
Self-Compassion and Intuitive Eating

What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion involves showing up for yourself in a supportive way when things are difficult. Self-compassion looks like treating yourself as you would treat a close friend who was struggling. We are often harder on ourselves than we are on others.

How does this relate to practicing intuitive eating (IE)?

There will be days in which we succeed at applying some or all the IE principles, and days that we will not. This is part of being human. The ways in which we handle setbacks will have an impact on our long-term success. Research shows that those who practice self-compassion are more likely to engage in IE behaviors and have improved body image.

Tips to Facilitate Self-Compassion:

1. Treat yourself as if you would a good friend.

- Treat yourself with warmth, care, and understanding rather than harsh judgement.
- Practice asking yourself during moments of suffering, “is there anything I can do to help myself in this moment?”
- You can think about the ways you would treat a good friend if they were facing a difficult situation and direct these compassionate responses towards yourself.

2. Practice Mindfulness.

- Mindfulness allows us to be with painful feelings as they are. It involves avoiding extremes of suppressing feelings or lashing out from painful feelings.
- Becoming aware of our thoughts and how they affect our feelings and behaviors can help us be more compassionate towards ourselves.
- Practicing mindfulness can help us nurture and accept ourselves during difficult times.

3. Remember that you are not alone.

- To feel is human. We are all imperfect. We all suffer. Suffering is a part of life. Keep in mind other people feel this way and you are not alone. All human suffering is worthy of compassion.
- Feelings of failure and inadequacy are part of the experience of living a human life. This is how we learn and evolve.

4. Write a letter to yourself.

- Think of a difficult or stressful situation you have faced or continue to face that causes you pain and suffering. Write a letter to yourself describing the situation without placing blame. Think about how you might respond to a good friend who is experiencing this same situation and writing these kind and supportive words to yourself.

5. Consider engaging in supportive touch.

- When you're feeling bad or when under stress consider practicing supportive touch to care for and comfort yourself.
- Touch activates our parasympathetic nervous system to help us calm down and feel safe.
- Research has found that just 20 seconds a day of self-touch can increase self-compassion!
- Ways to Practice:
 - Put your hand on your heart and feel your heartbeat
 - Cross your arms and give yourself a gentle squeeze
 - Cup one hand in the other in your lap

6. Change your critical self-talk.

In a journal or by speaking aloud to yourself, or thinking silently, consider the following:

- Notice when you are critical. Think about what you've said to yourself. Notice the tone of your voice and the words you use. Get a clear sense of how you tend to relate to yourself. Get to know your inner critic.
- Connect with your inner self-critic in a compassionate, non-judgmental way. For example, "I know you're worried about me and feel unsafe, but you're causing me unnecessary pain. Could you let my inner compassionate self say a few words now?"
- Reframe the words of your inner critic in a positive way. Imagine what you would say to a friend or child. Engage in supportive self-talk.

7. Help yourself identify what you really want.

- Think of ways you use self-criticism as a motivator. Do you think being hard on yourself will help you change?
- See if you can think of a kinder way to motivate yourself to change. What's the most supportive message you can think of?
- Try to quiet the inner critic and reframe your inner dialogue to be more encouraging and supportive.
- Always remember love is a more powerful motivator than fear.