



Self-Compassion Defined & Experienced Exercises

Self-compassion involves being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate. Three elements of self-compassion are: self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness.

The following exercises are two which you can use to experience self-compassion.

Exercise One: Giving and Receiving Compassion¹

- Please sit comfortably, closing your eyes, and if you like, putting a hand over your heart or another soothing place as a reminder to bring not just awareness, but loving awareness, to your experience and to yourself.

Savoring the Breath

- Taking a few deep, relaxing breaths, noticing how your breath nourishes your body as you inhale and soothes your body as you exhale.
- Now letting your breathing find its own natural rhythm. Continue feeling the sensation of breathing in and breathing out. If you like, allowing yourself to be gently rocked and caressed by the rhythm of your breathing.

Warming Up Awareness

- Now, focusing your attention on your in-breath only, letting yourself savor the sensation of breathing in, one breath after another, perhaps noticing how the in- breath energizes your body.
- If you like, as you breathe in, breathing in kindness and compassion for yourself. Just feeling the quality of kindness and compassion as you breathe in, or if you prefer, letting a word or image of kindness ride on your breathing.
- Now, shifting your focus now to your out-breath, feeling your body breathe out, feeling the ease of exhalation.
- Now calling to mind someone whom you love or someone who is struggling and needs compassion. Visualize that person clearly in your mind.
- Begin directing your out-breath to this person, offering the ease of breathing out.
- If you wish, sending kindness and compassion to this person with each outbreath, one breath after another. (If it's easier for you, you can breathe out to others in general rather than visualizing a single person.)

In for Me, Out for You

- Now focusing again on the sensation of breathing both in and out, savoring the sensation of breathing in and out.
- Beginning to breath in for yourself and out for the other person. "In for me and out for you." "One for me and one for you."
- And as you breathe, drawing kindness and compassion in for yourself and sending something good out to another person.
- Feel free to adjust the balance between breathing in and out—"Two for me and one for you" or "One for me and three for you"—or just let it be an equal flow, whatever feels right to you at this moment.
- Letting go of any unnecessary effort, allowing this meditation to be as easy as breathing.
- Allowing your breath to flow in and out, like the ocean going in and out - a limitless, boundless flow. Letting yourself be a part of this limitless, boundless flow. An ocean of compassion.
- Gently opening your eyes.

¹ Neff, K., & Germer, C. (2018). *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook: A Proven Way to Accept Yourself, Build Inner Strength, and Thrive*. Guilford Publications.



Exercise Two: Loving-kindness for a Loved One

- Allow yourself to settle into a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. If you like, putting a hand over your heart (or another location that is comforting) as a reminder to bring not only awareness, but loving awareness, to our experience and to ourselves.

A Living Being Who Naturally Makes You Smile

- Now bring to mind a person or other living being who naturally makes you smile. Someone with whom you have an easy, uncomplicated relationship. This could be a child, a grandparent, your cat or dog—whomever naturally brings happiness to your heart. If many people or other living beings arise, just choose one.
- Letting yourself feel what it's like to be in that being's presence. Allowing yourself to enjoy the good company. Create a vivid image of this being in your mind's eye. (pause)

May You...

- Now, recognize how much this being wishes to be happy and free from suffering, just like you and every other living being. Repeating softly and gently, feeling the importance of your words:
 - o May you be happy.
 - o May you be peaceful.
 - o May you be healthy.
 - o May you live with ease.
- You can use your own words to capture your deepest wishes for your loved one, or continue to repeat these phrases. (pause)
- When you notice that your mind has wandered, returning to the words and the image of the loved one you have in mind. Savoring any warm feelings that may arise. Taking your time.

May You and I (We)....

- Now, adding yourself to your circle of good will. Creating an image of yourself in the presence of your loved one, visualizing you both together.
 - o May you and I (we) be happy.
 - o May you and I (we) be peaceful.
 - o May you and I (we) be healthy.
 - o May you and I (we) live with ease. (Repeat twice, slowly, pause)
- Now, letting go of the image of the other, perhaps thanking your loved one before moving on, and then letting the full focus of your attention rest directly on yourself.

May I...

- Putting your hand over your heart, or elsewhere, and feeling the warmth and gentle pressure of your hand. Visualizing your whole body in your mind's eye, noticing any stress or uneasiness that may be lingering within you, and offering yourself the phrases.
 - o May I be happy.
 - o May I be peaceful.
 - o May I be healthy.
 - o May I live with ease. (Repeat twice, slowly, pause)
- Finally, taking a few breaths and just resting quietly in your own body, accepting whatever your experience is, exactly as it is.