History of compassion and connection experiences

When to use:

After “History related to shame and self-criticism” handout.

This and the “History related to shame and self-criticism” are part of functional analysis

Materials needed:

Handout: Your Experience of Warm and Supportive Relationships form

Instructions:

While we have talked about some of your past experiences that may have contributed to your history with shame and self-criticism, I think it’s also really important to get a sense of any experiences you might have had with relationships that were characterized by kindness, caring, or warmth. People’s experiences with caring and kind relationships are incredibly varied. Some people have had lots of relationships in their life with others who have treated them with kindness, caring, or compassion. For others, there may have been one or two of those relationships, but maybe those relationships were incredibly important. Still others may not be able to recall anyone who has treated them with kindness and compassion.

While this might be surprising, it’s fairly common for people to feel sad or upset when thinking about past experiences of loving and caring. This may be the case whether you are unable to recall any at all or whether you are able to recall quite a few. Remembering past experiences of love and warmth can bring us into contact with what we are lacking in our current lives. That’s normal and part of the process of developing greater self-compassion.

Just as we did with taking a look at your history with criticism and shaming experiences, I’d like us to just gather some data about your relationship, both in the past and currently that you’d say were characterized by feelings of kindness, care, or compassion.

Would you be willing to do that?

[Assuming client is willing]. Great. So this week, I will ask you to spend some time writing about those experiences you may or may not have had. If you’re willing to answer the questions here on this handout [Your Experience with Warm and Supportive Relationships form] and bring it back to our next session. We can talk about it more then.

Do you have any questions or concerns?

Debrief:

1. What was it like to do this homework? What did you notice?

2. Did you learn anything new in doing this homework?

3. After doing this exercise, did you have anything you might wish would have been different for you?

# Handout: Your Experience of Warm and Supportive Relationships

*Please use this form so that we can get a better understanding of some of the warm and supportive relationships you may have had in the past and currently.*

1. Who, if anyone, in your family (parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.), would you say treated you with warmth, kindness, or affection as you were growing up? How would you describe those people to someone who had never met them? How did they show you they cared about you?

2. As you grew up, did you ever have any excellent teachers, mentors, or coaches who really cared about you and wanted you to do well? If so, please write some about who those people were and the way they treated you.

3. Did you ever have friends or other people such as neighbors or acquaintances that were warm, caring, or supportive to you? If so, please describe those relationships.

4. Have you had pets or other animals that you loved and that you felt cared for you in return? What did it feel like to be cared for by that animal?

5. Did you have religious or spiritual experiences with a warm or loving God or other spiritual experience where you felt loved, connected, or part of something larger than yourself? If so, describe these experiences.

6. Did you ever have periods of life or situations where you felt you felt like they fit in or were valued, for example, as a summer camp, on particular vacations, at church, in a social group, or during particular activities (e.g., sports)? If so, please describe those experiences and how it felt to be a part of that experience.

7. Were there any other ways that you received feelings of warmth, comfort, love, or safety when you needed them?

8. Finally, how does it feel when you spend time thinking about and reflecting on these experiences you may have had or not had in the past? As you reflect on these experiences, what do you wish might have been different for you if anything?