



Simply Mindful
CANBERRA MINDFULNESS CENTRE



Mindfulness for mental health carers

5: Self-compassion for carers: being on your own side

Self-compassion practice helps you when things get tough, to support and be there for yourself like an inner friend, helper or coach rather than being an inner critic or bully, or moving into unhelpful shame or guilt.

Self-compassion reduces stress and increases the ability to problem-solve. Sometimes people worry that self-compassion will make them more self-absorbed or selfish. Actually, quite the opposite is true. People who practice self-compassion:

- Develop different (healthier) coping strategies
- Have more pleasant experiences = happiness

Mindfulness and Self-compassion: like the two wings of a bird

Mindfulness and self-compassion together help us to tolerate our own distress without having to turn away or close off from it. This in turn helps us to tolerate the distress of others. When we can no longer cope with emotional pain, we tend to lose connection with ourselves, particularly with the body. Self-compassion helps to re-establish the connection, stay connected and to fill up our own inner tank so that we have more resources inside us and feel less threatened.

- Mindfulness helps us to steady the mind and develop sustained present moment awareness.
- Self-compassion helps us to stay connected

When things are hard you may have feelings you think you're not supposed to have, or don't like. Self-compassion also reminds us of our shared human vulnerabilities and makes it possible for us to face, understand and meet the difficulties we face with kindness. This bigger perspective can be very helpful as we tend to feel alone and isolated when we're stressed or facing difficulties.

Compassion is more than empathy

Empathy is feeling with – feeling the pain of another. Compassion is empathy + action. What is often called compassion fatigue should really be called 'empathy fatigue'.

Empathy fatigue

'Empathy fatigue happens when we have become exhausted from being too involved in the pain of others and don't get around to giving compassion to ourselves' (Matthieu Richard, Paul Gilbert)

Self-compassion for carers practice: taking and giving

This practice helps you to acknowledge feelings and support and be there for yourself and also others.

Settle into your body and let your attention rest gently on the breath. Allow yourself to get in touch with some of the stress and difficulty of being a carer. Allow yourself to feel your feelings and acknowledge them, even the ones you feel you shouldn't be having.

Now consider these suggestions, which may help us to remember that even though the things required of us can seem superhuman, we are only human.

Everyone is on their own life journey

I'm not the cause of this person's suffering no do I have the power to make it go away, even though I wish I could

Moments like these are difficult to bear

And yet I will try to help, if I can

IN BREATH: When you're ready, tune into your IN breath.

As you breathe in, imagine that you're breathing in compassion for yourself.

Breathing in your own care and concern for the difficulties you face.

Giving yourself some of the care, support and nourishment you need. Perhaps that's strength, courage, patience, peace, compassion.

Breathe in for yourself.

OUT BREATH: When you're ready, focusing on the person/s you care for and the difficulties they face.

Focus on the OUT breath. As you breathe out, imagine that you're filling them with what they need: relief, peace, kindness, courage...

Breathe out for them.

IN AND OUT BREATH: Bring both together. Breathe in for me and out for you.

If your own stress or fatigue is really coming up for you right now and you need more resourcing, breathe in more for you. So, 4 in for me, 1 out for you.

If the pain or difficulty of the person you care for is feeling strong at the moment, feel free to breathe out more for them.

Remembering that compassion is actually unlimited. There's more than enough for both of you.

Self-compassion on the go

Connect with your breath....

IN

Breathing in compassion for yourself,
Breathing in what you need

OUT

Breathing out compassion for others,
Breathing out what they need

Self-compassion phrases or a mantra

IN Breathing in what you need

'May I have...peace, ease, joy'

'May I be a good friend to myself'

OUT Breathing out what they need

'May you have ease', 'may you be happy'

'May you be a good friend to yourself'

