

## Self-Compassion: What it is, Its Benefits & How to Cultivate It

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You have probably heard a lot about mindfulness over the years. Self-compassion is a natural by-product of mindfulness, as a self-compassionate attitude asks us to be mindful of how we are relating to ourselves. Self-compassion is commonly defined as the ability to adopt a stance of self-kindness, feel a sense of connection to others, and be mindful of one's thoughts and feelings in the context of one's experience of pain and suffering. There are three elements that are inherent within self-compassion. Self-kindness, or the tendency to be kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure, rather than being harshly self-critical or judgmental. Awareness of shared human experience, or the tendency to perceive one's difficult experiences as part of the larger human experience, rather than seeing them as isolating or separating. Mindfulness, or the tendency to hold painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness rather than over-identifying with them.

A self-compassionate attitude has many psychological and health benefits. Self-compassion allows one to act autonomously and in accordance with one's authentic self, rather than comparing oneself to external standards. Self-compassion fosters higher self-worth, less social comparison, less self-consciousness, less anger, and less self-rumination and self-criticism. It also allows one greater ability to self-reflect in order to better understand oneself and others. It is a healthier way of relating to oneself!

Self-compassion also promotes for a brighter outlook! It is associated with less depression and anxiety symptoms, and promotes better emotional regulation. Thus, one feels more socially connected, optimistic, happy, curious, motivated to explore, and to take initiative.

Reduced stress! Aspects of self-compassion buffer the stress response and induce more relaxed and tranquil states. This can lead to less muscle tension, reduced heart rate, and lower blood pressure.

Overall, self-compassion tends to engender a greater sense of purpose and more life satisfaction!

### *Cultivating Self-Compassion*

Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and *take 3, deep, relaxing breaths*. Form an image of yourself sitting. Put a hand over your heart, feel its warmth and gentle touch, and feel the rhythmic rising and falling of your chest as you breathe. *Feel your breathing wherever it feels natural to you*. Become present to the moment, listening to the sounds around you, feeling the position of your body. *Keep your attention on your breath*. Notice the sensations that are occurring within your body. Notice your attention wander. *Gently bring your attention back to the body and breath*. Notice any difficult emotions you sense within you (worry, anger). Notice how they express themselves in your body. Know that others too experience emotional difficulty. *Stay focused on the in and out breath*. Cultivate a feeling of goodwill, loving-kindness, and self-compassion and offer this to yourself. You may also slowly repeat phrases, such as: "May I be safe." "May I be peaceful." "May I be kind to myself." "May I accept myself as I am."

Return again and again to the phrases and feeling of self-compassion directed toward yourself. *Observe the flow of breath*. Notice the image of yourself sitting. Gently open your eyes.