

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 capable of developing compassion for others.

—Dalai Lama XIV



EMPOWERING EDUCATION

Mindfulness-Based Social & Emotional Learning

Self-Compassion

Level: Lower Elementary (K-2)

Timeframe: 20-30 minutes

Concepts:

- Mindfulness
- Self-Compassion
- Self-Kindness
- Self-Talk



Big Ideas For This Lesson

Just as we show kindness and compassion to others, we can learn to practice showing this same compassion towards ourselves. This is the gist of self-compassion. There are 3 basic components of **Self-Compassion**.^{1,2}

1. **Self-Kindness:** Treating ourselves with the same warmth and understanding that we treat friends, family and even strangers. Especially when experiencing the inevitable difficulties of life.
2. **Common Humanity:** The recognition that our problems and sufferings are normal parts of being human and that we are not alone in our struggles.
3. **Mindfulness:** Conscious, non-judgmental awareness, and recognition of our challenging emotions and thoughts without ignoring, escaping, or getting swept away by them.

Remember that our definition of **compassion** from the previous lesson includes both the recognition of others' suffering and the motivation to relieve that suffering. So, self-compassion includes both the recognition of our own suffering and a desire to relieve that suffering with kindness.

When compared to self-esteem,³ self-compassion promotes a more holistic sense of well-being⁴ because it is not dependent on conditions of success, failure, achievement, or comparison to others. With enough awareness, self-compassion is accessible at any given moment. This lesson teaches students how to take a **Self-Compassion Break**. It has been adapted from the work of Dr. Kristin Neff.¹



Essential Vocabulary

Common Humanity
Compassion
Inner Critic
Mindfulness
Self-Compassion
Self-Kindness

Materials

- Self-Compassion Break Poster.
- Self-Compassion Themed Read-Alouds (Optional):
[A Bad Case of Stripes](#) by David Shannon
[Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun: Having the Courage To Be Who You Are](#) by Maria Dismondy



Preparation

Familiarize yourself with the teaching script and practice your own self-compassion break.



Teaching Script

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)

Last week we learned how to show compassion and send kind thoughts to others.

Review definition of compassion and any key-points from the “Kindness and Compassion” lesson as time allows. Possible questions to review and check for understanding include:

- *What is compassion? What is kindness?*
- *How does it feel when we send kind thoughts to others?*
- *Has anyone been practicing kindness or compassion this week? What have you noticed?*

Today we are going to learn a useful way to deal with difficult feelings by being kind and compassionate to ourselves. But before we think about that, first I'm wondering...what are some things you do to make your friends feel better when they are sad or upset?

Wow, what good friends you all are! You really know how to be kind and compassionate toward others. Now here's my next question...what are some things you do to make yourself feel better when YOU are sad or upset?

Teaching Note: Most of us tend to be less compassionate and harsher critics to ourselves than to others. While this tends to be true for most people, it may or may not be true for your class (especially for younger students). The main point is to model for students a way to show self-compassion. It can become a strategy for your ‘cool down’ or ‘take-a-break’ area. Adjust this discussion according to the needs of your class.

Summarize themes and key points from the discussion, highlighting differences between how we treat others and how we treat ourselves.

I'm noticing a theme. It seems like most of us are less kind to ourselves than we are to others. When a friend is having a hard time, most of you are very compassionate and loving towards your friend.

List examples of compassionate behaviors and phrases towards others that students shared.

However, when you are having a hard time it seems like many of us aren't as kind to ourselves or we don't have as many kind ideas for ourselves!

List examples of non-compassionate behaviors and phrases towards self that students shared.



GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

Facilitate a guided **self-compassion** break.

*Today I'm going to teach you a new strategy so you can help yourself when you are feeling down or upset. It's called a **self-compassion** break.*

*Self-compassion means treating yourself with the same love and care that you would treat a friend. After all, you are the most important person in your life. So how do we do this? Well, one way to do this is to practice a **self-compassion** break. Let's try it out.*

Find your mindful body and take some long deep breaths."

Close your eyes and remember a time recently when you were feeling sad or upset. What happened? Why were you upset?

Remember the situation and how it made you feel. Notice how it made you feel in your body.

Now, wrap your arms around your body and give yourself a big hug! Just like you would give your friend a big hug if they were upset!

Repeat after me:

Ouch, this feeling hurts!

Other people have felt this way before too, so I'm not alone.

May I be happy.

May I be healthy.

May I be peaceful.



REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

That was a self-compassion break! How did that feel?

Facilitate a brief share-out as a class.

Now that you know how to do a self-compassion break, you can practice it anytime. In fact, I am going to hang this poster with instructions on how to take a self-compassion break in our take-a-break space. The next time you are struggling in class or having a hard time with a friend, just take a few minutes in the break area and practice a self-compassion break. We will practice these every day this week as a class, but you can practice them at home or outside of class anytime you need a little extra compassion.



EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

Reflect on it

- *How do you do a self-compassion break?*
- *What were the biggest differences between how you treat yourself and how you treat others?*
- *What are some other creative ways you can show yourself compassion (e.g. bubble baths, walk in the park, etc.)?*

Journal it

Have students complete the Self-Compassion: SEL Journal Page for this lesson.



EXTENSIONS

Classroom

- Practice self-compassion breaks every day this week.
- Post the [Self-Compassion Break Poster](#) in the take-a-break space.
- Explore the [guided meditations and self-compassion exercises](#) on www.self-compassion.org¹ for use in your class or for yourself!
- Check out and sign up for the free brain break website called Gonoodle.com. Show students the video called [Be Kind to Yourself](#)⁴ (4:22).

School-wide

Consider hosting a “**Self-Compassion Day**” or even “**Self-Compassion Week.**” Post self-compassionate quotes in the hallways, have “self-care stations” throughout the school, have adults in the building model self-compassion; make a big fuss over being kind to ourselves!



REFERENCES

1. Neff, K. (2015). Self-Compassion. Retrieved August 7, 2015, from <http://self-compassion.org>
2. Neff, K. D., & Dahm, K. A. (in press). Self-Compassion: What it is, what it does, and how it relates to mindfulness. To appear in in M. Robinson, B. Meier & B. Ostafin (Eds.) *Mindfulness and Self-Regulation*. New York: Springer.
3. Persinger, J. (2012). An alternative to self-esteem: Fostering self-compassion in youth. *Communique*, 40 (5), 20-23.
4. Empower Tools. (n.d.). Be Kind to Yourself. Retrieved May 1, 2016, from <https://app.gonoodle.com/channels/empowertools/be-kind-to-yourself?source=channel>

Self-Compassion Break

Give yourself a big hug!

Say to yourself:

Ouch! This feeling hurts!

Other people have felt this way before too, so I'm not alone.

May I be happy.

May I be healthy.

May I be peaceful.