

Self-Compassion and Trauma

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Overview

- Speaker introduction
- What self-compassion is and what it is not
- How self-compassion works
- Using the three components
- Discussion & Practice

The suffering itself is not so bad; it's the
resentment against suffering that is the
real pain.”

Allen Ginsberg, poet

Self-Compassion: What it is

- Theoretical Familiarity
 - Carl Roger's "unconditional positive regard"
 - Acceptance and Mindfulness
 - Connected with shame research; in some ways, an answer to self-esteem
- Compassion is relating to suffering, whether it be your own or someone else's
- Three components
 - Self-Kindness
 - Common humanity
 - Mindfulness

Self-Compassion: What it's not

- Self-pity
- Letting yourself off the hook
- Self-indulgence
- Self-esteem

Practice 1

- Remember a time that you felt compassion for another person
 - What was the first thing that had to happen?
 - Then, what came next?
 - Anything else?

→ The basic principles of having compassion for another individual are the same as having compassion for yourself.

- Core components

Self-kindness

Extending warmth and understanding to oneself vs. criticism and self-judgment

Common Humanity

Seeing your experience as part of the larger human experience vs. separation and isolation

Mindfulness

Holding painful thoughts and feelings in *balanced awareness* vs. over-identification and avoidance

(Neff, 2003; Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005)

Survivors of Trauma

“Incorporating the principles of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness into interactions with survivors can create a nurturing and supportive environment.” (Tesh, Learman, & Pulliam, 2013)

- Trauma can result in feelings of shame & self-blame
- Self may be seen as:
 - Defective
 - Inherently bad
 - Powerless
 - Deserving of maltreatment
 - Something to be kept hidden away
 - i.e. maladaptive coping
- “Self-compassion has been negatively associated with maladaptive states...including catastrophizing, anxiety, depression, self-criticism, avoidance, and PTSD symptoms.” (Neff et al., 2005; Thompson & Waltz, 2008)
- Shame as a barrier to receiving or continuing services

What the Research says

- Self-compassion has been associated with:
 - Resilience (*Scoglio et al., 2015*)
 - Improvement of emotional responses and mental health outcomes for trauma survivors (*Tesh, Learman, & Pulliam, 2013*), (*MacBeth & Gumley, 2012*)
 - Lower levels of shame, avoidance coping, social isolation, depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidality (*Tesh, Learman, & Pulliam, 2013*)
 - *Negatively* associated with rumination, brooding, thought suppression, avoidance (*Barnard & Curry, 2001*)
- Self-compassion partners well with other interventions (*Tesh, Learman, & Pulliam, 2013*)
 - *E.g. CBT, MBSR, etc.*
- Self-compassion as emotional regulation (*Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006*)

With clients...

Reduces self-blame

Reduces shame

Reduces anxious and/or depressive experiences

Application

With self...

- Reduces self-blame
- Reduces shame
- Reduces anxious and/or depressive experiences

Practice 2

- Think of a recent moment of suffering
- Hold this memory in your mind
 - What were you feeling?
 - What were you thinking? How were you talking to yourself?
- Apply self-compassion to this moment of struggle
 - How many people feel or have experienced X, Y, Z?
 - Speak kindly into that moment
 - Extend warmth, understanding. Witness to your own experience nonjudgmentally.
 - (Isn't this what we do everyday with our clients....?)

Strategies and Examples

- Write a letter to self from ideal compassionate other
- Practicing self-compassion
 - Practicing self-compassion for a friend in a mild situation
 - Getting in a fender-bender
 - Practicing self-compassion for yourself in a mild situation
 - Same scenario
 - Practicing self-compassion for a friend in a difficult situation
 - A great struggle, experiencing self-blame
 - Practicing self-compassion for yourself in a difficult situation
 - Something you blame yourself for
- Self-compassion is a concept that survivors can practice and internalize in order to use on their own once they are no longer receiving services.

References

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- MacBeth, A., & Gumley, A. (2012). Exploring compassion: A meta-analysis of the association between self-compassion and psychopathology. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32, 545-552.
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- Tesh, M., Learman, J., & Pulliam, R. M. (2013). Mindful Self-Compassion Strategies for Survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse. *Mindfulness*, 1-10.
- Thompson, B. L., Waltz, J. (2008) Self-compassion and PTSD symptom severity. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 21, 556-558.
- Valdez, C. E., & Lilly, M. M. (2015). Self-Compassion and Trauma Processing Outcomes Among Victims of Violence. *Mindfulness*, 1-11.

Additional Resources

- Dr. Kristin Neff
 - *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*; self-compassion.org
- Dr. Christopher Germer
 - *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions*
- Self-Compassion and Responses to Trauma: The Role of Emotional Regulation
 - Arielle A. J. Scoglio, Deirdre A. Rudat, Donn Garvert, Maggie Jarmolowski, Christie Jackson, Jusith L. Herman
- Self-Compassion and Trauma Processing Outcomes Among Victims of Violence
 - Christine E. Valdez & Michelle M. Lilly
- Mindful Self-Compassion Strategies for Survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse
 - Miki Tesh, Joy Learman, Rose M. Pulliam
 - (All three available on self-compassion.org/the-research/)