

A Kinder Voice

REFLECTIVE WRITING SERIES · 3 OF 5 · SELF-COMPASSIONATE WRITING

Writing to yourself with the warmth you'd offer someone you care about

Many of us speak to ourselves more harshly than we would to anyone else. In some studies, writing to oneself with compassion after a mistake or setback was linked with more motivation to learn and improve, not less. Self-compassion isn't letting yourself off the hook; it's being on your own side.

KINDNESS

Warmth, not harshness

Responding to your own difficulty with care and understanding, rather than criticism.

SHARED HUMANITY

You're not alone in this

Struggle and imperfection are part of being human, not a sign you're failing on your own.

BALANCE

Noticing, as it is

Acknowledging the pain honestly, without pushing it away or letting it take over.

Before I begin, my distress feels
0 = calm · 10 = the most distressed I can imagine

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 What am I being hard on myself about?

2 What does the critical voice tend to say?

Just a line is enough. Sometimes a critical voice develops in response to difficult experiences or expectations. Whatever its origins, you can explore how it affects you now.

3 Who else might struggle with something like this, and how would I see them?

4 A letter from a kinder voice

Write as a warm, wise friend would: honest, but firmly on your side. You might begin "Dear..."

5 One small step I could take that comes from care, not criticism

After writing, my distress feels
rate again; any change, or none, is useful to notice

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What the research suggests

In a series of experiments, people who reflected on a weakness or mistake with self-compassion reported more motivation to improve. Evidence for self-compassion approaches is growing, but effects vary and are not the same for everyone.

Go at your own pace

Writing about difficult experiences can bring up emotions. Pause whenever you need to, or come back to the exercise when it feels manageable.

When you finish

Take a moment to notice how you feel. A little grounding, movement, or time away from the page can help you transition back into your day.

SOURCES

Breines, J. G., & Chen, S. (2012). Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(9), 1133–1143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212445599>

Neff, K. D. (2003). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2(3), 223–250.