

Self-Compassion

What is Self-Compassion?

Self-compassion is a way of responding to our own experiences with a sense of caring and tenderness that we would offer to someone we care about, like our good friends, children, or pets. It is the opposite of self-criticism, which can trigger anxiety, prolonged stress response, and harm our sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Self-compassion may be broken into three components: Mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness.

Mindfulness: We first have to be aware of our own suffering to have compassion for it, which requires us to allow ourselves to feel what we feel emotionally and, in the body, be aware of the difficult/critical thoughts that are giving us grief.

Common Humanity: We then have to see our experience as part of a collective **normal** human struggle, which will draw us to reach out to others and to draw strength from our support system to ward off the difficulty/pain, rather than succumbing to a negative spiral of isolation, aggression, or depression.

Self-Kindness: Is taking actions to treat ourselves with kindness and to take care of ourselves through this moment of suffering. It can be giving ourselves some space to take a couple of deep breaths, pouring ourselves a warm cup of tea, or simply repeating the mantra that we use to cheer our friends up from a hard time "This will pass." or "One day at a time."

How can self-compassion benefit us?

Mental Health

Reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. Giving ourselves kind words and supportive touches can trigger the "Tend and Befriend" response with the release of oxytocin in the body, which increases the feeling of calmness and safety, and reduces the "fight/flight/freeze" response and the chronic worries that maintain our stress response.

Better self-esteem by having more understanding of our own human experience, we are less likely to identify with our mistakes, and instead, be able to treat ourselves with grace and dignity when mistakes inevitably happen in life.

Better life satisfaction Less time spent dwelling on past mistakes and setbacks; more cognitive flexibility as we see mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow, thus promoting a growth mindset.

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Enhance your relationships as we create better self-esteem and life satisfaction, our relationships benefit as our cups are replenished often and we have more to offer.

Physical Health

Research suggests that cultivating self-compassion can benefit our physical health: when we have compassion for ourselves, we are more likely to reach out for help when we need it (this could be asking for help from our family/friend, seeking out help with social assistance/respite care); we are more likely to do the things that will have a positive impact on our health such as eating a healthier diet, exercising, and attending to appointments with our healthcare providers. Practicing self-compassion also helps to alleviate negative emotions, which would be associated with better outcomes for people managing chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and arthritis.

Self-compassion is also shown to boost our immune function and promote better sleep by reducing stress; it also helps us better avoid danger (such as wearing protective gear).

Self-compassion as a Caregiver

Self-compassion encourages us as caregivers to get in touch with our own stress and emotions throughout caregiving situations, cultivate an acceptance of those emotions and be able to acknowledge our limitations as caregivers. It encourages us to take our own needs as seriously as the needs of the person(s) we are caring for. And be reminded that the compassionate attention we give to ourselves will not take away the amount of compassion we can give to the person(s) we are caring for. On the contrary, the better we are able to meet our own needs, the more our family/patients will benefit from our care.

So how do I start my practice?

You can practice self-compassion through:

1. Keeping a journal to acknowledge your feelings
2. Writing a weekly letter to yourself
3. Noting the voice of your inner critic, and think “what would I say to a friend instead?” if they are in this situation
4. Use a mantra

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5. Get physical: give your body the space it needs to fidget, give yourself firm and soothing touch on the chest, arms, and belly; do yoga or stretches to take care of the aches and pain resulting from body tension accumulated throughout the day
6. Meditate: You can find other kinds of practice exercises and audio, ranging from writing exercises to meditation online
7. Talk to a therapist: a therapist will be able to help you understand where your current struggles are coming from, putting them into contexts that can help you to have more compassion for yourself. Ask your family doctor to refer you for mental health counselling with a CarePoint Health professional

Resources

Tara Brach Podcast (free meditation and speaks updating regularly)

The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions – Christopher Germer, PhD

(Available through the Mississauga Library [Search Results for the mindful path to self-compassion \(sirsidynix.net\)](#))

