



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

SEEDS OF SELF-COMPASSION

"You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."

—Buddha

OVERVIEW

Students build their self-compassion vocabulary by writing or drawing positive affirmations about themselves.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime to improve classroom well-being
- When students are struggling with negativity, self-doubt, or failure
- At the beginning of the year, to build a positive classroom culture

TIME REQUIRED

- One class session

LEVEL

- Lower Elementary

MATERIALS

- Writing/drawing materials
- Optional [Affirmation Flower template](#)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Explore what it means to be kind to ourselves (self-compassion)
- Build their self-kindness vocabulary
- Grow in self-awareness
- Identify their strengths

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](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Kindness
- Love
- Self-Compassion

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to reflect on how you talk to yourself. How easily do words of self-kindness come to you?
- Consider doing this [affirmation break](#) (8:41) first before bringing this practice to your class.
- Which affirmations resonated with you? Which ones were harder to say to yourself? If you could pick two or three to post on your desk as daily reminders to speak kindly to yourself, which ones would you choose? (And maybe consider actually posting them!)

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE KIND TO OURSELVES?

- Tell students:
 - *Today we are going to talk about being kind to ourselves! Why do you think we should be kind to ourselves?*
 - *First, what are some ways to be kind to other people?* [Invite students to share their ideas out loud, while you write them on the board.]
 - They might have ideas such as: Give someone a hug; help them when they are struggling; when they look sad, ask them if they are OK

- Ask: *Have you ever done or said any of these things to yourself?* (There could be some giggles, and that's OK! It is a new concept for many children.)
- *Just as it is important to be kind to others, it is important to be kind to ourselves, too. Some people call this self-compassion. Being kind to ourselves helps us feel better and can even help us to persevere when things are hard!*
- Ask: *When do you think it might be especially important for us to be kind to ourselves?*
 - Possible answers might be: When I'm having a hard time learning how to do something new, when someone says something mean to me, when I make a mistake.
- *One way we can prepare ourselves for when something challenging happens is to practice saying nice things to and also about ourselves!*

STEP 2: AFFIRMATION EXAMPLES

- Show one of the following Affirmation videos for kids, to give them some ideas of affirmations:
 - [Snoop Dogg Affirmation Song \(2:05\)](#)
 - [Simple 10-affirmation video \(1:02\)](#)
 - [33 Morning Affirmations for Kids \(4:09\)](#)
- Alternatively, brainstorm affirmations together as a class on the board with some of the following questions. You may need to scaffold this, especially for very young students, and turn their shares into "I am" statements:
 - *What are some things you like about yourself?* (e.g., I am funny; I can make people smile)
 - *What is something nice someone else might say about you?*
 - *What are some things you are proud of yourself for?* (e.g., I am brave; I don't give up)
 - *What do you believe you can do?* (e.g., I can learn if I stick to it)

STEP 3: AFFIRMATION FLOWER

- Tell students:
 - *We are going to fill our flower petals with nice words/phrases to ourselves.* Younger students may prefer to draw or write single words.
 - Use this [flower template](#) or invite them to draw their own flower.

DISCUSSION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Invite students to share their flowers with each other, reading out 1-2 affirmations they wrote for themselves or describing their drawing.
- Ask students:
 - *Was it easy or challenging to think of nice things to say to yourself?*
 - *Is there something someone else wrote on their flower that you would like to add to yours?* (Let them add to their flowers.)
 - *How does your body feel after saying all those nice things to yourself? What feelings do you have?*

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

- This is a great practice to use towards the beginning of the year. You can post their flowers somewhere special in the classroom, as a reminder to use affirmations and positive self-talk throughout the year.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- *Were there any barriers for students to participate? If you were to try this again, what might you modify or try differently next time?*
- *Did you notice any shifts in the mood of your classroom during or after this activity?*
- *How else might you incorporate positive self-talk or affirmation activities throughout the school year?*

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research is still [emerging](#) with regard to self-compassion practices with younger students, despite the large body of research that supports its benefits with [adolescents](#) and [adults](#). However, related practices such as positive self-talk show promise as being beneficial for our youngest students.

For example, positive self-talk, or talking to oneself positively and encouragingly, can improve young students' [motivation and engagement](#) in school, along with their [academic achievement](#). Also, just the act of building young children's [vocabularies](#) around their emotions has been shown to lead to better emotion understanding and regulation.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Self-compassion contributes positively to young people's [well-being](#), [social relationships](#), and [success in school](#)—especially as it pertains to persevering through challenges and adversities. Early childhood is a crucial time to plant the seeds of self-compassion by helping children build their self-kindness and positive self-talk vocabulary. Not only will they have the words to talk to themselves more kindly as they grow up, they will also learn to recognize when their need for self-compassion arises as they face the struggles of life.

SOURCE

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