

3 Self-Compassion Exercises

based on the work of Kristin Neff, Ph.D.

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Change Your Critical Self-Talk

When you notice that you're being hard on yourself, take a few moments to write down exactly what your self-critical voice is saying. Next, try to respond to it in a positive and caring way, like something you'd say to a friend. Here's an example of how Maggie can respond to her self-blame:

Self-critical voice: "You're so stupid. Why did you ask Ted to take Chloe to ballet class? You should have known he'd blow up!"

Compassionate response: "I know you wanted Chloe to be able to go to class; ballet means so much to her. It's not your fault that Ted blew up."

Give it a try!

Self-critical statement: _____

Compassionate response: _____

Write a Compassionate Letter to Yourself

Imagine that you have a friend who loves you unconditionally, forgives you, understands your life experiences, and knows all your strengths and weaknesses – including everything you've failed at, feel ashamed of, and don't like about yourself. Write a letter to yourself from this imaginary friend that focuses on the things you tend to judge yourself harshly about.



Dr. Neff suggests that you consider:

- What would this friend say to you about your “flaw” from the perspective of unlimited compassion?
- How would this friend convey the deep compassion he/she feels for you, especially for the pain you feel when you judge yourself so harshly?
- What would this friend write in order to remind you that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses?
- And if you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, how would these suggestions embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion? (source: <https://self-compassion.org/exercise-3-exploring-self-compassion-writing/>)

Be sure to reread your letter a few times and let the compassion and acceptance it contains sink in fully.

Give it a try! Jot down some answers to the questions above to get started. Then use these notes to write your letter on a separate piece of paper.

Loving Touch

You can also calm and soothe yourself through loving touch.

Physical touch is a powerful therapeutic tool. It releases oxytocin, the love hormone, which promotes feelings of calm, trust, safety, and connectedness; and it reduces the stress hormone cortisol that's released when we're blamed or criticized by ourselves or others. So, by giving yourself a hug or gentle neck massage, you're changing your body's chemistry (increasing oxytocin and decreasing cortisol). It's a simple yet effective way to comfort yourself.

Give it a try! Try using loving touch and record how it feels.

