

Kindness, compassion and connection

Kindness and compassion to ourselves and to other people can be cultivated. Kindness and compassion can help us to deal with pain and illness and they also make us feel happier. Kindness and compassion benefit us socially, with feelings of connectedness with others.

When we practice compassion meditations we are activating the parasympathetic nervous system which is responsible for calming and soothing us. We also release oxytocin which is a neuropeptide, produced in the brain, released in the bloodstream and intimately involved in social bonding. Endorphins (naturally occurring opium-like substances in the brain) are also linked to the 'soothing' mode.

Loving kindness meditation

Don't worry if you aren't filled with 'good feelings' or able to 'sense' the kindness or compassion directed towards yourself or others. It is simply enough to hold the intention to extend these kind wishes and to incline the mind in this way to do so.

Notice gently and see if it is possible to mindfully hold any feelings of resistance, embarrassment or unworthiness in awareness, if they arise, just allowing them their own space and to pass in their own time, as best you can.

And if you need to, knowing that it is always possible to return to a sense of the breath and the body to re-connect you with the present moment, should you get caught up in thinking and powerful emotions.

Settle yourself in to a comfortable posture that will support your intention to direct good will to yourself and others over the period of the guided meditation.

Grounding yourself in the physical sensations of sitting. So, feeling your feet on the floor, your bottom on the chair and your hands on your legs on resting in your lap for a few moments.

Then, bring awareness to breath and following the breath all the way in and all the way out for the next few breaths.

Then, as best you can, gently slow down and deepen your breath, without forcing.

Adjust your posture so that it supports a calm breathing rhythm, allowing the shoulders to become relaxed, the jaw to soften and any tension in the face to soften to the extent that it will.

Rest awareness gently and lightly in the belly, following the breath all the way in and all the way out and allow the belly to soften, too.

As the breath passes through the heart area allowing any feelings of space, and lightness and warmth to emerge to the extent that they will and if you'd like to, placing one or both hands on your heart to help with this focus.

Once you feel relaxed with your breathing rhythm, whether or not it has slowed, just continue to breathe

Allowing the breathing rhythm to softly soothe you and bring you more fully in to the sense of your body.

Call to mind a person (or pet) of past or present whose steady love and unconditional acceptance of you touches your heart in a special way. Allow yourself to experience their lovingkindness as if they were right near you, happy for your presence and grateful for you just as you are. Notice how this image eases your body and your mind.

Relax into this warm feeling of connection. Keep it simple. Allow thoughts to arise and evaporate and come back to the heart. Take your time.

Now put this lovingkindness and warmth that you are receiving into words. If helpful, you can imagine that these kind thoughts are what the person (or animal) you've called to mind wants for you and picture that they are wishing them with you. Adapt the words so they reflect your personal wishes and situation. Here's one example:

May I be held in lovingkindness.

May I be safe.

May I be healthy in body and in mind.

May I always have enough.

May my heart know peace.

Repeat the wishes at least three times, out loud or in your mind. Savour them. Take your time. Feel their ability to warm and open the heart.

Next, bring to mind someone who means a lot to you, someone in whose presence you can relax and be fully appreciated for who you are. Feel the goodness of this heart connection, feel your mutual gratitude. As you offer your well-wishes, imagine that the person is touched by them and experiences happiness and peace.

May you be held in lovingkindness.

May you be safe.

May you be healthy in body and in mind.

May you always have enough.

May your heart know peace.

Repeat the wishes at least three times, out loud or in your mind. Appreciate the sincerity of the words. Feel their ability to warm and open the heart. Take your time.

Next, bring to mind someone you've met casually, someone you recognize but don't really know. E.g. a person who works in your local supermarket, a neighbour you nod to. As you think of them, wish them well. Repeat the same words and imagine that they receive the full benefit of them. Imagine that as your wishes touch them, their hearts and minds are at ease.

May you be held in lovingkindness.

May you be safe.

May you be healthy in body and in mind.

May you always have enough.

May your heart know peace.

Repeat the wishes at least three times. Appreciate the sincerity of the words. Feel their ability to warm and open the heart. Take your time.

(The next step is traditional, but if it's too difficult for you, you can skip it.)

Now imagine someone you don't care for. It could be someone you know personally or someone you know of and who triggers your antipathy. You may think of this person as unworthy of your kind consideration. As you evoke them in your mind's eye, try to let go of your antipathy. It may help to imagine them as they were when they were a young, vulnerable child, before things became so difficult. Can you include them in your well-wishes?

May you be held in lovingkindness.

May you be safe.

May you be healthy in body and in mind.

May you always have enough.

May your heart know peace.

Repeat the wishes at least three times. Appreciate the words. Feel their ability to warm and open your heart. Take your time.

Finally, include as many people and animals as you can in your wishes. Happy or sad, loved or neglected, in good health or in poor health, in all stages of life. Without making a particular effort to envision them separately, simply maintain awareness of the presence of all of these beings who share your planet and send them your wishes with a sincere and tender heart.

May you be held in lovingkindness.

May you be safe.

May you be healthy in body and in mind.

May you always have enough.

May your heart know peace.

Repeat the wishes at least three times. Appreciate the words. Feel their ability to warm and open the heart. Imagine that your practice brings about deep healing for yourself and others. Take your time.

Now return to awareness of being present in your space, connected to all of these beings through your wishes. Maintaining this sense of presence to your best ability, simply sit.

You can use *any phrases that are meaningful for you*. Feel free to experiment and explore what feels right for you in any given moment. Some examples are:

- May I/you be kind/gentle to my/your self
- May I/you *learn* to allow my/yourself to be as I am
- May I/you bring patience and kindness to myself in this moment
- May I/you be free from inner turmoil
- May my/your anxious/agitated self find peace.
- In the midst of this (difficulty) may I/you find stillness.
- May I/you learn to forgive myself.

Adapted from Mindworks.org

Related resources

self-compassion.org

[Compassionate Mind App | Chris Irons & Elaine Beaumont | England \(selfcompassion.me\)](#)

Soothing rhythm breathing audio: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsGek_AEDJI

Opening up to emotions

- Identify an emotion that comes up as you consider taking an action in line with your values.
- This exercise can be done at home or out, and it might help if you sit down. Today you can have your eyes shut, or open and looking down if you're not comfortable with that.
- Step 1: Notice where you feel, or felt, the emotion most in your body. Emotions are often centred in your stomach, chest, throat, or head area. Use your imagination, if you have to, to describe it. Or pretend you're relating what this emotion feels like to someone who's never had an emotion.
- To yourself, describe the physical aspects of your emotion (or sensation) in terms of: where is it, ... what's its shape, what's its colour, size, form, density, temperatureetc. (e.g., it's in the chest, pulsing, tight, round, heavy, hollow, fluttery, red, black, hot or cold etc.).
- Name the emotion if you can.
- Step 2: Breathe through your nose gently (or just a little slowly and deeply) in and around the physical place of the feeling. (pause)
- Now repeat to yourself "I'm willing to have this emotion". You don't have to like it or want it.
- You can also say to yourself "I can make room for it, I can open up to it." (wait 20 seconds or more)
- Notice where the feeling *is not* in your body. It's probably not in every part of your body. So you can remind yourself that you can still talk, walk, make decisions and act on your values and goals, even with strong feelings. (wait 10 seconds or so)
- Step3: Now breathe gently *into* the emotion area. Again, say to yourself, "I am willing to have this emotion, I can open up to it". You don't have to like it.
- Remember you are not trying to relax or get rid of the feeling – this is about opening up, letting go of any struggle with it. Keep doing that for 30 seconds or so.
- Now you can wriggle your fingers and toes and open your eyes.

Adapted from ACBS resource