



Compassion for Yourself

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Self-compassion is something you can learn if you do not already have it. Although it may seem something that is weak, or fluffy, or perhaps something along the lines of self-pity, it is not. It is in fact quite a challenge for many people to have compassion for themselves. It is not a sign of weakness. Few people are good at it, and it can sometimes take a great deal of courage to have compassion for yourself. Especially if you have grown up in, and experienced, harsh environments.

Compassion for yourself does not mean letting yourself off the hook for what you have or have not done, and it does not mean refusing to take responsibility for your actions. It means being understanding about why you have done what you have done. Often people without self-compassion don't take responsibility for mistakes or harm they caused. Without self-compassion it is difficult to take responsibility for things we did that were not nice. Instead, we deny, we refuse to take accountability, and we blame others. Our lack of compassion for ourselves prevents us from facing up to our wrongs.

Self-compassion is not about drowning in self-pity either. Self-pity is when we become so immersed in our own problems and concerns, we cannot think about or talk about anything else. Our minds and our time are taken up with thinking about how awful things are and how terrible our lot in life is. Self-pity is usually quite a selfish way to be as we forget about everyone else and what they may be going through. Self-compassion is about being kind and understanding to ourselves, and through this process being able to deal with issues and move on.

Self-compassion is also not self-indulgence. If you feel terrible because of something that happened and you eat a whole chocolate cake that is not self-compassion. If you feel angry about something that happened at work and you stay away or don't do work you are supposed to do, that is not self-compassion. Self-compassion is being kind and caring to yourself. It means your self-talk is that of a good friend to yourself. It is about being in your own corner and being nice to you. It certainly is not about self-sabotaging your life by indulging in things that may or may not be good for you.

Self-compassion means relating to yourself with kindness and understanding, especially when you are facing difficult times, mistakes, or your own shortcomings. It is being a good friend to yourself. It is treating yourself with the care and support you would treat a close, respected, good friend. It is about acknowledging that we are not perfect as human beings. We will make mistakes. We will say things

that hurt others. We will fall short of the mark many times. But we will treat ourselves with kindness and understanding rather than beating ourselves up harshly. It is easier to fix our mistakes if we have compassion for ourselves. If we are harsh with ourselves, it is too painful to acknowledge what we have done, and so we deny and blame others rather than fixing things.

One of the reasons you want to have compassion for yourself is because we do tend to treat others the way we treat ourselves. If you have compassion for yourself, you are likely to be compassionate with others. If you focus on understanding why you did what you did and correcting it if necessary, you are also likely to try to understand why others do what they do. If you want to make changes in your own life or experience change from others, then acting with compassion is more likely to achieve it than acting in a harsh and cruel way.

It can be difficult to determine if we have compassion for ourselves. To get you thinking along the lines of self-compassion ask yourself these questions.

1. Am I harsh in judging myself when I make a mistake.
2. When things are going wrong do I tend to think I have made such a mess of my life.
3. When I am hurting or in pain am I not loving and kind to myself?
4. Do my inadequacies make me feel less than other people?
5. When I fail at something do I want to hide away because I feel the most useless person ever.
6. When times are difficult am I hard on myself.
7. Do I deny those aspects of my personality that I do not like.
8. Am I unkind to myself when I experience suffering?

As you think about your answers to the above questions, you will start to form an idea of how self-compassionate you are.

To help you practice self-compassion, think of something that makes you feel bad, for instance a mistake you made. Name the emotions you are feeling without judging them. Now think of a very caring and kind friend speaking to you. This friend understands your life history, your background and everything you have been through in life. Speak to yourself in the way this friend that is kind and compassionate would. You could also write down, in the form of a letter to yourself, what this friend would say. Experience what it is like to have compassion from your friend. Do this a few times. You won't build self-compassion by a once off exercise. Like everything in life, if you have learned to be harsh with yourself, it is going to take time to reprogramme your thinking to be more compassionate.

Because practice strengthens new neural pathways that accompany the thoughts and actions of self-compassion you want to practice a lot. You can even start by setting a time to do this if you are new to this. You can set up regular practice sessions. Think of past situations when you were hurt, upset, made a mistake, were dealt with unfairly, and speak to yourself as a compassionate friend would. Think of current situations where you can treat yourself with compassion. And do so. Although some people may think this makes you weak and useless, you will in fact be stronger for it, you will be more

able to deal with situations where things go wrong, and research has even shown that self-compassion makes you more resilient. And in this world that is something we all need.