Greater Good Science Center
The Greater Good Science Center

Resources for a compassionate and resilient society

Online Magazine: Find award-winning articles, parenting blog, videos, podcasts, and more at http://greatergood.berkeley.edu

Events: “The Science of A Meaningful Life”

Science: Research fellowships

Books: Born To Be Good; The Compassionate Instinct; Raising Happiness; Are We Born Racist?
Self-Compassion and Emotional Resilience

Kristin Neff, PhD
University of Texas at Austin
Agenda

9:00 - 10:30 - Self-compassion and well-being
10:30 - 10:45 - Break
10:45 - 12:00 - How to practice mindfulness, loving-kindness, and self-compassion
12:00 - 1:00 - Lunch (on your own)
1:00 - 2:30 - Using self-compassion for motivation and managing difficult emotions
2:30 - 2:45 - Break
2:45 - 4:30 - Self-compassion, positive emotions, and happiness
Is self-esteem all it’s cracked up to be?
The need to be special and above average

Welcome to Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.

-- Garrison Keillor
Narcissism
Social Comparison
Bullying and Prejudice
Ego-Defensive Anger
Contingency and Instability of Self-Worth
Self-Compassion
Compassion for Others
The three components of self-compassion:

Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment
Common Humanity vs. Isolation
Mindfulness vs. Over-identification
Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment:

- Treating self with care and understanding rather than harsh judgment
- Desire to alleviate one’s own suffering
- Actively soothing and comforting oneself
Common humanity vs. Isolation

- Seeing own experience as part of larger human experience not isolating or abnormal
- Recognizing that life is imperfect (us too!)
Mindfulness vs. Over-identification

- Avoiding extremes of suppressing or running away with painful feelings
- Allows us to “be” with painful feelings as they are
Isn’t suffering blindingly obvious?
Difference between mindfulness and self compassion

Mindfulness is aimed at *experience*: pos./neg./neutral
Self-compassion is aimed at the suffering of *experiencer*
  - Involves active self-soothing
Exercise

Gestures of Self-Compassion
Why isn’t self-compassion more prevalent in Western culture?
Compassion can be a strong, powerful force for change.
Confusion with self-pity
Confusion between

Harsh Judgment    Discriminating Wisdom
Confusion with Self-Indulgence
Confusion with “Making excuses”
Belief that motivation requires self-criticism
Motivation with Self-Criticism

Fear of being bad or worthless
Motivation with Self-Compassion

Desire for health and well-being
Self-compassion focuses on self-acceptance, not self-improvement
Doesn’t self-acceptance mean being passive or complacent?
The curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I can change

-- Carl Rogers
Self-compassion provides the safety needed to see ourselves clearly.
Provides the emotionally supportive environment needed for change and growth
If possible....

“Yeah, well, the Dalai Lama never had to deal with your whining.”
Research on Self-Compassion
Sample Self-Compassion Scale Items

Self-Kindness Subscale: I try to be understanding and patient toward those aspects of my personality I don't like.

Self-Judgment Subscale: I’m disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.

Common Humanity Subscale: I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.

Isolation Subscale: When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.

Mindfulness Subscale: When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.

Over-identified Subscale: When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.
Populations studied
Ages 14 – 83

United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Belgium, Netherlands, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, Turkey, Germany, Norway
Self-compassion linked to well-being

Reductions in:

Anxiety, depression, stress, rumination, perfectionism, body shame, fear of failure
Self-compassion linked to well-being

Increases in:

Life satisfaction, happiness, self-confidence, optimism, curiosity, creativity, gratitude
Self-compassion linked to well-being

Physiological changes:
- Increased heart rate variability (flexible responding, emotion regulation),
- Reduced cortisol (stress)
- Greater activation in insula (empathy)
Linked to motivation

- Greater intrinsic motivation, desire to learn and grow
- Personal standards just as high, not as upset when don’t meet them
- Less fear of failure
- More likely to try again when fail
Linked to health behaviors
Linked to personal accountability

- More conscientiousness
- Taking greater responsibility for past mistakes
- Shame-free guilt (don’t externalize blame)
- Disposition to apologize
Linked to Coping and Resilience
Self-Compassion versus Self-Esteem

✧ Fewer social comparisons
✧ Less ego-defensive anger
✧ Less contingent self-worth
✧ More stable self-worth
✧ No association with narcissism
Self-Compassion Linked to Other-Focused Concern

- Greater compassion and empathy for others
- More forgiveness of others
- More caring and supportive relationship behavior (as rated by partners)
Cultural differences in self-compassion

Culture main effect: $F(2, 613) = 31.37, p < .001, R^2 = .18$

Culture and sex interaction: $F(1, 613) = 3.04, p < .05, R^2 = .01$
It’s All Natural!

Paul Gilbert
Social Mentality Theory
Physiological underpinnings of self-esteem

Social rank system

Dopamine activation
Physiological underpinnings of self-criticism

Threat defense system

Cortisol and adrenaline
Physiological underpinnings of self-compassion

Mammalian care-giving system

Oxytocin and opiates
Family influences on self-compassion

Attachment security
Parental criticism
Conflict in home
The development of self-compassion
Mindful Self-Compassion Program

8-week workshop designed to explicitly teach skills of self-compassion

Uses meditation, informal practice, group discussion and homework exercises
Research on Mindful Self-Compassion program

Randomized clinical trial
Intervention group vs. wait-list control group
Percent change in self-compassion, mindfulness, and compassion for others
Percent change in well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hap.</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conn.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Sat.</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dep.</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anx.</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All well-being gains maintained over time

Self-Compassion
Informal Practice

Self-Compassionate Language
Informal Practice

Soothing Touch

![Image of a child](image_url)
Informal Practice

Self-Compassion Mantra

This is a moment of suffering
Suffering is part of life
May I be kind to myself in this moment
May I give myself the compassion I need
Mary Oliver

The Journey
Meditation

Affectionate Breathing
MINDFULNESS
Paying attention to what’s happening, while it’s happening, on purpose.
MIND WANDERING
DEFAULT MODE NETWORK
I realize I've only been at it for 5 minutes, but meditation isn't bringing me the peace of mind I was promised.
Two Components of Mindfulness
Being in the Present Moment
Direct perception of experience
Thought is not a direct perception of reality

APPLE
The past and future are thoughts
Non-judgmentally accepting the reality of the present moment
Resistance
Attack or Avoidance
What we resist, persists!
Avoidance
Attacking or trying to control
THIS SHOULD NOT BE HAPPENING!
Suffering = Pain x Resistance
Negative emotion ⇔ Resistance ⇔ React

Negative emotion ⇔ Mindfulness ⇔ Respond
Three Skills of Mindfulness Practice

Concentration
Mindfulness
Kindness/Compassion
Concentration

One-pointed awareness
Anchor for attention
Calming and grounding
Meditation is too hard. How do you keep one thought in your mind for this long?

Dinner dinner dinner dinner...
Mindfulness (Open Monitoring)
COMPASSION

Emotional Attitude
Accompanying Mindfulness
THREE SKILLS

Concentration - Calm difficult emotions

Mindfulness - Accept difficult emotions

Compassion - Comfort self for difficult emotions
Important to Remember!

We give ourselves compassion not to feel better but *because* we feel pain.
Naomi Shihab Nye

Kindness
Loving-Kindness (Metta)

Compassion (Karuna)
Exercise

Interpersonal Connection

(adapted from Joanna Macy and Jack Kornfield)
Loving-kindness Meditation

Words
Feelings
Images
May you be safe
May you be peaceful
May you be healthy
May you live with ease
Meditation

Loving-Kindness and Self-Compassion
Loving-Kindness meditation works on the level of intention
Derek Walcott

Love after love
Research on Loving-Kindness Meditation
Loving-Kindness meditation changes the brain (Dose dependent)
Research with Long-Term Meditators

- Higher levels of left-prefrontal activity (joy)
- Stronger activity in right insula (empathy)
- Increased activity in regions of brain involved in planned movement (readiness to help)
Research with New Meditators

Frederickson et al. (2008)

- Taught LKM for 7 weeks
- Compared to wait-list controls
- More positive emotions (e.g., happiness, love, gratitude, hope, awe, contentment, etc.)
Research with New Meditators
Davidson et al. (submitted)

- Taught LKM over internet for two weeks
- Controls taught cognitive reappraisal
- Significantly increased self-compassion
- Gains in self-compassion associated with increased insula activity (empathy)
- Insula activity predicted altruism
Self-compassion for caregivers
Caregivers are often extremely hard on themselves, and push beyond their limits.
Compassion

Fatigue
Setting boundaries usually recommended
Self-Care Strategies
Is compassion fatigue really *empathy* fatigue?
Empathy: Emotional Resonance
Compassion:
Embracing suffering with kindness
Self-compassion allows us to be in the presence of suffering with equanimity.
Provides the emotional resources needed to care for others
Research on self-compassion for caregivers

- Self-compassion is associated with less burnout and “compassion” fatigue
- Associated with more satisfaction with caregiving role
Meditation
Equanimity Phrases and
Breathing Compassion In and Out
Working with Difficult Emotions
Backdraft
How to deal with backdraft
Meditation

Soften, soothe, allow
Softening is physical compassion

Soothing is emotional compassion

Allowing is mental compassion
Mary Oliver

Wild Geese
Working with Positive Emotions
NEGATIVITY BIAS

Positive Emotions     Negative Emotions
“The deeper that sorrow carves into your being the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?”

- Kahlil Gibran
Though focused on suffering, self-compassion linked to positive emotions

WHY?
Barbara Frederickson

Broaden and Build Theory
Negative emotions narrow focus, allow people to be aware of dangers
Positive emotions broaden focus, allow people to notice opportunities.
“When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.”

- Helen Keller
Exercise: Silver Linings
SAVORING
Billy Collins

Aimless Love
Informal Practice

Pleasure Walk
Self-Appreciation
Why is it so hard to take a compliment?
The three components of self-appreciation:

Self-Kindness
Common Humanity
Mindfulness
Self-Kindness

✧ Appreciating your own good qualities without taking them for granted
Common humanity

- Remembering that all people have strengths as well as weaknesses
Mindfulness

△ Noticing and paying attention to what’s good about yourself

△ Countering the tendency to always focus on problems
Exercise
Giving yourself permission to shine
Self-compassion allows us to recognize the richness and complexity of life.
Perfection is boring!
David Whyte

Everything is Waiting for You
Closing Meditation

Deepest wish for yourself and all beings
Self-compassion calculator, guided meditations, exercises available at:

www.self-compassion.org
Thank you!

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu
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