



SESSION 3:

Compassion: kindness and caring for self and others



What is Compassion?

Compassion is the feeling you experience when you see another person suffering, and then you take action to help them. The word comes from latin, where it literally means “to suffer together.”

Compassion is a process that involves five stages:

1. Knowing that suffering is happening to someone else, or you
2. Feeling something in response in our body and emotions
3. Wanting to help and to relieve the suffering we are seeing.
4. Being willing to do something, and knowing what you can and can't actually do
5. Feeling good when you know you have expressed compassion, also known as “warm glow”

Compassion is related to sympathy, but isn't the same. When you feel *sympathy* for someone you can understand what the person is feeling but you may not actually feel the feelings yourself. When you feel *compassion* for someone you feel some of their suffering and act to help reduce that suffering.

We are never at risk of “using up” all our compassion. In fact, the more we show compassion the more easily we can access it to help us cope with discomfort.

Self-compassion

If compassion does not include ourselves, it is incomplete.

For many of us, it is easier to feel compassion for other people than it is to feel compassion for ourselves. **Self-compassion** is essential for caregivers, to build resilience and make sure you don't burn out. But it is not always easy, and there are many barriers to compassion for yourself and others.

Barriers to compassion

- Exhaustion - not getting enough sleep, food, movement, respite, etc.
- Feelings of guilt, anger, resentment, fear, or revulsion
- Feeling sadness and grief at what may happen in the future
- Feeling stressed by what we have to do
- Doing nothing if we can not do it perfectly

How does mindfulness help with compassion?

Mindfulness helps us quiet our busy minds and helps us notice when we, or someone else, is suffering. With a quiet mind we can also see more clearly if we are experiencing any barriers to compassion.

Many people experience some version of these barriers. The struggle to give compassion is a common part of caregiving, so be kind to yourself if you find yourself struggling - you are not alone.

Self compassion exercise

Place a hand over your heart if you wish. Take a few deep breaths and think of a situation when you were suffering or finding things difficult. Say to yourself silently or aloud:

- 1. This is a moment of suffering*
- 2. Suffering is a part life*
- 3. May I be kind to myself*

Homework exercise

A few times during the week, offer compassion to yourself. When things get difficult, or when you find yourself thinking about how you wish you had done things differently, notice how you are responding to your own feelings and thoughts. Are you treating yourself as you would a good friend?

It may help to try the Self-Compassion exercise and see if you can do this for yourself, even if only for a few breaths.

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