



The Selves Model

THE HAVEN SELVES MODEL *offers a way of understanding ourselves and an opportunity to live our lives with more awareness and choice. It traces an individual's development from an original Authentic Self towards an Ideal Self, derived at first from external sources such as family and society, and then internalized. As people consistently fail to match up to their internalized Ideal, and are confronted instead with the reality of their Actual Self, they fall into a cycle of self-hate which has a wide range of consequences for the health and well being of the person. The Haven model offers another option, which we call the cycle of self-compassion.*

The Selves model begins with the assumption that every person is born as an Authentic Self, with a basic nature that is unique to each individual. This 'essence' contains the entire potential of what the person might in time become.

As children grow, they gradually become aware of their parents' or guardians' expectations of them. Through daily experience they form an image of how they must be in order to please those upon whom they are dependent for their survival. This developing image is the kernel of a child's Ideal Self. Though its source is originally external, it is soon internalized and incorporated into a self-regulating system of behaviour in the maturing person. This system is further strengthened as the person encounters other sources of authority, at school and more widely in society. Frequently, the *demands* of the Ideal Self are in opposition to the *desires* of the Authentic Self, and most often the Authentic Self is surrendered in some form of compromise. This reality is a person's Actual Self.

This process is a normal and necessary part of growing up and being part of society. Each person must live as all three Selves, attempting to satisfy them all in order to maintain some emotional balance and ease. Sadly however, as we strive but consistently fail to match up to the perfect requirements of the Ideal Self, while at the same

time progressively abandoning our Authentic Self, we react with self-hate. We may achieve a great deal in the process of doing and striving, but there is a price to pay. In order to carry on working against our deepest natures, we become numb or frozen. In particular we constrain our breathing in an attempt to still our feelings. In so doing we deny ourselves the full pleasure of being alive. As we lose touch with our feelings, our bodies begin to manifest symptoms. The consequences of self-hate include physical illness, addictions, depression, and a sense of isolation.

It is possible, however, to choose another option, the cycle of self-compassion. There are tools available to help us on this path. The first step is to *breathe*; by doing this we can begin to 'unfreeze' and experience again our own aliveness. We can then become increasingly *aware* of our patterns of striving towards our Ideal, of our Actual Self, and of the desires of our Authentic Self. In *acknowledging* this, to others as well as ourselves, we begin to *accept* our selves; and we can take *action* to further the cycle of self-compassion. As we continue, we progressively develop a fifth 'a', *appreciation* of ourselves

Thus we have an acronym for this cycle of self-compassion: BAAAAA – Breath, Awareness, Acknowledgment, Acceptance, Action, Appreciation.

Many people who come to The Haven know the cycle of self-hate very well, and are all too aware of both the emotional and physical symptoms that can result from it. For many, the realization that there is a powerful alternative to this marks a turning point in their lives. Awareness gives us the opportunity increasingly to *respond* to the events and circumstances of our lives with self-compassion, curiosity and humour, rather than simply *reacting* with self-hate. There is enormous potential in this for growth and increased wellbeing. The challenge is to acknowledge and honour each aspect of ourselves and to move through our lives with choice and responsibility.

