

Developing Self-Appreciation

Compassion

 Exercise

 20 min

 Client

 No

How do you react to positive praise from others or yourself? Do you receive it easily and graciously, or do you tense up, resist, or dismiss it? Self-appreciation is the act of acknowledging and recognizing the worth and value of your positive qualities. However, appreciating our strengths and accomplishments is often easier said than done for many reasons. First, human beings have a negativity bias, meaning that we naturally give more psychological weight to negative things or experiences than to positive things or experiences. This means we are less likely to see ourselves positively and acknowledge and appreciate our goodness, and we are more likely to focus on our negative qualities. Second, growing up in an environment where one is discouraged from feeling proud of his or her achievements is a common barrier to self-appreciation. In these instances, appreciating one's strengths and accomplishments can feel unnatural and subsequently uncomfortable and 'wrong.'

According to Neff and Germer (2018), self-compassion, which is the act of noticing and accepting our flaws and inadequacies, can be utilized to practice and develop a self-appreciation. The three components of self-compassion are self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. In cultivating self-appreciation, self-kindness involves expressing appreciation for our good qualities just as we would do with a good friend, common humanity relates to acknowledging our good qualities without feeling isolated or better than others, and mindfulness means to pay attention to our good qualities rather than take them for granted. Neff and Germer (2018) also emphasized the roles of wisdom and gratitude in self-appreciation, suggesting that these qualities allow us to see our strengths and accomplishments in a broader context—acknowledging everything and everyone that helped us develop our goodness in the first place.



Author

This tool was adapted from Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer's Self-Appreciation exercise (seen in their 2018 book entitled *'The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions'*) by Lucinda Poole.



Goal

The goal of this tool is to help clients develop self-appreciation by discovering qualities that they appreciate about themselves and acknowledging influencers (people, places, things) that helped develop these good qualities.



Advice

- Clients may hold the belief that self-appreciation is selfish or self-centered, and thus may experience feelings of discomfort during the exercise. If this occurs, let your client know that self-appreciation is an adaptive, healthy function, and it can help correct our negativity bias toward ourselves and see ourselves more clearly as a whole person (with both 'good' and 'bad' qualities).



References

- Neff, K., & Germer, C. (2018). *The mindful self-compassion workbook: A proven way to accept yourself, build inner strength, and thrive*. The Guilford Press.



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Instructions

Step 1: Identify positive qualities

In the space below, write about three to five things you like and appreciate about yourself. Allow yourself to be honest and open up to what you *really*, deep down, like about yourself. Write as much or as little detail as you like.

Step 2: Extend appreciation to the self

Re-read your list (Step 1) and contemplate each of these positive qualities, one by one, and give yourself a metaphorical pat on the back for having each of these gifts. Close your eyes as you do this and observe any thoughts and feelings that show up.

Step 3: Record thoughts and feelings

In the space below, write down what thoughts and feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant, emerged in Step 2.

I thought...



I felt...

Step 4: Appreciate those who helped

Now, for each positive quality, consider who helped you develop it. Perhaps friends, parents, teachers, even authors of books who had a positive effect on you. In the space below, extend some gratitude and appreciation toward each of these positive influencers through writing (e.g., *I am grateful to X for helping me develop [insert positive quality]*).

Step 5: Sit, savor, and reflect

Take a moment here to sit and savor the feeling of appreciation for yourself and for those who influenced you. Then discuss the following:

- How did it feel to give yourself appreciation for your goodness?
- Did you find any part of the exercise difficult?
- Did you find any part of the exercise easy?
- Did self-appreciation become easier when you brought in gratitude and appreciation for others?
- What did you learn from the exercise?