

Practicing Self-Compassion While You Grieve

Objective

To practice mindful self-compassion exercises in order to alleviate the suffering of your loss and increase your self-compassion.

You Should Know

Everyone deserves compassion, especially during challenging periods in our lives, including grieving the loss of a loved one. If you are in mourning, your emotions might be up and down for quite some time. You might find that you are criticizing yourself for those ups and downs, somehow expecting that your moods “should” be on an even keel, or that you should be “over it” by now. People around you, or society itself, might be giving you messages about your grief process—that you are somehow “doing it wrong.”

There is no wrong or right when it comes to grief. So, it only makes matters worse when we beat ourselves up for our true emotions. As you would have compassion for someone you care about who is grieving, what about offering yourself such compassion? This is not the same as self-pity. It is not being selfish. It is a healthy, effective way to heal and move forward.

Much research exists to show the psychological benefits of mindful self-compassion, a practice derived from the Buddhist concept of ‘lovingkindness’ and brought to our Western culture by psychologists Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff, among others. It is important to understand the terms “mindful” and “mindful self-compassion” (MSC). Mindfulness is defined by the American Psychological Association as “moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgment. In this sense, mindfulness is a state and not a trait. While it might be promoted by certain practices or activities, such as meditation, it is not equivalent to or synonymous with them.”

MSC combines the skills developed through mindfulness with the specific practice of self-compassion. Note: Self-compassion is not the same as self-pity, or feeling sorry for yourself. When you are compassionate toward someone else who might be suffering, you do not pity them—you feel empathy, caring, love, warmth, and a desire to help them heal. MSC can help you learn how to extend those same feelings toward yourself.

Dr. Germer writes: “Self-compassion involves the capacity to comfort and soothe ourselves, and to motivate ourselves with encouragement, when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate. Self-compassion is learned in part by connecting with our innate compassion for others, and self-compassion also helps to grow and sustain our compassion for others.”

What to Do

In this worksheet, you will practice generating self-compassionate phrases to say to yourself and then record when you use them and how they make you feel.

First, think of statements you might say to a friend or family member whom you care about a lot who might be grieving or going through a hard time and needs your support. Write them below.

Next, describe what it is that is emotionally challenging for you during this time of grief.

What are your worries, fears, ruminations, hopes?

Now, what can you say to yourself that is kind and compassionate—accepting, nonjudgmental, and understanding of *all of your* feelings? If you have trouble thinking of something to say, look at what you might say to a loved one and write that down.

Here are some possible statements:

- I am OK as I am.
- I am going to get through this difficult time.
- I forgive myself.
- I am a good person.
- I have normal needs and desires.
- I have normal emotions and feelings.
- I love myself.
- I am strong and resilient.
- I am trying hard and deserve support.
- It is OK to be imperfect.
- I am a kind, loving person.
- It is OK to be tired, sad, anxious, and scared as I grieve.

Here are some more statements, drawn from the mindfulness literature on lovingkindness.
Think of these statements as wishes or, if you like, prayers.

- May I be safe.
- May I be free of physical suffering.
- May I be peaceful.
- May I love and be loved.
- May I be healthy.
- May I accept myself as I am.
- May I be happy.
- May I be kind to myself.
- May I be free from sorrow.
- May I live with ease.

Your own ideas:

What statements would you like to repeat to yourself in the coming week? Write them below.

Record when you use the statements and how you feel before and after.

Date	How Do You Feel Before Using MSC?	MSC Statement Used	How Do You Feel Now?

Reflections on This Exercise

What was the most challenging part of doing the MSC exercise? Why?

What aspects of the exercise felt comforting or helpful to you in your grief process?

What self-compassionate statements would you like to repeat to yourself on a regular basis?

Do so for ten minutes each day, even if you are not experiencing distressing feelings.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area of your recovery?
