



## The Self-Compassion Break: Being Kind to Yourself in Hard Moments

An explainer and three-step practice card · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)  
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### At a glance

- Self-compassion means treating yourself with the same care you would offer a good friend.
- It is not self-pity or letting yourself off the hook. Research links it with more motivation, not less.
- A three-step "break" takes under a minute and can shift how you meet hard moments.

### What self-compassion is, and isn't

Psychologist Dr. Kristin Neff describes self-compassion as having three parts: being kind rather than harsh with yourself, remembering that struggle is part of being human, and noticing your pain mindfully without exaggerating or ignoring it.

| Self-compassion is...               | Self-compassion is not...         |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Acknowledging that something hurts  | Wallowing or self-pity            |
| Taking responsibility with kindness | Making excuses                    |
| Encouraging yourself to grow        | Lowering your standards           |
| Recognizing others struggle too     | Comparing to feel better or worse |

### "But won't I get lazy?"

Many people believe harsh self-criticism keeps them motivated. Research suggests the opposite: self-criticism tends to increase fear of failure and avoidance, while self-compassion is linked with greater resilience, persistence, and willingness to learn from mistakes.

### What the research says

Self-compassion is a measurable trait made up of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003).

A meta-analysis found that higher self-compassion is strongly associated with lower depression, anxiety, and stress (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012).

### Tool: The Self-Compassion Break

#### THREE STEPS (under one minute)

1. **Mindfulness:** *"This is a moment of suffering." or "This is really hard right now."*
2. **Common humanity:** *"I'm not alone. Everyone struggles sometimes."*
3. **Kindness:** Place a hand on your heart or another comforting place and say, *"May I be kind to myself. May I give myself what I need."*

Find words that feel natural to you. You might try "Of course this hurts," "Lots of people would feel this way," or "I'm here for you."

#### Practice log

| Day | The hard moment | Words I used | How I felt after (0–10) |
|-----|-----------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| Mon |                 |              |                         |
| Tue |                 |              |                         |
| Wed |                 |              |                         |
| Thu |                 |              |                         |
| Fri |                 |              |                         |
| Sat |                 |              |                         |
| Sun |                 |              |                         |

### Strategies to try

- **Use a friend lens.** Ask, "What would I say to someone I love in this situation?" Then say it to yourself.
- **Try soothing touch.** A hand on your chest, a self-hug, or holding your own hand can calm the body.
- **Write a compassionate letter.** Write to yourself from the perspective of a wise, loving friend.
- **Start small.** If kindness feels unnatural, begin with neutral: "This is hard."

## Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Imagine your compassionate other.** Picture an ideal compassionate figure, real or imagined, who is wise, warm, and strong. Imagine what they would say to you right now.
- **Practise "fierce" self-compassion.** Compassion isn't only soft. Sometimes it means protecting yourself: saying no, leaving a situation, or setting a boundary.
- **Write from your future self.** Write a letter from yourself five years from now, looking back with kindness on what you're going through.
- **Find your "common humanity" person.** Think of someone who faced something similar. How did you see them? Offer yourself the same understanding.

## Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

**How do I usually speak to myself when I make a mistake?**

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**Where did I learn that voice?**

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**What do I most need to hear right now?**

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**How might my life change if I were a little kinder to myself?**

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## When to reach out for support

If your inner critic is constant, cruel, or tied to depression or past experiences, therapy, including compassion-focused approaches, can help you build a gentler relationship with yourself.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

*In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.*

*This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.*

## References

MacBeth, A., & Gumley, A. (2012). Exploring compassion: A meta-analysis of the association between self-compassion and psychopathology. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32(6), 545–552.

Neff, K. D. (2003). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2(3), 223–250.

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