

Mindful Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is often defined as “treating yourself the way you would treat a good friend” (McGee, 2019, 5:30). Higher self-compassion is linked to reduced anxiety, depression and stress, as well as greater life satisfaction, optimism and sense of belonging (McGee, 2019). While some may argue that self-compassion undermines motivation for self-improvement, it has actually been correlated with improved motivation and determination (McGee, 2019). For adolescents, practicing mindful self-compassion can lead to reduced stress and increased resilience, life satisfaction, social connectedness and gratitude (Bluth et al., 2016; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017; Yang et al., 2021). There are many ways to practice self-compassion, such as repeating kind and positive phrases to oneself, listening to a guided self-compassion meditation, self-soothing touch through hugging oneself, putting hands over the heart, or patting oneself on the back (McGee, 2019). Taking a mindful self-compassion break in the classroom and practicing some of these activities can help students develop key components of wellbeing (Bluth et al., 2016; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017; Yang et al., 2021).

Grade Level:	All
Materials:	None. Some example self-compassion meditations and other activities can be found here .
Duration:	A few minutes daily, repeat as needed.
Implementation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. In order to help students feel more comfortable practicing self-compassion, Karen Bluth (McGee, 2019) recommends that teachers first explain to students why self-compassion is important and its benefits to wellbeing. Explain that with practice, self-compassion will become more comfortable.2. Model self-compassion with your students. Be careful to express kindness to yourself for your own mistakes in front of your students.3. Listen to a guided self-kindness meditation as a class, or create your own script using the examples above.4. After students complete a difficult task, encourage them to pat themselves on the back.5. Take a dedicated self-compassion break with students for a few minutes daily, and have them either repeat kind phrases to themselves, write a short compassionate note to themselves, give themselves a soothing touch, or listen to a short self-compassion meditation.

Does it work?

In the pilot study of the mindful self-compassion program “Making Friends with Yourself” developed by Bluth and colleagues (2016), practicing self-compassion was associated with improvements in anxiety, depression, mindfulness, and life satisfaction. 34 students, ages 14-17 participated in this study, with half participating in the intervention and half being assigned to a waitlist control group. This was a six-week course, with a 90-minute weekly lesson where students learned about self-compassion, participated in role-plays, listened to self-compassion mindfulness meditations, practiced soothing touch, among other self-compassion based activities. Following the program, those in the self-compassion intervention group reported significantly lower depression and anxiety levels as compared to the waitlist group, as well as improved levels of self-compassion and life satisfaction. Some students shared that practicing self-compassion was particularly helpful during stressful times, such as preparing for advanced placement (AP) exams (Bluth et al., 2016). A follow up study completed by Bluth and colleagues in 2017, also found that practicing self-compassion improved emotional wellbeing, gratitude and curiosity, while reducing stress.

A three year study was recently completed with adolescents in China measuring the impact of self-compassion on prosocial behaviors and gratitude, important aspects of psychological wellbeing (Yang et al., 2021). About 1500 7th grade students were recruited for this study, with about 1000 completing the entire three year study. Students completed a variety of surveys over the three years, measuring perceived levels of self-compassion, gratitude, and interactions with others. It was found that higher levels of self-compassion were associated with the development of prosocial behaviors, such as empathy, altruism, and compassion for others. Self-compassion in adolescents was also associated with higher levels of gratitude and appreciation for life (Yang et al., 2021).

References:

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