



EMERALD POINTS

**THE  
COMPASS  
MODEL IN  
CRIMINAL AND  
FORENSIC  
PSYCHOLOGY**

**MARK A. DURKIN**



THE COMPASS MODEL IN  
CRIMINAL AND FORENSIC  
PSYCHOLOGY

This page intentionally left blank

Dr Mark A. Durkin's work developing the COMPASS Model framework is both innovative and needed within Forensic psychological settings. The model emphasises a holistic approach to forensic practice and therefore makes for a more comprehensive approach to understanding and responding to people involved in the criminal justice system. This book introduces the reader to this new framework in detail and is clearly going to be of great use to those seeking to better understand offending populations (students, academics) but also those implementing the model within their forensic practice.

—*Dr Dominic Willmott*, Reader in Legal and Criminological Psychology, Loughborough University, UK

Every person has a moral identity consisting of values, norms and principles all of which determine how we think about right and wrong, good and bad etc. However, there are people, trapped in a vicious circle of negative experiences, who are unable to choose and to break loose without help. This book delivers a trustworthy combination of theory and practice as it is based on Dr Durkin's own lived experiences. Through its novel combination of compassion and positive psychology the COMPASS Model will be an excellent practitioner's guide for how to navigate people who wish to make a moral transition in life. With a gentle but instructive voice the author tells the reader how to 'tear down walls' and how to 'build bridges'. This book is an urgent call for unity and understanding in a divided and somewhat incomprehensible world.

—*Dr Mats Niklasson*, University of Bolton, UK and Vestibularis Clinic, Sweden

The criminal justice system is a highly complex environment for professionals, the public, and the offender to navigate. Many years of attempted punishment, shaming, reintegration and rehabilitation have created a landscape in which everybody can get lost. Moving forward into new and less damaging futures is fraught with the possibility of losing our way and subsequent failure. By creating this COMPASS model, Durkin builds upon his previous work and brings a fresh perspective to addressing and reducing future offending. The integration of compassion, and the simple but effective visual model, helps describe the journey

onwards and upwards. This allows all who travel this route, offenders in particular, to build upon strength and hope, and not wallow in despair and failure. An excellent read!

—*Dr Barrie Green*, RMN, PhD, MA, BA(Hons) (Forensic), PGCert(Law),  
DipMDO Forensic Nursing Consultant &  
Visiting Research Fellow, University of Bolton

COMPASS is a thought-provoking book that thoroughly unpacks the complex journey of moving away from criminal behaviour. The author combines academic rigor with accessible writing, making it a valuable resource for both students and professionals in Forensic Psychology. The book offers a practical and holistic perspective to desistance and recovery. Engaging, well-structured, and deeply informative, this text is an essential contribution to criminological and psychological literature.

—*Dr Dara Mojtahedi*, PhD, FHEA, C.Psychol Reader  
in Forensic Psychology

This book is a very refreshing and eye-opening piece of work! Mark highlights the often-overlooked realities of life's challenges for those with an offending history, and the transformative power of a compassion-focused perspective. Providing examples of personal narratives and offering an insightful analysis, the author describes how their new model can offer a hopeful vision for rehabilitation and reintegration. This book is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of the rehabilitation process and the profound impact of compassion and understanding in fostering genuine change.

—*Dr Samantha Marie Walkden* BSc (Hons) MSc PhD CPsychol SFHEA  
PGCHE Co-Programme Director MSc Forensic  
Psychology, Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology

This book is remarkable, unique and innovative at its core. Mark's work incorporates criminological and positive psychological theory, evidence and indeed his own lived experience of receiving criminal justice interventions and desisting from crime. Mark's COMPASS Model constructs a compassionate umbrella, encompassing the leading models within the 'what works' framework. COMPASS provides criminal justice practitioners with an evidence-based tool, integrating and expanding on what is currently known to develop desistance capital, through

the recognition of valuing justice involved peoples past, their present and their future. In his own words, the model doesn't claim to know 'what works', but rather draws on 'how it works'. There is no doubt that this book will enhance the knowledge of criminal justice practice at a time when we are in desperate need of innovation.

—*Andrew (Andi) Brierley*, Senior Lecturer,  
Criminology, Investigation & Policing (CIP)

This page intentionally left blank

# THE COMPASS MODEL IN CRIMINAL AND FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

BY

**MARK A. DURKIN**  
*Leeds Trinity University, UK*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India  
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2025

Copyright © 2025 Mark A. Durkin.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83549-557-5 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-83549-556-8 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-83549-558-2 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This book is dedicated to my late mother Maureen Durkin,  
'love you, see you later'.*

This page intentionally left blank

# CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
1. Introduction	1
2. The Biopsychosocial Reasons for Why People Offend	9
3. Current Models for the Rehabilitation and Prevention of Offending Behaviour	31
4. Compassion-Focused Therapy/Compassionate Mind Training Theory	49
5. Positive Psychology Theory and Practice	65
6. Desistance Capital	83
7. Bringing It All Together: Introducing the COMPASS Model for Criminal and Forensic Psychology	97
8. Assessing the COMPASS Model	117
<i>About the Author</i>	135

This page intentionally left blank

# FOREWORD

It is an honour for me to have been asked to write the Foreword for Mark's new book on his exciting Compassionate Positive Applied Strengths-based Solutions (COMPASS) model. I first met Mark in 2012, when I was asked to supervise his undergraduate dissertation in Psychology. We soon developed a close relationship that then led to me supervising his Master's dissertation. He then went on to complete a PhD with me on the topic of compassion. Mark was never someone happy with the status quo. He was always looking to bring in new ideas. He came up with several innovative elements for his doctoral dissertation, including his Compassion Strengths model and his keys for compassion. This book is the culmination of some of these ideas. Mark has brought together the fields of Compassionate Mind Training and the work of Professor Paul Gilbert and himself and combined it with Positive Psychology. COMPASS standing for COM = Compassionate and PASS representing Positive Applied Strengths-based Solutions. He has woven this in with Desistance Capital. This work has not only come from years of scholarship but his own lived experience of having been in the criminal justice system himself. This is what makes this book unique. Mark may well be one of the few people to have entered our penal system and later achieved a BSc an MSc and a PhD in Psychology. Truly, this is a 'redemption narrative'.

Mark starts the book by considering the reasons why people get involved in criminal activity. He covers a range of explanations from biological, psychological and social perspectives. He examines two intervention models in depth. These are the Risk-Need-Responsivity model and the Good Lives Model. The development of his COMPASS model represents a move away from a risk-based approach to working with offenders towards a compassion and strengths-based approach. The notion of desistance capital is also central. Mark draws our attention to human, justice, social and community capital and how each is critical to help people stop re-offending. For Mark, the three key components of the COMPASS model are compassionate understanding of offenders, having a holistic view of desistance and adopting a strengths-based way of working with offenders. In the last chapter, he presents two case studies showing the application of the model.

This book is a welcome addition to the literature on working with offenders. While it seems as if society always wants to punish offenders, the high rates of recidivism show that incarceration in itself is ineffective in the long term. A different set of approaches is needed. The COMPASS model described in this book is an innovative way to engage with offender populations on a more therapeutic basis, rather than from a punitive perspective. The book could have a transformative effect on the criminal justice field. I am delighted to endorse it and its creator, Dr Mark Durkin.

**Professor Jerome Carson, September 2024, University of Bolton**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my greatest thanks to my friends and family for their unwavering support over the years, especially the ones who were there for me during the worst of times, and indeed while writing this book. To Callum, Megan, Emilia, Eva, Noah, Florence, Nelly, Maggie and Stella for everything you do and all that you are. To my Siany for your love and support. To Professor Jerome Carson for always believing in me. To Andi Brierley for encouraging me to be more open and accepting of my past and to use it as a force for change, thank you brother. To Mahimna Vyas for his extensive review of earlier drafts and to everyone who provided feedback and endorsed the book. To Daniel Ridge for his belief in the idea of the book from our initial meeting and for telling me this book would be a 'game changer'. To everyone at Emerald who has helped in the production of the book and promotion of the ideas within it. Last and by no means least, to anyone who has experience of the justice system, past, present and future, and to everyone who has managed to find their way out of offending, and those who support them along the journey.

This page intentionally left blank

# INTRODUCTION

## ABSTRACT

*This book presents a novel approach to understanding and addressing offending behaviour through the integration of compassion and positive psychology into a comprehensive model. By drawing on both theoretical frameworks and personal experience, the book offers a unique perspective on criminal justice and desistance. The author, having navigated the complexities of offending and incarceration, provides an authentic voice that bridges lived experience with academic insight. The book introduces the COMpassionate Positive Applied Strengths-based Solutions (COMPASS) model, which combines elements of compassion-focused therapy, positive psychology, capital and desistance theory to create a holistic guide for practitioners and individuals within the criminal justice system.*

**Keywords:** Lived experience; offending behaviour; prisons; compassion; positive psychology

## INTRODUCTION

The text is structured into three main sections: the past, the present and the future. It begins with an exploration of offending theories and current models, progresses through the principles of compassion and positive psychology and culminates in a practical application of the COMPASS model with real-life case studies. This integrative approach aims to address the systemic issues of offending and re-offending by focusing on the human potential for change, leveraging both compassion and positive psychology to foster effective desistance. Ultimately, the book aspires to offer a theoretical framework and a

practical guide that reflects the lived experiences of those who have been through the criminal justice system. It seeks to inspire and equip practitioners to support meaningful change, emphasising that compassion and positive psychology can significantly enhance the process of desisting from crime and improving outcomes for individuals and communities alike.

### MOTIVATION FOR THIS BOOK

The impetus for writing this book stems from a deep-seated desire to contribute positively to the justice system, informed by both my personal experiences and academic insights. Drawing from my own encounters with the criminal justice system, coupled with my educational journey, I aim to present a compassionate, positive strengths-based approach to addressing the systemic issues plaguing justice systems globally. Recent statistics underscore the urgency of reforming how we address offending and re-offending. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime Survey for England and Wales reported approximately 8.8 million offences in [March 2024](#), with similar trends observed in the United States ([FBI Crime Data Explorer, 2024](#)). In Australia, there were 347,742 offences with most acts of harm to others (26%), illicit drug offences (15%) and public order offences (11%) ([Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024](#)). Crime affects all societal layers, exacting a heavy psychological and emotional toll on victims and their families. For instance, surviving a loved one's murder involves a complex grief process with lifelong repercussions, while robbery or theft can lead to severe anxiety and altered daily behaviours. Families of offenders often face stigma and shame, compounding the broader impact of criminal behaviour.

I believe that a paradigm shift towards compassion and positive psychology could help mitigate these issues. Just as one act of crime can have far-reaching negative effects, a unified approach grounded in compassion and positive psychology has the potential to foster significant positive change, both in reducing crime and alleviating the suffering it causes.

### THE VALUE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

One of the driving forces behind this book is recognising that many rehabilitation models lack input from those with first-hand experience in the criminal justice system. Those who have lived through the challenges of offending and

incarceration offer invaluable insights that can be used to support the desistance of people who offend and improve justice practice (Brierley, 2023; Buck, 2020). Integrating these lived experiences with academic research can provide a comprehensive framework for addressing offending behaviour. This book aims to bridge this gap by drawing on personal experiences and academic research to propose a novel approach to criminal justice that addresses the root causes of offending with compassion and fosters positive meaningful change.

## PERSONAL INSPIRATION

The inspiration for this book is deeply rooted in my own experiences with the criminal justice system. Incarcerated from ages 19 to 21 for drug offences, my journey took a transformative turn at 31 when I enrolled in an access course to higher education in psychology. Despite having no formal qualifications and facing numerous challenges, I then pursued a bachelor's degree, a master's and a PhD in Psychology. My personal journey from incarceration to academia underscores the potential for change and the impact of compassion, hope, gratitude, strength and support. This book not only aims to offer a practical guide for practitioners working with offenders but also to serve as a source of inspiration for those who may feel trapped by their past. By demonstrating that profound personal transformation is possible, I hope to encourage both people who have offended and practitioners to believe in and work towards positive change.

## HOW WE TREAT OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR?

Traditionally, criminal behaviour is met with punitive measures, rooted in longstanding moral and religious notions of good and evil. There are approximately 11 million people held in prisons across the world either on remand or sentenced (Fair & Walmsley, 2024), with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024), reporting that incarceration rates are on the rise. Prisons are overcrowded, and nearly a third of offenders are in pre-trial detention, with 1 in 10 deaths a result of suicide. The United States leads the global incarceration rates, with over 2 million people sent to prison across all states (World Population Review, 2024). The incarceration of offenders comes at a significant social and economic cost. In the United Kingdom, for

example, the annual cost of housing a prisoner is approximately £49,000, with re-offending rates contributing to a financial burden exceeding £18 billion annually (PRT, 2021). This underscores the pressing need for effective rehabilitation and reintegration strategies. The Netherlands and various Scandinavian nations have demonstrated the benefits of focusing on normalising prison life to reflect the outside world and treating inmates as people over and above confinement and incarceration (van de Rijt et al., 2023). These countries have significantly reduced recidivism rates by integrating programmes that address the root causes of offending and support reintegration (Boone et al., 2022). The United Kingdom's current approach includes early releases to manage prison overcrowding, yet this also highlights the need for comprehensive support plans for all individuals involved. As rule four of the Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations, 2015, p. 3) states:

*The purposes of a sentence of imprisonment or similar measures depriving of a person's liberty are primarily to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. Those purposes can be achieved only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, the reintegration of such persons into society upon release so that they can lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life.*

Prisons, as institutions, present a paradox. They aim to protect society by isolating offenders, yet this environment can facilitate the formation of criminal networks and escalate offending behaviour. While some prisons offer educational and vocational programmes that aid desistance, their effectiveness varies widely. Alternatives to incarceration, such as community-based supervision, also require robust support systems to be successful. Furthermore, current 'offender rehabilitation' models do not identify or pinpoint where barriers to desistance and problems with re-offending may occur and whether this is at a personal, social, justice or community level. Knowing this could help policymakers and those working with offenders make more informed decisions about interventions to prevent offending behaviour. The COMPASS model presented in this book departs from a predominately risk-based approach to a compassionate and strengths-based approach to the treatment of justice involved people.

The professionals working within the justice system – probation officers, social workers and counsellors, play a critical role in fostering hope and facilitating change. Their interactions with offenders can significantly impact the desistance process, though they too face challenges such as burnout and systemic limitations. Efforts are needed to ensure that desistance support starts at the beginning of a prison sentence and continues all the way through the

incarceration period to release and then further in the community. Staff need to be supported along this journey and theirs as well as inmates' perspective considered so that prisons can be designed with everyone's needs in mind and foster a holistic approach to desistance and the prevention of offending.

## MOVING FORWARD WITH COMPASSION AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Our approach to criminal behaviour should transcend mere punishment and aim to address the underlying causes of offending. Offending behaviour often stems from complex personal histories that are overlooked in traditional punitive approaches. Viewing offending through a compassionate lens allows us to recognise the humanity in every individual and understand the broader context of their actions. Compassion, both from others and towards oneself, has been a transformative force in my own life. It is a critical element often missing from forensic and criminal psychology but is essential for fostering meaningful change. This book aims to advocate for a justice system that is both compassionate and effective, focusing on reducing offending and supporting desistance through a compassionate, human-centred approach that moves away from a rigid didactic view of offending to one that considers the interplay of multiple factors involved in offending behaviour.

This book offers a fresh perspective on criminal justice, emphasising the need for a compassionate and holistic approach to dealing with offending behaviour. By prioritising humane treatment and supportive interventions, we can work towards a justice system that not only addresses criminal behaviour but also promotes lasting positive change.

## AIMS OF THE BOOK

The primary aim of this book is to introduce and elaborate on a new model for understanding offending behaviour and supporting individuals in their journey towards desistance. Grounded in the author's personal experience with the criminal justice system and informed by contemporary evidence from compassion and positive psychology, the book presents the COMPASS model.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into three main sections across eight chapters:

*Past:* This section lays the groundwork by exploring theories on why people offend and reviewing current models aimed at reducing offending behaviour.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the book, author background, and a rationale for moving forward with compassion and positive psychology.

Chapter 2: Examination of key theories on offending, including evolutionary perspectives from compassion-focused therapy.

Chapter 3: Review of existing frameworks like Risk Need Responsivity and Good Lives Model, highlighting their strengths and limitations.

*Present:* This section delves into contemporary theories and practices relevant to the COMPASS model.

Chapter 4: Exploration of Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) and its application in understanding and addressing offending behaviour.

Chapter 5: Overview of positive psychology principles and their role in enhancing well-being and life satisfaction.

Chapter 6: Discussion of desistance theory and the concept of desistance capital.

*Future:* The final section integrates previous theories into the COMPASS model and provides practical examples.

Chapter 7: Introduction to the COMPASS model.

Chapter 8: Case study examples demonstrating the application of the COMPASS model in practice.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE AND USE

This book is for practitioners within the criminal justice system and anyone involved in supporting individuals who have offended. It provides an integrative approach combining compassion-based and positive psychology interventions with capital and desistance theory, offering a holistic perspective on offending behaviour. By understanding the complexities of why people offend and the factors that influence their behaviour, readers will be better equipped to support individuals in achieving positive change and leading pro-social lives.

## CONCLUSION

This book stands out for two key reasons. First, it integrates compassion and positive psychology into a comprehensive model designed to guide practitioners, individuals who have offended and those working within the criminal justice system. This holistic approach is intended to offer practical, compassionate strategies for fostering desistance and promoting positive change. Second, it is informed by my own lived experience with offending, incarceration and the criminal justice system. Having navigated the complexities of crime, prison life and the associated stress and stigma, I offer a perspective that is both personal and practical. My journey from a troubled past to a successful career in psychology exemplifies the potential for transformation and underscores the impact of compassion and positive psychology. I am living proof that change is not only possible but also profoundly transformative. Moments of compassion, hope and optimism have been pivotal in my own life, enabling me to make critical changes and achieve my current position. Through this book, I blend theory, practice and personal experience in a way that is both engaging and instructive. By doing so, I hope to provide valuable insights and tools for those working with individuals who have offended, demonstrating how compassion and positive psychology can enhance effective practice and support meaningful, lasting change.

## REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Recorded Crime – Offenders*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice>
- Boone, M., Pakes, F., & van Wingerden, S. (2022). Explaining the collapse of the prison population in the Netherlands: Testing the theories. *European Journal of Criminology*, 19(4), 488–505.
- Brierley, A. (2023). An introduction to the team and project. In A. Brierley (Ed.), *The good prison officer* (pp. 1–16). Routledge.
- Buck, G. (2020). *Peer mentoring in criminal justice*. Routledge.
- Fair, H., & Walmsley, R. (2024). *World prison population list*. ICPR.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2024). *FBI Crime Data Explorer*. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home>

Office for National Statistics. (2024). *Crime in England and Wales: Year ending March 2024*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024>

Prison Reform Trust. (2021). *Bromley briefing prison factfile: Winter 2021*. <https://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

United Nations. (2015). *Standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners*. (The Nelson Mandela Rules). [https://www.un.org/en/events/mandeladay/mandela\\_rules.shtml](https://www.un.org/en/events/mandeladay/mandela_rules.shtml)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2024). *Global prison population and trends: A focus on rehabilitation*. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/briefs/Prison\\_brief\\_2024.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/briefs/Prison_brief_2024.pdf)

van de Rijt, J., van Ginneken, E., & Boone, M. (2023). Lost in translation: The principle of normalisation in prison policy in Norway and the Netherlands. *Punishment & Society*, 25(3), 766–783.

World Population Review. (2024). *Incarceration rates by country*. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/incarceration-rates-by-country>