



Mindful Self-compassion Meditation

Length: 15-20 minutes

Practice frequency: 1-2x/week

Introduction:

This mindful self-compassion meditation aim at facilitating feelings of mindful compassion towards ourselves by creating a safe experience of acknowledging negative feelings of self-criticism, self-doubt, or shame, and shifting towards self-compassion. Self-compassion is a key protective factor against compassion fatigue, caregiver strain, anxiety, and depression. Compassion fatigue and caregiver strain are negative states characterized by mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional exhaustion, reduced ability to be caring and compassionate, irritability, negative thinking, and other symptoms.

Experiencing feelings of self-compassion can be difficult at first. Many people struggle with the idea of being kind to themselves in the same way they are kind to others, and instead engage in self-criticism and beliefs that they are not good enough. Practicing this meditation can feel awkward or uncomfortable at first, but regular practice helps us to open our kind and caring hearts to ourselves by reminding us of our shared imperfect human experience. You do not have to follow this script exactly as it is. However, the order in which each part appears in this script is intentional so as to ease you into the practice.

Instruction:

Begin by sitting comfortably in a quiet place. Notice how your body feels, and the points of your body that touch the cushion or chair. Bring yourself to this moment, right here and now, and begin to settle. First take three deep breaths to let out any tension that you may be holding onto. Invite your awareness inwards, not paying attention to any sounds that you may hear, but simply noticing them and letting them go. Now begin to notice your breath as it comes in and out of your nostrils. Notice the rise and fall of your chest with each breath. No need to change the breath but simply become aware of it. As your mind wanders, just gently bring it back to the breath.

Bring to your mind something that is causing you to worry or suffer that you did not cause. Something that is causing suffering in your life because of something external to you. Perhaps someone you care about is ill, or you are worried for a friend who is going through hardship. Think not of the other person, but of your own suffering. Do you feel sad, worried, or anxious? Try to identify the feeling or feelings that are connected to this experience. See if you can find these feelings in your body. Where do you feel them? Do you feel them as tightness in your chest?



Tension in the shoulders? Where are these emotions felt in your body? Now invite the feeling of compassion to ease the suffering you feel because of this situation or this person you care about.

Bring yourself feeling of compassion for this type of suffering - suffering that is part of our shared human experience. Remember that our lives are not always as we want them to be. With a kind and compassionate mind, repeat these phrases silently (2-3x):

May we be safe.
May we be kind to one another.
May we live free of suffering.
May we be peaceful and at ease.

Notice if you feel more warmth and openheartedness. Thank yourself for being a good and caring friend capable of so much compassion.

Bring to mind a mistake you made. Something you have been criticizing yourself for, or something that has caused you to feel shame or guilt. Notice how thinking about this action or experience makes you feel. Perhaps it makes you feel sad, isolated, or inadequate. Try to identify the feeling or feelings that are connected to this experience. See if you can find these feelings in your body. Where do you feel them? Do you feel them as heaviness in your heart? Stomach area? Tightness in your throat? Where are these emotions felt in your body?

Rather than pushing them away or avoiding them, notice them. Notice how much suffering is present in self-judgment for making a mistake or for believing that you are not good enough. Think of the pressure we put on ourselves to be perfect when we don't expect perfection from anyone else. It may be difficult at first, but try to stay with the feeling, observing it, noticing it non-judgmentally.

Gently place your hands on your chest and see if you can feel your heart. As you think about this mistake, or negative experience, notice the hardship that this emotion brings to you. Now remember our shared human experience of imperfection and allow yourself to repeat these phrases of compassion to yourself.

May I be safe.
May I be kind to myself.
May I live free of suffering.
May I be peaceful and at ease.

Try to connect with genuine feelings of compassion and acceptance. Think of how you would extend the same compassion and acceptance to someone you love and care about, and connect with that feeling. Then repeat these phrases of compassion to yourself.

May I be safe.
May I be kind to myself.
May I live free of suffering.
May I be peaceful and at ease.

Take a few moments to experience the peaceful compassion of this practice, noticing any changes in your body from where you felt tension or tightening before. Take a few breaths and release any lasting tension before opening your eyes and resuming your day.