

**BABCP 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference & Workshops,  
23-26<sup>th</sup> July, University of Manchester**

**Topic: Project Soothe**

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**Abstract:**

The link between imagery and emotion has long been established, and there has been increasing evidence for the use of imagery-based psychotherapeutic approaches. Specifically, Compassion-focused therapy uses mental imagery exercises to help individuals activate their 'soothe' affective system. Based on this theoretical and therapeutic underpinning, Project Soothe ([www.projectsoothe.com](http://www.projectsoothe.com)) was launched in 2015 as a novel Citizen Science Project. The first phase of the project has resulted in a rich repository of over 800 soothing photographs sourced globally, mostly featuring photographs depicting nature-related scenery such as landscapes, sky, water features, flowers and plants, and animals.

A series of evaluation studies have been completed, which collectively showed that viewing a random selection of 25-30 images from the collection could effectively reduce negative affect, and depressive and anxiety-related mood states. These effects have been replicated across both adults and adolescents and, encouragingly, those with higher levels of pre-existing symptoms of psychological distress appeared to experience more positive mood changes. These mood benefits were further replicated when images were used in an app format. Our qualitative studies provided further insights into the possible psychological mechanisms that underpin these mood benefits.

Building upon this empirical foundation, we have worked on collaborative initiatives with children and young people, as well as clinical and educational professionals, to co-create interventions. This collaborative research has been marked by a dynamic exchange of ideas, fostering the development of innovative strategies to harness the therapeutic benefits of visual stimuli within educational and clinical settings.

This talk will take the audience through a whistle-stop tour, presenting research findings and showcasing the synergistic interplay between research insights and community-driven

collaborations. By sharing our journey, we aim to illuminate the transformative potential of interdisciplinary partnerships and public engagement in advancing psychological interventions rooted in compassion and visual engagement.

**Keywords:** Compassion-Focused Therapy, Imagery, Project Soothe, Psychological Intervention, Co-Production, Depression, Anxiety, Well-being, Adolescent Mental Health.