

**“When we give ourselves unconditional love, we discover the conditions under which we were unloved.”**

Kristin Neff, PhD

*growing pains of healing repressed emotions and trauma with self-compassion*

# PROCESS BACKDRAFT EMOTIONS

Refers to the pain – very old repressed pain – that arises when you provide yourself with compassion. It can be confusing and unsettling at first, expecting to feel better with self-care methods, only to feel suffering.

Backdraft is a firefighter term to describe when a fire has used all oxygen, but a window or door is opened, flames rush out as oxygen rushes in.

Since most of us have been taught, from a very young age, to abandon our emotional-self by suppressing, avoiding, attempting to numb, escape, or even shame our emotions - we have thereby "trapped" and "suffocated" these old emotions within.

Thus, it is inevitable to experience old pain like backdraft flames, flaring up, as you open the door of your heart to the fresh air of connecting with your emotions and your Self in a nurturing, caring way.



## WHAT DO BACKDRAFT EMOTIONS LOOK LIKE AND FEEL LIKE?

Backdraft is a key part of connecting and loving yourself, and is a sign that healing has begun. Backdraft is proof that you are lifting resistance and processing painful emotions and traumatic experiences.

Backdraft shows up as emotional, mental or physical uneasiness in many forms...

- **Mentally:** "I'm alone," "I'm a failure," "I'm too much," "I'm not enough", etc.
- **Behaviorally:** triggered reactions stemming from old "stuff" and regrets, in the form of angry outbursts, reactivity, maladaptive patterns of behavior, etc.
- **Physically:** body memories, aches, pains, inflammation, headaches, digestive issues, rashes, fatigue, fibromyalgia, food sensitivities, and more.
- **Emotionally:** shame, grief, fear, sadness, feeling vulnerable and 'too open' resulting in felt-need to clam-up and retreat into solitude as you process. This is okay and normal. Tears can appear out of nowhere and feel warmer, bigger, and more deeply cleansing than usual. Anger may get triggered, and you could feel angry at yourself for neglecting your feelings for so long (albeit unintentional)

**"Painful feelings are, by their very nature, temporary. They will weaken over time as long as we don't prolong or amplify them through resistance or avoidance. The only way to eventually free ourselves from debilitating pain, therefore, is to be with it as it is. The only way out is through."**

Kristin Neff, PhD

## WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I EXPERIENCE BACKDRAFT EMOTIONS?

### *four steps* TO PROCESS THROUGH BACKDRAFT AND EMOTIONAL FLASHBACK

- 1 LABEL** the experience for what it is: "Ah, this is backdraft emotion" in a kind, compassion tone
- 2 VALIDATE** that backdraft emotions are human and part of the healing process
- 3 SIT** with your feelings, emotions, inner dialogue, sensations, and present moment sensory experiences for at least 30 minutes
- 4 PROVIDE** yourself with even more self-compassion and self-care during this sensitive emotional experience

## RATHER THAN WAITING FOR BACKDRAFT, PRACTICE DAILY EXERCISES TO PROCESS BACKDRAFT

### *daily exercises* TO PRACTICE MINDFUL SELF-COMPASSION AND EMOTIONAL PROCESSING

Rather than waiting until you are feeling or experiencing backdraft, it is ideal to incorporate Self-Compassion exercises into your day. This builds your Soothing System, self-trust, Emotional Health Skills, and your ability to process through big feelings. Daily exercises can be as simple as **Daily Simple Comforts** and a daily **Guided Meditations**. You may also use the practices available within the Seven Days of Learning Self-Compassion.

## PROCESS BACKDRAFT WITH R.A.I.N.

### *practice* R.A.I.N. DURING PAINFUL EMOTIONS AND ALSO DURING SUBTLE FEELINGS

Self-compassion begins to naturally arise in the moments that we recognize we are suffering. This is especially true during painful emotions and beliefs, and during the depths of shame and feeling unworthy of love or even living. Self-Compassion comes into fullness as we intentionally nurture ourselves with self-care. Even though we can feel isolated and lame during these experiences, these experiences are part of being human, whether we like it or not. What our selves need more than anything during these times, is our own self-compassion and self-nurturance. Practice processing through subtle and excruciating emotions and beliefs with R.A.I.N, see worksheet below.

>> [Processing Painful Emotions](#)

