

Below are some links to several websites that discuss self compassion and offer practices that you can download.

Dr. Kristen Neff, www.mindfulcompassion.org

Dr. Christopher Germer, www.mindfulselfcompassion.org

Dr. Paul Gilbert, www.compassionatemind.co.uk

Suggested Readings:

The Mindful Path to Self Compassion,
Christopher Germer, PhD, Guilford Press, 2009

Self Compassion,
Kristen Neff, PhD, Harper Collins, 2011

The Mindful Path Through Depression,
Williams, Teasdale, Segal and Kabat-Zinn, Guildford Press, 2007

To learn more about Klinik's "Life in Balance" program and self compassion practices, visit www.klinik.mb.ca .



Every Person's Guide to Self Compassion



“Act as if you always had compassion and you will discover that you always did.”

—Robert Aitken

Living with people who care about us and are connected to us is essential for our well being. We thrive when supported by a circle of nurturing people, especially our family and friends.

Research shows that babies do not develop normally if they are born into non-nurturing surroundings — where there is little or no interaction with adults who create a sense of security and comfort. As they grow older, these babies can experience difficulties with learning, forming healthy relationships, and comforting themselves during times of distress.

We never outgrow our need for positive human connections. Being seen, heard and understood by others, especially during times of distress, reduces our pain and anxiety in very real ways. When others show us that they appreciate our situation, are aware of our feelings, are not judging us, and want to help, they are being compassionate. They convey a message of comfort and concern through their facial expression, tone of voice, respectful approach and kind words.

Because we look for and respond to these positive messages, we are drawn toward people who express them. When we experience empathy, our sadness, fear, anger and a host of negative emotions slowly dissolve, and our physical health improves. Indeed, research has shown that a kind word from a doctor can actually enhance recovery from an illness.

As important as compassion is in our relationships, treating ourselves kindly is even more important, but unfortunately, it is not

always easy to do. Instead, many of us judge ourselves too harshly, second-guess our choices and decisions, and blame ourselves for anything and everything that happens.

Sadly, many people believe that harsh self criticism is actually helpful and motivates us to do better. But what actually happens is that our inner critic examines our flaws in a tone of voice and a bluntness that we would never use with a friend. As a result, we often say things to and about ourselves that are quite shocking. When we direct hostility and unkind words at ourselves it impacts our self image and ability to manage stress. In other words, self criticism doesn't encourage motivation; it undermines it.

Researchers believe that self compassion can help reduce anxiety, and depression. It can also increase our ability to enjoy life more, and to be happier and more hopeful. When we aren't doing so well or being productive, self compassion can help us see things a bit more clearly.

Some people are naturally kinder to themselves and able to ignore society's anxious and unrealistic pursuit of perfection. But what about the rest of us?

Researchers and therapists Drs. Christopher Germer, Kristin Neff and Paul Gilbert have been working on understanding self compassion, which they believe is something we can all learn. They have been developing programs to help people engage in self-compassion practices. These practices incorporate aspects of mindful meditation and build on the age-old teachings of “loving kindness”.

By cultivating mindful awareness, we can learn to develop heartfelt feelings of kindness toward ourselves, hold those close to us in a positive regard, and extend loving kindness to everyone everywhere.

Practicing self compassion involves:

- Paying attention to the present, and noticing when our thoughts drift into self blame, criticism or hostility.
- Being less self judgemental and more compassionate when considering our actions or situations. This allows us to soften the harsh words we hear in our minds and replace them with phrases that express understanding, such as, “This is a difficult time.”
- Recognizing that this is a moment of suffering, that everyone's life contains difficulties, and that we share a common humanity. We are not perfect and that's okay.

To practise self compassion:

- Get comfortable in a place where there are few distractions. Become aware of the present moment by focusing on your breathing. Take a few minutes to settle your mind; notice and feel each breath. Gently bring yourself back to the present when your mind wanders.
- Notice any bodily sensations, thoughts or emotions, and accept them without judgement. Do not fight or resist those feelings; be aware of them without judging them and then let them pass. When noticing painful sensations or thoughts, remind yourself that everyone experiences difficulty in their lives. Tell yourself that “This is a moment of suffering”
- Extend a heartfelt wish for your peace and safety. Repeat phrases like, “May my heart be filled with loving kindness. May I be safe. May I be healthy in body and in mind. May I be happy, truly happy. May I live my life with ease.”
- Follow this pattern and direct it toward others in radiating circles of kindness, including loved ones, pets, acquaintances, friends, and even people we have difficulty with.
- After practising for a while to bring your mind back to these phrases when it wanders, end by letting the experience “soak” into your body.

Allow several minutes for the sensations associated with kindness to sink into your muscles and bones.

Most of us know that brooding on our past or present circumstances doesn't help to change them. Research has also shown that strong negative emotions associated with self criticism and anger foster feelings of helplessness. Eventually, our thoughts spin and our bodies are ignored.

The practice of self compassion is one way to counter negative moods and social isolation. It is not a trick of the mind, and it is not simply about replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. Rather, it is about building on our natural ability to join the mind and body so they work together in an experience of kindness directed toward ourselves. It is this felt sense that heals.

Self compassion allows us to soften our view of ourselves and open our hearts and minds in the midst of trouble. We respond to this form of kindness just like we do to well wishes sent by a good friend. It increases our sense of safety and encourages us to look and see what can be done to change things. And it begins the experience of seeing ourselves worthy of kindness and respect.

Perhaps the most important outcome of self compassion is the increased capacity to care about and join with others. Feeling connected to others is a particularly important component of mental wellness. If we are more aware that we are all in the same boat, and that we all struggle, are afraid, have pain, and experience doubt, then we can more easily feel compassion for the plight and suffering of others.

The great wisdom traditions of the world understand that to begin caring for others, we need to first love ourselves. We are one community. And in this community, true compassion goes further than any emotional connection. It can actually ignite the desire to relieve the suffering of others, and lead to clear and unselfish action.