

The Proof is in the Pudding: The Healing Power of Self-Compassion (Part 2)

Continuing Step 11: Changing Behaviors

Pursuing Podcast Episode 15

September 2, 2019

Notes	
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Step 11: <i>We commit to behaviors that are consistent with our healthier emotions, thoughts, and beliefs.</i>• As we work on changing our emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, behavior change will follow.• This being a circular feedback process, as we implement behavior change, our emotions, thoughts, and beliefs are reinforced in a positive way.• Some critical positive behavior changes are self-parenting, self-care, and showing up with self-compassion. Research is clear that for behavior change to be positive and lasting, self-compassion is far more effective than self-punishment.• As we consciously change behavior, we can take advantage of the brain's design for efficiency to automate the process. By consciously repeating these behaviors through evidence-based methods, we create unconscious action programming, or habits.
How do we apply self-compassion in our lives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In order to be able to apply self-compassion in our lives, we have to do four things: (1) Examine our beliefs about self-compassion; (2) understand what self-compassion really is; (3) learn how to apply it in our lives, and (4) know what the benefits of doing so are.
Learn how to apply self-compassion in our lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As Dr. Kristen Neff defined self-compassion, it entails three core components: "First, it requires <i>self-kindness</i>, that we be gentle and understanding with ourselves rather than harshly

critical and judgmental. Second, it requires recognition of our *common humanity*, feeling connected with others in the experience of life rather than feeling isolated and alienated by our suffering. Third, it requires *mindfulness*—that we hold our experience in balanced awareness, rather than ignoring our pain or exaggerating it. We must achieve and combine these three essential elements in order to be truly self-compassionate” (p. 41).

- The irony is that denying and ignoring our pain actually keeps us stuck and *stops* us from really letting it go and moving forward. The act of letting go and moving on is only possible if we first acknowledge, allow, and accept, and be kind to ourselves in that process.
- We can’t heal what we can’t (or won’t) feel.

Mindfulness:

- It is important that when we do acknowledge what is happening, that we do so with mindfulness, which refers to the clear seeing and nonjudgmental acceptance of what’s occurring in the present moment. This means acknowledging not only the event that is occurring, but the pain caused by the experience. Remember, our brain is wired to avoid pain, so we have to be very intentional about mindfully acknowledging the pain associated with the event (even if it is failure or negative experience by our own hands). If we do not, our suffering will go unattended, and feelings of stress and worry will only increase.
- It is also important to not exaggerate the painful emotions. Especially when we first start being mindful, we can go from mindful to hysterical quickly. This happens for two main reasons: (1) we don’t know how to work through the emotions, and/or (2) we over identify with them.
- Strategies like Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) can be extremely helpful in handling intense and negative emotions.
- Avoiding our negative emotions does not make them go away. Avoiding is a form of resistance, and resistance of our pain creates suffering.
- Suffering = pain x resistance
- Our emotional suffering is caused by our desire for things to be other than they are.
- Pain is unavoidable; suffering is optional.

- Mindfulness allows us to stop resisting reality because it holds all experience in nonjudgmental awareness.
- The second reason why we can quickly go from mindful to hysterical is because of overidentification. “Our sense of self becomes so wrapped up in our emotional reactions that our entire reality is consumed by them.
- Neff (2011), said, “Rather than stepping back and objectively observing what’s occurring, we’re lost in the thick of it. What we think and feel seems like a direct perception of reality, and we forget that we are putting a personal spin on things” (p. 83).
- Being mindful, and observing our emotions without overidentifying with them can save us from a lot of unwanted pain. “Mindfulness brings us back to the present moment and provides the type of balanced awareness that forms the foundation of self-compassion. When we notice our pain without exaggerating it, this is a moment of mindfulness” (Neff, 2011, p. 85).
- Seeing our situation with clarity and objectivity is the doorway to wisdom.

Self-Kindness

- “Self-kindness, by definition, means that we stop the constant self-judgement and disparaging internal commentary that most of us have come to see as normal. It requires us to *understand* our foibles and failures instead of condemning them. It entails clearly seeing the extent to which we harm ourselves through relentless self-criticism, and ending our internal war. But self-kindness involves more than merely stopping self judgement It involves *actively* comforting ourselves, responding just as we would to a dear friend in need” (Neff, 2011, p. 42).
- Our abilities and beliefs around being kind to ourselves are shaped early on, but they are not etched in stone—we can change them. We as humans are wired to give care, we just need to recognize that we can do that for ourselves too.
- One of the best ways to be kind to ourselves is to stop our critical self-talk. Neff (2011) said, “When faced with our human imperfection, we can either respond with kindness and care, or with judgment and criticism. An important question to ask is, what qualities of heart and mind do we want to encourage in ourselves. We can’t stop our judgmental

thoughts, but we don't have to encourage or believe in them either. If we hold our self-judgments with gentleness and understanding, the force of self-contempt will eventually fade and wither, deprived of the sustenance needed to survive. We have the power to live with joy and contentment by responding to our suffering with kindness" (p. 55). Learning to love and accept ourselves as we are is the necessary foundation for ultimate growth and healing.

Common Humanity

- The final element involved in self-compassion is *common humanity*. Neff (2011), said, "Acknowledgment of the interconnected nature of our lives—indeed of life itself—helps to distinguish self-compassion from mere self-acceptance or self-love. Although self-acceptance and self-love are important, they are incomplete by themselves. They leave out an essential factor—other people. Compassion is, by definition, relational. Compassion literally means 'to suffer *with*,' which implies a basic mutuality in the experience of suffering" (pp. 61–62).
- Tara Brach, author of *Radical Acceptance* (2003) writes: "Feeling unworthy goes hand in hand with feeling separate from others, separate from life. If we are defective, how can we possibly belong? It seems like a vicious cycle: the more deficient we feel, the more separate and vulnerable we feel."
- We have an innate need to belong. Abraham Maslow, a well-known American psychologist working in the mid-twentieth century, argued that the need for individual growth and happiness can't be met without first satisfying the more basic need for human connection. Connection with others is important, but often our fears and self-judgments are like blinders that often prevent us from seeing the hands that are being held out to help us.
- Neff (2011) said, "That's why it's so important to transform our relationship with ourselves by recognizing our *inherent* interconnectedness. If we can compassionately remind ourselves in moments of falling down that failure is part of the shared human experience, then that moment becomes one of togetherness rather than isolation. When our troubled, painful experiences are framed by the recognition that countless others have undergone similar hardships, the blow is

	<p>softened. The pain still hurts, but it doesn't become compounded by feelings of separation" (p. 65).</p> <p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we can be mindful, then we can (1) step back and respond to our pain with kindness, and (2) reframe our situation in a light of shared humanity so that we don't feel isolated. Mindfulness is how we take the plane off of auto-pilot. We take the controls and are able to intentionally direct where we are going. • Give yourself kindness and care—rather than reacting with harsh criticism or resistance to an experience, choose to show up with kindness through your self-talk, acts of self-care and self-parenting (Pursuing Perspective Podcast, Episode 12). • Remind yourself that encountering pain is part of the shared human experience. Being kinder to yourself will help with this, but more than anything it is about acknowledging our interconnectedness and reminding yourself of it during difficult times especially. Finding support in whatever way works best for you can also be extremely helpful. • You can hold your thoughts and emotions in mindful awareness. (Pursuing Perspective Podcast, Episode 7)
<p>Know the benefits of applying self-compassion in our lives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Resilience: Research has shown that people who are more self-compassionate tend to be less anxious and depressed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Helps us avoid negativity bias (we're more sensitive to negative than positive information) ○ Helps break the cycle of rumination. (Ruminate on the past = depression and Ruminate on the future = anxiety.) ○ We are better able to navigate the waters of emotions without getting crushed by the waves of intense emotions or drowning in their depths. • "The beauty of self-compassion is that instead of <i>replacing</i> negative feelings with positive ones, new positive ones are generated by <i>embracing</i> the negative ones. The positive emotions of care and connectedness are felt alongside our painful feelings. When we have compassion for ourselves, sunshine and shadow are both experienced simultaneously" (Neff, 2011, p. 117).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-Compassion over Self-Esteem: It takes us out of the self-esteem game."Research has shown that self-compassion is the perfect alternative to the relentless pursuit of self-esteem because it offers the same protection against harsh self-criticism as self-esteem, but without the need to see ourselves as perfect or as better than others. Self-compassion provides the same benefits as high self-esteem without its drawbacks" (Neff, 2011, p. 8). ● Motivation: Self-compassion is more motivating than self-criticism, thus when we choose to use self-compassion we actually create more positive behaviour changes, accomplish more personal growth, and experience more joy in life.
Facebook Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For discussions, questions, topic suggestions, etc.,you can join the Facebook group, <i>Pursuing Perspective</i>.
Three Action Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Give yourself kindness and care—rather than reacting with harsh criticism or resistance to an experience, choose to show up with kindness through your self-talk, acts of self-care and self-parenting. ● Remind yourself that encountering pain is part of the shared human experience. Being kinder to yourself will help with this, but more than anything it is about acknowledging our interconnectedness and reminding yourself of it during difficult times especially. Finding support in whatever way works best for you can be extremely helpful. ● You can hold your thoughts and emotions in mindful awareness.
Sources:	<p>Brach, T. (2003). <i>Radical Acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of a Buddha</i>. New York, New York: Bantam Books.</p> <p>Neff, K. D. (2011). <i>Self-Compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself</i>. New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers.</p>