



Do you have self-compassion?

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When I first started my business and I was working on my vision, mission, and values, I decided on the three values – respect, excellence, and growth – as my values. That is just who I am. I don't even have to try to embody those, they just come naturally and easily. Sometime later I decided I wanted my values to form the first letters of the word GRACE. And that would mean including abundance and compassion as values. This would have to be aspirational though, because while I can do respect, excellence and growth very easily, abundance and compassion are less easy although I do value them. Compassion for others I can do fairly well, but self-compassion is a challenge. And it is also a challenge for many of my clients, who will show enormous compassion for others and none for themselves.

So let me ask you, the reader, to go through the statements below and think about your answers. Are any of these true for you?

1. I judge myself negatively and very harshly when it comes to my own flaws and inadequacies.
2. When things are not going well for me, I tell myself that my life is a mess and I am a mess.
3. I don't take care of myself when I am in pain.
4. When I fail at something that is important to me, I immediately feel I am the most useless person in the world.
5. I don't see my weaknesses as part of being human.
6. When I am going through a hard time, I don't take time out to look after myself.
7. I am intolerant and impatient with those aspects of myself that I don't like.
8. When I make a mistake, I replay the mistake in my head for days.
9. When something goes wrong, I tend to blame myself even when logically I know I am not at fault.
10. When I am upset by something or someone, my emotions go out of balance for a long time.
11. I am unkind to myself when I experience suffering.
12. When I fail at something that is important to me, I feel alone and miserable as well as useless.

If you think these statements describe you, then you are lacking in self-compassion. And while some people may have the view that being harsh and critical of others is good for them, it is not. When we

are hard on ourselves, and sometimes even cruel to ourselves, it makes it harder for us to be compassionate to others. When we are harsh and critical of ourselves, it is harder for us to change when it would be good for us if we change. Condemning ourselves makes us want to deny and run away from what it is we condemn. When we can accept what we don't like about ourselves, and we can only do that if we are not beating ourselves up about it, it becomes easier for us to make the necessary changes to improve.

Self-compassion is a way of relating to ourselves with kindness and understanding. And it is especially important when we are facing difficult times, mistakes, and what we believe to be personal failures. It is about treating ourselves with care and kindness as we would a close friend and someone we love. It is not about making excuses for ourselves and condoning bad behaviour. It is about recognising that we are human, will mess up, and that is not a reason to beat ourselves up. In order to have self-compassion it is necessary to realise that imperfections are a normal part of human life.

Self-compassion is not self-pity which is never a good thing. You don't want to get so obsessed with your own problems you ignore everyone around you and wallow in how awful you think your life is. It is also not self-indulgence. Self-compassion is not binge eating or going on a spending spree because you feel awful. It is treating yourself with kindness and consideration no matter the circumstances you are in.

How to bring self-compassion into your life?

Imagine an incredibly caring friend who understands and accepts you. Imagine that this friend can see all the strengths and weaknesses you have, including aspects of yourself you wish to hide from others. This friend understands your life history from the time you were born and the millions of things that have happened to you to create who you are at this moment. This friend understands that many things which make you feel bad about yourself are connected to aspects you didn't choose – your genes, your family history, the time and place you were born, circumstances you have faced, and many other things out of your control. What would this person say about what you think your faults are from the perspective of unlimited compassion?

Write a letter to yourself from this imaginary friend that is kind and compassionate. When you feel you need some self-compassion read this letter. Read it slowly, taking in every word. Feel the compassion coming from your friend. Feel it calm you and soothe you. Sit back or lie down and close your eyes and feel what it is like to experience someone who accepts you exactly as you are. Hold onto this feeling for a minute or two.

Like all things we want to change about ourselves, it takes repeated practice to get into a habit of treating ourselves with compassion. When things go wrong, we tend to default to our usual state which makes it particularly difficult to be self-compassionate. When you do find yourself thinking harshly of yourself, then remind yourself to be compassionate with yourself and bring yourself back to focusing on treating yourself with kindness and care.

Incidentally my mission, which I wrote over 16 years ago is still my mission. "My mission is to facilitate mental wellbeing, personal development, and peak performance, so everyone is enabled and empowered to reach their full potential."