

## WELLNESS CHAMPIONS

# How to Practice Self-compassion

**Self-compassion is the ongoing practice of relating to yourself kindly and fairly. It is especially helpful during times of stress and suffering.** Practicing self-compassion increases well-being and resilience to stress and trauma. It has also been linked to healthier behaviors (like more exercise and less substance use), greater motivation, confidence, and sense of personal responsibility.

It also improves our pro-social or supportive relationship behaviors.

## The Three Elements of Self-compassion

Dr. Kristin Neff and colleagues have identified three elements of self-compassion. Though each element can be practiced individually, self-compassion includes a combination of mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness.

Mindfulness	Self-kindness	Common Humanity
<p><b>What it is:</b> Being aware of the physical, emotional, or mental pain of the moment.</p>	<p><b>What it is:</b> Treating ourselves with kindness, considering our own needs.</p>	<p><b>What it is:</b> Remembering that these experiences are normal and part of being human.</p>
<p><b>Why it works:</b> The act of putting feelings into words sends soothing neurotransmitters to the limbic system.</p>	<p><b>Why it works:</b> Reduces stress hormones, like cortisol, and increases oxytocin, which helps us feel calm and safe.</p>	<p><b>Why it works:</b> Builds connection with others, bringing depth to emotion and fostering compassion.</p>
<p><b>How to do it:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scan the body for pain or tension</li> <li>2. Label the emotion (e.g., anger, sadness, shame)</li> <li>3. Articulate the feeling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I’m tense”</li> <li>• “I’m activated”</li> <li>• “This is painful.”</li> <li>• “This is heavy.”</li> <li>• “This feels so big right now.”</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p><b>How to do it:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take a few deep breaths</li> <li>2. Adjust the body for comfort</li> <li>3. Stretch or move gently</li> <li>4. Take a soothing action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer yourself a warm touch—place a hand on the part that hurts, a hug, massage, belly breathing, etc.</li> <li>• Say words of affirmation, “I am doing my best.” “I don’t know the answer, but I can sit here and breathe.”</li> <li>• Have a cup of tea or coffee, a good meal, a glass of water, etc.</li> <li>• Say no; ask for help.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p><b>How to do it:</b></p> <p>Acknowledge that you are not alone in your experience with phrases like these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I’m not alone in feeling this way.”</li> <li>• “Others get stuck sometimes.”</li> <li>• “This is part of being human.”</li> <li>• “I’m human too; I’m not perfect.”</li> <li>• “Life isn’t perfect.”</li> </ul>

Adapted from “What is self-compassion.” Available at <https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/>

## Five Facilitation Tips for Teams

1. **Talk about it.** Bring up the topic before problem-solving or debriefing. Share some of the facts and mention the myths below.

Myths	What the research <sup>1</sup> suggests:
Self-compassion is a form of self-pity.	Self-compassionate people tend to brood less about their misfortune. <sup>2</sup>
Self-compassion means weakness.	"Self-compassion is one of the most powerful sources of coping and resilience available to us. When we go through major life crises, self-compassion appears to make all the difference in our ability to survive and even thrive." <sup>1</sup>
Self-compassion will make me complacent.	Self-compassion strengthens personal accountability. <sup>3</sup>
Self-compassion is narcissistic.	"Self-compassionate people are better able to remain emotionally stable, regardless of others." <sup>4</sup>
Self-compassion is selfish.	"Self-compassion helps people sustain the act of caring for others." <sup>1</sup>

2. **Encourage each other.** Build a supportive culture by reminding each other to respond to ourselves with compassion. ("What would you say to someone else if they were in this situation?")
3. **Recognize acts of self-kindness** when checking in with teams or individuals. ("I'm so glad to hear that you are taking time to recover on your days off.")
4. **Incorporate this skill** with other exercises from the Wellness Champions toolkit, like [check-in questions](#) and the [positive psychology](#) tools.
5. **Get creative!** Use an audio guide in a meeting. Invite the Resiliency Center to facilitate a "self-compassion break" during a huddle or meeting. Put up the quick guide companion to this article in common areas.

### References

1. *The Five Myths of Self-compassion* (2015).
2. *Rumination and Worry as Mediators of the Relationship Between Self-compassion and Depression and Anxiety* (2010).
3. *Self-Compassion Increases Self-Improvement Motivation* (2012).
4. *Self-compassion and Reactions to Unpleasant Self-Relevant Events: The Implications of Treating Oneself Kindly* (2007).
5. *Self-compassion as a Prospective Predictor of PTSD Symptom Severity Among Trauma-Exposed U.S. Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans* (2015).

Find the complete step-by-step guide online at: [accelerate.uofuhealth.utah.edu/explore/wellness](https://accelerate.uofuhealth.utah.edu/explore/wellness)