

# A Self-Compassion Story



Peer Support Service



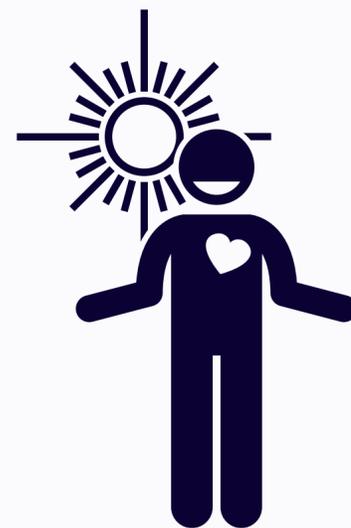
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## What does self-compassion mean?

Self-compassion is extended compassion towards one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure or general suffering.

It's made up of 3 things.

- Self-kindness
- Common Humanity
- Mindfulness



Drawing from my own experience, self-compassion was always last on my to-do list. I seemed to be on autopilot, chasing my tail on the hamster wheel, juggling family, work, study, creating a home, and striving for perfection, only to fall short every time as most of us do. It's easy to get caught up in social media and what other people think, feeling overwhelmed in these uncertain pressures of life. I was so busy looking after everyone else I had no energy left for myself. The phrase "You can't pour from an empty cup" never came into my mind. By ignoring myself and my needs I became resentful and eventually lost sight of my identity and life purpose which ended with me becoming unwell.

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## Why is self-compassion so important?

It has a huge amount of benefits and a rippling effect which I've witnessed within myself and working with others. For example, it increases motivation, boosts happiness, enhances self-worth, fosters resilience, and reduces stress, anxiety, and depression.



Through further learning and Peer Support at Mindspace, I felt safe to connect and explore while being accepted in a non-judgmental environment. This gave me hope and it is where I turned a corner. I learnt all kinds of coping skills and tools to practice in everyday life. Repetition is the key, just like riding a bike when you were young. Practicing made it easier for me to recognise when I was suffering and when to be kinder to myself whenever I made unfortunate mistakes and about my personal shortfalls. I become aware and acknowledged my emotions, feelings and thoughts rather than ignoring them or hurting myself with self-criticism (sometimes we can be our own worst enemy and play the victim in times of blame, guilt and disappointment). I recognised that suffering and failure is part of life's shared human experience. Learning from failure is an opportunity and choice we have which helps us to bounce back quicker while we develop and grow, and I now use them as stepping stones to build upon.

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Our minds are more powerful than we realise. Most of us are unaware that our inner conversations are the cause of some of our circumstances in life. Everyone has an inner critic, what you tell yourself every day will either lift you up or tear you down, e.g. when you catch yourself saying I can't do this, I'm not good enough or I'm stupid, it adds weight to the problem.

Now flip the coin to something more positive, like, I can, I am worthy, if I'm unsure I'll try a different way. I try and listen to what I say to myself these days and ask myself is this helpful and is it true? If I heard my best friend talking to themselves this way what would I say to them?

Over time I've become my own best friend by giving myself encouragement, saying kind and positive words, using affirmations, treating myself occasionally, and showing and practicing gratitude. There are so many people out there already that will put you and others down. Please don't be one of them, everyone is fighting their own unforeseen battles. My Dad was a horseman and would say to me "Get back on your horse!" That simple little saying is ingrained in me and saves me every time. Different things work for different people, lift yourself up then you can lift others and we can all rise together.



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The penny dropped when I was inspired to look within myself to challenge my beliefs and rediscover myself while working on the inner me. Everything else fell into place, for example, by using a tree as a metaphor. The tree trunk and roots being you, and the leaves being other people such as family, friends or colleagues, or life in general.

Can the tree pick and choose which leaves to look after? No, to nurture the tree you must water it from the roots - only then can it look after all the leaves.



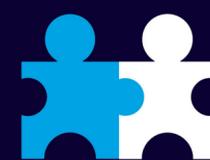
Here are some ways to try to improve and boost your self-compassion...

- Release self-judgment and embrace self-love (reframe your thoughts, flip the coin).
- Set healthy boundaries to keep yourself well and safe.
- Practice forgiveness, we all make mistakes, that's part of life (let go of all that no longer serves you). This frees you up for better things.
- Employ a growth mindset (life is a learning process we never stop learning).
- Expressing gratitude - a powerful life tool which helps change your mindset.

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- Be mindful and reconnect with your senses to stay present (enjoy the little things in life as they become life's treasures).
- Be kind and respect others (we are all on the same journey but on different paths, no one is perfect, steer away from judgment and embrace everyone's uniqueness. That's what makes us special).

These all sound so simple and so easy to do yet I found them one of the hardest things to practice. I felt afraid of becoming vulnerable, not wanting to let my protection shield down. I started with little steps, walking before I could run. Become aware of different perspectives and learning, everyone is brought up with different ancestral imprints, values and beliefs. Even though we have all our senses we still see and hear things differently just as we all learn differently - I myself learn visually. It wasn't until I embraced my uniqueness, the good, the bad and the ugly, did I feel like my true self. Awareness and acceptance were the keys that empowered me. Life is not about who you once were. It's about who you are now, and who you have the potential to be. I am now working as a Peer Support Worker and an Adult Recovery Facilitator. If you feel you need peer support or would like to learn some life coping skills, please contact Mindspace.

I've never looked back because I'm not going that way.

Julie

