



Common Humanity Jars

Compassion

Exercise

15-30 min

Group

No

Dr. Kristin Neff, a leading expert in the field of self-compassion, proposed three elements to self-compassion, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

Self-kindness involves treating ourselves warmly and with understanding when we make a mistake or fail in some way, rather than using harsh or critical self-talk. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is an inevitable part of the human experience. Accordingly, in the face of painful experiences, they are more able to be gentle with themselves. Neff suggests that being open to and accepting of the inevitability of suffering enables “greater emotional equanimity,” meaning we can remain calm and composed in the face of difficulty. Self-kindness involves being soothing and nurturing towards ourselves and acknowledging that we are doing the best we can.

Common humanity involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy are part of the shared human experience - something that we all go through rather than something that happens to “me” alone. Too often, when we make a mistake or are suffering in some way, we believe that we are the only person to have endured such difficulty. This type of thinking can lead to feelings of isolation and defectiveness. The sense of shared humanity allows us to take a broader perspective of our circumstances and ourselves.

Mindfulness involves the ability to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity through self-compassion. In this way, we are less likely to become overly caught up in the difficult moments and more able to detach and differentiate between our negative self-concepts and our actual selves.

While self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness may not come naturally to all of us, cultivating these elements, either separately or together, may in time lead to a more accessible self-compassionate frame of mind.



Goal

This tool was developed to provide participants with an experiential demonstration of common humanity, one of the three elements of self-compassion.



Advice

- This tool can be extended to allow participants to practice cultivating self-compassion more fully (see Optional extra step). Remind participants to choose an experience that is only mildly to moderately distressing rather than something that has powerful emotions attached to it, given this is a group setting (rather than individual).



References

- Germer, C. K. (2009). *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*. Guilford Press.
- Neff, K. (2012, September 20). *Embracing our common humanity with self-compassion*. <http://self-compassion.org/embracing-our-common-humanity-with-self-compassion/>



Common Humanity Jars

Instructions

Step 1: Preparation

You will need:

- A bowl of marbles or similar
- 6 jars labeled with shared human experiences, for example: Felt nervous before speaking in public; Got a lower mark than expected on an assignment; Tripped while walking and felt embarrassed; Said something you later regretted; Had a job interview and didn't get the job; Sent a text or email to the wrong person.
- 6 stations (e.g., chairs) around the room, each with a jar.

Step 2: Hand out marbles

Pass the bowl of marbles to the group and ask each participant to each take 6 marbles from the bowl.

Step 3: Place marbles in jars

Ask participants to approach each station, read the label on the jar, and place a marble in the jar if they relate to that experience. Instruct the group to do this mindfully and in silence. Once participants have visited all 6 stations, they can return to their seats, placing any leftover marbles back into the bowl.

Step 4: Open group discussion

Bring the jars over to the group and facilitate an open group discussion using the following questions and prompts:

- What do you notice as you look at these six jars?
- Have you ever thought you were alone in experiencing these things? Perhaps you have felt like others are good at public speaking, but you're the only one that struggles, or you're the only one silly enough to make small mistakes.
- What is it like to see that others, in fact, most people, also have these experiences?



Optional extra step: Practice mindful self-compassion

Invite participants to pick one of the experiences from the jars and guide the group through the following mindful self-compassion practice to practice cultivating self-compassion in vivo.

- Get yourself into a comfortable position, sitting upright but relaxed. Place your hands in your lap and gently close your eyes.
- Now, recall the one experience you chose from the standard humanity jars. As best you can, remember a specific time in your life where this happened to you. Recall the details of the experience ... exactly what happened ... who was there ... where you were, inside or outside, with lots of people or just a few.
- Your task here is not to judge the experience, but simply to notice what the experience was like.
- Now, as best, you can connect with how you felt at the time ... [20 secs]
- What emotions were present? Were there physical sensations present in your body? [20 secs]
- Notice whether you are feeling these emotions or sensations right now, with the memory of this experience in your mind. [20 secs]
- There is no need to try and change these feelings ... simply notice them with openness, curiosity, and without judgment. [10 secs]
- Now, think of how you can be kind to yourself considering this challenging experience. What is one thing you might say to yourself in kindness? For example, 'it was hard going through that break-up, I struggled with a lot of sadness and longing ... though I know, that's a normal part of any break-up, and I did well to get through it ... [30 secs]
- Now, what is one thing that you might do in kindness for yourself, considering this challenging experience? Examples include giving yourself a hug or taking the time to write down what you learned from the experience. [30 secs]
- When you are ready, gently open your eyes, and reconnect with the room around you. While you still remember, jot down what you noticed during the exercise, including what act of kindness you came up with for yourself.
- With the person next to you, share what you noticed during the practice.