



## **10 Steps to Awakening Self-Compassion**

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Compassion is the natural and spontaneous feeling that arises when we witness suffering, and that triggers our taking action to alleviate the suffering. Self-compassion involves becoming aware of the presence of suffering in our bodies, emotions, thoughts, and actions—and then taking steps to diminish it. While it may sound easy, practicing self-compassion can be more difficult than compassion for others. Creating a practice to integrate self-compassion into your life can contribute to healing your mind and body, and opening your heart to new heights.

### **Benefits of Self-Compassion**

Research [1] indicates that cultivating self-compassion can contribute to beneficial physical, emotional-mental, and interpersonal changes, such as:

- Modulating hormonal functioning, especially of oxytocin and cortisol
- Reducing the intensity and frequency of negative and chronic stress reactions
- Coping with difficult emotional experiences
- Moderating depression and anxiety
- Increasing emotional well being
- Mitigating negative thinking, including rumination
- Improving interpersonal relationships
- Enhancing patience, generosity, gratitude, acceptance, humility, openness, and gentleness

### **10 Steps to Self-Compassion**

Set aside 15 minutes the first time you do this practice. Read through the sequence to get a feel for the flow of the practice before you begin. You will develop your own pace and rhythm as your practice grows, extending or decreasing the amount of time you need to get the most out of it.

- 1 Lie down or take a comfortable seat that feels both relaxed and alert.
- 2 Practice mindful breath: Become aware of your breath; breathe naturally while noticing in-breathing and out-breathing. Anchor your attention to a specific body-part, for examples you can focus at the tip of the nostrils or lips, sensing air entering and exiting the body, or you can focus on your belly as it rises while breathing in, and falls while breathing out.
- 3 Place one or both hands over the region of the heart, and bring a mental picture or memory of a loved one into awareness, someone with whom you have experienced a feeling of unconditional acceptance. This may be a human being or an animal, any being whose presence elicits natural happiness.

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- 4 Recognize that your loved one, like all beings, experiences the vulnerabilities and the aspirations that life brings. He or she is subject to the sufferings of pain, accidents, disease, undo fear or sadness, and eventual dying and death.
- 5 Bring the presence of this person into your heart-space while silently repeating:
  - May you be safe
  - May you be well
  - May you be happy
  - May you live with ease
- 6 As you notice that your attention has wandered elsewhere, gently bring your attention back to the presence of the loved one at your heart center, and resume the practice of repeating each of the four phrases.
- 7 Add yourself to the goodwill you are generating from the space of your heart, repeating the following phrases:
  - May you and I be safe
  - May you and I be well
  - May you and I be happy
  - May you and I live with ease
- 8 Repeat these or other phrases that feel natural to you, while cultivating an attitude of openness, acceptance, and loving-kindness.
- 9 Picture the entirety of your mind-body. Gently and slowly begin to scan your body by moving your attention:
  - From the crown of the head down the neck, shoulders, both arms, hands and fingers
  - Along the front and back of the upper torso, and then the pelvic region
  - Down the hips, legs and knees, ankles, feet and toes
  - Up the body from the toes all the way to the crown of the head
  - Toward any areas of pleasantness and unpleasantness
- 10 Offer compassionate loving kindness to yourself by repeating the following phrases:
  - May I be safe
  - May I be well
  - May I be happy
  - May I live with ease
- 11 If it feels safe, then revisit areas of unpleasantness while holding a part of the mind-body in the heart space. Consider naming the mind-body part, for example:
  - “May the knee that I am trying to take care of be well ...”
  - “May the fear that I have tried to push away be at ease ...”
  - “May I be at ease with the negative thoughts that I have fought for so many years ...”
- 12 Conclude your practice by bringing awareness back to the entire mind-body, and sense the entirety of your being as a singular organism intimately connected with all other life forms. As you breathe, feel your connection with all of life. Lay down or sit for some time in silence.

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## **Shorter Options for a Self-Compassion Practice**

At any time in your day, you can practice self-compassion, even if you only have 15 or 30 seconds. Whether you're at work, at home, or anywhere you feel the need for a little extra self-love, take a moment to activate self-compassion by bringing loving kindness to your awareness.

## **7-Day Self-Compassion Challenge**

Form an intention to practice for seven consecutive days to see how beneficial the practice can be. If possible, practice at the same time each day. After one week of practice, ask yourself:

- What was your experience?
- Has practicing self-compassion catalyzed more personal awareness? If yes, of what?
- Has practicing triggered ideas about what to do to alleviate your suffering?
- Have you taken actions you had not taken before doing this practice?
- Evaluate whether you want to commit to practicing for another week, and then another...

Formally practicing each day generates, solidifies, and strengthens deeply positive experiences in your life that literally etch into the brain. Being compassionate with yourself generates acceptance of your humanness and the humanness of others, an essential quality for a fuller awakening. Your focus shifts from the time-bound personal narrative of the small ego-self to present-moment compassionate awareness. When you awaken self-compassion, you can strengthen your familiarity with your essential nature and reconnect with the vast fullness of life.

After a steady practice, you might find yourself spontaneously feeling self-compassion, even when you're not practicing.

[1] <http://self-compassion.org/the-research/>

This article is for informational purposes only. If you have a medical or psychiatric problem, then please consult with a licensed health care provider, such as a Medical Doctor, Registered Nurse, Counselor, Psychologist.