

What Is Compassion-Focused Therapy?

Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) was developed by Dr. Paul Gilbert as a complement to traditional Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques.

This psychotherapeutic approach can be helpful for individuals with high levels of self-criticism and shame and aims to help them develop a more compassionate relationship with themselves.

CFT is an integrative approach that may comprise part of broader treatment for mood-related disorders such as anxiety, trauma, or depression.

Understanding the CFT Model

An evolutionary approach, Compassion focused therapy (CFT) attempts to functionally analyze our basic human social motivations and their relationship with our emotional regulation systems.

For example, social motivational systems include the basic drive to live together in communities or to protect loved ones from harm.

Some examples of functional emotional systems entail how we respond to threat, and the drive to seek out safety.

3 Emotion Regulation Systems

The CFT model proposes that three systems are used to regulate emotional states: A *Caregiving/Doing System*, *Threat System*, and a *Drive System*.

Each has a different function or objective and focus and is associated with different thoughts, feelings, physical states of arousal, and behaviors, as shown in the table below.

	Caregiving/Doing	Threat	Drive
<i>Function/Objective</i>	Protecting	Survival	Reward/Accomplishment
<i>Focus</i>	Sensitivity to suffering/distress	Perceived threat	Aims/Achievement/Goals
<i>Thoughts</i>	Tending/Soothing	Risk	Achievement
<i>Feelings</i>	Safety	Stress/Disgust/Anxiety/Fear	Excitement/Vitality
<i>Physical State</i>	Low arousal/Calm	High arousal	Arousal
<i>Behaviors</i>	Soothing/Protecting/Caring	Avoidance/Self-criticism/Safety-seeking	Focus

Our Emotion Regulation systems are all innate, but our life experiences and environment determine which we use the most and whether we develop our non-survival-based *Caregiving/Doing* and *Drive* systems.

Developing Self-Compassion

CFT is concerned with developing our *Caregiving/Doing* systems to help us better cope with distress and suffering.

This 'compassionate' system is distinguished by:

- *Empathy*
- *Non-Judgment*
- *Distress Tolerance*
- *Sensitivity*
- *Care for Well-Being*, and
- *Sympathy*.

Helpful skills that facilitate its development include:

- *Visualization*
- *Attention*
- *Reasoning*
- *Conscious Behaviors*, and
- *Practicing Caregiving Behaviors*.

By focusing on our capacity for caregiving and compassion, CFT aims to help individuals manage their emotions more adaptively and introduce more balance to the emotional regulation system.