

Self Compassion Letter



Intervention Overview

Self compassion involves fully “embracing ourselves as we are: flaws and all” (TEDx Talks, 2013,6:45). As educators, too often we are self critical, which only undermines our motivation and job satisfaction, and increases our levels of stress and burnout. In a recent study assessing the impact of various characteristics on educator wellbeing, self-compassion was associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and student-teacher closeness(Hwang et al., 2019). Also, greater self-compassion was correlated with lower levels of relationship conflict, anxiety and emotional eating, as well as improved sleep quality. Compared to dispositional mindfulness, sleep and eating behaviors, and student-teacher relationships, self-compassion was the most significant predictor of lower stress levels among educators(Hwang et al., 2019).

Dr. Kristin Neff identified three key domains of practicing self compassion: self kindness, recognizing our common humanity, and mindfulness(Neff & Germer, 2017). Self kindness involves treating ourselves as we would a good friend and thinking positively about, rather than belittling, ourselves. The recognition of common humanity involves reinforcing the belief that “to be human means to be imperfect” (Tedx Talks, 2013, 8:03). We are not unique or alone in our suffering and imperfections. Mindful self compassion involves being present with and accepting of our suffering and extending compassion to ourselves in the moment(Neff & Germer, 2017). Dr. Neff suggests that to practice self compassion, we may participate in a self-compassion guided meditation, self-soothe by touching our heart, hugging ourselves, or clasping our hands, or by writing a self-compassionate letter to ourselves. While the intervention included in this resource focuses on the self-compassion letter, we encourage you to visit Neff’s website [here](#) for additional self-compassion exercises that may help support your wellbeing.

Intervention Guide

Materials:	Paper, writing utensil
Duration:	15-20 minutes, as needed.

- Implementation:
1. Identify something that is making you feel frustrated, uncomfortable, or insecure. This may be something about yourself, or a way you may have reacted in a situation with a student, colleague, etc.
 2. Write down this concern and describe how it makes you feel, being as honest as possible.
 3. Now, write a letter to yourself, perhaps as if from a trusted friend or loved one, expressing compassion, understanding and acceptance of yourself and what you're experiencing.

(Adapted from Greater Good Science Center, n.d.)

Does it work?

Shapira and Mongrain (2010) assessed the impact of self-compassionate and optimistic letter writing on depression and happiness. The self-compassion activity required participants to write a letter about a distressing event and to express compassion to themselves. For the optimism activity, participants visualized a desired future and wrote a letter to themselves about steps to achieve it. Both interventions were practiced daily for one week. The study involved about 1000 participants, with one third being assigned to each intervention, and the final third being assigned to a control group that wrote about an early memory. Both interventions were found to improve emotional wellbeing. Participants who practiced the self-compassion exercise reported lower levels of depression 3 months following the intervention and higher levels of happiness at the 6 month follow-up (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010).

Mantelou and Karakasidou (2017) completed a similar study, assessing the impact of a self-compassion intervention on life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. This study involved 42 university students, half of whom were randomly assigned to the intervention and half to a control group. The self-compassion intervention involved five meetings where participants learned about and practiced self-compassion, including writing a self compassion letter. Those who participated in the intervention reported significant improvements in life satisfaction and positive affect, with a decrease in negative affect, as compared to the control group (Mantelou & Karakasidou, 2017)

References:

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TEDx Talks. (2013, February 6). *The space between self-esteem and self compassion: Kristin Neff at TEDxCentennialParkWomen* [VIDEO]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvTZBUSplr4>



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