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**Virtual reality therapy** can help fight **depression**  
  
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A **virtual** **reality** **therapy** could help people with **depression** be less critical and more compassionate towards themselves, reducing depressive symptoms, a new study has found.

The therapy, previously tested by healthy volunteers, was used by 15 **depression** patients aged 23-61. Nine of them reported reduced depressive symptoms a month after the therapy, of whom four experienced a clinically significant drop in **depression** severity, researchers said.

In the study by University College London and ICREA University of Barcelona, patients wore a virtual reality headset to see from the perspective of a life-size 'avatar' or virtual body. Seeing this virtual body in a mirror moving in the same way as their own body typically produces the illusion that this is their own body. This is called 'embodiment'.

While embodied in an adult avatar, participants we re trained to express compassion towards a distressed virtual child. As they talked to the child it appeared to gradually stop crying and respond positively to the compassion.

After a few minutes the patients were embodied in the virtual child and saw the adult avatar deliver their own compassionate words and gestures to them.

This brief eight-minute scenario was repeated three times at weekly intervals, and patients were followed up a month later. "People who struggle with anxiety and **depression** can be excessively self-critical when things go wrong in their lives," said study lead Chris Brewin from University College London.

"In this study, by comforting the child and then hearing their own words back, patients are indirectly giving themselves compassion," said Brewin.

The study was published in the British Journal of Psychiatry Open.

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