

**9:00 – 10:00 (Session 1): Mindful Self-Compassion: What it is, how it may help you**

**Definitions:**

*Compassion:* to suffer with others with a desire to reduce *their* suffering.

*Self-compassion:* to suffer with ourselves with a desire to reduce *our* suffering.

*Mindful self-compassion:* to suffer with ourselves with a desire to reduce our suffering in ways that are intentional and aware of our experiences.

“If your compassion does not include yourself it is incomplete.” (author unknown)

Self-compassion is an “inside-out” process: when we become more compassionate towards ourselves, we become more compassionate with others.

**What is mindful self-compassion (MSC)\*?**

- It is a response to our own suffering.
- It entails treating ourselves as we would a trusted friend (Neff, 2003b).
- The three components of mindful self-compassion (Neff, 2003b):
  - Mindfulness:
    - Allows us to “be” with painful feelings just as they are without trying to change them.
    - Avoids extremes of suppressing or running away with painful feelings.
  - Common humanity:
    - Sees our own experience as part of the larger human experience, not as isolating or abnormal.
    - Recognizes that life is imperfect (and we are, too).
  - Self-Kindness:
    - Treats our self with care and understanding rather than harsh judgment.
    - Actively soothes and comforts our self.
- The classic MSC question is “*What do I need right now?*” We can ask ourselves this even when we are comforting others and attending to their needs.
- Other related questions are:
  - “What works for me now?”
  - “What’s right for me now?”



**Yin and Yang of Self-Compassion:**

- YIN: “being with” ourselves in a compassionate way—comforting, soothing, validating.
- YANG: “acting in the world” in a compassionate way—protecting, providing, and motivating.



**Five main misgivings about self-compassion\*:**

- It is a form of self-pity.
- It entails being weak.
- It will undermine motivation.
- It will lead to self-indulgent behaviors.
- It is selfish.

(\*Neff, 2015)

**Self-Compassion contrasted with other concepts:**

<b>Self-Compassion</b>	<b>Self-Criticism</b>	<b>Self-esteem</b>	<b>Self-care</b>
Our response to our own suffering, similar to how we would respond to a friend’s suffering.	Our judgement of our behavior, thoughts, or feelings, usually harshly.	Our evaluation of our overall value or worth as a person.	Actions we take in order to take care of our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health.

**Self-Compassion and stress:**

<b>Stress Response</b>	<b>Stress Response Turned Inward</b>	<b><i>Self-Compassion</i></b>
Fight	Self-criticism	Self-kindness
Flight	Isolation	Common Humanity
Freeze	Rumination	Mindfulness

**Wandering mind or monkey mind:**

- Commonly associated with meditation but can happen at any time.
- Our mind is trained to solve problems. When it doesn't have them, it often tries to find or create them.
- Default mode network (DMN): an interconnected network of brain regions that is active when the mind is resting and inactive is engaged in a task.
  - It includes structures that are located in the middle of the brain from the front to the back.
  - These structures become active when we disengage and inactive when we engage.
  - The DMN does three things:
    - Creates a sense of self.
    - Projects that self into the past and future.
    - Looks for problems.
- Mindfulness meditation, according to the research, deactivates the DMN when we are meditating and when we are in a resting state.
- Given this, our mind is simply doing what it's biologically wired to do when we meditate. The DMN gets activated and our mind wanders and tries to solve problems.
- Sharon Salzberg says "The moment you realize you've been distracted is the magic moment." (<https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-meditate-sharon-salzberg-on-getting-started/>)
- In MSC, we say that this moment of magic is an opportunity for self-compassion. When I realize my mind is wandering, I often say (in a soft and gentle voice) "Hello brain. I see you wandering and trying to do your job. Thanks for working so hard. Let's take a break for a few breaths" and then I try to resume my meditation.

**How can MSC help you in your work?**

- It can offer tools to address your own suffering.
- When you address your own suffering, you become more accepting and compassionate with others' suffering.
- Awareness and practice of the three components of MSC:
  - Helps us to accept the present moment, just as it is (Mindfulness).
  - Fosters a sense of connection to others (Common Humanity).
  - Leads to treating ourselves more kindly and then to treating others more kindly (Self-kindness).

**10:15 – 11:15 (Session 2): Tuning in: Exercises to ground you to the present moment**

***Self-Compassion Break:***

This exercise can be done anywhere, anytime, in a matter of a few seconds.

*Invitation:*

Close your eyes and think of a situation that is a little stressful but not too much (no more than a 2 – 3 on a scale of 1 – 10).

Recognize that this situation is causing you stress and say to yourself “This is a moment of suffering” (or “stress” or whatever word works for you). (This is *mindfulness*.)

Now think about the fact that others may be experiencing the same type of suffering (or stress) that you are and that this is a part of life. (This is *common humanity*.)

See if you can say some kind words to yourself, the same kind words you might offer to a friend or someone you care about. (This is *self-kindness*.)

*Self-Compassion Break* in short and easy language (two versions):

***Version A***

*This is a moment of suffering.*

*Suffering is a part of life.*

*May I give myself what I need.*

***Version B***

*I am suffering.*

*Others are suffering, too.*

*May I be kind to myself.*

***“Soles of the feet” practice:***

This practice is often done to bring our attention to the present moment and can be used to help people calm challenging emotions. It can be done anywhere you can make mental awareness with your feet. It can be done alone and/or with others.

*Invitation:*

Whether standing, sitting, or laying down, bring mental awareness to the soles of your feet.

Focus on where your feet make contact with any other surface such as the other foot, another body part, the floor, a chair, or anything else they have contact with.

Focus on the sensations in your feet:

Feel whatever covers your feet and focus on the feeling of that on your feet, on the way it covers and/or touches your feet.

Focus on your toes, perhaps wiggling them around a bit.

Focus on the balls of your feet, then the arches, and then the heels.

If it right for you and your body, wiggle your feet around and turn them in circles, first in one direction, and then in another.

Focus all of your attention on your feet.

If it feels right for you and your body, send a little gratitude to your feet for all they do.

***Giving and Receiving Compassion Meditation:***

This is a simple meditation that is based on one of the three core MSC meditations. The PDF and audio version of the meditation can be found on the website I have created for this group. This meditation can be done very simply anytime and anywhere simply by breathing in compassion for yourself and breathing out compassion for another person. Alternatively, there may be times when you need to both breathe in and breathe out compassion for the same person which may also be yourself. You can do this simply by doing something to the effect of:

On the *in* breath, saying “In for me, compassion for me.”

On the *out* breath, saying “Out for you, compassion for you.”

**12:45 – 1:45 (Session 3): Compassionate listening: The gift you give to yourself and others**

**Compassionate Listening**

This practice is at the heart of comforting others. It is one that takes practice and is hopefully something you have learned in other settings. It involves listening with our *whole* bodies, with all of who we are, but especially our hearts. I have often said that since being diagnosed with single-sided hearing loss three years ago, “I hear worse but listen better” because I listen with all of my senses and with my body and heart, not just my ears.

Despite your best intentions, you may have interrupted someone who was sharing a difficult experience. You may have done this verbally and/or non-verbally by touching the person and/or engaging in distracting behaviors. People may interrupt others because:

- it is difficult to listen to others’ suffering, no matter what their training is;
- they empathetically share their suffering; it may feel like their own suffering and it is real suffering; and
- speaking enables them to reduce the intensity of what they are hearing and feeling.

In order to stay in loving, connected, presence with those who are suffering and whose pain may almost be too much to bear, you need to:

- stay in connection with *yourselves*;
- be aware of your own empathetic pain; and
- be compassionate with yourself.

You can do this by:

- listening in an embodied way, with your whole body, letting yourselves feel whatever sensations arise in your bodies as well as paying attention with your eyes and ears;
- silently noting what you are feeling (“I’m feeling really sad for Christy”);
- paying attention to where you are experiencing your emotions in your bodies;
- paying attention when your mind wanders off and/or you want to interrupt; and
- practicing the Giving and Receiving meditation informally, on the spot:
  - breathing *in* for yourself reconnects you with your body;
  - breathing *out* for the speaker reconnects you with them.

- do so without focusing too much on our breathing and instead, use it as a way to redirect your attention when you become distracted, are in pain, and/or want to interrupt the speaker.

(Germer & Neff, 2019; Neff & Germer, 2018)

**2:00 – 2:45 (Session 4): Pulling it all together: Questions, answers, and applications**

**Key points:**

- MSC is response to our own suffering.
- When we become more compassionate with ourselves, we become more compassionate with others.
- It is something that can be practiced anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances, alone or with others.
- It can be practiced in a just a few seconds, with as little as one or two breaths.
- The question “What do I need?” is often a way to anchor ourselves to our needs, even as we attend to the needs of others.
- By practicing self-compassion, we often empower others to be kinder, more gentle, and more compassionate with themselves.

A copy of this handout and other information about MSC including the practices in this handout can be found at [bit.ly/crispcoh2019](http://bit.ly/crispcoh2019)