



SELF-COMPASSION BREAK FOR ADULTS

"This is a moment of suffering. Suffering is part of life. May I be kind to myself in this moment. May I give myself the compassion I need."

—Kristin Neff

OVERVIEW

Take a short break to acknowledge your stress, feel less isolated, and offer yourself kind words.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the year
- At least once per week as an initial goal
- Before class begins, during prep time, during lunch, at the end of a work day
- When you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed
- Before a staff meeting

TIME REQUIRED

- 5 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult
- College

MATERIALS

- A quiet place to practice

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

You will:

- Practice comforting and soothing yourself when you experience stress

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- What sorts of challenges are you facing right now, either personally or professionally? How do you typically speak to yourself when you are under stress?
- How do you tend to comfort and soothe yourself?
- If you are leading a self-compassion break with a group, consider how the participants might respond. How can you prepare yourself to model and experience a calm, self-accepting presence?

INSTRUCTIONS

- Whether alone or leading a group, engage in a brief mindfulness practice before beginning this activity—or take a few deep breaths.
- Settle into a quiet mental space for reflection.
- If leading a group, remind participants that they are encouraged but not required to participate. (Students or staff are welcome to sit quietly if they choose not to participate.)
- Invite participants to close their eyes or to keep their eyes softly focused on their feet or on the floor.
- Think of a situation in your life that is difficult and is causing you stress.
- As you bring this situation into your mind, see if you can actually feel the stress in your body.
- Now say to yourself, “This is a moment of suffering.” When you say this, it is a form of mindfulness—of simply noticing what is going on for you in the present moment, without judging that experience as good or bad. You can also say to yourself, “This hurts,” or, “This is stress.” Use whatever statement feels most natural to you.
- Next, say to yourself, “Suffering is a part of life.” This is a recognition of your common humanity with others—that all people have trying experiences, and these experiences give you something in common with the rest of humanity rather than mark you as abnormal or “not okay.” Other options for this statement include “Other people feel this way,” “I’m not alone,” or “We all struggle in our lives.”
- Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch on your chest, and say, “May I be kind to myself.” This is a way to express self-kindness. You can also consider whether there is another specific phrase that would speak to you in that particular situation. Some examples:

“May I give myself the compassion that I need,” “May I accept myself as I am,” “May I learn to accept myself as I am,” “May I forgive myself,” “May I be strong,” and “May I be patient.”

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What does it feel like to soothe yourself in this way? Do you notice any resistance in your own body as you engage in this activity?
- Consider the three components of the self-compassion break. Which components were most powerful or meaningful in your experience? Mindfulness (“This is a moment of suffering.”)? Common humanity (“I am not alone in my suffering.”)? Self-Kindness (physical touch; “May I be kind to myself.”)?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Participants in an eight-week Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) [program](#), which included practicing the self-compassion break, reported feeling greater self-compassion, mindfulness, and life satisfaction at the end of the program when compared to a control group.

Studies indicate that self-compassion practices are a form of [self-care](#) that may reduce [burnout](#) in adults who work in service-oriented professions like teaching. A [review](#) of 22 self-compassion related therapies indicates that self-compassion approaches can reduce both anxiety and depression. In fact, self-compassion strategies may even be more effective in addressing [depressed mood](#) than strategies like reappraisal (shifting your thinking about a negative event) and acceptance.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When we face challenges with students or colleagues, and we beat ourselves up about them as a result, we can end up feeling even more stressed and isolated. A healthier response is to treat ourselves with kindness and understanding, and the self-compassion break is a great way to self-soothe during times of stress at school. In fact, teachers who are more mindful and self-compassionate foster more [emotionally supportive](#) relationships with students in their classrooms.

And for those using the practice in higher education, self-compassionate [college students](#) are more likely to ask questions, seek help, and participate in the classroom activities.

SOURCE

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