

## Compassion for yourself

Showing compassion towards yourself relieves anxiety and stress. It also reduces feelings of shame and guilt, and increases satisfaction with life. This sort of understanding attitude towards ourselves helps us to take better care of ourselves and to feel better. It's important to take care of oneself – the same way we look after our loved ones.

Compassion for ourselves is made up of three elements:

1. **Kindness to yourself.** Frequently showing compassion is much easier towards others than towards oneself. We know how to comfort and support a friend in a difficult situation. We may, however, criticise and blame ourselves under similar circumstances. This nevertheless makes our personal situation even harder. When we suffer, fail, make a mistake, behave incorrectly or face difficult matters in life, it is important to show kindness and mercy towards ourselves. We can treat ourselves the same way as we treat others who are important to us. In this manner we can manage and get through life's hard experiences.
2. **The experience of shared humanity.** Being human involves good things, but also pain, loss and making mistakes. When life is difficult, we easily think we're alone and we isolate ourselves from others. It's important to remember that each one of us also endures suffering in our lives. None of us is capable of being perfect.
3. **Mindfulness – i.e. affirmative 'conscious presence'.** Both positive and negative thoughts are part of life. Negative emotions are often hard to withstand, and we would like them to disappear quickly. Avoiding feelings, however, frequently makes how we feel worse over the long term. You can practise identifying your thoughts and feelings and embracing them in an acceptable way. In this respect, we do not try to deny, oppose, change or exaggerate them. This helps us to establish some distance from our emotions. Affirmative 'conscious presence' – mindfulness – gives us permission to live with our thoughts and feelings just as they are.

By means of these three steps, try to show yourself compassion when you're in a difficult situation:

1. Take note of what you feel and think. Don't try to change anything. (Mindfulness)
2. Acknowledge the fact that others could likely think or feel the same way under the same circumstances. (The experience of shared humanity)
3. Show mercy towards yourself the same way you would towards your loved ones. (Kindness to yourself)

## How can compassion for yourself be practised?

Showing compassion for yourself is a skill which can and should be practised. This skill can be developed in many ways. When you face a difficult situation, thought or feeling in your life the next time, try one of the following methods.

- Imagine that a friend of yours is in a similar situation as you're in now. How would you treat your friend? What would you say to your friend? What would you suggest s/he do to start feeling better? See if you can say the same things to yourself and act according to your own suggestions.

- Take notice of how you talk to yourself in your mind. Do you judge or blame yourself? Would you say the same things to your friend if s/he were in the same circumstances? Does talking worsen or relieve the way you feel? Try to change your speech to make it kinder. How does this feel? Does it change the way you feel?
- Treat your body in a kind and merciful manner. Find an exercise style that's agreeable to you. For example, you can go out for a walk, enjoy nature, practise yoga, stretch, or dance. Eat and drink regularly in a healthy way. Give yourself a foot or hand massage, take a warm shower, listen to your favourite music, or engage in relaxation techniques. If your body is tired, give yourself permission to rest.
- Write a letter to yourself. Outline a difficult issue that keeps going round and round in your head. Describe what thoughts and emotions the matter stirs inside you right now. Then write a reply in another letter to yourself. In your answer, be as kind and merciful as possible.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one. When we're going through something that's hard, the company of others can cheer us up and provide a moment to think about something else.
- Discuss matters with a professional. You need not remain alone with your difficult personal experiences. Asking for help is looking after yourself.
- Think up sentences or words you can repeat to yourself under difficult circumstances: for example, 'I'll get through this' or 'I'm up to it'.