**Self-Compassion in Acceptance-Based Treatment**

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**DEFINITIONS**

**Mindfulness**

“The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose,

in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn -

“Awareness, of the present moment, with acceptance.” - Chris Germer -

“Knowing what you are experiencing, *while* you’re experiencing it.”

**Acceptance**

“Active, nonjudgmental embracing of experience in the here and now.”

- Steven Hayes –

**Empathy**

“An accurate understanding of the [another’s] world as seen from the inside. To sense [another person’s] world as if it were your own.”

- Carl Rogers -

**Loving-Kindness**

“The wish that all sentient beings may be happy.” – Dalai Lama -

**Compassion**

“The wish that all sentient beings may be free from suffering. “

– Dalai Lama –

“Deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and other living beings,

coupled with the wish and effort to alleviate it.” – Paul Gilbert –

**Self-Compassion**

“When we suffer, caring for ourselves as we would care for someone we truly love. Self-compassion includes self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness.”

- Kristin Neff -

**PATHWAYS AND STAGES**

**Pathways to Self-Compassion**

1. *Physical* – Caring for your body/non-harm
2. *Mental* - Allowing your thoughts
3. *Emotional* - Accepting your feelings
4. *Relational* – Connecting authentically with others
5. *Spiritual* - Nurturing your values

**Stages of Acceptance**

1. *Exploring* – turning toward discomfort with curiosity
2. *Tolerating* – safely enduring
3. *Allowing* – letting feelings come and go
4. *Befriending* – seeing pain as part of a meaningful life

**Stages of Progress**

1. *Striving* – wishing to feel better
2. *Disillusionment* – when resistance amplifies discomfort
3. *True Acceptance* – acceptance before change

**SELF-COMPASSION IN DAILY LIFE**

The goal of the MSC program is to be mindful and self-compassionate in daily life. That means to (1) know when you’re under stress or suffering (*mindfulness*) and (2) to respond with care and kindness (*self-compassion*). The simplest approach is to discover how you *already* care for yourself, and then remind yourself to do those things when your life becomes difficult.

**PHYSICALLY – soften the body**

How do you care for yourself physically (e.g., exercise, massage, warm bath, cup of tea)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Can you think of new ways to release the tension and stress that builds up in your body?

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**MENTALLY – reduce agitation**

How do you care for your mind, especially when you’re under stress (e.g., meditation, watch a funny movie, read an inspiring book)?

Is there a new strategy you’d like to try to let your thoughts come and go more easily?

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**EMOTIONALLY – soothe and comfort yourself**

How do you care for yourself emotionally (pet the dog, journal, cook)?

Is there something new you’d like to try?

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**RELATIONALLY – connect with others**

How or when do you relate to others that brings you genuine happiness (e.g., meet with friends, send a birthday card, play a game)?

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Is there any way that you’d like to enrich these connections?

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**SPIRITUALLY – commit to your values**

What do you do to care for yourself spiritually (pray, walk in the woods, help others)?

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If you’ve been neglecting your spiritual side, is there anything you’d like to remember to do?

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**SOOTHING TOUCH**

An easy way to support ourselves when we’re feeling badly is to offer ourselves comforting or soothing touch.

***Hand-on-Heart***

* When you notice you’re under stress, take 2-3 deep, satisfying breaths.
* Gently place a hand over your heart, simply feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand. If you wish, placing *both* hands over your heart.
* Feel the natural rising and falling of your chest as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
* Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

Some people feel uneasy putting a hand over the heart. Feel free to explore where on your body a gentle touch is actually soothing. Some other possibilities are:

* One hand on your cheek
* Cradling your face in your hands
* Gently stroking your arms
* Crossing your arms and giving a gentle squeeze
* One hand over your heart
* Cupping your hand over a fist over your heart – compassion with strength
* Gently stroking your chest, back and forth or in small circles
* Two hands over your heart
* One hand on your belly and one over heart
* Two hands on your belly
* Cupping one hand in the other in your lap

**SELF-COMPASSION BREAK**

When you notice that you’re feeling stress or emotional discomfort, see if you can find the discomfort in your body. Where do you feel it the most? Make contact with the sensations as they arise in your body.

Now, say to yourself, slowly:

1. *“****This is a moment of suffering”***

That’s mindfulness. Other options include*:*

* + - *This hurts.*
    - *Ouch!*
    - *This is stressful.*

1. *“****Suffering is a part of life”***

That’s common humanity. Other options include*:*

* *I’m not alone. Others are just like me.*
* *We all struggle in our lives*
* *This is how it feels when a person struggles in this way*

Now, put your hands over your heart, or wherever it feels soothing, feeling the warmth and gentle touch of your hands.

Say to yourself:

1. ***“May I be kind to myself”***

or another way of saying this is, ***“May I give myself what I need.”***

See if you can find words for what *you need* in times like this.

Options may include:

* *May I accept myself as I am*
* *May I learn to accept myself as I am*
* *May I forgive myself.*
* *May I be strong.*
* *May I be patient.*

If you’re having difficulty finding the right words, imagine that a dear friend or loved one is having the same problem as you. What would you say to this person? If your friend would leave with just a few words in mind, what would you like those words to be? What message would you like to deliver, heart to heart?

Now see if you can offer the same message to yourself.

**SOLES OF THE FEET**

This is an effective way to anchor your awareness in the present moment, in body sensation, especially when you’re upset and can’t calm yourself down.

* Stand up and feel the soles of your feet on the floor. Rock forward and back a little, and side to side. Make little circles with your knees, feeling the changes of sensation in the soles of your feet.
* When you notice your mind has wandered, just feeling the soles of your feet again.
* If you wish, you can begin to walk slowly, noticing the changing sensations in the soles of your feet. Noticing the sensation of lifting a foot, stepping forward, and the placing the foot on the floor. Doing the same with both feet as you walk.
* As you walk, perhaps also noticing for a moment how small the surface area of your feet is, and how hard your feet work to keep your body off the ground. See if you can notice that with appreciation or gratitude.
* When you are ready, returning to standing.

*Adapted from Singh et al, 2003*

**COMPASSIONATE MOVEMENT**

* **Anchoring**

Please stand up and feel the soles of your feet on the floor. Rocking forward and backward a little, and side to side. Making little circles with your knees, feeling the changes of sensation in the soles of your feet. Anchoring your awareness in your feet.

* **Opening**

Now opening your field of awareness and scanning your whole body for other sensations, noticing any areas of ease as well as areas of tension.

* **Responding Compassionately**

Now focusing for a moment on places of *discomfort*.

Gradually begin to move your body in a way that feels really good to you—giving yourself compassion. For example, letting yourself gently twist your shoulders, rolling your head, turning at the waist, dropping into a forward bend…whatever feels just right for you right now.

Giving your body the movement it needs. As poet Mary Oliver said, “You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.”

* Finally, coming to stillness, standing again and feeling your body, noting any changes.

**WORKING WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS**

There are 3 components to this exercise: (1) labeling emotions, (2) mindfulness of emotion in the body, and (3) soften-soothe-allow. The purpose of the following exercise is to develop familiarity and skill with the components and then apply them, individually or together, in daily life when difficult emotions naturally arise.

* Place your hand on your heart, or another soothing place, for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and that you, too, are worthy of kindness.
* Let yourself recall a mild to 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.
* Clearly visualize the situation. Who was there? What was said? What happened?

**Labeling Emotions**

* Now that you’re thinking about this situation, seeing if you can name the different emotions that arise within you:
* Anger?
* Sadness?
* Grief?
* Confusion?
* Fear?
* Longing?
* Despair?
* Shame?
* Now seeing if you can name the *strongest* emotion—a difficult emotion—associated with that situation.
* Repeating 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 expanding your awareness to your body as a whole.
* Recalling the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it most easily. In your mind’s eye, sweeping your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.
* Now please *choose a single location in your body* where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension, an achy feeling, or a heartache.
* In your mind, inclining gently toward that spot.

**Soften-Soothe-Allow**

* Now*,* ***softening*** into that location in your body. Letting the muscles soften, letting them relax, as if in warm water. Softening…softening…softening… Remember that we’re not trying to change the feeling—we’re just holding it in a tender way.
* If you wish, just softening a little around the edges.
* Now, ***soothing*** yourself because of this difficult situation.
* If you wish, placing your hand over the part of your body that feels uncomfortable and just feeling the warmth and gentle touch of your hand. Perhaps imagining warmth and kindness flowing through your hand into your body. Maybe even thinking of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. Soothing…soothing…soothing.
* And are there some comforting words that you might need to hear? If so, imagine you had a friend who was struggling in the same way. What would you say to your friend? (“I’m so sorry you feel this way.” “I care deeply about you.”)
* Can you offer yourself a similar message? (“Oh, it’s so hard to feel this.” “May I be kind to myself.”
* If you need, feel free to open your eyes whenever you wish, or let go of the exercise and just feel your breath.
* Finally*,* ***allowing*** the discomfort to be there. Making room for it, releasing the need to make it go away.
* And allowing *yourself* to be just as you are, just like this, if only for this moment.
* Softening…soothing…allowing. Softening…soothing…allowing.
* Now letting go of the practice and allowing yourself to be exactly as you are in this moment.

**GIVING AND RECEIVING COMPASSION**

Please sit comfortably, closing your eyes, and if you like, putting a hand over your heart or another soothing place as a reminder to bring not just awareness, but *loving* awareness, to your experience and to yourself.

**Savoring the Breath**

* Taking a few deep, relaxing breaths, noticing how your breath nourishes your body as you inhale and soothes your body as you exhale.
* Now letting your breathing find its own natural rhythm. Continue feeling the sensation of breathing in and breathing out. If you like, allowing yourself to be gently rocked and caressed by the rhythm of your breathing.

**Warming Up Awareness**

* Now, focusing your attention on your *in-breath*, letting yourself savor the sensation of breathing in, noticing how your in-breath nourishes your body, breath after breath….and then releasing your breath.
* As you breathe, breathing in something good for yourself…whatever you need. Perhaps a quality of warmth, kindness, compassion, or love? Just feel it, or you can use a word or image if you like.
* Now, shifting your focus now to your *out-breath*, feeling your body breathe out, feeling the ease of exhalation.
* Please call to mind *someone whom you love* or *someone who is struggling and needs compassion*. Visualize that person clearly in your mind.
* Begin directing your out-breath to this person, offering the ease of breathing out.
* If you wish, intentionally sending warmth and kindness—something good—to this person with each outbreath.

**In for Me, Out for You**

* Now letting go of what you or the other person may need, and just focusing on the sensation of breathing compassion in and out. “In for me and out for you.” “One for me and one for you.”
* If you wish, you can focus a little more on yourself, or the other person, or just let it be an equal flow—whatever feels right in the moment.
* Or you can send compassion to *more* than one person.
* Allowing your breath to flow in and out, like the gentle movement of the sea - a limitless, boundless flow - flowing in and flowing out. Letting yourself be a *part* of this limitless, boundless flow. An ocean of compassion.
* Gently opening your eyes.

**COMPASSION WITH EQUANIMITY**

This practice can be applied in meditation or in actual caregiving situations. It is a way of caring for others without losing ourselves, combining Giving and Receiving Compassion meditation with phrases that cultivate equanimity. Equanimity is balanced awareness in the midst of pleasant or unpleasant emotions.

* Please find a comfortable position and take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment. You might like to put your hand over your heart, or wherever it is comforting and soothing, as a reminder to bring affectionate awareness to your experience and to yourself.
* Bring to mind someone you are caring for who is exhausting you or frustrating you—someone whom you care about who is suffering. For this introductory exercise, please choose someone who is *not* your child, as this can be a more complicated dynamic. Visualize the person and the caregiving situation clearly in your mind, and feel the struggle in your own body.
* Now please listen carefully to these words, letting them gently roll through your mind:

*Everyone is on his or her own life journey.*

*I am not the cause of this person’s suffering,*

*nor is it entirely within my power to make it go away,*

*even if I wish I could*

*Moments like this are difficult to bear,*

*yet I may still try to help if I can.*

* Aware of the stress you are carrying in your body, inhaling fully and deeply, drawing compassion inside your body and filling every cell of your body with compassion. Letting yourself be soothed by inhaling deeply, and by giving yourself the compassion you need.
* As you exhale, sending out compassion to the person who is associated with your discomfort, or to others in general.
* Continue breathing compassion in and out, allowing your body to gradually find a natural, breathing rhythm—letting your body breathe itself.
* “One for me, one for you.” “In for me, out for you.”
* Occasionally scanning your inner landscape for any distress and responding by inhaling compassion for yourself and exhaling compassion for others.
* If you find that anyone needs *extra* compassion, focusing your attention and your breath in that direction.
* Noticing how your body is caressed from the inside as you breathe.
* Letting yourself float on an ocean of compassion—a limitless ocean that embraces all suffering.
* And listening to these words once again:

*Everyone is on his or her own life journey.*

*I am not the cause of this person’s suffering,*

*nor is it entirely within my power to make it go away,*

*even if I wish I could*

*Moments like this are difficult to bear,*

*yet I may still try to help if I can.*

* Now letting go of the practice and allowing yourself to be exactly as you are in this moment.
* Gently open your eyes.

**CORE VALUES WITH SELF-COMPASSION**

Please take out a pen and paper. This is a written reflection exercise.

Please close your eyes and, in your mind’s eye, find yourself in the room. If you can, smiling at yourself in welcome.

Place your hand over your heart or elsewhere and feel your body. This body has been with you for many years, working hard to live a happy life.

**Looking Back**

* Now imagine that you are near the end of your life, looking back on the years *between now and then*. Looking back, what would have given you deep satisfaction, joy and contentment?
  + What values did you embody that gave your life meaning and satisfaction? In other words, what core values were expressed in your life? Please write them down. Make sure you include some personal core values. (Long pause – this exercise requires sufficient time to reflect on one’s life.)

**Not Living in Accord with Values?**

* Now, please write down any ways you feel you are *not living in accord with your core values***,** or ways in which your life feels out of balance with your values. For example, perhaps you are too busy to spend much quiet time in nature, even though nature is your great love in life. (pause)
* If you have several values that feel out of balance, please choose one that is especially important for you to work with for the remainder of this exercise.

**External Obstacles?**

* Of course, there are often obstacles that prevent us from living in accord with our core values. Some of these may be *external obstacles*, like not having enough money or time, or having other obligations. If there are, please write down any external obstacles. (pause)

**Internal Obstacles?**

* There may also be some *internal obstacles* getting in the way of you living in accord with your core values. For instance, are you afraid of failure, do you doubt your abilities, or is your inner critic getting in the way? Please write down any internal obstacles. (pause)

**Could Self-Compassion Help?**

* Now consider if *self-kindness and self-compassion could help you live in accord with your true values.* For example, by helping you overcome internal obstacles like your inner critic. Or is there a way self-compassion could help you feel safe and confident enough to take new actions, or risk failure, or to let go of things that aren’t serving you?

(pause)

**Compassion for Insurmountable Obstacles?**

* Finally, if there are *insurmountable obstacles* to living in accord with your values, can you give yourself compassion for that hardship? That is, not abandon your values in spite of the conditions?

And if the insurmountable problem is that you are *imperfect*, as all human beings are, can you forgive yourself for that, too? (pause)

*Adapted from Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2003.*

**LIVING WITH A VOW**

When we talk about making a vow, we don’t mean making a binding contract. Rather, a vow is an *intention* to which we can continually reorient ourselves when we’ve gone astray in our lives. Living with a vow is self-compassionate because it anchors our life to what matters most to us.

**Discovering Core Values**

* Place your hand over your heart, or wherever it feels comforting, to remind yourself to bring *warmhearted* awareness to your experience and to yourself.
* Now imagine that you are near the end of your life, looking back on the years *between now and then*. Looking back, what would have given you deep satisfaction, joy and contentment.
* What values did you embody that gave your life meaning? In other words, what core values were expressed in your life? Examples are *compassion, generosity, honesty, courage, loyalty, family, service, curiosity,* and *nature*.

**Making a Vow**

* Please select a primary core value that you would like to manifest for the rest of your life.
* Write it in the form of a vow:
  + *May I…*
  + *I vow to…as best I can.*
* Loving-kindness phrases can also be life vows, such as “May all beings be happy and free from suffering.” Or, “May I learn to love all beings.”
* You can orient your heart and mind to your core values every morning before you get out of bed. Just put your hand on your heart and say your vow a few times, and then get up. You can do the same before you go to sleep. Sometimes it helps to have a little ritual, such as lighting a candle when you make your vow.

*Adapted from Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2003.*

For additional self-compassion training opportunities, please go to:

Center for Mindful Self-Compassion

[www.CenterForMSC.org](http://www.CenterForMSC.org)

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[www.Self-Compassion.org](http://www.Self-Compassion.org)

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University of California, San Diego

Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute

<http://mbpti.org/msc-mindful-self-compassion-teacher-training>

Compassionate Mind Foundation

<http://compassionatemind.co.uk>

Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education

[www.CCare.Stanford.edu](http://www.CCare.Stanford.edu)

Center for Healthy Minds

<http://centerhealthyminds.org>

Greater Good Science Center

[www.GreaterGood.com](http://www.GreaterGood.com)

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