Self Compassion and Mindfulness

Home Practice

- Submit the Daily Practice Form **at least once** before next class!
- If you'd like, schedule a 1-1 meeting with me to get practice support.

Formal Practice

Sit daily for 15-20 minutes:

1. For the first 5 minutes, attend to your anchor
2. For the remaining time, use this guided meditation on Kindness

- If you are unfamiliar with or need a refresher on Anchor meditations, use this guided meditation.
- If you feel the Kindness practice is overwhelming on any day, switch to the Anchor meditation until you feel more balance and calmness.

Informal Practice

- **Recognizing Moments of Kindness**
    - Notice moments of self-kindness or connection and fill them in on the "Informal Practice tracker" (attached)
    - No expression of kindness is too small - It could be getting yourself a drink of water because you feel thirsty.
- **Phrases of Care**
    - Create your own phrases of care for when you get stuck in a moment of suffering
    - Include 3 components: Mindfulness, Shared humanity, Kindness
    - Some examples of each (pick one phrase from each):
        - ***Mindfulness****: "This is difficult", "Unpleasant feelings are here"*
        - ***Shared humanity****: "I am not alone", "Other people feel like this sometimes", "Everyone has their moments"*
        - ***Kindness****: "It's okay", "I'm with you", "It's not your fault"*
    - My favorite one: "This is a moment of suffering (mindfulness). Everyone has moments like these (shared humanity). May I be kind to myself (kindness)."

Class Summary

Key Takeaways

1. **Mindfulness** is the act of observing our present moment experience with an attitude of kindness and acceptance.
2. **Meditation** is the formal practice of mindfulness, when we set aside time in a quiet place to practice bringing our attention again and again back to our present moment experience.
3. **Compassion** is being kind and nurturing in the face of particularly difficult experiences.
4. **Self compassion** is taking the compassion we would feel for the suffering of a good friend and turning that kindness toward ourselves when we are suffering.
5. **Daily practice** of mindfulness and compassion is the pathway to experiencing its benefits.

Course Overview

We will be learning about Self Compassion through the lens of Mindfulness and Mindfulness Meditation. Most of the practices we're learning here have Buddhist roots and some have been adapted by Western psychologists and neuroscientists. What we're talking about is backed by both ancient wisdom and science and is regarded as a path to well-being, growth, and happiness.

Class & Course Outline

Every class will have roughly the following schedule:

1. 3-minute guided grounding practice
2. Group check-in about last week's practice
3. Talk on particular topic
4. Guided meditation on same topic
5. Home Practice description
6. Questions

Week 1 - Self Compassion and Mindfulness
Week 2 - Practice of RAIN
Week 3 - Nurturing and Resourcing
Week 4 - Forgiveness
Week 5 - Gratitude
Week 6 - Reflections & Sharing

Group Guidelines

- **Confidentiality** - Creating a safe space for people to share what's really going on inside them by not repeating what they share outside of group
- **Right to Pass** - If you're called on to share, you can always say "I'd like to pass"
- **Mindful Speaking** - Sharing what feels true for you in this moment without the need for explanation. Being mindful of time. If you usually speak a lot, try stepping back. If you usually speak a little, try stepping in. It's an experiment.

- **Mindful Listening** - Really listening to what someone is sharing without focusing on what you'll say next, what you or someone said a moment ago, and without offering advice. Simply listening and receiving.

Definitions

Mindfulness is the act of observing our present moment experience with an attitude of kindness and acceptance. It allows the experience to be what it is without adding anything to it, changing it, trying to make it last longer, or trying to push it away.

Meditation is the formal practice of Mindfulness. We set aside time to devote to doing nothing but practicing Mindfulness of a predetermined object of focus (like our breath) in a predetermined posture (like sitting in a chair). Each time our mind wanders, we:

1. notice our mind has drifted away from our chosen object of focus
2. release our attention from the distraction
3. relax our body
4. gently bring our attention back to the object

Compassion is being kind and nurturing in the face of suffering. When the experience we are being mindful of is particularly difficult, compassion gives us the strength to stay with that experience.

Self compassion is taking the compassion we would feel for the suffering of a good friend and turning that kindness toward ourselves when we are suffering. To be self-compassionate is to be touched by our own vulnerability and have a desire to nurture ourselves in times of difficulty.

Three Components of Self Compassion

Researcher Kristin Neff proposes three components of self compassion:

1. **Mindfulness** - The recognition that suffering is present. Noticing any thoughts, feelings, and sensations that are contributing to an experience of suffering.
2. **Common Humanity** - Recognizing that we are not alone in our suffering. All humans face difficulties. Suffering is an inevitable part of life.
3. **Kindness** - Bringing non-judgmentalness and friendliness to our experience, with a desire to nurture and care for ourselves during the difficult experience.

We can use these components to create a phrase that is uniquely meaningful to us during times of suffering. For example:

1. "This is a moment of suffering" (mindfulness)
2. "Everyone has moments like these" (common humanity)
3. "May I be kind to myself" (kindness)

The invitation is to find phrases that feel authentic and meaningful to you.

Benefits of Self Compassion

Self compassion has been an increasing topic of scientific research in the past 10 years. Research suggests that practicing self compassion

- Increases happiness
- Reduces depression and anxiety
- Decreases burnout
- Reduces physical pain
- Decreases shame

Experientially, **being in a state of self compassion means being in a healing state**. The larger our capacity for self compassion, the larger our capacity to be with a range of pleasant and unpleasant experiences in our lives.

Self compassion is an essential ingredient to practicing Mindfulness, especially when faced with difficult or intense physical or emotional experiences.

Self compassion invites anything and everything to the surface of our consciousness, as it sends the message that "everything is welcome and will be treated with kindness." Because of this, **we are able to process the experiences that we have buried in our daily lives that are asking for our attention**.

Tara Brach shares:

"When I get stuck in painful emotions, it brings me to a repeated realization, an insight that has profoundly changed my life: I have to love myself into healing. The only path that can carry me home is the path of self compassion."

Obstacles to Self Compassion

Biological Conditioning

- Our brains are trying to make sense of the dangers of the world and are constantly scanning for threats and making mental maps.
- Sometimes this scanning for what's wrong becomes internalized and manifests as negative self talk.
- This is survival-oriented and completely normal and understandable. It's not due to a personal deficiency. **We can be kind to our conditioning.**

Cultural Conditioning

- If we are used to pushing ourselves, being inwardly harsh, critical, or judgmental, it can feel unnatural to be kind
- Our culture values self development, which is not negative, but can send a subtle message that we're not okay as we are

- **We can recognize that we can not force ourselves to be inwardly kind, but we can plant and water seeds, creating the best conditions for kindness to emerge on its own.**

Misconceptions of being Self Compassionate

- “I will never change or grow anymore”
- “I won’t take responsibility for things I actually regret”
- “It is weak”
- “It is selfish”

Compassion is not pity. It is not passive. It can be rather fierce when it needs to be. It is having the strength to see suffering as it really is. **By being with reality as it is, by not turning away, we can allow it to change.**

Tending to our own needs also gives us much greater capacity to be with others. **We can give to others not when our cup is empty, but when our cup is overflowing.**

Difficult Emotions

- **Sometimes when we increase our compassion and love toward ourselves, painful emotions can seem to intensify. If this happens, know that it is completely normal.**
- You can think of it as previously hidden parts of yourself that were not accepted are now, under the light of awareness and acceptance, coming out to be seen.
- As you continue to practice, they will flow away.

- **Sometimes the most self compassionate thing to do is to take a break from our practice if the emotions are overwhelming**.
- Instead of directly being with the emotions we can engage in a soothing activity like petting an animal, calling a friend, drinking a cup of tea, or just doing a self hug, reading a favorite book, taking a walk, etc.
- We come back to the practice when we feel we have more balance.

“Behind all of this fear and pain, there is an ocean of love” -Michael Singer

Practice Guidance

- Building a Regular Practice
    - Try to find the same time every day to practice and build it into the space before or after an already-existing ritual, like a hot morning beverage, exercise or walk, bedtime routine, etc.
    - In times of doubt, remember the support of the shared group. We are in this together!
    - Regularly refer back to your intention for practicing
- Important Reminders

    - The most important thing is our *intention* to practice, even if we don't feel true feelings of kindness or compassion
    - Practice when it's more easy! The more we practice when it's easy, the more accessible the practice will be when we're faced with difficulty.
- Formal Practices
    - **Mindfulness Practice**
        - Bringing awareness to our experiences (body sensations, thoughts, feelings) that are feeding into our current state
        - Bringing a calm, allowing and kind attitude to all our experiences
    - **Kindness Practice**
        - Kindness is a good foundation for compassion because kindness turns to compassion when faced with suffering
        - Wishing ourselves well, using any phrases, gestures, or imagery that enliven this feeling of well-being
        - It is often helpful to first find the feeling of kindness by wishing it upon another
- Informal Practices
    - **Recognizing Moments of Kindness**
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            - ***Kindness****: "It's okay", "I'm with you", "It's not your fault"*
        - Example: "This is a moment of suffering (mindfulness). Everyone has moments like these (shared humanity). May I be kind to myself (kindness)."