be there and float away. That takes practice too obviously. What happens is that after the initial shock of getting your arm cut off, you can be like, "Okay, my arm's been cut off. What am I going to do? I need a tourniquet. I need to go to the hospital," whatever it may be. You take care of that and then it heals.

Same thing with emotional wound. It's the same damn thing actually. It's actually that simple but we make it very complicated because we have been taught ... I'm going to jump to this. We have been taught that our pain is not real. We have been taught that when our humanity is denied, our experiences are denied, when we are violated, whether that be physically, emotionally, individually, through institutions, by things we see on the media, these are all things that constantly tell us that we don't exist

or the way that we exist in the world is no longer valid. We get told a different way, it's like, "Hey, nothing really happened." We try to speak out, when we try to say what happened to us we get shut down, it didn't happen or you're just making it into a bigger deal than it is. You're exaggerating. It was your fault. You were asking for it. If you just pulled up your pants it wouldn't have happened. Behave different, if you weren't wearing that then that wouldn't happen to you.

Why do you keep talking about it? You're just making it worse. These are so often the reactions that we get when we try to speak out. One of the things that when I talk to people about feminism and what it means to them, what a difference it makes in their lives, I used to do this as part of the interview process when I would hire new folks. Every single person actually gave the same answer. For them, feminism, particularly intersectional feminism, gave them the framework, gave them language to name what they had been experiencing, all the harm that they had been seeing and experiencing themselves in a world that was normalizing that harm. I was like, "No, actually that is harmful. What you're experiencing is true for you."

That [inaudible 00:40:26] narrative is very problematic and is not the whole truth in everything. Not in the way they're trying to teach you. This is part of this work because, can you see the bottom? We have learned this lesson incredibly well. Now even if we stop getting these toxic messages from society all around us through our family, our friends, our coworkers, religious institutions, media, government, whatever, if we weren't hearing it from all of them, we'd still keep on doing it because we've learned those lessons so well because they got taught to us when we were really little as children.

That's one of the big things, as children we get treated like we're property where our parents are our caregivers, they can do anything to us. We're very incredibly emotionally and physically vulnerable, so even if we had wonderful, wonderful parents or caregivers, there are still these moments where our feelings got ignored, got dismissed, got stepped over. Whatever happened, life happens. Bad stuff happens. Painful things happen. We got easily overwhelmed. Even people who have really great upbringings, unfortunately there always are things. Somebody I know, very, very smart, except around math. She told me that one day she was talking to her math teacher, she was a kid, and the teacher said something to her that made her feel like she wasn't good at math. Ever since then she never tried at math. She was little, she didn't know.

She felt really hurt by that comment. That just stayed with her. That was just a wound that stayed with her, impacted her for the rest of her life and her ability to do math. As an adult we can think back upon that and be like,

"That's not a big deal," but as a child we don't know. Sometimes children, a lot of times it's just like they're trying to make sense of the world around them, and they blame themselves and they'll make themselves wrong in order to be like this is why bad things happen. It's how people operate and learn. They're like little sponges. You were this little sponge trying to absorb and make sense of everything. These are the things that you learned. This is why I'm saying it's not much use to be judging and hating on people because we all lived through this. It's just that some folks were able to heal and move beyond it, and other folks are still stuck in the past, still living that out.

That's why doing this work, learning to acknowledge our own feelings and not suppressing our pain and actually getting in touch and take care of it like they matter, because they do, that is powerful. That is actually revolutionary. I'm going to stop for a second here. It is at thirty minutes. I'm going to stop for a second here and take questions on this. Sam, with anything people?

Sam: I see questions from earlier. Do you want me to pull some of the earlier questions or did anyone have questions about what was just said?

Sandra: Let me move on then. In case someone wants to see someone get coached, we will do that in the next session for sure. This session, it depends. Can you see everything? This is just the summation of what I've been talking about, how we're the ones responsible for ourselves. Compassionate self-accountability, what that really is, we talk about the accountability, holding people accountable, and that's really about holding somebody else accountable. What I'm talking about here is holding ourselves accountable. Accountability, taking responsibility, that is an invitation that we do to ourselves and to other people. We don't have control over other folks. We can invite them to listen and consider the impact that they've done or reflect on pondered behavior. It all is an invitation, it's up for them to decide.

For ourselves, we have a choice. We can choose whether or not we are going to it and reflect on the harm, on the impact and on behavior. We're the most important person to give that to ourselves. We do this not to punish ourselves, not to beat ourselves up for not being perfect, because we do that a lot. We beat ourselves up for not being perfect. A lot of overachievers probably in this room with me. We don't do it for that reason. I put compassionate in front of self-accountability for a good reason, because a lot of times because we have inherited a model of punishing, where it's focused on punitive measures or focused on making you wrong as a human being, it's focused on hurting you back to be quite honest. That's not what this is about.

As I said before, compassion is that we are moved in the presence of pain to relieve it, to do something to relieve that pain and suffering.

Compassionate self-accountability is acknowledging that we are hurting. When we do something harmful or we experience harm, that's all pain. We get in touch with that through mindfulness and we are then moved to do something to address it, to relieve it. That means acknowledging that we have not. Had we been taking care of that pain previously, then it would have healed. The fact that it still exists all these years later it just means that we haven't been taking care of. We've been ignoring it. We've been doing exactly what we have been taught to do, deny, minimize, blame, shame, police, silence.

That's what we have been taught and that's what we've been doing and that hurts. That's just kept that wound being open, festering. You are the ones throwing salt on the open wound. We just got to take responsibility for that, not to make ourselves wrong, not to make you feel worse, not to beat yourself up about it, but just be like, "Hey, this happened. It happened. I did that and it had this impact on me and I want to stop doing that. Let me take care of it." This is why in the exercise I did with you all, at the end I had you ask what do you need? What can I give you? You'll notice there was a shift. Some folks felt like they were already in a place to give that and do that. Other folks was still a little unsure, but at least you knew. At least you got something concrete to work with.

This is the difference when you talk about the toxic swirl of make believe because nothing's going to change. You can't do nothing with make believe because it's make believe, and that's why you get caught up in it. That's why you're like a dog with a bone where you are the bone, because you can't move forward, because there's nothing to move forward on in make believe because it's all make believe. Hopefully you guys get in touch with the pain. That's something real and concrete. It may be in your head, but that's not less real because it's in your head and body. That doesn't make it less real. It's still really real, it's still really valid. Just because it's not exactly a hundred percent about what's happening in front of you does not make it less real. It's still really real. Just means it's more about your past. That's all. It is what it is.

We have a choice about how we respond to it and we stop running away from it. we shift our focus to actually what's going on with us and we have a choice about what we want to do. Let me make this big. This is all this. The tagline for this program is responding to everyday oppression with love and justice. This is just another recap of the process, another framing of it, of restoring internal justice with love and compassion. This is justice within ourselves. Like I said, you're the most important person to yourself. If you wait the entire time for other people to give this to you, you just gave up your power because you can't control them, you can't make them. That

type of coercion, abuse and control is not the type of world you want to create anyways. Not if you actually thought about it.

Usually we want to make them stop, we want to make them, we want them to agree with us because we're hurting. The thing is you have the power to actually heal that hurt. You just go to shift your focus to yourself again. Everyone's going to get a copy of this stuff on the PowerPoint, so even if you don't get to write all of it down it's okay. You're going to get a hand off version.

Like I said, this is something that we need to practice. I created these quick little formulas for folks that help us create a new groove. I mentioned it before, all these toxic messages we've heard our entire lives, they've cut this groove in our bodies, in our minds, deeper and deeper and deeper each time. Whether it's like I'm unlovable, I'm not important, I don't matter, no one cares. I'm unworthy, there's something wrong with me. These are just messages that have cut a deep groove and so they're old habits. Our bodies shift to it easily. It's about repeating. It's about creating new habits, new thinking patterns. It's just to start out some foundational formulas that I use all the time with folks is I feel okay, I feel X and that's okay or that matters. Some folks are not ready for that.

I was working with somebody who didn't like speaking in public. He was a student in college, and he wouldn't raise his hand. He wanted to say stuff but he felt like if he said something it might be quote/unquote "stupid" and then he would feel embarrassed. He didn't think he was smart enough. I said, "What about "I can say something that's not brilliant in class and that be okay""? He couldn't sit with that. To say that was total rejection for him. I was like, "Okay, well how about it's possible to say something that's not brilliant and that be okay," he could be with that. When I was going through my deep healing process, one of the things I would repeat to myself is that I have the right to be happy because I did not believe that at that point in time.

I just kept repeating that. I did a mirror exercise where I would look in the mirror before I brushed my teeth, I would say that ten times to myself. It was hard in the beginning for me to say that because I so did not believe that that I would start crying. Now of course I have a right to be happy. I'm going to work hard to be happy. I'm going to do what I need to do, but it wasn't like that for me back then. If it feels like, this is ridiculous, you can say it's possible that I have the right to be happy. Work with what you got. Sit, pay attention, listen to yourself. I see your pain and I care. If it's something that you did and you're hung up on it, you can't seem to let it go, like, "I can't believe I did that. How could I do this? How come I didn't do anything?" You feel yourself with a dog with a bone, that's the toxic

swirl, you should be like, "Okay, I didn't do that. I didn't say X," whatever it was.

"I didn't do it and that happened" or "I did do it and it happened. Just acknowledging, get re-grounded in reality. It happened. I want us to practice them right now. I want folks to think about that situation. Actually no, I want folks to just take a pause right now. Just take a couple deep breaths. Just breathe in and then breathe out. Breathe in and then breathe out. I want you to listen to the chatter in your head. What is it telling you? It probably was telling you something like you have to do something or it can't believe you or it is some sort judging, shoulding, blaming. You're stuck between a hard place and a rock. It's probably one of those things. Our minds, like I said, we learn these lessons well, systemic oppression, where there's something wrong with us.

Depending on what came up for you, I want you to create a compassionate self-accountability statement, an affirmation. If it was a feeling or it was a sense of pain that you had, whatever it may be. Something that acknowledge where you are, that counters that toxic message and your toxic self-talk. Play around with it. I want you to just take a second to play around with different variations and see what resonates with you. What I mean by resonate is that you'll feel your energy rise to meet it. Play around. Try a couple different ones out. When you got one that feels good to you. When you got one that feels good to you repeat it five times. It feels good but slightly uncomfortable, that's a good one. You want to be ... oh maybe not. That's a good one. That's [inaudible 00:57:28].

I'm going to give you a minute to do that. When you've got a statement, repeat it five times. I would like folks to start typing in the chat box and just sharing, sharing what your statement was and what difference, if you notice anything, if you notice anything after you said those affirmations to yourself, repeated them. Say nothing happened for you, say you didn't even create an affirmation, you couldn't find one that actually resonated with you, that's okay to. That happens. Notice a pattern? This is also a group thing, so I need to facilitate. Maybe you get interrupted [inaudible 00:59:22]. You get interrupted and it breaks up the mood. That happens. Try doing it later. Sam, if you want to share. I think someone mentioned to not say peoples names?

Sam: Let's see. Someone said there's a big difference for me between "it's okay" and "that matters." There's an affirmation here, "I feel angry with myself and that's okay, that matters." They added "That's scary to say." "Someone said, "I'm not alone."

Sandra: Then you can say, "I feel fear and that's okay." Go with where you are. If that brings fear up, you can try to continue with that statement, I can feel

anger and that's okay, but then if you also feel like I want to deal with the fear, you say, "I feel fear and that's okay." Be with where you are.

Sam: Someone said, "It was hard to say it out loud and I started crying." Someone said, "I feel drained and that's okay, and I did feel a little more okay about it." Someone said, "I'm frustrated with my sister and how my family relates to her and that's okay." Someone said, "My experience is denied and it's okay. It feels do different from my experience is denied and that matters." It is powerful to be able to counteract the old messages. I feel hopeless and that's okay. It was uncomfortable but it felt like the shoulders in my tension was finally releasing and it really felt okay. There's a question, are you open to answering a question?

Sandra: Let's hold that because that's a good question.

Sam: Okay. Someone said, "I started saying I see you, I care to the pain of a loved one whose pain I cannot handle, and they are making me suffer because of their suffering. I've been resisting saying it's not my responsibility, but this statement, "I see your pain and I care," puts me at a distance and makes me more empowered while thinking of that person." Someone said, "I think they said I feel like I'm whining. I feel stuck and that's okay. Repeating it helped me feel more empowered around the emotion." That's what we have so far. Someone added, "I was able to acknowledge the impatience and disappointment I feel constantly without being dismissive."

Sandra: The question that somebody had earlier is, "What do I do when I've stated my feelings and needs and the other people continue to ignore me?" Sorry, taking out the cough drop now. As people can tell, people have a range of experiences, but on the whole more people than not felt that the acknowledgement did something for them. It released something for them. They were giving to themselves what they were not receiving from the rest of the world, and that made a really big difference. All that was was like two minutes. Folks, y'all get that. I had you do something for two minutes. Imagine if you did those two minutes every single day. Maybe you took those two minutes twice a day, two minutes each time you heard that toxic voice.

In the model I talk about how this is not about doing it 24/7, 365 days year. This is about doing it in a moment and doing it more moments. This is what I mean. This is the huddle, to use a sports analogy. I don't play sports, but I heard this and I like it. This is the huddle. This is the huddle where we talk about this, we practice this before you go out to the real game. This is a practice with two minutes here. You can do two minutes any other point in time. Two minutes when you're in the bathroom. Like I said, I used to do it before I brushed my teeth. Make it a habit. Then when other people continue to ignore when you stated your feelings and needs,

you have a handle. You're taking care of yourself already. It is nice when other people do. It's great when other people do, but you don't need them.

You don't need them to give it to you. You already give it to yourself. That's what I mean. You get your power back when you do this. Your ability to then share your truth from this place of natural wholeness is so much greater actually. Their ability to receive it, other people to receive your truth, your feelings and needs changes. Not always. I can't promise you that of course, but it's because you're coming at it differently, then the possibility that it's going to be different for them is there. If you come at it the same way that you always shave and you've always been getting people to ignore you as a response, I'm not saying this new way necessarily is going to have them not ignore you, but I'm just saying you doing something different, the likelihood that something is going to be different in their response is greater.

What's most important is that you're giving it to yourself. As you saw in these two minutes, people felt a shift, people felt more empowered, people felt a release, people cried, in the release way I'm assuming. That's what you can get. All it is, we've been so focused on trying to make ourselves feel different, we weren't focusing on the stuff that actually would probably lead to us feeling different, which is beating ourselves up for not being happier, for not being more at peace, for not being more compassionate. That's what we've been doing. Like I said, it's like the weather. You can't make the weather happen, but you can shift. We got no more power over the weather, so you can shift our focus to what we do, to what we say to ourselves.

These are just words that you're saying to your brain, but they make a big difference in your reaction, in your body and the way it responds. When we did the exercise in the other session where I thought how you think of the most delicious food you've ever had, you all got hungry, y'all sat salivating. There's no food here. There was not food in my mouth, there was no food in your mouth, and yet your body responded. Do we control whether or not we feel hunger when the hunger arises? No. We can't make it come and go. We can choose to eat or not to eat and that creates feelings of hunger or not. It's the same thing with our emotional feelings as it is with our physical feelings..

When you really get that, you start to really understand how much power you have in your life, in your experience, all of your life. We still got ten minutes. I want to take questions on that. Not takeaway yet. I want to take one or two more questions and then we're going to do key takeaways.

Sam: Questions as in new questions or maybe older questions?

Sandra: If you feel like I haven't answered the old questions, that works too. If there are new questions based on the content I've said, the experience, that'd be welcome as well.

Sam: If someone has an old question that they want to resubmit because it wasn't answer, you can go ahead and do that now, or if you have a new question.

Sandra: We can just move on to key takeaway because I apparently so brilliantly explained everything. Everything is wonderfully clear to everybody. It's wonderful. I love that.

Sam: Someone just asked, "What if when you ask your feelings, what they need, they say they need acknowledgment from others?"

Sandra: You can ask that. You can go to the person and you can say, "Is there somebody specific that you want acknowledgement from?" Then ask for details, so that you know exactly how to do it. They're like, "Well I need you to talk to this person and ask them to acknowledge." Remember folks, you can't force other people to do stuff. Then you start getting abusive and controlling. That's how we've been taught, I know. That's how we do. That's how we act oftentimes. What we can do is invite folks. You can let them know that you're going to share what's going on with you and you're going to invite somebody else to acknowledge that. That's you doing it.

Whether or not they actually agree with you, that's up to them. You took responsibility and asked for what you wanted. Nothing wrong with that. That's all great.

Sam: Someone asked what do you see as the difference between "And it's okay" versus "And that matters"?

Sandra: it depends on how it's living for you. Sometimes the feeling that we have, we want push it down because we feel like it doesn't, how do I say, that we're being judgmental of it. You shouldn't exist or it's not reasonable for you to exist. This isn't all personal. You got to play with this. For me, the way I see the difference, the way I experience the difference is that it's okay because for me that means it happened. For me saying it's okay means it's happening. It's happening. It's okay. Those feelings of fear, sadness, guilt, they have a right to exist. Other folks I understand still don't feel it's okay actually means it's happening, we're acknowledging it. They feel like saying it's okay still feels like it's saying it's acceptable because that distinction is not so alive for them as much.

I don't want people to get tripped up on the word "it's okay" and feel like it's actually saying that it's acceptable, that it's harmful or whatever. That's why I offer the other option of "it matters," but a time where I say it matters

might be when there's a much stronger need to validate that feeling because it's been so denied to me and I've also been severely denying it. If that's the case, then saying "And that matters" is a stronger more emphatic way of saying "That's okay" actually. I guess it depends on what you need to counter the toxic message that you've been hearing. That's why I think you can play around with it. Playing around with it is important.

We're almost to time, but I'm going to take this question because I think it's an important question. Someone's having difficulty with the wording or "You're the only person responsible for your behavior." Things happen to us. Actually if this person can actually explain it a little bit more because I think I know where you're going with this question, but I just want to make sure. Debbie Uni.

Sam: They added in the chat box.

Sandra: I don't see the clarification of that question. Do you see it?

Sam: Yes. They didn't specifically clarify, but there was some clarification when we previously were talking in the chat box. It was on the compassionate self-accountability slide, the first bullet point, just wanting clarification on what that means.

Sandra: Okay, just generally. When I say things happen to us, life happens to us. We don't control that. We can influence it by asking for something different and then noticing the impact of what we do and how that creates the world around us or how that influences the world around us, but what happens to us happens to us. If we could control that we would but we can't. What we can control is how we respond to it. We make a choice. What am I going to do right now? If you put ten people in the same situation, ten people are going to do ten different things. What they do depends. Depends on what they think is best, based on their own past, what they know, a skillset.

Still what they do is what they do. They're the only ones who make that happen. We are always responsible for our actions in the world because we are the ones choosing to do those actions. Now how much that choice is a full informed choice varies. Oftentimes we do things that we feel like we have no choice around. I always say that if you feel like there's only one way, one option is not a real choice, it's not a meaningful choice. It's still the thing that we did though. By taking responsibility for our actions, then we can do what we need to do to get more options like take this course, like read our website. There's different ways of being in the world and this is why we focus on making this accessible to folks because it's hard to get support so that you have more choices.

At the same time, we are always responsible for what we do, our actions in the world. How we feel, our desires, what arises for us, like I said, it's like the weather. That's just what happens. We can choose what we focus on and then that'll influence what arises for us. That's this dynamic between the two that you go to be cognizant of. This is not used to whip yourself when I say somebody's responsible for their behavior, it's not used to whip yourself. I'm not saying that to judge, blame and shame you. We're all doing the best that we can based on what we know, and that's limited. That's why we're trying to expand what people know are their options and support them in developing those practices and those skills.

There's some other people trying to clarify what that may have met. Taking care of your emotions, that's an action. Do you take care of your emotions? Do you take care of your pain? That's an action. That's another way of being responsible for yourself. If you saw a hurt child, you can choose to act, you can choose to ignore, you can choose to comfort. The same thing when the pain is inside of you. I want to take just another couple more minutes and I want folks to share what is the main takeaway for you. If you can only remember one thing from this ninety minute session, what was the most important thing for you to take away? Sam, can you share?

Sam: Someone said we don't control our feelings but we control where we put our focus. Having self-worth is a form of resistance against systematic oppression.

Sandra: Very, very true.

Sam: "Yes and" feels very different from "Yes but." We get our power back by restoring that internal justice. When you know what hurts, you know what to take care of. We are taught to repress ourselves and we have control of whether we keep doing that or not. Anyone else? Someone asked for the slide to be put back up.

Sandra: I'll put it back after we're done with the main takeaways.

Sam: When our pain is so big we push out other people's reality. When we acknowledge and accept our pain, we can begin to heal our pain and make space for others. Someone learned how important it is to check in with ourselves. The last point in advanced formula was important for me. I have the right to self-love and self-care. Taking more time to acknowledge my emotions both in moments of difficulty and regularly through my lights.

Sandra: I want to pause and comment on that. This is something that I'm practicing with. I'm really good when stuff's bad and stuff hurts and I'm upset and taking care of that. I'm super good at that obviously. That's why I teach it. I'm not as skillful at noticing moments where I can be focusing on taking

actions that would bring me more joy and focus on where I have pain and healing that so that transforms into freedom for me. I practice in the Thich Nhat Hanh tradition where we talk about, if you know Thich Nhat Hanh he's a Vietnamese buddhist master, very well known in the west. He talks about watering seeds. We water the seeds of joy and peace.

We give, we shift our focus and we water the seeds of joy do what will probably lead to us feeling joy, and then it will arise if it arises. If it doesn't arise, there's some other stuff that it needs. That's just kind of saying work through everything ourselves. Yeah, doing this, acknowledging your feelings both in moments of difficulty, just normally regularly throughout your life. We have this funny thing in English where we say feelings as if they're bad all the time. Joy is a feeling. Peace is a feeling. Happiness is a feeling. Love is a feeling. Feeling in this language in our society is always this negative thing. The pain, upsetness, you don't want to deal with, you don't want to talk about feelings.

That's why I talk about energy. It's really just another word for feelings folks because you have that connotation with feelings so I say energies instead. They're a little bit different. Just think about your everyday how are you feeling. How do you want to feel? What would lead to that and then shift your focus. You have a lot more power over your internal reality than we think.

Sam: Do we want to share a couple more?

Sandra: If there's something new.

Sam: There's a couple. Having compassion for yourself is the first step to begin having compassion for others. We can't expect external forces to empower you; you have to acknowledge your feelings in order to empower yourself. We'll do one more. Acknowledging my feelings helps me to better acknowledge the feelings of others.

Sandra: Excellent. Thank you so much for engaging in this work with me. Like I said, this is pivotal. If you don't know what to do, come back to the third practice. We are going to be practicing this a lot in the bi-monthly Q&A sessions. Please watch out for those. You'll see a lot more coaching and just doing it together and troubleshooting this practice. The next session is going to start at two PM, so you have a twenty-five minute break. Two PM eastern, eleven AM Pacific. I will see you then. Take care of yourself, whatever you need to do.