

Upcoming Self-Compassion Programs (*Online*)

note: registration open to anyone interested in Mindful Self-Compassion

- Self-Compassion for Caregivers & Healthcare Communities:

- January 14 – February 18, 2021
- Thursdays 10:30 – 12 (PST)

- Self-Compassion for Caregivers & Healthcare Communities:

- January 12 – February 16, 2021
- Tuesdays 6:30– 8 pm (PST)

- For info or to register please contact Patricia Williams:
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“Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn



WELCOME

Self-Compassion for Caregivers


AAMAC November 21, 2020



Overview

- What is Mindful Self-Compassion?
- Review of Research: Self-Compassion, Burnout and Caregiver Resilience
- The Physiology of Self-Compassion
- Practice 1: The Self-Compassion Break
- Practice 2: Compassion With Equanimity (Compassionate Breathing)
- Summary
- Q & A

What is Mindful Self-Compassion?



The “Problem” with Self-Care

- Extremely important (exercise, eat well, time with friends, vacations, etc.)
- But self-care happens **outside of providing care**, not while caregiving
- **Can’t** say to the person you are caring for, “Whoa, man, this situation is just TOO MUCH!” I think I’ll go get a massage!”
- **Can** calm yourself -> calms the person you are with...
- Self-Compassion can happen in the moment...**while providing care!**



Mindful Self-Compassion

- A decade of research by scientist Kristen Neff consistently shows if we are compassionate toward ourselves then we are much less likely to be depressed, anxious, and stressed...
- AND we are much more likely to be happy, resilient, and optimistic about our future
- In short, we have better mental health.



Mindful Self-Compassion: The 8-Week Program

- Skill training based on a large body of empirical research
- Developed by Kristen Neff & Christopher Germer
- 8-Weeks (2.75 hours) + ½ Day Retreat
- Includes:
 - Topics & discussion & exercises
 - Experiential practices
 - Formal & Informal meditation
 - Home Practice & a silent retreat
 - *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook*



Mindful Self-Compassion: The Program

- Decreases self-criticism, anxiety, depression, shame
- Enhances well-being and emotional regulation
- Motivates with kindness not criticism
- Transforms challenging relationships
- **Reduce risk of compassion fatigue & burnout**



Mindful Self-Compassion: The Inner Resource

- MSC also = the inner resources & resiliency we cultivate based on the insights and practices outlined in the program.
- LEARN to give ourselves compassion when struggling
- **KEY:** a strength we call on when **we are suffering** – not a fair-weather friend!

How Do We Respond?

- What sound might you make if you saw this sad babe?
- What are you thinking & feeling?
- What would you want to do?





What is Compassion?

Compassion for others:

1. ***Notice*** they are suffering
2. ***“Suffer with”*** them and want to help – offer kindness and understanding when they fail, not judgment
3. Recognize suffering, failure and imperfection are ***shared by all humans***



What is *Self*-Compassion?

- Acting the same way you do to ***others*** when ***you*** are falling short, failing or notice something you don't like about yourself
- Rather than ignoring your pain, you say, *“This is really difficult right now...how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?”*
- It is made up of 3 Elements

Self-Compassion: 3 Elements

SELF KINDNESS

- Warmth
- Kindness

COMMON HUMANITY

- Not alone
- Everyone suffers

MINDFULNESS

- Awareness
- Acceptance

First Component of Self-Compassion



Second Component of Self-Compassion



Third Component of Self-Compassion




Yin & Yang of Self-Compassion

Two Ways of Caring

- Yin of SC = “being with” ourselves – *comforting, soothing, validating*
- Yang of SC = “acting in the world” – *protecting, providing, & motivating* ourselves
- Yin = nourishing
- Yang = courage & strength
- Need ***nourishment of yin*** before go into world with ***courage and strength - yang***

“*Strong back, soft front*” Halifax, 2012



Self-Compassion involves kindness,
common humanity & mindfulness.
In other words, self-compassion means
being in a state of loving, connected
presence.

Review of the Research: Self-Compassion Burnout Caregiver Resilience

Review of Research

- Research uses Neff's SC Scale and an 8-week Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) training
- Low SC scores -> mental health challenges
- As SC increases -> mental health improves

Research Results

Mindfulness Self-Compassion

- reduced anxiety & depression
- Improved well-being
- Increased life satisfaction
- Improved social connection

Research Results

- Manage the aging process
- Transform difficult & romantic relationships
- Transform Sense of Self
- Reduce body shame, enhance self worth & body image
- Increase intrinsic motivation (healthy lifestyle)
- **Reduce Compassion Fatigue/Burnout**

Burnout


- Chronic stress + emotionally intense work + inadequate resources
- SC training reduces risk of burnout:
 1. INCREASE SC, mindfulness, compassion to others, compassion satisfaction & feelings of personal accomplishment
 2. DECREASE stress, depression & measures of burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and secondary traumatic stress)



Compassion & Caregiving


For someone to develop genuine compassion towards others, first he or she must have a basis upon which to cultivate compassion, and that basis is the ability to connect to one's own feelings and to care for one's own welfare... Caring for others requires caring for oneself.

Tensin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama ~



“Caring for Others Without Losing Yourself”

- ***Self-Compassion for Healthcare Communities (SCHC)*** = a short adaptation of MSC Program (6-week)
- Also supported by research
- Learning to be more self-compassionate reduces caregiver stress
- Lowered stress increases wellbeing
- Reduces empathy fatigue & burnout
- Relevant for family and volunteer caregivers




“Caring for Others Without Losing Yourself”

- Designed to enhance wellbeing & reduce burnout
- Results (2 Studies):
 - Significantly increased SC
 - Significantly increased wellbeing
 - Significantly reduced secondary traumatic stress
 - Significantly reduced burnout
 - Self-Compassion explains the other gains
 - Those with low levels of SC benefit more

Compassion Satisfaction

- Goal is to **reduce emotional depletion** and **increase a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction** in your caregiving role.
- Compassion satisfaction – satisfaction in your caregiving role - not only feels good but is a **powerful buffer against burnout**.
- ***Self-compassionate people are more compassionate toward others.***



Burnout is prevalent among caregivers and self-compassion is a proven buffer against burnout.



Empathy & Compassion: *Social Emotions*

- **Empathy** = the capacity to share +/- feelings of others
- Empathic response to suffering – 2 types of reactions:
 - 1. **Empathic distress: *feeling WITH the other***
 - Self-related, aversive
 - Negative emotion (stress)
 - Poor health & burnout,
 - Withdrawal (non-social behavior) to avoid neg. emotion
 - 2. **Compassion: *feeling FOR the other***
 - Other-related concern
 - Positive feelings (love, desire to help)
 - Good health
 - Approach (prosocial motivation)



Empathy Training vs. Compassion Training

- Neuroscience -> overlap in brain networks when experiencing our own pain & observing pain in another
- Empathy & Compassion training change **different** brain networks!
- Empathy training may lead to **negative** affect
- Compassion training produces **positive** affect, resilience, enhanced coping – precisely what caregivers need!



Good News! Compassion can be Learned

- Several weeks of Loving Kindness Meditation (Compassion meditation):
 - Increased brain activation in compassion area (neuro-plasticity)
 - Improved mood & well-being
 - Increased resilience (coping)
 - Increase in true altruism
 - Fostered compassion for distress of others



Good News! Compassion can be Learned

- Recognize the difference between empathic distress & true compassion.
- Cultivating compassion & developing compassion satisfaction is an important key in being able to continue caregiving without burning out!

The Physiology of Self-Compassion

The Physiology of Self-Compassion



The Physiology of Self-Criticism

- Self-criticism VERY different impact on body chemistry!
- Threat -> amygdala signals fight-or-flight -> increased blood pressure, cortisol and adrenaline
- Body response the same whether threat is external or internal (i.e., emotional attack by the inner critic)
- Self-compassion changes body chemistry by raising oxytocin, lowering cortisol and calming cardiovascular system

Self-Compassion through gentle touch
activates the mammalian caregiving system.
Calms tension, painful thoughts and feelings...
AND soothes our body chemistry.
Can be done unobtrusively...while caregiving!

Practice 1: The Self-Compassion Break



Self-Compassion Practice

- Caution: Back Draft & Self-Care
- The Self-Compassion Break ~ 3 Parts:
 - *This is a moment of suffering.*
 - *I am not alone.*
 - *What do I need right now?*
- Sharing in Dyads and Group

Practice 2: Compassionate Breathing

(Compassion With Equanimity)

Compassionate Breathing

- An exercise for caregivers & those receiving care
- Used ***within*** the caregiving situation
- Encourages compassion for self & other
- Promotes connection
- Promotes equanimity = “balanced awareness in the midst of pleasant or unpleasant emotions”

Equanimity

- Mindfulness leads to equanimity which leads to wisdom.
- Mindfulness gives us the space to see the complex, interdependent causes and conditions that make our lives as they are, the the wisdom that we have limited control.
- Equanimity gives us the emotional space to be compassionate while remaining in connection with others – engaging fully but understanding the limits of our capacity to control the outcome of our actions.
- Equanimity is not cold detachment, but arises from deep understanding of the transient, interdependent nature of reality.
- It is a different kind of caring, based on both emotional intimacy *and* wise discernment.

Equanimity Phrases

Everyone is on their own life journey.
I am not the cause of this person's suffering,
nor is it entirely within my power to make it go away,
even though I wish I could.
Moments like these can be difficult to bear,
yet I may still try to help if I can.



Circle of Compassion

- What we have compassion for within the self, we have compassion for outside the self.
- What we reject in the world, we also reject within ourselves.
- We cannot ignore the suffering of other people because they are part of us.
- Disconnect from suffering of others...disconnect from self.

Summary

- **MSC = *self-kindness + common humanity + mindfulness***
- **MSC/SC Research:**
 - ***Increases*** resilience, mental health, wellbeing, QoL, compassion for self/others, positive relationships, & compassion satisfaction
 - ***Decreases*** stress, anxiety, depression, burnout & empathy fatigue
- **Self-Criticism = threat** -> impacts the body
- **Self-Compassion = safety** -> counteracts at neurochemical level -> activates mammalian caregiving system
- Self-Criticism impacts the body & Self-Compassion counteracts it at a biochemical level

Summary

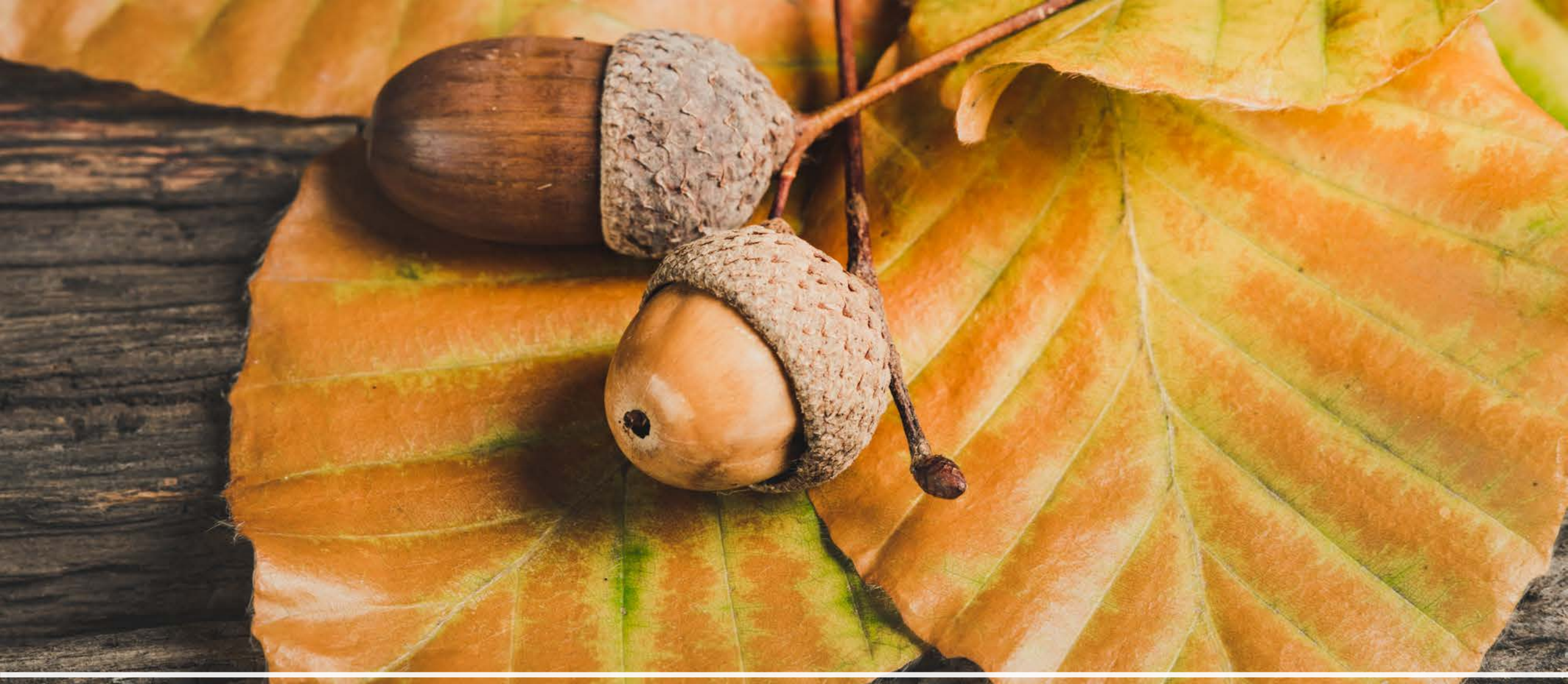
- **Self-care** happens *away from caregiving* situation...
- **Self-compassion** happens *while caregiving* – eases suffering & enhances compassion satisfaction.
- The Self-Compassion Break & Compassionate Breathing can be done anytime, anywhere...*in the moment that you are struggling.*
- *“A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day. A string of such moments can change the course of your life.” – Chris Germer*

- Caregiving is challenging!
- Self-Compassion lessens the risks, builds inner resources & emotional strength.
- MSC is empirically proven to help!
- Replace *empathic distress* with *compassion satisfaction* to reduce *burnout*.
- Self-care is essential, but hard to practice while caregiving.
- Self-compassion is designed to be used in the midst of struggle...while offering care to another.



Recommendations

- Practice ***self-care*** that works for you!
- Enhance ***personal resources*** (compassion, mindfulness, positive coping strategies)
- Build ***compassion satisfaction*** – seek support to restore joy in role as a helper
- Practice ***Self-Compassion Break & “Compassionate Breathing”***
- Practice ***gratitude and savoring*** the things you love



Questions & Discussion



Book References

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- Gilbert, P. (2010). Compassion-focused therapy. New York, NY: Routledge.
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- Neff, K. (2016). *Self-Compassion*. Retrieved from: <http://self-compassion.org>
- Chris Germer's website: <https://chrisgermer.com/meditations/> includes free, downloadable meditations, including the core meditations found in the MSC program
- Germer, C. (2016). *Mindful self-compassion*. Retrieved from: <http://www.mindfulselfcompassion.org>
- Germer, C., et al (2016). Center for mindful self-compassion. Retrieved from: [http://www.centerformsc.org/who we are](http://www.centerformsc.org/who_we_are)
- Center for Mindful Self-Compassion website: <https://centerformsc.org/> CMSC has research articles, free meditations and much more!
- Insight Timer is a free app that has thousands of meditations related to mindfulness, self-compassion and includes some of the MSC meditations included in the training.



Journal Articles References

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- Hlabangana, V. & Hearn, J. H. (2019). Depression in partner caregivers of people with neurological conditions; Associations with self-compassion and quality of life. *Journal of Mental Health*. DOI 10.1080/09638237.2019.1630724