

The Self and The Sailboat Metaphor



This presentation

- Chapter 1: Introducing the self
- Chapter 2: The Self-as-story
- Chapter 3: The Impact of the Self-as-story
- Chapter 4: The Self-as-process
- Chapter 5: Summary

1



Introducing the Self

The self is popular

Research by

- psychologists
- sociologists
- anthropologists
- political scientists
- economists



The self is popular

- Google Scholar: 3 million citations
- PsycINFO: tens of thousands of articles
- Positive Psychology Program Survey: no. 1 topic of interest

Why is the self so popular?

According to self and identity theories:

- people care about themselves
- people want to know who they are
- people use self-knowledge to make sense of the world



Why is the self so popular?

Self and identity influences:

- what people are motivated to do
- how people think
- how people make sense of themselves and others
- the actions people take
- people's feelings
- people's ability to regulate themselves

2



The self-as-story

Who are you?

”

I'm John, 24 years old, I have an important job being a CEO of a big company, I like watching football, I have a nice house in Denver, I am good at sports, I am extraverted...

Who are you?

“I am a person who . . . ” ...can generate dozens, or even hundreds, of supposed attributes in most people. Our ‘self’ is who we believe we are.

Hayes (1999, p.181).

”

We humans do not merely live in the world, we live in the world as we interpret it, construct it, view it, or understand it.

The self-as-story

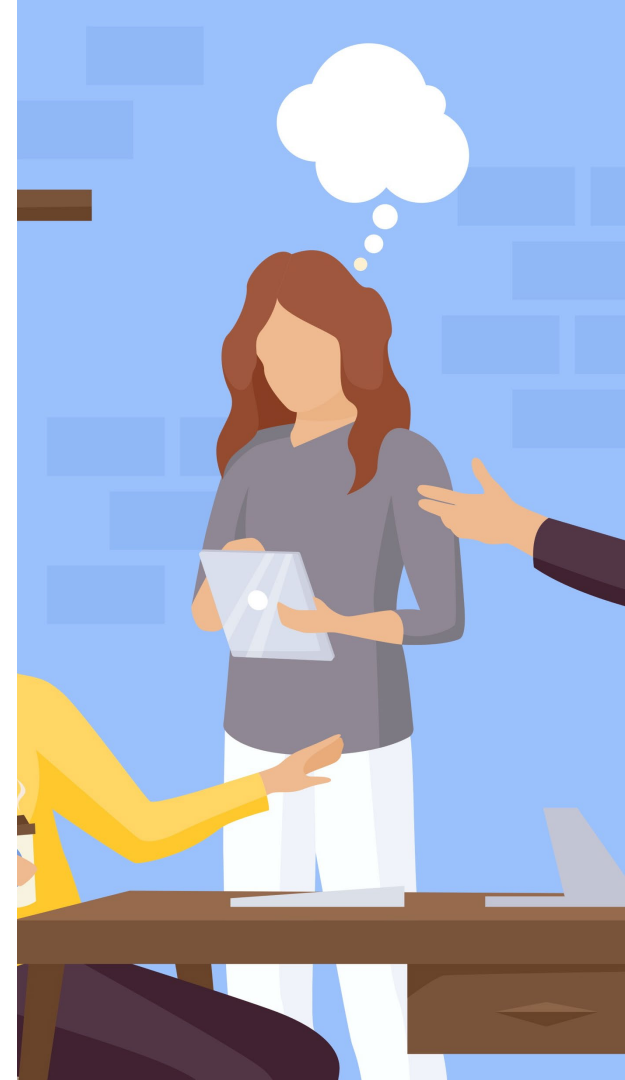
- based on a constructivist approach of the self
- people construct both a sense of **who they think they are** and of the “reality” within which they live
- the self is a mental construction: “me story”



The self-as-story

During the day, we create it by:

- evaluating whether experiences are good or bad
- deciding what experiences say about us
- wondering why experiences happen



The self-as-story

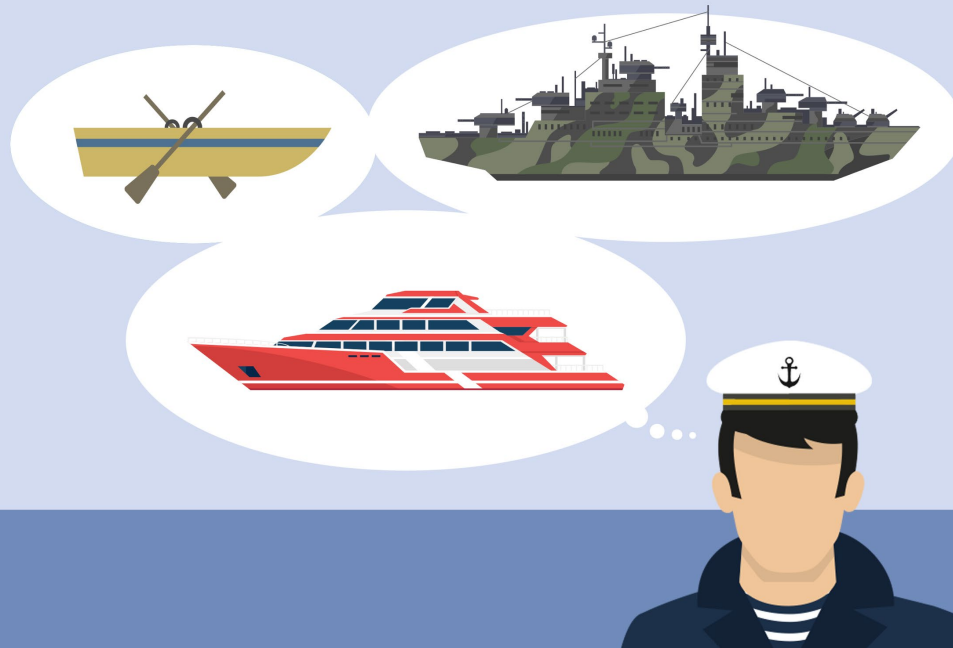
Over time, we create it by:

- formulating our own life history
- defining our dominant attributes
- evaluating our dominant attributes
- constructing cause and effect relations



Chapter 2 – The Self-as-story

The sailboat metaphor



The self-as-story

positive

I am smart

I am knowledgeable

I am strong

negative

I am unattractive

I am a victim

I am unlovable

The self-as-story

Synonyms:

- self-as-content (ACT)
- ego
- narrative self
- conceptualized self



Practical advice



Some clients believe strongly in an elaborate story that they have created about themselves. Talking at length about this story further strengthens the client's identification with it, which can hinder the process of change. Rather than focusing on these stories, discussing and debating them, it is often more helpful for clients to step out of this "mental story mode". **Creatively using silence** during the session can be a powerful way to **disrupt the client's self-story monologue**.

The core process: Identification

- identify with something =
making it the same as “me”
- perceiving it as an inseparable
part of the self
- a creation of the mind



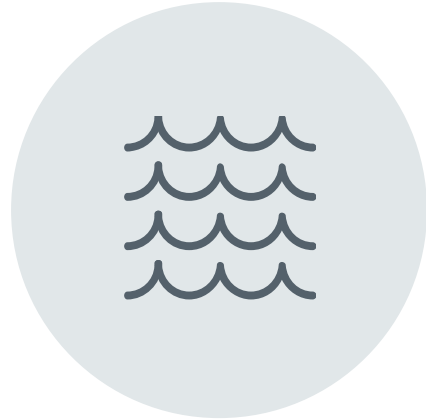
Types of identification

- appearance
- beliefs
- possessions
- performance
- job
- opinion
- group memberships



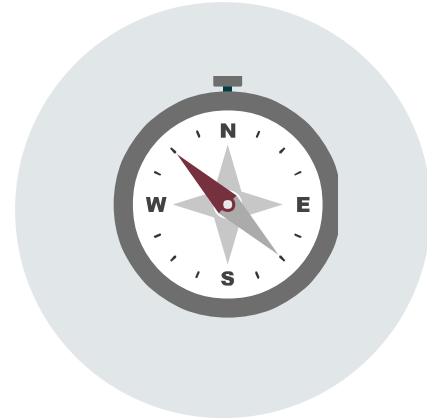
The sailboat metaphor

- “I am a policeman” (profession)
- “I am a hockey player” (hobby)
- “I am a father” (family)
- “I am rich” (finances)



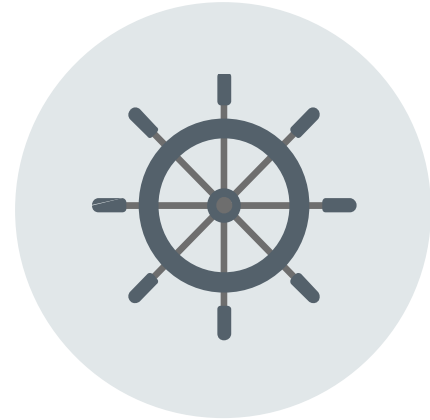
The sailboat metaphor

- “I am hurt”
- “I am happy”
- “I am angry”



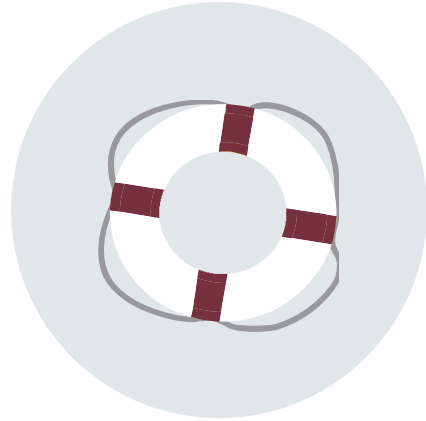
The sailboat metaphor

- “I am right because I value X”
- “Unlike others, I know what is really important in life”



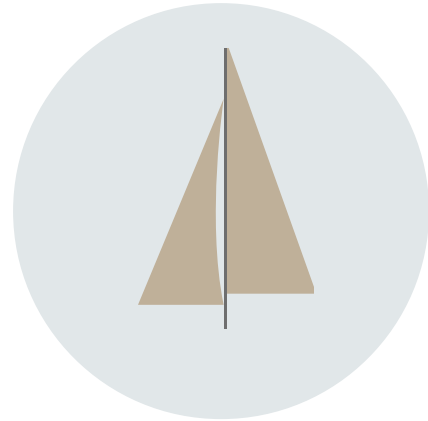
The sailboat metaphor

- “I am nobody”
- “I am a failure”
- “I am worth less than others because I suffer from X”



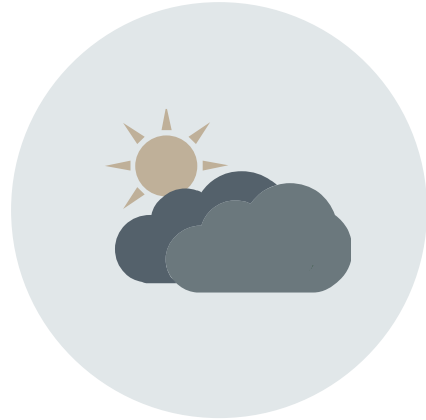
The sailboat metaphor

- “I am talented”
- “I am better than others because I can do X extremely well”
- “I am unbeatable”



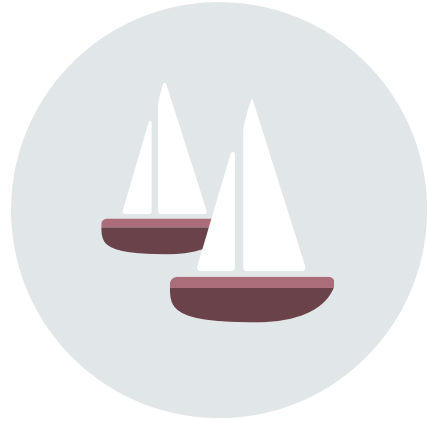
The sailboat metaphor

- “I am a victim because X happened”
- “I am strong because I survived X”
- “I am worthless because X happened”



The sailboat metaphor

- “I am attractive because I have attractive friends”
- “I am important because I know important people”
- “I belong to group X”



The sailboat metaphor

- “I am successful because I achieved X”
- “I am not going to be successful because I never achieved anything”



Practical advice



Clients may identify with clinical labels. Rather than using general, self-story inducing labels such as “personality disorder” and “eating disorder”, **practitioners can label the specific behaviors that reduce well-being**. Focusing on behavior stresses the temporary nature of struggles and problems, opens the gateways for solutions and highlights the difference between what clients do and what clients seemingly are.

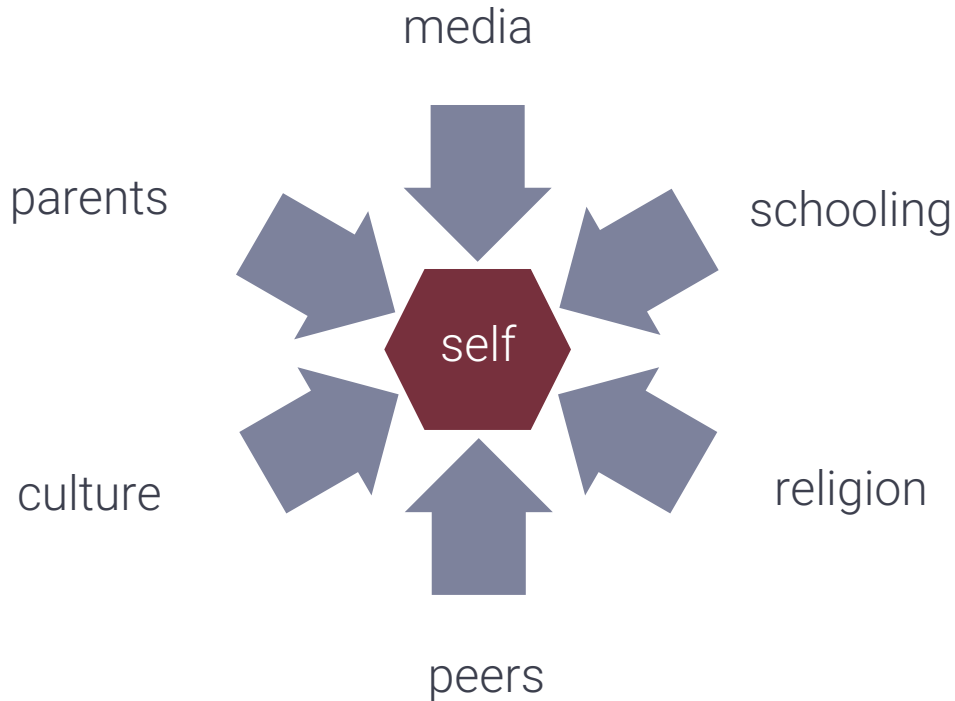
Development of the self-story

the self image:

- forms from external, repeated feedback about the self
- can be formed consciously or unconsciously
- can be formed directly or indirectly



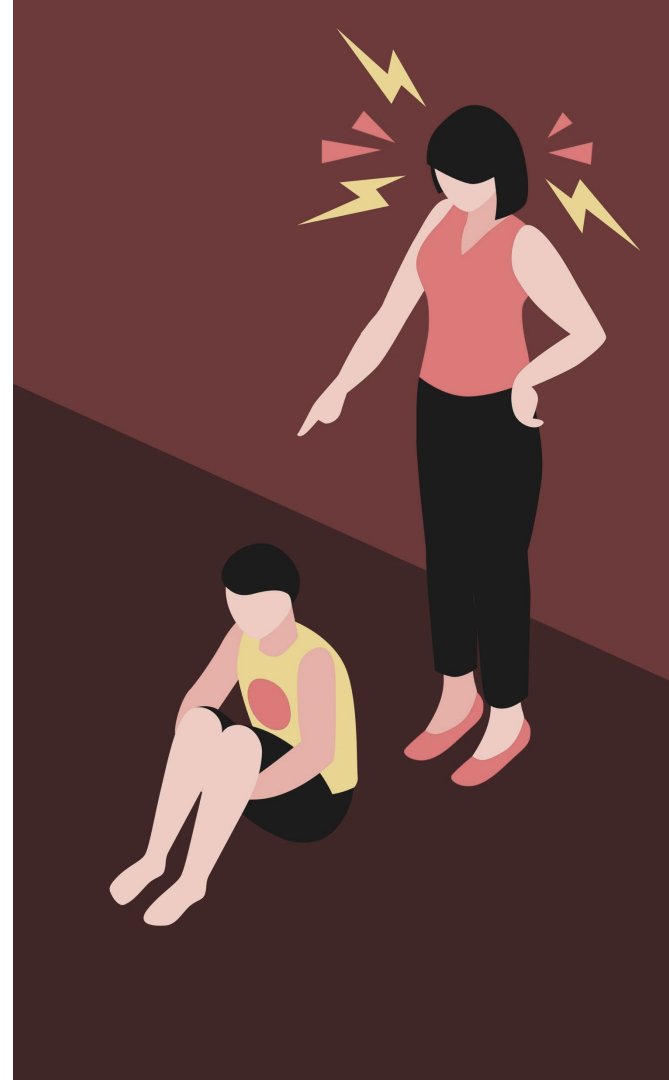
Contributions to the self-story



Contributions to the self-story

caregivers, peers, and others:

- direct feedback (e.g. bullying)
- modeling
- values of caregivers (studying, “honorable” job, being loyal, etc.)
- beliefs (respect for the local worthies, men are not allowed to cry, etc.)



Contributions to the self-story

formal schooling and instruction:

- pre-defined ideas about what knowledge and skills are valuable
- intellectual abilities = standard
- tests and exams



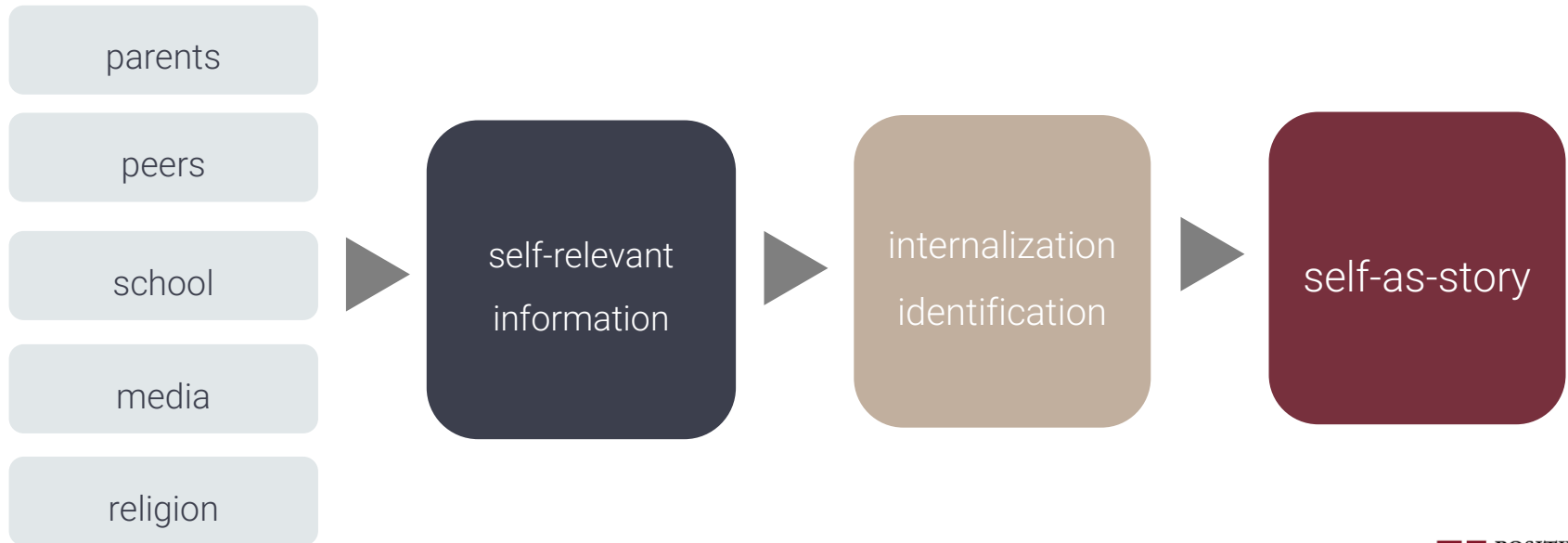
Contributions to the self-story

media:

- guidelines for beauty
- markers of success
- product-value = self-value



Contributions to the self-story



Language

words:

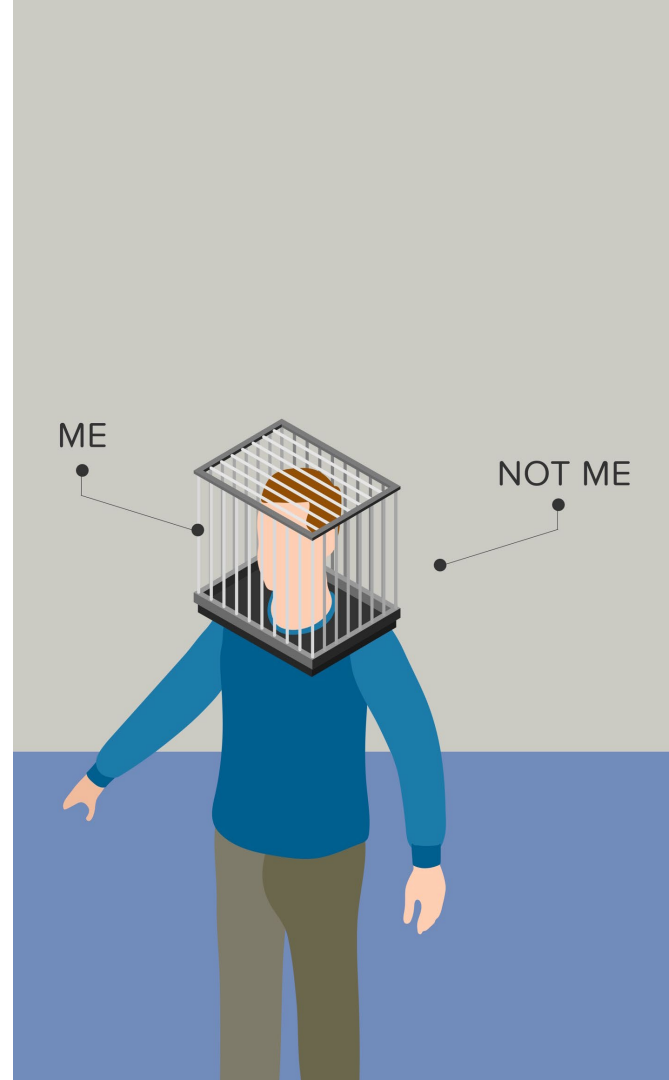
- are the main building block of the self-image
- are symbols
- can never fully capture reality
- can never capture the complexity of a human being



Language

the problem of using words to describe the self:

- many words falsely imply a dichotomy
- many words are relative rather than absolute
- words can have different meanings to different people



3



The impact of the self-as-story

Cognitive biases

Cognitive biases are automatic patterns of deviation in judgment that occur in particular situations, leading to perceptual distortion, inaccurate judgment, illogical interpretation, or what is broadly called irrationality.

Cognitive biases

- aim to protect or enhance the created self-image
- people embrace information consistent with their self-views and reject information inconsistent with their self-views



Cognitive biases

the better-than-average effect

- most people rate themselves as safer than the average driver, more sexually skilful than the average lover, and more ethical than the average person
- 86% of employees rate their job performance as “above average,” whereas only 1% say they perform below average at work



Cognitive biases

self-serving attributions

- athletes are more likely to assume personal responsibility when they perform well in the sports arena than when they perform poorly
- drivers attribute accidents to external factors (e.g. the weather, the condition of their car, other drivers) yet attribute the narrow avoidance of an accident to their alertness and finely honed driving skills.

Need for affirmation

- need to receive validation and approval of the self-image
- threat to the self-story = threat to the self
- continuous and restless search



Social comparison

- comparing to others on relevant self-story dimensions
- jealousy increases when the domain of the other person's achievements is also a domain of high self-relevance to the individual



Social comparison

people who make frequent social comparisons are more likely:

- to experience envy, guilt, regret, and defensiveness
- to lie and blame others
- to have unmet cravings

Chapter 3 – The Impact of the Self-as-story

Sailboat metaphor



4



The Self-as-process

The self-as-process defined

the self-as-process is the experiential being at the core of a person; that which sees, hears, dreams, thinks, feels, etc.

The self-as-process

- the observer that is aware of the experience in this moment
- able to observe mind-made stores
- in direct contact with the present moment
- emerges naturally, from moment-to-moment experience
- cannot be captured by words or symbols



The self-as-process

synonyms:

- self-as-context (ACT)
- transcendent self
- the observing self
- the witness
- the true self

Comparing the two selves



- words
- rigid/fixed
- defined by past
- inner commentary
- can be threatened



- consciousness
- dynamic
- experienced in moment
- inner witness
- cannot be threatened

Practical advice

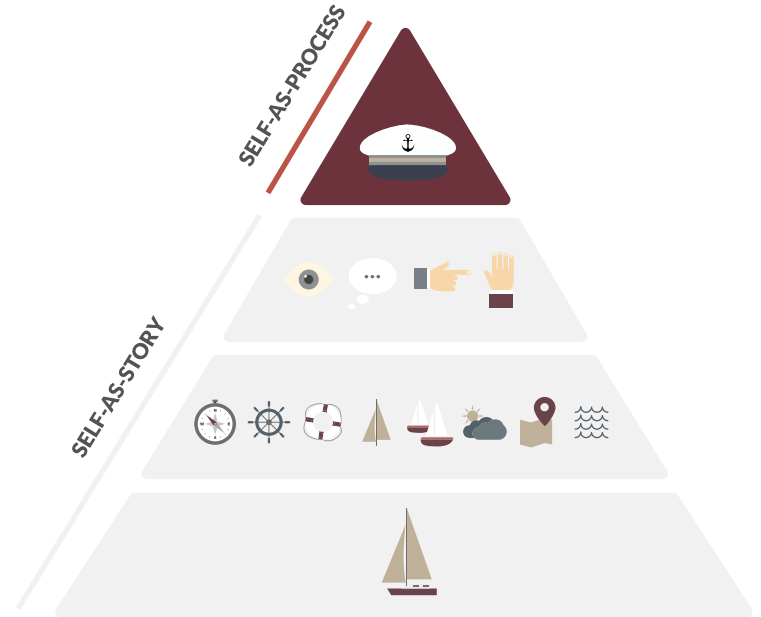


Helping clients tune in to their self-as-process is relatively simple to do. Ask them to choose something to become aware of in the present moment (e.g., a sight, sound, smell, or taste), and then focus on that thing, observing it as if they were a curious scientist. As clients observe their chosen thing, **ask them to notice who is doing the observing**. Who is hearing the sound? Who is noticing the thought? Who is becoming aware of bodily sensations? It is the part of the self who is doing the observing: the self-as-process.

The sailboat metaphor

the self-as-process is represented by
the captain:

- entity that operates at a meta-level
- not confusing himself with his attention, thoughts, motivations, or actions
- not confusing himself with the eight elements of his boat



A functional self-story

- language to describe the self is necessary
- identification with an invented self-story makes it potentially harmful, not the story itself
- self-story is a **tool** that helps the individual navigate the world



A functional self-story

A person who uses his self-story rather than the other way around, is like an actor who is aware that he is playing a role and thus able to switch out when leaving the stage. This actor does not confuse himself with the role he is playing.



Dysfunctional self-stories

narcissism

- unrealistically positive and inflated self-story
- feelings of entitlement
- self-promotion
- attention-seeking

low self-esteem

- unrealistically negative and deflated self-story
- feelings of low-worth
- self-criticism
- attention-avoidance

Strengthening the self-as-process

observing thoughts

- taking the position of a neutral, non-judgmental observer
- notice when one is making stories about the self or telling others stories about the self
- meditation, expressive writing, cognitive defusion techniques



Strengthening the self-as-process

Using observational language

- e.g. “I notice that I having the thought that I am a loser
- e.g. “I work as a senior manager”
- e.g. “I sometimes behave clumsily”



Strengthening the self-as-process

Disengaging from behavior that results from a self-as-story

- boosting the self by downward comparison
- reacting defensively when the self-story is threatened
- bragging, showing off, name dropping, etc.
- judging and condemning others



Strengthening the self-as-process

Crisis

- threat to self-story
- loss of sources of identification
- stronger connection with the self that remains



5



Summary

The self-as-story

- a definition of ourselves in words
- created by external viewpoints, norms, feedback, etc.
- who we *think* we are
- can be judged, evaluated, and compared
- identification = inability to see through the constructed nature of the self-story
- problems arise when the self-as-story uses the individual, rather than the other way around



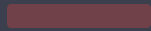
The self-as-process

- the observer that is aware of the experience in this moment
- a self beyond words and concepts
- cannot be judged, evaluated, and compared
- strengthening the self-as-process can help to make the self-as-story functional



Weaknesses

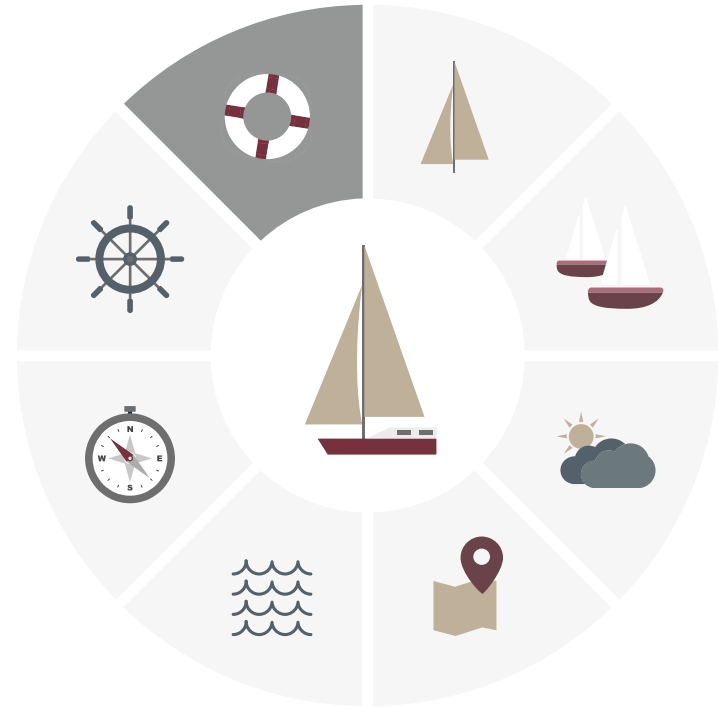
(leak)



Weaknesses (leak)

Weaknesses

- fourth element of sailboat metaphor
- leak



Weaknesses (leak)

Weakness

- a personal characteristic that reduces well-being
- vulnerability
- can be present without external trigger
- physical, cognitive and behavioral levels

Weaknesses (leak)

Weakness

- causes negative emotions
- reduces value-congruent behaviour
- hinders goal achievement



Weaknesses (leak)

Practical note

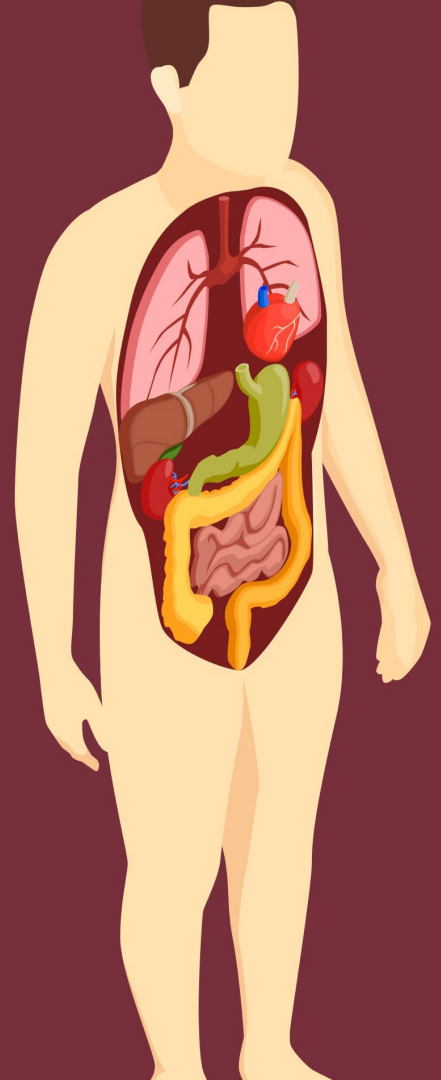


The term 'weakness' does not refer to 'being weak'. Weaknesses, as defined here, are an inherent part of life and human functioning, and nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, acknowledging and facing our weaknesses is considered a great strength. In a practical context, however, it may be more beneficial to **use a less negative term**, such as “area for growth”, “unhelpful pattern” or “hindrance”.

Weaknesses (leak)

Physical level

- pain
- hunger
- fatigue
- metabolic processes
- imperfections
- etc.



Weaknesses (leak)

Cognitive level

- worrying
- rumination
- self-blame
- holding grudges
- unrealistic personal standards
- etc.



Weaknesses (leak)

Behavioral level

- low performance
- procrastination
- impulsivity
- aggression
- pleasing others
- controlling others



Weaknesses (leak)

Practical note

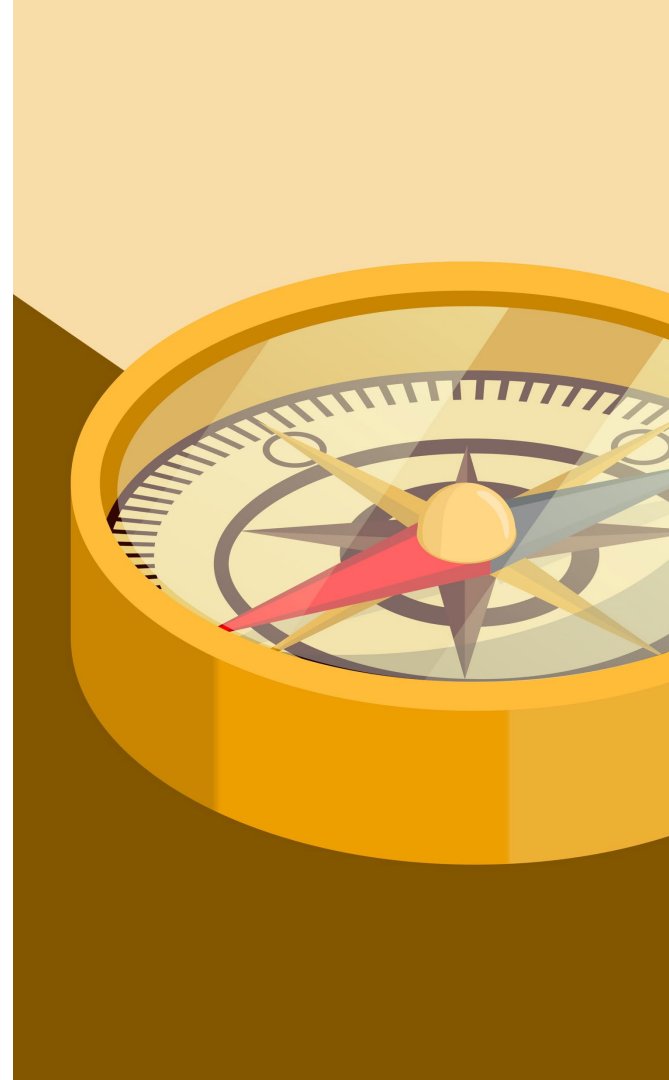


Clients are not always aware that their weakness is operating at multiple levels. Ignoring one or more levels will often prevent the client from effectively dealing with the weakness and may provide only a short-term solution. Therefore, practitioners should assess and address clients' weaknesses at multiple levels.

Weaknesses (leak)

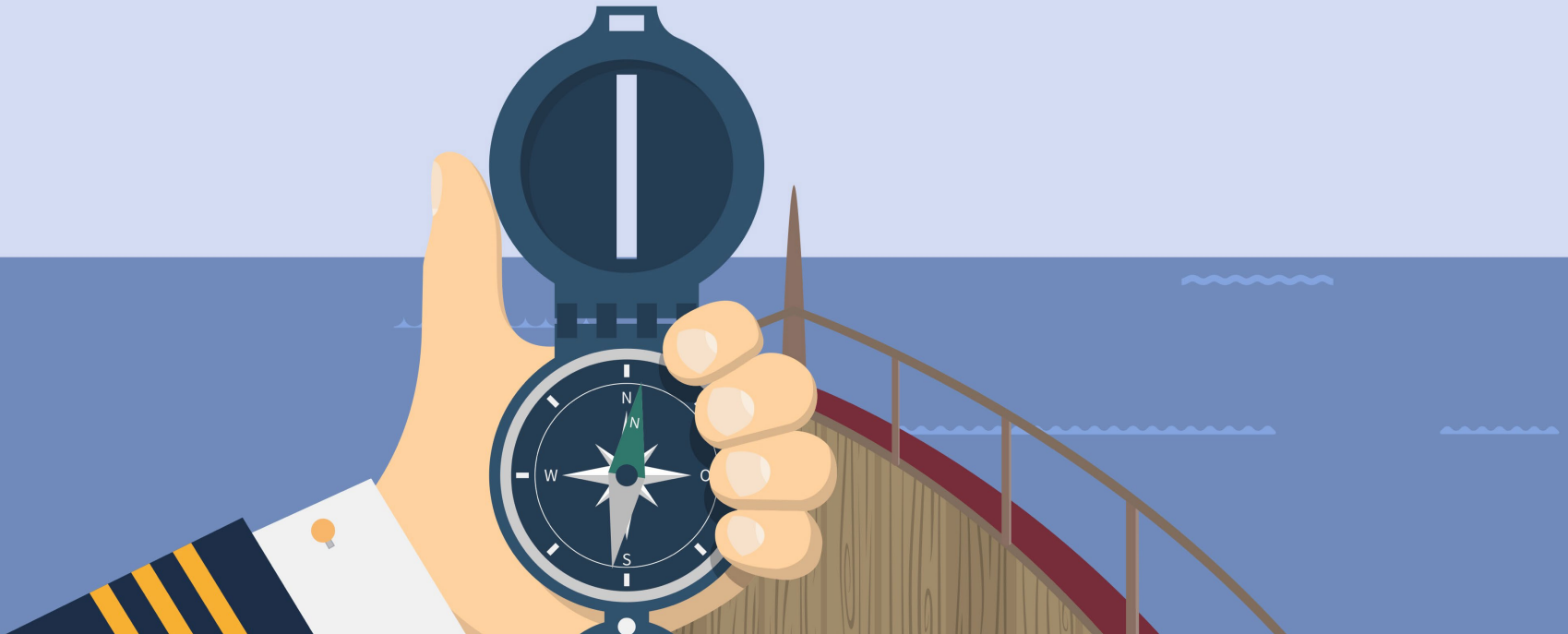
Emotions are not weaknesses

- weaknesses may be experienced at an emotional level (e.g. feelings of fear)
- emotions serve a signalling function
- communicate valuable information about needs



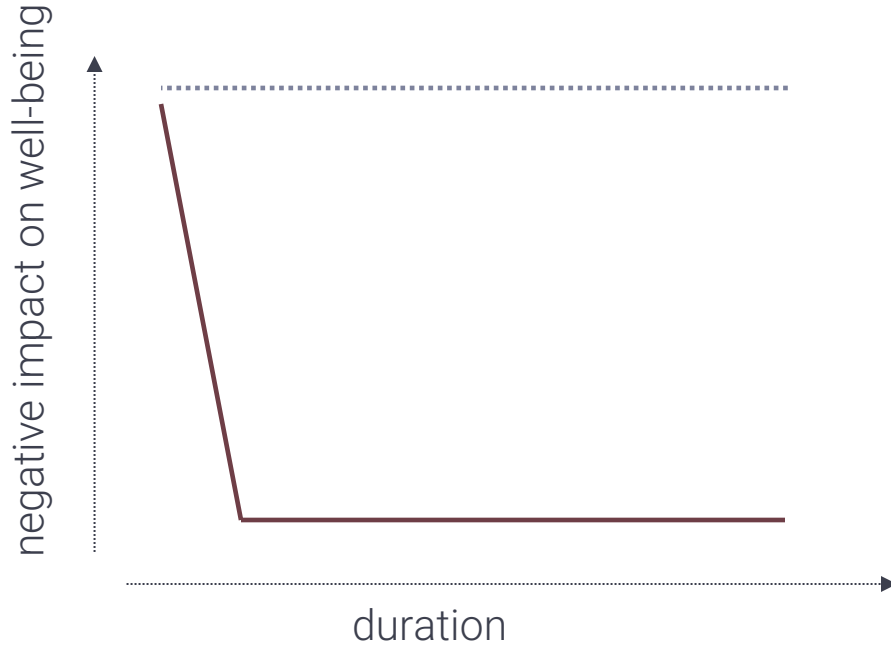
Weaknesses (leak)

Sailboat metaphor



Weaknesses (leak)

Duration and intensity

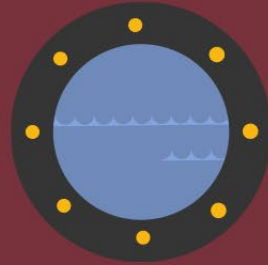
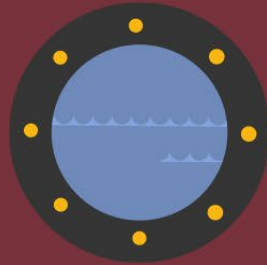


— temporary
(minutes - hours)

..... long-term
(several hours per day for weeks or months)

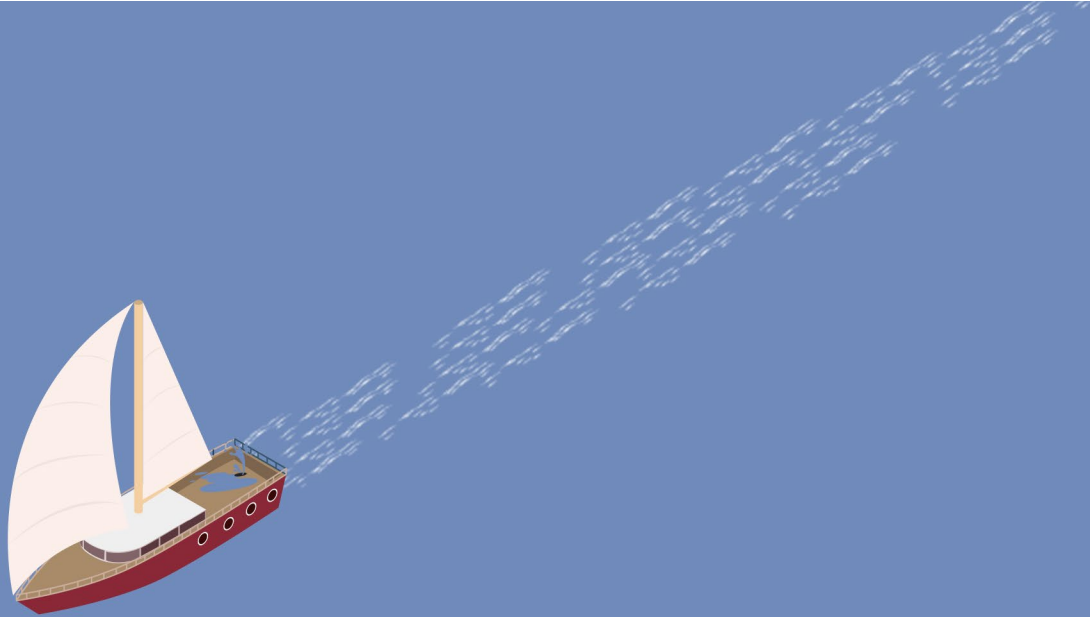
Weaknesses (leak)

Sailboat metaphor



Weaknesses (leak)

Sailboat metaphor



Weaknesses (leak)

Stressors

internal stressor

- comes from within
- self-induced
- e.g. worrying



external stressor

- generated outside the individual
- often uncontrollable
- e.g. unemployment

Weaknesses (leak)

Sailboat metaphor



Weaknesses (leak)

Identifying weakness(es)



The interviewer addresses the ‘leaks’ of the interviewee’s boat. Which personal characteristics (physical /cognitive /behavioral) reduce the interviewee’s well-being? *How* do these impact the overall functioning of his or her sailboat? Invite the interviewee to refer to the sailboat metaphor as much as possible during this discussion.

The relationship with weaknesses

- the nature of one's relationship with his or her weaknesses strongly influences the suffering caused by the weakness
- the relationship with weaknesses explains why something can be weakness for person A and not for person B
- changing the relationship with weaknesses can be essential for addressing them

Awareness of Weaknesses

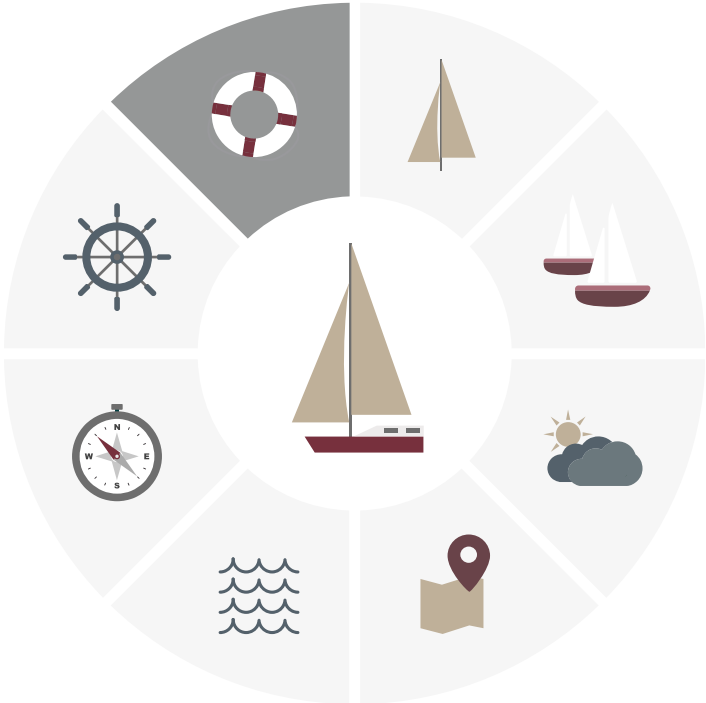
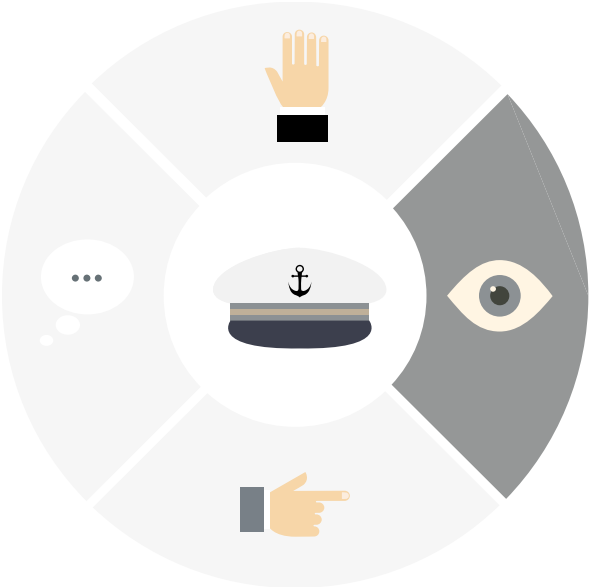


leak - attention



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

The captain: Attention



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

Core question

?

“To what extent is the individual aware of his or her weaknesses?”

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Importance of awareness

awareness of weaknesses is a pre-requisite for

- coping
- social support
- personal growth
- self-acceptance

Awareness of Weaknesses (lack-attention)

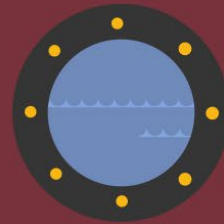
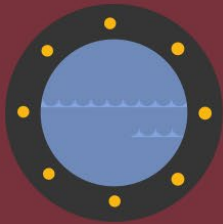
Too little attention for weaknesses

Common causes:

- lack of self-reflection
- strong external focus (other people, circumstances)
- defence mechanisms

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Sailboat metaphor



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

The illusion of invulnerability

people believe they are less likely than similar others:

- to become ill
- develop breast cancer or lung cancer
- experience a heart attack
- experience health problems due to environmental pollution

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Defense mechanisms

- doubting evidence
- external attribution
- confirmation bias
- etc.



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

Motivation behind defensiveness

- people are motivated to protect their self-views
- information about personal weaknesses can 'threaten' the image that people have created about themselves



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

Motivation behind defensiveness



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

The costs of defensiveness

self-serving distortions are linked to:

- narcissism
- ego involvement
- lower levels of self-esteem
- reduced well-being



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

The costs of defensiveness

- self-serving distortions **not** shown by people who are highly autonomous and self-determining
- distorting self-information prevents the individual from learning from this information



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

Practical note



If clients are expected to be open about their experiences, it is crucial to **lead by example**. The practitioner's willingness to be honest about his or her feelings and experiences paves the way for clients to do the same. The ability to show vulnerability is an essential part of the trust-building process between client and practitioner.

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

Increasing awareness



How would you treat clients who lack awareness of weaknesses or have difficulty acknowledging vulnerability?

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Too much attention for weaknesses

- excessive self-monitoring
- depression, social anxiety, perfectionism
- low levels of self-worth
- loss of connection with values



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Sailboat metaphor



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Motivation behind excessive attention

- people strive to maintain their self-image, even if it is negative
- a negative self-view promotes attention for negative self-information



Cameron, Stinson, Gaetz & Balchen, 2010

1. study goal presented as “compatibility between opposite-sex strangers”
2. trait self-esteem measure
3. “record a video to introduce yourself to opposite sex participant (confederate) in other room”
4. watch reply from other participant (pre-recorded - high/low acceptance)
5. report perceived acceptance from other participant

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Cameron, Stinson, Gaetz & Balchen, 2010

low-acceptance condition responses:

- minimal self-disclosure
- no reference to the participant's video-tape
- expressed minimal nonverbal liking cues (e.g., no smiling, no laughing, little eye contact)

Cameron, Stinson, Gaetz & Balchen, 2010

high-acceptance condition responses:

- self-disclosed personal information
- confederate agreed with some of the participant's responses (e.g., "I'm with you on this one")
- expressed strong nonverbal liking cues (e.g., smiling, eye contact)
- displayed personal interest (e.g., "So, I hope to see you in the second part of the study!").

Cameron, Stinson, Gaetz, & Balchen, 2010

- lower self-esteem individuals perceived fewer acceptance cues from interaction partners
- when acceptance cues did not relate to themselves, low self-esteem individuals detect acceptance cues to the same degree as high self-esteem individuals (Study 2)

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

Practical note



For clients who focus too much on their weaknesses, be sure to assess and **emphasize personal strengths** in treatment. This will ensure that weaknesses become embedded in a larger picture and are considered in the service of personal goals and values, rather than being the primary target of intervention. A balanced focus on both strengths and weaknesses will help these clients develop a more holistic and realistic self-view.

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Kristin Neff

”

“Just as we need to notice others’ good qualities in order to appreciate them, we need to consciously acknowledge our own positive features. However, we’re often so focused on our mistakes and flaws that we don’t even see when we get things right.”

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Self-appreciation



In pairs, describe two things that you really appreciate about yourself. Notice what it feels like to share this with the other person.

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Managing excessive focus

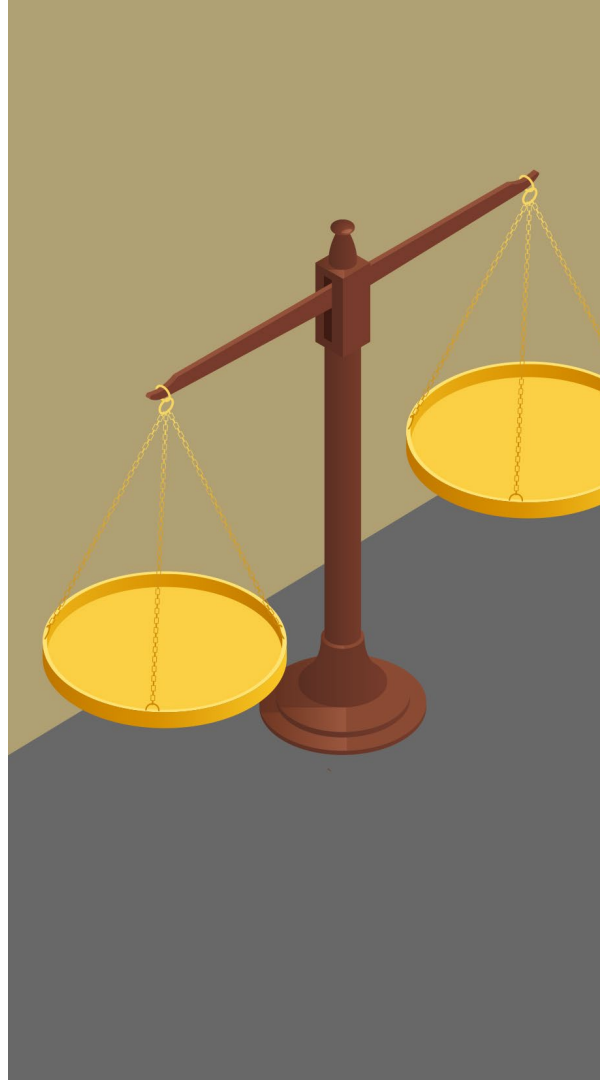


How would you treat clients tend to focus excessively on personal weaknesses?

Awareness of Weaknesses (leak- attention)

Balanced attention

- open attitude towards incoming information on the self
- unbiased processing of self-information
- attention for both weaknesses and strengths
- authenticity



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Sailboat metaphor



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

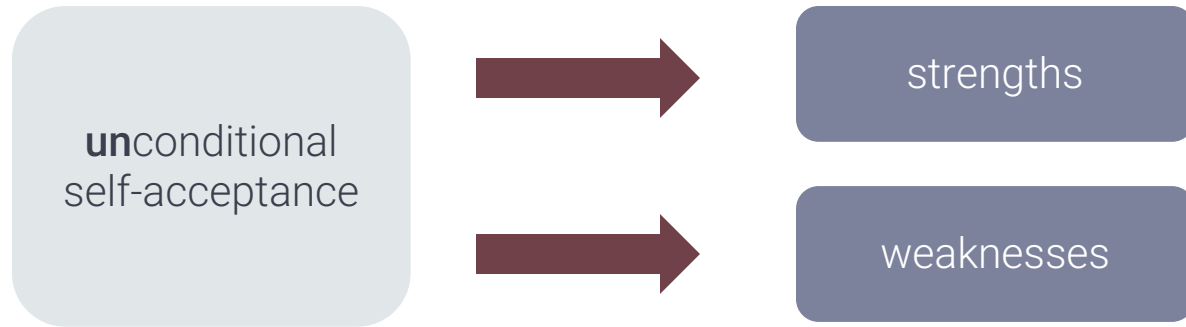
The benefits of unbiased processing

unbiased processing is positively associated with:

- autonomy
- life satisfaction
- self-knowledge

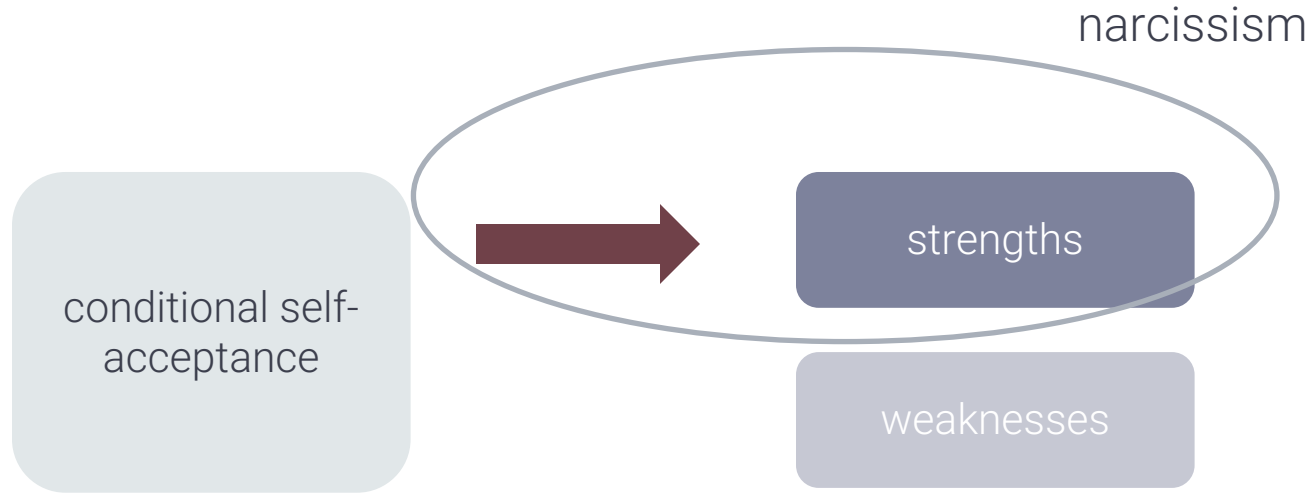
Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Possible mechanism



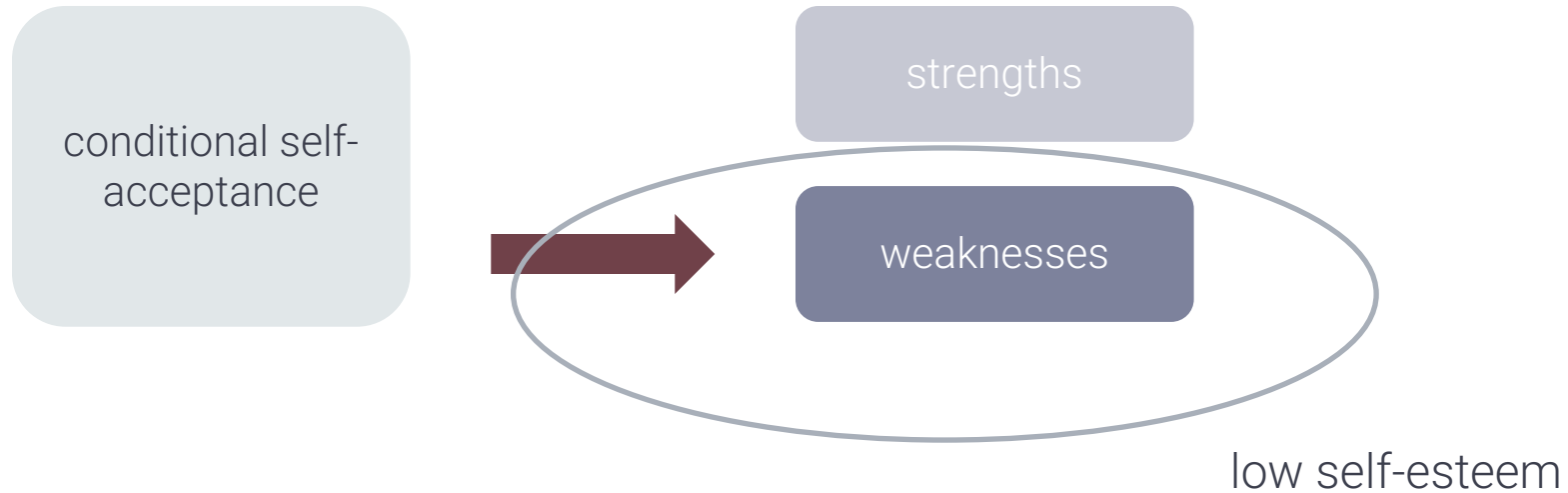
Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Possible mechanism



Awareness of Weaknesses (leak-attention)

Possible mechanism



Self-evaluation

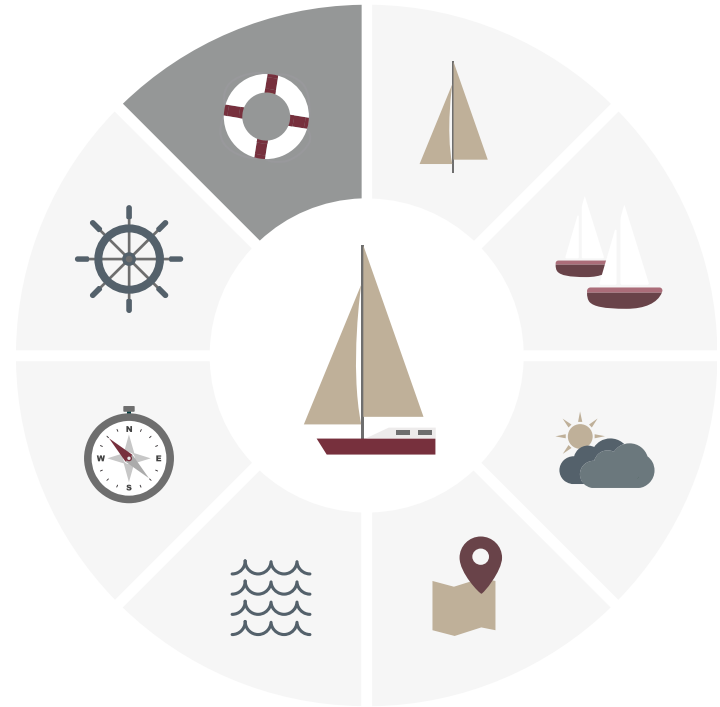
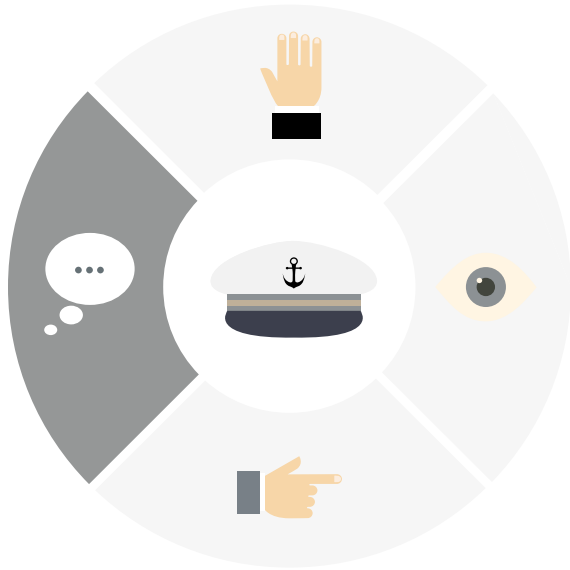


leak - thoughts



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

The captain: Thoughts



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Core question

?

“What influence does the individual's weaknesses have on his or her self-evaluation?”

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

beliefs about weaknesses

- people differ in the way they think about their weaknesses
- thoughts about weaknesses reflect the individual's relationship with weaknesses



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Self-evaluation



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Unconditional self-acceptance (Ellis, 1977)

”

“...fully and unconditionally accepting yourself, regardless of whether you behave correctly, intelligently or competently, and regardless of whether people respect, accept or love you.”

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Unconditional self-acceptance

Unconditional self-acceptance (US) results from **the belief** that the self is worthy no matter what.

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Unconditional self-acceptance

"I am okay."

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Unconditional self-acceptance

- the **unconditional** acceptance of the self despite weaknesses or deficiencies
- one does not feel inferior to others because of his or her weaknesses
- the self is not evaluated as less worthy because of weaknesses



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Thoughts about weaknesses reflecting US

"This weakness says nothing about my value as a human being."

"I deserve to be loved despite this weakness."

"I am worthy despite this weakness."

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

High levels of unconditional self-acceptance

- interpersonal satisfaction
- affect regulation
- positive body image
- leadership effectiveness
- life satisfaction
- mindfulness

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Conditional self-acceptance

Conditional self-acceptance (CS) results from **the belief** that the self's worth is dependent on the degree to which certain conditions for "worthiness" are met.

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Conditional self-acceptance

"I will be okay **when . . .**"

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Conditional self-acceptance

- weaknesses or deficiencies hinder acceptance of the self
- feeling inferior compared to others because of weaknesses
- the self is evaluated as less worthy because of weaknesses



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Thoughts about weaknesses reflecting CS

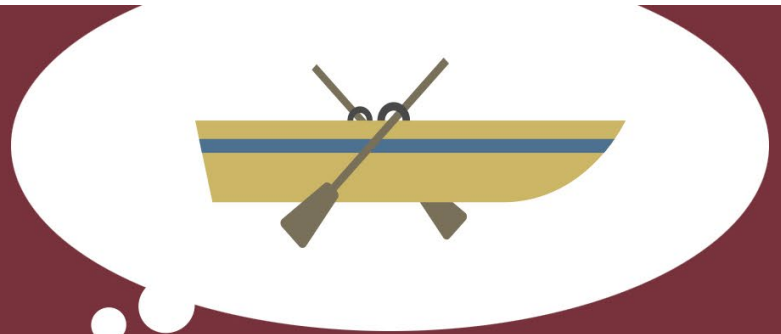
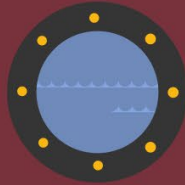
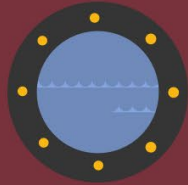
"I don't deserve to be loved because of this weakness."

"I am worth nothing because of this weakness."

"This weakness proves that I am not enough."

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Sailboat metaphor



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

high levels of conditional self-acceptance

- higher levels of depression and anxiety
- narcissism
- important contributor to the development and maintenance of eating disorders and obesity
- contribute to a negative body image

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Evaluation that reflects CS

Situation: A student gets a low grade.

Thoughts: “I’m a complete failure”.

Everyone succeeds except me.”



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Evaluation that reflects US

Situation: A student gets a low grade.

Thoughts: “I will try and get more out of the next exam. I will practice more. My value as a person is not made up by my test/exam score.”



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Evaluation that reflects CS

Situation: A person experiences high level of stress.

Thoughts: “I should not feel stressed. It’s a sign that I am weak and not able to handle things.”



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Evaluation that reflects US

Situation: A person experiences high levels of stress.

Thoughts: “It is OK for me to be stressed. Everyone experiences stress now and then.”



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

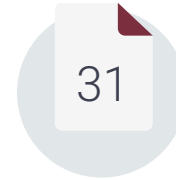
Practical note



When clients' thoughts about their weaknesses reflect low self-acceptance, the practitioner should avoid trying to change these thoughts through reasoning.

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

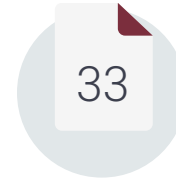
Unconditional self-acceptance



- unconditional self-acceptance questionnaire
- trait level of unconditional self-acceptance
- 20 items
- how characteristic is each statement for you?

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Reflecting on self-acceptance



- Have there been moments when you found it difficult to accept yourself for who you are? If so, when?
- Which standard do you fail to achieve in these moments?
Describe the standard.
- How would it feel if you were able to let go of this standard and accept yourself for the way you are in these moments?

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Increasing self-acceptance



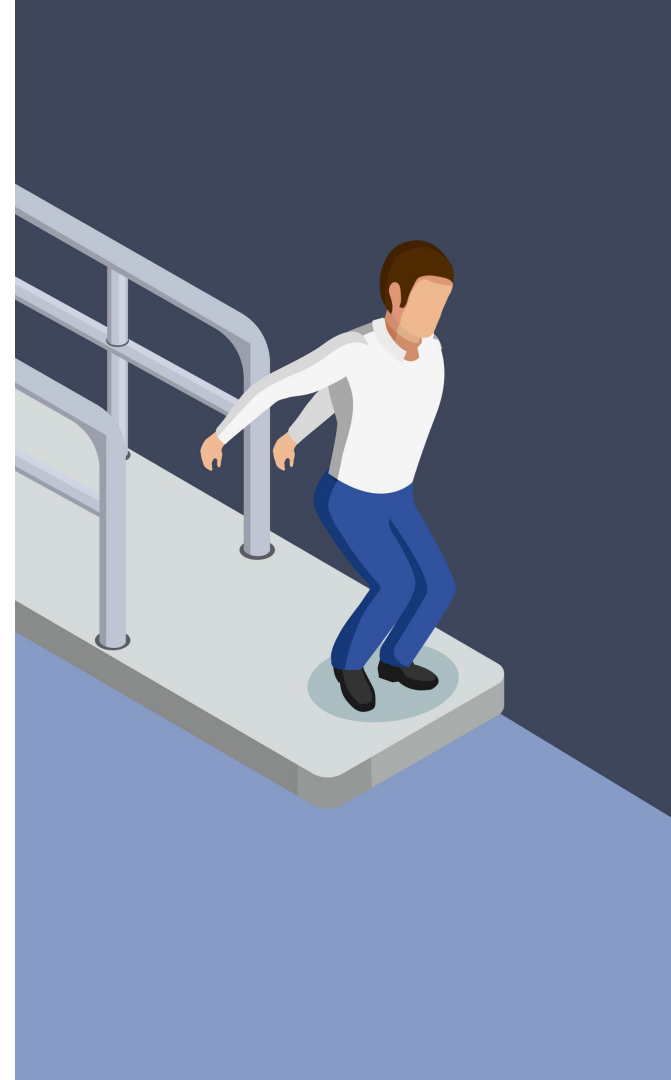
How can we increase self-acceptance?

Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Increasing self-acceptance

setting an intention

- understand the reasons for change
- experience the necessity for change
- shift paradigms from a world of blame, doubt, and shame to a world of allowance, tolerance, and acceptance



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Increasing self-acceptance

monitoring self-rating

- noticing when self-rating occurs
- aware of how self-rating affects feelings, thoughts, and behavior
- rate behavior rather than the self



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Increasing self-acceptance

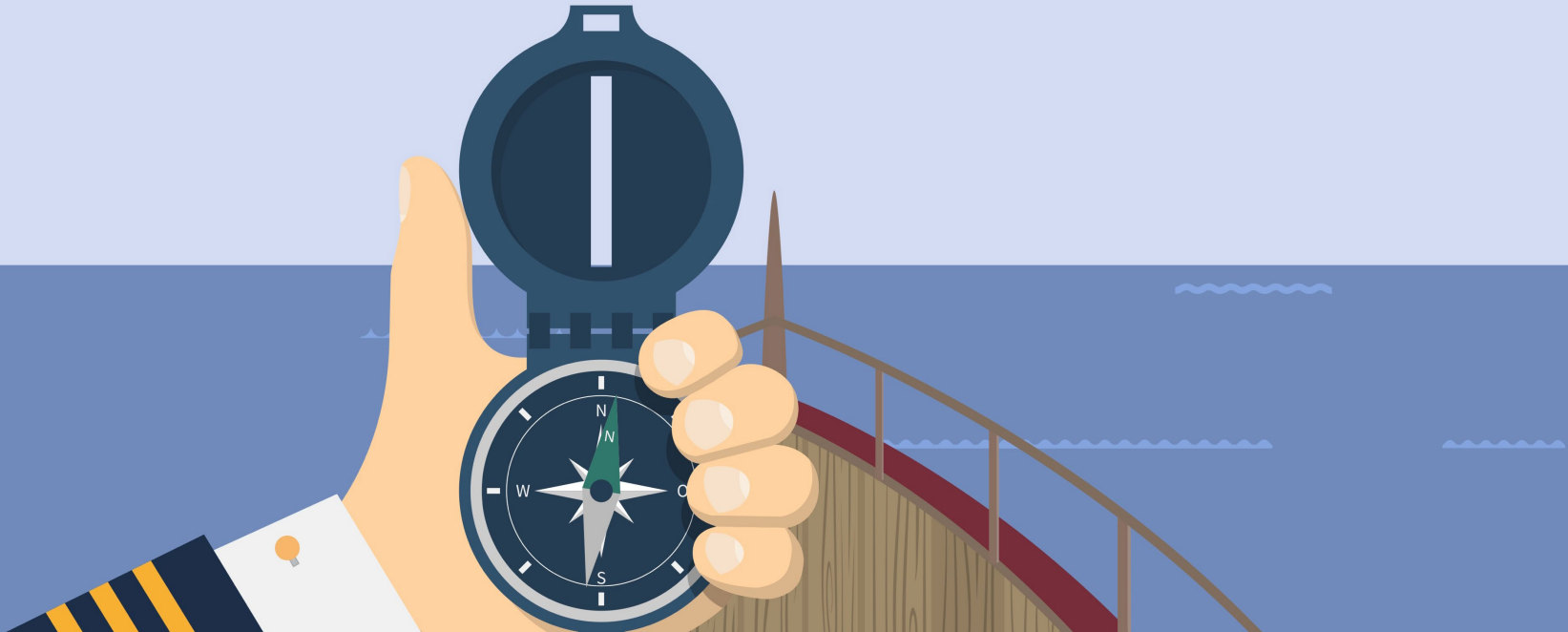
acceptance of experiences

- cultivating an open, non-judgmental stance towards personal experiences
- “living” self-acceptance by creating space to be exactly as one is at that moment.



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Sailboat metaphor



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Increasing self-acceptance

developing the courage to be
vulnerable

- the willingness to let others see one's true self, including one's strengths and imperfections.
- overcoming the fear of being rejected



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Sailboat metaphor



Self-evaluation (leak- thoughts)

Increasing self-acceptance

strengthening the self-as-process

- one must have a self-story in order to rate this story
- the self-as-process cannot be rated



Motivation for Improvement

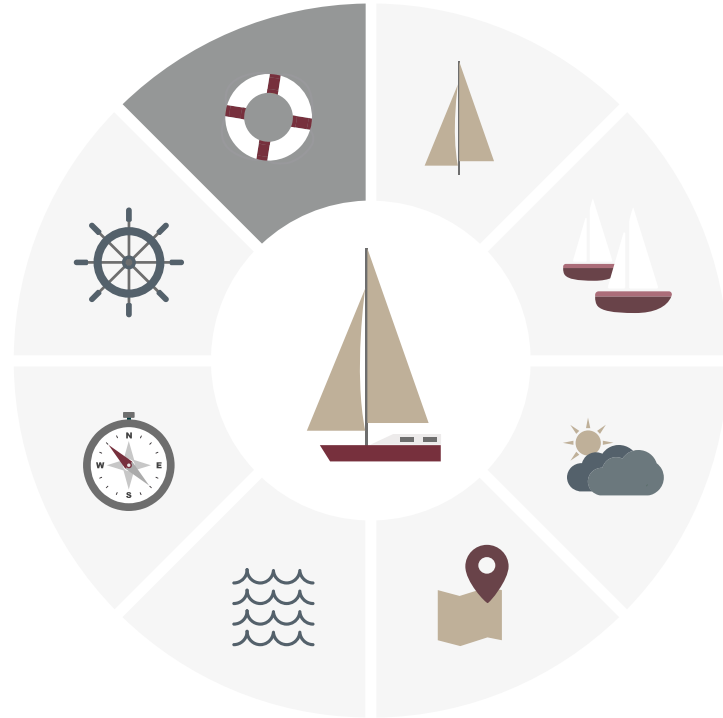
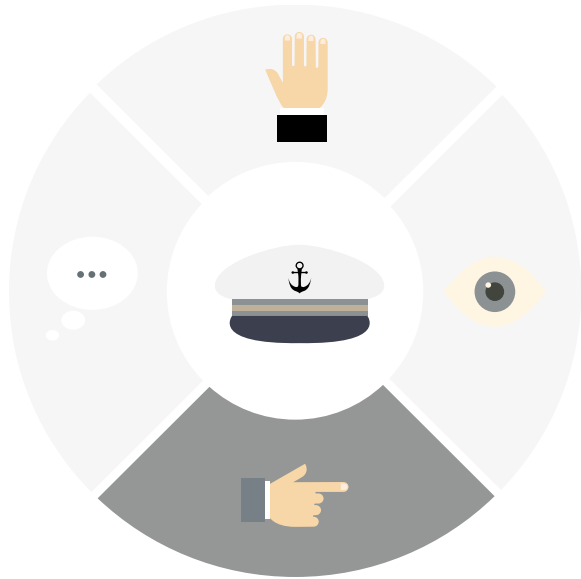


leak - motivation



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

The captain: Motivation



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

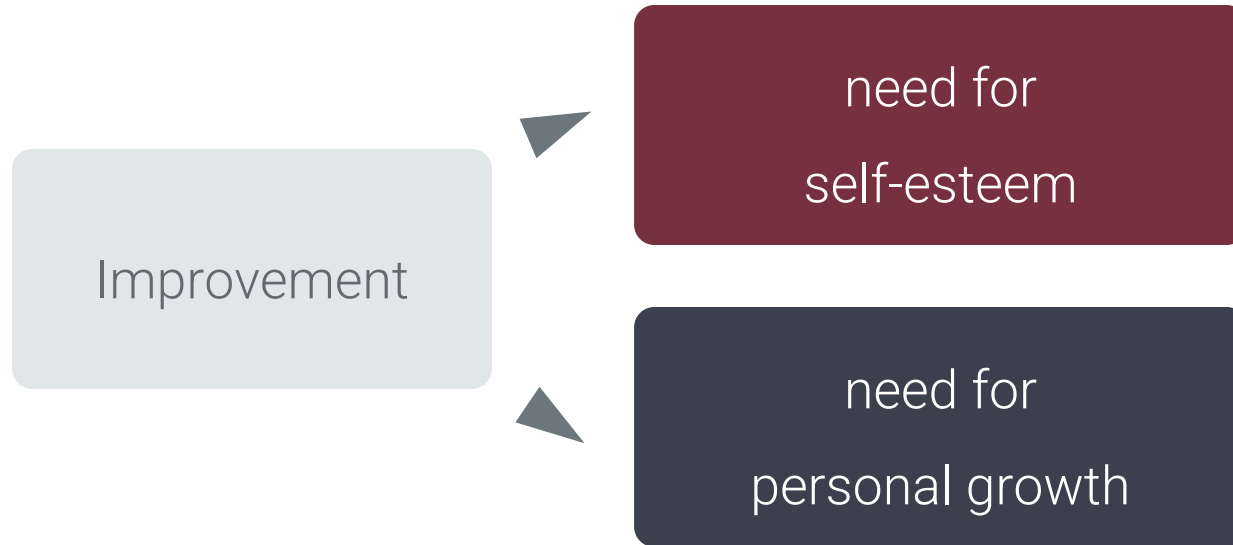
Core question

?

“Which needs underlie the individual’s attempt to overcome weaknesses?”

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

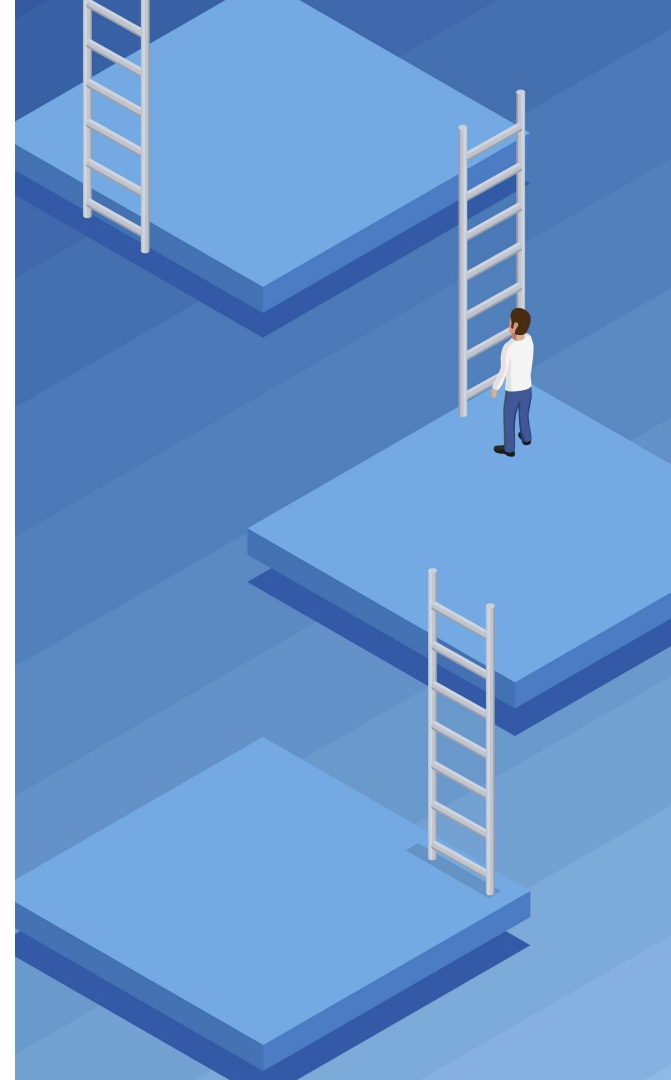
Different needs



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Need for self-esteem

- starting point: I am ok **if...**
- extrinsic
- arguably one of of the most influential motivators of behavior
- often occurs outside of conscious awareness



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Self-esteem

- a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self
(Rosenberg, 1965)
- feelings of self-worth
- core process = self-evaluation / self-rating
- conditions that must be met for the individual to be “worthy”

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Conditions of worth



EXTERNAL STANDARD

media images
work targets
expectations from others

INTERNAL STANDARD

productivity
beauty
financial success

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

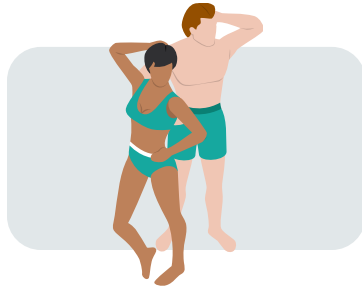
Domains of self-worth

People pursue self-esteem by attempting to achieve success and avoid failure in domains they consider to be **central to their self-concept**.

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Domains of self-worth

SELF-CONCEPT



“If I succeed at domain X, then I have value as a person;
if I fail at domain X, then I am worthless.”

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

The self-esteem paradox

people with high self-esteem are:

- more satisfied with their lives
- less anxious
- less hopeless
- less depressed

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

The self-esteem paradox

yet high self-esteem is associated with:

- more violence
- being less open to unfavourable feedback
- placing success over well-being
- narcissism
- bullying



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

The costs of pursuing self-esteem

- A. negative emotions
- B. confirmation addiction
- C. psychological need thwarting
- D. unrealistic ideals

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

A) Negative emotions

- failure in domains that are central to one's self-concept
- anticipation of future failures, criticisms, rejections, or inabilities
- success only momentarily relieves feelings of anxiety



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

B) Confirmation addiction

- success is temporary assurance
one is “good enough”
- restlessness
- continuous drive to prove self-worth
to oneself and others



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

C) Psychological need thwarting

continuous
pressure to “be
worthy”

more concerned
with performance
than learning

pre-occupation
with self and
need to be
superior to others

autonomy

competence

relatedness

Practical note



Trying to boost clients' self-esteem by helping them to evaluate themselves more positively may not be an effective way to increase their well-being.

The problem with these attempts is that they all strengthen the very process that is responsible for the client's low feelings of self-worth: evaluation of the self's worth based on a standard. Thus, **attempting to boost the client's self-esteem may actually worsen the complaints**, as the conditional relationship of the client with him or herself is strengthened.

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

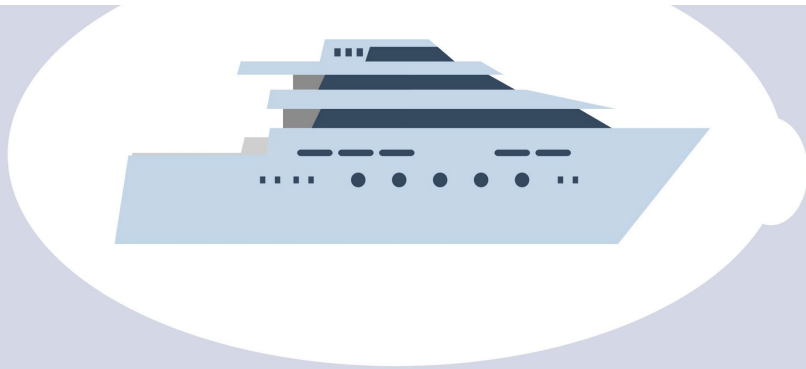
D) Unrealistic ideals

- perfectionism
- impossibly idealized image: low self-esteem inevitable
- eating disorders, depression, personality disorders, sexual dysfunction, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorders



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Sailboat metaphor



Motivation for Improvement (leak– motivation)

Practical note



Many positive psychology interventions, like “the best possible self” or “at your best” invite clients to contemplate about a best possible version of the self. If not used with caution, these exercises can easily become interpreted by clients as a focus on **“improving the imperfect self”**. When this is the case, they may resonate with the client’s deep held belief that he is ‘not good enough’, or ‘not there yet’.

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Need for personal growth

- starting point: I am ok
- intrinsic
- the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Need for personal growth



Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Motivational differences

need for self-esteem

VS

need for personal growth

outcome oriented

process oriented

driven by what the self
should be

driven by what the self
needs

driven by the fear of not
being enough

driven by the love of
development

Motivation for Improvement (leak- motivation)

Practical note



A powerful way for clients to connect with motivation that is driven by the need for personal growth (and not a need for self-esteem) is to help them **cultivate a growth mindset**. A growth mindset helps to shift attention from failure to meet a standard (an “outside-in orientation”) to personal growth.

Self-care

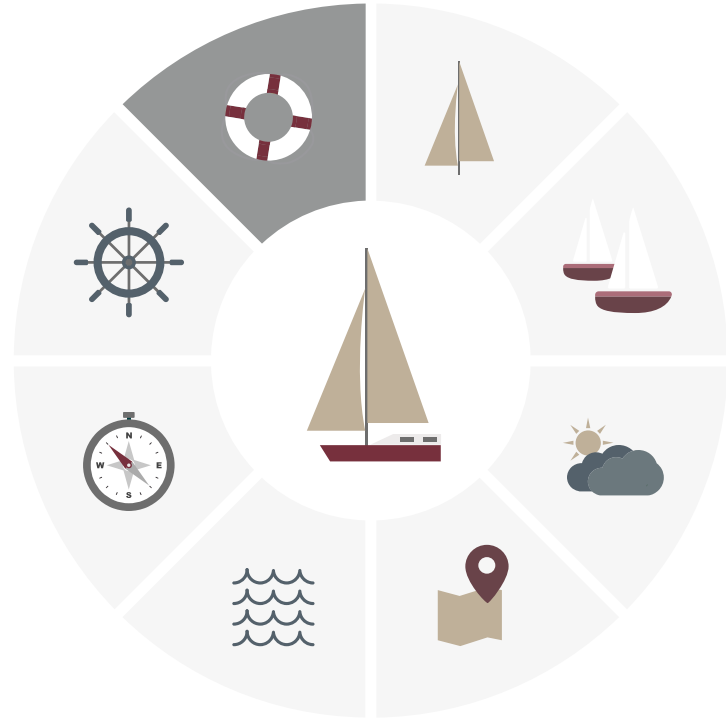
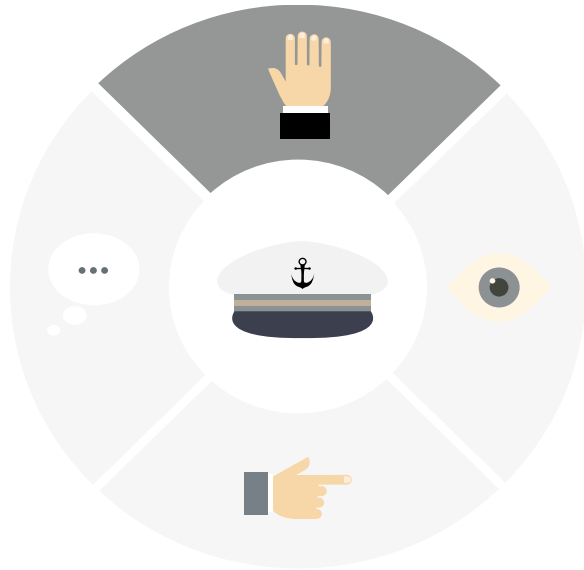


leak - action



Self-care (leak- action)

The captain: Action



Self-care (leak- action)

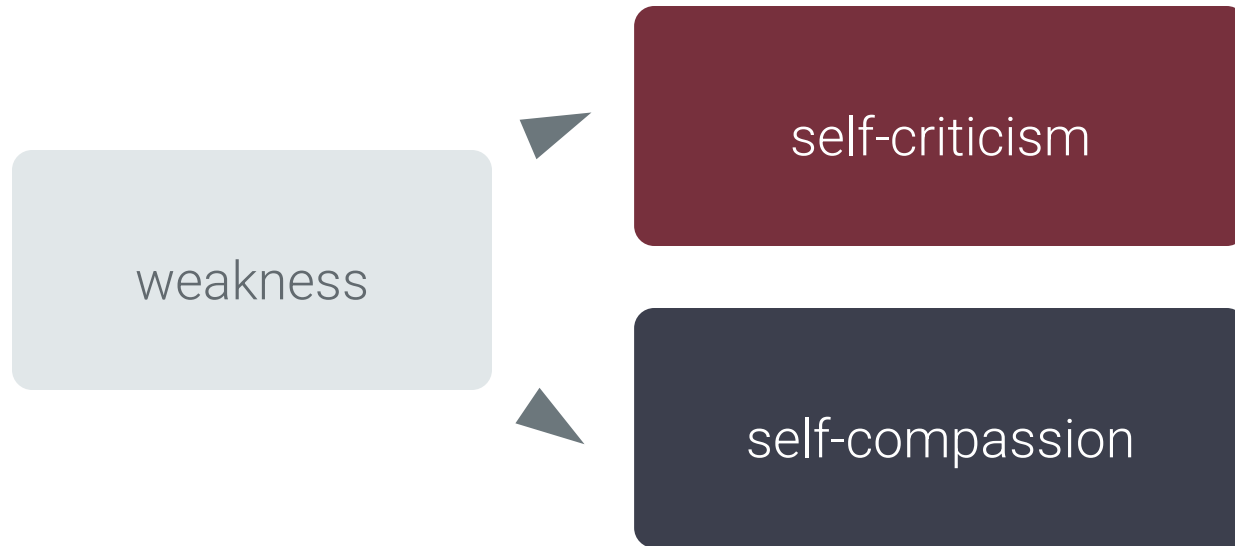
Core question

?

“How does the individual treat him- or herself when confronted with weaknesses?”

Self-care (learn- action)

Reacting to weaknesses



Self-care (leak– action)

Self-criticism



Bring to mind a recent situation where you were disappointed in yourself. Perhaps you made a mistake, or failed to reach an important goal, or did the wrong thing. With this situation in mind, consider the following:

- What did you say to yourself? What words did you use?
- What was the tone of (inner) voice?
- How did it make you feel?

Self-care (leak- action)

Self-criticism

- negative and critical attitude towards the self
- blaming the self for weaknesses
- function: prevention of mistakes and motivation toward ideals

Self-care (leak- action)

Thoughts

- What is wrong with me?
- How could I let this happen?
- I can't do anything right
- If I continue like this, I will inevitably fail
- Fool!
- A child could do this better
- It's no wonder I never succeed



Self-care (leak– action)

Self-criticism

pointing towards
threats

monitoring
weakness

judgement

“if you don’t do
X, you will...”

“you messed
this up again”

“you’re weak”

Self-care (leak- action)

Sailboat metaphor



Self-care (leak- action)

Practical note



The absence of self-criticism can be, but is not always a predictor of high self-acceptance. The absence of self-criticism may also indicate that the client is generally able to **live up to the expectations** that he has set for himself.

Self-care (leak- action)

High levels of self-criticism

- eating disorders
- substance abuse
- depression
- social anxiety
- impaired social relationships



Self-care (learn- action)

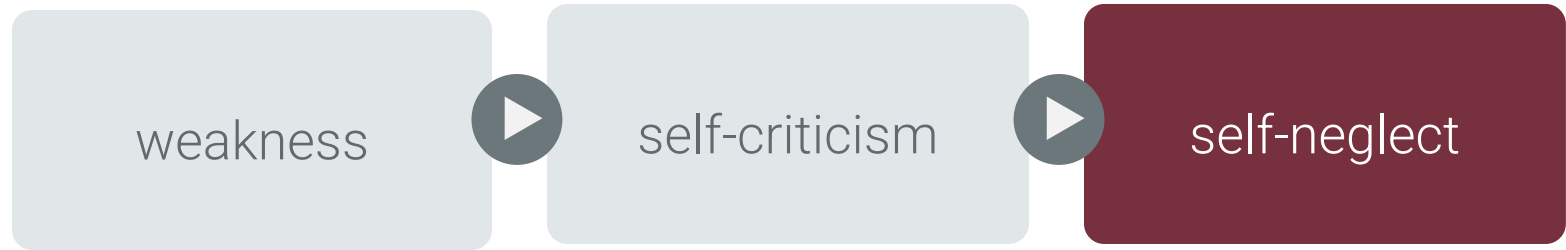
Practical note



A client who claims he or she does not suffer from inner criticism may **lack awareness** of his or her inner criticism. Over the years, the voice of the inner critic can become so internalised and automatic, that the individual perceives it as an inseparable part of the self, failing to observe it from a distance.

Self-care (leak- action)

Behavior



Self-care (leak- action)

Self-neglect

Self-neglect is a behavioral condition in which an individual is unable or unwilling to recover, maintain, and improve his or her physical and mental health.

Self-care (leak- action)

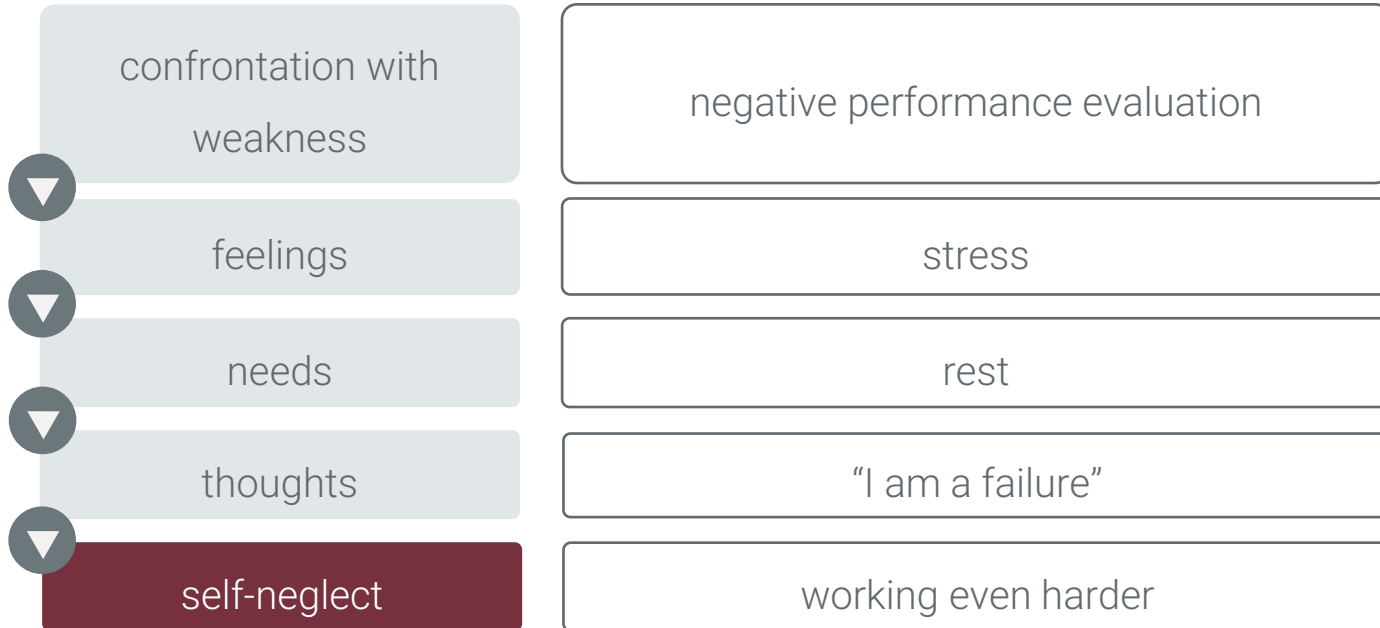
Self-neglect

- primary focus = fixing
- persisting despite pain
- ignoring personal needs
- (physical) self-harm



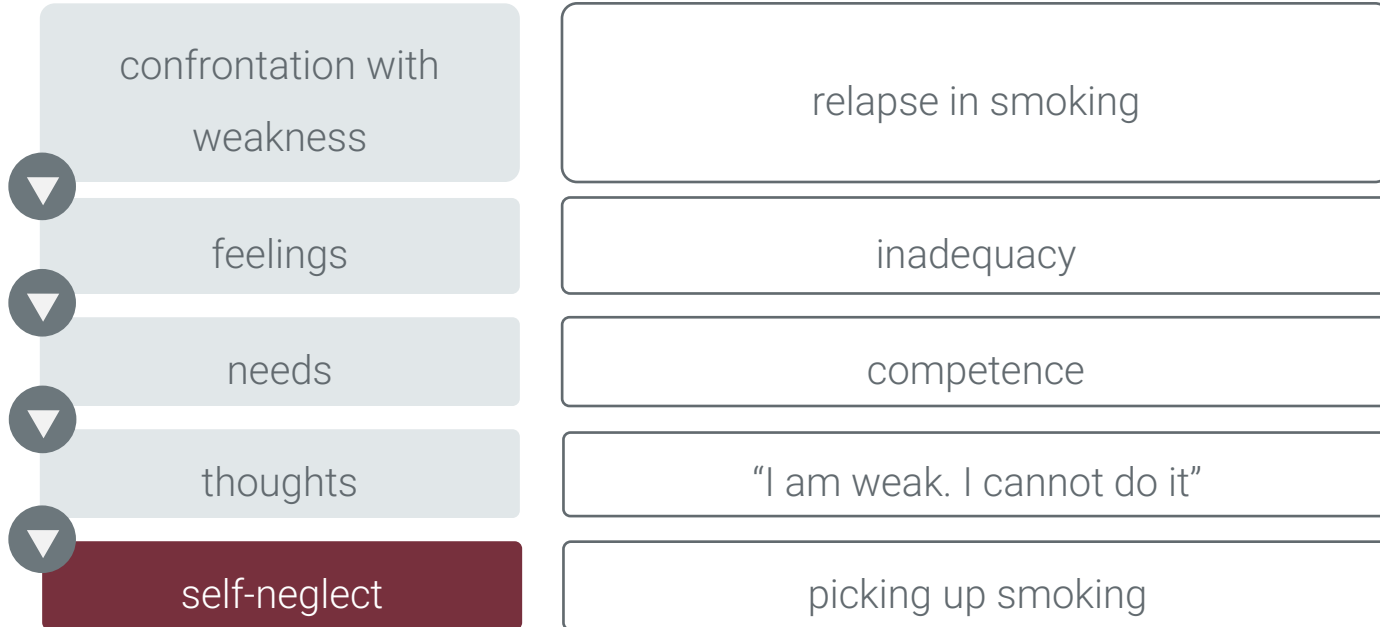
Self-care (leak- action)

Self-neglect



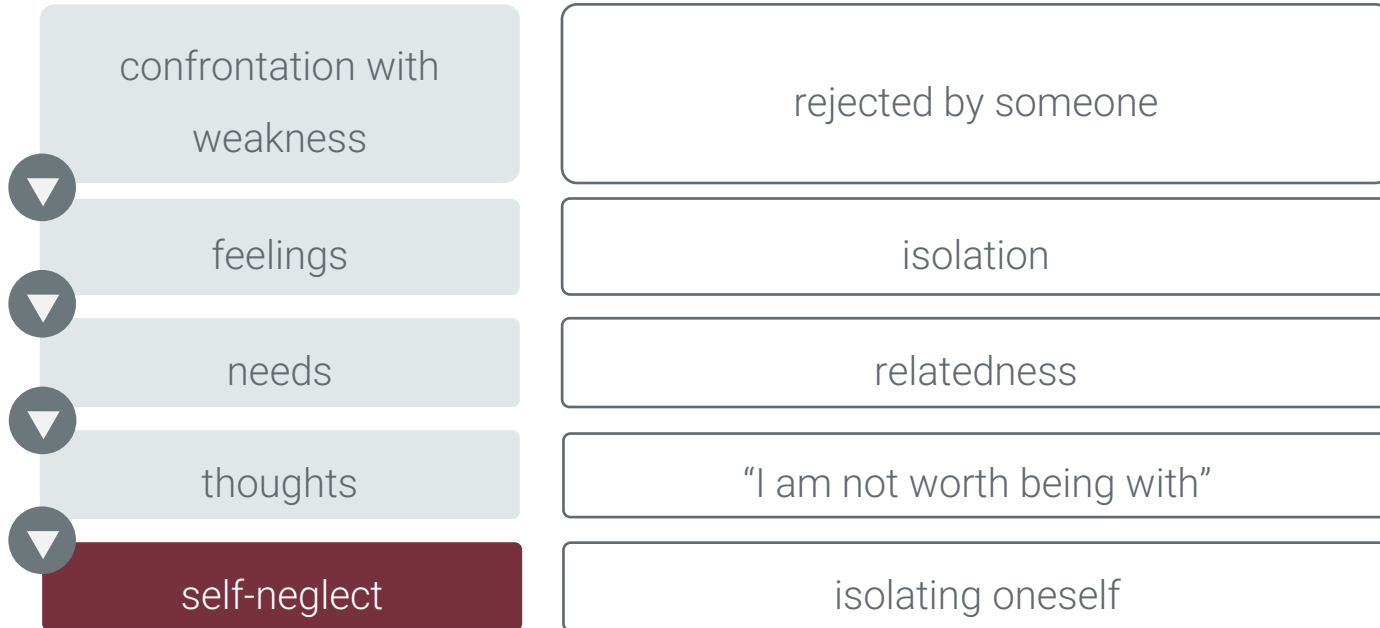
Self-care (leak- action)

Self-neglect



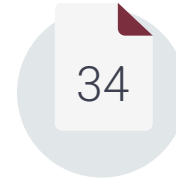
Self-care (leak- action)

Self-neglect



Self-care (leak- action)

How would you treat a friend?



- Bring to mind a time when a close friend was confronted with a personal weakness, or felt badly about themselves. Describe the situation, including what you felt for your friend, and what you said to him or her.
- Now think about a time when you yourself were confronted with a personal weakness. Recall what you said to yourself, and what tone of voice you used, at the time.
- Analyse the differences.

Self-care (leak- action)

Self-compassion

- approaching ourselves with the same kindness as we would with others
- kind and understanding attitude towards the self
- treating the self with care and concern when considering personal inadequacies, mistakes, failures, and painful life situations
- desire to be healthy

Self-care (leak- action)

Thoughts

- I tried my best
- I am a human being, just like everybody else
- I never signed a contract to be perfect
- I learned something
- next time, I will do it differently

Self-care (leak- action)

Self-compassion is not

- self-pity
- selfish
- self-indulgent
- a form of making excuses



Self-care (leak- action)

Sailboat metaphor



Self-care (leak- action)

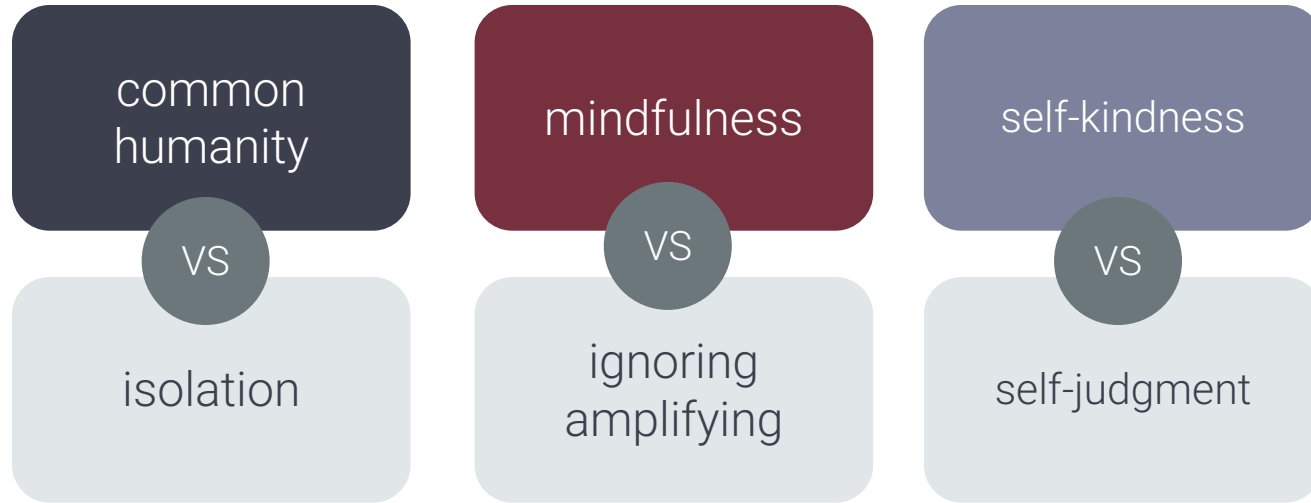
Self-compassion

higher levels of self-compassion are associated with:

- lower level of anxiety and depression
- less rumination and thought suppression
- better emotional coping skills
- greater personal initiative to make needed changes

Self-care (leak- action)

3 components



Self-care (leak- action)

Common humanity



have you ever:

- felt nervous before speaking in public?
- felt insecure about your appearance?
- said something to another person that you later regretted?
- felt insecure about your own capabilities?
- failed a test?

Self-care (learn- action)

Self-compassion vs self-esteem

- level of self-compassion predicts **stable feelings of self-worth** more than self-esteem
- self-esteem (but not self-compassion) is positively correlated with **narcissism**
- compared with self-esteem, self-compassion is more strongly associated with taking **personal responsibility** for one's role in negative events

Self-care (leak- action)

Self-compassion vs self-esteem

self-esteem	self-compassion
self-evaluation	relating to the self
comparisons needed	no comparisons needed
disconnectedness	interconnectedness
contingent on circumstances	regardless of circumstances

Self-care (learn- action)

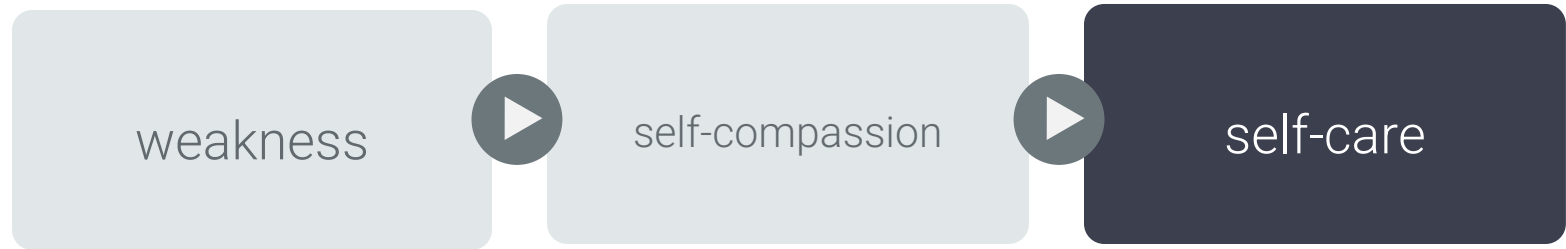
Neff, Hseih, & Dejitthirat (2005)

participants in the self-compassion condition:

- viewed their weakness as more malleable
- showed greater motivation to make amends and avoid repeating a recent moral transgression
- devoted more time to studying for a difficult test after an initial failure
- reported greater self-improvement motivation

Self-care (leak- action)

Behavior



Self-care (learn- action)

Self-care

Self-care involves the actions an individual might take in order to **recover, maintain, and improve his or her physical and mental health**. Self-care is needed to meet both physical and mental needs.

Self-care (leak- action)

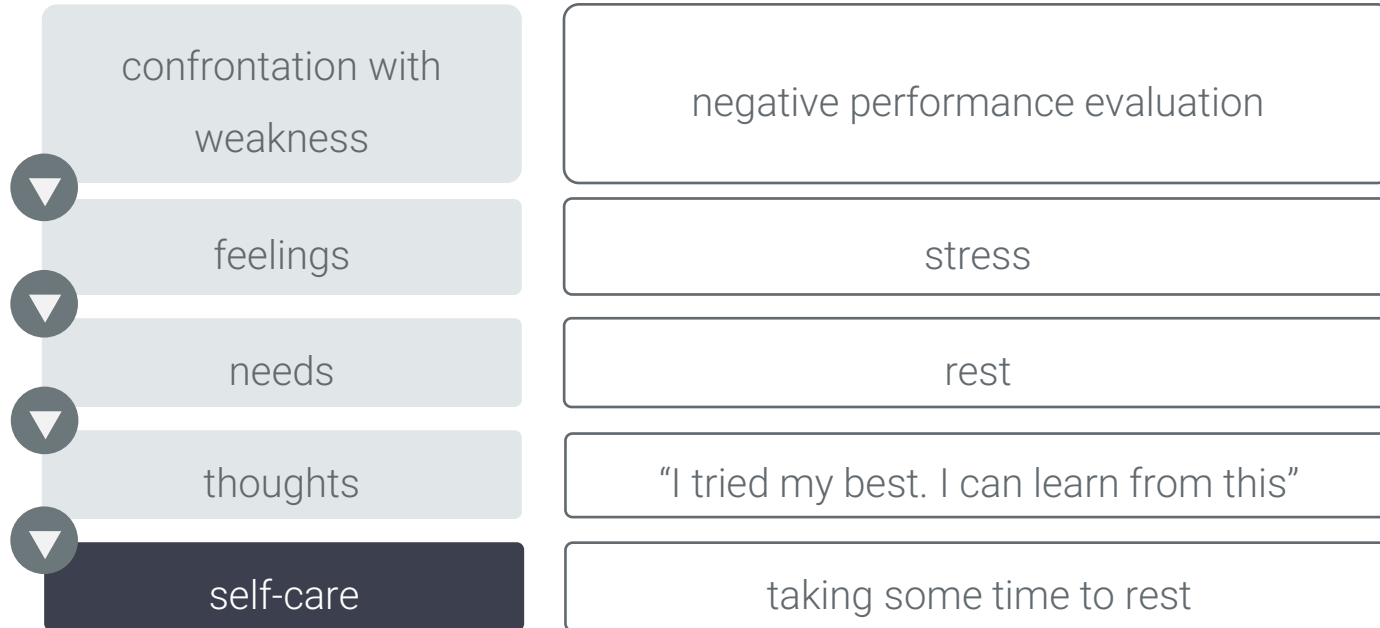
Self-care

- primary focus = need fulfilment
- stopping
- activities that provide a sense of warmth and being cared for



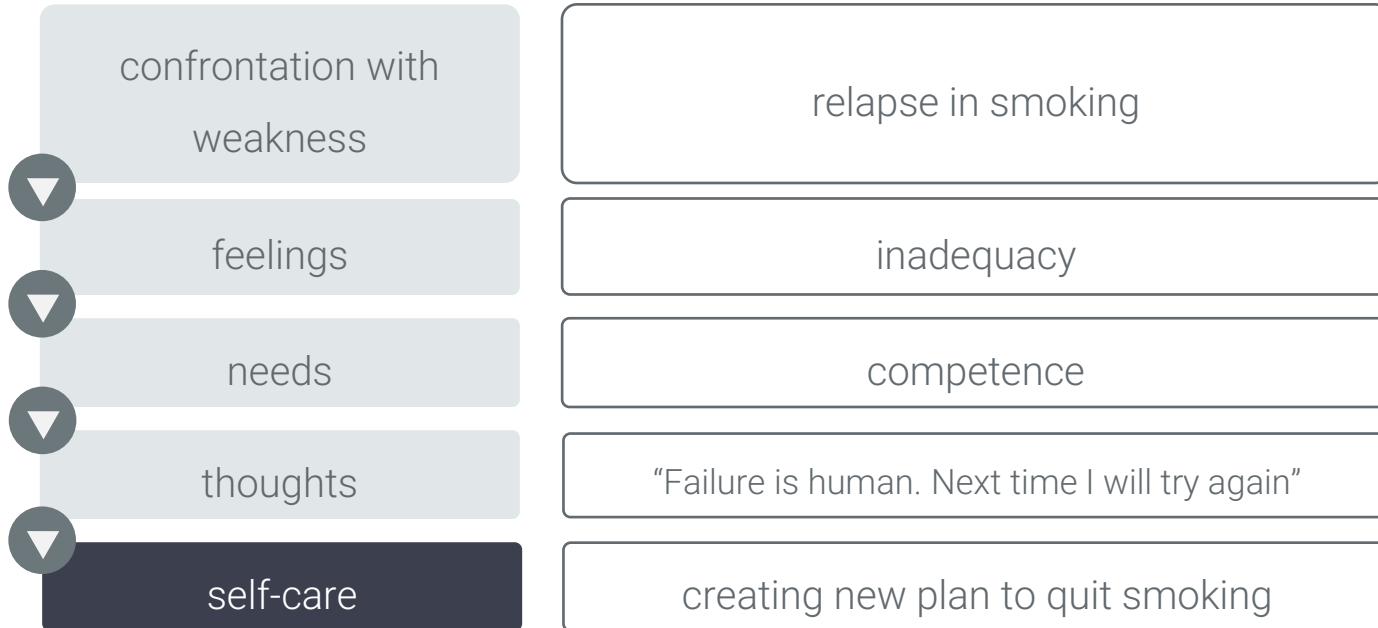
Self-care (leak- action)

Self-care



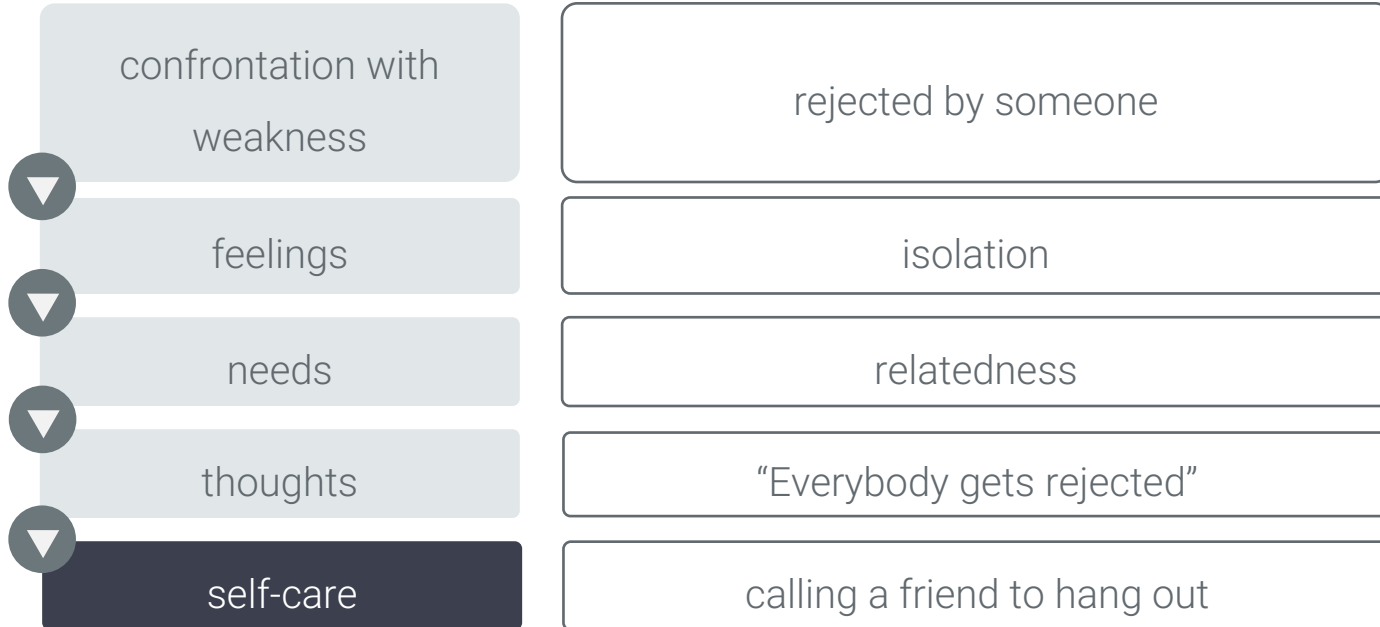
Self-care (leak- action)

Self-care



Self-care (leak- action)

Self-care



Self-care (leak- action)

Practical note



Some clients may argue that by cultivating more self-compassion they will become lazy or unmotivated to address their weaknesses. It is important for these clients to realize that a self-compassionate individual still evaluates his or her behavior. The difference, however, lies in **the starting point for improvement**; self-criticism may be a great motivator but is mainly fuelling action by guilt and a fear of failure, whereas **self-compassion is fuelled by kindness and encouragement.**

Self-care (leak- action)

Increasing self-care

awareness of self-criticism

- observing inner critic
- disrupting automatic cycle of self-punishment, negative feelings and self-neglect



Self-care (learn- action)

Increasing self-care

replacing self-criticism with constructive feedback

- friendly, curious stance
- What would I say to a close friend in the same situation?
- What can I learn from this?



Self-care (leak- action)

Increasing self-care

tuning in to personal needs

- focus on personal rather than others' needs first
- reduce excessive focus on the future
- increase willingness to approach emotions



Self-care (leak- action)

Practical note



When introducing the idea of self-compassion, clients may respond with “I am not at all like that”. What is likely here is that the client is not familiar with expressing this kind of behavior. **Building more self-compassion into their daily life** can help them to relate more and more to their “new” self-compassionate self.

Self-care (learn- action)

Increasing self-care

actively using social support

- others may help to satisfy personal needs
- overcome barriers to seeking contact with or help from others



Self-care (leak– action)

Sailboat metaphor



Self-care (leak– action)

Practical note



Inspiring clients to use social support is not easy for many practitioners because they often refrain from doing so themselves. Commonly, this is caused by the practitioner's belief that reaching out for assistance violates their role-based self-story. By practicing techniques that strengthen the self-as-process, practitioners can learn to discriminate stories about who they should be from what they really need in this moment.

Self-care (leak– action)

Increasing self-care

distancing oneself from unsupportive relationships

- Which people try to bring me down?
- Which people speak negatively to me?
- Which people reinforce negative self-talk?



Self-care (leak– action)

Practical note



Some self-care actions may provide immediate need fulfilment but not long-term wellbeing. For example, alcohol may satisfy a client's need for relaxation in the short-term, but if used excessively and over a long time, will have negative impact on well-being. It is recommended that the practitioner **review the client's current self-care actions** and where necessary, help the client replace unhealthy ones with better alternatives.

Thanks



for your attention