



Center for Mindful Self-Compassion

Soften, Soothe and Allow

Please find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three relaxing breaths. Place your hand on your heart for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and to bring kindness to yourself.

Labeling

Now let yourself recall a mild-moderately difficult situation that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, or a loved one in pain. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem—choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it. Now clearly visualize the situation. Who was there? What was said? What happened?

Now see if you can *name* the strongest emotion—a difficult emotion—associated with that situation: anger? sadness? grief? confusion? fear? longing? despair? Repeat the name of the emotion to yourself in a gentle, understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what he or she is feeling: “That’s longing.” “That’s grief.”

Mindfulness of Emotion in the Body

- Now expand your awareness to your body as a whole.
- Recall the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it the most. In your mind’s eye, sweep your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.
- Now *choose a single location in your body* where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension or an achy feeling, like a headache.
- In your mind, incline gently toward that spot.

Soften, Soothe, and Allow

- *Soften* into that location in your body. *Let* the muscles be soft without a requirement that they *become* soft, like simply applying heat to sore muscles. You can say, “soft...soft...soft...” quietly to yourself, to enhance the process. Remember that you are not trying to make the sensation go away—you are just being with them with loving awareness.

If you wish, let yourself just soften around the edges, like around the edges of a pancake. No need to go all the way in.

- *Soothe* yourself for struggling in this way. Put your hand over your heart and feel your body breathe. Perhaps kind words arise in our mind, such as, “Oh my dear, this is such a painful experience. May I grow in ease and well-being.”
- If you wish, you can also direct kindness to the part of your body that is under stress by placing your hand in that place. It may help to think of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. You can say kind words to yourself, or just repeat, “soothe...soothe...soothe.”
- *Allow* the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go as it pleases, like a guest in your own home. You can repeat, “allow...allow...allow.”
- “Soften, soothe and allow.” “Soften, soothe and allow.” You can use these three words like a mantra, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness toward your suffering.
- If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better.
- Slowly open your eyes when you’re ready.