



Fostering Self-Compassion

“With self-compassion, we give the same kindness and care we’d give to a good friend.” – Dr. Kristen Neff

In our culture of comparison and striving to compete and achieve, we’re not always taught how to develop compassion, patience, and kindness towards ourselves. Dr. Kristen Neff is a leading expert on self-compassion, and she explains self-compassion is about honoring and accepting our humanness and “being aware of what we need in the moment and giving that to ourselves.” Perhaps this means letting ourselves rest and relax after a busy week, allowing ourselves to feel emotions that we’ve been bottling up, setting healthy boundaries, or doing something joyful.

Rather than judging and criticizing ourselves for what we consider to be our failings or inadequacies, we can practice treating ourselves with kindness and understanding instead. Trying to change yourself in order to have more health and happiness then comes from a place of caring for yourself, rather than trying to improve yourself because you feel unworthy or not good enough. We all experience frustrations, difficulties and disappointments in life, and accepting this reality will help you feel more kindness and compassion for yourself. Learning to develop a kinder relationship to yourself is a huge part of mental health and self-esteem.

Below are some self-compassion tips and exercises based on Dr. Kristen Neff’s work.

How would you treat a friend?

Think about a time when your friend was really struggling. What did you say to them? Now think about a time when you were struggling. What kinds of things did you tell yourself? Is there a difference in how you responded? The next time you feel down about yourself, try talking to yourself as you would a friend. You can also try writing yourself a letter from the perspective of a kind and loving friend, and try to show in your letter your kindness and acceptance.



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Take a Self-Compassion Break:

If you're feeling particularly stressed, anxious, or down on yourself, take a moment to pause. Acknowledge how the stress feels in your body. Recognize that you are not alone and that struggle is a part of life. Put your hands on your heart and feel the comfort and weight of your hands. Imagine yourself sending kindness to the part of you that is stressed and struggling. Ask yourself if there is anything you need in this moment.

Challenging self-criticism and negative self-talk:

This might take some time to get the hang of, so be patient with yourself. The first step is noticing when you're being self-critical, as it might be a habit you barely even notice anymore. What words do you use and what phrases do you keep repeating? Then, try talking to this critical part of yourself with compassion, too. Perhaps say something like, "I know you're worried and feel upset, but you're really hurting me and making things harder." Next try finding a kind and supportive way of expressing what you're feeling critical about. You can even give yourself a hug if that feels supportive.

Self-Compassion Journal:

Try recording a daily self-compassion journal. At the end of the day, write down the things you judged yourself for or felt bad about. When you are writing, try to be honest but in a non-judgmental way. Write about how this was connected to being human—we're all imperfect and have difficult experiences. Then write yourself some kind words of support, forgiveness, reassurance, and compassion.



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Practice Kinder Ways of Motivating Yourself:

When we are critical of ourselves, we sometimes think that being hard on ourselves will help us improve or stay motivated. But self-criticism can create a lot of emotional pain. Perhaps there is a different language you can use to motivate yourself. Rather than being self-critical, try using language that is encouraging, supportive and lovingly motivating.

Learning to have more self-compassion takes patience and... self-compassion when you hit bumps along the way! Remember not to beat yourself up if you find you're still being overly critical and judging yourself harshly. Send compassion to those parts of yourself too. Learning to have more self-compassion is a process that can improve the relationship you have with yourself, your self-esteem, and your mental wellbeing.