



April 2020

Compassion

“When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it's bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast, and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there, as well as how much space”.

-Pema Chödrön

With the onset of COVID-19, our lives have changed dramatically. As a result, an opportunity exists to move into a far more compassionate and kind culture. The crisis is showing us how interconnected we are. Around the world, we are witness to the devastating consequences and yet we are also coming together to devise solutions and care for one another. Compassion in essence, is choosing to look beyond oneself; it has the power to transform anxiety and fear into courage and hope. Now more than ever we need to cultivate compassion; not only today in the wake of the virus, but later also in rebuilding communities and people's lives.

What is Compassion?

Compassion is rooted in caring and means “to suffer together.” When we experience compassion, we notice and are moved by the suffering of others. Research shows that when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down, we secrete oxytocin, and regions of the brain linked to empathy are activated. We are moved to care for other people. Studies find that people often identify compassion as warm, peaceful, and pleasant.

What is Empathic Distress?

Empathic distress is the strong and yet difficult individual response to the suffering of others. It includes a desire to withdraw from a situation in order to protect one's self from excessive and negative feelings such as fear and vulnerability. Empathic distress is overwhelming and a barrier to compassion. Emotional regulations strategies can help:

- ★ Mindfulness approaches such as paying attention to the other person in the moment.
- ★ Distinguish yourself from other (this is me, this is you).
- ★ Enter a compassionate state of mind and body by cultivating feelings of love care and concern beforehand. This can be achieved through compassion meditations such as those below
- ★ Be creative in your thinking of the persons suffering and form a new uplifting point of view.

How to Listen with a Compassionate Presence:

- ★ Strengthen ability to listen in silence and bring your full attention.
- ★ Stay with the person and mindfully notice your tendencies to jump in.
- ★ Have open body language, eye contact.
- ★ Listen to understand and let go of planning what to say.

Some Compassionate Needs of Others:

Compassion for self: when compassion is turned inwards, it is called self-compassion. In our culture we value compassion for others. It is easy to offer support to those we care about, yet it is a common challenge to bring compassion to ourselves.

Self-compassion researcher Kristen Neff offers three core components to support self-compassion:

1. Self-kindness: Treat yourself with the same type of kind, caring support and understanding that you would show to a friend. Find ways to be warm and soothing to ourselves compared to cold and judgmental.
2. Imperfection: is part human experience and you are not alone. When you remind yourself that imperfection is part of being human, you can feel more connected with others.
3. Mindfulness: Acknowledge your suffering as it is. For example: “This is difficult or this hurts and in this moment I need self-compassion”.

Children:

- ★ Compassion from caregivers can help children rebuild a sense of belonging.
- ★ Name feelings that are behind a behavior and offer a kind tone.
- ★ Take a “time in” with your child and watch feelings shift.
- ★ Respond and name your own frustrations too.

Adolescents:

- ★ Studies show when caregivers offer compassion to an angry teen, both shift into a compassionate state. Caregivers can focus on a desire to connect to create balance and strengthen the relationship.
- ★ Remind yourself that this is a hard time for this age group in particular. Compassionate connections are key to their well-being.

Work Relationships:

- ★ Work colleagues need to support each other, now more than ever.
- ★ Let your colleagues know that you care about them in words and acts of kindness.
- ★ Communicate understanding.
- ★ Give and receive help and support.

Compassion Fatigue

It is also important to recognize your level of expectations during this challenging time. Be kind to yourself and know that you are doing your best. Give permission to know what your limits are emotionally and ensure you prioritize rest, sleep, and other ways to take care of yourself.



Loving Kindness Meditation

Find a comfortable and quiet spot to sit. Close your eyes or turn your gaze down. Feel your breath moving and with each exhale feel yourself deepening. Place your right hand on your heart and repeat these words:

- May I be safe
- May I be happy
- May I be healthy
- May I be free of suffering May I live with ease

Allow yourself to feel the spirit of loving kindness as it permeates through you. Bring to mind someone that you easily feel compassion towards. Hold them in your heart and mind and repeat these words:

- May you be safe
- May you be happy
- May you be healthy
- May you be free of suffering May you live with ease

We're here to help!

If you have questions, need information or wish to book an appointment, call us at one of the numbers here.



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