WORKSHEET 124 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# The three pillars of self-compassion

Mindfulness, common humanity, kindness

**AIM**

Introduce the three components of self-compassion according to Neff and apply them to a real difficult situation, contrasting them with their opposites (self-criticism, isolation, over-identification).

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Self-criticism, perfectionism, shame, failures experienced as proof of one's worth.

**DURATION**

15-20 min

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. Introduce the three pillars and their opposites: mindfulness / over-identification, common humanity / isolation, kindness / self-criticism.
2. The person chooses a recent, moderately difficult situation.
3. For each pillar, they note what they usually tell themselves and what they could say instead.
4. Ask them to say the sentences aloud and observe the effect in the body.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. Self and Identity, 2(2), 85-101.

Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Batts Allen, A. & Hancock, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92(5), 887-904.

Neff, K. D. & Germer, C. K. (2013). A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion program. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 69(1), 28-44.

## PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 124 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# The three pillars of self-compassion

Self-compassion is treating yourself in difficulty the way you would treat someone you love. The psychologist Kristin Neff describes three pillars: recognising the suffering, remembering you are not alone and speaking to yourself kindly.

1. The difficult situation I am thinking about: _____
2. For each pillar, first note what you usually tell yourself.
3. Then write what you could tell yourself instead.
4. Read your three sentences quietly, with a hand on your chest if it helps.

| Pillar | What I usually tell myself | What I could tell myself |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**What I notice (in my body, in my emotions) when I read the new sentences:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 125 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# What if it were a friend?

Comparing how I speak to others and how I speak to myself

**AIM**

Highlight the double standard (kindness towards others, harshness towards oneself) and draw on the voice the person already uses with their loved ones.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Self-criticism, guilt, high self-demands, people who are very attentive to others.

**DURATION**

15 min

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. Ask how the person would react if a close friend were in the same situation: their words, their tone, their gestures.
2. Compare it with what they tell themselves in that same situation.
3. Explore the reasons for the difference (“if I’m kind to myself, I’ll slack off”).
4. Invite them to try speaking to themselves this week as they would to that friend.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> The fear of “slacking off” is common: research shows the opposite, self-compassion sustains the motivation to improve after a failure (Breines and Chen, 2012). In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the “backdraft” described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. Self and Identity, 2(2), 85-101.

Breines, J. G. & Chen, S. (2012). Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38(9), 1133-1143.

Germer, C. K. & Neff, K. D. (2019). Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion Program: A Guide for Professionals. Guilford.

## PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 125 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# What if it were a friend?

Many people are gentle with others and very hard on themselves. Yet you already know how to speak kindly: you do it with your loved ones. It is about offering yourself that same voice.

1. Choose a situation in which you were hard on yourself.
2. Write what you would say to a close friend in the same situation.
3. Write what you said to yourself.
4. Write a sentence you could say to yourself, in the voice you use with your friend.

| The situation | What I would say to a friend | What I said to myself | What I could say to myself |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**Why I think I am harder on myself than on others:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 126 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# The kind letter

Writing to myself as someone who wishes me well would

**AIM**

Write oneself a letter from the point of view of a compassionate figure, about a difficulty or an aspect of oneself that causes shame, to develop a supportive inner voice.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Shame, self-criticism, difficulty comforting oneself, after a failure or a breakup.

**DURATION**

20 min, to reread over the following days

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. The person chooses a difficulty or an aspect of themselves that they judge harshly.
2. They imagine a compassionate figure, real or imaginary, who knows them and accepts them completely.
3. Write from that figure's point of view: understanding, reminding them that it is human, encouraging without judging.
4. Reread the letter later and note what they feel.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> The letter should be warm and realistic, not indulgent: it can encourage a change, without reproaches. In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Germer, C. K. & Neff, K. D. (2019). Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion Program: A Guide for Professionals. Guilford.

Gilbert, P. (2009). Introducing compassion-focused therapy. Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 15(3), 199-208.

Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Batts Allen, A. & Hancock, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92(5), 887-904.

## PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 126 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# The kind letter

Think of someone, real or imaginary, who knows you well and wishes you well: they see your difficulties and accept you anyway. Write yourself a letter from them.

1. I am writing on behalf of: _____
2. Think about what is making you suffer or what you reproach yourself for.
3. Write what that person would say to you: that they understand, that it is human, what you need.
4. Reread the letter tomorrow, quietly.

| What is making me suffer | What that person would write to me | What I need now |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**What I feel when I reread the letter:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 127 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# My three emotional systems

Threat, drive, soothing

**AIM**

Explain the three emotion regulation systems model from compassion-focused therapy (threat, drive/seeking, soothing) and identify their balance in the person's life.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Anxiety, self-criticism, burnout (overactive drive and threat), difficulty resting or feeling safe.

**DURATION**

20 min

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. Draw three circles: threat (protection, alertness), drive (motivation, achievement, wanting), soothing (calm, connection, safety).
2. Explain that these systems are normal and useful, and that soothing is often underdeveloped.
3. The person notes what activates each system in them and the current size of each circle.
4. Look together for concrete ways of feeding the soothing system.

## POINTS TO WATCH

A simplified explanatory model, presented as a useful metaphor and not as a precise neurological description. In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Gilbert, P. (2009). Introducing compassion-focused therapy. Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 15(3), 199-208.

Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 53(1), 6-41.

## PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 127 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# My three emotional systems

According to the psychologist Paul Gilbert, our emotions are organised around three systems: threat (protecting ourselves), drive (moving forward, achieving) and soothing (feeling safe and connected). When threat and drive take up all the space, we wear ourselves out.

1. Read the description of each system in the table.
2. Note what activates it in you these days.
3. Note how you recognise it in your body and your thoughts.
4. Estimate its place in your life: small, medium or large.

| System | What activates it in me | How I recognise it | Its place (small, medium, large) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**What could feed my soothing system this week:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 128 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# Understanding my inner critic

What it says, what it is trying to protect

**AIM**

Explore the function of self-criticism (often an attempt to protect oneself from rejection, failure or danger) and develop a compassionate alternative that pursues the same aim without the harshness.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Intense self-criticism, shame, perfectionism, low mood.

**DURATION**

20-30 min

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. Ask them to describe the inner critic: its words, its tone, whom it resembles.
2. Ask what it is trying to protect the person from ("if I don't criticise myself, what will happen is…").
3. Assess what it costs them (emotions, energy, motivation).
4. Look for what a compassionate voice would say to achieve the same aim.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> If the inner critic literally repeats the voice of an abusive person, proceed with caution and in session. In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 53(1), 6-41.

Gilbert, P. (2009). Introducing compassion-focused therapy. Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 15(3), 199-208.

Breines, J. G. & Chen, S. (2012). Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38(9), 1133-1143.

## PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 128 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# Understanding my inner critic

The voice that criticises you often wants to protect you: to spare you a failure, a rejection, a moment of shame. But it does so harshly. You can keep the aim and change the manner.

1. Write what your inner critic says, in its own words.
2. Ask yourself what it is trying to protect you from.
3. Note what it costs you: emotions, energy, wanting to act.
4. Write what a kind voice would say with the same aim.

| What it says | What it wants to protect me from | What it costs me | What a kind voice would say |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**If I thank the critic for its intention, I can answer:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 129 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# My compassionate self

Imagining the wisest, strongest, warmest version of me

**AIM**

Develop, through imagery, a “compassionate self” with wisdom, strength and warmth, which the person can turn to in difficulty (a core exercise in compassion-focused therapy).

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Self-criticism, shame, anxiety, lack of an inner figure that provides safety.

**DURATION**

10-15 min of practice, then 5 min a day

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. Find a steady posture and slightly slower breathing (worksheet 15 or 42).
2. Invite the person to imagine that they are, for a few minutes, the most compassionate version of themselves, like an actor stepping into a role.
3. Explore each quality: wisdom, strength, warmth, commitment to help; voice, posture, facial expression.
4. From that self, look at a difficulty and note what they would say.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> It isn’t about already feeling like that, but about practising imagining it. If imagery is hard, an external figure (a person, an animal, a place) can serve as a starting point. In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the “backdraft” described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 53(1), 6-41.
Gilbert, P. (2009). Introducing compassion-focused therapy. Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 15(3), 199-208.

## PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 129 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# My compassionate self

Like an actor stepping into a role, imagine for a few minutes that you are the wisest, strongest and warmest version of yourself. You don't have to feel like that: imagining it is enough.

1. Sit down and slow your breathing a little.
2. For each quality, imagine you have it: your voice, your posture, your face.
3. From that version of you, think about a current difficulty.
4. Note what that compassionate self would tell you.

| Quality | How I imagine it (voice, posture, face) | What it would tell me |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**The sentence from my compassionate self that I want to take with me:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 130 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# Loving-kindness meditation

Sending good wishes, to myself and to others

**AIM**

Practise loving-kindness meditation: expressing good wishes towards oneself and then towards ever wider circles, to cultivate emotions of warmth and connection.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Isolation, anger or resentment, self-criticism, wanting a meditation practice focused on connection.

**DURATION**

10-15 min a day

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. The person chooses 3 or 4 simple phrases ("May you be safe. May you be at peace. May you be healthy. May you live with ease.").
2. They direct them in turn to a loved one, to themselves, to a neutral person and then to all beings.
3. Later a difficult person can be added, only if they wish.
4. After the practice, they note what they felt, without looking for a result.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> Starting with a loved one is usually easier than starting with oneself. Never impose the "difficult person", especially if there has been violence. In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Hofmann, S. G., Grossman, P. & Hinton, D. E. (2011). Loving-kindness and compassion meditation: Potential for psychological interventions. Clinical Psychology Review, 31(7), 1126-1132.

Klimecki, O. M., Leiberg, S., Ricard, M. & Singer, T. (2014). Differential pattern of functional brain plasticity after compassion and empathy training. Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 9(6), 873-879.

Germer, C. K. & Neff, K. D. (2019). Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion Program: A Guide for Professionals. Guilford.

## PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 130 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# Loving-kindness meditation

This meditation involves silently repeating good wishes, first for someone you love, then for yourself and then for others. It isn't about feeling something in particular: you are cultivating an intention.

1. Choose 3 or 4 simple phrases that mean something to you.
2. Sit down and direct them silently to each person in the table, for a few minutes each.
3. Skip the "difficult person" row if you don't feel like it.
4. Note what you felt with each one.

| For whom | My phrases | What I felt |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**With whom it was easiest, and hardest:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 131 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# What holds me back from compassion

Fears of kindness, towards myself and from others

**AIM**

Identify the fears or resistance to compassion (giving it to oneself, receiving it, offering it), common in self-critical people, and explore them without forcing.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Severe self-criticism, shame, a history of abuse or neglect, difficulty accepting help.

**DURATION**

20-30 min in session

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. Normalise: many people are wary of kindness, especially if it was scarce or dangerous in their history.
2. Go through the fears in the table and let the person add others.
3. Explore where they may come from, without trying to eliminate them.
4. Choose a very small step, in a low dose.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> Fears of compassion are associated with self-criticism and depressive symptoms (Gilbert et al., 2011). The work is done gradually and in session. In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the “backdraft” described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Gilbert, P., McEwan, K., Matos, M. & Rivis, A. (2011). Fears of compassion: Development of three self-report measures. Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice, 84(3), 239-255.

Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 53(1), 6-41.

Germer, C. K. & Neff, K. D. (2019). Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion Program: A Guide for Professionals. Guilford.

## PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 131 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# What holds me back from compassion

Best done with your psychologist

Being kind to yourself, receiving help or tenderness can be frightening. That is common, especially when gentleness has been scarce in your life. These fears have a history: identifying them is already a step.

1. Read each fear and note how true it is for you (0 to 10).
2. Write where it may come from, if you know.
3. Choose a very small, very easy step.
4. Talk about it with your psychologist.

| The fear | True for me (0-10) | Where it may come from | A very small step |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**What I understand about what holds me back:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 132 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# Helping without wearing myself out

From empathic distress to compassion

**AIM**

Distinguish empathic distress (feeling another person's suffering to the point of exhaustion) from compassion (warmth and the wish to help), and build ways of helping that also protect the helper.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Family carers, health professionals, teachers, social workers, psychologists, very empathic people who wear themselves out.

**DURATION**

20 min

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. Explain the difference: empathy makes you feel the other person's pain; compassion adds warmth and the wish to help, and protects better against exhaustion.
2. The person describes 2 or 3 situations in which they help and identifies their signs of exhaustion.
3. For each one, distinguish what depends on them (a possible action, a wish) from what doesn't.
4. Add what they need for themselves (rest, support, limits).

## POINTS TO WATCH

> In health professionals, established exhaustion requires specific support (burnout worksheets 97-105). In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

## REFERENCES

Singer, T. & Klimecki, O. M. (2014). Empathy and compassion. Current Biology, 24(18), R875-R878.

Klimecki, O. M., Leiberg, S., Ricard, M. & Singer, T. (2014). Differential pattern of functional brain plasticity after compassion and empathy training. Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 9(6), 873-879.

## PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications

WORKSHEET 132 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# Helping without wearing myself out

Feeling other people's pain can be exhausting. The researchers Tania Singer and Olga Klimecki distinguish this "empathic distress" from compassion: warmth and the wish to help, without drowning in the other person's suffering. And compassion is also directed at you.

1. Choose 2 or 3 situations in which you help someone.
2. Note your signs of exhaustion in each one.
3. Write what depends on you: a possible action, a good wish.
4. Write what you need yourself to be able to carry on.

| Situation in which I help | My signs of exhaustion | What depends on me | What I need |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**A limit or a form of self-care I am putting in place this week:**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

© 2026 Gonzalo Garzo, clinical psychologist · gonzalogarzo.com · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: free to share, no commercial use or modifications