

An Exercise in Self Compassion

The Idea

Research suggests that people who respond with compassion to their own flaws and setbacks – rather than beating themselves up – experience greater physical and mental health. I have prepared an exercise to help you train yourself towards greater self-compassion.

The Activity

- Think of a time when you felt stupid, embarrassed, humiliated or a failure (choose on example, and make sure it is well in the past. If it was last week and the feelings are still raw, leave well alone for now).
- Write a paragraph about it, detailing what happened and how you felt about it at the time.
- Imagine that this event happened to a loved one or close friend, who also felt very bad about it.
- Describe how they must have felt and their response to the event.
- Write a compassionate letter to this person. Empathise and express your understanding of how they felt. Explain to them why you feel moved to support them in this way and why you think they are worthy of your compassion and understanding.
- Now write a balanced and compassionate summary of the experience and your feelings about it. Write in the third-person (use 'he' or 'she' instead of 'I' or 'me'), just as you did when you wrote about your friend, except that now the the central character is you. Make the summary compassionate and insightful as you can.
- When you have written the letter put it aside. Come back to it later and read it though. Do this particularly if you are feeling bad about yourself, to remind to be more self-compassionate.

Keep in Mind

Imagine that there is someone who is supportive and who loves you unconditionally and accepts you just as you are. What would that person say to you about you?

Remember that everyone has some flaws and things they don't like about themselves. You are no different; you are more normal than you may think.

Consider the events and experiences that have shaped you, particularly the family environment you grew up in, and the unhealthy beliefs that you may have been imposed on you when you were a child, and too young to question them.

Think about constructive changes could make or a project you could start that would enable you to build self belief and confidence. Learning something new or taking on a challenge is a great booster.

With practice you'll get better at doing this exercise. Put it in your diary to remind yourself to do it weekly, or at least monthly, until you no longer need it.