

Exercise 6.7: Creating a ‘compassionate companion’ (pages 170-5)

Sometimes it can be very difficult to recall memories of people being compassionate toward us, or of us being compassionate. This exercise uses your imagination to help you develop your compassionate mind and ability to give and receive compassion, including compassion to yourself.

We can practice using an idea of a ‘compassionate companion’ whom we create for ourselves. Of course, you are not limited to one companion, you can have a whole bunch of them that represent different compassionate qualities (for example, one to go to when you need courage and another to offer you comfort).

Some people choose a tree or a colour. Some prefer their image to be that of an animal or a fantasy character (like a dog or fairy). Some people can bring to mind a fictional character from a book or film (e.g. Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings*), while some prefer to invent their own individual person or creature. You can choose a real person you actually know, although in my experience this can be a little tricky. Most people we know are not compassionate all the time – after all, they are only human, like us! It is very tempting to choose someone who has been very caring but may no longer be with us – perhaps a teacher, friend or relative who may have passed away or moved on and whom we no longer see. This image can get mixed up with feelings of grief and longing, which can distract us from the aim of this exercise, which is to experience receiving compassion from our compassionate companion. Please be careful when you chose your compassionate companion if you are using a real person; be sure that it does not come with any other powerful emotional ‘baggage’. If there is a person (or people) who you feel you can use without emotional complications (for example, someone you used for Exercise 6.6), this is absolutely fine. You can use them completely or take aspects from them to build your companion.

It is important that you give your companion certain qualities:

- A deep commitment to you – a desire to help you cope with and relieve your suffering and take joy in your happiness.
- Strength of mind that is not overwhelmed by your pain or distress, but remains present, enduring it with you.
- Wisdom that has been gained through experience and truly understands the struggles you go through in life.
- Warmth, conveying gentleness, caring and openness.
- An acceptance that is never judgemental or critical but understands your struggles and accepts you as you are, while also being deeply committed to helping and supporting you.

You can use Worksheet 5 to help you with this exercise. When you have completed the worksheet, you are ready to begin the imagery part of the exercise. Please complete this now and then start the audio for Exercise 6.7 when you are ready.