

Mindfulness Practices: Self-Compassion Break

Handout adapted from: Neff, Kristin; Germer, Christopher. *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook* (p. 36). Guilford Publications. Kindle Edition.

This practice is a way to help remind ourselves to apply the three core components of self-compassion—mindfulness, common humanity, and kindness—when difficulties arise in our lives. It also harnesses the power of soothing touch to help us feel safe and cared for. It's important to find language that is effective for you personally—you don't want to have an internal argument about whether the words make sense. For example, some people prefer the word struggle to the word suffering, or prefer the word support or protect to the word kindness. Try out a few different variations and then practice what works for you. After reading through these instructions, you may want to try them out with your eyes closed so you can go inward more deeply. There is a link to a recording of the self-compassion break at the end of this handout.

Think of a situation in your life that is causing you stress, such as a health problem, relationship problem, work problem, or some other struggle.

- Choose a problem in the mild to moderate range, not a big problem, as we want something that is easy to work with, not overwhelming.

Visualize the situation clearly in your mind's eye. What is the setting? Who is saying what to whom? What is happening? What might happen?

- Can you feel discomfort in your body as you bring this difficulty to mind?
- If not, choose a slightly more difficult problem.

Now, try saying to yourself: "This is a moment of suffering."

- That's mindfulness. Perhaps other wording speaks to you better. Some options are:
 - This hurts.
 - Ouch.
 - This is stressful.

Now, try saying to yourself: "Suffering is a part of life."

- That's common humanity. Other options include:
 - I'm not alone.
 - Everyone experiences this, just like me.
 - This is how it feels when people struggle in this way.

Now, offer yourself the gesture of soothing touch that you discovered in the previous exercise.

And try saying to yourself: "May I be kind to myself" or "May I give myself what I need."

- Perhaps there are particular words of kindness and support that you need to hear right now in this difficult situation. Some options may be:
 - May I accept myself as I am.
 - May I begin to accept myself as I am.

- May I forgive myself.
- May I be strong.
- May I be patient.

If you're having difficulty finding the right words, imagine that a dear friend or loved one is having the same problem as you. What would you say to this person? What simple message would you like to deliver to your friend, heart to heart?

- Now see if you can offer the same message to yourself.

REFLECTION:

Take a moment to reflect on how the experience of this exercise was for you. Did you notice anything after you evoked mindfulness with the first phrase, "This is a moment of suffering"? Any shifts? How about the second phrase, reminding you of common humanity, or the third, which invited self-kindness? Were you able to find kindhearted words you would say to a friend, and if so, what was it like to say the same words to yourself? Easy? More difficult?

Sometimes it takes a bit of time to find language that works for you personally and feels authentic. Allow yourself to be a slow learner—eventually you will find the right words. Note that this informal practice can be done slowly as a sort of mini-meditation, or you can use the words as a three-part mantra when you encounter difficulties in daily life.

Here is a link to a 5-minute version of the Self-Compassion Break by Kristen Neff:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/self-compassion.break_01-cleanedbydan.mp3

And here is more info on self-compassion in general: <https://centerformsc.org/>