

Three systems (compassion focused therapy)



When we lack self-compassion we can judge ourselves and feel our motivations are shameful. But, it is believed that there are 3 evolutionary reasons why we do things. When evaluating a decision consider which of these were active and if you can have compassion for yourself with that knowledge.

The Drive system

This system evolved to make us want things that feel good. People sometimes feel wanting is shameful but this system is responsible for us gathering food and shelter, pair bonding and other things that humans need to survive.

The Soothe system

This system evolved to make us stop and take care of ourselves. It lets us rest, recover and seek support. Needing these is not a failure to cope, it is coping.

When feeling shame- what systems drove the behaviour. Be compassionate even if you did wrong

The Threat system

This system evolved to identify and respond to danger. It generates anxiety and avoidance. While these are harmful if the danger was only a worry in real dangerous situations they are essential to survive.

Balancing these systems and having them trigger only when they are useful (e.g. threat should trigger in response to real danger rather than hypothetical danger) is important for mental health. But you can't reflect on how to balance them if you are ashamed of them, that prevents real reflection. These are natural responses, even if they triggered in the wrong situation or way. Even if you got it wrong you are still not bad. You are just learning the balance of the systems.