

Introduction to Mindful Self-Compassion
March 9, 2019 at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church

What is self-compassion?

- Self-compassion is a response to our own suffering.
- It entails treating ourselves as we would a trusted friend (Neff, 2003b).
- The three components of self-compassion (Neff, 2003b):
 - Mindfulness vs Over-identification:
 - 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 vs Isolation:
 - Seeing our own experience as part of larger human experience, not as isolating or abnormal.
 - Recognizing that life is imperfect (and we are, too).
 - Self-Kindness vs Self-Judgment:
 - Treating our self with care and understanding rather than harsh judgment.
 - Actively soothing and comforting our self.
 - The classic MSC question is “What do I need right now?” Other related questions are “What works for me now?” and “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.



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Self-Compassion contrasted with other concepts:

| <i>Self-Compassion</i> | Self-Criticism | Self-esteem | Self-care |
|---|--|---|---|
| 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:

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

Wandering mind or monkey mind:

- Our mind is trained to solve problems. When it doesn't have them, it 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.



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Backdraft:

- Defined as the “distress that arises when we give ourselves compassion” (Germer & Neff, 2019).
- Is a term that firefighters use to describe how a fire can intensify when fresh air is introduced through an open door.
- A similar effect can occur when we open the door of our hearts with self-compassion. Most of our hearts are hot with pain accumulated over a lifetime. In order to function in our lives, we needed to shut out stressful or painful experiences. However, when the door of our hearts opens and kindness flows in, old hurts are likely to come out. This is backdraft. The discomfort we feel is not created by self-compassion practice—it’s simply being re-experienced and transformed by the power of compassion.
- Backdraft can show up as any type of emotional, mental, or physical uneasiness. For example:
 - Emotionally: shame, grief, fear, and sadness.
 - Mentally: “I’m all alone.” “I’m a failure.” “I’m unworthy.”
 - Physically: body memories, aches, and pains.
- Responses to backdraft:
 - Ask yourself what you need right now and what you need to do to feel safe.
 - Allow backdraft to percolate in the background of their awareness and see if it dissipates on its own.
 - Slightly reduce whatever practices you are doing if backdraft remains strong, and see what happens.
 - If backdraft remains too distressing, then practice mindfulness to regulate emotions.
 - When all else fails, anchor your awareness in ordinary activities—do normal things you enjoy.



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Self-Compassion Break:



Resources from this training including handouts, poetry, exercises, and mediations can be found at:

<http://catherinecrisp.com/msc-workshops/intro-to-msc-march-9-2019/>

Scan this with your smartphone to be taken directly to the website:



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