Self-Care Strategies MIND:
An Invitation to Explore Resistance

When we wish that our current reality is different than it is, we experience resistance. The truth is that often what we resist persists. We may experience resistance as we explore compassion resilience in the workplace. Valid questions from staff that include the role of personal sharing at work, the risks of saying too much, and the fear of being judged or evaluated can be addressed openly. Depending on your social location and how power is used in your setting, there may be identifiable resistance that is both self-protective and a reaction to oppressive dynamics in the workplace. Historical acts of resistance have been the gateway for awareness and change, and this perspective can be elevated as part of our shared story, rather than deferred as an individual's "resistance." If one has felt othered or marginalized, what is the motivation to engage in this work? Is collegial support accessible to all staff? Is vulnerability an acceptable pathway for learning and support?

We can develop strengths in the areas of compassionate action and resilience. Just as the way to develop our bodies after years of inactivity is through gradually introducing exercise, cultivating compassion resilience is no different. And, just as the introduction of exercise inevitably leaves us feeling the soreness of our first steps, sometimes our steps towards becoming more compassion resilient can be uncomfortable and bring up feelings of resistance. The good news is that this resistance can decrease as we incorporate what we learn and life satisfaction increases.

Some of us have learned to associate relationships in the workplace with the arrival of punishment, rejection, or compassion fatigue. After experiences of harsh treatment at the hands of leaders or colleagues during our careers, we can come to associate closeness or support at work with a pending threat. There also may be historical or personal trauma that influences one's willingness to engage in the activities that support compassion resilience. The following reflective questions can be considered when resistance to the toolkit arises:

1. What does support look like for me with the personal identity that I have?

2. What do I stand to lose if I engage in the work of the toolkit?

3. How can my workplace acknowledge and support the differential impact that may occur for certain individuals (i.e., a new staff member, the only person of color on the staff, a person in acute grief, or an out gay staff member)?

We may associate times that we have offered compassion without boundaries and became fatigued or burnt out. This can lead to some difficult feelings, and it certainly can lead to resistance to the idea of compassion and compassion resilience. When we notice "resistance" to compassion – in others or even in ourselves – we are watching a natural process of responding to expectations of threat. We can remember that it is not our fault that we experience such resistance. It may be helpful to remember that compassion becomes increasingly available to us as we become available to it at our own pace. Throughout the toolkit, we will learn new ways to protect ourselves from the type of compassionate action that drains our well-being.

[1] Weng, H., Fox, A., Shackman, A., Stodola, d.,...Davidson, R. (2013). *Compassion training alters altruism and neural responses to suffering. Psychological Science, 1-10.*

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Self-Care Strategies: MIND (continued)

Reflections:

- What reactions did you have when you heard that your school will be focusing on building compassion resilience over the next few years?

- What experiences from your past do you think informed how you reacted to this news? What is healthy for me to resist?

- How might accepting your resistance as being "what is for now," allow you to engage in the work of compassion resilience? In evaluating the pros and cons, where do you land?

- Consider the role of how participation with boundaries that align with your personal identity may be useful.

- If you felt "all in" when this experience was introduced, how might that be detrimental along the way? What do you need to sustain your openness? Consider how you might communicate this to the toolkit facilitator(s).

- What will help you to shift from resistance to openness about this experience? What additional support might you benefit from? Consider how you might communicate this to the toolkit facilitator(s).

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