

Self-compassion is the practice of providing kindness and understanding to ourselves particularly in light of disappointment or failures. This by human nature is a difficult perspective but essential to positive growth and habit change;

We often feel that we have to execute some activity or action perfectly in order to reach our goals.

Consider for example, if we start a new dietary practice. We will often sabotage ourselves if we feel that we have deviated from the expectation we have in our mind. The truth is that the meal or the weekend usually doesn't kill the diet, but it's the mentality around it, the inability to accept our imperfections that does.

The wish to be perfect is human, but it is not realistic. In fact, imperfection is part of the human condition, so how we respond to these imperfections really determines how we are going to grow and to evolve.

Self-compassion is a practice that allows us to cultivate kindness and understanding in the setting of our flawed and messy lives. And the science shows that self-compassion is integral to habit change. In fact you are much more likely to engage in positive behaviors and to succeed if you engage in mindful self compassion.

So, what are the 3 elements of Self-Compassion?

1. Practice Self-kindness, *not* Self-judgment:

How do you respond to your imperfections? Do you have a sentiment of kindness and understanding towards yourself or do you judge and criticize yourself when you fail or feel inadequate? Think of a time in which you experienced a setback or felt disappointment in yourself. Think about how that made you feel and think about how that affected your motivation. How

motivated did you feel to continue to go on? Now, can you reframe this moment with an attitude of kindness towards yourself?

2. Acknowledge our Common Humanity

Often when we suffer, we imagine that we are the only one. But you are not alone in this struggle. No one can always be what they want, have what they want or get what they want. Being human means being imperfect, and therefore suffering imperfection or failure is part of the human condition. How does a sense of common humanity make you feel about the setback you described above? When we consider that we all suffer the same imperfections, it allows us to have a little bit more kindness towards ourselves and also makes us feel less alone. How might you remind yourself in times of suffering that you are not alone?

3. Mindfulness

We all experience negative thoughts and self-critical thinking. Often these thoughts are so quick, so routine, and so habitual that we don't even realize we're thinking them. Some examples I hear from patients are: I'm not an exerciser, I'm not an athlete, I look in the mirror and the first thing I think is I'm fat. These thoughts are automatic. With mindfulness you can become aware of these automatic thoughts. With time you will catch yourself in these thoughts and learn to question them, so that they are less automatic. You can learn through mindfulness not to over-identify with or engage with your negative thoughts, reminding yourself that just because you think it, does not make it true.

So again, the three components of self compassion are mindfulness, acknowledging our common humanity and the human condition, and lastly, practicing self-kindness, not self-judgment. If this seems hard do not

despair, self-compassion is a *practice* and with practice you can learn to cultivate a greater sense of care, kindness, and compassion for yourself.

So how do we do that?

Some suggestions to help include:

A mindfulness self-compassion course. These include mindfulness meditation practices that help you cultivate awareness of your thoughts and a sense of self-compassion.

For those of you who are more self-directed, I recommend a journaling practice. Sit down every morning or evening and write down your thoughts. That way when they are out on paper, you have the opportunity to disengage from them, to evaluate them and to really consider not only are they true or untrue, but what are they doing for you? Are they empowering you? Or more likely, are they de-motivating and disempowering you? You can see in that context how these negative thoughts and the lack of self-compassion can take you away from positive habit change and successful changes in your lifestyle.

And finally, I have a daily writing practice I call the 5's: 5 prouds, 5 forgives and 5 commits. Each day write down 5 things that you are proud of. They don't have to be monumental accomplishments, just 5 things that you consider wins. Then write down 5 forgives- these are 5 things that didn't go quite right that you forgive yourself for. And finally 5 commits- write down 5 things that you commit to. Keep in mind that these commitments should not be grandiose but rather things that are doable. We don't need to commit to six days of one hour of running per week, we can commit to small changes, small bites, small actions that over time, make a big impact in your health and well-being.

Well that's all for today. I hope that this has been helpful. For more hop onto Healthbite anywhere you podcast where you can hear this weeks episode on Self- Compassion.