



SELF-COMPASSIONATE LETTER FOR ADULTS

"Remember that if you really want to motivate yourself, love is more powerful than fear."

— Kristin Neff

OVERVIEW

Write a kind letter to yourself about a challenge you are facing.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the year
- At least once per month as an initial goal
- Before class begins, during prep time, during lunch, at the end of a work day
- When you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed
- Before a staff meeting

TIME REQUIRED

- 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult
- College

MATERIALS

- A quiet place to practice

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

You will:

- Practice comforting and soothing yourself when you experience stress

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- What sorts of challenges are you facing right now, either in your professional or personal life? How do you typically speak to yourself when you are under stress?
- How do you tend to comfort and soothe yourself?
- If you are leading this practice with others, try writing a self-compassionate letter yourself.

INSTRUCTIONS

- First, identify something about yourself that makes you feel ashamed, insecure, or not good enough. It could be something related to your work with students or colleagues, your personality, behavior, or abilities, your relationships, or any other part of your life.
- Once you identify something, write it down and describe how it makes you feel. Sad? Embarrassed? Angry? Try to be as honest as possible, keeping in mind that no one but you will see what you write.
- The next step is to write a letter to yourself expressing compassion, understanding, and acceptance for the part of yourself that you dislike.

As you write, follow these guidelines:

1. Imagine that there is someone who loves and accepts you unconditionally for who you are. What would that person say to you about this part of yourself?
2. Remind yourself that everyone has things about themselves that they don't like, and that no one is without flaws. Think about how many other people in the world are struggling with the same thing that you're struggling with; if you're struggling with something at school, think about how many educators face the same issue.
3. Consider the ways in which events that have happened in your personal or professional life, the family environment you grew up in, or even your genes may have contributed to this negative aspect of yourself.
4. In a compassionate way, ask yourself whether there are things that you could do to improve or better cope with this negative aspect. Focus on how constructive changes could make you feel happier, healthier, or more fulfilled, and avoid judging yourself.

5. After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back to it later and read it again. It may be especially helpful to read it whenever you're feeling bad about this aspect of yourself, as a reminder to be more self-compassionate.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

What does it feel like to extend kindness yourself in this way? Do you notice any resistance in your own body or mind as you write this letter? When was it easiest to write? Most difficult?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A study found that participants who wrote a self-compassionate letter every day for a week reported lower symptoms of [depression](#) and greater happiness three to six months later, and participants who wrote a compassionate paragraph to themselves regarding a personal weakness subsequently reported more [motivation](#) to improve themselves.

Research indicates that self-compassion practices are a form of [self-care](#) that may reduce [burnout](#) in adults who work in service-oriented professions like teaching. A [review](#) of 22 self-compassion related therapies indicates that self-compassion approaches can reduce both anxiety and depression. In fact, self-compassion strategies may even be more effective in addressing [depressed mood](#) than strategies like reappraisal (shifting your thinking about a negative event) and acceptance.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When we face challenges with students or colleagues, and we beat ourselves up about them as a result, we can end up feeling even more stressed and isolated. A healthier response is to treat ourselves with kindness and understanding, and the self-compassion break is a great way to self-soothe during times of stress at school. In fact, teachers who are more mindful and self-compassionate foster more [emotionally supportive](#) relationships with their students.

And for those using this practice in higher education, research has found that self-compassionate [college students](#) are more likely to ask questions, seek help, and participate in the classroom activities.

SOURCE

[Kristin Neff, Ph.D.](#), University of Texas, Austin
[Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#)