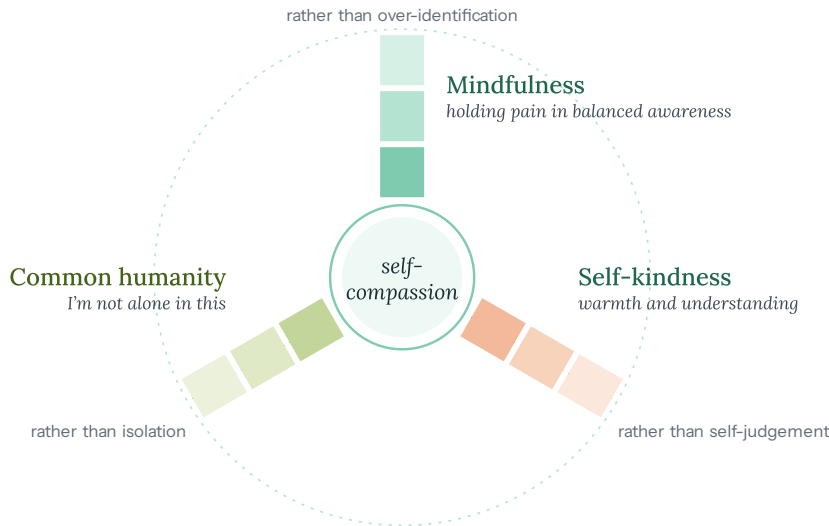


Self-Compassion

PSYCHOEDUCATION & PRACTICE · KRISTIN NEFF'S THREE-PART MODEL

Meeting your own pain with the care you'd offer a good friend

When things go wrong, many of us become our own harshest critic. Psychologist Kristin Neff describes self-compassion as a different way of responding: turning towards our own difficulty with warmth, perspective and balanced awareness. It is a skill that can be practised, not a personality trait you either have or lack.



A compass for hard moments

three linked ways of responding to pain

Each arm runs from a harsher response at its pale outer edge toward a more compassionate one near the centre.

Most people move back and forth along these arms many times a day. The aim isn't to stay at the centre, but to notice where you are and turn gently inward.

harsher kinder

01 The three parts of self-compassion

each one supports the others

Self-kindness

rather than self-judgement

Being warm and understanding towards yourself when you struggle or fall short, rather than attacking yourself for it.

INSTEAD OF

"How could I be so stupid?"

IT MIGHT SOUND LIKE

"That was hard. What would help right now?"

Common humanity

rather than isolation

Recognising that difficulty, mistakes and imperfection are part of being human, rather than something that sets you apart.

INSTEAD OF

"Everyone else copes. What's wrong with me?"

IT MIGHT SOUND LIKE

"Lots of people would feel this way."

Mindfulness

rather than over-identification

Noticing painful thoughts and feelings with some openness, without pushing them away or getting swept up in them.

INSTEAD OF

"This is a disaster. It'll always be like this."

IT MIGHT SOUND LIKE

"This is really painful right now."

02 Common worries about self-compassion

what the research suggests

"Won't it make me lazy?"

In a series of experiments, people prompted to be self-compassionate after a mistake showed more motivation to improve, not less.

"Isn't it just self-pity?"

Self-pity tends to narrow the focus to "poor me". Common humanity widens the view to include others who struggle too.

"Isn't it self-indulgent?"

Caring for yourself often means thinking about long-term wellbeing, which can include saying no to short-term comfort.

"Isn't it weak?"

Being kind to yourself in pain can take courage. It can also include protecting yourself and making changes.

03 Tender and fierce

two sides that work together

Tender

being with yourself

COMFORT · SOOTHE · VALIDATE

Accepting yourself and your feelings, and offering comfort when you are hurting.

"It makes sense that this hurts."

Fierce

acting for yourself

PROTECT · PROVIDE · MOTIVATE

Standing up for yourself, meeting your needs, and encouraging change with care.

"This isn't okay. I'm going to speak up."

What the research suggests, and its limits

Across many studies, higher self-compassion has been linked with lower anxiety, depression and stress. Most of this research is correlational, so it shows associations rather than causes. Structured programmes such as Mindful Self-Compassion have shown benefits in controlled trials. There is ongoing debate about how self-compassion is best measured, especially whether less self-criticism and more self-kindness should be scored together.

If kindness feels uncomfortable

For some people, turning kindness inward can at first stir up sadness, grief or old hurts. This is common and often eases with time. Go slowly, and start with small, practical acts of care.

04 A self-compassionate pause

a few minutes, when something hurts

Choose gently. Pick a mild to moderate difficulty, not your most painful experience. If distress rises, it's fine to stop or come back later.

What happened? *a few words is enough*

BEFORE · 0 TO 10

How upset I feel

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

How harsh my inner
voice is

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

i
Notice
MINDFULNESS

What am I feeling, and where do I notice it in my body? Can I name it without exaggerating it or pushing it away?

ii
Connect
COMMON HUMANITY

Who else might feel something like this in a similar situation? How is this part of being human?

iii
Befriend
SELF-KINDNESS

What would I say to a close friend here? What do I need, and what is one small kind thing I could do?

What shifted, if anything? *it's okay if nothing did*

AFTER · 0 TO 10

How upset I feel

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

How harsh my inner
voice is

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

05 Words that feel true to me

believable matters more than positive

This is hard right now.

I'm doing what I can with what I have.

Other people feel this too.

I can be patient with myself.

06 A week of small practices

tiny and imperfect counts

☐ a kind word

☐ a soothing touch

☐ naming the feeling

☐ a short break

☐ reaching out

☐ a practical act of care

☐ something else

DAY	A HARD MOMENT	WHAT I TRIED	HARSHNESS 0-10
Mon			-- → --
Tue			-- → --
Wed			-- → --
Thu			-- → --
Fri			-- → --
Sat			-- → --
Sun			-- → --

07 Reflecting

at the end of the week

What I noticed

What got in the way

What I'd like to talk about

GO AT YOUR OWN PACE

Writing about difficult experiences can bring up emotions. You can pause, stop, choose a different prompt, or return to the exercise later. If you become significantly distressed, consider reaching out to a health professional or someone you trust.

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Exercises on this page are original and informed by Neff's research. They are not the Self-Compassion Scale or official Mindful Self-Compassion materials.