

Self-compassion

Self-compassion - can we measure it? How can we improve it?

Who hasn't beaten themselves up when they haven't won that pitch, a business meeting hasn't gone quite how it should have, or we fight with our partner or family member? And now, in a post-Covid world, with our morale challenged almost daily, are we more likely to create negative self-talk and irrational beliefs?

Blaming ourselves or just overthinking negative outcomes creates tangible stress, not just for ourselves but also for those around us. Research tells us this is a catalyst for compromised mental health and well-being.

01 What is Self-compassion?

Self-compassion is a derivative of compassion. Compassion, as described by the Buddhist religion, is not just being aware and touched by the suffering of others but also the desire to help and be kind to alleviate others' pain.

Compassion is non-judgemental and is an acceptance that failure, shortcomings, or inadequacy is seen as part of the human condition. Compassion is external or outward, something one feels towards another. Self-compassion is defined as compassion but is an inward experience. Here we are touched by our pain, suffering, and desire to help ourselves. Self-compassion recognises that an individual is not perfect and that the human condition has inadequacies and experiences failings.

Self-compassion can be broken into three separate but related elements:

- **Self-kindness:** Extending kindness and understanding to oneself rather than harsh judgement and self-criticism.
- **Common humanity:** Seeing one's experience as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating or isolating.
- **Mindfulness:** Holding one's painful thoughts and feelings in a balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them.

Self-compassion should not be confused with self-esteem or self-pity.

Self-esteem is "a favourable evaluation of oneself". Self-esteem has a judgement, either a judgement of self against a benchmark or a perceived evaluation of oneself by others. While self-esteem uses judgement, self-pity focuses more inwardly, where issues can amplify, and people often feel disconnected.

02 Benefits of self-compassion

- Self-compassionate individuals have a strong ability to manage change and ambiguity, and through a non-judgemental lens, we can see the similarities to having a growth mindset.
- Self-reflection would be more honest and clearer through a self-compassionate lens, where individuals would be genuinely reflective without judgement or negative self-talk.

03 Measuring self-compassion

Kristen Neff's Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) is globally accepted as the predominant measure of self-compassion. Neff has 26 questions covering six constructs (see below questionnaire and how to score). Knowing the areas helps and guides which construct can be reflected on to improve and address.

Self-compassion scale – SCS

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04 Exercise

How do I typically act towards myself in difficult times?

Please read each of these statements carefully before answering. To the right of each item, please indicate how often you behave in this manner using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
ALMOST NEVER	OCCASIONALLY	ABOUT HALF THE TIME	FAIRLY OFTEN	ALMOST ALWAYS

NB** Please remember to reverse the scores on the following questions: 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25.

1.**	I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies	
2.**	When I'm feeling down, I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong	
3.	When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through	
4.**	When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world	
5.	I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain.	
6.**	When I fail at something important to me, I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.	
7.	When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.	
8.**	When times are difficult; I tend to be tough on myself	
9.	When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance.	
10.	When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people	
11.**	I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like	
12.	When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need	
13.**	When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am	

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1	2	3	4	5
ALMOST NEVER	OCCASIONALLY	ABOUT HALF THE TIME	FAIRLY OFTEN	ALMOST ALWAYS

NB** Please remember to reverse the scores on the following questions: 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25.

14.	When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation	
15.	I try to see my failings as part of the human condition	
16.**	When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself.	
17.	When I fail at something important to me, I try to keep things in perspective	
18.**	When I'm really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it	
19.	I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering	
20.**	When something upsets me, I get carried away with my feelings	
21.**	Can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering.	
22.	When I'm feeling down, I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness	
23.	I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies	
24.**	When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion	
25.**	When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure	
26.	I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like	

YOUR RESULT

Scoring

Subscale scores are computed by calculating the mean of subscale item responses. To compute a total self-compassion score, reverse score the negative subscale items (**) - self-judgement, isolation, and over-identification (i.e., 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1) - then compute a total mean.

CONSTRUCT (SEE STATEMENTS ON P3)	GROSS	AVERAGE
Self-Kindness statements: 5, 12, 19, 23, 26	 /5	
**Self-Judgment statements: 1, 8, 11, 16, 21	 /5	
Common Humanity statements: 3, 7, 10, 15	 /4	
** Isolation statements: 4, 13, 18, 25	 /4	
Mindfulness statements: 9, 14, 17, 22	 /4	
** Over-identified statements: 2, 6, 20, 24	 /4	
Total Mean	/6	

Interpretation of scores

As a rough guide, average scores for the Self-Compassion Scale are around 3.0 on the 1-5 Likert scale; a score of 1-2.5 indicates low self-compassion, 2.5-3.5 indicates moderate, and 3.5-5.0 is an indication of high self-compassion.

Scores from each subscale can predict several potential outcomes. For instance, a high score on the self-kindness subscale predicts happiness significantly, while a low score predicts anxiety. Higher scores in the mindfulness subscale indicate greater life satisfaction, while over-identification indicates depression, and isolation is a strong predictor for stress.

In the modern world, we are surrounded by judgement, benchmarks, and targets, and we are often our worst enemy, which does not support self-efficacy or motivation. There is much research on self-compassion positively correlated to mental health and well-being. We encourage people to better understand and appreciate this construct, especially at the heart of self-compassion is “change”.

Notes