

Self-Compassion Workshop: Handout

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UMass, Amherst
Workshop Dates: 2.8.23, 2.15.23, 2.22.23 (in-person)
2:30 – 3:45pm

About CCPH

CCPH offers an array of services that include individual therapy, groups and workshops, and 24/7 on-call urgent care. Visit www.umass.edu/counseling to learn more about CCPH's services, or call 413.545.2337 to reach on call services or make an appointment.

CCPH is in the Middlesex Building on Campus at 111 County Circle Way

Self-Compassion Workshop

Week 1

- Explore **previous knowledge** of the concept
 - What is self-compassion?
 - Have you practiced it before?
 - If so, what have you tried?
 - Have you noticed anything that has facilitated self-compassion, or made it harder?
 - Are there times when self-compassion is easier or harder? If so, what does that teach us about it?
- **Intro to self-compassion**
 - What is self-compassion?
 - Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself as you would for someone else when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a "stiff upper lip" mentality, you stop to tell yourself "This is really difficult right now," and "how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?"
 - Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment
 - Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism.
 - We are self-compassionate when we recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable. In these moments, we are self-compassionate when we are gentle with ourselves, rather than becoming angry when life falls short of set ideals. *What are some ways that we can begin to incorporate a perspective/attitude of acceptance?*
 - When we fight against suffering, it increases in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism, but when we accept the reality of suffering and meet it with sympathy and kindness, greater emotional equanimity is experienced.
 - Common humanity vs. Isolation
 - Frustration when we don't have things exactly as we want is often accompanied by an irrational but pervasive sense of isolation – as if "I" were the only person suffering or making mistakes. All humans suffer, however.
 - The very definition of being "human" means that one is mortal, vulnerable and imperfect. Therefore, self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience – something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to "me" alone.
 - Mindfulness vs. Over-identification
 - Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach with our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. This equilibrated stance stems from the process of relating personal experiences to those of others who are also suffering, thus putting our own situation into a larger perspective.
 - It also stems from the willingness to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. This may involve "re-wiring" how we see negative emotions. So often, we want to push them away and make them better, however, if

we can just accept them (and accept suffering), they may lose potency more quickly.

- Mindfulness is a non-judgmental, receptive mind state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them.
 - We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. At the same time, mindfulness requires that we not be “over-identified” with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity. This process doesn’t happen overnight, but slowly when we work on it, we’ll find that instead of being swept up (e.g., mad, sad, angry, jealous, etc.) for two days, it may be a day and a half, or it will go from 4 hours to 3, etc. etc.
- Identifying struggles
 - Reflect upon what may get in the way of practicing self-compassion
 - Expectations/Goals
 - What do you expect to gain from this workshop?
 - List goals
 - Self-compassion exercise: Letter to a Friend
 - On a sheet of paper, reflect on the following questions:
 - First, think about times when a close friend feels really bad about him or herself or is really struggling in some way. How would you respond to your friend in this situation (especially when you’re at your best)? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you typically talk to your friends.
 - Now think about times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you talk to yourself.
 - Did you notice a difference? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others so differently?
 - Please write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way, as you’d typically respond to a close friend when you’re suffering.

Self-Compassion Workshop

Week 2

- **Review and further conceptualize** self-compassion
- **Restate goals and expectations**
 - Review of concepts
 - How are your thoughts and feelings around self-compassion?
 - Does anything resonate with you?
 - Notice any challenges
- **Cultural/Sociopolitical factors** and pressures that may be making the practice of self-compassion difficult
 - **Culture:** White Supremacy and capitalism are two sets of values based on productivity, hierarchy, climbing a ladder, and oppression. These values instill in us that our worth is connected to our production. Academia is a culture that incorporates these values, too. Rest is the antidote to this; it slows us down, and emphasizes joy and mindfulness over productivity, which gives us space to feel our emotions and catch up with ourselves. Tricia Hersey (2022) of the Nap Ministry says it best, “rest is resistance.” It is easier to be mindful when we are rested, which will help us better challenge systems that foster self-criticism.
 - **Values**
 - Perfectionism: always thinking that things must be perfect and the best. When we strive for “perfect,” there is not much room for accepting the inevitable: uncomfortable negative emotions and pain.
 - Exceptionalism: the idea that we are different and better than others. This also fosters individualistic and isolated thinking, which hampers our understanding of suffering and common humanity.
 - *How can we create space in our lives for imperfection? What makes this hard?*
 - **Pressure**
 - Academic, Social
 - Family values and internalized pressure from family can contribute to internal pressure.
 - Society, cultural stigmas: Crying is a sign of weakness; emotions are too “soft” and soft is bad; or just emotions complicate things and there is no time for them.
 - **Consider how these factors may contribute to self-criticism and judgement.**
 - Examples:
 - Not taking breaks/feeling guilty when they do
 - Not practicing self-care
 - Being on “automatic pilot”/not being mindful
 - Setting unrealistic expectations for yourself
 - Having internal pressures
 - Rejecting negative emotions
 - “Crying and going”; What might be problematic about this type of response?
 - Perfectionism

Self-Compassion Workshop: Week 2 Continued

- **Exercise: Freedom from Blame** (Rockman & Hurley, 2015, adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff)
 - Think about a trait you often judge yourself for, and that plays a large role in how you see yourself. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. How often do I display this trait? Who am I when I don't display this trait? Am I still me?
 - b. 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 me if particular circumstances must be present in order for it to emerge?
 - c. What are the various causes and conditions that led to having the trait in the first place (early experiences, genetics, life pressures, sociopolitical factors etc.)?
 - d. Did I choose to have this trait, and do I have much choice about whether or not you display this trait? Challenge yourself: if I did not choose this trait, why judge myself for it? What happens when I reframe your self-description so that I am not defining myself in terms of this trait?
- **Final Reflection**

Self-Compassion Workshop

Week 3:

- Review concepts and answer any questions
- Wrap up and Reflect!
 - Open space to talk about students' experiences in the workshop
 - Was it helpful?
 - What did you learn?
 - Will they practice self-compassion? How?
 - What are they noticing about themselves?
- Mindfulness/self-compassion exercise (Rockman & Hurley, 2015, adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff)
 - Intro: Take a few deep breaths and settle into your body. Then bring to mind a situation in your life that is causing you stress. When first learning this practice, choose a problem that's mild to moderate, so that we gradually develop this quality of self-compassion. Bring this difficulty to life in your experience right now.
 - Where do you feel it in the body?
 - Notice and feel any discomfort in your body. Be present with the sensations as they arise in your body.
 - Step 1: Keep the difficulty in mind and try saying to yourself, slowly "This is a moment of struggle." Acknowledge that it is tough.
 - This is the first component of self-compassion: recognize the struggle while we're struggling and validate how we feel while we're experiencing it.
 - We can also say to ourselves: "This hurts, ouch!, this is stressful."
 - Step 2: Now, try saying to yourself, "Struggle is a part of life."
 - This is *common humanity*, the second part of self-compassion.
 - Or, you can try saying: "I'm not alone; We all struggle in our lives; Many other people struggle like this, just like me; This is how it feels when a person struggles in this way."
 - Step 3: Place your hand over your heart or offer yourself comfort in some other way. Feel the warmth of your hands.
 - Try saying, "May I be kind to myself," or "May I give myself what I need."
 - You can also try saying: "May I accept myself as I am; May I begin to accept myself as I am; May I forgive myself; May I be patient with myself."
 - Addendum: 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? What simple message would you like to deliver to your friend, heart to heart? Now see if you can offer the same message to yourself.

References

- Hersey, T. (2022). *Rest is resistance: A manifesto*. Little, Brown Spark.
- Rockman, P. & Hurley, A. (2015). *Self-compassion and mindfulness*. The Center for Mindfulness Studies.

