



Embracing Your Humanness

Compassion

Exercise

15-20 min

Group

No

Why do we say “it’s only human” to comfort someone who has made a mistake?

The emotion of compassion arises from the recognition that humans are imperfect and fallible. According to Neff (2012), this recognition is critical in cultivating self-compassion. Acknowledging that suffering and personal inadequacy are part of the shared human experience enables one to see that suffering is something that we all go through rather than something that happens to “me” alone.

Unfortunately, most of us tend to focus on what we do not have in common with others when we make a mistake or when we are going through a difficult time. Rather than viewing our imperfection in light of the shared human experience (e.g., “many people get parking fines every day”), we tend to feel isolated and disconnected from the world around us (e.g., “no one else was as stupid as me to park here”). When we view our imperfect selves in this way, our perspective tends to become narrow; we become absorbed by our feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and fail to see the bigger picture.

This tool is designed to help people cultivate self-compassion by developing an appreciation for common humanity.



Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (Ph.D.) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD).



Goal

The goal of this tool is to demonstrate to people that they are not alone in their tendency to be self-critical. In this way, people develop a sense of common humanity, which is a crucial component of self-compassion.



Advice

- Since this is a group exercise, suggest that participants choose to write down something that is only mildly to moderately distressing rather than something that has powerful emotions attached to it.
- On a practical note, hand out the same type of pen to all participants to help with Anonymity.
- In step 5, participants may pick their note by chance. This is okay. Notes are anonymous, so the group will be unaware of whether a participant reads aloud his or her own note. Reading one's note out loud may even help facilitate acceptance and defusion.
- An alternative way to run this exercise is to gather participants' notes and place them all face up on the floor or a table, rather than putting them into a box. Participants can then view the collection of negative self-views in one place, reading the notes silently to themselves. This option may be preferable for more timid groups, or as a precursor to the first exercise (reading notes out loud).



References

- Neff, K. (2012, September 20). *Embracing our common humanity with self-compassion*. <http://self-compassion.org/embracing-our-common-humanity-with-self-compassion/>.



Embracing Your Humanness

Instructions

Step 1: Preparation

You will need:

- Blank pieces of paper or card paper (1x piece per participant)
- Pens or felt-tip pen (identical)
- A box or bowl

Step 2: Hand out pieces of paper

Hand out the blank pieces of paper, ensuring that each participant gets one piece.

Step 3: Write down a self-criticism

Ask participants to write down something about themselves that makes them insecure, something for which they tend to criticize themselves. For example, “I’m ugly” or “I’m not smart enough.” Instruct participants to write in capital letters so that their handwriting is not recognizable to others and to fold their piece of paper in half when they are finished.

Step 4: Collect and share the notes

Collect all the participants’ folded notes and put them into a box, and share them around.

Step 5: Choose a note at random and share

Now, pass the box around to the group and ask each participant to retrieve a note at random. As they do this, participants unfold the note and read it aloud to the group. The facilitator then asks for “a show of hands” from group members who have criticized themselves in the same (or similar) way.



Step 6: Group reflection

As a group, discuss the following:

- What was this exercise like?
- Have you ever thought you were alone in experiencing such self-critical thoughts?
- What was it like to see that others also have the same (or similar) thoughts?