

Self-Compassion IV: Cultivating Self-Compassion in Your Own Life and Using Self-Compassion with Clients

This lesson offers you the opportunity to directly explore the cultivation of self-compassion for yourself through the use of assessments, guided meditations, and written exercises developed by the experts in the field. These are the same exercises you could use as interventions with your clients. At the end of the lesson, further resources are provided for clinicians, including training opportunities and online materials to further your knowledge and expertise in the application of self-compassion interventions in a clinical context.

The Self Compassion Test

Begin with the informal self-assessment, provided by Neff on her website, entitled [Exercise 1](#).

Once you have completed this exercise, try a more formal self-assessment tool. Kristin Neff has also developed the Self-Compassion Scale for use by researchers in the field. This 26-item measurement tool is available online for self-use in a version which scores itself. Assess your own level of self-compassion taking the [Self-Compassion Scale](#) yourself. How do your results with these two approaches compare? Which one was more useful for you as a self-assessment exercise? Which might be more useful for your clients?

Why Self-Compassion is Important

Kelly McGonigal is a senior teacher for the Stanford University Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE). In this video, McGonigal covers topics such as the impact of self-compassion on depression and happiness, relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others, the effects of self-compassion on the brain, forms of resistance to self-compassion, and the usefulness of self-compassion for changing difficult behaviors. Watch McGonigal's Youtube video "Why Self-Compassion Matters, and How to Develop It" (13 mins.)

Then view the following video including Kristin Neff's perspective on why self-compassion is important. (1 min.)

In the next video, listen to Duke University Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience Mark Leary discussing self-compassion vs. self-esteem. Topics include the downside of self-esteem, and the effects of self-compassion on self-indulgence and accountability. (3 min.)

Guided Meditations

[Christopher Germer's](#) website has written meditation instructions and audio guided meditations designed to help with the cultivation of self-compassion and related skills. Many are adaptations of traditional Buddhist meditations that are also used in secular contexts, like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (See our lessons on [MBSR](#) and [MBCT](#)), but phrased to invite the cultivation of self-compassion within the context of a mindfulness exercise.

Germer makes available a variety of [downloadable audios](#) for guided self-compassion meditations. See especially Compassionate Body Scan, Compassionate Breathing, Self-Compassion Meditation, and Mindful Self-Compassion Meditation. (These exercises are listed with their file size in megs. The length in minutes is a bit more than the file size in mgs. For example, a 10 meg file takes about 12 minutes to play.) The authors have found it useful to refer clients to guided meditations such as these for practice between therapy sessions.

Self-Compassion Exercises from Neff, Germer, and Gilbert

Handouts for self-compassion activities included in "Mindful Self-Compassion," the eight-week group intervention Neff and Germer are developing, can be found on [Germer's website](#). Titles of the activities include: "Compassionate Letter to Myself," "The Self-Compassion Break," and "Developing Your Own Self-Compassion Mantra."

Self-compassion activities developed by Paul Gilbert can be found in his online handbook, [An Introduction to the Theory & Practice of Compassion Focused Therapy and Compassionate](#), pages 56-97. Exercises include "Imaging the Self Critical Part of Self," "Developing Qualities of Inner Compassion," and "Compassion-Focused Imagery Work."

Look through these experiential exercises and pick several to try for yourself. These exercises may also be adapted for use in the

context of individual or group therapy.

Training in Self-Compassion

Both Germer and Neff offer trainings for their eight-week intervention, “Mindful Self-Compassion,” sometimes together. See their websites ([Germer](#) and [Neff](#)) for their current teaching schedules.

In England, Paul Gilbert’s organization, The Compassionate Mind Foundation, offers [workshops](#) on the clinical applications of compassion. Gilbert has also made his clinical intervention handbook, *An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Compassion Focused Therapy and Compassionate Mind Training for Shame Based Difficulties*, available for free online (see above) as well as the [accompanying materials](#) for participants. For those interested in more information about how this material is implemented in a clinical intervention, Gilbert provides a detailed downloadable description of the use of his [Compassion-Focused Group Therapy](#) as taught by himself in the context of a Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) program.

In addition, Stanford’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) offers what they call “Compassion Cultivation Training” which they describe as follows:

“Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) is a nine-week program designed to develop the qualities of compassion, empathy, and kindness for oneself and for others. CCT integrates traditional contemplative practices with contemporary psychology and scientific research on compassion. The program was developed at Stanford University by a team of contemplative scholars, clinical psychologists, and researchers.”

Details can be found on the [CCARE website](#).

Tara Brach has developed a nine-session training program for clinicians on integrating mindfulness, including self-compassion, into psychotherapy practice available through [Sounds True](#). [Brach’s own website](#) also has many useful resources for those cultivating self-compassion, including talks on self-forgiveness and radical acceptance.

Gilbert is careful to caution that clinicians employing his material should be adequately trained to do so, especially noting that CFT and CMT are grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), as well as mindfulness. For CBT, he directs those interested to [Tony Roth’s website](#) for developing core competencies for the various psychotherapies. As with any mindfulness-based intervention, a clinician using such interventions should themselves have a personal mindfulness practice.

Further Resources for Clinicians

Online [self-compassion bibliography](#) .

[The Self Compassion Diet: A Step-by-Step Plan to Lose Weight With Lovingkindness](#) by Jean Fain. To view Harvard Medical School psychotherapist Fain describing her approach to dieting, watch the following video.

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