Mindful Self-Compassion
Core Skills Training

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## 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.”

“Awareness, of the present moment, with acceptance.”

“Knowing what you are experiencing, *while* you’re experiencing it.”

**jon Kabat-Zinn**

**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.”

“The wish that all sentient beings may be free from suffering, coupled with the wish and effort to alleviate it.”

“Deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and other living beings, coupled with the wish and effort to alleviate it.”

**Dalai Lama**

**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

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
  - 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

**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** (Braun, Park, & Gorin, 2016; 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)

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

**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)

**Linked to motivation**

- Less fear of failure, more likely to try again and persist in efforts after failure (Breines & Chen, 2012)
- More personal responsibility and motivation to repair past mistakes (Leary et al., 2007)

**Linked to health**

- Healthier behaviors (Terry & Leary, 2011)
  - More exercise, safer sex, helps smokers quit, less alcohol use, more doctors visits
Linked to other-focused concern

- Linked to better romantic relationships (Neff & Beretvas, 2013)
  - More caring and supportive relationship behavior (as rated by partners)
  - Less controlling and verbally aggressive
- More forgiveness and perspective taking (Neff & Pommier, 2013)
- More compassion, empathy, altruism for others (Neff & Pommier, 2013)

Self-compassion for caregivers

- Less burnout and “compassion” fatigue (Raab, 2014)
- More satisfaction with care-giving role (Barnard & Curry, 2012)

Family Influences on Self-Compassion

- Attachment security (Wei, Liao, Ku & Shaffer, 2011)
- Parental criticism and conflict in home (Neff & McGehee, 2010)
- History of abuse (Vetesse et al., 2011)

How to Increase Self-Compassion

Mindfulness-Based approaches

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy have all been shown to increase self-compassion (Keng et al., 2012)
- Self-compassion appears to be a key mechanism of program effectiveness (Kuyken et al., 2010)

Compassion Focused Therapy (Gilbert, 2010):

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

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

- 8-week workshop designed to explicitly teach skills of self-compassion
- Uses meditation, informal practice, group discussion and homework exercises
- Randomized clinical trial of MSC with intervention group vs. wait-list control group
- MSC led to significantly greater gains in self-compassion, mindfulness, compassion, life satisfaction, as well as greater reductions in depression, anxiety, stress, emotional avoidance
- All well-being gains maintained for one year
- Degree of formal and informal self-compassion practice both related to gains in self-compassion
  - Days per week spent meditating
  - Hours per day spent in informal practice

Current research directions

- MSC has been adapted for adolescents – “Making Friends with Yourself” (Bluth et al., 2015)
- Developing brief intervention using MSC practices but no meditation
  - Three 90 min sessions or six 45 min sessions
  - Studying teachers and health care workers to see if can improve wellbeing and reduce burnout
References


PATHWAYS AND STAGES

Pathways to Self-Compassion
1. Physical – Caring for your body/non-harm
2. Mental - Allowing your thoughts
3. Emotional - Accepting your feelings
4. Relational – Connecting authentically with others
5. Spiritual - Nurturing your values

Stages of Acceptance
1. Exploring – turning toward discomfort with curiosity
2. Tolerating – safely enduring
3. Allowing – letting feelings come and go
4. Befriending – seeing pain as part of a meaningful life

Stages of Progress
1. Striving – wishing to feel better
2. Disillusionment – when resistance amplifies discomfort
3. True Acceptance – acceptance before change
What Is Backdraft?

Backdraft refers to discomfort that may arise 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 grow 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. A tear can appear while meditating, or a sadness, or 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 agitated, 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 any of the following strategies:

- **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 savour it. Please see the handout, “Mindfulness in Daily Life,” for further instructions.

- 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. Please see the handout, “Self-Compassion in Daily Life,” for additional instructions.

- If you need further assistance, please make use of your personal contacts (friends, family, therapists, teachers) to get what you need.
MEDITATIONS
AFFECTIONATE BREATHING

• Please find a posture in which your body is comfortable and will feel supported for the length of the meditation. Then let your eyes gently close, partially or fully. Taking a few slow, easy breaths, releasing any unnecessary tension in your body.

• If you like, placing a hand over your heart or another soothing place as a reminder that we’re bringing not only awareness, but affectionate awareness, to our breathing and to ourselves. You can leave your hand there or let it rest at anytime.

• Now beginning to notice your breathing in your body, feeling your body breathe in and feeling your body breathe out.

• Just letting your body breathe you. There is nothing you need to do.

• Perhaps noticing how your body is nourished on the in-breath and relaxes with the out-breath.

• Now noticing the rhythm of your breathing, flowing in and flowing out. (pause) Taking some time to feel the natural rhythm of your breathing.

• Feeling your whole body subtly moving with the breath, like the movement of the sea.

• Your mind will naturally wander like a curious child or a little puppy. When that happens, just gently returning to the rhythm of your breathing.

• Allowing your whole body to be gently rocked and caressed – internally caressed - by your breathing.

• If you like, even giving yourself over to your breathing, letting your breathing be all there is. Becoming the breath.

• Just breathing. Being breathing.

• And now, gently releasing your attention to the breath, sitting quietly in your own experience, and allowing yourself to feel whatever you’re feeling and to be just as you are.

• Slowly and gently opening your eyes.
LOVING-KINDNESS FOR OURSELVES

• Please find a comfortable position, sitting or lying down. Letting your eyes close, fully or partially. Taking a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment.

• Putting your hand over your heart, or wherever it is comforting and soothing, as a reminder that you are bringing not only awareness, but loving awareness, to your experience and to yourself.

• After awhile, feeling your breath where you notice it most easily. Feeling your body breathe in and out, and when your attention wanders, noticing the gentle movement of your breath once again.

• Then gently releasing your focus on the breath, or continuing to have a background awareness of your breath as you begin offering yourself words of kindness and compassion, over and over ...words that you need to hear, words you can savor.
  o If you already have phrases that are meaningful to you, please use these.
  o If you are new to meditating with phrases, please open your heart and mind to what you need to hear – words of wisdom and compassion that speak to you in the deepest way.

• Opening your heart to these words, whispering them gently into your own ear, again and again.

• Perhaps hearing the words from the inside, allowing them to resonate within you.

• Allowing the words to take up space, to fill your being, if only for this one moment.
  Whenever you notice that your mind has wandered, refreshing your aim by feeling the sensations in your body. Coming home to your own body. And then feeling the importance of your words. Coming home to kindness.

• Finally, releasing the phrases and resting quietly in your own body.

• Gently opening your eyes.
GIVING AND RECEIVING COMPASSION

Please sit comfortably, closing your eyes, and if you like, putting a hand over your heart or another soothing place as a reminder to bring not just awareness, but loving awareness, to your experience and to yourself.

Savoring the Breath

• Taking a few deep, relaxing breaths, noticing how your breath nourishes your body as you inhale and soothes your body as you exhale.
• Now letting your breathing find its own natural rhythm. Continue feeling the sensation of breathing in and breathing out. If you like, allowing yourself to be gently rocked and caressed by the rhythm of your breathing.

Warming Up Awareness

• Now, focusing your attention on your in-breath, letting yourself savor the sensation of breathing in, noticing how your in-breath nourishes your body, breath after breath….and then releasing your breath.
• As you breathe, breathing in something good for yourself...whatever you need. Perhaps a quality of warmth, kindness, compassion, or love? Just feel it, or you can use a word or image if you like.
• Now, shifting your focus now to your out-breath, feeling your body breathe out, feeling the ease of exhalation.
• Please call to mind someone whom you love or someone who is struggling and needs compassion. Visualize that person clearly in your mind.
• Begin directing your out-breath to this person, offering the ease of breathing out.
• If you wish, intentionally sending warmth and kindness—something good—to this person with each outbreath.

In for Me, Out for You

• Now letting go of what you or the other person may need, and just focusing on the sensation of breathing compassion in and out and sending something good. “In for me and out for you.” “One for me and one for you.”
• If you wish, you can focus a little more on yourself, or the other person, or just let it be an equal flow—whatever feels right in the moment.
• Or you can send something good to more than one person.
• Allowing your breath to flow in and out, like the gentle movement of the ocean - a limitless, boundless flow - flowing in and flowing out. Letting yourself be a part of this limitless, boundless flow. An ocean of compassion.
• Gently opening your eyes.
LOVING-KINDNESS FOR A LOVED ONE

• Allow yourself to settle into a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. If you like, putting a hand over your heart or another location that is soothing as a reminder to bring not only awareness, but loving awareness, to our experience and to ourselves.

• Bringing to mind a person or other living being who naturally makes you smile. This could be a child, a grandparent, your cat or dog—whomever naturally brings happiness to your heart. Letting yourself feel what it’s like to be in that being’s presence. Allowing yourself to enjoy the good company. Create a vivid image of this being in your mind’s eye.

• Now, recognize how much being wishes to be happy and free from suffering, just like you and every other living being. Repeating softly and gently, feeling the importance of your words:
  - May you be happy.
  - May you be peaceful.
  - May you be healthy.
  - May you live with ease.

• You may wish to use your own words to capture your deepest wishes for your loved one, or continue to repeat these phrases.

• When you notice that your mind has wandered, returning to the words and the image of the loved one you have in mind. Savoring any warm feelings that may arise. Taking your time.

• Now, adding yourself to your circle of good will. Creating an image of yourself in the presence of your loved one, visualizing you both together.
  - May you and I (we) be happy.
  - May you and I (we) be peaceful.
  - May you and I (we) be healthy.
  - May you and I (we) live with ease.

• Now, letting go of the image of the other, and letting the full focus of your attention rest directly on yourself. Putting your hand over your heart, or elsewhere, and feeling the warmth and gentle pressure of your hand. Visualizing your whole body in your mind’s eye, noticing any stress or uneasiness that may be lingering within you, and offering yourself the phrases.
  - May I be happy.
  - May I be peaceful.
  - May I be healthy.
  - May I live with ease.

• Finally, taking a few breaths and just resting quietly in your own body, accepting whatever your experience is, exactly as it is.

• Gently opening your eyes.
COMPASSIONATE FRIEND

Please find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. Gently close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body. Put one or two hands over your heart or another soothing place to remind yourself to give yourself loving attention.

Safe Place

Now imagining yourself in a place that is safe and comfortable—as comfortable as possible. It might be a cozy room with the fireplace, or a peaceful beach with a warm sun and a cool breeze, or a forest glade. It could also be an imaginary place, like floating on clouds...anywhere you feel reasonably peaceful and safe. Letting yourself enjoy being in this place. (pause).

Compassionate Friend

Soon you’ll receive a visitor, a warm and compassionate presence—a compassionate friend—who embodies the qualities of wisdom, strength, and unconditional love.

This being may be a spiritual figure; a wise, compassionate teacher; or a person from your past like a grandparent. He or she may have no particular form—perhaps this being is more like light, or a warm presence.

Your compassionate friend cares deeply about you and would like you to be happy and free from unnecessary struggle.

Please allow a being to come to mind.

Arrival

You have a choice to go out from your safe place and meet your compassionate friend, or to invite him or her in. (pause) Please take that opportunity now, if you like

Placing yourself in just the right way in relation to your compassionate friend—whatever feels right. Imagining your compassionate friend in as much detail as possible, especially allowing yourself to feel what it’s like to be in his or her presence. There is nothing you need to do except to experience the moment. (pause).

Meeting

Your compassionate friend is wise and all-knowing, and knows exactly where you are in your life journey. Your friend might want to tell you something, something that is just what you need to hear right now. Please take a moment and listen carefully to what your compassionate friend might have to say. (pause) If no words come, that’s okay, too—just continue to experience the good company. That’s a blessing in itself.

And perhaps you would like to say something to your compassionate friend. Your friend listens deeply, and completely understands you. Is there anything you’d like to share? (pause)

Your friend may also like to leave you with a gift—a material object. The object might simply appear in your hands or you may put out your hands and receive one—something that has special meaning to you. (pause) If something appears, what is it? (pause)

Now taking a few more moments to enjoy your friend’s presence. (pause) And as you continue to enjoy his or her good company, allowing yourself to realize that your friend is actually a part of yourself. (pause) All the compassionate feelings, images, and words that you are experiencing flow from your own inner wisdom and compassion.
Reflection

Finally, when you’re ready, allowing the images to gradually dissolve in your mind’s eye, remembering that compassion and wisdom is always within you, especially when you need them the most. You can call on your compassionate friend anytime you wish.

Settling back into your body and letting yourself savor what just happened, perhaps reflecting on the words you may have heard or the object that may have been given to you. (pause)

And finally letting go of the meditation and allowing yourself to feel whatever you feel and to be exactly as you are.

Gently opening your eyes.

Adapted from Gilbert, 2009
INFORMAL PRACTICES
SOOTHING TOUCH

An easy way to support ourselves when we’re feeling badly is to offer ourselves comforting or soothing touch.

Hand-on-Heart

- When you notice you’re under stress, take 2-3 deep, satisfying breaths.
- Gently place a hand over your heart, simply feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand. If you wish, placing both hands over your heart.
- Feel the natural rising and falling of your chest as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
- Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

Some people feel uneasy putting a hand over the heart. Feel free to explore where on your body a gentle touch is actually soothing. Some other possibilities are:

- Cupping your hand over a fist over your heart
- One hand over your heart and one on your belly
- Two hands on your belly
- One hand on your cheek
- Cradling your face in your hands
- Gently stroking your arms
- Crossing your arms and giving yourself a gentle squeeze
- Gently stroking your chest, back and forth or in small circles
- One hand tenderly holding the other
- Cupping your hands in your lap
SELF-COMPASSION BREAK

When you notice that you’re feeling stress or emotional discomfort, see if you can find the discomfort in your body. Where do you feel it the most? Make contact with the sensations as they arise in your body.

Now, say to yourself, slowly:

1. “This is a moment of suffering”

That’s mindfulness. Other options include:
- This hurts.
- Ouch!
- This is stressful.

2. “Suffering is a part of life”

That’s common humanity. Other options include:
- I’m not alone. Others are just like me.
- We all struggle in our lives
- This is how it feels when a person struggles in this way

Now, put your hands over your heart, or wherever it feels soothing, feeling the warmth and gentle touch of your hands.

Say to yourself:

3. “May I be kind to myself,” or another way of saying this is, “May I give myself what I need.”

See if you can find words for what you need in times like this. Options may include:
- May I accept myself as I am
- May I learn to accept myself as I am
- May I forgive myself
- May I be strong
- May I be patient
- May I live in love

If you’re having difficulty finding the right words, imagine that a dear friend or loved one is having the same problem as you. What would you say to this person? If your friend would leave with just a few words in mind, what would you like those words to be? What message would you like to deliver, heart to heart?

Now see if you can offer the same message to yourself.
SOLES OF THE FEET

This is an effective way to anchor your awareness in the present moment, in body sensation, especially when you’re upset and can’t calm yourself down.

• Stand up and feel the soles of your feet on the floor. Rock forward and back a little, and side to side. Make little circles with your knees, feeling the changes of sensation in the soles of your feet.

• When you notice your mind has wandered, just feeling the soles of your feet again.

• If you wish, you can begin to walk slowly, noticing the changing sensations in the soles of your feet. Noticing the sensation of lifting a foot, stepping forward, and the placing the foot on the floor. Doing the same with both feet as you walk.

• As you walk, perhaps also noticing for a moment how small the surface area of your feet is, and how hard your feet work to keep your body off the ground. See if you can notice that with appreciation or gratitude.

• When you are ready, returning to standing

• Adapted from Singh et al, 2003
MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE

Mindfulness can be practiced every moment of the day—while you brush your teeth, while you walk from the parking garage to work, when you eat your breakfast, or whenever your cell phone rings.

• *Pick an ordinary activity.* You might choose drinking your cup of coffee in the morning, brushing your teeth, or taking a shower. If you wish, select an activity that occurs early in the day before your attention is pulled in many directions.

• *Choose one sensory experience to explore in the activity, such as the sensation of taste as you drink your coffee or the sensation of water touching your body while showering.*

• *Immerse yourself in the experience, savoring it to the fullest. Return your mind to the sensations again and again when you notice it has wandered away.*

• *Bring gentle, friendly awareness to the activity until it has been completed.*
**SELF-COMPASSION IN DAILY LIFE**

The goal of the MSC program is to be mindful and self-compassionate in daily life. That means to (1) know when you’re under stress or suffering (*mindfulness*) and (2) to respond with care and kindness (*self-compassion*). The simplest approach is to discover how you *already* care for yourself, and then remind yourself to do those things when your life becomes difficult.

### Self-Compassion in Daily Life

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
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| PHYSICALLY – soften the body | How do you care for yourself physically (e.g., exercise, massage, warm bath, cup of tea)?  
Can you think of new ways to release the tension and stress that builds up in your body? |
| MENTALLY – reduce agitation | How do you care for your mind, especially when you’re under stress (e.g., meditation, watch a funny movie, read an inspiring book)?  
Is there a new strategy you’d like to try to let your thoughts come and go more easily? |
| EMOTIONALLY – soothe and comfort yourself | How do you care for yourself emotionally (pet the dog, journal, cook)?  
Is there something new you’d like to try? |
| RELATIONALLY – connect with others | How or when do you relate to others that brings you genuine happiness (e.g., meet with friends, send a birthday card, play a game)?  
Is there any way that you’d like to enrich these connections? |
| SPIRITUALLY – commit to your values | What do you do to care for yourself spiritually (pray, walk in the woods, help others)?  
If you’ve been neglecting your spiritual side, is there anything you’d like to remember to do? |
FINDING LOVING-KINDNESS PHRASES

This is a pen and paper exercise rather than an informal practice for use in daily life. The exercise is designed to help you discover loving-kindness and compassion phrases that are deeply meaningful to you. If you already have phrases and wish to continue using them, you can try this exercise as an experiment but please don’t feel you need to find new phrases.

To start, please close your eyes, put a hand over your heart or elsewhere, and feel your body gently breathe.

What Do I Need?

• Take a moment, allowing your heart to gently open. You can imagine your heart opening like a flower in the warm sun – opening to itself.

• Then asking yourself the question, “What do I need? What do I truly need?”

If this need has not been fulfilled in a given day, your day is not complete. Let the answer be a universal human need such as the need to be connected, kind, peaceful, free. Give yourself time to allow one or more words to arise naturally within you.

• When you are ready, please open your eyes and write down what you, as a person, really need.

• If you wish, you can translate your needs into wishes for yourself, such as,
  
  o “May I feel connected to others”
  o “May I be kind to myself”
  o “May I live in peace”
  o “May I be free”

  Or you can use the word or words just as they arose in your mind

What Do I Long to Hear?

• Now, closing your eyes again and asking yourself these questions:

  “What do I long to hear from others?”

  “What words do I long to hear spoken to me because, as a person, I really need to hear words like this?”

  “If I could, what words would I like to have whispered into my ear every day for the rest of my life -- words that would fill me with gratitude every time I hear them? Inside I would feel, ‘Oh, thank you...thank you...thank you’”

Open the door of your heart and wait for words to come. Have courage. Listen.

• Now gently open your eyes again and take a moment to write down what you heard.

  If you heard a lot of words, see if you can make the words into a short phrase—a message to yourself.

• Words that we long to hear from others are often qualities that we wish to actualize in our own lives, or attitudes that we wish to know for sure. They are subtle wishes for ourselves. For
FINDING LOVING-KINDNESS PHRASES

example, longing to hear “I love you” means that we wish to know that we are lovable.

You can keep your phrases just as you wrote them down, with an implicit wish behind them, or you can shape them into an explicit wish for yourself.

For example:
- “I love you” can become the wish, “May I love myself just as I am.”
- “I’m here for you” can become the wish, “May I be there for myself,” or “May I be strong.”
- “You’re a good person” can become the wish, “May I know my own goodness.”

You can offer yourself what you long to hear from others.

- Now, take a little time to review what you have written, and settle on 2-4 words or phrases that you would enjoy hearing again and again. These are gifts to yourself, words that make you feel grateful when you receive them.

- Finally, close our eyes for a last time. Begin saying your phrases over and over, slowly and gently, whispering them into your own ear as if into the ear of a loved one. (5 minutes)

- Gently open your eyes.

Please consider this exercise to be only the beginning of a search for phrases that are just right for you. Finding phrases is a soulful journey, a poetic journey. Hopefully you will find yourself returning to this process (“What do I need?” What do I long to hear?”) as you practice loving-kindness meditation.
Everybody has something about themselves they don’t like; something that causes them to feel shame, insecure, or not “good enough” (i.e., an unhealthy habit, a physical attribute, or a way of relating to others). When you notice that you are being unnecessarily critical toward yourself, the following exercise can help to cultivate a more compassionate, encouraging voice.

**From a Friend to Yourself**

- Think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally wise, loving and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and weaknesses, including what you don’t like about yourself. This friend recognizes the limits of human nature, and is kind, accepting, and forgiving.

- Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend, focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for. What would this friend say to you from the perspective of unlimited compassion? And if you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, how might these suggestions embody feelings of care, encouragement, and support?

- After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back to it and read it again, really letting the words sink in. Feel the compassion as it pours into you, soothing and comforting you. Love, connection and acceptance are your birthright. To claim them you need only look within yourself.

**From Yourself to a Friend**

- Write a letter as if you were talking to a dearly loved friend who was struggling with the same concern that you are. What words of compassion and support would you offer? Then go back and read the letter, applying the words to yourself.

**From Your Compassionate Self to Yourself**

- Write a letter from the perspective of your own compassionate self. This part of you would like to help you because he or she cares deeply about you. The intention behind your compassionate self is “I love you and I don’t want you to suffer.” Put the letter away and read it to yourself later on.
SENSE AND SAVOR WALK

• The goal of the walk is to notice as many pleasurable things as possible, slowly, one after another. Using all your senses—sight, smell, sound, touch... maybe even taste.

• How many happy, beautiful, or inspiring things can you notice while you’re walking? Do you enjoy the fresh air, the warm sun, a beautiful leaf, the shape of a stone, a smiling face, the song of a bird, the feeling of the earth under your feet?

• When you find something delightful or pleasant, let yourself go into it. Really enjoy it. Feel a tender leaf or the texture of a stick, if you like. Give yourself over to the experience as if it were the only think that existed in the world. And when you are ready to discover something new, let it go and wait until you discover something else that is pleasurable and delightful to you.

• Be like a honeybee going from one flower full of nectar to another. When you are full with one, go to another.

• Take your time and enjoy!

Adapted from Bryant & Veroff, 2007
COMPASSIONATE WALKING

• Stand still for a moment and anchor your attention in your body. Be aware of yourself in the standing posture. Feel your body.

• Recall that every living being wants to live peacefully and happily. Connecting with that deep wish: “Just as all beings wish to be happy and free from suffering, may I be happy and free from suffering.”

• Beginning to walk, noting yourself moving through space in the upright position. Feeling the sensations of your body, perhaps noting the sensations in the soles of your feet or the wind in your face. Keeping a soft gaze and walking at a normal pace.

• After walking for a few minutes, repeating the loving-kindness phrases to yourself:

  May I be happy and free from suffering

• The phrases will keep your attention anchored in your body and start to evoke the attitude of loving-kindness. Try synchronizing the phrases with each step or with each breath. It may help to shorten the phrases to a single word: “safe, happy, healthy, ease” or “love, love, love, love.”

• When your mind wanders, gently returning to the phrases. If you find yourself hastening to your destination, slowing down and refocusing on your purpose.

• Doing this with kindness, especially a feeling of gratitude toward your feet for supporting your entire body. Appreciating the marvel of walking.

• After a few minutes, expanding loving-kindness to others. When someone catches your attention, saying to yourself:

  May you be happy and free from suffering

• You may also say “May we be happy and free from suffering...” or just “safe...happy... healthy...ease” or “love...love... love...love.” Don’t try to include everyone; just do it one person at a time, keeping the attitude of loving-kindness alive.

• Eventually including all forms of life in the circle of your loving-kindness, e.g., dogs, birds, insects, and plants.

• Allowing yourself to receive any expressions of kindness that may come your way.

• At the end of the walking period, standing still for a moment and repeating “May all beings be happy and free from suffering” before you go on to your next activity.
COMPASSIONATE MOVEMENT

• Anchoring
  Please stand up and feel the soles of your feet on the floor. Rocking forward and backward a little, and side to side. Making little circles with your knees, feeling the changes of sensation in the soles of your feet. Anchoring your awareness in your feet.

• Opening
  Now opening your field of awareness and scanning your whole body for other sensations, noticing any areas of ease as well as areas of tension.

• Responding Compassionately
  Focusing for a moment on places of discomfort.
  Gradually begin to move your body in a way that feels really good to you—giving yourself compassion. For example, letting yourself gently twist your shoulders, rolling your head, turning at the waist, dropping into a forward bend...whatever feels just right for you right now.
  Giving your body the movement it needs. As poet Mary Oliver said, “You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.”

• Stillness
  Finally, coming to stillness, standing again and feeling your body, noting any changes.
COMPASSIONATE LISTENING

When you are engaged in conversation and would like to listen more attentively and feel more compassion, try practicing Giving and Receiving Compassion. You can continue the conversation and, in the background, feel the movement of your breath in your body. This practice allows us to disentangle from strong emotions and stay connected and emotionally attuned.

• Feel your breathing and, with every out-breath, send comfort and soothing to the other person. Wait for each out-breath to return again, sending comfort and soothing each time. (Do this for 5-6 breaths.)

• Now shift your attention to your in-breath. Breathe in care and comfort for yourself. Waiting for each in-breath, feel your body inhale, and enjoy the comfort that comes with breathing in. (5-6 breaths.)

• Now feel your body breathe both in and out—breathing in for yourself and out for the other. “In for me, out for you.” “One for me, one for you.”

• If you like, you can let a word ride on each inbreath and outbreath, such as “compassion.” “warmth,” “comfort,” “tenderness,” or “love.” Or you can imagine inhaling and exhaling warmth or light. Continue inhaling something good for yourself and exhaling something good for the other.

• If you find that you, or the other person, needs extra compassion, focus again on the in- or out-breath, as needed.

• Gently open your eyes.
There are 3 components to this exercise: (1) labeling emotions, (2) mindfulness of emotion in the body, and (3) soften-soothe-allow. This exercise is presented below as a meditative practice to develop familiarity with the components. However, it is an informal practice that is designed to be applied on-the-spot in daily life rather than as a meditation, and the individual components can be practiced individually or in combination.

- Place your hand on your heart, or another soothing place, for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and that you, too, are worthy of kindness.
- Let yourself recall a mild to moderately difficult situation that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, or a loved one in pain. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem—choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it.
- Clearly visualize the situation. Who was there? What was said? What happened?

**Labeling Emotions**

- Now that you’re thinking about this situation, seeing if you can name the different emotions that arise within you:
  - Anger?
  - Sadness?
  - Grief?
  - Confusion?
  - Fear?
  - Longing?
  - Despair?
  - Shame?
- Now seeing if you can name the *strongest* emotion—a difficult emotion—associated with that situation.
- Repeating the name of the emotion to yourself in a gentle, understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what he or she is feeling: “That’s longing.” “That’s grief.”

**Mindfulness of Emotion in the Body**

- Now expanding your awareness to your body as a whole.
- Recalling the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it most easily. In your mind’s eye, sweeping your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.
- Now please choose a *single location in your body* where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension, an achy feeling, or a heartache.
**SOFTEN-SOOTHE-ALLOW**

- In your mind, inclining gently toward that spot.

  **Soften-Soothe-Allow**

- Now, **softening** into that location in your body. Letting the muscles soften, letting them relax, as if in warm water. Softening...softening...softening... Remember that we’re not trying to change the feeling—we’re just holding it in a tender way.

- If you wish, just softening a little around the edges.

- Now, **soothing** yourself because of this difficult situation.

- If you wish, placing your hand over the part of your body that feels uncomfortable and just feeling the warmth and gentle touch of your hand. Perhaps imagining warmth and kindness flowing through your hand into your body. Maybe even thinking of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. Soothing...soothing...soothing.

- And are there some comforting words that you might need to hear? If so, imagine you had a friend who was struggling in the same way. What would you say to your friend? (“I’m so sorry you feel this way.” “I care deeply about you.”)

- Can you offer yourself a similar message? (“Oh, it’s so hard to feel this.” “May I be kind to myself.”)

- If you need, feel free to open your eyes whenever you wish, or let go of the exercise and just feel your breath.

- Finally, **allowing** the discomfort to be there. Making room for it, releasing the need to make it go away.

- And allowing **yourself** to be just as you are, just like this, if only for this moment.

- Softening...soothing...allowing. Softening...soothing...allowing.

- Now letting go of the practice and allowing yourself to be exactly as you are in this moment.
COMPASSION WITH EUANIMITY

This exercise is intended for use in actual caregiving situations. It is a way of being compassionate with ourselves while maintaining connection to others. It combines the Giving and Receiving Compassion meditation with phrases that cultivate equanimity. Equanimity is balanced awareness in the midst of pleasant or unpleasant emotions.

Please find a comfortable position and take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment. You might like to put your hand over your heart, or wherever it is comforting and soothing, as a reminder to bring affectionate awareness to your experience and to yourself.

Bring to mind someone you are caring for who is exhausting you or frustrating you—someone whom you care about who is suffering. Visualize the person and the caregiving situation clearly in your mind, and feel the struggle in your own body.

Now please listen carefully to these words, letting them gently roll through your mind:

Everyone is on his or her own life journey.
I am not the cause of this person’s suffering,
nor is it entirely within my power to make it go away,
even if I wish I could
Moments like this are difficult to bear,
yet I may still try to help if I can.

Aware of the stress you are carrying in your body, inhaling fully and deeply, drawing compassion inside your body and filling every cell of your body with compassion. Letting yourself be soothed by inhaling deeply, and by giving yourself the compassion you need.

As you exhale, sending out compassion to the person who is associated with your discomfort, or to others in general.

Continue breathing compassion in and out, allowing your body to gradually find a natural breathing rhythm—letting your body breathe itself.

“One for me, one for you.” “In for me, out for you.”

Occasionally scanning your inner landscape for any distress and responding by inhaling compassion for yourself and exhaling compassion for others.

If you find that anyone needs extra compassion, directing your breath in that direction.

Noticing how your body is caressed from the inside as you breathe.

Letting yourself float on an ocean of compassion—a limitless ocean that embraces all suffering.
And listening to these words once again:

Everyone is on his or her own life journey.
I am not the cause of this person’s suffering,
nor is it entirely within my power to make it go away,
even if I wish I could
Moments like this are difficult to bear,
yet I may still try to help if I can.

Now letting go of the practice and allowing yourself to be exactly as you are in this moment.

Gently open your eyes.
RESOURCES

Weblinks

Center for Mindful Self-Compassion
www.CenterForMSC.org

University of California, San Diego
Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute
http://mbpti.org/msc-mindful-self-compassion-teacher-training

Kristin Neff
www.Self-Compassion.org

Chris Germer
www.MindfulSelfCompassion.org

Books and Audio:


Poems

John Austin: *Awareness*

Naomi Shihab Nye: *Kindness*

Mary Oliver: *The Journey*

Danna Faulds: *Allow*

Derek Walcott: *Love after Love*
Videos

*Moments:*  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNVPaINZD_I

*The Fly:*  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSsAEWkmBFU

*Twin Boys Talking:*  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JmA2ClUvUY

*Empathy Fatigue:*  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khjPsVG-6QA