



Self-Compassion Exercises: Being your inner ally

Work in this module has been adapted from the works of Kristin Neff, Brené Brown, and Christopher Germer.

Shame vs. Guilt

Shame is “*I am bad.*” – *focus on self*

Guilt is “*I did something bad.*” – *focus on behavior*

Self-criticism sustains shame, and self-compassion can help build shame resilience.

Self-compassionate people are more likely to feel guilty for harming others, to own up to their mistakes, and apologize, compared to those who lack self-compassion. As a result, they are less likely to experience shame.

Self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification exacerbate shame

Self-judgment: When we fail, make a mistake, or perceive an inadequacy, feelings of shame are created when we harshly judge ourselves and create negative beliefs about our worth as a person. With self-compassion, we are kind and understanding toward ourselves, recognizing that we are doing our best.

Isolation: Feelings of shame are maintained when we feel isolated by our failures and imperfections. This is a type of egocentrism in which we feel that everyone else is living a perfectly “normal” life (i.e. failure free) while it’s just me that has done this shameful act. With self-compassion, we recognize that failure and imperfection is part of the shared human condition.

Over-Identification: Feelings of shame are bolstered when we over-identify with our mistakes and failure. Instead of thinking “I did something bad” we believe “I am bad” and identify with this feeling. With self-compassion, we are mindful of our actions, taking responsibility for them while also recognizing that they do not define who we are.

What is Self-Compassion?

1. Self-kindness: Talking to ourselves the way we talk to those we love.
2. Common Humanity: knowing this happens to others, we are not alone)
3. Mindfulness: staying present, not over-attaching to emotion

Myths and Stereotypes

Myth: Self-compassion is weak. It’s soft. Being a sissy. Being in self-pity or feeling sorry for yourself, making excuse, letting ourselves off the hook, self-indulgent, undermine self-criticism, lose edge of self-hatred.

Fact: Research shows that self-compassion is one of the biggest sources of strength and resilience that we have available to us. When we face a difficult life challenge while being kind and encouraging to ourselves, it will help us deal with the challenge in a strong way. We have our own back. People who are more self-compassionate take more responsibility for themselves when they’ve harmed someone else, take responsibility for choices and actions. It’s safe because people are not mired in shame, but strengthened knowing they are imperfect. They are less afraid of failure, and when they do fail, they will pick themselves up and try again, even when difficult. SC increases motivation, it doesn’t undermine it.



Being your Inner Ally: Physiology of self-criticism and self-compassion

I've got my own back. How can I expect others to be my ally if I don't think I'm worth having my back? There is a strong physiological response to both criticism and compassion. *When others fail, we typically don't feel threatened. When we fail, we feel threatened.* Our most primitive threat defense system lies in the reptilian part of our brain. When threatened, it releases adrenaline and cortisol to prepare to attack the problem. This is the fight/flight/or freeze mode. However, when the problem is ourselves, or it's us who made the mistake, we end up attacking ourselves! Evolved to fight off lions in the past. In modern times, we are not usually in physical threat, but faced with emotional threats or self-concept. When we fail or make a mistake, it is our thoughts of ourselves that feel threatened. Again, we attack problem, but we attack ourselves, the feeling of being inadequate.

In evolution from reptiles to mammals, mammals developed a mechanism to keep the offspring near the mother because they are immature and need protection. This is called the Mammalian Caregiving system and has three physical triggers:

1. Warmth
2. Soothing touch
3. Soothing vocalizations.

If we are unable to access our own emotional safety, we can access care and safety through this system.

This is sometimes why a hug is more powerful than words.

Working with tough emotions

1. *Name it to tame it.* Naming our emotions in the moment helps us to get space from the inundation that comes from the feeling. It gives us a tiny space to make a decision about how we want to act.
2. *Feel it to heal it-* mindfulness of emotion in the body. Where do you experience this emotion in your body? It's more difficult to manage a difficult emotion by changing our thoughts than by exploring the physical component. Thoughts are very impermanent and we usually can't hang on to them long enough to transform them, but the body is slow moving. When we locate and anchor our emotions in the body, find where it's located—the difficult emotion starts to change.
3. *Soften, sooth, allow.* Softening the body is physically compassionate, soothing ourselves is emotionally compassionate, and allowing discomfort to continue is mentally compassionate.

Backdraft

While self-compassion can lessen shame, sometimes the process of healing our feelings of shame is a slow one and the road to healing can be a bit bumpy.

Christopher Germer, another mindfulness researcher, came up with this term. Firefighting term used to describe what happens if you open a door to a fire. The oxygen rushes in and the fire bursts out. When we feel negative emotions, we close the doors of our heart to start protecting ourselves. When we start opening the doors to our heart, the love and compassion run in, but the fear, anger rush out.

In fact, sometimes when we give ourselves compassion, strong negative feelings of shame, fear, anger, arise. Backdraft is a part of the healing process.

“When we give ourselves unconditional love, we immediately remember all the conditions in which we're unloved.”



What to do when backdraft happens:

1. Label the experience as backdraft- Same as name it to tame it
2. Explore where the emotion physically resides (feel it to heal it)
3. Redirect attention to a neutral focus inside your body (breath), a sensation of the boundary of the body (soles of feet, hands on table), or a sense object in the outside world (colors of environment, sounds, smells).
4. Practice behavioral self-compassion- do something kind for yourself like a bubble bath, a cup of tea, listening to music. It's not about distracting yourself from difficult emotions or backdraft- it's about intentionally soothing yourself. You are the only one that knows what you need in the moment. The key is doing the practice with intention.

Tasks for Week 2:

1. Complete Soothing touch, self-compassion break, and inner critic audio exercises.
2. Post at least 2 times in facebook group or via group email about how your self-compassionate practice/ talk is going.