

Developing Self-Compassion

Everybody has something about themselves that they don't like; something that causes them to feel shame, to feel insecure, or to feel not "good enough." Even people who seem to have everything—beauty, wealth, intelligence, and more—are often living with a sense of great inadequacy.

Do you think you are self-critical? Do you often feel you are not as good as the people around you or that there is something really wrong with you? Ask yourself if you really need to suffer from your sense of not being "good enough." Suffering is part of the human experience, and we all will have times of pain, failure, and loss. But do you really have to add to your suffering? Do you have to make yourself suffer more?

Kristin Neff, a psychologist who has dedicated her life to teaching the importance of self-compassion, notes that self-compassion is not self-pity. She explains:

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 is also very different from self-indulgence. Self-indulgence is merely giving yourself short-term pleasure, which may actually get in the way of your happiness and well-being. You may indulge yourself with a big bowl of ice cream, or buying something special, or binge-watching your favorite show. These indulgences are fine once in a while, but as you can see, they have little to do with self-compassion.

This worksheet is designed to help you bring self-compassion into your life. It will help you show the same compassion to yourself that you would show to someone you care about very much.

Begin by Writing Something About Yourself You Don't Like

Write down one issue or thought that often makes you feel inadequate or bad about yourself, such as your physical appearance, your work, a relationship issue, a mistake you made, and so on. Describe that issue below by completing the sentence.

I feel bad about myself because

What emotions come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself?

Write down as many emotions as you can.

Now take a moment to sit with these emotions even though they may make you uncomfortable. Just feel them without judging them. You might have some images or words come to mind. Don't judge them or try to get rid of them. Just observe them. *They are not you, but rather only thoughts and images you have in your mind.*

Write down any images or words that come to mind.

Now Imagine an Incredibly Caring Friend Who Understands and Accepts You

Now that you are in touch with your self-critical thoughts and feelings, think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting, kind, and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspects of yourself you wish you could hide from others.

Reflect on what this friend feels toward you and how he/she loves and accepts you exactly as you are, with all your very human imperfections. This friend has a profound understanding of what it means to be human. This friend is kind and forgiving toward you. This friend loves you unconditionally in spite of what you think of as your problems and faults.

In his/her great wisdom, this friend understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened in your life to create you as you are in this moment.

This friend understands that the things which make you feel bad about yourself are connected to many aspects of your life you didn't choose: your genes, your family history, the place where you were born, and many other things outside your control.

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend – focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for. What would this friend say to you about your flaws from the perspective of unlimited compassion?

In the words of this friend, express the deep compassion he/she feels for you, especially for the pain you feel when you judge yourself so harshly.

Write down what this friend would say to alleviate some of your pain.

Write down what this friend would say to help you feel that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses.

If you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, write them down. Make sure these suggestions would embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion.

What else would your friend say to you to express his/her acceptance, kindness, and caring for you?

What would this friend say to express his/her desire for your health and happiness?

Take a Few Minutes to Feel This Compassion

Feel the compassion from your imaginary friend as it soothes and comforts you. Sit back and close your eyes and feel what it is like to experience unconditional love from someone who accepts you exactly as you are without thinking for a moment even the slightest critical thought.

Hold on to this feeling for another minute or two.

Now, imagine that your friend wants to leave you with one important thought to carry with you. Just reading this one thought pours soothing compassion into you and comforts you like a cool breeze on a hot day or a warm blanket on a cold night.

Write down this one thought.

Now, write down this thought again very slowly. With each word, see if you can feel the compassion and acceptance behind this thought.
