

I'd like to give you a taste of self-compassion right now. I find that some men initially resist the following exercise because they think it is “girly” or “weak” or “touchy-feely.” But once they get past those judgments and give it a go, they invariably find it helpful.

A Compassionate Hand

I invite you now to find a comfortable position in which you are centered and alert. For example, if you're seated in a chair, you could lean slightly forward, straighten your back, drop your shoulders, and press your feet gently onto the floor.

Now bring to mind a reality gap you are struggling with. Take a few moments to reflect on the nature of this gap: remember what has happened, consider how it is affecting you, and think about how it might affect your future. And notice what difficult thoughts and feelings arise.

Pick one of your hands, and imagine it's the hand of someone very kind and caring.

Place this hand, slowly and gently, on whichever part of your body hurts the most.

Perhaps you feel the pain most in your chest or in your head, neck, or stomach. Wherever it is most intense, lay your hand there. (If you're numb, lay your hand on the part that feels the numbest. If you're feeling neither pain nor numbness, then simply rest your hand on the center of your chest.)

Allow your hand to rest there, lightly and gently; feel it against your skin or against your clothes. And feel the warmth flowing from your palm into your body. Now imagine your body softening around this pain: loosening up, softening, and making space. If you're numb, then soften and loosen around that numbness. (And if you're neither hurting nor numb, then imagine it any way you like. You might imagine that in some magical sense your heart is opening, for example.)

Hold your pain or numbness very gently. Hold it as if it is a crying baby, or a whimpering puppy, or a priceless work of art.

Infuse this gentle action with caring and warmth—as if you are reaching out to someone you care about.

Let the kindness flow from your fingers into your body.

Now use both of your hands in one kind gesture. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Let them gently rest there, and hold yourself kindly. Take as long as you wish to sit in this manner, connecting with yourself, caring for yourself, contributing comfort and support.

Continue this for as little or as long as you wish: five seconds or five minutes, it doesn't matter. It's the spirit of kindness that counts when you make this gesture, not the duration of it.



Most people find this exercise very soothing. It tends to center you and bring comfort. So I encourage you to do it repeatedly throughout your day. (Obviously, this wouldn't go down well in the middle of a business meeting; it is best to keep this as something you do in private!) And if by some chance you didn't get much out of it, please try it again, at least several more times. With repetition, you are likely to find it very helpful.

Also feel free to adapt or modify this exercise. For example, if you don't like placing your hands as suggested you can substitute any gesture of kindness you prefer: rubbing your neck or shoulders, massaging your temples or your eyelids, or gently stroking your forehead or arm.

This simple act of self-compassion can have a profound impact if you practice it often. Think of it as "emotional first aid": the very first step you take when you are hurting.

THE TWO ELEMENTS

Self-compassion consists of two main elements, and so far we've only looked at the first one: being kind to ourselves. In later chapters, we'll explore self-kindness in more depth, but for now we're going to focus on the second element: being present with our pain.

Now notice your mind's reaction to the previous sentence. Is your mind saying something like "But I don't want to be present with my pain! I want to get away