



## A Letter of Self-Compassion

### Compassion

Exercise

5-10 min

Client

Yes



### Author

Kristin Neff, Ph.D., University of Texas, Austin.



### Goal

The goal of this exercise is to cultivate and promote self-compassion through writing. Writing this letter can help clients realize that they are their own source of support at all times.



### Advice

- It is advisable to do this practice weekly, or at least once per month, to achieve sustainable effects.
- Clients should be informed that it is normal that they will not immediately feel self-compassion after writing this letter. Cultivating self-compassion is not a quick fix, and it can take a considerable amount of time to change the relationship with the self in a positive way.
- Instead of writing from the perspective of an imaginary friend, if it feels more comfortable, clients may also choose to write from the perspective of a loved one, a best friend, or a mentor who deeply cares about them. Clients should feel free to switch the perspectives should that feel better.

This tool was adapted from Kristen Neff's self-compassion exercise called Exploring Self-Compassion Through Writing. More information on this tool can be found through an internet search of this original title.



## References

- Breines, J. G., & Chen, S. (2012). Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18, 1133-1143.
- 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, 28-44.
- Shapira, L. B., & Mongrain, M. (2010). The benefits of self-compassion and optimism exercises for individuals vulnerable to depression. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 5, 377-389.



# A Letter of Self-Compassion

## Instructions

### Step 1

Choose an aspect of yourself or your life that you dislike and criticize. It can be something that makes you feel ashamed, unworthy, inadequate, or self-conscious. Examples may include appearance, career, relationships, health, and others.

- Write in detail about how this perceived inadequacy makes you feel. What thoughts, images, emotions, or stories arise when you think about it?

### Step 2

Now, imagine someone who is unconditionally loving, accepting, and supportive. Gently and lovingly, this friend sees your strengths and opportunities for growth, including the negative aspects of you. The friend accepts and forgives, embracing you kindly just as you are.

- Now write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this kind friend. What does this friend say to you? How is compassion demonstrated? How does this friend encourage and support you in taking steps to change? Let the words flow from you: do not think too hard about phrasing or structure. Just write from the perspective of deep kindness, understanding, and non-judgmental acceptance.

### Step 3

After fully drafting the letter, put it aside for at least fifteen minutes or more if you wish.

- When some time has passed, return to the letter and reread it. Let the words fully sink in. Feel the encouragement, support, compassion, and acceptance, and let every positive word rush into you.
- Whenever you are feeling down, review the letter about this aspect of yourself that you feel is not favorable. Providing self-acceptance and self-support is the first step to change.