

Self-Compassion Exercises

Treat yourself like you would a good friend

If a friend was having a hard day, what would you say to them and how would you treat them? You would likely be kind, validating, empathetic and encouraging. Practice directing the same compassionate treatment toward yourself.

Journaling

Pull out a journal or a piece of paper and start writing what you are feeling at the moment, let it be raw and messy, and then write something encouraging. This is a way to validate your emotions and affirm yourself. It is nice when people intentionally purchase a particularly special journal for this, because even the act of buying a nice journal and pen is a micro-moment of self-compassion.

Do something kind for your body

Get a massage, a manicure, rub your feet, have a nap, buy a more comfortable chair, get a haircut, the list goes on. You matter, and your body matters. Your body is part of you.

Soften critical self-talk

We all have an inner critic, and part of self-compassion is making peace with that voice. Notice when you are being hard on yourself and then try to soften it. For example, "I should have known better" could be softened to, "I did my best and I am allowed to learn." This might seem small, but the difference is significant when it comes to our emotional health.

Do something special for yourself

Take yourself out on a date to a coffee shop, drive to a scenic place and listen to music, watch a favourite movie that evokes nostalgia, or anything else that you would enjoy and isn't something you "have" to do and isn't too productive (more like a treat).

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Practice living mindfully

When we get caught up in rush or the mundane, we can inadvertently treat ourselves poorly. Practicing mindfulness helps us practice connection with ourselves. This might look like sitting down and mindfully drinking a cup of tea (noticing the smell, the warmth, and slowly savouring each mouthful), it could look like mindfully washing dishes (noticing the sensation of the water on your hands, observing the sounds), or sitting by the window and quietly watching the birds outside (wondering where they have come from, where are they going?).

Practice healthy boundaries

Saying no to things that are not healthy for you, and saying yes to things that are. This takes practice, and you may need to tolerate some level of guilt that you will initially feel in order to experience the longer-term reward of increased self-compassion.

Self-compassion grounding activity

Place a hand on your chest, the other on your cheek, slow down your breathing, then say something like, "It's okay, this is a challenging moment, but I am safe, and I am loved, and I am going to get through this." You can change the words, the key is to validate yourself and offer yourself kindness and safety.

Practice curiosity rather than judgment

Our brains love to judge, and this can become shaming very quickly. Instead of judging yourself for having certain thoughts or emotions, practice a curious approach. For example, rather than, "I wish I didn't feel this way!", replace with "I wonder why I feel this way?"

Make time for fun

It might sound foreign, but having fun, laughing, and doing things you enjoy sends messages to your heart, your mind, and your nervous system that you matter.