

SELF-COMPASSION

with Kristin Neff & Brené Brown

EXERCISE:

Motivating Ourselves with Compassion

Think about a behavior that you would like to change—something you often beat yourself up about. Choose a behavior that is unhelpful to you and that is potentially changeable.

(Don't choose a permanent characteristic like "my feet are too big").

Examples of behaviors you might be criticizing yourself for are:

- "I eat too much."
- "I don't exercise enough."
- "I don't meditate enough."
- "I procrastinate."
- "I get angry too easily."

1. Please write down a behavior that you would like to change that you typically criticize yourself for:

FINDING YOUR SELF-CRITICAL VOICE

2. Now please write down what you typically say to yourself when you find yourself doing this behavior.

3. How does the self-critical voice express itself?

What words does it use?

And what tone does it use?

(In fact sometimes there are no clear words, but simply a feeling of judgment and disapproval, or perhaps even an image.)

CONTACTING YOUR CRITICIZED SELF

Now switching perspectives, and taking a moment to get in touch with the part of yourself that feels criticized. Please take a moment to notice how it feels to receive this message.

4. What are you feeling when you hear your self critical voice? What has been the impact on you?

If you wish, try giving yourself compassion for how hard it is to be the recipient of such harsh treatment, taking a moment for yourself, perhaps by validating the pain:

"This is hard."

"This hurts."

TURNING TOWARD YOUR INNER CRITIC

Now, turning toward your inner critic with interest and curiosity.

Please reflect for a moment on why the criticism has gone on for so long. Is your inner critic trying to protect you in some way, even if the result has been unproductive?

5. Please write down what motivates your inner critic.

Trying to protect you in some way

Trying to keep you safe from danger

Trying to help you

If you can't find any way that your inner critic is trying to help you—sometimes self-criticism has no redeeming value whatsoever—please continue to give yourself compassion for how you've suffered from self-criticism in the past.

If you did identify some way your inner critic might be trying to keep you safe, see if you can acknowledge it's efforts, perhaps even writing down a few words of thanks. Let your inner critic know that even though it may not be serving you very well now, its intention was good, and it was doing its best.

6. Write down a few words of thanks to your inner critic.

FINDING YOUR COMPASSIONATE VOICE

7. What is the phrase that captures the essence of your inner compassionate self?
"I deeply care about you, and that's why I'd like to help you make a change."
"I have your back."

If you prefer, you can bring to mind the image of a person who you care deeply about and imagine they are struggling with the exact same behavior.

8. What would you say to that friend?
9. Now write down that same message to yourself.
10. What did it feel like to go through this exercise?
11. How will you incorporate this learning into your life?