

Self-Compassion: An Overview

What is compassion?

Compassion happens when we see pain in the world and are motivated to do something about it. *It is caring and kindness + action in response to the struggles/suffering of others.* For example, if our friend tells us that they are having a difficult day, we may be compassionate by recognizing that they are suffering and/or struggling and then doing something about it by choosing to comfort them and/or offer support.

What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion is exactly what it says – having compassion for yourself. It is recognizing when we are suffering or struggling and responding to ourselves in the way that we would respond to a dear friend in the same situation - with caring and kindness + action.

Why self-compassion?

- Self-compassion helps us tolerate and process difficult emotions in a healthy way, which is essential for overall wellbeing. This is important because it is inevitable that we will experience difficult emotions in our lives. When we are unable to process these emotions in a healthy way, there can be significant negative consequences to our wellbeing.
- Self-compassion helps us tolerate healthy guilt, which is correlated with much higher overall wellness than shame and helps us make the changes we'd like to in our lives more effectively.

Self-Compassion How-to:

3 Core Components of Self-Compassion:

1. *Mindfulness* – noticing when we are struggling or suffering by paying attention to what's going on with us in the present moment throughout the day; checking in with ourselves often
2. *Kindness* – active self-soothing in the midst of imperfection; responding to ourselves during moments of struggle or suffering in the same way that we would a dear friend
3. *Common humanity* – recognizing and reminding ourselves in moments of struggle or suffering that everyone in the world feels this way at different times and that it's a part of being human to struggle, suffer, be imperfect, and make mistakes.

Keep in mind:

- Judging ourselves when we are in struggle/suffering only makes it worse. Judging ourselves has the same effect as a friend judging when we share something difficult with them.
- Although they may seem insignificant, practicing responding to ourselves with self-compassion when we have small hurts helps program our brains so that we slowly begin to habitually respond to ourselves with self-compassion for all hurts, big and small.

Self-Compassion Tricks:

- Imagine talking to yourself the way you would talk to someone you care deeply about if they were in the same situation – your child, your niece or nephew, your friend or family member. Bring up the same energy of care, concern, and tenderness that you would bring up if you were soothing a child you are close to.
- Know that you can treat yourself both lovingly and hold yourself accountable at the same time. A loving firmness is much healthier and more effective than harshness. See Reframing Shame
- The challenge is to be in touch with the difficult emotion (e.g. shame), without getting carried away with the storyline of the difficult emotions (e.g. I'm a horrible mother because I just screamed at my kids). The goal is to be aware of the emotion ("Woah, I'm really feeling shame right now") without allowing ourselves to be carried away with the shame-based narrative ("I'm a bad mother because ...").
- Write a compassionate, supportive, and/or encouraging phrase down that you would say to a friend who is in the same circumstances. Stand in front of the mirror and say that phrase to yourself as you would say it to someone you care about, practicing kindness, gentleness, and compassion as you do it.
- To help us not get carried away by a difficult emotion, we can:
 - Label the difficult emotion (Feeling Vocabulary handout)
 - Find the emotional experience in our bodies (Feeling into our Bodies handout)
 - Soothe and comfort yourself:
 - Self-compassion.org guided meditations
 - Wrap yourself in a warm blanket
 - Speak kindly to yourself
 - Place both hands over your heart
 - Give yourself a self-hug
 - Do something else for yourself that you find comforting (Comforting vs. distracting vs. numbing handout)
- Self-compassion is a practice – the more regularly we do it, the more habitually we'll do it and the better we'll feel
- Use the Exploring Self-Compassion through Writing protocol

Be Aware of:

- Pause Buttons – personalized tools we can use to distract ourselves when we're feeling overwhelmed with an emotion
- Backdraft – this is what happens when there's a fire in a house and the firefighter opens the door. The influx of oxygen causes it to roar out the door even larger and louder at first. When we first start practicing self-compassion, this can happen as well as we start to notice difficult emotions we've been ignoring or bottling up for a long time – they come roaring out with intensity at first. This is a sign of healing and a part of the process. Sometimes when we give ourselves unconditional love, we immediately remember all of the conditions under which we were unloved. What to do:
 - Be aware that it's happening and label it as backdraft
 - Name the emotions and identify where you feel them in your body

Resource created by Stephanie Hawryliw, R. Psych; resilienttogethertherapy.weebly.com

- Stay grounded in your body – notice the soles of your feet on the floor instead of the emotion in your throat, for example
- Soothe and comfort yourself – see above and Comforting vs. Distracting vs. Numbing hand out

*See also the resources on shame vs. guilt, shame resilience, working with our inner critic, and perfectionism which are related to this process.