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How To Practice Self-Compassion (And Love Yourself More)

We are constantly bombarded with messages telling us we need to be thinner, prettier, or better in some way to be happy and successful. All that can create a lot of self-doubts and negative self-talk, which can be very [damaging to our self-esteem](#).

The good news is that there is a proven way to counter all of that self-negativity – through the practice of self-compassion.

A lack of self-compassion can make you feel irritated with yourself for no apparent reason. It can make you judge and [criticize yourself](#) harshly.

Self-compassion is when you greet and treat yourself as your best friend, with attention, acceptance,

warmth, and kindness.



Some people are naturally self-compassionate, but not everyone is. Fortunately, we can learn this skill. It's easy, we assure you.

How Can You Practice Self-Compassion?

Imagine treating yourself with the same kindness, empathy, and love as you would to your best friend. That is the simplest way to understand self-compassion.

By practicing self-compassion, you'll [start to love yourself more](#) and feel better about who you are.

You learn to love and forgive yourself when you have self-compassion. It shows how you can be kind to yourself while dealing with life's sorrows and sufferings. It allows you to see

yourself as a human, a part of common humanity, and recognize that none of us on this planet are perfect beings.

Here are four tips to help you start practicing self-compassion:

1. Take A Self-Compassion Break.

Take care of yourself. Make sure to schedule some time for activities that make you happy and help you relax.

According to Dr. Kristin Neff, self-compassion is a composite of three features: *mindfulness*, *common humanity*, and *self-kindness* (Neff, 2003a; 2003b).



3 Elements of Self-compassion

• Mindfulness

In self-compassion theory, **mindfulness** is considered the inverse of avoidance or over-identification—it requires acknowledging

and categorizing our own thoughts rather than reacting to them (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Neff, 2010).

Exercise (Part 1): Imagine you are in a grief-laden or stressful situation. Tell yourself, "*Buddy, this is a moment of suffering. It's hurting you.*" This part is mindfulness.

• **Common Humanity**

A common theme in positive psychology literature is "being a part of something bigger." The human urge to connect with others is an essential human characteristic (Maslow, 1943).

Having a sense of common humanity entails understanding our own experiences as an integral part of the larger human experience, rather than perceiving ourselves as isolated or different from others (Neff, 2003a).

Exercise (Part 2): Then, tell yourself, "*Suffering is a natural part of human life. You're not alone. Everyone goes through this at some point.*" This part is common humanity.

Self-compassion is about recognizing your own common humanity and giving yourself the grace of being imperfect.

• Self-Kindness

Self-kindness is showing empathy and kindness to ourselves when we falter or get hurt. When we acknowledge the negative influence of self-judgment, we can treat ourselves with kindness and patience instead of criticizing or judging ourselves harshly (Gilbert & Irons, 2005).

Exercise (Part 3): Finally, give yourself a hug, and say, "*May I be kind to myself. May I begin to accept myself. May I be strong.*" This part is self-kindness.

Remember that you are human and that you're doing the best you can. Give yourself a little more kindness and empathy.

2. Give Yourself Supportive Touch.

Close your eyes and give yourself a warm hug.

Every time you do something to comfort your physical body, you also soothe your inner being with a dose of self-compassion.

When you give yourself a supportive touch, like a loving hug, **your vagus nerve gets activated**. As a result, your heart rate

decreases, your cortisol (“stress hormone”) levels drop, and you relax.

Physical touch also causes the release of *oxytocin*, popularly known as the “love hormone.” This gives you a sense of security and care.

Other than hugging yourself, try these:

- Lay down to relax your body.
- Treat yourself to some nutritious food.
- Gently rub your shoulders and lower back.
- Take a leisurely stroll through a natural park.

3. Write Yourself A Self-Compassion Letter.

Find an issue that is troubling you, and sit down to write about it. Remember to include your feelings.

Next, picture an imaginary friend who is aware of your strengths and weaknesses, and who loves you unconditionally. Write a letter to yourself from that friend, emphasizing his loving acceptance of you.

Put the letter away, somewhere secure, after you’ve finished writing it. Then, a few hours or days later, read it again. It will make you feel compassionate toward yourself.

Another way to do this is to recall a painful situation, like [a breakup with a friend or a lover](#), the loss of a job, or a [sharp criticism at work](#).

And write a self-compassion letter to yourself describing the situation exactly as it happened, without blaming anyone, including yourself. This will calm down your frazzled mind.

You could also try [writing mindfully](#).

4. Treat Yourself As You Would Treat Your Friend.

When you decide to be self-compassionate, you value and treat yourself with the same tender-hearted kindness that you show to your best friend and your most loved person.

Recall what place you took your friend to that made them ecstatic. Take yourself to the same place.

Take a sheet of paper and write out what you would say and do for a close friend who is in distress. Then, write out everything you said and did to yourself when you committed your most recent mistake.

And take note of how different you were in each situation. Next, write down how things would be better if you treated yourself [the same way you would treat a close friend](#).

Allow yourself to be human and make a few little deliberate mistakes on occasion. It is a great way to embrace your imperfections and remind yourself that you are not alone in being imperfect (Abrams, 2017).

Be mindful of your self-talk. If you wouldn't say it to a friend, don't say it to yourself.

What Are The Benefits Of Self-Compassion?

Neff, Rude, and Kirkpatrick (2006) found that self-compassion has positive associations with happiness, optimism, positive affect (mood), wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration, agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness.

- Self-compassionate people are mindful of their actions, are highly conscientious, intrinsically motivated, and less fearful of failures.
- They are more resilient, cheerful, and curious. People are happier and **more optimistic** when they practice self-compassion.
- Self-compassion practice helps you learn how to stop being so hard on yourself, and how to handle difficult emotions with greater ease.
- It also tells you how to encourage yourself, how to transform difficult relationships, both old and new, and **how to include mindfulness meditation in your daily life.**

FAQs

What Is Self-Compassion?

Self-compassion is the practice of treating yourself with kindness and compassion, rather than with judgment, criticism, or punishment. In practicing self-compassion, you understand and accept your feelings. It means you let yourself experience **negative emotions** without judging or trying to change them.

What Is Mindful Self-Compassion?

Mindful self-compassion (MSC) is a new mental health development approach based on Buddhist philosophy to dealing with anxiety, stress, and depression. According to the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, MSC is “an evidence-based approach to cultivating self-kindness and compassion for oneself in difficult situations.” Practicing MSC can help you overcome stress and anxiety by cultivating a loving-kindness attitude toward yourself, and it can lead to improved happiness even in the face of adversity.

Further reading:

- Wood, J. V., Elaine Perunovic, W. Q., & Lee, J. W. (2009). Positive self-statements: Power for some, peril for others. *Psychological Science*, 20(7), 860-866.
- Barnard, L. K., & Curry, J. F. (2011). Self-compassion: Conceptualizations, correlates, & interventions. *Review of General Psychology*, 15(4), 289-303.
- Cohen, G. L., & Sherman, D. K. (2014). The psychology of change: Self-affirmation and social psychological

intervention. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 333-371.

- Howell, A. J. (2016). Self-Affirmation Theory and the Science of Well-Being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 18(1), 293–311.

Final Words

Self-forgiveness is a crucial part of self-compassion. We all make mistakes. But when we learn from them, forgive ourselves, and move on, we become much better people.

Let's close this with a beautiful insight from the [Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#):

Self-compassion is a practice of goodwill, not good feelings. If we use self-compassion practice to make our pain go away by suppressing it or fighting against it, things will likely just worsen.

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.



Did you know that the best thing you can do when having difficult emotions is to **not fight or suppress them?** Find out how you can **embrace your negative emotions.**



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