

**Compassion Focused Therapy
Promoting A Balanced Emotional State**

W J Phillips

The Three Systems Dashboard



We can think about emotional regulation and wellbeing in three key areas.

Threat - The fight, flight or freeze response. This regulates how we respond to potential danger or risk.

Drive - The force that motivates and moves us towards what we want and desire.

Soothe - The balancing system that improves our capacity for self-compassion / support and alleviates the deleterious effects of stress.

Threat



**Purpose: Threat detection
& protection “Better safe
than sorry”**



Amygdala

Adrenaline, cortisol



**Feelings: Anxiety, anger,
disgust**

Drive



Purpose: To motivate us towards resources



Nucleus accumbens

Dopamine



Feelings: Wanting, pursuing, achieving, progressing, focused

Soothe



Purpose: To manage distress & promote bonding



Prefrontal cortex

Opiates, oxytocin



Feelings: Contented, safe, protected, cared-for, trust

When The System is Out of Balance



Research indicates that when these systems are out of balance, we can experience emotional regulation problems. This is particularly prevalent in individuals that experience high levels of self criticism, guilt and shame.

Anxious Exhaustion / Burn Out



When we experience periods of high threat and high drive, we are driven by the need to avoid risk, threat, uncertainty or danger. This leaves us feeling constantly anxious, always on guard and emotionally depleted.

Anxious / Depression



When we experience enduring periods of high threat and low drive, we find ourselves locked into a continuous state of hopeless anxiety. We feel depressed about our anxiety and feel unable to escape the worry and distress. This is often associated with mixed states of generalised anxiety and depression.

The Balancing Effect



Attempting to suppress or stop our perception of threat is difficult. The answer is to develop resilience so that we can respond to and manage threat.

The threat and the compassion system have a mutual balancing effect. As we learn to exercise self compassion, we develop personal resilience, reduce negative perceptions and moderate our unrealistic reactions to threat.

Healthy Motivation



Moderate threat, high compassion and high drive is associated with states of optimum productivity and effectiveness.

We are motivated to responsibly achieve our goals without neglecting our personal needs. These states are not continuous, but represent flexible and resilient shifts from restful to high productive states.

We can think of this as "Bouncebackability".

Balanced / Restful States



Balanced states provide a healthy baseline for our normal dynamic range.

Balance means feeling proportionately responsible, self supporting and realistically ambitious.

This provides a restful state, consistent with developing presence, mindfulness and resilience.

Summary



Achieving long term balance is about developing our green capacity, whilst maintaining healthy red and blue settings. We don't want to neglect risk, nor do we want to lose our sense of drive or purpose.

Developing green means taking responsible action to self sooth, accept, and acknowledge ourselves as fallible human beings. It means replacing our critical voice with a realistic voice that acknowledges our value and develops our capacity for growth and self respect.