



Center for
Mindful Self-Compassion

Mindful Self-Compassion

COURSE HANDOUTS

COURSE LEADER(S)

DATE AND LOCATION

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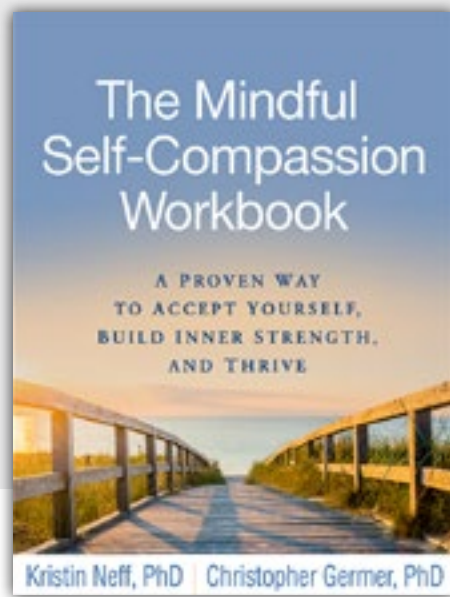
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MSC WORKBOOK

Published in 2018, *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook* (Neff & Germer) was designed as a companion to the MSC course and to introduce the general public to MSC. It includes much of the theory and practices taught in MSC, plus additional material on research and special topics.

The workbook is highly recommended for MSC participants to:

- ▶ supplement what is learned in class
- ▶ reduce the need to take notes
- ▶ help prepare for class
- ▶ review a missed session
- ▶ support home practice

The workbook also contains writing exercises for home study, and vivid stories of people using the techniques to address relationship stress, weight and body image issues, health concerns, anxiety, and other common problems. People who purchase the book have access to recorded meditations [from the publisher's website](https://www.guilford.com/books/The-Mindful-Self-Compassion-Workbook/Neff-Germer/9781462526789):

<https://www.guilford.com/books/The-Mindful-Self-Compassion-Workbook/Neff-Germer/9781462526789>



DEFINITIONS

Mindfulness

- ▶ “The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.” [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#)
- ▶ “Awareness, of the present moment, with acceptance.” [Chris Germer](#)

Acceptance

“Active, nonjudgmental embracing of experience in the here and now.” [Steven Hayes](#)

Empathy

“An accurate understanding of the [another’s] world as seen from the inside. To sense [another person’s] world as if it were your own.” [Carl Rogers](#)

Loving-Kindness

“The wish that all sentient beings may be happy.” [Dalai Lama](#)

Compassion

- ▶ “The wish that all sentient beings may be free from suffering.” [Dalai Lama](#)
- ▶ “Deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and other living beings, coupled with the wish and effort to alleviate it.” [Paul Gilbert](#)

Self-Compassion

“When we suffer, caring for ourselves as we would care for someone we truly love. Self-compassion includes: self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness.” [Kristin Neff](#)



THE SCIENCE OF SELF-COMPASSION

The three components of self-compassion

(Neff, 2003b)

- ▶ Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment:
 - Treating self with care and understanding rather than harsh judgment
 - Actively soothing and comforting oneself
- ▶ Common humanity vs. Isolation
 - Seeing own experience as part of larger human experience not isolating or abnormal
 - Recognizing that life is imperfect (us too!)
- ▶ Mindfulness vs. Over-identification
 - Allows us to “be” with painful feelings as they are
 - Avoids extremes of suppressing or running away with painful feelings

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

Physiological underpinnings (Gilbert, 2009)

- ▶ Physiological underpinnings of self-criticism
 - Threat defense system
 - Cortisol and adrenaline
- ▶ Physiological underpinnings of self-compassion
 - Mammalian care-giving system
 - Oxytocin and opiates

Research on self-compassion

- ▶ Explosion of research into self-compassion over the past decade
- ▶ Most research conducted with the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003a)

Self-compassion linked to wellbeing

(Zessin, Dickhauser & Garbadee, 2015)

- ▶ Reductions in negative mind-states: Anxiety, depression, stress, rumination, thought suppression, perfectionism, shame
- ▶ Increases in positive mind-states: Life satisfaction, happiness, connectedness, self-confidence, optimism, curiosity, gratitude
- ▶ Self-compassion leads to wellbeing by holding negative thoughts and emotions in loving, connected, presence

Self-compassion vs. self-esteem

(Neff & Vonk, 2009)

- ▶ Offers same wellbeing benefits without pitfalls
- ▶ Fewer social comparisons
- ▶ Less contingent self-worth
- ▶ No association with narcissism

Five main misgivings about self-compassion

- ▶ Is a form of self-pity
- ▶ Means weakness
- ▶ Will undermine motivation
- ▶ Will lead to self-indulgence
- ▶ Is selfish



THE SCIENCE OF SELF-COMPASSION

Is less self-focused

- ▶ Linked to less rumination and self-consciousness (Raes, 2010; Neff & Vonk, 2003a)
- ▶ Linked to more connectedness (Neff, 2003a)

Linked to coping and resilience

- ▶ More effective coping with divorce (Sbarra et al., 2012)
- ▶ Less likely to develop PTSD after combat trauma (Hiraoka et al., 2015)
- ▶ Better coping with chronic health conditions (Sirois, 2015)

Linked to motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012)

- ▶ Less fear of failure, more likely to try again and persist in efforts after failure
- ▶ More personal responsibility and motivation to repair past mistakes

Linked to healthier behaviors (Terry & Leary, 2011)

- ▶ More exercise, more doctors visits, safer sex, less alcohol use

Linked to more other-focused concern

- ▶ More caring and supportive relationship behavior (Neff & Beretvas, 2013)
- ▶ Less controlling and verbally aggressive
- ▶ More forgiveness and perspective taking (Neff & Pommier, 2013)

Early influences on self-compassion

- ▶ Secure versus insecure attachment (Wei, Liao, Ku & Shaffer, 2011)
- ▶ Parental criticism and family conflict (Neff & McGehee, 2010)
- ▶ History of sexual, emotional, physical abuse (Vetesse et al., 2011)

Mindful Self-Compassion

(MSC; Neff & Germer, 2013)

- ▶ 8-week workshop (2.5 hours each session) designed to explicitly teach self-compassion
- ▶ Empirically demonstrated to increase self-compassion, mindfulness, wellbeing
- ▶ An empirically supported teen adaptation exists called Making Friends with Yourself (Bluth et al., 2015)



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Pathways to Self-Compassion

- ▶ Physical – Caring for your body
- ▶ Mental - Allowing your thoughts
- ▶ Emotional - Accepting your feelings
- ▶ Relational – Connecting authentically with others
- ▶ Spiritual - Nurturing your values

Stages of Acceptance

- ▶ Exploring – turning toward discomfort with curiosity
- ▶ Tolerating – safely enduring
- ▶ Allowing – letting feelings come and go
- ▶ Befriending – seeing the value in all experience

Stages of Progress

- ▶ Striving – struggling to feel better
- ▶ Disillusionment – when resistance amplifies discomfort
- ▶ Radical Acceptance – acceptance before change



MSC SESSION OUTLINE

SESSION 1

Discovering Mindful Self-Compassion

- ▶ Topic: Welcome
- ▶ Exercise: Why Am I Here?
- ▶ Topic: Practical Details
- ▶ Topic: Tips - How to Approach MSC
- ▶ Exercise: Guiding Principles
- ▶ Exercise: How Do I Treat a Friend?
- ▶ Topic: What is Self-Compassion?
- ▶ Exercise (optional): Gestures of Self-Compassion
- ▶ Topic: Misgivings about Self-Compassion
- ▶ Topic (optional): Research on Self-Compassion
- ▶ Topic (optional): Self-Compassion and Self-Esteem
- ▶ Topic (optional): Physiology of Self-Compassion and Self-Criticism
- ▶ Informal Practice: Soothing Touch
- ▶ Informal Practice: Self-Compassion Break

SESSION 2

Practicing Mindfulness

- ▶ Core Meditation: Affectionate Breathing
- ▶ Practice Discussion
- ▶ Today's Session: Practicing Mindfulness
- ▶ Topic: Wandering Mind
- ▶ Topic: What is Mindfulness?
- ▶ Informal Practice: Soles of the Feet
- ▶ Topic: Resistance
- ▶ Exercise: How We Cause Ourselves Unnecessary Suffering
- ▶ Topic: Backdraft
- ▶ Informal Practice: Mindfulness in Daily Life
- ▶ Informal Practice: Self-Compassion in Daily Life
- ▶ Informal Practice (optional): Here-and-Now-Stone
- ▶ Topic: Mindfulness and Self-Compassion

SESSION 3

Practicing Loving-Kindness

- ▶ Opening Meditation: Affectionate Breathing
- ▶ Practice Discussion
- ▶ Today's Session: Practicing Loving-Kindness
- ▶ Topic: Loving-Kindness and Compassion
- ▶ Exercise: Awakening Our Hearts
- ▶ Topic: Loving-Kindness Meditation
- ▶ Meditation: Loving-Kindness for a Loved One
- ▶ Topic: Practicing with Phrases
- ▶ Informal Practice: Finding Loving-Kindness Phrases

SESSION 4

Discovering Your Compassionate Voice

- ▶ Opening Meditation: Loving-Kindness for Ourselves
- ▶ Today's Session: Discovering Your Compassionate Voice
- ▶ Topic: Stages of Progress
- ▶ Exercise: How is MSC going for me?
- ▶ Topic: Self-Criticism and Safety
- ▶ Exercise: Motivating Ourselves with Compassion
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassionate Letter to Myself



MSC SESSION OUTLINE

SESSION 5

Living Deeply

- ▶ Opening Meditation: Giving and Receiving Compassion
- ▶ Practice Discussion
- ▶ Today's Session: Living Deeply
- ▶ Topic: Core Values
- ▶ Exercise: Discovering Our Core Values
- ▶ Informal Practice: Living with a Vow
- ▶ Topic: Finding Hidden Value in Suffering
- ▶ Exercise: Silver Linings
- ▶ Topic: Listening with Compassion
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassionate Listening

SESSION 7

Exploring Challenging Relationships

- ▶ Opening Meditation: Compassionate Friend
- ▶ Practice Discussion
- ▶ Today's Session: Exploring Challenging Relationships
- ▶ Topic: Challenging Relationships
- ▶ Topic: Pain of Disconnection
- ▶ Exercise: Meeting Unmet Needs
- ▶ Exercise (optional): Silly Movement
- ▶ Topic (optional): Forgiveness
- ▶ Topic: Pain of Connection
- ▶ Informal Practice: Self-Compassion Break in Relationships
- ▶ Topic: Caregiving Fatigue
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassion with Equanimity

SESSION 6

Meeting Difficult Emotions

- ▶ Opening Meditation: Loving-Kindness for Ourselves
- ▶ Practice Discussion
- ▶ Today's Session: Meeting Difficult Emotions
- ▶ Topic: Stages of Acceptance
- ▶ Topic: Strategies for Meeting Difficult Emotions
- ▶ Informal Practice: Working with Difficult Emotions
- ▶ Topic: Shame
- ▶ Informal Practice (optional): Working with Shame

SESSION 8

Embracing Your Life

- ▶ Opening Meditation: Compassion for Self and Others
- ▶ Today's Session: Embracing Your Life
- ▶ Topic: Cultivating Happiness
- ▶ Topic: Savoring and Gratitude
- ▶ Informal Practice: Gratitude for Small Things
- ▶ Topic: Self-Appreciation
- ▶ Informal Practice: Appreciating Our Good Qualities
- ▶ Exercise: What Would I Like to Remember?
- ▶ Informal Practice (optional): Self-Compassion Bracelets
- ▶ Topic (optional): Tips for Maintaining a Practice

RETREAT

- ▶ Today's Session: Retreat
- ▶ Meditation: Compassionate Body Scan
- ▶ Informal Practice: Sense and Savor Walk
- ▶ Core Meditation: Affectionate Breathing
- ▶ Informal Practice: Savoring Food
- ▶ Informal Practice: Soles of the Feet
- ▶ Core Meditation: Loving-Kindness for Ourselves
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassionate Movement
- ▶ Core Meditation: Giving and Receiving Compassion
- ▶ Informal Practice: (optional) Compassionate Walking
- ▶ Exercise: Coming Out of Silence
- ▶ Group Discussion



HOME PRACTICE

We recommend that MSC participants practice mindfulness and/or self-compassion at least 30 minutes per day, formal and informal practice combined. The purpose is to develop the habit of self-compassion. Here are some tips for maintaining a practice:

- ▶ Make your practice as easy and pleasant as possible—self-reinforcing.
- ▶ Start small—short practices can make a big difference.
- ▶ Practice during daily life, when you need it the most.
- ▶ Be compassionate when your practice lapses, and just start again.
- ▶ Let go of any unnecessary effort.
- ▶ Pick a consistent time to practice each day.
- ▶ Identify obstacles to practice and envision your way around them.
- ▶ Use guided meditations, read books, journal.
- ▶ Stay connected—practice in community.
- ▶ Below is a schedule of the new practices that are learned each session.
- ▶ Please try these practices during the following week and discover how they work for you. Continue to use the practices that you like the most.

HOME PRACTICES

Session 1: Discovering Mindful Self-Compassion

- ▶ Informal Practice: Soothing Touch
- ▶ Informal Practice: Self-Compassion Break

Session 2: Practicing Mindfulness

- ▶ Core Meditation: Affectionate Breathing
- ▶ Informal Practice: Soles of the Feet
- ▶ Informal Practice: Mindfulness in Daily Life
- ▶ Informal Practice: Self-Compassion in Daily Life
- ▶ Informal Practice (optional): Here-and-Now Stone

Session 3: Practicing Loving-Kindness

- ▶ Meditation: Loving-Kindness for a Loved One
- ▶ Informal Practice: Finding Loving-Kindness Phrases

Session 4: Discovering Your Compassionate Voice

- ▶ Core Meditation: Loving-Kindness for Ourselves
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassionate Letter to Myself

Session 5: Living Deeply

- ▶ Core Meditation: Giving and Receiving Compassion
- ▶ Informal Practice: Living with a Vow
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassionate Listening

Retreat

- ▶ Meditation: Compassionate Body Scan
- ▶ Informal Practice: Sense and Savor Walk
- ▶ Informal Practice: Savoring Food
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassionate Movement
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassionate Walking (optional)

Session 6: Meeting Difficult Emotions

- ▶ Informal Practice: Working with Difficult Emotions
- ▶ Informal Practice: Working with Shame (optional)

Session 7: Exploring Challenging Relationships

- ▶ Meditation: Compassionate Friend
- ▶ Informal Practice: Self-Compassion Break
- ▶ Informal Practice: Compassion with Equanimity

Session 8: Embracing Your Life

- ▶ Meditation: Compassion for Self and Others
- ▶ Informal Practice: Gratitude for Small Things
- ▶ Informal Practice: Appreciating our Good Qualities



WHAT WORKS FOR ME?

The MSC program contains 3 core meditations, 4 other meditations, and 20 informal practices that can be used to strengthen the habit of responding mindfully and compassionately to emotional distress. After you complete the program, please check the practices that appealed to you the most.

Core Meditations

1. Affectionate Breathing _____
2. Loving-Kindness for Ourselves _____
3. Giving and Receiving Compassion _____

Other Meditations

1. Loving-Kindness for a Loved One _____
2. Compassionate Body Scan _____
3. Compassionate Friend _____
4. Compassion for Self and Others _____

Informal Practices

1. Soothing Touch _____
2. Self-Compassion Break _____
3. Soles of the Feet _____
4. Mindfulness in Daily Life _____
5. Self-Compassion in Daily Life _____
6. Here-and-Now Stone (optional) _____
7. Finding Loving-Kindness Phrases _____
8. Compassionate Letter to Myself _____
9. Living with a Vow _____
10. Compassionate Listening _____
11. Sense and Savor Walk _____
12. Savoring Food _____
13. Compassionate Movement _____
14. Compassionate Walking (optional) _____
15. Working with Difficult Emotions _____
16. Working with Shame (optional) _____
17. Self-Compassion Break in Relationships _____
18. Compassion with Equanimity _____
19. Gratitude for Small Things _____
20. Appreciating our Good Qualities _____



What Is Backdraft?

Backdraft refers to “distress that arises when we give ourselves compassion.” The experience of backdraft can be confusing for some practitioners but it is a key part of the transformation process. It helps to understand the nature of backdraft and to know how to respond to it.

“Backdraft” 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. That’s 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.

There is another metaphor for this process – warming up ice-cold hands. When our hands are numb from being out in cold and then they begin to warm up, we may experience pain for a short time. Numbness is also what we may feel toward old pains in our lives until we warm up our awareness with self-compassion.

How Do We Recognize Backdraft?

Backdraft can show up as any type of emotional, mental, or physical uneasiness.

For example:

- ▶ Emotionally – shame, grief, fear, sadness
- ▶ Mentally – “I’m all alone.” “I’m a failure.” “I’m unworthy.”
- ▶ Physically – body memories, aches, pains

Often uneasiness appears out of nowhere and we may not understand why it’s happening. Sadness may appear while meditating, or perhaps a sense of vulnerability. Secondary reactions may also arise when we struggle not to feel backdraft. For example, we might go into our heads (intellectualize), become nervous, withdraw, space-out, or criticize ourselves and others. All these reactions are quite natural and can also be met with kindness and compassion.



What Can We Do About Backdraft?

Below is a summary of approaches to backdraft that you will learn in MSC. However, please remember that you are the foremost expert on your life and what you need. You can begin by asking yourself “What do I need right now? “What do I need to feel safe?” Then, depending on what feels right to you, you may consider a few strategies in the following sequence:

1. Allow backdraft to percolate in the background of their awareness and see if it dissipates on its own.
2. Slightly reduce whatever practices you are doing if backdraft remains strong, and see what happens.
3. If backdraft remains too distressing, then practice mindfulness to regulate emotions
4. When all else fails, anchor your awareness in ordinary activities—doing normal things you enjoy.

Practice mindfulness to regulate attention:

- ▶ Label the experience as backdraft – “Oh, this is ‘backdraft’” — as you might for a dear friend.
- ▶ Name your strongest emotion and validate it for yourself in a compassionate voice (“Ah, that’s grief”).
- ▶ Explore where the emotion physically resides in your body, perhaps as tension in your stomach or hollowness in your heart, and offer yourself soothing or supportive touch.
- ▶ Redirect your attention to a neutral focus inside your body (e.g., the breath), or a sensation at the boundary of the body (e.g., sensations in the soles of your feet while walking), or a sense object in the outside world (e.g., ambient sounds). The further from your body you go, the easier it will be.

Anchor awareness in ordinary activities:

- ▶ You may feel the need to anchor your awareness in an everyday activity, such as washing the dishes, going for a walk, showering, cycling. If you happen to find the activity pleasant or rewarding for your senses (smell, taste, touch, sound, vision), allow yourself to savor it - mindfulness in daily life.
- ▶ Or you may feel the need to comfort, soothe or support yourself in a practical, behavioral way, such as by having a cup of tea, a warm bath, listening to music, or calling a friend - self-compassion in daily life.
- ▶ If you need further assistance, please make use of your personal contacts (friends, family, therapists, teachers) to get what you need.



MSC WEEKLY FEEDBACK

Dear Participant,

To help teachers be more responsive to your needs during the course, kindly reflect on the following questions and share as much or as little as you like. Writing down your experience is also likely to facilitate your learning and reinforce what you've already learned.

Many thanks!

Your Experience

Please describe any moments in your MSC practice that you found particularly noteworthy – surprising, challenging, uplifting, confusing, or deepening.

The Practices

What formal or informal practices are you working with right now? Have you found any to be particularly helpful or unhelpful so far?

The Course

How is the MSC course unfolding for you? Is there anything that would be helpful for your teacher(s) to know?

As a graduate of MSC, you are part of a growing worldwide community. Welcome!

The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, a non-profit organization founded by MSC Co-Creators Chris Germer and Kristin Neff, is dedicated to supporting your practice in a variety of tangible ways that are listed below.

We would also like to cordially invite you to join the global MSC community by visiting our website at

www.centerformsc.org/join-us

The website includes:

- ▶ Freely available audio and video recordings by Chris Germer, Kristin Neff, and other senior MSC teachers
- ▶ Resources for supporting continuing practice
- ▶ Online offerings for continuing study and ongoing support and community-building
- ▶ A searchable database of teachers and programs worldwide
- ▶ Information on how to become a teacher of MSC
- ▶ Links to financially support our non-profit organization

Further study opportunities

- ▶ **Mindful Self-Compassion Teacher Training** - Year round, global, multiple languages

CMSC supports prospective teachers in every step of their journey to becoming a Trained or Certified Teacher. Visit the CMSC website to learn more.

<https://centerformsc.org/teach-msc-2/>

- ▶ **Mindful Self-Compassion Silent Retreats** - Year round, global, multiple languages

In order to meet the growing demand for silent retreats from amongst our graduates, CMSC sponsors silent retreats in a variety of locations around the world. These retreats will also fulfill the silent meditation retreat requirement for those interested in training to teach MSC.

www.centerformsc.org/course/category/silent-retreats-offered-by-msc-teachers/

- ▶ **MSC Circles of Practice (CoP)** - Weekly online, drop-in practice group (Donation based)

Available to all MSC graduates. Each online session is an hour long and consists of an MSC practice and optional sharing about the direct experiences arising from the practice. MSC practice in an easily accessible space online, on a weekly basis, and within a supportive, international community.

<https://centerformsc.org/msc-circle-of-practice/>

- ▶ **Live Online MSC (LOMSC)** - Online, ongoing, 10 weeks

LOMSC is ideal for those people who do not have access to MSC in their area, who have commitments or mobility issues that make it difficult to leave home to do a course, or who have already done MSC and would like a refresher.

<https://centerformsc.org/lomsc/>

- ▶ **MSC Community for Deepening Practice (CDP)** - online community experience, 8 months, English

Inspired to explore MSC more deeply over the long term with a consistent community of other graduates across the globe? The community of 20 people meets online together once a week for 2 hours to slowly re-explore MSC. The course can be done within the framework of a busy life.

<https://centerformsc.org/msc-community-for-deepening-practice/>

