The Power of Compassion

Practicing Self-Compassion

Being kind to ourselves doesn't always come naturally. We may have to actually practice bringing out compassionate thoughts. Gradually we can shift away from negative self-talk to a more positive, supportive inner voice. Below are some ideas and exercises for building self-compassion.

In the moment

Offer comfort

Just as a kind hand on the shoulder or a warm hug from others can comfort us, we can offer comfort to ourselves. When you feel stressed, try pairing physical comfort with reassuring words. For example, you might hold one hand with the other, or put a hand to your cheek or heart. Remind yourself that you're not alone with this difficulty. Offer yourself kindness: "This is hard. Life can be hard sometimes. It is for everyone. I deserve to be kind to myself."

Compassionate mantra

It's easy to feel isolated and ashamed when we don't meet our own expectations. A simple sentence can help remind you to be kind to yourself when things aren't going well. Some examples:

- I'm human and that's OK.
- Everyone makes mistakes.
- No one is perfect; I'll keep trying.
- I get to be who I am.

Visualize your critic

It can be easier to quiet your inner critic when you get some distance from it. Try to notice when your inner voice gets critical. Visualize a person or character saying the words you hear. Is there anything helpful in the message? Or is it purely critical? Try saying the words out loud to really hear the tone.

Visualize kindness

Turn away from those critical thoughts by picturing someone who loves and supports you. You could even visualize your pet or a physical place that brings you contentment. Notice how this makes you feel. Focus on that feeling, then flip to a kind message that reflects this attitude. For example, when you make a mistake, "You're an idiot!" softens to, "It's been a stressful day; you need to slow down."

Practice exercises

See your vulnerability

Being hard on ourselves is a habit that hardens over time. When it does, it can be a norm to see ourselves as unworthy of forgiveness or kindness. The tone and words of our inner voice reflect this mindset. If we can see ourselves in a different way, it may be easier to see that we deserve kindness from ourselves. One way to do this is to picture yourself as you were when you were a child. See that child making the mistake or not performing at their best. What would you say to them?

Be a friend

Think of something about yourself or a worry that makes you feel insecure. Now imagine a friend has come to you with this concern. How would you respond? What tone would you have? You might say that everyone has flaws and things they don't like about themselves. We've all made choices we regret. You could encourage them to consider factors they can't control that feed this feeling, such as their upbringing or life situations they didn't choose. How would you help them feel that they're good enough? What suggestions might you make on how to change or better cope with the challenge? Try to tap this perspective of kindness, acceptance, and forgiveness when struggling with insecurities.

Finding our way to self-compassion can be difficult work. Remember, your EAP is always available to help you connect with professional support.

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