



HOW WOULD YOU TREAT A FRIEND?

"If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete."

—Jack Kornfield

OVERVIEW

A brief writing exercise that will make you aware of the difference between the way you speak to your friends and yourself during difficult times, while encouraging you to be kind to yourself.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the year
- As a classroom or advisory period exercise for students
- Before class begins, during prep time, during lunch, at the end of a school day
- When you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed

TIME REQUIRED

- 5 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult
- College
- High School

MATERIALS

- Writing materials or a computer

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

You (or students) will:

- Compare and contrast the ways you respond to a close friend in distress (versus yourself), and consider how you might adjust what you say to yourself when you are struggling

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- What sorts of challenges are you facing right now, either personally or professionally?
- How do you typically speak to yourself when you are under stress?
- If you are leading this writing exercise with a group, consider how the participants might respond. How can you prepare yourself to model and experience a calm, self-accepting presence?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

Take out a sheet of paper or open a blank document on your computer and go through the following steps.

1. First, think about times when a close friend of yours feels really badly or is struggling in some way. How do you respond to your friend in these situations (if you're at your best)? Please write down what you typically do and say, and note the tone in which you talk to your friend.
2. 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 and say, and note the tone in which you talk to yourself.
3. 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?
4. Write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself when you're suffering in the same way you typically respond to a close friend.

5. Next time you are struggling with something, try treating yourself like a good friend and see what happens.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What does it feel like to notice differences in the way you respond to others vs. yourself?
- What do you think you would most appreciate hearing from yourself the next time you are facing a challenge or feeling badly about yourself?
- What tone might you take? What specific words might you use?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

One study found that [participants](#) who recalled a time when they gave emotional support to a friend reported greater self-compassion for themselves around a problem with which they were struggling, compared with participants who didn't think about supporting a friend.

Research suggests 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 students in their classrooms.

And for those using the practice with students, self-compassionate [college students](#) are more likely to ask questions, seek help, and participate in the classroom activities, while [high school students](#) who practice self-compassion report greater social connectedness as well as lower anxiety and depression.

SOURCE

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