

SELF-COMPASSION



Compassion involves the act of sympathizing with others. However, sometimes it is easier to sympathize with others than ourselves. Cecilia Yu shows us how to exercise self-compassion, leading to a healthier relationship with ourselves.

Let me ask you this: What are you thankful for? I bet you can rattle off a laundry list of things and people, while grinning.

Now, another question: What about YOURSELF are you thankful for? Think about it. Is it taking you longer to answer than it did for the previous question? Look at your list. How many things can you name?

Many of us may not have been taught to praise or love ourselves especially in difficult times. Are you one of those? This isn't a rhetorical question meant to offend you. Let me break the ice and confess.

I am Cecilia. I wasn't raised to praise and love myself. I am a recovering perfectionist.

All this means I cohabit with a friend who sometimes can be a tenacious inner critic. Both on good days and days when I need motivation, she pounces on me and enthusiastically screams, "Get up, you can do better. You deserve better. You've got this! I am with you no matter what. I am your soft landing." I love her when she shows up like this for me. On other days, especially those tired, everything-has-gone-wrong days, she

pulls and tugs mercilessly at my mind and heart and screams any or all of the following:

Hello?! How could you have missed that?

Now, *how* will you ever fix that?

Omg! *What* were you thinking?

So yeah, she isn't always my cheerleader BFF. She can be overly critical and judgmental. Thankfully, I haven't let her inconsistent empathy affect how I show up for others. When my friends and loved ones encounter huge (sometimes ego-crushing) blows, I become their soft landing cushion. I intentionally empathize with and listen to them as they vent, cry, and express self-doubt. I soothe them with words like:

You did your best.

It must have been hard.

That took a lot out of you. Cry, if you need to.

You are still cherished, despite what happened.

You are only human; of course, mistakes can happen.

I lovingly play my part to help them feel heard, seen, and respected. I bet your friends hear more of these loving words from you than you have told yourself, correct? OK, now it's your turn to confess. Do you have a similar, cohabiting friend? If so, read on.

We need to stop our so-called 'friend' because they can harm us in two ways when we don't draw boundaries with them. In one instance, studies have shown that when we let our inner critic blare out, our cortisol levels rise. Cortisol equates to physiological inflammation, which may lead to many diseases (1). No amount of healthy eating can eradicate these inflammations. Harsh, abrupt words, colored with judgmental tones never motivate us. Another harm I've seen in my professional experience, is how this negativity can crush our spirits and even rein us in from taking risks meant to help us grow. Worse, what kind of examples do we set for children? Their learning is etched into their subconscious through observing us, and not by mere self-love pep talk sessions their guidance counselors or favorite TikTok influencers give.

So, ditch your 'friend' and replace her with self-compassion, which is a mindfulness practice that calls for us to be



as kind to ourselves as we are to our loved ones, in good times and bad times (especially the latter).

Dr. Kristin Neff, a renowned psychologist who pioneered research on self-compassion, has passed on a legacy of valuable learnings about this process. Her research, which is based on the foundational pillars of many subsequent self-compassion studies, concluded that self-compassion is accomplished in three ways (2):

- 1) Be aware of and present with your feelings
- 2) Recognize the common humanity of feeling what you feel; it makes us human
- 3) Show kindness to yourself

Be present with feelings

Name your feelings to tame them. Dashing from them isn't the answer; the pain will eventually catch up. Repressed or unacknowledged anger can turn into resentment towards others. Grief becomes overconsumption with work or isolation from what brings you joy. Feeling overwhelmed can result in being overly controlling. Fear becomes a risk aversion of living and experiencing life. When we mask

emotions that dampen our spirit, we numb our abilities to feel full of even the good.

I 'sit' with my feelings and self-inquire about what they may indicate by:

- Crying, sometimes lots of it
- Screaming, also sometimes a lot
- Journaling
- Talking to someone

Acknowledging our feelings is really about being human and experiencing the richness of the living experience. Recognize that whatever you are feeling shall pass, or at least ebb and flow in its intensity, because nothing is permanent.

Recognize common humanity

Common humanity involves viewing our struggles as what makes us human. Confiding in those you trust might reveal that they have experienced something similar. This may help you understand that others are going through what you're going through, and that it's likely they have reacted similarly. Find a support group for what you are struggling with. By doing so, you may also encourage others sailing similar boats, in similar waters, swallowed by similar tides, to confess their heartaches.

In sharing, we uplift each other and feel not so alone.

Show yourself kindness

I won't judge your go-to self-care practices. You should lovingly ask yourself, "What do I really need in this moment of suffering?". Your needs can look this this:

- Hibernating in a spa oasis
- Bathing in an aromatic warm body of water, with lit candles by your side
- Dancing the night away
- Gorging that tub of ice-cream
- Running till your legs and breath are exhausted
- Lying on your couch completely still, in your PJs, while bingeing on Netflix
- Shopping mindlessly; filling your carts with items you suddenly 'so desperately' need.

Fancy adding to this list?

But know that these fixes are temporary. Yes, they bring a short-lived joy. They temporarily numb and bury your heartaches, but these will resurface and rear their ugly heads in self-sabotaging ways (as I mentioned in a previous section) (3).



More lasting fixes you ask? Honestly, journaling. I would say it is a triumph to talk to your confidantes. You may fail to understand how you are truly feeling until you quiet yourself, write (from a stream of consciousness, unfiltered, truthfully), read (out loud if you want), and reflect on the journal entry. Journaling helps you to tap into your inner wisdom (we all have it); it's like a free therapist accessible 24/7.

After you acknowledge your suffering, name the feelings you have towards it, and recognize that suffering is common to many. Be as kind to yourself as you would to a friend who has tearfully confided in you. Hug yourself (seriously, skin contact gives your body the feel-good hormone, oxytocin like breastfeeding does [4]). Create for yourself loving kindness that resonates. Suggest ideas like:

May I forgive myself?

May I be patient with myself?

May I let go of the need for perfection?

Write them down and post them around your rooms: on your mirrors, TVs and computer screens (perfect reminders during your Netflix marathons). Carry them in your wallet (ideal reminders during your retail therapy). Record them on a voice memo app (hopefully you remember to open this app as you mindlessly scroll through social media). Repeat them frequently, and you will begin to believe them. Much like how we soothe and encourage our children when they tread new territories with fears and anxieties.

Finally, see the silver linings and lessons in your mistakes and shortcomings, even if they are as simple as, "I won't act like that again". That alone is growth and learning, right? After all, aren't we all here to evolve, and live more in alignment with the core of who we truly are?

If my ideas still remain foreign, then just remember this:

Be the love you already are, and listen to 'yourself' with every fiber of your being.

Photos courtesy of Canva

About the Author

Cecilia Yu is a self-compassion enthusiast and coach. Certified in Integrative Nutrition Coaching, Culinary Nutrition, Goddess Yoga and Women's Circle Leadership, Cecilia empowers mommies and their loved ones to lead a healthy, soulful life through anti-inflammatory dietary lifestyle, meditations, yoga, journaling, and her Self-Compassion Circles for Moms. For inspiration, follow her on @CeciliaADoseofVitaminL (FB/IG).



References

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