

Meditation has many benefits, but in terms of self-compassion two are particularly important.

Resilience

As we have seen, our brains have evolved to notice negative events more quickly than positive ones and to remember them for longer. This makes sense when we think of our ancestors wanting to avoid danger – knowing where a predator is lurking becomes more important than sampling some juicy berries we have just come across. Furthermore, we need to remember the places the predator is likely to hang out, so we can avoid it in the future. However, for many of us in our daily lives this can mean that we focus on the bad stuff that happens to us at the expense of the good. Perhaps we have a lovely night out with friends – good food, lively conversation and lots of laughter – but then on the way home we get caught by a speeding camera. From then on we will remember the event as, 'that evening I got caught for speeding'! Once our brains have latched on to a negative thought, we tend to replay it over and over again. We call this rumination.

Being able to work with our thoughts and emotions in meditation helps us to build resilience. As we become more proficient at allowing our thoughts to come and go – like

Make notes from your experience

clouds moving across the sky – something settles. We see our thoughts and emotions more clearly and are less entranced by them. We can allow ourselves to be in each moment without judgement and without wishing things were one way or another. Resilience is an important skill in working with stress.

Accessing our soft spot

Because in meditation we are not defending anything, it is easier to connect with our own soft spot, our capacity for love and kindness. This soft spot is the source for compassion for us, and for others. With meditation, we can peel away the layers that obscure our natural kindness, revealing a rich resource with which we can face life's difficulties. We are more in touch with our own tender heart, our innate gentleness. Accessing this part of ourselves is a tremendous boost to our ability to practise self-compassion. It can help to provide the alternative voice to our harsh inner critic.