



Self-Compassion

What is self-compassion?

1. The awareness that you are suffering.
2. Self-compassion involves feeling moved by your suffering so that your heart responds to your pain. Allow your heart to respond to your pain as it would to the pain you may see someone else experiencing. Let yourself feel, towards yourself, the warmth, caring and desire to help end the suffering that you typically feel when you have compassion for another person.
3. Self-compassion means offering understanding and kindness to yourself when you fail or make mistakes, rather than judging yourself harshly
4. When you feel compassion for yourself (rather than mere pity), it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience (i.e. we all experience these emotions!).

Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings - after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?

THREE ELEMENTS OF SELF-COMPASSION:

- Self-Kindness vs Self-Judgment

Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable, so they meet them with kindness.

- Common Humanity vs Isolation

Frustration at not having things exactly as we want is often accompanied by an irrational but pervasive sense of isolation - as if "I" were the only person suffering or making mistakes. self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience - something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to "me" alone.

- Mindfulness vs Over-Identification

Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. This equilibrated stance stems from the process of relating personal experiences to those of others who are also suffering, thus putting our own situation into a larger perspective. It also stems from

the willingness to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. At the same time, mindfulness requires that we not be “over-identified” with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.

Self-compassion is not:

- Self-pity
- Self-indulgence
- Self-esteem (though these two often go hand in hand!)

If we use self-compassion practice to try to make our pain go away by suppressing it or fighting against it, things will likely just get worse.

With self-compassion we mindfully accept that the moment is painful, and embrace ourselves with kindness and care in response, remembering that imperfection is part of the shared human experience. This allows us to hold ourselves in love and connection, giving ourselves the support and comfort needed to bear the pain, while providing the optimal conditions for growth and transformation.

Some people find that when they practice self-compassion, their pain actually increases at first. When love goes in, old pain can come out. We have to allow ourselves to be slow learners when it comes to practicing self-compassion.

Practice Exercise

I urge you to go to self-compassion.org, which is an amazing website with a number of exercises to help you practice self-compassion. Here's one of my favourites!

1. Identify a situation in which you are being self-critical instead of self-compassionate
2. Identify the thoughts you are having that are self-critical. I suggest writing these down.

A few common ones may include “I’m not doing well enough” or “I’m a loser”.

Try to notice if there are any phrases that you tell yourself over and over when you are being self-critical. Where did this phrase come from? Did someone teach you to feel this way about yourself?

3. Take a moment to ground yourself in self-compassion. Feel the warmth, caring and urge to help that you usually have for others who suffer and direct it to yourself.

4. Make an effort to speak to your self-critical side from a place of compassion. Send love towards the part of yourself that is being critical. Ask if your self-compassion can take over and say a few words.
5. Try re-writing the thoughts you wrote in step 2 from a place of compassion. The easiest way to do this is usually to imagine a child is saying the self-critical things to themselves and you are helping them say it differently. Try imagining this is your child, or better yet, imagine that you are speaking to yourself as a child. It's alright to start by writing in the third person at first, so long as you then switch it to the first person ("You are going through a lot right now" would become "I am going through a lot right now").

Here are a few changes that we may be able to make when speaking from self-compassion instead of self-criticism.

6.

Self-Criticism	Self-Compassion
I'm so disgusting for eating all these chips	I had a hard day at work, which is why I ate the chips. Unfortunately, chips won't make my day better, so maybe I should go call a friend instead of eating more.
I'm such an idiot!! I only got 70% on this test and everyone else did way better than that.	I'm struggling to understand that concepts on this test, and that's okay, this is a hard subject. Maybe I should reach out to the professor to see if they can offer me additional help.
Nobody like me. I'm a loser.	I feel really alone and rejected right now. Just because I feel this way though, doesn't mean I'm a loser.

Notice that in the self-compassionate statements above, I spoke from a place of kindness but that did not mean I allowed myself to continue doing unhealthy habits. I recognized that they happened, accepted it, then worked to change the behaviour. Many people fear that self-compassion means they get away with everything. This is not the case! It just means that when we make mistakes (which we will do!!) we move through them with grace, rather than trying to change ourselves through criticism.