

Mindfulness Practices: Soothing/Supportive Touch

Adapted from: Neff, Kristin; Germer, Christopher. *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook* (p. 34). Guilford Publications. Kindle Edition. For more info: <https://centerformsc.org/>

Although it may seem a bit “touchy-feely” at first—and in fact it is—it’s useful to harness the power of physical touch to help us trigger the compassion response. By putting one or two hands on our physical body in a warm, caring, and gentle way, we can help ourselves to feel safe and comforted. It’s important to note that different physical gestures evoke different emotional responses in different people. The invitation is to find a manner of physical touch that feels genuinely supportive, so that you can use this gesture to care for yourself whenever you’re under stress.

Find a private space where you don’t have to worry about anyone watching you. Below is a list of different ways that people comfort themselves with touch. Go ahead and try them out, and also feel free to experiment on your own. You may want to do this exploration with your eyes closed so you can focus on what feels just right for you.

- One hand over your heart
- Two hands over your heart
- Gently stroking your chest
- Cupping your hand over a fist over your heart
- Prayer position
- One hand on your heart and one on your belly
- Two hands on your belly
- One hand on your cheek
- Cradling your face in your hands
- Crossing your arms and giving yourself a gentle hug
- Gently stroking your arms
- One hand tenderly holding the other
- Clasping your hands together over your heart
- Cupping your hands in your lap

Continue your exploration until you find a type of touch that is truly comforting—everyone is different. Also, recognize that it may take some cultivating to fully experience this; if you notice even a small shift towards safety and comfort with any of these, continue working with it over time. It may also help to remember to do one or more of these when you are feeling good. Doing so builds a positive association that makes the move more powerful when you need to provide yourself with support. Finally, you can try these as you bring someone to mind that you deeply care for. This can build on the feeling of caring and connection and make the way you hold your hands even more meaningful.

REFLECTION: What was this practice like for you? Were you able to find a gesture that felt genuinely soothing and supportive? If you found a physical touch that works for you, try adopting this gesture whenever you feel stress or emotional pain in everyday life. By helping your body feel cared for and safe, you will make it easier for your mind and heart to follow. Sometimes it can feel awkward or uncomfortable when we give ourselves soothing touch, however. It is possible that old pains emerge when we give ourselves kindness, such as remembering times when we were not treated kindly. This is why soothing touch might not feel soothing. If that happens to you, you can try touching an external object that is warm and soft, like petting a dog or cat, or holding a pillow. Or maybe a firmer gesture would feel better, such as tapping or fist-bumping your own chest. The point is to express care and kindness in a manner that meets your own needs.