

You can't pour from an empty cup

Self-compassion

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In these unprecedented times we find ourselves in today it is so easy to forget to look after ourselves as we put the needs of others before ourselves. We continue to “pour from our cups” giving time and energy to work, family, friends and life in general. We have endless to-do-lists and none of the events, activities or plans seem to include our needs and as a result our cups run empty leaving us feeling tired, grouchy and miserable. It is therefore important to replenish your cup, taking time to care and look after yourself.

What is self-compassion?

The Dalai Lama once said: “If you don't love yourself, you cannot love others. You will not be able to love others. If you have no compassion for yourself then you are not able of developing compassion for others.”

Self-compassion is when a person is able to become aware of their own pain and suffering, realising that these emotions is what makes us human. Neff (2003) defined self-compassion as being kind and understanding with yourself; accepting that you are not perfect; and understanding that there is potential for learning and growth in every mistake you make. Expressing self-compassion would mean acting in a warm, caring and non-judgemental way towards oneself when you notice you are having a difficult time, failing at something or when you realise something you don't like about yourself.

Dr Kirsten Neff identifies three elements of self-compassion:

Self-kindness vs self-judgement

Being kind and warm towards yourself once you realise you are in pain or suffering or you realise you have failed at something or feeling that you are “not good enough” is being self-compassionate. You recognise these feelings and thoughts and choose to be gentle with yourself instead of responding with anger, frustrations and self-criticism.

Common humanity vs isolation

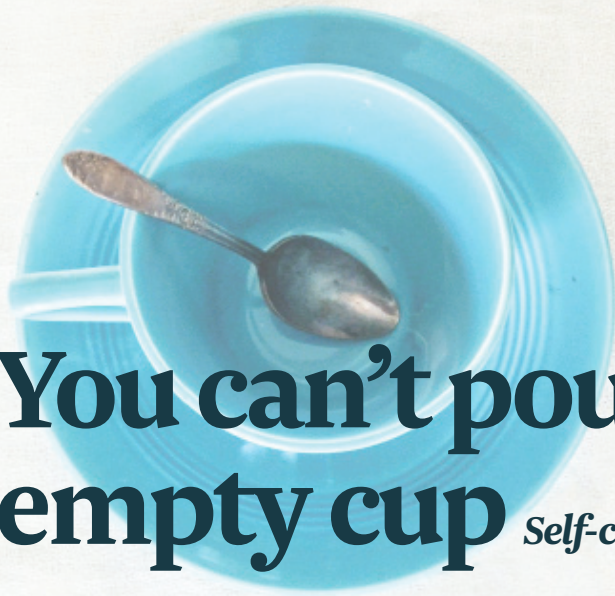
Self-compassion means realising we are all human – mortal, vulnerable and imperfect – and that suffering and feeling insufficient (“not good enough”) is part of the shared human experience. If we struggle to realise this we experience a sense of loneliness and isolation.

Mindfulness vs Over-identification

Self-compassion includes being aware of your unwanted feelings (sadness, fear, shame, guilt), not suppressing nor amplifying these but rather willingly observing them. Being mindful means being aware about one's thoughts and feelings as they are without trying to reject or suppress them.

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Five steps to “fill your cup” (practice self-compassion)

These five steps have been adapted from www.postivepsychology.com

Step one: Practice forgiveness

One of our biggest challenges is to “make peace” with ourselves. We often blame and punish ourselves for our mistakes and failures. It is important to realise that we do not need to be a certain way to be worthy.

Step two: Employ a growth mindset

Research by Carol Dweck found that the type of mindset we have, whether it's fixed or growth, have an influence on our happiness. Having or employing a growth mindset allows you to observe and see challenges as opportunities to grow rather than impossible obstacles. Embrace challenges and explore the meaning they hold for you. Should you find yourself judging or comparing yourself to others try to find inspiration in their successes instead of feeling threatened. Focus on doing what is meaningful to do in the moment.

Step three: Express gratitude

There is a sense of strength in appreciating what we have in the moment. Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that the feeling of gratitude is very powerful.

Focussing on your blessings allows you to foster a kinder, more gentle inner voice allowing you to focus on the world around you with all its beauty. Ways to practice being mindful about your surroundings could be going for gratitude walks, or keeping a gratitude journal.

Step four: Find the right level of generosity

Being generous is a great way of expressing compassion and cannot be self-less – You can not pour from an empty cup. When being generous, be aware of your own needs, the resources you have available and the amount of energy you have to be able to look after your own well-being. Remember to give back to yourself to keep your cup full.

Step five: Be mindful

Being mindful has shown to promote self-compassion and reduce the propensity to be self-judgemental (Kabat-Zinn, 2014). Allow yourself to be in the moment, allowing feelings, whether positive, negative or neutral to be, and to exist, without judgement.

Having self-compassion means allowing yourself to be, accepting your humanness and expressing kindness to yourself. Life happens and things do not always go to plan. We experience losses, we make mistakes, we get confronted

with our “not good enough story” leaving us feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. The more you allow yourself to be open to life and its situations the more you will be able to feel and express compassion to yourself and others.

Should you wish to explore self-compassion or should you have any questions please do not hesitate to be in touch with one of our clinicians at Re-centre.

About Kahn Higgs



Kahn is a clinical psychologist who specialises in working with clients who might find coping with everyday life challenging – depression, anxiety, loss and grief, relationships and adjustment.

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References:

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