

The Science of “Mindful Self-Compassion”

Having mindful self-compassion means caring for yourself as you would care for someone you truly love, while being aware of the reality that surrounds you. It combines the concepts of mindfulness—maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment—and compassion, which literally means, “to suffer with“. When we talk about suffering, we refer to any physical, mental, or emotional pain that has negative impacts on us. “Suffering with” someone, means feeling his or her pain as if it were your own. Thus, self-compassion is an act of acceptance and appreciation of your humanity.

The three components of self-compassion are:

- **Self-kindness:** being gentle and understanding with yourself—rather than critical and judgmental
- **Common-humanity:** realizing that all individuals have the same needs and suffer in the same way. Recognizing that life is imperfect and everyone has limitations
- **Mindfulness:** being able to live in the moment and realize that thoughts about the past and the future are just that—thoughts. A balanced conscience allows us to awaken to the reality of the present moment.



Using Mindful Self-compassion can improve your way of life in multiple ways. Wellbeing can improve by reducing the amount of depression, stress, and anxiety one may have. Self-compassion can also increase motivation which can lead to an increase in desire to learn as well as decreasing fear of failure. Having a smaller fear of failure means you are more likely to be persistent and not give up which can help when learning a heart healthy lifestyle. Finally self-compassion can have a positive effect on your body and eating behavior by having fewer weight worries and decrease overindulging after blowing a diet plan.

Neff, K. D., (2003b). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self And Identity*, 2, 85-102

Self-Compassion Exercise

When in a situation in your life that is difficult and causing you stress, see if you can actually feel the stress and emotional discomfort in your body.

Then, say to yourself:

1. “This is a moment of suffering”

Allowing awareness of the present moment, which is mindfulness. Other options include:

- “This hurts.”
- “Ouch.”
- “This is stress.”

2. “Suffering is a part of life”

Recognizing this is common for humanity. Other options include:

- “Other people feel this way.”
- “I’m not alone.”
- “We all struggle in our lives.”

Softly put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands on your chest. Or use a soothing touch you feel is right for you.

Now, say to yourself:

3. “May I be kind to myself?”

You can also ask yourself, “What do I need to hear right now to express kindness to myself?” Is there a phrase that speaks to you in your particular situation, such as:

- “*May I give myself the compassion that I need?*”
- “*May I learn to accept myself as I am?*”
- “*May I forgive myself?*”
- “*May I be strong?*”
- “*May I be patient?*”

This practice can be used any time and it will help you remember to evoke the three aspects of self-compassion—mindfulness, humanity, and self-kindness—when you need it most.

When practicing self-compassion - observe for any signs of stress relief. If practicing this seems a struggle, it is not self-compassion!

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