

## So what is compassion not? [Empathic care vs. distress]

Compassion is not:

- the *personal distress* one feels at the sight of someone else's pain,
- Simply feeling for someone's pain and *feeling sorry* about it.

For many of us, we can go into personal distress or empathic distress when we sense another person's suffering.

- This can shut down the heart space, versus opening us to compassion.

## **What is empathic distress?**

- When one feels distress, or get triggered over another person's suffering.
- It's discomfort, upset, and suffering in response to suffering.
- Empathic distress can be a form of our own trauma response to the suffering of others - we go into our own fight, flight, freeze, or fawn in response to their suffering.
- It leads to self-related emotions, stress, poor health, burnout, and withdrawal.
- Empathetic distress comes from our own wounding and the ways we defend/protect against them.
- Feels like an effort, is very limited, and is always draining
- May feel like their pain and suffering is yours.

**Empathic care** is characterized by tenderness, caring, openness, and warmth.

- It leads to other-related emotions, positive feelings, including love, good health, and connection.
- An awareness of others' suffering and understanding their experience rather than feeling their pain.
- **It's an understanding that it's their pain.**

## So how can we build up empathic care?

- **Through mindfulness - awareness that it's happening, and focus on the present moment** [ability to be where you are, doing what you are doing, noticing what is happening in your body, mind and environment, and being present with what is happening], **and non-judgemental acceptance.**
  - This is what can help regulate our distress.
- Awareness that this is not your suffering. It's theirs.
  - Can say a phrase to remind you, or can even take a movement like sitting back or feeling your own feet on the ground.  
“This is your pain, not mine.” or “I’m here with you, not for you.”