

MINDFUL SELF-COMPASSION (MSC) IN PSYCHOTHERAPY



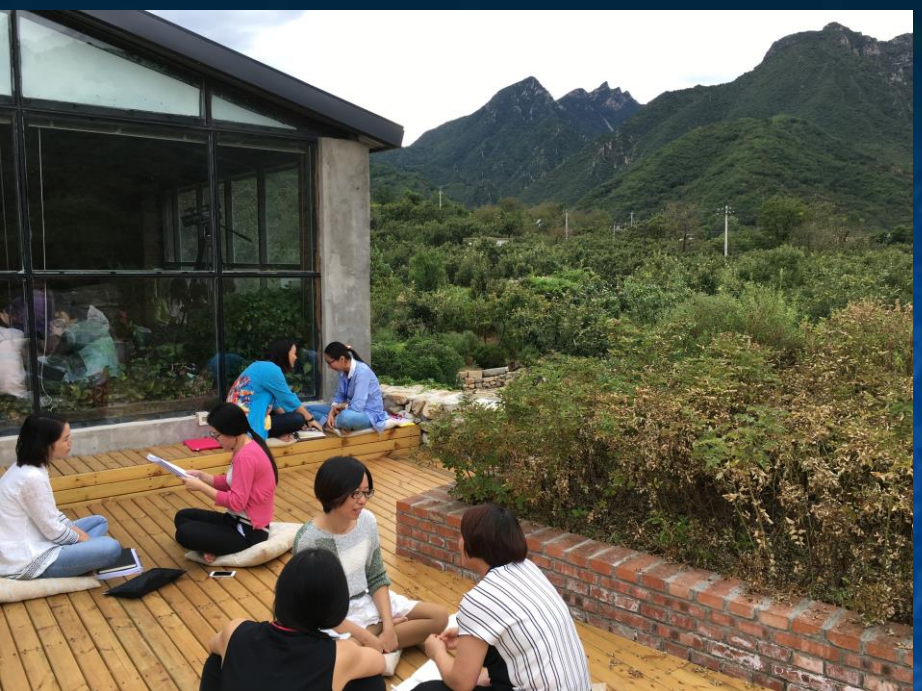
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3rd Seoul International Meditation Expo
Dongguk University
17. May 2022

KEY POINTS

- What is self-compassion?
- Three levels of integration into therapy – presence, relationship, interventions
- How does self-compassion work in therapy?
- Self-compassion for caregiver fatigue

My Doorway to Self-Compassion





WHAT'S *SELF*-COMPASSION?

Treating ourselves with the same kindness and understanding as we would treat a dear friend when things go wrong.

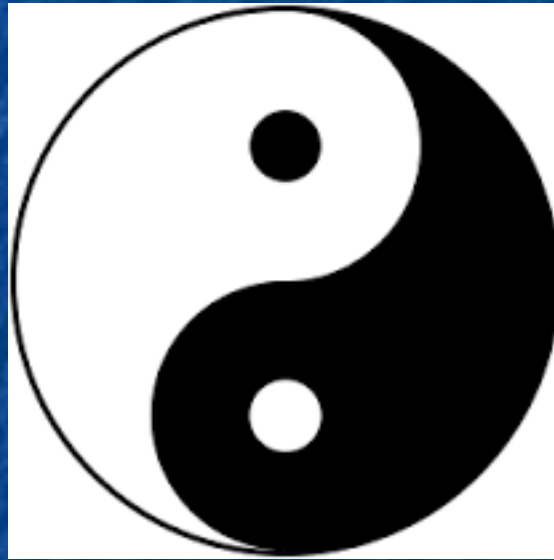


FORMAL DEFINITION OF SELF-COMPASSION



Kristin Neff, 2003

TWO APPROACHES TO SELF-COMPASSION

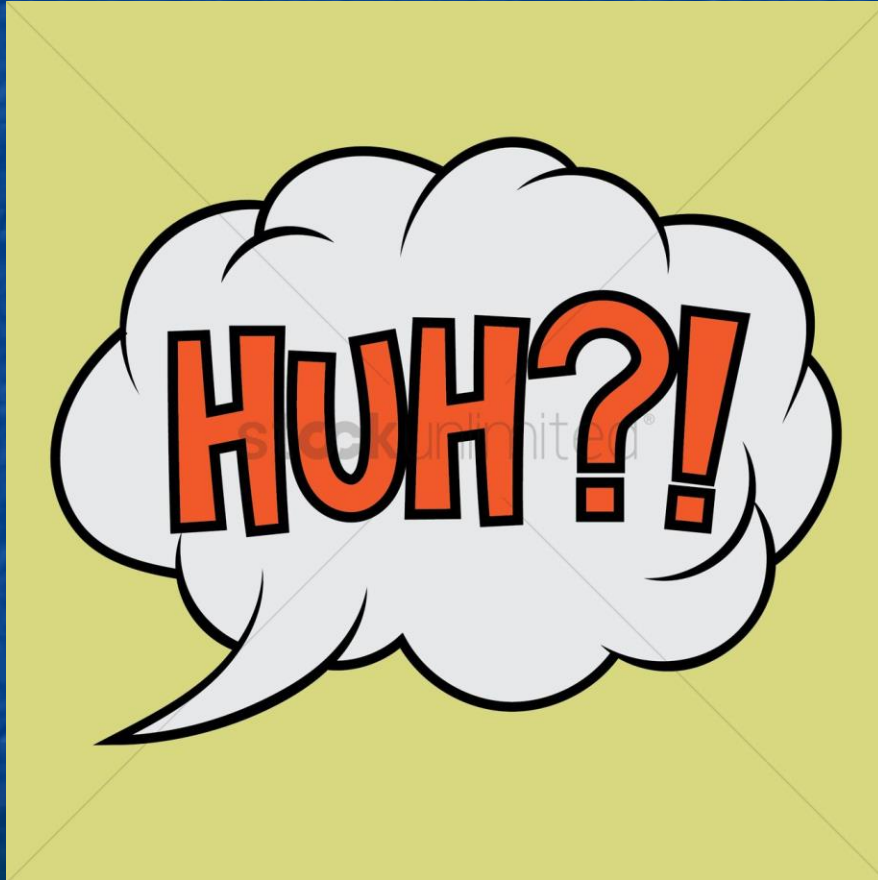


YIN: (“being with”) comfort, connect, validate

YANG: (“acting in the world”) protect, provide, motivate

CARE

MISGIVINGS ABOUT SELF-COMPASSION



1. Selfish
2. Weak
3. Self-pity
4. Self-indulgent
5. Demotivating

RESEARCH ON SELF-COMPASSION



WELL-BEING

INCREASES in:

- Life satisfaction, happiness, gratitude, self-confidence, optimism, wisdom, curiosity, conscientiousness, creativity, autonomy, competence, relatedness, hope, emotional intelligence, perspective-taking...



WELL-BEING

REDUCTIONS in:

Anxiety, depression, stress, maladaptive perfectionism, self-criticism, rumination, shame, suicidality...



GOOD FOR PHYSICAL HEALTH



Fewer self-reported health symptoms

Eat balanced meals

Regular exercise

Drink less alcohol

Get enough sleep

Protected sex

EARLY INFLUENCES ON SELF-COMPASSION



Attachment security
Parental criticism
Conflict in home
History of neglect or abuse

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO LEARN SELF-COMPASSION!



- Psychotherapy
- Self-compassion training (MSC), compassion training (CCT, CBCT, MBCL)
- Mindfulness training (MBSR, MBCT)
- Owning a dog, practicing yoga, walking in nature, compassion toward others.

MINDFULNESS & SELF-COMPASSION



MINDFULNESS AND SELF-COMPASSION

Mindfulness is loving awareness of *moment-to-moment experience*.

Self-compassion loving awareness of the *experiencer*.

Mindfulness asks, “What do I *know*?”

Self-compassion asks, “What do I *need*?”

Mindfulness regulates emotion through attention and awareness

Self-compassion regulates emotion through care and connection

Mindfulness is calming

Self-compassion is warming



SELF-COMPASSION BREAK



PIONEERS IN SELF-COMPASSION



Paul Gilbert



Kristin Neff

SELF-COMPASSION IN THERAPY: 3 LEVELS OF INTEGRATION

- **Compassionate Presence:**
How therapists relate to their *own experience*
- **Compassionate Alliance:**
How therapists *engage with their clients*, verbally and non-verbally
- **Compassionate Interventions:**
How clients *relate to themselves*, esp. Home practice

LEVEL 1

COMPASSIONATE PRESENCE

*how therapists relate to themselves
embodying mindfulness and compassion*



COMPASSIONATE PRESENCE

- **Presence** is closely associated with *mindfulness* – spacious, non-judgmental awareness of moment-to-moment experience.
- **Self-compassion training enhances mindfulness** and mindfulness training enhances self-compassion.
- **Self-compassion training is linked to presence** (Bourgault & Dionne, 2019):
 - with *oneself* – reduces self-criticism and enhances self-kindness
 - with the *client* – increases other-compassion, reduces therapist burnout
 - in the *therapy relationship* – reduced reactivity and awareness of common humanity

LEVEL 2

COMPASSIONATE ALLIANCE

how therapists relate to their clients



COMPASSIONATE ALLIANCE

- The **alliance** is a common factor in therapy –a robust predictor of treatment outcome across therapies.
- **Empathy** accounts for more treatment outcome than treatment interventions (meta-analysis by Bohart et al, 2002).
- **Successful therapists** tended to be warmer, more empathic, understanding and supportive of their clients, and are less likely to blame, ignore, neglect, or reject the clients (meta-analysis by Lambert & Ogles, 2004).
- **Loving-kindness and compassion meditation** increases altruism, positive regard, affective empathy and empathic accuracy (review by Bibeau et al., 2016)

LEVEL 3 COMPASSIONATE INTERVENTIONS

how clients relate to themselves / home practice



COMPASSIONATE INTERVENTIONS

- An intervention is an action taken to bring about positive change in a client or patient.
- Self-compassion home practices can be found in literature on *Mindful Self-Compassion* and *Compassion Focused Therapy*, and numerous workbooks.
- SC can be learned from workbooks alone (Held et al, 2018).
- Traditional CBT practices can be integrated with SC – e.g., exposure therapy or behavioral activation with compassionate self-talk.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR DESIGNING THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

- *“WHAT DOES THE CLIENT NEED?”*
 - ...to feel safe*
 - ...to be comforted, soothed, validated*
 - ...to protect, provide for, motivate yourself?*
- *“HOW DOES THE CLIENT CARE FOR HIM OR HERSELF ALREADY?”*
- *“HOW WOULD THE CLIENT TREAT A FRIEND IN THIS SAME SITUATION?”*

SELF-COMPASSION AS AN UNDERLYING CHANGE PROCESS IN THERAPY



TRANSDIAGNOSTIC – improves mental health across diagnostic conditions.

TRANSTHEORETICAL – improves mental health in different kinds of therapy

HOW DOES SELF-COMPASSION WORK?



1. EMOTION REGULATION

- **Emotion regulation** refers to the ability to “attend to, appraise, and modulate the intensity and duration of emotional states” (Gross & Muñoz, 1995).
- Emotion regulation is a **key mechanism of change in therapy**, and self-compassion is closely related to emotion regulation in the literature.
- Research showed **improvements in self-regulation along with self-compassion in therapy** for depression, anxiety, childhood maltreatment, substance abuse, bulimia, OCD, sexual pain and caregiver distress.

SELF-COMPASSION FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

- Most people do not develop PTSD from trauma; it depends on how we *relate* to trauma.
- How we *regulate* challenging emotions statistically predicts PTSD better than trauma exposure itself. (Barlow, Turow & Gerhart (2017).
- PTSD is maintained by *experiential avoidance* (Marx & Sloan, 2005).
- With self-compassion, feelings are acknowledged and accepted rather than avoided (Thompson & Waltz, 2008).
- SC calms the nervous system, reduces shame from trauma, and increases sense of safeness.
- Self-compassion helps emotion regulation among people with childhood abuse and neglect (Vettese, dyer, Li, & Wekerli, 2011) and also women with severe and repeated interpersonal trauma (Scoglio, et al, 2018)
- SC is consistently associated with reduced PTSD (Winders et al., 2020), and is also linked to post-traumatic growth and healing (Wong & Yeung, 2017)

2. NEUROPHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGE

- Lower *sympathetic arousal* (reduced salivary alpha-amylase and interleukin-6). **Less fear.**
- Increased *parasympathetic activity* - greater vagally-mediated heart-rate variability (self-soothing). **More safety.**
- **vmPFC** (active during information processing and decision-making) and **dIPFC** (active while switching attention and response inhibition) appear to be associated with self-compassionate responding. **Better executive control of emotion.**

3. INCREASES SECURE ATTACHMENT

- Since children internalize how they are treated, if they received comfort and support from primary caregivers when they were in distress, they will probably do the same for themselves later in life
- Parental rejection, criticism, overprotection and stressful family relationships are negatively correlated with SC. Early memories of warmth and safeness and SC are positively correlated with SC.
- SC mediates the relationship between insecure attachment and emotional distress (Mackintosh et al., 2018), subjective wellbeing (Wei et al., 2011) and mental health in general (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011)

4. BACKDRAFT AND REPARENTING

- *Backdraft* – the actual distress that arises when people receive compassion from themselves or others.
 - *thoughts and beliefs*, e.g., “I’m unlovable”
 - *emotions*, e.g., grief or shame
 - *body memories* – e.g., aches and pains
 - *automatic behaviors* – e.g., withdrawal or aggression.
- **Compassion activates old memories** and makes them available for reprocessing. As the resource of self-compassion develops, clients develop a “secure base” and feel safer within themselves.
- Cultivating self-compassion in therapy can be understood as a process of *reparenting*.

5. ALLEVIATES SHAME

- Shame is a “self-conscious” emotion characterized by negative self-evaluation.
- Patterns of rejection in childhood can make a person shame-prone (Claesson & Sohlberg, 2002).
- Shame and SC were inversely related in treatment outcomes for depression, PTSD, eating disorders, social anxiety disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, chronic pain, and stress due to intellectual disability.
- People who have been shamed in childhood find it difficult to activate feelings of warmth and kindness. The objective of compassion-focused therapy is to address fears of compassion and activate self-compassion (Gilbert, 2010).

SELF-COMPASSION FOR CAREGIVERS



Less compassion fatigue
More compassion satisfaction
Greater resilience
Less sleep disturbance

MEDITATION: GIVING AND RECEIVING COMPASSION



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Self-Compassion in Psychotherapy (SCIP) Program

<https://scipprogram.com>

Institute of Korean Meditation and Psychotherapy

<http://ikmp.org>

Center for Mindful Self-Compassion

www.centerformsc.org

Chris Germer

www.mindfulselfcompassion.org

Kristin Neff

www.self-compassion.org

Compassionate Mind Foundation

www.compassionatemind.co.uk