

A decorative graphic consisting of approximately 15 parallel, curved lines that sweep from the top left towards the bottom right. Each line is composed of small, light gray dots.

Self-Compassion and Mindfulness

The Centre for Mindfulness Studies

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Self-Compassion & Mindfulness Program Outline

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Session I: Discovering Self-Compassion

Orientation

1. How would you like to be treated during this program?
2. How would you like to treat others?

Exercise: How Would You Treat a Friend?

1. How do you respond to a friend when they are struggling? What do you say? What do you do? What is your tone?
2. How do you treat yourself when you are struggling? What do you say? What do you do? What is your tone?

Home Practice

1. Notice how you speak to yourself throughout the day. What language do you use?
2. Practice “Soothing Touch” twice daily.
3. Use the “Self-Compassion Break” when you become aware of distress.

Soothing Touch

One easy way to soothe and comfort yourself when you're feeling badly is to give yourself a gentle hug or caress, or simply put your hand on your heart and feel the warmth of your hand. It may feel awkward or embarrassing at first, but your body doesn't know that. It just responds to the physical gesture of warmth and care, just as a baby responds to being cuddled in its mother's arms. Our skin is an incredibly sensitive organ. Research indicates that physical touch releases oxytocin, provides a sense of security, soothes distressing emotions, and calms cardiovascular stress. So why not try it?

If you notice that you're feeling tense, upset, sad or self-critical, try stroking your arm or face, or gently rocking your body. What's important is that you make a clear gesture that conveys feelings of love, care, and tenderness. If other people are around, you can often fold your arms in a non-obvious way, gently squeezing yourself in a comforting manner. You can also simply *imagine* hugging or caressing yourself if you can't make the actual physical gesture.

Try giving stroking your skin or putting your hand over your heart during difficult periods several times a day for a period of at least a week.

Hand-on-Heart

- When you notice you're under stress, take 2-3 deep, satisfying breaths.
- Gently place your hand over your heart, feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand. If you wish, place *both* hands on your chest, noticing the difference between one and two hands.
- Feel the touch of your hand on your chest. If you wish, you could make small circles with your hand on your chest.
- Feel the the natural rising and falling of your chest as you breath in and as you breathe out.
- Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

Hopefully you'll start to develop the habit of physically comforting yourself when needed, taking full advantage of this surprisingly simple and straightforward way to be kind to ourselves.

SELF-COMPASSION BREAK

Bring to mind an interaction with someone that makes you feel badly—only *moderately* badly so that you can feel the stress in your body but not get overwhelmed by it. Visualize the situation until it makes you a little uncomfortable.

Now, say to yourself:

- *This is a moment of suffering* (mindfulness)
- *Suffering in a part of life* (common humanity)

Put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands, the gentle pressure of your hands, and notice your chest rhythmically rising and falling beneath your hands.

Now, say to yourself:

- *May I be kind to myself.* (self-kindness)
- *May I accept myself just as I am*

For the last one or two phrases, use whatever words speak to your particular situation, such as:

May I be safe.
May I forgive myself
May I be happy and free from suffering
May I safely endure this pain
May I find peace in my heart
May I be strong
May I protect myself
May I learn to live with ease and well-being
May I accept the circumstances of my life
May we learn to live together in peace

Self-Compassionate Language

What types of things do you typically judge and criticize yourself for (appearance, career, relationships, parenting, etc.)?

What language do you use with yourself when you notice a flaw or make mistakes?

How could you reframe your language to be more kind, supportive, and understanding, to remember that you're only human, and to acknowledge things as they are without blowing them out of proportion?

As you go about your day, notice when you're using harsh or unkind language with yourself, and then try to reframe your language so that it's more self-compassionate.

Session II: Practicing Mindfulness

Home Practice

1. Sitting practice (approximately 20 minutes), using three meditation “skills” – on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally
2. Affectionate breathing practice
3. Daily practice: compassionate movement
4. Practice using the here-and-now stone when aware of distress
5. Mindful Activity: Practice bringing greater awareness to one daily activity each day (i.e. brushing teeth).

Compassionate Body Scan

To begin, it's best to lie down on a bed or the floor unless you will fall asleep. Lie flat on your back and gently rest your arms about six inches away from your sides and hold your legs around shoulder-width apart. Place a hand on your heart as a reminder to be kind to yourself. Feel the warmth of your hand and take 3 deep, relaxing breaths. Then place your arm by your side again.

- Start with your feet. Notice what your feet feel like. Are they warm or cool, dry or moist? Then notice if there's any discomfort there. If so, mentally soften the area as if you were placing a warm towel on it. If you wish, bring some compassion to the area with words like "there's a little pain there, it's okay."
- Just feel the sensations of your body—pleasure, pain, or nothing at all—and let every sensation be just as it is. (You can take action to help your body feel better after the meditation.)
- Now bring a measure of *gratitude* to your feet. Your feet have such a small surface area yet they hold up your entire body all day long. They work hard for us although we rarely pay any attention to them. If your feet feel good today, you can also extend gratitude for the discomfort that you *don't* have.
- If you have a lot of time, carefully move your loving attention from one toe to the next, or from one part of each foot to another, first one foot and then the next. Make sure that your awareness is saturated with tenderness, gratitude, and respect for each area of your body.
- When you notice your mind has wandered, as it will after a few seconds, just return to the sensations in your body. If you are flooded with judgment or associations to a particular body part, put your hand on your heart again and breathe gently, and then return to the simple body sensations. If an area of your body is very difficult to stay with, then move to another body part for now. Let this exercise be gentle and peaceful.
- After you have given compassionate awareness to the sensations in your feet, move slowly to other parts of your body, right up to the crown of your head:
 - Feet
 - Ankles
 - Calves and shins
- etc
- As you move from one part of your body to another, return your awareness again and again to whatever sensations are present at the moment, making sure to bring gratitude, kindness, and respect to each body part. For example, remind yourself how hard your stomach works to digest your food, the effort of your neck holding up your head, and the way your eyes and ears guide, inform, and delight you all day long.
- When you have paid loving attention to each individual body part, put your hand on your heart again and give your entire body a final shower of affection.
- Then gently open your eyes.

Compassionate Walking Meditation

Plan to walk for 10 minutes or longer, anywhere you like. Dedicate the time specifically to cultivating loving-kindness and compassion.

- Stand still for a moment and anchor your attention in your body. Be aware of yourself in the standing posture. Feel your body.
- Recall that every living being wants to live peacefully and happily. Connect with that deep wish: "Just as all beings wish to be happy and free from suffering, may I be happy and free from suffering."
- Begin walking. Note yourself moving through space in the upright position. Feel the sensations of your body, perhaps noting the sensations in the soles of your feet or the wind in your face. Keep your eyes softly focused and walk at a normal pace.
- After walking for a few minutes, repeat the loving-kindness phrases to yourself:

May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I live with ease.

- The phrases will keep your attention anchored in your body and start to evoke the attitude of loving-kindness. Try to synchronize the phrases with each step or with each breath. It may help to shorten the phrases to a single word: "safe, happy, healthy, ease" or "love, love, love, love."
- When your mind wanders, gently return to the phrases. If you find yourself hastening to your destination, slow down and refocus on your purpose.
- Do this with kindness, especially a feeling of gratitude toward your feet for supporting your entire body. Appreciate the marvel of walking.
- After a few minutes, expand loving-kindness to others. When someone catches your attention, say to yourself:

May you and I be safe. May you and I be happy.

May you and I be healthy. May you and I live with ease.

- You may also say "May you be safe..." or just "safe...happy... healthy...ease" or "love...love... love...love." Don't try to include everyone; just do it one person at a time, keeping the attitude of loving-kindness alive.
- Eventually include all forms of life in the circle of your loving-kindness, e.g., dogs, birds, insects, and plants.
- Allow yourself to *receive* any expressions of kindness that may come your way.
- At the end of the walking period, stand still for a moment and repeat "May all beings be happy and free from suffering" before you go on to your next activity.

Affectionate Breathing

Please find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Sit in a way that your bones are supporting the muscles and you don't need any effort to remain in one position for the whole exercise. To do this, try keeping your back straight and gently supported, with your shoulder blades slightly dropped and your chin gently tucked toward your chest. Take three, slow easy deep breaths to relax and let go of whatever burdens you're carrying around. Then let your eyelids gently close, or partially close, whichever makes you more comfortable.

- Now bring your attention to your breathing. Pay attention to where you notice your breathing most easily. Some people feel it at the nostrils, perhaps as a cool breeze on the upper lip. Other people can feel the chest rising and falling. Still others feel the breath most clearly in the abdomen, as the belly expands with every in-breath and contracts with every out-breath. Gently explore your body and discover where your breathing is easiest to notice.
- Just feel your breath for awhile. When you notice your mind has wandered, feel your breath again.
- Some people find it easier to pay attention to only *part* of the breath cycle—the inbreath or the outbreath. If you like, notice when you feel your breath more easily—when you exhale or when you inhale. Just feel it then, and then take a little vacation. Just wait for the inbreath or the outbreath to return, whichever part you feel more strongly. Feel that breath, and then wait again for it to return.
- Let your body *breathe you*—it does that automatically anyway.
- Now put your hand on your heart for a moment to remind yourself that you will be bringing *kind* attention to your breathing.
- Be aware how your breath nourishes you whether you are paying attention to it or not. It is with you from birth until death, more loyal than your closest companion. Allow yourself to appreciate this automatic process that sustains your life wherever you go. See if you can incline toward your breathing like a mother might incline toward a beloved child, with curiosity and gratitude.
- Your mind will wander away from the sensation of the breath many times every minute. Don't worry about how often your mind wanders. Gently return to the feeling of your breathing when you notice that your mind has wandered.
- Now just for a moment, rest in the experience of your body, and then slowly, gently open your eyes.

Here-and-Now Stone

Any sense object brings us into the present moment and out of our sorrows (past) and worries (future) as long as we are aware of our moment-to-moment experience of the object.

- Find a stone that you really enjoy looking at and feeling.
- When you are emotionally upset, find your stone and bring your attention to the *sensation* of touching the stone.
- You can also enjoy the *sight* of the stone, choosing to focus on how it looks at that moment.
- Slowly savor how the stone feels in your hand, turning it around in your fingers.
- Contemplate how ancient it may be, almost as old as the earth itself, in contrast to our soft and tender bodies.
- Know that you can reach for this stone and experience a mini-vacation in the present moment any time you're feeling distress or agitation.

Session III: Practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation

Home Practice

1. Daily Practice: Loving-Kindness toward a benefactor.
2. Notice situations where there is criticism toward yourself or another. See if you can “soften” this criticism. What do you need to hear? Do?
3. Practice using your own phrases when distress arises.

Affectionate Breathing

Please find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Sit in a way that your bones are supporting the muscles and you don't need any effort to remain in one position for the whole exercise. To do this, try keeping your back straight and gently supported, with your shoulder blades slightly dropped and your chin gently tucked toward your chest. Take three, slow easy deep breaths to relax and let go of whatever burdens you're carrying around. Then let your eyelids gently close, or partially close, whichever makes you more comfortable.

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- Let your body *breathe you*—it does that automatically anyway.
- Now put your hand on your heart for a moment to remind yourself that you will be bringing *kind* attention to your breathing.
- Be aware how your breath nourishes you whether you are paying attention to it or not. It is with you from birth until death, more loyal than your closest companion. Allow yourself to appreciate this automatic process that sustains your life wherever you go. See if you can incline toward your breathing like a mother might incline toward a beloved child, with curiosity and gratitude.
- Your mind will wander away from the sensation of the breath many times every minute. Don't worry about how often your mind wanders. Gently return to the feeling of your breathing when you notice that your mind has wandered.
- Now just for a moment, rest in the experience of your body, and then slowly, gently open your eyes.

Loving-Kindness Meditation for Beginners

Please set aside 20-40 minutes for the purpose of bringing warmth and good will into your life. Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Close your eyes fully or partially. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment.

- Put your hands over your heart to remind yourself that you are bringing not only attention, but *loving* attention, to your experience. Feel the warmth of your hands, the gentle pressure of your hands, and feel how your chest rises and falls beneath your hands with every breath.
- Now, bring to mind a person or other living being who naturally makes you smile. This could be a child, your grandmother, your cat or dog—whomever naturally brings happiness to your heart. Perhaps it's a bird outside your window. Let yourself feel what it's like to be in that being's presence. Allow yourself to enjoy the good company.
- Now, recognize how vulnerable this loved one is--just like you, subject to sickness, aging, and death. Also, this being wishes to be happy and free from suffering, just like you and every other living being. Repeat softly and gently, feeling the importance of your words:

*May you be safe.
May you be peaceful.
May you be healthy.
May you live with ease.*

- When you notice that your mind has wandered, return to the words and the image of the loved one you have in mind. Savor any warm feelings that may arise. Go slow.
- Now add *yourself* to your circle of good will. Put your hand over your heart and feel the warmth and gentle pressure of your hand (for just a moment or for the rest of the meditation), saying:

*May you and I be safe.
May you and I be peaceful.
May you and I be healthy.
May you and I live with ease.*

- Visualize your whole body in your mind's eye, notice any stress or uneasiness that may be lingering within you, and offer kindness to yourself.

*May I be safe.
May I be peaceful.
May I be healthy.
May I live with ease.*

- Now take a few breaths and just rest sit quietly in your own body, savoring the good will and compassion that flows naturally from your own heart. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.
- Gently open your eyes.

Exercise: What Do I Need?

(Adapted from Dr. Tara Brach)

1. Bring to mind some difficulty you are experiencing in your life currently. Sit for a few moments and play the situation out in your mind.
2. Focus your awareness on any thoughts, feelings, sensations or emotions that arise. Ask yourself, what am I experiencing right now?
3. Allow the thoughts, feelings, emotions or sensations to be there. Notice any aversive reactions.
4. Investigate your experience with a gentle curiosity. Ask yourself, “what most wants my attention?” “How am I experiencing this in my body?” “What am I believing?” “What does this feeling want from me?”
5. Expand your awareness to the entire body.

Exercise: Freedom From Blame

(Adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff)

Think about a trait you often judge yourself for, and that is an important part of your self-definition.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. How often do I display this trait? Who are you when you don't display this trait? Are you still you?
2. Are there particular circumstances that seem to draw out the trait, and others in which the trait is not apparent? Does this trait really define you if particular circumstances must be present in order for it to emerge?
3. What are the various causes and conditions that led to having the trait in the first place (early experiences, genetics, life pressures etc.)
4. Did you choose to have this trait, and do you have much choice about whether or not you display this trait? If not, why are you judging yourself for this trait?
5. What happens when you reframe your self-description so that you are not defining yourself in terms of this trait?

Session IV: Finding Your Compassionate Voice

Home Practice

1. Daily Practice: Loving-Kindness toward a benefactor and self
2. Daily Practice: Equanimity Phrases

Loving-Kindness and Self-Compassion

Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Fully or partially close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment. Put your hand on your heart for a moment as a reminder to be kind to yourself.

- Form an image of yourself sitting down. Note your posture on the chair as if you were seeing yourself from the outside.
- Now bring your attention *inside* your body and feel the pulsation and vibration of your body.
- Locate your breathing where you can feel it most easily. Feel how your breath moves in your body, and when your attention wanders, gently feel the movement of your breath once again.
- After a few minutes, start to notice *physical sensations* of stress that you're holding in your body, perhaps in your neck, jaw, belly, or forehead.
- Also notice if you're holding some *difficult emotions*, such as worry about the future or uneasiness about the past. Understand that every human body bears stress and worry throughout the day.
- Now offer yourself goodwill *because* of what you're holding in your body right now. Say the following phrases to yourself, softly and gently:

May I be safe.

May I be peaceful.

May I be kind to myself.

May I accept myself as I am.

- When you notice that your mind has wandered, return to the words or the experience of discomfort in your body or mind. Go slow.
- If you are ever overwhelmed with emotion, you can always return to your breathing. You can also name the emotion, or find it in the physical body and soften that area. Then, when you're comfortable, return to the phrases.
- Finally, take a few breaths and just rest sit quietly in your own body. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.
- Gently open your eyes.

Equanimity Phrases

Everyone is on his or her own life journey.

I am not the cause of this person's suffering, nor it entirely within my power to take it away.

Although this moment is difficult to bear, I will help to the extent that I can.

Forgiveness Phrases

May I forgive you for what you have done, wittingly or unwittingly, that caused me harm.

May I forgive myself for what I (may) have done, wittingly or unwittingly, that caused you harm.

Compassionate Letter to Myself

Step One:

Everybody has something about themselves that they don't like; something that causes them to feel shame, to feel insecure, or not "good enough." It is the human condition to be imperfect, and feelings of failure and inadequacy are part of the experience of living a human life. Try writing about an issue you have that tends to make you feel inadequate or bad about yourself (physical appearance, work or relationship issues...) How does this aspect of yourself make you feel inside - scared, sad, depressed, insecure, angry? What emotions come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself? This is just between you and the paper, so please try to be as emotionally honest as possible and to avoid repressing any feelings, while at the same time not being overly melodramatic. Try to just feel your emotions exactly as they are – no more, no less – and then write about them.

Step Two:

Now think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting, kind and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspect of yourself you have just been writing about. Reflect upon what this friend feels towards you, and how you are loved and accepted exactly as you are, with all your very human imperfections. This friend recognizes the limits of human nature, and is kind and forgiving towards you. In his/her great wisdom this friend understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened in your life to create you as you are in this moment. Your particular inadequacy is connected to so many things you didn't necessarily choose: your genes, your family history, life circumstances – things that were outside of your control.

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend – focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for. What would this friend say to you about your "flaw" from the perspective of unlimited compassion? How would this friend convey the deep compassion he/she feels for you, especially for the pain you feel when you judge yourself so harshly? What would this friend write in order to remind you that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses? And if you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, how would these suggestions embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion? As you write to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend, try to infuse your letter with a strong sense of his/her acceptance, kindness, caring, and desire for your health and happiness.

After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back and read it again, really letting the words sink in. Feel the compassion as it pours into you, soothing and comforting you like a cool breeze on a hot day. Love, connection and acceptance are your birthright. To claim them you need only look within yourself.

Session V: Living Deeply

Home Practice

1. Daily centering meditation
2. Daily meditation practice of Loving-Kindness toward benefactor and self
3. Each day, engage in one activity/behavior which engages your vow

Loving-Kindness and Self-Compassion

Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Fully or partially close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment. Put your hand on your heart for a moment as a reminder to be kind to yourself.

- Form an image of yourself sitting down. Note your posture on the chair as if you were seeing yourself from the outside.
- Now bring your attention *inside* your body and feel the pulsation and vibration of your body.
- Locate your breathing where you can feel it most easily. Feel how your breath moves in your body, and when your attention wanders, gently feel the movement of your breath once again.
- After a few minutes, start to notice *physical sensations* of stress that you're holding in your body, perhaps in your neck, jaw, belly, or forehead.
- Also notice if you're holding some *difficult emotions*, such as worry about the future or uneasiness about the past. Understand that every human body bears stress and worry throughout the day.
- Now offer yourself goodwill *because* of what you're holding in your body right now. Say the following phrases to yourself, softly and gently:

May I be safe.
May I be peaceful.
May I be kind to myself.
May I accept myself as I am.

- When you notice that your mind has wandered, return to the words or the experience of discomfort in your body or mind. Go slow.
- If you are ever overwhelmed with emotion, you can always return to your breathing. You can also name the emotion, or find it in the physical body and soften that area. Then, when you're comfortable, return to the phrases.
- Finally, take a few breaths and just rest sit quietly in your own body. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.
- Gently open your eyes.

Centering Meditation

Centering meditation is a technique for discovering a compassionate word or phrase that applies particularly to you and your current situation. Beginning practitioners of loving-kindness meditation can use centering meditation to discover their own, personalized loving-kindness phrases.

- Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take a few deep, relaxing breaths.
- Notice your posture—sitting, not lying down, not standing—and feel the sensations in your body. If you have any physical discomfort, gently touch it with your awareness. If you have emotional distress, notice it and let it be there.
- Place one or two hands on your chest as a reminder to give yourself loving attention. Feel the warmth of your hands, the gentle pressure, and the rhythmic rising and falling of your chest as you breathe.
- Keep paying attention to your breathing. As you breathe, let your awareness move deeply into the experience of breathing.
- Just continue to breathe and open your awareness to the space between your outbreath and your inbreath. Feel that space. Let your awareness drop into the space between your outbreath and the next inbreath.
- The breath comes seemingly out of nowhere—it's actually breathing *you*, keeping you healthy even when you're fast asleep. Go deeply into the deep, empty space from which breathing emerges, from which the faintest movement originates. This is a field of great peace and freedom.
- Just as your inbreath originates out of seemingly nowhere, your thoughts also emerge out of a deep, quiet invisible space. When you're ready, listen for any words that may bubble up. Open yourself up to a word or a phrase that might be *just what you need to hear right now*. If a word or phrase were to appear from the bottom of your heart, what would it be?
- Take a few minutes to do this. Breathe, relax, and open yourself to words that might bubble up from deep inside. If no words arise, just stay with your breath. If a *few* words arise, roll them over in your mind and select one that's perfect for you at this time in your life. Some possibilities might be "love," "let it be," "I love you," "yes," "trust," "peace" or "mercy."
- When you have a word or phrase, allow yourself to savor it, rolling it over and over in your mind. If you notice that your mind wanders, bring it ever so gently back to the word or words.
- After a while, let go of what you're doing and simply be with your inner experience, letting yourself be just as you are.
- Slowly open your eyes.

Exercise: Discovering Core Values
(adapted from Dr. Stephen Hayes)

Imagine you are at your own funeral and someone is delivering your eulogy. They capture what your life has stood for and the person you were....

What would you want that person to say?

Is there some way in which you aren't living in accord with your core values?

Are there external circumstances that prevent you from living according to your core values?

Are there internal circumstances that are preventing you from living according to your core values?

Is there any way that giving yourself more compassion/support could help you live more according to your values?

Making a Vow

In your own words, write out a promise, you make to yourself that describes how you will live according to your core values. For example, “may I be patient with myself when I make mistakes”

Exercise: Finding the Silver Lining

Describe a past incident that seemed impossible at the time it occurred and that now you feel you learned important lessons from.

Describe, if there is one, a current situation (practical or emotional) that also seems impossible or you can't see your way through.

Assuming you'll get through this, what could you learn from the current situation? What deeper understanding will you have once you have gotten through the situation?

Is there any way bringing greater self-compassion to the situation can help you learn and grow?

Session VI: Managing Difficult Emotions

Home Practice

1. Daily Loving-Kindness practice toward benefactor, self, neutral person and challenging person.
2. Daily Practice of Soften, Soothe, Allow.

Soften, Soothe and Allow

Please find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three relaxing breaths. Place your hand on your heart for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and to bring kindness to yourself.

Labeling

- Now let yourself recall a mild-moderately difficult situation that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, or a loved one in pain. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem—choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it. Now clearly visualize the situation. Who was there? What was said? What happened?
- Now see if you can *name* the strongest emotion—a difficult emotion—associated with that situation: anger? sadness? grief? confusion? fear? longing? despair? Repeat the name of the emotion to yourself in a gentle, understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what he or she is feeling: “That’s longing.” “That’s grief.”

Mindfulness of Emotion in the Body

- Now expand your awareness to your body as a whole.
- Recall the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it the most. In your mind’s eye, sweep your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.
- Now *choose a single location in your body* where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension or an achy feeling, like a heartache.
- In your mind, incline gently toward that spot.

Soften, Soothe, and Allow

- *Soften* into that location in your body. *Let* the muscles be soft without a requirement that they *become* soft, like simply applying heat to sore muscles. You can say, “soft...soft...soft...” quietly to yourself, to enhance the process. Remember that you are not trying to make the sensation go away—you are just being with them with loving awareness.
- If you wish, let yourself just soften around the edges, like around the edges of a pancake. No need to go all the way in.
- *Soothe* yourself for struggling in this way. Put your hand over your heart and feel your body breathe. Perhaps kind words arise in our mind, such as, “Oh my dear, this is such a painful experience. May I grow in ease and well-being.”
- If you wish, you can also direct kindness to the part of your body that is under stress by placing your hand in that place. It may help to think of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. You can say kind words to yourself, or just repeat, “soothe...soothe...soothe.”
- *Allow* the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go as it pleases, like a guest in your own home. You can repeat, “allow...allow...allow.”
- “Soften, soothe and allow.” “Soften, soothe and allow.” You can use these three words like a mantra, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness toward your suffering.
- If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better.
- Slowly open your eyes when you’re ready.

Loving-Kindness Meditation with the Challenging Person

This meditation takes about 20 minutes. Prepare for meditation in the usual manner and begin repeating the loving-kindness phrases for yourself and/or your benefactor for about 5 minutes. Remember to put one or two hands on your heart as a reminder to bring loving attention to yourself.

- Now bring an image of your "difficult person" to mind. Remind yourself that the difficult person is struggling to find his or her way through life and, in so doing, is causing you pain. Say to yourself, "Just as I wish to be peaceful and free from suffering, may you, too, find inner peace."
- Repeat the phrases softly, keeping the image of the difficult person in your mind while sensing the value of your words:

May you be safe.

May you be peaceful.

May you be healthy.

May you live with ease.

- Feelings of aversion, disgust, anger, guilt, shame, or sadness will immediately arise. The phrases may sound hollow alongside these emotions. Give a label to the emotion you're feeling ("sadness," "anger") and practice compassion for yourself ("May I be safe..."). When you feel better, try again with your difficult person. 99% of loving-kindness meditation for the difficult person may actually be compassion meditation for oneself.
- Feel free to use self-compassion phrases like:

May I be kind to myself

May I accept myself as I am

- Go back and forth between yourself (or your benefactor) and the difficult person. Make sure the energy of good will pervades your meditation session.
- Before you end, release the difficult person and say:

May I and all beings be safe.

May I and all beings be peaceful.

May I and all beings be healthy.

May I and all beings live with ease.

Gently open your eyes.

Exercise: Working with Shame

Think of a behavior you feel very badly about (something you would like to change and/or that you beat yourself up about).

Write down what you regularly say to yourself about this behavior.

Reflect on your mental chatter about this behavior and note the feelings that arise.

Explore why you might criticize yourself. What is the critic trying to accomplish? What might it be trying to do for you?

If the critic had a function, what is it? Write down what the role of the self-critic has been.

Let the critic know it has served you well, had good intentions and was trying its best to help you.

Now close your eyes and imagine the behavior. Note what is happening in the body. Now, soften the body and offer yourself words of reassurance.

Session VII: Transforming Relationships

Home Practice

1. Continue practicing Loving-Kindness toward benefactor, self, neutral person and difficult person.
2. When uncertainty arises, practice the compassionate friend meditation.

Forgiveness – Self and Other

We all make mistakes. This is because every thought and action is the product of a universe of invisible causes stretching back through time and outward across the planet. For example, I have inherited my temperament from my parents and grandparents, and my actions are shaped by untold, interacting elements of my environment—climate, people, diet, culture, current events. Therefore, I have limited knowledge and control over precisely what I say and do from one moment to the next.

When we make a mistake, it's natural to feel remorse. Remorse is a useful emotion that alerts us to a mistake. However, when we resist the experience of remorse, perhaps because we're embarrassed, then remorse may turn into guilt, rumination, defensiveness, and reprisal. A healthy response to our own mistakes is *self-forgiveness*. There are 4 steps:

1. Open to the natural pain of remorse.
2. Recognize that it's only human to make mistakes, and try to understand some factors leading to your mistake.
3. Offer forgiveness to yourself, perhaps by saying "*May I forgive myself for what I have done, wittingly or unwittingly, to have caused [this person] harm.*"
4. Resolve not to repeat the same mistake.

Why forgive *others*? Because it's often the best thing we can do for ourselves. Forgiveness is a way of letting go of pain. When we forgive others, we release the pain of anger and bitterness, but we can only forgive others after we have validated our own pain and learned to comfort ourselves. Here are the steps:

1. Open to the pain that another person caused you.
2. Offer yourself compassion for how you have suffered, perhaps by saying: "May I be safe. May I be peaceful. May I be healthy. May I be free from suffering."
3. Try to understand the forces that made this person act badly, or that shaped his or her personality (e.g., financial stress, difficult childhood, low self-esteem, cultural factors)
4. Offer forgiveness to the other person, perhaps by saying: "*May I forgive you for what you have done, wittingly or unwittingly, to have caused me harm.*"
5. Resolve not to be harmed again.

COMPASSIONATE FRIEND

(adapted from Kornfield, 2011; Gilbert, 2009)

Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Gently close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body. Put one or two hands over your heart for a moment to remind yourself to give yourself *loving* attention.

- Now imagine yourself in a room that is safe, cozy, and comfortable—a perfect room, just the way you'd like it. The lighting is perfect, the furniture is just right. Make yourself comfortable in your room.
- You'll soon receive a visitor in your room, a light being who embodies the qualities of wisdom, strength, warmth and unconditional acceptance. This being may be a known figure like Christ or Buddha, it can be a compassionate person from your past like a grandparent who passed away, or it could just be a warm, loving presence without any particular form. This being of light would like to visit you for a little while.
- Your room has a door that you can open. Please go to the door and open it for your compassionate friend who is coming to visit. Invite him or her in.
- Place yourself at just the right distance from your compassionate friend—not too close and not too far. Just enjoy the company of this loving being. See your compassionate friend in your mind's eye and enjoy his or her good company. There is nothing special you need to do except savor the moment.
- Your compassionate friend would like to tell you something now, something that is *just what you need to hear right now* in your life. Listen carefully to what your compassionate friend has come to say. If no words come, that's okay, too—just share his or her good company. That's a blessing in itself. Just be with your friend, listening if there is anything you should hear.
- Soon your friend will be leaving again, but before that happens, your friend would like to give you something—a material object. As you place your hands together, your friend reaches out and puts an object in your hands, or an object simply appears in your hands—something that has special meaning for you. What is it? What did you receive from your compassionate friend? Look it over carefully.
- Soon it's time for your friend to leave, but he or she can return anytime. Open the door, enjoy his or her good company for a last moment, and then bid your friend farewell.
- You are now alone in your room again. Let yourself savor what just happened, enjoying the words and the object that was given to you. Know that you can invite your friend back anytime you wish.
- And when you're ready, slowly open your eyes.

Exercise: Letting Go of Resentment
(Adapted from Jack Kornfield)

1. Let yourself sit comfortably and quietly. Bring kind attention to your body and breath.
2. Bring into awareness the story, the situation, the feelings and reactions that it is time to let go of. Name them gently (i.e. anger, grief) and hold them compassionately. Continue to breathe.
3. Gently ask yourself, “Do I have to continue to replay this story?” “Do I have to hold onto these feelings?” “Is it time to let go?”
4. If not, give yourself compassion for not being ready to let go.
5. If you would like, say to yourself, “letting go, letting go”. Softly repeat the phrase.
6. Soften the body and feel any space that arises as you let go.
7. Sitting quietly notice if any of the feelings, thoughts, etc. return.
8. Simply return to softening and the phrase: “letting go.”

Exercise: Soft Feelings Behind Hard Feelings

1. Sitting quietly, reflect upon a recent situation in which you experienced strong feelings of anger and/or resentment.
2. Notice what is happening in your mind and body. What do you feel? What stories are present?
3. Now, sitting with the breath, see if you can relax and scan the body for any additional feelings. You might ask yourself, “is there anything I need that I am not getting in this situation?”
4. If not, try holding the hard feelings compassionately. If “softer feelings” (i.e. sadness or shame) arise, hold those compassionately as well. Notice what is happening in the mind and body.
5. Gently ask yourself what you need now, in this moment. How might you give yourself what you need?

Session VIII: Embracing Your Life

Home Practice

Savoring Food

- Breathe in and out a few times.
- *Look* at your food. Enjoy the color, texture or shape of your food.
- Gratitude: Reflect for a moment on all the many hands involved in bringing this food to our table.
- Enjoy the *smell* of your food. Notice if you begin to salivate.
- Begin eating. If it's a hand-held snack, how does your food *feel* in your fingers?
- Slowly chew your food, perhaps chewing 5-10 times before swallowing. Notice the feeling of the food in on your tongue, between your teeth, and as it goes down your throat.
- How does it *taste*?
- Now ask yourself: *When I eat this, am I really enjoying it, or am I preoccupied with other thoughts and feelings?*
- Be still. Slow down. Give undivided attention to your eating.
- Stay in your body. How does your food *feel* in your mouth?
- When you are chewing, know that you are chewing. Chew consciously.
- Be 100% in the experience of chewing and tasting.
- Enjoy!

Meditation: Loving-Kindness for All Beings

Once you have found a comfortable sitting position, spend a few moments offering loving-kindness toward a benefactor, yourself, a neutral person and a difficult person.

Now, as best you can, expand your awareness to include individuals and groups who are, in many ways, unknown to you. For example, you may wish for all women, or men, to be happy. It sometimes helps to categorize people, or beings, into opposites. For example, may all children be happy and may all adults be happy. Alternatively, you may simply wish for all beings to be happy.

As you extend loving-kindness toward all beings, notice the spaciousness in the body and see if you can notice your breath extending out, past the body.

Exercise: Appreciating Yourself
(Adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff)

List ten things about yourself that you really like or appreciate. The qualities you list don't have to be ones you display all the time. As you write down each quality, see if you can notice any uncomfortable feelings – embarrassment, fear of vanity, unfamiliarity? If discomfort comes up, remind yourself that you are not claiming you're better than anyone else, nor that you're perfect. You're simply noting the good qualities that you sometimes display. See if you can acknowledge and enjoy the positive qualities you have, lingering over them and really taking them in.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Exercise: Seeing Yourself as You Are

A. List five culturally valued traits for which you are *above average*

1
2
3
4
5

B. List five culturally valued traits for which you are *average*

1
2
3
4
5

C. List five culturally valued traits for which you are *below average*

1
2
3
4
5

D. Consider the full range of traits listed above. Can you accept all these facets of yourself? Being human does not mean being better than others. Being human means you encompass the full range of human experience, the positive, the negative and the neutral. Being human means you *are* average in many ways. Can you celebrate the experience of being human?