

SELF-COMPASSION

The 'Self-Compassion' exercise involves being kind to yourself, like a wise compassionate friend, when in reaction and feeling negative feelings towards others, or when beating yourself up.

Contrary to what lots of people believe, beating yourself up does not help recovery when you 'fail' and it does not aid resilience. Think how children respond to criticism and punishment versus kindness, concern and having their difficult feelings acknowledged and validated. Which is the greater motivation for change? Which causes resistance, resentment and reluctant compliance? We treat ourselves far worse than we would ever treat our cherished friends, and the worst things we say to ourselves, we would never say to our friends (not if we wanted to keep them!).

Self-compassion aids resilience as you recover quicker from upset or failure. Self-compassion is motivating & aids achievement because recovering quicker allows you to recommit. Ruminating about the past or worrying about the future merely stops you from acting from a grounded space in the present.

Self-compassion is not self-pity or wallowing in your own feelings. It is not lowering your standards or eroding your boundaries so that everything you think or do is acceptable and you lose any drive for change or self-correction. It is simple acknowledging the difficulty of the unpleasant feelings you are feeling, and being kind to yourself about this.

Step 1- Self-Compassion for unpleasant feelings towards others.

This involves being kind to yourself when in reaction to others (including blame, anger, resentment & hurt). It is saying to yourself something like,

"It must be hard for you Jenny/Geoff [your name], feeling these feelings of anger & resentment towards this person. It is not a nice space for you to be in."

Step 2 – Acknowledging your Self Critic's aims.

You acknowledge that the self-critical part is trying to help prevent you doing something wrong again by criticising or punishing - but this is not helping.

"I appreciate you are just trying to help me from not stuffing up again, or are wanting to punish me for what you feel I have done wrong, or who I am, but it's not helping. It's just making me feel worse."

Step 3- Self-Compassion for critical, judgemental & unpleasant feelings towards yourself.

Giving yourself self-compassion rather than self-judgement.

"It must be hard for you Jenny/Geoff [your name], feeling these negative feelings towards yourself."

Step 4 – Connecting to the common humanity of failure versus isolating yourself in shame.

This is seeing failure as human and connecting you to the common humanity rather than isolating you as the only one who fails like this, and believing most other people have got it together far better than you have. It is also combating the feeling that you have to feel that you are doing better than others to feel equal or worthy. Failure doesn't dictate having to give up or to keep pushing either.

"It doesn't feel good when I stuff up, fail, make mistakes, feel less than perfect or unworthy, and don't meet my expectations of myself. These are difficult feelings to feel. All humans fail, make mistakes, don't live up to their expectations, feel like imposters and engage in unhealthy behaviours at times – we just don't see inside others' heads to see how they feel about themselves. Failure is what makes us human and brings us together rather than isolates us. It's all part of the flawed human condition we all share - and that's okay."

Step 5 – Recommitting and taking action

The final part is to look at recommitting. This can be recommitting to your beliefs and values, or to your goals. Then it is working out some action to take, however small, and taking it. If we attempt to take on too much it becomes overwhelming, so we recommit by answering the following question:

"What is the least I can do to move myself forward right now?"

Note: Stroking your arm or self-hugging while talking to yourself has been shown to release oxytocin. This is the 'love & nurturing hormone' & helps you to feel warmer towards yourself and others. These techniques are drawn from research by Kristin Neff, see - Kristin Neff (2011) – *"Self Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind"*