



Using Self Compassion *to Improve Wellbeing* *and Support Growth*

A moment of self-compassion
can change your entire day.
A string of such moments can
change the course of your life.
~Christopher K. Germer

April 2023

Introduction to this work

Self-compassion holds significant potential to help people achieve goals, improve wellbeing or address longer term chronic challenges.

What is in this pack?

- The evidence behind using self-compassion
- A brief description of self-compassion
- Making more lasting neurological changes through work by Rick Hanson
- Getting started: Breathing, a description of mindfulness, finding loving kindness phrases, and when self-compassion is hard to do
- Written transcripts of self compassion exercises for you to do daily for up to 8 weeks. Choose the ones that work for you and try to do one daily
- This might sound like a major commitment. As you will read, doing this work regularly in this time frame does contribute to more lasting changes
- There is a worksheet to help you monitor your efforts
- The references behind this work
- We have put the exercises on clips you can watch. You will be able to find them on ASERT's website: <https://www.ascert.biz/> or the South Eastern Trust's website under the [Health Living tab - Building a toolkit for change](#).

Getting the most from this booklet

This is an introduction to using self-compassion: it will not be a complete course.

- ~ It is up to you how you use it. Use what you find helpful
- ~ It is a 'workbook.' It will involve effort from you to get the most out of it
- ~ Do not let unfamiliar words throw you. Read it over a few times if you need to
- ~ Talk about your learning. Ask questions or look stuff up
- ~ Go slowly through the exercises that follow and monitor your responses
- ~ Stop if you feel you have opened up a part of you that is difficult to manage
- ~ Any increase in symptoms or distress, stop, and discuss it with a professional
- ~ This work is not a quick fix. It will take effort and repetition on your part to build positive habits
- ~ If your practice lapses, as it may, notice any self-criticism. Recognize the barriers that any of us can have. Remind yourself of the benefit from the work and getting back on track is a gift you want to give yourself. We hope you find this helpful.

*These tiny steps, marginal gains,
are rarely dramatic in the short term.
But their effect compounds over time,
like compound interest.
In the medium and long-term,
the effect can be extraordinary.*

Archer and Jamieson, 2020



Using Self-Compassion for Self-Care and Recovery - The Evidence



With anything we want to introduce, we want to make sure it has evidence behind it. While we do not want to bombard you, we do hope these first pages give you 'why' behind this work.

Dr. Zev Schuman-Olivier's research from Harvard Medical School has shown the benefit of self-compassion. There is a lot to learn from his work both coming out of this stress of COVID and supporting people making changes or dealing with addictions or other chronic conditions.

There is mounting evidence that mindfulness with a compassionate voice can impact people's capacity for behaviour change.

We all can get caught up in habitual self-soothing that may help in the short term, whether it is the inability to stop watching Netflix uploads, social media, drinking too much, or smoking. These all use similar pathways in the brain. Habits can become compulsive.

Also, people who have experienced trauma earlier in their life may have feelings of shame or guilt. Self-soothing through things like drugs, alcohol, excessive eating, shopping can become a way of avoiding these emotions. While they may help for a while, they can cause more problems in the long term.



Things self-compassion can help deal with:

Our negativity bias: Human beings tend to see the worst, dwell on the bad, or see things as threat. That is our negativity bias.

The amygdala, an area in the brain, evolved as a protective process to mobilise us when under threat. When we go into a survival mode our thinking shuts down. We need ways to counter that sense of threat that happens daily living in the modern world.

Using mindful self-compassion improves the connection between the thinking part of the brain, our prefrontal cortex and the amygdala (the part of our brain that filters for threat).

In just two weeks, using it daily, people were less self-critical. Instead of getting caught up in self-criticism, they were able to look at situations in a more compassionate way. ***And that was at two weeks.***

By eight weeks with regular practice, seeing things with more self-compassion became automatic because of more sustained shifts in the brain.

Other Things Self-Compassion Helps With



The absolute violation effect - People may set goals to stop or increase something, then slip back into old ways. The 'abstinence violation effect' is when people make global, negative assumptions about themselves from self-criticism.

Say you are on a diet, eat a few biscuits, you may think - ***"I am never going to be able to do this. I might as well just keep going."***

This can happen with any change people are trying to make. Self-compassion helps people not get stuck in self-criticism. ***"This was a slip. I can still do this."***

Not being 'stuck in the story.' - There is a part of the brain called the default mode network, which wires up during adolescence and young adulthood. It connects all the parts of the brain involved in thinking about ourselves in the past, the future, about what others think about us. It creates a story of ourselves.

We can get stuck in that story with self-critical rumination about ourselves, the past or the future. It is just a story. While it can be hard to get out of the story, there is always opportunity for change. One way people get out of that story is through task-positive activity. That is basically doing something. When you talk to people in early recovery, you hear, ***"I have to stay busy."*** They want to stay out of that story and stay in the moment. Doing things helps.

Interoception - Interoception is understanding and feeling what's going on inside your body. It is like we have an internal smoke detector monitoring things like temperature, breathing, heart rate.

How we relate to our internal body has been shown to improve with self-compassion. Noticing emotions, and the sensations that come with those emotions, gives you the ability to understand and regulate them instead of acting on them automatically.

Interoception can be impaired with trauma and depression. Body sensations can feel overwhelming and not a safe place. It helps to learn to trust the body again, to feel it is a safe place.

If you find this difficult, you may need to seek additional support. Bringing a warm awareness to body sensations is incredibly helpful.

Final thing to say is when people completed eight weeks of self-compassion, they were three times more likely to initiate a behaviour change.



***That was a lot of science. We hope that was not too much for you.
The references are on the back page.***

Understanding Self-Compassion

**Everyone makes mistakes
in life.**

**That does not mean you have
to pay for them for the rest
of your life.**

**Sometimes good people
make bad choices.
It does not make them bad.**

It means they are human.

Self-compassion is not the same as self-esteem or self-confidence. It is a way of thinking and treating yourself.

Instead of judging and criticizing yourself for shortcomings or mistakes, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding toward yourself. Whoever said you were supposed to be perfect?

Three elements of self-compassion

Dr. Kristin Neff, a psychologist and pioneering researcher in the area of self-compassion, outlines three parts of self-compassion:

Self-kindness - being non-judgemental toward yourself

Self-compassion involves treating and talking to yourself just like your friends or family. You are supportive and understanding toward yourself during a challenging time rather than being harsh and critical.

Common humanity - we all make mistakes

You see mistakes or shortcomings as part of being human. It is something we all go through, and we are not alone. Your flaws and setbacks can help you understand yourself better, not making you overly stressed or feeling bad about yourself. Self-compassion is about realizing everyone makes mistakes - including you.

Mindfulness - Seeing yourself objectively

You recognize stress. Practicing self-compassion involves being able to observe and acknowledge uncomfortable emotions in the moment without exaggerating, ignoring, or overreacting. Just by naming feelings can help start to turn on the calming part of our brain. It also means you do not dwell on those mistakes or beat yourself up for making them.

Benefits of Self-Compassion

- You understand that making bad decisions or mistakes does not automatically make you a bad person
- People who practice self-compassion have better connections and greater overall satisfaction with life. They also are more caring, supportive, and empathetic
- People who are self-compassionate have less anxiety, depression and fear of failure
- Research also shows that self-compassion can be a motivator helping people learn from their mistakes instead of intense self-criticism.



How to Practice Self-Compassion

Dr Neff has suggestions that can help us learn the practice of self-compassion:

- **Imagine how you would talk to a friend**

We can often extend kind words, hope and encouragement to friends or loved ones when going through a tough time. Consider how you might respond to a close friend if they were going through a similar situation and talk to yourself in that way.



- **Become an observer**

During times when we feel challenged or struggling, we are reacting and trying to emotionally survive the moment. By slowing down, we can take a small step back to observe our experience. Looking at the bigger picture can help us keep things in perspective and help us see what might have been otherwise missed.

- **Change your self-talk**

Notice how you talk to yourself when you are experiencing challenging emotions. Work to change critical self-statements in a more positive, nurturing way. This may sound more like a mentor, rather than a critic or judge.

- **Keep a journal and write it out**

Take time to write out some of the challenges you are experiencing. Note moments your mind tends to wander into critical statements. As you would with self-talk, intentionally change critical statements with a softer, more understanding tone to see how it might feel different.

The practice of self-compassion can be quite different than anything you have done before.

Be patient with yourself. We cannot control everything in our lives, including how quickly we are able to change old, self-critical habits into new, healthy and compassionate habits.

The exercises in this booklet can help you get started. As we said at the beginning, using this work daily will help you get the most from it.



‘Getting the most from this work though’

Thoughts from Rick Hanson, PhD, Author of ‘Hardwiring Happiness.’



Your mind takes its shape from what it repeatedly rests upon

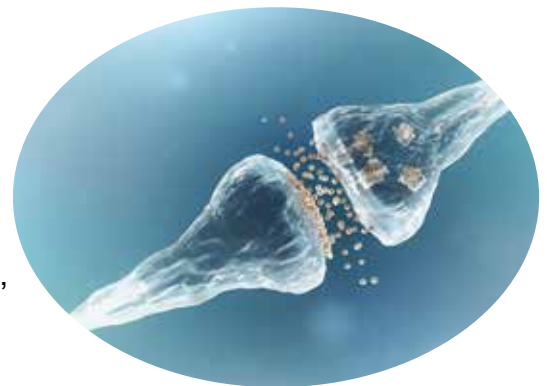
What we do with positive experiences can lead to lasting change in the brain. How does that sound to you? You can literally change the way your brain is wired. It is called neuroplasticity.

It will not happen by itself. Begin using this work for 2 weeks daily and you will begin to see changes. Keep it going for 8 weeks and these changes become more lasting.

The ‘how’ to do this is as evidence-based as the exercises themselves. It may sound simple. Extend the duration of a positive experience: the feelings in the body, the emotions, the intention, the understanding, for a breath or two. Feel it in your body. Let it really sink in.

Another factor of neuroplastic change is focus on what is rewarding, meaningful and enjoyable about it.

There is science behind this: Focusing on the reward value of something as we experience it, heightens activity of dopamine, the chemical related to pleasure in your brain.



When we do this deliberately and purposely, it can increase lasting physical change of structures in our brains. Neurons (cells in our brain) that fire together wire together.

States to traits: Short term or more long term

States, while pleasant, only last a short while. They do not lead to lasting value.



A trait is more of a lasting part of us. How can we turn experiences or states into traits?

Keep the positive bigger, not hijacked by the negative. The positive gradually soothes the negative and can even replace it.

It is like a bed of flowers. Uproot the weeds and replace the weeds with flowers in the garden of your mind.

How to do this? **H.E.A.L. can help.**

H.E.A.L. Have, Enrich, Absorb and Link



The way change happens in the brain involves two steps.

The first step, experience positive emotions
In the second step, internalize it to install it as lasting physical change in the nervous system.

The **H.E.A.L.** acronym, **Have**, **Enrich**, **Absorb** and **Link** summarizes the ways in which we can be active agents in that process: the driver of our own bus.

In the first step, **H** for **Have** the positive experience.

In the second step, you turn on the inner recorder by enriching and absorbing that experience.

Enriching involves five factors to help build states into traits.

1. **Duration**: Help the experience last for a breath or longer
2. **Intensity**: Turn up the volume on the experience
3. **Widen the experience from different angles**: Notice sensations in the body, emotions, what you are thinking. The richer the experience, the more it tends to be encoded as lasting change in what is called implicit memory
4. **Novelty**: Bring a beginner's mind to the experience
5. **Personal relevance**: *"Why would it matter to me? Why is it important? Own it."*

In **Absorbing**, there are three factors for sensitizing your brain to the enriched experience.

1. **Intent**: It is deliberate. The more you actively choose to do it, the more you gain from it
2. **Give over to it**: Release resistance to it, be open to it
3. **Focus on what is rewarding about it**: That heightens the sensitivity of the memory making machinery in your brain.

Can you see the difference?

With **Enriching**, you are helping your experience be big and lasting and take over.

In **Absorbing** and **Linking**, you are increasing the sensitivity of your brain to that experience. This is more effective at encoding it into memory.

What about the more difficult things in life?

Life has its challenges. We already talked about the brain's negativity bias, which makes it like velcro for bad experiences, but teflon for positive ones.

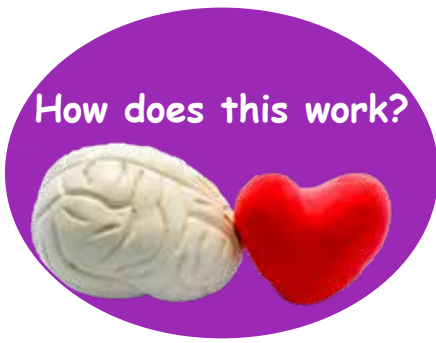
Keeping the positive bigger, not hijacked by the negative, we can use H.E.A.L. to help make lasting changes in our brain and give us more resources to deal with life's difficulties.



'Our Brains have a negativity bias which makes it like velcro for the bad and teflon for the good.'

We need to learn to take in the positive experiences, weaving them into the fabric of our brains.'

Rick Hanson



Tools to get started: 'Breathing, Mindfulness and Finding your loving kindness phrases

Breathing: One of our strongest tools for our nervous system.

When we experience stress of any kind, we tend to breathe shallow and rapid. Breathing like this is part of the fight/flight/freeze response. Slow, belly breathing is effective to counter that.

What makes slow, belly breathing so calming?

Our vagus nerve runs past our ears, throat and into our lungs and heart. When you breathe out longer than you breathe in, the vagus nerve sends a signal to turn up your calming, parasympathetic nervous system turning down your fight or flight, sympathetic nervous system.

Sounds simple? Yes, it is. When we practice this regularly, it can become more automatic. There are different forms of relaxed breathing.

Here we are going to try **2-4-1**. Look on YouTube for other forms of relaxed breathing and find one you like.

1. To begin, sit still and tall somewhere comfortably. Close your eyes and begin breathing through your nose. Draw air from your stomach, not your chest
2. Inhale for a count of **2**. Pause at the top of your inhale for a count of **1**
3. Exhale gently, for a count of **4**. Pause at the bottom of your exhale for a count of **1**
4. Keep your breathing even and smooth. If the **2-4** count feels too short, try increasing the breath lengths to **4** in and **6** out. If longer breaths create any anxiety; there is no need to push yourself. The most important thing is the exhale is longer than the inhale.

Exhaling through the mouth with a soft "haaa" sound like you are misting your glasses can also be useful. Creating sound stimulates the vagus nerve.



Set a timer and breathe this way for at least **5** minutes a day to see a difference in your mood.

Just **5** minutes a day can have influence on your mood. **11** minutes a day balances hormones in your body. **25** minutes a day can balance blood pressure.



Mindfulness

We have talked about Mindfulness as one of the parts of self-compassion.

Mindfulness is deliberately focusing all your attention on the present moment on one thing.



You can begin to get into the habit of mindfulness by:

- Using relaxed belly breathing
- Focusing attention on one thing at a time like sounds, smells, and sights
- Being non-judgmental: Do not judge yourself as good or bad
- Present Moment: Fully stay in the present without being distracted
- Open Mind or Beginner's Mind is being open to new experiences and trying new things like Mindfulness. It may take a while to get used to it and find the benefits.

A few ways to use mindfulness

Mindful of Breathing involves focused attention on your breathing. How are you breathing? Notice slower and fuller breaths. Notice your belly rise and fall as you breathe in and out. When your mind drifts away from your breathing, and it will, simply notice it and gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Mindful of Sounds: Focus your attention on sounds; soft, loud, nearby, or distant sounds. When your attention drifts away to a thought or feeling, notice what thoughts or feelings you were distracted by, and gently return your attention to the sounds.

Mindful eating: When eating mindfully, choose a place that is quiet and free of distractions. Before beginning to eat, look at the food. Notice what it looks like, its shape, size, and colour. How does it smell? Notice any hunger, urges before you taste the food. Now take a bite. Notice the taste, texture, and sensations in your mouth. Notice your chewing. Notice your swallowing.

Hold something and really focus on it: It may be a stone with patterns or colors that run through it. Feel how heavy or light, smooth or rough it feels in your hand. This can be done with any object.

If you know you are going into a stressful situation, put it in your pocket or purse so you can do this calming exercise on the go.

Getting benefits from Mindfulness take practice. Every time thoughts wander off into the future or the past, gently bring yourself back to the present.



From what you tried; how did it go?

Finding loving-kindness phrases that work for you

Just as the breath can be an anchor for calmness, loving-kindness phrases can also anchor you.

People sometimes struggle with loving-kindness phrases. They find repeating phrases clumsy, or they do not really believe them. They stop because the phrases sound robotic or not real for them.



If you have this experience, do not worry. This exercise is designed to help you discover loving-kindness and compassion phrases that will work for you. If you already have phrases that work, that is ok. Do not feel you need to change them.

To start, please put a hand over your heart. Feel your body breathe. Take a moment and allow your heart to open gently and be receptive, like a flower opens in the warm sun.

Ask yourself this question, allowing the answer to arise naturally within you:
“What do I truly need?”

Let the answer be a *universal* human need, such as the need to be *connected, loved, peaceful*. Write it down. The words you produced can be used in just as they are, like a mantra, or you can rewrite them as wishes for yourself, such as:



Now consider a second question: *What do you need to hear?*

Open your heart and wait for words to come. **What words would you like to have whispered into your ear every day? What words would make you say, “thank you” every time you hear them?**

Now, when you are ready, write them down.

- If you heard a lot of words, see if you can make the words into a short phrase
- The words you wrote down can be used just as they are or rewritten as wishes for yourself.

Words we would like to hear from others are qualities we would like to have in our own lives. That is why we need to hear the words over and over again. If you like, you can rephrase your words as wishes for yourself.

For example: ***“I’m here for you”*** can become the wish ***“May I feel safe and secure.”*** ***“You’re a good person”*** can become the wish ***“May I know my own good points.”***

Choose phrases that will work for you. These words or phrases are gifts you will give to yourself over and over again.



When self-compassion is hard to do

- The physical side of self-criticism

If you find the exercises in this booklet hard to do, there may be a reason. 'Backdraft' is common, especially when first using self-compassion.

In firefighting 'backdraft' describes what happens when a fire is deprived of oxygen. Given air, it re-ignites and intensifies quickly. The same thing can happen when we are beginning self-compassion. When experience has taught us to be self-critical, compassionate self-talk may initially not work. The way the human brain works explains this.



As infants we are programmed to be comforted: warmth, tender touch, soft voice releases oxytocin in the infant's brain that influences calming. These same processes are activated when people are warm and kind to us, or we are kind and caring to ourselves. With self-compassion, we are moving from threat to our own care-giving and soothing system. This triggers the release of oxytocin, bringing feelings of safety and peace.

Self-criticism does the opposite. It triggers the brain's threat system. When the threat system gets triggered, the brain releases cortisol (a stress hormone) and this activates the nervous system that tells the body: 'Get ready for danger' and a 'fight or flight' response.

A securely attached child grows up with a sense of safety. With insecure attachments, adults were harsh or unresponsive. We are not being judgemental saying this. Estimates suggest 40% of us as adults have had some levels of insecure attachments as kids that came from a whole range of sources. We may not have the same stock of comforting emotional memories that become activated using self-compassion. A gesture of compassion when feeling angry or fearful may spark memories of these feelings being dismissed or messages to 'toughen up'. When that happens, the threat system is activated.

An alternative is to practice *behavioural* self-compassion: figuring out what you need in the moment to feel soothed. This may feel safer than mental exercises as you practice self-compassion. What we are saying is there may not be 'one size fits all.' It helps to make self-compassion practice work for you. When upset, figure out what you need to feel safe, comforted, soothed, validated, provided for and try applying those practices in daily life.

When backdraft keeps occurring, keep going. This work may take time.

- Label what's happening, *I know this, this is 'backdraft'*
- Name the emotion present. It really helps to name the emotion with a kind tone of voice
- If you've located where a painful emotion is in your body, offer *soothing touch*. (One of the exercises in the booklet)
- There's no need to push on with an overly intense experience. As we said in the beginning, if this work creates distress, it may be a good time to reach out for more support.

If you are going to try self-compassion exercises when alone, try using self-compassionate phrases in front of a mirror. This allows us to see our face and eyes, which are important in the way we communicate compassion.

Self-compassion in daily life

Becoming self-compassionate may take time and practice. Once feeling safer, it may then be the right time to move on from the behavioural exercises alone to the mental exercises.

The goal of this work is to be mindful and self-compassionate in daily life. That means knowing when you're under stress or struggling (mindfulness) and to respond with care and kindness (self-compassion).

How do you already care for yourself?

Remind yourself to do those things when your life becomes difficult. It is our hope ideas in this workbook help you do this.

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PHYSICALLY - Calm the body | <p>How do you care for yourself physically? (eg. exercise, massage, warm bath, cup of tea, wrap in a blanket).</p> <p>Can you think of new ways to release the tension and stress that builds up in your body?</p> |
| MENTALLY – Reduce agitation | <p>How do you care for your mind, especially when you're under stress? (eg. meditation, watch a funny movie, read an inspiring book).</p> <p>Is there a new strategy you'd like to try to let your thoughts come and go more easily?</p> |
| EMOTIONALLY - Soothe and comfort yourself | <p>How do you care for yourself emotionally? (pet the dog, journal, self-hug, talk with someone you trust)</p> <p>Is there something new you'd like to try?</p> |
| RELATIONSHIPS - Connect with others | <p>What connections brings you genuine happiness? (eg. meet with friends, send a birthday card)</p> <p>Is there any way that you'd like to enrich these connections?</p> |
| SPIRITUALLY | <p>What do you do to care for yourself spiritually? (pray, walk in the woods, help others).</p> <p>If you've been neglecting your spiritual side, is there anything you'd like to remember to do?</p> |

Self-compassion exercises

Affectionate Breathing

The Self-Compassion Break

Soles of the Feet

The Compassionate U-Turn

Taming that critical voice in your head

A 'Fierce Self-Compassion' Break

My strengths

**It is not about
being perfect**

**It is about
effort**

**When you bring
that effort every
day that is when
change happens**

'I am naturally hard on myself. It is like an awful Superpower. So, if I can use these practices and find them helpful, anybody can. Recently I was going through a tough time, and I was reacting in my usual way of being very harsh and feeling a lot of shame. I stopped this cycle and said to myself 'no more, no matter if I make mistakes and feel I cannot cope, I am not going to add suffering by hating myself in the process. No more. I do not deserve this suffering. And unbelievably, the shame spiral stopped. My mental health did not go downhill. I still cannot believe how well it worked for me. It might work for you too!'

From **Ceara Clarke**

Following my progress

Writing down and capturing the benefits from the exercises may really help you make use of H.E.A.L. Going beyond doing it and capturing the experience.

In the space below, write down the activities you used and write down the benefits you experienced.



| What did you do? | Success Rating (1 - 7) 1 is lowest 7 is highest | What were the benefits of doing it? Use H.E.A.L. |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
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Affectionate Breathing

Affectionate Breathing is the first exercise as the sensation of breathing is so helpful and is available everywhere we go.

Allowing ourselves to be soothed by the rhythm of our breathing adds important elements; being supported by your breath, pleasure in breathing, and gratitude for how the breath nourishes the body.

Affectionate Breathing is different from relaxed breathing with its emphasis on savouring the rhythm of the breath, rather than intentionally breathing in a rhythmic manner to calm the body. Being rocked or cradled by our breathing can be deeply soothing.

If it makes you feel more anxious from doing this, simply feel the rhythm of your breath, rather than to experience the internal caress of the breath.

Instructions

Find a posture you feel comfortable and supported for the duration of the exercise. Let your eyes gently close, partially, or fully. Take a few slow, easy breaths, releasing any unnecessary tension in your body.

If you like, place a hand over your heart or another soothing place as a reminder that you are bringing not only awareness, but *affectionate* awareness, to your breathing and to yourself.

Notice your breathing, feeling your body breathe in and breathe out. Notice how your body is nourished on the in-breath and relaxed with the out-breath. There is nothing else you need to do.

Now, notice the *rhythm* of your breathing, flowing in and flowing out. (*Pause*) Take some time to *feel* the rhythm of your breathing. Lean your attention toward your breathing as you might toward a beloved child or a dear friend. Feel your *whole body* subtly moving with your breath, like the movement of the sea.

Your mind may wander. If this happens, just gently return to the rhythm of your breathing. See if you can let that go and just be with your breath, **feeling** it. Allow your whole body to be gently rocked and caressed by your breathing.

And now, gently release your attention to your breathing, sit quietly and allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling and to be just as you are.

When you are ready, slowly, and gently open your eyes. Please take a minute to let your mind settle and soak in what you just experienced.

- What did you notice?
- What did you feel?
- How do you feel now?'
- Did you find anything particularly enjoyable, or challenging?
- If you wish, please feel free to take notes on what you experienced.



The Self-Compassion Break

Presented by Christopher Germer, PhD at the Compassion Summit, 2022



The **Self-Compassion Break** gives you an experience of the three components of self-compassion:

- **Self-kindness**
- **Mindfulness**
- **Common humanity.**

You can practice it now as a meditation or any time you feel stress.

Please find a comfortable position and then close your eyes partially or fully. Think of a situation in your life that is difficult, that is causing you some stress right now, such as a worry, a problem in a relationship, or a work problem.

Please choose a situation that is in the mild to moderate category, not a big problem. We do not want you to feel overwhelmed as we are just learning to use self-compassion.

When you have a problem in mind, please allow yourself to feel your way into the situation.

What happened? Who was there? What was said?

Feel your way into it so you can experience some uneasiness in your body, even noticing where in your body you feel it the most.

Make contact with the discomfort.

Now acknowledge the discomfort in your body, by quietly saying to yourself. ***“This is uncomfortable, this is stressful, this hurts, Ouch.”*** Whatever feels right for you.

Acknowledge it to yourself, as you might with a good friend.

Are there any particular emotions that are there for you right now? Can you give these emotions a name? If you can, make room or space for these experiences, allowing them to be there, if only for this moment.

Allow the experience to be there because what you are now feeling is part of the human experience. Stress is a part of living. Though you may feel alone, you are not alone.

Everyone feels like this from time to time. Others in the same situation as you, would feel just as you do right now.

What you are feeling is part of being human: our common humanity.

And finally, if you want to, place a hand on that part of your body where you feel the distress the most.

Allow yourself to feel this sense of touch, or the warmth of your hand. Focus your attention to the spot you are touching with the wish. ***“May I be kind to myself. May I give myself the compassion that I need.”***

And if you like, imagine that a person who knows you and cares about you very much were to whisper something into your ear right now that you need to hear that would bring comfort or support.

- **What would that be?**
- **What would the words be?**
- **What do you need to hear at a time like this?**

Now see if you can offer yourself the same words, letting them roll around in your mind and your heart.

When ready to release from this exercise, allow yourself to settle.

Allow yourself to feel whatever is in your body right now, and allowing yourself to be, just as you are right here and right now. Notice if there was any shift in terms of how your body feels. Any change in your emotions?

No matter what you experienced or are experiencing now, allow that to be so. Allow yourself to be in the moment.

- **Breathe deeply to come out of this exercise**
- **When you are ready to, slowly open your eyes**
- **Take a moment to use H.E.A.L. - Have, Enrich, Absorb, Link**
- **You have had the experience**
- **Now enrich it and absorb it**
- **Link it**
- **How did it help you?**

If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.

Jack Kornfield
Psychologist and Author

Soles of the Feet

Soles of the Feet is a way to use the soles of our feet either standing, walking, or sitting to ground and stabilise yourselves in the present moment especially when experiencing difficult emotions.

It is best done standing. If you feel more comfortable, you can do this sitting in your chair.

First, adopt a position that is comfortable for you. Start with taking three deep breaths, breathing out more than you are breathing in and bring your mind to the present.

Not to worries of tomorrow or regrets of yesterday, the present.

Now, simply feel the soles of your feet on the floor.

Feel that point of contact. Just let your awareness go to that small area.

Where do your feet end and the floor begin? How do you know that? There is some pressure, maybe some heat or tension.

Now what I would like you to do is start swaying your upper body from side to side. You can do this sitting, just shifting your body weight in the chair. If you are standing, you can just sway your body from side to side very slowly.

Notice as you move your upper body, or sway your upper body in the chair, the soles of your feet register the movement of your body. That is incredible. The soles of our feet are balancing your entire body. Feel the changing sensation in the soles of your feet.

Any emotions you may be feeling are connected to the earth.

Now come back to standing. (Ok if you are sitting). Imagine that the earth is just taking all your difficult emotions and is holding it for you.

Before this exercise started you may have felt stressed or distressed. You are not alone; you are connected to the earth. Feel the earth holding you, connecting with you through the soles of your feet.



Loving, connected, and present are components of self-compassion. Let it flow from your body to the earth through the soles of your feet.

You may need to say to yourself ***“I am connected, grounded.”***

You might notice that as you do this, your back naturally starts to straighten as you fill your body with loving, connected presence flowing from the earth through the soles of your feet and into your body.



If your mind wanders, that is okay. Re-ground yourself. Refocus on the feeling of the soles of your feet on the earth. Be gentle with yourself. Minds wander. If you notice you are getting lost in thought, drop all the way down to the soles of your feet feeling your connection with the earth.

As you finish with deep breathing, notice how your body feels now. Savour that connection. Notice how you feel with that connection with the earth through the soles of your feet. Enrich it and absorb it. Grow from it.

Extra thoughts

There is research that shows this practice is really effective regulating intense and difficult emotions. Whenever we focus on a single object like the soles of your feet, your amygdala actually gets less reactive. It calms you down.

There is also the fact that you are grounding yourself to the earth. It is not you having to hold all these difficult emotions, but the earth. This can help you feel less overwhelmed.

Also, you are getting away, as far as humanly possible, from your brain by focusing on the soles of your feet. That helps you get a little distance from the emotions you are feeling.



The Compassionate U-Turn

This exercise was adapted from Christopher Germer, PhD who presented it at the Compassion Summit 2022

The Compassionate U-Turn activates the self-kindness component of self-compassion and is based on the three universal expressions of compassion:

- **Soft gaze**
- **Soothing touch**
- **Gentle vocalizations.**



It was developed through research by Dacher Keltner, and we have added information at the end if that would help you.

It is called 'The Compassionate U-Turn' because we usually are compassionate toward others, but we can also give compassion to ourselves in the same way.

Please find a comfortable position. Take a few deep, delicious breaths as you allow yourself to settle into your body and into the chair.

For this exercise, please recall a problem or a difficulty in your life. Make sure it is in the mild to moderate range, enough that you can register it as a difficulty, generating a little stress in the body, but please, not your worst nightmare.

Part One - A soft gaze

What I would like you to do is to bring to mind a face, particularly the eyes, of a person whom you consider deeply compassionate.



It could be a grandparent, a friend, a child. It could be your dog or your cat. It could be a photo of somebody who is very compassionate.

I would like you to visualize the eyes of such a compassionate being. There is nothing else to do. Just give yourself permission to bathe in this person's gaze. Allow yourself simply to receive the warm gaze of compassion.

Part Two - A soothing or supportive touch

Just take your hand and put your hand on any place in your body where there might be stress at this moment.

Just feel the sense of touch and warmth. Allow kindness to stream through your fingers into that part of your body that has been working pretty hard.

You are not trying to change the experience, but simply give an expression of kindness to your body. Nothing has to happen. You are just present in the moment.



Part Three of the Compassionate U-Turn, gentle vocalizations

Think for a moment of words that you might like to hear right now, words of encouragement, support, trust, kindness. See if you can whisper those words into your mind's ear, words that you need to hear right now in your life in a warm and tender way, as you might speak to a person whom you care about.



Give yourself permission to receive those words Allow them to saturate your body. Fill your being with words of kindness.

Now let us do all three expressions of compassion together.

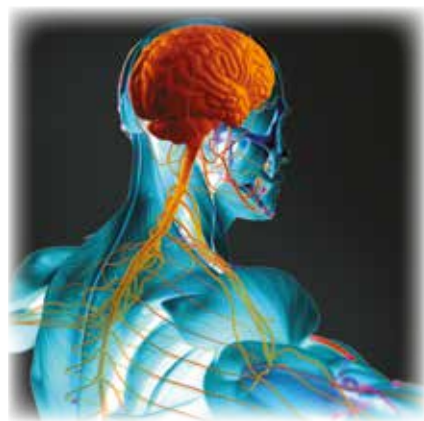
Visualize the eyes and soft gaze of a compassionate being, allow yourself to bathe in that gaze, feel the compassionate touch of your hand on your body and offer yourself words of kindness, that you need to hear, especially in times of distress.

When releasing from this exercise, take a moment before you open your eyes to use H.E.A.L. - Have, Enrich, Absorb, Link

- You have had the experience. Allow yourself to be in this moment just like this.
- Now enrich it and absorb it, helping your experience be bigger, lasting longer and take over for a moment
- Notice how it feels in your body. Notice if there was any shift in terms of how your body feels
- Notice any change in your emotions
- Link it. How did it help you?

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

Want to know how and why this works?



Our bodies are wired for compassion through the Vagus Nerve. Dr. Keltner did studies involved with this.

Vagus is Latin for 'wandering,' and the Vagus Nerve starts at the top of the spinal cord and wanders through your body. It then drops down and picks up the interaction between your breathing, heart rate, and digestive system.

The Vagus Nerve connects mind and body. This makes the Vagus Nerve one of the great mind-body links in the human nervous system.

Every time you take a deep breath, your heart rate slows down. You see football players do this taking a penalty. They breathe out to calm down, just before they kick. The Vagus Nerve controls that relationship, between breathing and calming.

In his studies, Dr. Keltner showed distress activates the Vagus Nerve. He also found if you tell someone an inspiring story, their Vagus Nerve is also active.

The more you feel compassion toward yourself, the stronger the Vagus Nerve responds helping you calm down quicker.

Taming that critical voice in your head



This exercise can be done over several weeks for changing how you relate to yourself in the long-term.

Some people find it useful by writing in a journal. Others are more comfortable thinking it through. Do whatever works for you.

The first step towards changing the way to treat yourself is to notice when you are being self-critical. It may be that your self-critical voice is so automatic that you do not even notice when it is there.

Whenever you are feeling bad about something,

think about what you have just said to yourself. Try to be as accurate as possible.

Are there key phrases that come up repeatedly? What words do you use? What tone does it use: harsh, cold, angry? Maybe there are no words at all, but an image. How does your inner critic express itself?

Does the voice remind you of anyone in your past that was critical of you?

You want to be able to get to know the inner self-critic well and become aware when it is active.

Write down what you typically say to yourself when you are self-critical. Sometimes the inner critic is harsh, but sometimes it is more discouraging.

Now, take a moment to notice how it feels when you criticize yourself. Consider how much distress the voice of self-criticism causes you.

Try giving yourself compassion for how hard it is to hear such harsh language. ***“This is hard.”***
“I know how much it hurts to hear this.”

Think for a moment on why the criticism has gone on for so long. Is your inner critic trying to protect you in some way or to help you, even if the result has been unproductive? If so, write down what you think might be motivating your inner critic.

Maybe you cannot think of how that critical voice was helpful in any way. Sometimes self-criticism has no redeeming value whatsoever. Simply continue to give yourself compassion for how you have suffered from it in the past.

If you did identify some way your inner critic might be trying to help you or keep you safe, see if you can acknowledge its efforts. Let your inner critic know that even though it may not be serving you very well now, its intention was good, and it was doing its best.

Now that your self-critical voice has been heard, see if you can make space for another voice - your inner *compassionate* voice.

This comes from a part of yourself that is wise and recognizes how your critical voice is causing you harm. It wants you to change:

“I know that is the critic in me talking. Could you let my inner compassionate self say something now?”



1. Make an active effort to soften the self-critical voice but do so with compassion rather than self-judgment. Something like, ***“I know that is the critic in me talking. Could you let my inner compassionate self say something now?”***
2. Rethink what you hear from your inner critic in a friendly, positive way. If you are having trouble thinking of what words to use, you might want to imagine what a very compassionate friend would say to you in this situation.

While engaging in this supportive self-talk, you might want to try gently stroking your arm, or holding your face tenderly in your hands (as long as no one’s looking). Physical gestures of warmth can tap into the caregiving system even if you are having trouble calling up emotions of kindness at first, releasing oxytocin, the chemical in your body that helps you feel safe and connected.

Say something to yourself like ***“I deeply care about you, and that’s why I’d like to help you.”***
Or ***“I’m here for you and will support you.”***

Write a message to yourself in the voice of your inner compassionate self.

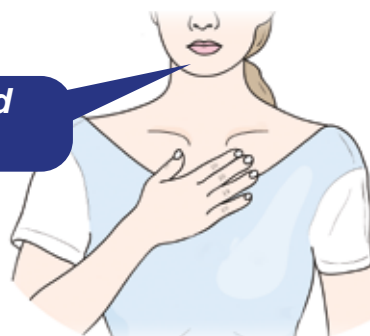
“What do you need to hear?”

If it is a struggle to find words, try writing down the words when speaking to a friend who was struggling with the same issue as you.

What emerges from the deep feelings and wish for yourself?

“I care about you and don’t want you to suffer.”

“I’m here for you and will support you.”



A 'Fierce Self-Compassion' Break

Presented by Kristin Neff, PhD at the Compassion Summit, 2022



The '**Fierce Self-Compassion Break**' uses the three components of **self-compassion**, **mindfulness**, a sense of our **common humanity** and **self-kindness**, so they can be called upon at any moment we need them to help in a demanding situation.

It can be really useful when the situation requires protecting ourselves and remembering that we are not alone. Our common humanity can empower us. That can give us the sense of power and courage needed to stand up to something or to protect ourselves.

When we open our hearts to protect ourselves, it is like a mamma bear or papa wolf. We can be very fierce, and brave. It reduces the fear response.

Think of a situation in your life where you feel you need a little of this fierce mamma bear or papa wolf, protective energy.

What I would like you to do is close your eyes and think of a situation in your life right now where you feel you do need to protect yourself in some way.

Maybe you need to draw a boundary, someone is asking too much of you, or treating you unfairly. Maybe you need the courage to speak up about something or someone who is trying to push their views on you, and you want to just say

"No!"

Take a moment to settle on a situation. Please do not choose one where you feel you are being actively threatened or traumatized. If you are overwhelmed, you will not be able to learn the practice. So, something that's real, but not super traumatizing or overwhelming.

Try not to get lost in a story about what is happening or the people that are causing it. Just focus on what is the harm being done. What is the thing you want or need to say no to, or speak up about? Focus on what you need to protect yourself from.

Now, drop out of your head into your body. Is there any anger, fear or agitation? Feel the feelings of discomfort that are in your body as you think about this situation.

See if you can connect with these feelings in their physical form as sensations in your body. Notice the posture of your body. Sit up tall and straight. Let your body embody strength, that straight, strong back.

You have strength. You have the ability to stand up to the situation.

We are going to be saying a series of phrases designed to bring forth fierce empowered clarity as we deal with this situation - the three components of self-compassion.

The first thing, be really clear, be **mindful**, of what is happening.

Say to yourself something like:

*"I see what's going on,
this is not okay."*

*"A boundary's being
crossed here."*

or

Whatever it is, just give yourself that clarity.

Call it out. Look at it square in the face. Use your mindfulness. Maybe you do not understand exactly what is going on, but you know that there is some threat, or some harm being done. You are looking at it straight in the face. ***"I will not turn a blind eye to this."***

Now, remember your **common humanity**. You are not alone. You are not the only person something like this has happened to. There is nothing wrong with you; this is part of the human experience.

Try a little gesture; try putting your fist on your heart. A fist can be a gesture of strength and power. See if you can commit to doing what you need to do to be safe, speak up, or draw that boundary.

"I will be brave."

Or

"I will protect myself."

"No!"

Simply say with conviction....

If you have difficulty finding that sense of protection, imagine that someone you really cared about, a child or a good friend was having the same situation that you are experiencing.

What might you say to them to help them feel strong and they can do it? And try saying something similar to yourself. ***"I'm here for you." "I have your back."***

Finally, I would like you to take your other hand and place it over the fist on your heart. We are going to integrate a little bit of fierce and tender self-compassion here.

We want to be fierce. We want to protect ourselves, with compassion, not harm. But we also want our hearts to be open. We do not want to harm anyone else in our fierceness.



Use **mamma bear**
or **papa wolf**

See if you can let those fierce and tender energies represented by the fist over your heart with the other hand gently placed over it to merge and integrate in your body.

Now with several deep breaths, you can let go of the practice and open your eyes.

Use **H.E.A.L.** to get the most out of it.

An added tool when faced with demanding situations

The Fist Clench exercise

The Fist Clench exercise uses moving our senses ever so slightly into the 'fight or flight' state. This enables us to use Self-compassion as a way to engage our parasympathetic nervous system (calming part of our nervous system) to help return to the key place of inner calm, understanding and support.



- ~ Close your eyes
- ~ Take a moment to feel the sensations of your body's current state
- ~ Clench your fists.

After about 20 seconds in a soft voice, while you are still clenching your fists, guide your internal thoughts by:

- Focusing on the feelings in your hands.
- What sensations does the tightening of your hands evoke for you?
- What emotions does the clenching and tightness of your fists suggest?
- How does your body feel?



Now release your fists, open your hands, and display your palms facing upward.

What shifts as you open your hands and face them upward?

Take deep breaths, cleansing breaths
- breathing in hope and happiness.

How does your body feel now?

Place one hand on top of the other and put them both gently on the centre of your chest. Focus on and feel the warmth of your hands on your heart and breathing deeply.

What feelings, thoughts or sensations does holding your hand on your heart and breathing deeply encourage?

Take a deep breath, and open your eyes.



My Strengths

A final tool you may find helpful is looking at your strengths. It will be your strengths that support you. Yet in Northern Ireland people are not as good at seeing their strengths compared to their weaknesses.

Circle the ones you see in yourself today (or this week)

| | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| Accepting | Committed | Flexible | Persevering | Stubborn |
| Active | Competent | Focused | Persistent | Thankful |
| Adaptable | Concerned | Forgiving | Positive | Thorough |
| Adventuresome | Confident | Forward looking | Powerful | Thoughtful |
| Affectionate | Considerate | Free | Prayerful | Tough |
| Affirmative | Courageous | Happy | Quick | Trusting |
| Alert | Creative | Healthy | Reasonable | Trustworthy |
| Alive | Decisive | Hopeful | Receptive | Truthful |
| Ambitious | Dedicated | Imaginative | Relaxed | Understanding |
| Anchored | Determined | Ingenious | Reliable | Unique |
| Assertive | Die-hard | Intelligent | Resourceful | Unstoppable |
| Assured | Diligent | Knowledgeable | Responsible | Vigorous |
| Attentive | Doer | Loving | Sensible | Visionary |
| Bold | Eager | Mature | Skilful | Whole |
| Brave | Earnest | Open | Solid | Willing |
| Bright | Effective | Optimistic | Spiritual | Winning |
| Capable | Energetic | Orderly | Stable | Wise |
| Careful | Experienced | Organized | Steady | Worthy |
| Cheerful | Faithful | Patient | Straight | Zealous |
| Clever | Fearless | Perceptive | Strong | Zestful |

See ones you use each day

Which ones do you use a lot?

-
-
-

Taken from Motivational Interviewing, Helping People Change by Bill Miller, and Steve Rollnick, 2013

Notes

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Most of the exercises were shared at the Compassion in Therapy Summit April 20-24, 2022.

Developed by Ed Sipler Health Development Specialist South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust with support from Dr. Ceara Clarke, Northern Trust, Dr. Sarah Ruston South Eastern HSC Trust, Pauline Green Multi-disciplinary team in General Practice and Claire Black South Eastern HSC Trust.

We have put the exercises on clips you can watch.

You will be able to find them on ASERT's website: <https://www.ascert.biz/> or the South Eastern HSC Trust's website under the [Health Living tab - Building a toolkit for change](#).

If you have gotten this far, well done!
We hope you found it helpful and have ways
to keep it going.
If you want to find out more and dive deeper
into self-compassion have a look at:

Self-compassion

<https://self-compassion.org>

For more YouTube clips on **Wellbeing** search:

Ed Sipler on [YouTube](#)  YouTube

or visit:



[ASCERT](#) website.

