

Teaching Teens Self-Compassion (and how it beats self-esteem)

Ashleigh Edelstein, LMFT-Associate

What is self-compassion?

- ▶ Compassion: sympathetic concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others
- ▶ Self-compassion: having that same concern for ourselves
 - ▶ Being kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings
 - ▶ Treating ourselves with kindness when we feel bad

3 Components of Self-Compassion

- ▶ **Component #1: Self-kindness versus self-judgment**
 - ▶ Treating ourselves with kindness as opposed to harsh self-judgment
- ▶ **Component #2: Common humanity versus isolation**
 - ▶ All people are imperfect and all people lead imperfect lives
- ▶ **Component #3: Mindfulness versus Overidentification**
 - ▶ Mindfulness is the ability to be present with what's happening as it's happening
 - ▶ We need to have the courage to be present with our difficult emotions
 - ▶ We can't over-identify with our thoughts and feelings

What is self-esteem?

- ▶ Self-esteem: confidence in one's own worth or abilities
- ▶ Often leads to constantly comparing yourself to others
 - ▶ How do I measure up?
- ▶ Not a bad thing to have self-confidence and self-esteem
 - ▶ Feels good to accomplish things and do well
- ▶ Pursuit of self-esteem is the problem
 - ▶ Can lead to narcissism and bullying

Differences between self-compassion & self-esteem

- ▶ Both involve an attitude we take towards ourselves
- ▶ Self-esteem means looking for validation through external factors
 - ▶ Contingent on peer approval, perceived appearance, success
- ▶ Self-esteem says, “It’s okay, you did this good,”
 - ▶ “I did badly, therefore I am bad.”
- ▶ Self-compassion says, “It’s okay you did this poorly. You messed up, but it’s okay.”
 - ▶ Not self-evaluation

Benefits of self-compassion

- ▶ Increases your motivation and confidence
 - ▶ Helps you not give up - key to reaching your goals in life
- ▶ Associated with:
 - ▶ Greater emotional resilience, better able to bounce back
 - ▶ Accurate self-concepts
 - ▶ Caring relationship behavior
 - ▶ Less narcissism and reactive anger
- ▶ Helps you become more compassionate towards others
 - ▶ Sense of common humanity

How it beats self-esteem

- ▶ Self-compassion offers same protection against harsh self-criticism as self-esteem
 - ▶ Doesn't require seeing ourselves as perfect or as better than others
 - ▶ Provides the same benefits as high self-esteem without its drawbacks
- ▶ Self-compassion is not a way of judging ourselves positively
 - ▶ It's a way of relating to ourselves kindly
- ▶ It's there for you when self-esteem deserts you
 - ▶ Gives you a sense of being valuable, because you are a human being worthy of love

Myths about self-compassion

- ▶ **Myth #1: I'll be lazy**
 - ▶ #1 complaint when introducing to teens
 - ▶ Self-compassion is accountability, not letting yourself off the hook
- ▶ **Myth #2: Beating myself up motivates me**
 - ▶ Being kind makes you more motivated, less likely to procrastinate
 - ▶ You can give it your all without worrying about failing
- ▶ **Myth #3: It's self-pity**
 - ▶ Self-pity is egocentric: "I'm all alone in my suffering"
 - ▶ Self-compassion gives you a greater perspective without isolation

How to introduce to teens

- ▶ Think of an area where your teen struggles
 - ▶ Failed a test, left out of something social, lost a sports game, etc
- ▶ Ask them what they would say to a friend:
 - ▶ “If John failed his test, what would you say to him?”
- ▶ “Is that different than how you talk to yourself?”
 - ▶ Get wheels turning, “why do you think that is?”
- ▶ Does self-compassion sound too soft or doesn’t resonate?
 - ▶ Try calling it “inner support”, “inner ally” or “inner friend” instead
 - ▶ Doesn’t matter what we call it as long as we’re supporting ourselves and alleviating suffering

How to practice self-compassion

- ▶ “How can I be a friend to myself today?”
 - ▶ Keep reminder somewhere, like post-it or daily alarm
- ▶ When you notice you’re beating yourself up, gently correct
 - ▶ Don’t beat yourself up for beating yourself up!
- ▶ Parents can model this for kids
 - ▶ Show yourself compassion when you mess up
 - ▶ Show them compassion when they mess up
- ▶ Self-care is self-compassion
 - ▶ Nighttime routine is a perfect time to care for yourself

The lasting impact

- ▶ Self-compassion won't solve all your problems
 - ▶ Helps build the resources to face your problems
 - ▶ Essential, foundational tool in their toolbox
- ▶ Provides a solid foundation and sense of self
 - ▶ Teens need this solid foundation to help them examine negative thought patterns or sit with difficult emotions
 - ▶ Takes time, is a process
- ▶ Helps parents become collaborative problem solvers
 - ▶ Take accountability piece as starting point to problem solve

Resources

- ▶ [Self-compassion.org](https://self-compassion.org)
- ▶ *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself* by Kristin Neff
- ▶ *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook* by Kristin Neff
- ▶ *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion* by Christopher Germer
- ▶ *Resilient* by Rick Hanson
- ▶ *The Self-Compassion Workbook for Teens* by Karen Bluth
- ▶ *The Gifts of Imperfection* by Brené Brown

Questions?

Ashleigh Edelstein, LMFT-A

Austin Psychotherapy Services

5524 Bee Caves Rd, Suite J-6, Austin TX 78746

512-549-8189

ashleighmft@gmail.com

www.austinpsychotherapyservices.com