Caregiving with Self-Compassion

Crystal Nichols, B.S.
A fail-safe way to increase your well-being is to practice self-compassion.

Studies show that people who have compassion for themselves are:
- happier
- more optimistic
- more grateful

... than those who are harder on themselves.
WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION, ANYWAY?

It has three main elements:

1. **Self-kindness**
   Being supportive and gentle to oneself

2. **Understanding common humanity**
   All humans are imperfect and make mistakes!

3. **Mindfulness**
   Being aware of one's suffering with clarity
Myths about self-compassion

If self-compassion is so great, why don’t we see more of it?

We confuse it with:

- Self-pity
- Self-indulgence
- Making excuses for bad behavior

In fact, self-compassion involves taking responsibility for our behavior—even when it’s bad—and accepting ourselves as human.

This allows us to see things clearly and change our behavior so we don’t stagnate, but rather make progress toward our goals.
Self-compassion or self-esteem?

Researchers find that self-compassion brings about more constant feelings of self-worth than does self-esteem.

That's because self-esteem may depend on comparing yourself favorably to others (and putting them down), while self-compassion is an intrinsic acceptance of yourself.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Self-Compassion</strong></th>
<th><strong>Self-Esteem</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Not based on self-evaluations</td>
<td>Sense of self-worth or how much we like ourselves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not based on particular traits (pretty, smart, talented, etc.)</td>
<td>Too little or too much is problematic</td>
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<td>No need to feel better than anyone</td>
<td>We often need to feel above average or special to have it</td>
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<td>Greater self-clarity</td>
<td>May lead to being self-absorbed or putting others down</td>
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<tr>
<td>No need to hide or deny weaknesses or failures</td>
<td>Encourages us to ignore, deny, or distort our weaknesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not based on external events and available any time</td>
<td>Fluctuates based on latest success or failure</td>
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**Differentiation**
Self-compassion: the have vs the have nots

**How else does self-compassion help?**

- **Self-compassion breeds resilience**
  Those who have it suffer less & are better able to reach their full potential

- **It’s not all about you**
  People who are compassionate toward themselves are better able to forgive others, too.

**Are you too self-critical?**

Research finds that people who are self-critical are:

- At higher risk for depression and stress
- Less effective at implementing coping strategies
Unique challenges of caregiving

• It is not easy to draw emotional boundaries between yourself and the care recipient, especially a loved one.

• Suggestions to engage in more relaxation, social support, and healthy living activities can be difficult when someone else is relying on you.
Signs that you need more Self-compassion

5 tell-tale signs you may want to work on boosting your self-compassion:

1. Nothing is ever good enough
2. Your way is always the right way
3. You ruminate repeatedly over your missteps
4. You see things as black or white, with no gray
5. You have an intense fear of failure

Here’s how to work on being less self-critical, from self-compassion researcher Kristin Neff, Ph.D.:
Steps you can take

STEP 1
Notice how you talk to yourself. What's your tone of voice, even if it's inside your head?

FOR EXAMPLE
“You turned down that public speaking opportunity because you are a chicken. You'll never get ahead.”

STEP 2
Say to your critical voice, “I know you’re disappointed, but you are causing me pain.”
Now reframe the criticism.

“You let your nervousness get the best of you. I know you can do this. Let’s take a long walk and strategize how to accept and fulfill the next speaking invitation.”

It might sound weird, but it can even help to stroke your arm. Just acting kindly (even if you don’t feel it) can help with the transformation.
More steps you can take

* A simple good morning
* Working towards changing the way you talk to yourself
* Changing your reaction when you make a mistake
* Mini-breaks when you are feeling frustrated, exhausted, stressed, or overwhelmed

Dr. Kristen Neff: 3 Elements of Self-Compassion

- **Self-Kindness:** Understanding, not punishment
- **Sense of Common Humanity:** Everybody goes through this
- **Mindfulness:** Neither ignoring nor exaggerating feelings of failure
Example of being kind to yourself

BE KINDER TO YOURSELF

Here’s another exercise from the research of Kristin Neff, Ph.D.:

Think of a difficult situation. Feel the stress in your body.

Say to yourself, “This is stress,” or “this is suffering.”

Then, “Everyone suffers.”

Now put your hands over your heart and feel the warmth of your hands.

Then say to yourself: “Let me accept myself as I am.”

Adopt the phrases so they work for you. Use this any time, anywhere!
Accepting yourself

Veterans who practiced self-compassion and mindfulness were more functional overall and were less likely to be mentally ill.

DID YOU KNOW?

People who accept their personal failures are more likely to take steps to improve themselves.

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”

—Carl Rogers
Resources for the caregiver

You can find many more resources online at www.self-compassion.org
Let's practice!

This is a moment of suffering. Suffering is part of life. Let me be kind to myself in this moment. Let me give myself the compassion I need.
Questions?

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