

**Compassion**

Exercise



15-20 min.



Group



No



Embracing Your Humanness

Why do we say “it’s only human” to comfort someone who has made a mistake?

The emotion of compassion arises from the recognition that humans are imperfect and fallible. According to Neff (2012), this recognition is key in cultivating self-compassion. Acknowledging that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience enables one to see that suffering is something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to “me” alone.

Unfortunately, most of us tend to focus on what we don’t have in common with others when we make a mistake or are going through a difficult time. Rather than viewing our imperfection in light of the shared human experience (e.g., “many people get parking fines every day”), we tend to feel isolated and disconnected from the world around us (e.g., “no one else was as stupid as me to park here”). When we view our imperfect selves in this way, our perspective tends to become narrow; we become absorbed by our own feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and fail to see the bigger picture.

This tool is designed to help people cultivate self-compassion through developing an appreciation for common humanity.

Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (PhD) (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hugo_Alberts) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD) (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lucinda-poole-24a122121/>)

Goal

The goal of this tool is to demonstrate to people that they are not alone in their tendency to be self-critical. In this way, people develop a sense of common humanity, which is a key component in self-compassion.



Advice

- Given this is a group exercise, suggest that participants choose to write down something that is only mildly to moderately distressing rather than something that has very strong emotions attached to it
- On a practical note, hand out the same type of pen to all participants, to help with anonymity
- In step 5, participants may pick their own note by chance. This is okay. Notes are anonymous and so the group will be unaware if a participant is reading their own note out loud. Reading one's own note out loud may even help to facilitate acceptance and defusion.
- An alternative way to run this exercise is to gather participants' notes and place them together facing up on the floor or on a table, rather than into a box. Participants can then view the collection of negative self-views in one place, reading and resonating with the notes silently to themselves. This option may be preferable for more timid groups, or as a precursor to the original exercise (reading notes out loud).



Suggested Readings

Neff, K. (2012, September 20) *Embracing Our Common Humanity With Self-Compassion*. Retrieved from <http://self-compassion.org/embracing-our-common-humanity-with-self-compassion/>.



Embracing Your Humanness

Instructions

Step 1: Preparation

You will need:

- Blank pieces of paper or cardpaper (1x piece per group participant)
- Pens or textas (identical)
- A box or bowl

Step 2: Hand out pieces of paper

Hand out the blank pieces of paper, ensuring that each participant gets one piece.

Step 3: Write down a self-criticism

Ask participants to write down something about themselves that they are insecure about; something they tend to criticise themselves for. For example, “I’m ugly” or “I’m not smart enough.” Instruct participants to write in capital letters, so that their handwriting is not recognisable to others, and to fold their piece of paper in half when they are finished.

Step 4: Collect and shuffle notes

Collect all participants’ folded notes into a box, and shuffle them around.

Step 5: Choose a note at random and share

Now, hand the box with folded notes around the group and ask each participant to retrieve a note at random. As they do this, participants unfold the note and read it aloud to the group. The facilitator then asks for “a show of hands” from group members who have criticised themselves in the same (or similar) way.

Step 6: Group reflection

As a group, discuss the following:

- What was this exercise like?
- Have you ever thought you were alone in experiencing such self-critical thoughts?
- What was it like to see that others also have these (or similar) thoughts?