Chapter 7. Social Support and Self-Compassion: Understanding and Fulfilling Your Inner Needs

One of this chapter's main themes is: "How to fulfil your real needs: the inner self and self-compassion." This theme connects deeply to what many teachers shared in our sessions. It is also a foundation for caring for students and colleagues—and a major source of inner strength.

Many teachers experience inner conflicts such as: "I feel I should do this, but deep down I don't believe in it," or "I did what was expected, yet I still feel anxious, frustrated, or empty." When such conflicts remain unrecognized, they quietly consume energy and contribute to emotional exhaustion. When we learn to notice these conflicts and understand our real needs, emotional strain often decreases. As a result, energy gradually returns, and we regain the strength to engage in positive, life-supporting activities—such as connecting with nature, doing something creative, moving our bodies, or caring for ourselves. In this way, the desire for life becomes clearer again.

This chapter has two parts. First, we discuss social support, because inner strength is not built alone. Second, we introduce inner self and self-compassion as practical ways to reconnect with real needs and reduce inner conflict.

1. Social Support

Social support refers to the perception or experience that one is cared for, valued, and connected to a supportive social network. It commonly includes:

Emotional support (empathy, listening, encouragement)

Instrumental support (practical help, resources, assistance)

Informational support (advice, guidance, sharing knowledge)

Social support can buffer the psychological impact of stress and promote resilience. Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed the buffering hypothesis, suggesting

that supportive relationships reduce the negative effects of stress—especially during crises.

Example of Social Support in Japanese Schools

In Japanese school culture, support among teachers is often structured and regular. Two examples include:

1) Lesson Study Meetings

Teachers meet to observe lessons and discuss teaching practices. Junior teachers receive guidance from senior colleagues. This system fosters collaboration, shared learning, and a sense of "we are working together."

2) Student Guidance Meetings

Teachers meet to discuss students' academic, behavioral, or emotional issues. These meetings can also become a safe space for teachers to share their own concerns and experiences, strengthening empathy and trust within the staff community.

These examples suggest that social support becomes stronger when it is not accidental, but regular, structured, and culturally accepted.

2. How to Fulfil Your Real Needs: Inner Self and Self-Compassion

In one session, we received a question: "I realize there is a purpose behind every action I take—to satisfy a certain need. If I feel nervous, it means something is wrong with my actions. Are there any techniques that help you identify and define these needs so that you can manage your emotions in the future?"

We understood this question as reflecting two common difficulties: Actions do not satisfy real needs, even when a person is "doing the right thing." Real needs are not clearly recognized, especially under chronic stress.

Many teachers have had similar experiences: we act as we "should" act, but still feel anxious, frustrated, or sad. One major reason is that the action may not match our real needs—and we may not even be aware of what those needs are.

Therefore, two key questions arise:

1) How can we recognize our real needs?

2) How can we fulfil them in ways that protect and restore us?

These questions relate closely to two psychological concepts: the inner self and self-compassion.

3. Inner Self vs. Outer Self: Why Inner Conflict Happens

Inner Self

The inner self includes your thoughts, memories, emotions, values, and deeper motivations—the private part of yourself that you do not always share with others. Being aware of the inner self and what it needs is important for mental, physical, and spiritual health.

Outer Self

The outer self is what you present to the world—your appearance, behavior, roles, and social identity. The outer self helps you function in demanding environments such as school, work, and family life. In a crisis, the outer self often becomes even stronger because it is needed for survival and responsibility.

Internal Conflict

Sometimes the inner and outer selves do not align. You may believe one thing internally but behave differently externally. The greater the gap between what the inner self needs and what the outer self does, the more discomfort and stress increase—often leading to exhaustion, sadness, irritability, or emotional numbness.

4. Three Types of Internal Conflict

1) Moral Conflict

This arises when personal ethics and values are tested. For example, a teacher values honesty, but feels compelled to hide frightening information from students to protect them emotionally. Moral conflict emerges when one feels pulled between two opposing "right choices."

2) Self-Image Conflict

A teacher may be seen as generous, flexible, and always calm (outer self), while the inner self is sensitive, straightforward, and easily hurt. When asked to do something unwanted—or when treated unfairly—the teacher may not know whether to tolerate it, refuse it, or express anger.

3) Other Conflicts: Religious, Political, Interpersonal, and Family Conflicts.

Religious conflict: wanting to believe that life has meaning and justice, while also feeling anger toward God or doubt when witnessing repeated loss.

Political conflict: feeling strong hatred toward the aggressor and a desire for justice, while also feeling guilt about hatred or exhaustion from constant outrage.

Interpersonal conflict: wanting to be supportive and calm for colleagues or family, while internally feeling overwhelmed and wanting distance.

Love/family conflict: wanting to protect children emotionally, but also needing to express one's own fear and pain; wanting closeness with a partner, but needing solitude to survive stress.

These conflicts are normal under war conditions, and recognizing them often reduces self-blame.

5. How to Recognize the Inner Self and Deal with Conflicts

1) Acknowledge the conflict and ask what you really want

When you feel "not good" after doing something, it may indicate inner conflict. Try to allow both-and thinking: "Part of me wants A, and part of me needs B."

This is difficult, but psychological maturity involves tolerating complexity rather than forcing a simple answer.

Ways to listen to the inner self include:

What choice would make you feel truly satisfied?

What did you value when you were a child?

What would you choose if you were not afraid of others' opinions or future uncertainty?

2) Calm down

Calming down is not escaping from the problem. It is creating inner space so that you can see clearly and choose wisely. Helpful activities include breathing exercises, music, reading, cooking, meditation, prayer, walking, or observing nature. At work, stepping outside for fresh air and breathing deeply can also help.

3) Do not rush to solutions

Try to understand the problem first, then act with resolve. Deep understanding often requires honesty with oneself—accepting what is true, not only what is comforting.

6. Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is a key method for caring for the inner self and reducing the damage caused by internal conflict.

Three Elements of Self-Compassion (Neff)

1) Kindness to self

Do you treat yourself with the same warmth you would offer to a close friend when something goes wrong?

2) Common humanity

All humans are imperfect and make mistakes. In Morita Therapy, this

resembles an "equality view": recognizing that suffering is part of being human.

3) Mindfulness

Noticing thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations in the present moment without resisting or avoiding them.

7. Facing Hard Feelings: "Just a Little"

When emotions are overwhelming, self-compassion does not require full acceptance immediately. A helpful principle is: "just a little."

Germer (2009) describes a gradual process:

Resisting: "Go away from me!"

Exploring: "What am I feeling?"

Tolerating: "I don't like it, but I can tolerate it."

Allowing: "I can make space for this emotion."

Befriending: "What can I learn from this?"

This process can take time. In Morita Therapy terms, waiting is essential.

Practical Steps for Working with Hard Feelings

1) Label the emotion: "This is anger," "Fear is coming," "This is sadness."

2) Notice it in the body: "My stomach is tense," "My chest feels heavy."

3) Soften, soothe, and allow: gently relax the body, offer kind inner words, and allow the feeling to exist without fighting it.

Discussion Note: Voices from the Group

When there was a pause during the division of teachers into small groups, the author shared observations about social support in European schools, particularly in Denmark and Sweden. This input was offered not as a model to be copied, but as a contrasting perspective to stimulate reflection. In schools in Denmark and Sweden, communication spaces are intentionally designed to be open. There are almost no

closed doors; when doors exist, they are often transparent, symbolizing openness and mutual visibility. This physical openness reflects a deeper cultural emphasis on dialogue, trust, and democratic participation.

In European schools and universities, important issues are discussed openly and repeatedly. Projects and plans are not only discussed after decisions are made, but also beforehand. A common phrase among teachers is: "Let's talk about what we are going to talk about." This practice ensures that all participants feel involved and prepared. For comfortable communication, schools provide many cozy spaces with tea, coffee, cups, and snacks. In addition to daily communication during work, regular social meetings are scheduled. Schools, universities, and even apartment buildings often organize gatherings once every two weeks or once a month. These practices are based on a shared concern that people are gradually losing connection with one another. Communication is considered a core element of social support. Teachers encourage students to ask questions and participate actively in decision-making. Students are given autonomy and choice—both in learning content and in how they achieve educational goals. As a result, students grow up more relaxed, confident in expressing their opinions, and respectful of others. According to European educators, open communication is essential for building a democratic society.

At first, many teachers reacted with visible sadness and inner pain. They expressed grief over the fact that they do not live in a peaceful country where such open communication can be safely and easily maintained. However, after reflection, teachers began to notice that they, too, have created open spaces for communication, particularly in shelters. Teachers said that whenever it is possible to meet children in shelters, it feels like a blessing. During distance learning, many children refuse to show their faces or communicate, but in shelters, teachers intentionally create small communication spaces where students can talk, interact, and feel connected.

Group Work Reflections: Communication with Students

Teachers noted that the war has caused severe isolation among children. Many have become withdrawn, avoid communication, and do not engage during online lessons. However, when blended learning became possible, communication improved significantly. Seeing each other face-to-face allowed students to rebuild relationships, discuss shared problems, and restore contact with teachers.

Teacher B shared: "Now it is difficult to communicate because even the road to the shelter can be dangerous. But the shelter is the only opportunity for communication. That is why we go there, despite the danger."

Teacher C, director of the "Alternative" Lyceum, described organizational changes: "Our lyceum has changed the way we communicate. Teachers, parents, and students—including the student parliament—meet regularly. Meetings take place in shelters and outdoors." She explained that their school includes three groups of students: general education students, students with hearing impairments, students under police supervision.

Communication among these groups has been effective because students help and support one another. She also described new principles of staff communication during the war: focusing on facts rather than emotions (because emotions can destabilize teams), not taking offense personally, concentrating on common tasks and shared responsibility. Teacher D added: "During mixed learning, children communicate much more actively. Joint art therapy, lessons in the botanical garden, and outdoor activities help a lot. Children become active when they have real opportunities to meet."

Teachers' Self-Created Support Systems

Teacher E described a grassroots support initiative:"We have created our own support system—women's conversations. Teachers meet regularly online and talk about daily life: recipes, medicines, household tasks, child-rearing. These conversations make us feel that we are not alone." She emphasized that they have

clear rules: "We do not discuss the war or the news. We try to read the news less. This really helps." Teacher F described institutional support: "At my school, psychologists conduct psychological trainings six times a year, such as 'Fundamentals of Psychological Self-Help in Crisis Situations.' These are held online and help us a lot." She noted that some trainings naturally become informal women's conversations, where teachers can share pain and emotions: "These conversations have meaning."

Diverse Perspectives on Social Support

Teacher G summarized key conditions for communication during war: involvement of all participants—teachers, parents, students; use of art therapy; opportunities for real meetings in shelters or in nature. She emphasized the importance of adaptive intelligence—the ability to adjust quickly to constantly changing conditions—and identified sources of support: friends, colleagues, family, nature, self-discipline, inner strength, and a sense of responsibility for the younger generation. She also referred to a teacher who previously wrote painful messages in the chat but later wrote: "Belief in victory gives us the strength to live."

In contrast, Teacher H expressed skepticism: "Teachers are extremely overworked and exhausted. There are many meetings, but they are not effective. Information overload prevents us from receiving real support." In response, the author introduced the concept of information intoxication—a state in which excessive information overwhelms individuals and reduces their capacity to process support meaningfully.

Teacher I echoed this concern: "Teachers are physically and emotionally overwhelmed. Many events and meetings are mandatory, but they are not effective. It is hard to get support this way." At the same time, she emphasized remaining resources: "We still have recovery resources—hobbies, nature, close people. During the war, some teachers ended relationships, others formed new ones, changed hobbies, and redefined their roles and self-awareness."

This discussion revealed that social support during war is neither uniform nor guaranteed. It can be deeply healing in some contexts and insufficient or exhausting in others. Teachers are actively experimenting—creating informal support systems, redefining communication, and adapting European ideas to wartime realities.

Rather than idealized models, what emerges is context-sensitive social support: fragile, imperfect, but deeply human. These shared efforts demonstrate that even under extreme conditions, teachers continue to search for connection, meaning, and ways to sustain life together.