

Integrating Self-Compassion into Mindfulness

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If you find yourself struggling or beating yourself up in meditation, it can be helpful to remember to cultivate self-compassion. In the last handout I emailed you, "Emotion-Focused Mindfulness Meditation," I described how Kristin Neff highlights three factors in cultivating self-compassion: trying to



be kind to yourself; remembering our common humanity (that whatever you are struggling with, many other people struggle with it as well); and cultivating mindfulness of your body, feelings and thoughts.

Cultivating kindness towards suffering in meditation can be very orienting. It can also be helpful to remember that encountering suffering and struggle in meditation is part of our common humanity. When people find themselves struggling in meditation, they often assume this is happening because they are bad meditators or not even really meditating at all. But many forms of mindfulness value when suffering emerges in meditation

as an opportunity to explore and transform our relationship with it. Suffering is not evidence you are a bad meditator or that you are not meditating, it is evidence you are having a meditation experience, the kind of experience other meditators have when they meditate. You can then explore the

meditation experience you are having by cultivating mindful experiencing, that is, developing a deeper sense about what is happening in your body, your feelings, the tone of your thoughts, and what you are thinking about.

Emotion-focused mindfulness therapy goes beyond Kristin Neff's perspective on self-compassion and mindfulness in emphasizing that wise self-compassion is empathic. Compassion involves feeling moved by suffering in ourselves or others, wishing for it to be alleviated and wanting to help. Empathy involves being able to follow our own and others' feelings and thoughts with kindness. Someone who is wisely compassionate can tolerate others' suffering, in fact, they are going to be sensitive to it, able to empathically follow that person's thoughts and feelings to help them sort out what they are feeling and how they would like to respond to whatever the situation is. Self-compassion can look the same within us. Not treating ourselves with the same old habitual indifference or harshness, but softening and opening with kindness and gentle curiosity towards our inner vulnerabilities and developing a deeper, transformative, healing sense of what is happening.