



Mindful Self-Compassion Starter Pack

Prepared by Liam Modlin and Christina Muller
Brought to you by Supporting Wounded Veterans

All content originally developed and produced by Dr Kristin D. Neff, author and founder of www.self-compassion.org

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Introduction

“One of the most consistent findings in the research literature is that greater self-compassion is linked to less anxiety and depression.” --Dr Kristin D. Neff, author and founder of www.self-compassion.org

How can being easier on ourselves help us get through hard times? It may sound counter-intuitive, but self-compassion is key to overcoming challenges and thriving in stressful circumstances. Self-compassion has received increased research attention lately, with over 200 journal articles and dissertations examining the topic since 2003. This ever-increasing body of research suggests that self-compassion enables people to suffer less while also helping them to thrive.

And yet, our cultures, our societies, our workplaces, even our families and friends often seem to place a higher value on the opposite of self-compassion. We're bombarded with information about people who sleep only 4 hours a night, employees who are reachable 24/7, amateur athletes who complete triathlons in their backyards...the list goes on. The end result is an enormous amount of pressure to ignore our emotions and exceed our physical limits – and to feel terrible about ourselves when we fail. The toll this takes on our minds and bodies is enormous.

What if there were a different way? The information in this starter kit is intended to introduce you to the concept of self-compassion as well as offer guidelines for getting started. It has been compiled from a variety of experts and published sources, notably www.selfcompassion.org. We hope you will find it useful as you begin to explore this important aspect of wellbeing.

--Liam Modlin and Christina Muller

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What is SELF-COMPASSION all about?

Dr. Kristin Neff

Definition of Compassion:

- Noticing another's suffering.

- Feeling moved by others' suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to "suffer with").
- When this occurs, you feel warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way.
- Offering understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly.
- Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience.



What then, is Self-Compassion?

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a "stiff upper lip" mentality, you stop to tell yourself, "This is really difficult right now," and ask, "How can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?"

Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings – after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?

You are human!

You may try to change in ways that allow you to be healthier and happier, but this is done because you care about yourself, not because you are worthless or unacceptable as you are. Perhaps most importantly, having compassion for yourself means that you honour and accept your humanness. Things will not always go the way you want them to. You will encounter frustrations, losses will occur, you will make mistakes, bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals. This is the human condition, a reality shared by all of us.

The more you open your heart to this reality instead of constantly fighting against it, the more you will be able to feel compassion for yourself and all your fellow humans in the experience of life.



The 3 Elements of Self-Compassion

1. Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment

- -Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate as opposed to ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism.



- Self-compassionate people recognise that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable, so they tend to be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences rather than getting angry when life falls short of set ideals.
- People cannot always be or get exactly what they want. When this reality is denied or fought against suffering increases in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism.

2. Common humanity vs. Isolation

- Frustration at not having things exactly as we want is often accompanied by an irrational but strong sense of isolation – as if “I” were the only person suffering or making mistakes.
- All humans suffer, however. The very definition of being “human” means that one is mortal, vulnerable and imperfect.
- Therefore, self-compassion involves recognising that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience – something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to “me” alone.

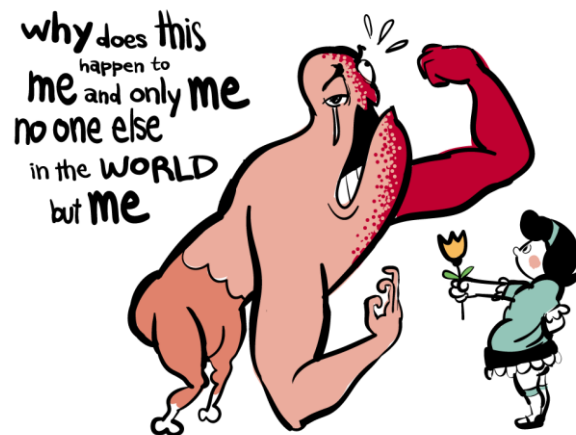
3. Mindfulness vs. Over-identification

- Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated.
- This stems from the willingness to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental, receptive mind state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them.

Myth Busting! What Self-Compassion is Not

1. Self-compassion is not self-pity.

When individuals feel self-pity, they become immersed in their own problems and forget that others have similar problems. They ignore their interconnections with others, and instead feel that they are the only ones in the world who are suffering.



Self-compassion, on the other hand, allows one to see the related experiences of self and other without these feelings of isolation and disconnection. Also, self-pitying individuals often become carried away with and wrapped up in their own emotional drama. They cannot step back from their situation and adopt a more balanced or objective perspective. In contrast, by taking the perspective of a compassionate other towards oneself, "mental space" is provided to recognize the broader human context of one's experience and to put things in greater perspective. ("Yes, it is very difficult what I'm going through right now, but there are many other people who are experiencing much greater suffering. Perhaps this isn't worth getting quite so upset about...")

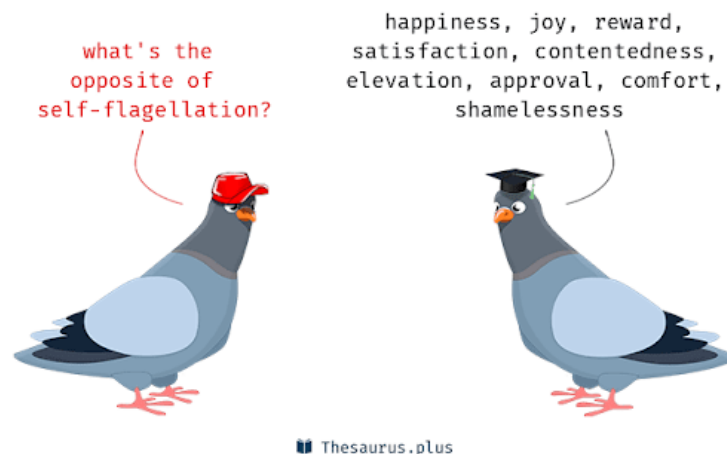
2. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence.

Self-compassion is also very different from self-indulgence. Many people say they are reluctant to be self-compassionate because they're afraid they would let themselves get away with anything. "I'm stressed out today so to be kind to myself I'll just watch TV all day and eat a quart of ice-cream." This, however, is self-indulgence rather than self-compassion.

Remember... that being compassionate to oneself means that you want to be happy and healthy in the long term. In many cases, just giving oneself pleasure may harm well-being (such as taking drugs, over-eating, being a couch potato), while giving yourself health and lasting happiness often involves a certain amount of displeasure (such as quitting smoking, dieting, exercising).

Remember... that people are often very hard on themselves when they notice something they want to change because they think they can shame themselves into action – the self-flagellation approach.

However, this approach often backfires if you can't face difficult truths about yourself because you are so afraid of hating yourself if you do. Thus, weaknesses may remain unacknowledged in an unconscious attempt to avoid self-censure. In contrast, the care intrinsic to compassion provides a powerful motivating force for growth and change, while also providing the safety needed to see the self clearly without fear of self-condemnation.



3. Self-compassion is not self-esteem.

Although self-compassion may seem similar to self-esteem, they are different in many ways. Self-esteem refers to our sense of self-worth, perceived value, or how much we like ourselves. While there is little doubt that low self-esteem is problematic and often leads to depression and lack of motivation, trying to have higher self-esteem can also be problematic.



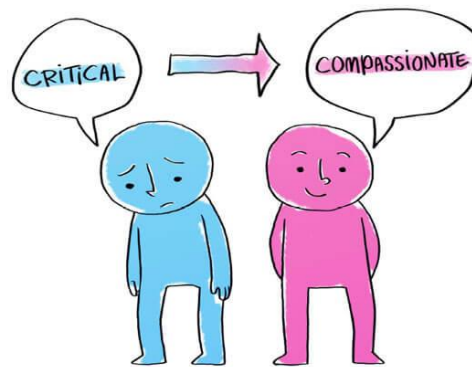
In modern western culture, self-esteem is often based on how much we are different from others, how much we stand out or are special. It is not okay to be average; we have to feel above average to feel good about ourselves. This means that attempts to raise self-esteem may result in narcissistic, self-absorbed behaviour, or lead us to put others down in order to feel better about ourselves. We also tend to get angry and aggressive towards those who have said or done anything that potentially makes us feel bad about ourselves.

The need for high self-esteem may encourage us to ignore, distort or hide personal shortcomings so that we can't see ourselves clearly and accurately. Finally, our self-esteem is often contingent on our latest success or failure, meaning that our self-esteem fluctuates depending on ever-changing circumstances.

In contrast to self-esteem, self-compassion is not based on self-evaluations. People feel compassion for themselves because all human beings deserve compassion and understanding, not because they possess some particular set of traits (pretty, smart, talented, and so on). This means that with self-compassion, you don't have to feel better than others to feel good about yourself.

Self-compassion also allows for greater self-clarity, because personal failings can be acknowledged with kindness and do not need to be hidden. Moreover, self-compassion isn't dependent on external circumstances; it's always available – especially when you fall flat on your face!

Research indicates that in comparison to self-esteem, self-compassion is associated with greater emotional resilience, more accurate self-concepts, more caring relationship behaviour, as well as less narcissism and reactive anger.



Dear me, I choose
a new inner voice...

Self-Compassion Research Findings

Results from a selection of investigations indicate that self-compassion:

- **Improves** self-reported emotional well-being in adolescents and adults (Bluth & Blanton, 2012).
- **Reduces** self-judgment, feelings of isolation, and over-identification (Neff, 2016).
- **Mediates** the impact of body dissatisfaction and unfavorable social comparisons on psychological quality of life (Duarte, Ferreira, Trindade & Pinto-Gouveia, 2015).
- Can **assist** in the reduction of compassion fatigue and burnout in practitioners and caregivers (Beaumont, Durkin, Martins & Carson, 2015).
- Significantly **reduces** shame-proneness, irrational beliefs, and symptoms of social anxiety (Candea & Tatar, 2018).
- Results in more motivation to **change** for the better, try harder to **learn**, and **avoid repeating** past mistakes particularly with health-related behaviors such as sticking to a diet, quitting smoking, or starting a fitness regimen (Germer & Neff, 2013).



Tips for the Practice of Mindful Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is often a radically new way of relating to ourselves. Research shows that the more we practice being kind and compassionate with ourselves, either using informal practices such as the Self-Compassion Break, or formal meditation practices such as Affectionate Breathing – the more we'll increase the habit of self-compassion.

Here are a few tips for practicing self-compassion that are important to keep in mind for novice and experienced practitioners alike.

Self-compassion is a practice of goodwill, not good feelings

In other words, even though the friendly, supportive stance of self-compassion is aimed at the alleviation of suffering, we can't always control the way things are. If we use self-compassion practice to try to make our pain go away by suppressing it or fighting against it, things will likely just get worse.



With self-compassion we mindfully accept that the moment is painful, and embrace ourselves with kindness and care in response, remembering that imperfection is part of the shared human experience. This allows us to hold ourselves in love and connection, giving ourselves the support and comfort needed to bear the pain, while providing the optimal conditions for growth and transformation.

Be prepared for “backdraft”

Some people find that when they practice self-compassion, their pain actually increases at first. We call this phenomena backdraft, a firefighting term that describes what happens when a door in a burning house is opened – oxygen goes in and flames rush out. A similar process can occur when we open the door of our hearts – love goes in

and old pain comes out. There are a couple sayings that describe this process: “When we give ourselves unconditional love, we discover the conditions under which we were unloved” or “Love reveals everything unlike itself.” Fortunately, we can meet old pain with the resources of mindfulness and self-compassion and the heart will naturally begin to heal.

Go slow, and stop if you get overwhelmed

We have to allow ourselves to be slow learners when it comes to practicing self-compassion. And if we ever feel overwhelmed by difficult emotions, the most self-compassionate response may be to pull back temporarily – focus on the breath, the sensation of the soles of our feet on the ground, or engage in ordinary, behavioral acts of self-care such as having a cup of tea or petting the cat. By doing so we reinforce the habit of self-compassion – giving ourselves what we need in the moment – planting seeds that will eventually blossom and grow.



Getting Started: A Week-by-Week Approach

Below is a suggested monthly structure for getting to know more about Mindful Self-Compassion. It is simply a way to review the material and become more introduced to the concepts that have shaped this approach.

For each week, you'll find links to several exercises and accompanying guided Mindful Self-Compassion meditations that might be of interest to you as well. It's important to note that this is simply a suggestion, or a guide; perhaps a blueprint or an introduction. The weekly programs do build upon each other, but feel free to sample elements in any order you like.

Before beginning, please set aside a few moments to watch Kristin's TedTalk below:

The Space Between Self-Esteem and Self Compassion: Kristin Neff

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvTZBUSplr4>

WEEK 1

Understanding Self and Compassion:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-1-treat-friend/>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://centerformsc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CompassionateFriend_Neff.mp3

Self-Compassion in Daily Life Practice:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break/>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://center4msc-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GivingandReceivingCompassion_Neff.mp3

WEEK 2

Compassionate Writing Exercise:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-3-exploring-self-compassion-writing/>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/affectionatebreathing_cleaned.mp3

Self-Compassion in Daily Life Practice:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/bodyscan_cleaned.mp3

WEEK 3

Recognising Harshness Exercise:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-4-criticizer-criticized-compassionate-observer/>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/noting.practice_cleaned.mp3

From Criticism to Compassion:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-5-changing-critical-self-talk/>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/softensootheallow_cleaned.mp3

WEEK 4

Self-Compassion in Daily Life Practice:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/self-compassion.break_.mp3

Compassionate Writing Practice:

<https://self-compassion.org/exercise-6-self-compassion-journal/>

Suggested Guided Meditation:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/LKM_cleaned.mp3

Further Resources

Online Presentations:

Kristin Neff: Overcoming Objections to Self-Compassion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFhcNPjIMjc>

Christopher Germer on Mindful Self-Compassion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rG09J7a40hc>

The Compassionate Mind by Paul Gilbert

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GKVMILwzdY>

Suggested Reading:

- Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself. This is the self-help book that helped set off the current wave of interest in self-compassion. Written by Kristin Neff, it weaves together ideas based on her research and Buddhist concepts, and is a good introduction to the idea of self-compassion.
- The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions. This excellent book by Christopher Germer contains a variety of meditative practices based on a largely Buddhist perspective that aims to help you soften your own self-criticism and be kinder to yourself and others.

Useful Apps:

- Insight Timer
- Head Space
- Calm

Related Websites:

www.self-compassion.org

www.ccare.stanford.edu

www.bemindful.co.uk