



It's been a Brutal Year. Show yourself some Compassion.

14 December 2020

It's been said so often perhaps it sounds a bit silly repeating it again, however, let's face it, this has been a difficult and even horrific year for many people. Life is not easy in the 21st century. Even prior to the pandemic people were battling financially, struggling with relationships, worrying about the work situation and their businesses. Then Covid-19 came along and just multiplied the stress, worry, and pain many times over. We will of course, get past this situation. But right now, a lot of us are feeling stressed, exhausted, and totally overwhelmed. What is traditionally a time of good cheer, is anything but.

When we have been stretched to our limits it is easy to lose it. We can find ourselves losing our temper for reasons we would not normally do. We may isolate ourselves. We may do nothing all day, and even find it difficult to get out of bed. When socialising is discouraged, we can forget that engaging with people is so important for our mental health. We may even find ourselves breaking down in tears, for what seem to us like ridiculous reasons. Someone I know, on her return from shopping, realised she had forgotten to buy an item of food. Overwhelmed by everything, this was the last straw, and she sat down on the kitchen floor and cried and cried. This year has been more than a lot of us can handle.

There are lots of things you can do when things get so bad. I have alluded to and spoken about many of them in previous newsletters this year. Now, I want to talk about self-compassion. When things are really bad, one of the actions you can take, and you should take, is to show yourself some compassion. The other plans and ideas and solutions can come at another time. With self-compassion, you give yourself the same kindness and care you would give a good friend.

Below are some ways in which you can show yourself compassion. These are actions you

can do at any time, not only when Covid-19 has devastated our lives and our world. And yes, you do want to learn to show yourself compassion. There is nothing wrong with giving yourself some of what you need. You don't have to always rely on others, and sometimes you can't rely on others to provide what you need. So, learn to self-soothe.



1. Bring compassion to yourself with well wishes. Write down how you would speak to a friend who was going through a difficult time. Then say those same things to yourself. Notice the tone you use. Find comforting things to say to yourself. "This is not my fault." "I am still a good and kind person, despite what is happening to me." "No matter what has happened, I am still good enough." "I have talents and skills and will get through this." "I know this is hard right now, it's only natural that I would feel stressed and out of sorts." "I have made it this far, and that is a victory."
2. Consider writing yourself a letter from a place of accepting yourself and having compassion for your situation. Often when we are in situations that are horrible for us, we tend to resort to feeling insecure and bad about ourselves. We may even feel shame or guilt or feel in some way we are to blame. Write about how this is not who you are, even if you may feel this way. Write about previous times when you were in difficult situations and you made it through. Remember some amazing things you have accomplished. Recognise yourself for that.
3. Consider that a best friend who really loves and cares for you has written you a letter during your time of struggle. What is in the letter? How does this friend convey their deep understanding and compassion for what you are currently experiencing? Write it yourself and read it to yourself. Realise you are loved and accepted just as you are. Realise that despite your imperfections and mistakes you are still a worthwhile person. Realise that the events of this year are not your fault and there was nothing you could do to prevent them. Realise that just getting through each day of this year has been hard. Yet, you have done it.
4. Give yourself some supportive touch. Quite frankly giving and receiving hugs is a big way in which we can feel better in the moment. Good touch activates the parasympathetic nervous system to help us calm down and feel safe. Now I know Covid-19 has meant that social distancing is a good idea and hugs are not, however, despite the virus, there must be some people you can hold and hug, even if you live alone. There have to be some people you know or could get in contact with to experience supportive touch without endangering your health. You could even try giving yourself a hug. Or putting your hand gently over your heart. You could even cover yourself with a blanket, which can be a self-soothing action at times.

5. Notice when you beat up on yourself and stop it. Allow yourself to not get everything right. We have never been through times like this (well most of us haven't). Not knowing what to do or doing something that later turns out to be a mistake doesn't mean you are a bad person or there is something wrong with you. You are human. Let yourself off the hook some of the time when you forget to do things, or don't do something perfect the first time.
6. In your daily journal, if you have one, start writing the events of the day through the lens of compassion. You can also describe the daily events in terms of how you showed compassion to other people. Show compassion to yourself and others too. We all need it. Our world needs it right now.
7. Reach out to others and share your weariness and concerns. Talking to someone who cares about you is a great way of showing you care about yourself. Connectedness also helps us feel like we belong and are not so alone in our pain.
8. Make a list of things you love doing. Then go and do some of those things.
9. Recharge your own batteries with rest and relaxation. If you have been a care-giver during this time, if you have had to look after other people, if you have had to home-school your kids and hold down a job, you could be physically and mentally exhausted.

Thoughts and self-talk you can use to start to change your self-dialogue to one of compassion for yourself.

- *"Changing is never simple but it's easier if I stop being hard on myself."*
- *"It's safe for me to show kindness to myself."*
- *"I deserve compassion, tenderness, and empathy from myself."*
- *"This will pass, and my life will get back on track again."*
- *"There are good things in my future. Just because today is difficult doesn't mean tomorrow will be."*

If you are someone who loathes the idea of compassion, either for yourself or others, then perhaps you are most in need of it. Compassion does not make you weak. It does not stop you from solving problems. It does not make you passive and lazy. It enables you to give yourself a break, cut yourself some slack from the trials of life, and set your mind at ease. If you practice compassion for yourself and others you are likely to do life better because your mind will be in such a better space.