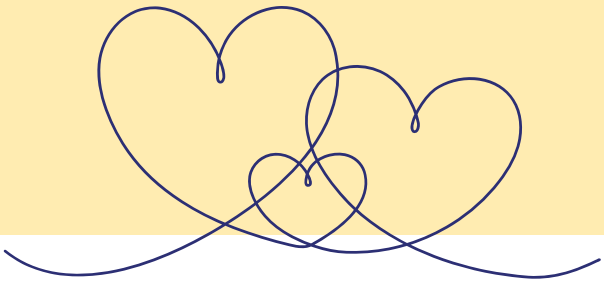
7 self-compassion exercises for young people



Self-compassion means treating yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would show a good friend. We all make mistakes, experience difficult emotions and have days when things don't go as planned. Learning to be kind to yourself can help you navigate these moments with greater confidence and care.

We've chosen seven self-compassion exercises for you to practice positive self-talk, recognize your strengths and respond to challenges with kindness. ***You don't have to be perfect, you just have to be willing to practice!***

1 Show yourself the same kindness

Think about how you would respond if a friend was having a hard time.
Imagine your friend:

- Got an answer wrong in class
- Lost a game or competition
- Forgot to do their homework
- Had an argument with someone they care about

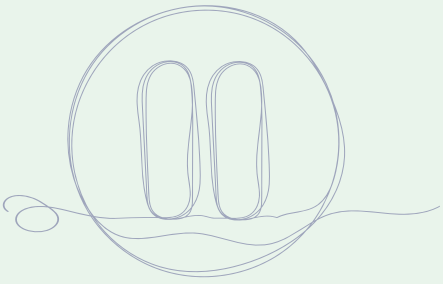
Step 1: What would you say to your friend to help them feel better?

Step 2: If the same thing happened to you, what would you say to yourself?

Step 3: Are your words to yourself as kind and understanding as the words you would offer your friend? If not, how could you change them?

You deserve the same kindness, patience and understanding that you give to others!

2 The self-compassion pause



When something goes wrong, it's easy to get frustrated with yourself or feel like you've failed. Instead of being hard on yourself, try taking a self-compassion pause. This three-step practice can help you slow down, show yourself kindness and figure out what to do next.

Step 1: Stop: Take a breath and notice how you're feeling.
Tell yourself: "This is hard right now, and that's okay."
Step 2: Show yourself kindness: Remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes and has difficult moments.
Tell yourself: "I'm allowed to make mistakes. I don't have to be perfect."
Step 3: Choose your next step: Think about what might help you in this moment.
Ask yourself: "What do I need right now? What's one thing I can do to help?"

Your turn!
Think of a time when something didn't go as planned. How could you use the self-compassion pause to respond to yourself with more kindness?

Compassionate self-talk mirror

Find a mirror and take a moment to look at yourself. Think about the words you use when you make a mistake, face a challenge or feel disappointed. Now, practice saying a few kind and encouraging words to yourself.

Choose two to three phrases to practice or create your own:

- "I am learning and growing."
- "It's okay to make mistakes."
- "I can try again."
- "I don't have to be perfect."
- "I am proud of myself for trying."
- "I deserve kindness, even when things are hard."
-
-

Reflect: How does it feel to say these words to yourself? Which phrase would you most like to remember when you're having a difficult day?

The way you talk to yourself matters. Practice using words that help you feel supported, encouraged and understood.

Draw your inner critic vs. your inner coach

We all have an inner voice that affects how we feel about ourselves. Sometimes, it can be critical and unkind. Other times, it can be encouraging and supportive. In this activity, you'll create two characters that represent these different voices.

1. Meet your inner critic

Draw a character that represents your inner critic. This is the voice that might show up when you make a mistake or feel disappointed.

What does your inner critic say to you?

When does it usually show up?

How do these words make you feel?

2. Meet your inner coach

Now, draw a character that represents your inner coach. This is the voice that encourages you, helps you learn and reminds you to be kind to yourself.

What does your inner coach say to you?

How does it help you when things get tough?

What would it say when you make a mistake?

3. Choose your voice

Imagine you didn't do as well as you thought on a test. Your inner critic says, "I'm terrible at this!" Your inner coach says, "I didn't do as well as I wanted, but I can learn from this and try again."

Reflect: Which voice would help you handle this situation in a healthier way? What is one kind or encouraging thing your inner coach could say to you today?

Celebrate your effort: The "I tried!" jar

It's easy to focus on whether you succeeded, got the right answer or did something perfectly. But self-compassion means recognizing that trying, learning and growing matter just as much as the outcome!

Your challenge: Find a jar, box or container to create your own "I tried!" jar. Throughout the week, write down something you tried, even if it felt difficult or didn't turn out the way you hoped. Add each note to your jar.

Need some ideas?

- "I raised my hand even though I felt nervous."
- "I tried something new."
- "I apologized when I made a mistake."
- "I asked someone for help."
- "I kept practicing even when it was hard."
- "I tried again after feeling disappointed."

-
-

Reflect: At the end of the week, read your notes. What are you proud of? What did you learn about yourself?

6

Welcome to the mistake museum!

Everyone makes mistakes! Sometimes we feel embarrassed, disappointed or frustrated when things don't go as planned. Instead of hiding your mistakes or being hard on yourself, let's turn them into learning experiences.

Your challenge: Create your own mistake museum! Draw or write about a mistake you've made and display it in your imaginary museum. Then, answer these questions:

What happened? Describe or draw the mistake.

How did I feel? What emotions did I experience?

What did I learn? What can I take away from this experience?

What would I tell a friend? If someone else made the same mistake, what kind and encouraging words would I share with them?

Reflect: How can you show yourself that same kindness and understanding?

Three things I appreciate about myself

Self-compassion means recognizing the things you value about yourself, not just what you achieve or how you look, but the person you are and the ways you grow, learn and care for others.

Your challenge: Think of three things you appreciate about yourself. These can be personal qualities, things you put effort into or ways you show kindness to yourself and others.

Need some ideas?

- "I am a good listener."
- "I keep trying, even when things are difficult."
- "I am creative."
- "I care about my friends."
- "I was brave today, even though I felt nervous."
- "I am willing to learn from my mistakes."

My three things:

1. I appreciate myself because

2. I appreciate myself because

3. I appreciate myself because

Reflect: Was it easy or difficult to think of things you appreciate about yourself? What is one quality you'd like to recognize more often?