

Fierce Self-Compassion Kristin Neff

What is Self-Compassion?

- The three components of self-compassion (Neff, 2003b)
- Mindfulness vs. Over-identification
 - Allows us to “be” with painful feelings as they are
 - Avoids extremes of suppressing or running away with painful feelings
- Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment:
 - Treating self with care and understanding rather than harsh judgment
 - Desire to alleviate suffering
- Common humanity vs. Isolation
 - Seeing own experience as part of larger human experience not isolating or abnormal
 - Recognizing that life is imperfect (us too!)
 - All suffering is not the same, but all human suffering is worthy of compassion

Two Faces of Self-Compassion

- Tender Self-Compassion
 - Nurturing aspect of self-compassion
 - Being “with” ourselves in a compassionate way
 - Allows us to heal
- Fierce Self-Compassion
 - Powerful dimension of self-compassion
 - “Acting in the world” in a compassionate way—*protecting, providing, and motivating*
 - Taking action to alleviate suffering

Tender Self-Compassion

- Kindness: Comforting and soothing ourselves
- Common humanity: Reassuring ourselves we aren't alone
- Mindfulness: Being present with and validating our pain
- Feels like loving, connected presence

Fierce Self-Compassion: Protecting

- Kindness: Bravely protect ourselves, draw boundaries
- Common humanity: Finding strength in numbers
- Mindfulness: Clearly seeing and speaking the truth
- Feels like brave, empowered clarity

Balance

- Tender and fierce self-compassion must be balanced and integrated for wellbeing
- Tenderness without fierceness leads to complacency
- Fierceness without tenderness leads to hostility and over-striving

Self-Compassion and Gender Socialization

- Men socialized to be fierce but not tender
 - Empowers men
 - Can lead to aggression
 - Stands in the way of emotional healing
- Women socialized to be tender but not fierce
 - Disempowers women
 - Can lead to discomfort with anger
 - Less self-compassion
- Self-compassion is a radical act of authenticity that transcends gender-role socialization

Balance of Fierce and Tender Compassion Helps Anger be Constructive

Destructive Anger

- Seeks to retaliate or harm
- Focus is personal
- Reactive and does not see clearly
- Comes from fear

Constructive Anger

- Seeks to prevent harm
- Focus is on the situation
- Non-reactive and sees clearly
- Comes from love

Challenges in drawing boundaries

- We feel it's selfish to say no
- We're afraid of others' reactions
- We want others to like us
- We want to help others
- We're valued for helping others
- We devalue our own needs and desires
- We lack power or privilege

General principles in drawing self-compassionate boundaries

- Your wants and needs count
- Your worth is not dependent on others' approval
- Is this your responsibility?
- Communicate in a way that causes the least harm
- Call on your inner wisdom
 - It's okay to not draw a boundary if it's unsafe
 - Pick your battles but know what you deserve
- Use tender self-compassion to accept what you can't change

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](http://www.Self-Compassion.org)

Reading:

Chemaly, S. (2018). *Rage becomes her*. Simon and Schuster.

Germer, C. K., & Neff, K. D. (2015). Cultivating self-compassion in trauma survivors. In V. M. Follette, J. Briere, D. Rozelle, J. W. Hopper, D. I. Rome, V. M. Follette, ... D. I. Rome (Eds.) , *Mindfulness-oriented interventions for trauma: Integrating contemplative practices* (pp. 43-58). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press. [PDF](#)

Levine, Peter A. (2008). *Healing Trauma: A Pioneering Program for Restoring The Wisdom of Your Body*. Sounds True

Levine, Peter A. (1997). *Walking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*. North Atlantic Books.

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.

Neff, K. D. (2021). *Fierce Self-Compassion: How Women Can Harness Kindness to Speak Up, Claim Their Power and Thrive*. Harper Wave/Penguin.

Schwartz, Richard. (2021). *No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model*. Sounds True.

Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York.

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Online offerings by CMSC (www.CenterforMSC.org)

- Live Online MSC (10 week live online self-compassion course)
- Self-Compassion for Healthcare Communities (6 week brief self-compassion training for healthcare professionals)
- Self-Compassion in Psychotherapy (30 week certificate program for clinicians to integrate self-compassion into therapy)
- Circles of Practice: Free live guided meditations
- Facebook self-compassion discussion group:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/mscfcgroup/>

Recorded Trainings:

[Introduction to Self-Compassion \(2020\). 3 hour video training](#)

[Self-Compassion Step by Step \(2013\). 6 hour audio training](#)

[The Yin and Yang of Self-Compassion. 3 hr audio training](#)

How to find a self-compassion-based therapist:

Any therapist who practices "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)" or "Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)" or "Internal Family Systems (IFS)" likely will be versed in self-compassionate approaches to counseling. You can do a google search in your area or search on Psychology Today and read therapist descriptions to see what resonates with you. Sometimes the exact phrase "self-compassion" will not be used, but you will find someone with an approach that feels right for you.

Finally, it might help to look for Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) teachers in your area (city and/or state). Some MSC teachers are therapists or else may know local therapists who specialize in self-compassion. You can search here:
<https://centerformsc.org/course-teachers-list/>