

Self-Compassion Supplemental Letter-Writing Exercise

What is self-compassion?

1. Mindfulness of your own suffering. *This includes recognizing your own physical pain/illness, stress, difficult emotions, difficult situations, negative thoughts, disappointments, etc., as well as the underlying need or desire – to be healthy, to be happy, to connect with others, to do well or do good, etc.*
2. Common humanity. *Understanding that your suffering does not reveal what it uniquely wrong with you and/or your life, but part of the human condition.*
3. Self-kindness/self-mentoring. *Remembering and honoring your most important values and goals, and encouraging yourself to act on them.*

Exercise in self-compassion:

Bring to mind a recent difficult experience, or some kind of stress or suffering that is present in your life. It could be your willpower challenge, or a setback you've had in reaching a goal.

Write a self-compassion letter to yourself, in the second person, about this experience, using the following guidelines.

You may want to do this exercise after practicing breath focus meditation or compassion imagery.

1. Mindfulness. Allow yourself to remember the situation or think about your stress/suffering. Then acknowledge your feelings or thoughts, as well as what you (were or are) hoping for and needing. E.g., "Dear Kelly, I know that you are feeling [sad/afraid/angry/disappointed in yourself, etc.]. You were really [looking forward to.../trying your best to..., etc.]" Write about both the stress/suffering and the core need underneath it: a desire for health, safety, love, appreciation, connection, achievement, etc.
2. Offer a message of common humanity. [E.g., all humans make mistakes, sometimes fail, get angry, experience disappointment, know loss, etc.]
3. Mentor yourself with some compassionate advice or encouragement. What would you say to a loved one in this situation? Someone you believed in and wanted the best for?

After writing the letter, consider reading it out loud to yourself, or putting it away for some time and bringing it out when you need self-compassion.