

The Science of Self-Compassion

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What is 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, supporting and protecting oneself
 - Desire to alleviate suffering (any pain or emotional discomfort – large or small)
- 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

The Yin and Yang of Self-Compassion

- Yin - Tender aspect of self-compassion
 - “Being with” our suffering: comforting, soothing, validating
- Yang - Fierce aspect of self-compassion
 - “Acting in the world”: protecting, providing, and motivating
- We must integrate both yin and yang self-compassion to alleviate suffering

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, perfectionism, shame, body dissatisfaction, disordered eating
- Increases in positive mind-states: Life satisfaction, happiness, self-confidence, body appreciation, immune function

Self-compassion vs. self-esteem (Neff & Vonk, 2009)

- *Self-compassion offers same mental health benefits without pitfalls*
 - Fewer social comparisons
 - Less contingent self-worth
 - No association with narcissism

Common misgivings about self-compassion

- Means weakness
- Is selfish
- Will lead to self-indulgence
- Will undermine motivation

Self-compassion is 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)

Self-compassion is 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)

Self-compassion is linked to healthier behaviors (Terry & Leary, 2011)

- More exercise, more doctor visits, safer sex, less alcohol use

Self-compassion is linked to greater motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012)

- Personal standards just as high, not as upset when don't meet them
- Less fear of failure, more likely to try again and persist in efforts after failure
- More personal responsibility and motivation to repair past mistakes

Physiological underpinnings

- Self-criticism
 - Threat defense system
 - Cortisol and adrenaline
- Self-compassion
 - Mammalian care-giving system
 - Oxytocin and opiates

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)

Compassion Focused Therapy (Paul Gilbert, 2010):

- Less depression, anxiety, shame, dysfunction
- Effective with a variety of clinical populations

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC; Neff & Germer, 2013)

- 8-week workshop (2.5 hours each session) designed to teach self-compassion
- Empirically demonstrated to increase self-compassion, mindfulness, wellbeing
 - All gains maintained for one year
- An empirically supported teen adaptation exists called Making Friends with Yourself
- Developing a brief 6 session (one hour each) version with no meditation

Making Friends with Yourself (MFY): An MSC program for Teens (Bluth et al., 2015)

- Empirically supported adaptation for teens
- Uses more movement, activities like art

References

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- Zessin, U., Dickhäuser, O., & Garbade, S. (2015). The Relationship Between Self-Compassion and Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 7(3), 340-364.

RESOURCES

Websites

Center for Mindful Self-Compassion (For information on MSC 8-week courses and intensives and MSC teacher training): www.CenterForMSC.org

Self-Compassion website (Self-compassion survey, videos, research articles, guided meditations and exercises): www.Self-Compassion.org

Books:

Germer, C. K. & Neff, K. D. (2019). *Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion program: A guide for professionals*. New York: Guilford Press.

Neff, K. D. & Germer, C. K (2018). *The Mindful Self-Compassion workbook: A proven way to accept yourself, find inner strength, and thrive*. New York: Guilford Press.

Neff, K. D. (2011). *Self-Compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself*. New York: William Morrow.

Online Training:

Live Online MSC. 10 week live online course: www.CenterforMSC.org

The Power of Self-Compassion (2017). Neff & Germer: www.soundstrue.com

Audio Training:

Self-Compassion Step by Step (2013). Kristin Neff: www.soundstrue.com

The Yin and Yang of Self-Compassion. 3 hr audio training by Neff: www.soundstrue.com