

**Compassion**

Exercise



5 min.



Client



No



## Self-compassion Break

Self-compassion involves acting kindly towards yourself when you are having a difficult time. Instead of avoiding the pain, you acknowledge that this is difficult right now and explore how you can comfort and care for yourself in this moment. Rather than extending harsh judgement and criticism toward yourself in the face of inadequacies or shortcomings, you extend kindness and understanding.

Further to this, Dr. Kristin Neff, researcher, author and founder of [self-compassion.org](http://self-compassion.org), suggests that “having compassion for yourself means that you honour and accept your humanness.” The human experience inevitably involves making mistakes, incurring losses, and ideals failing to match up to reality. According to Neff, the more we open to this reality, this shared human condition, the more we will be able to feel compassion for ourselves and for each other.

### Author

This tool was adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff’s ‘Self-compassion Break’ exercise (see <http://self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break/>) by Lucinda Poole.

### Goal

The goal of this tool is to provide clients with a simple, memorable way to cultivate self-compassion when they need it the most.

### Advice

- This tool can be used when a client is currently going through a difficult time in his or her life. However, clients may also bring to mind previous times of difficulty in session to practice cultivating self-compassion.
- If your client is bringing to mind a current difficulty, suggest that he or she brings to focus something that is not too overwhelming (perhaps a 6 out of 10 on his or her personal stress scale).
- Advise your clients that they can use this tool anytime (day or night) they need some self-compassion.



## Suggested Readings

Germer, C. K. (2009). *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*. New York: Guilford Press.

Neff, K. (2011). *Self compassion*. Hachette UK.



# Self-compassion Break

## Instructions

Recall a situation in your life that is difficult, and see if you can notice the stress and emotional discomfort in your body. Then, say to yourself:

### **1. *This is a moment of suffering.***

This acknowledgment is a form of mindfulness—of simply noticing what is going on for you emotionally in the present moment, without judging that experience as good or bad. You can also say to yourself, “This hurts,” or, “This is stress.” Use whatever statement feels most natural to you.

### **2. *Suffering is a part of life.***

This is a recognition of your common humanity with others—that all people have trying experiences, and these experiences give you something in common with the rest of humanity rather than mark you as abnormal or deficient. Other options for this statement include “Other people feel this way,” “I’m not alone,” or “We all struggle in our lives.”

### **3. *May I be kind to myself.***

Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch on your chest, and say, “May I be kind to myself.” This is a way to express self-kindness. You can also consider whether there is another specific phrase that would speak to you in that particular situation. Some examples: “May I give myself the compassion that I need,” “May I accept myself as I am,” “May I learn to accept myself as I am,” “May I forgive myself,” “May I be strong,” and “May I be patient.”

This practice can be used any time of day or night. If you practice it in moments of relative calm, it might become easier for you to experience the three parts of self-compassion—mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness—when you need them most.