

10 Self-Compassion Practices for COVID-19

By the Center for Mindfulness Self-Compassion

March 25, 2020

By Chris Germer & Kristin Neff

Co-Developers of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program

Many people have asked us how self-compassion practice might help them get through this challenging time. Everyone has been affected to some degree by the coronavirus, perhaps by anxiety about the invisible threat to our communities, loneliness from self-quarantine, economic hardship, or difficulties when we contract the virus ourselves or need to care for sick people.

Below are 10 practices from the Mindful Self-Compassion program that could be helpful, along with brief explanations. All these practices can be found in *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook*.

1. **Savouring and Gratitude** – Sooner or later, we will all become virus-weary and yearn for more joy in life. Fortunately, joy is close at hand if we give ourselves permission to enjoy the simple things we still have. Savoring a nice meal is a way to do that, or by taking yourself on a Sense and Self-Compassion Break – The 3 components of self-compassion are a powerful recipe for regulating difficult emotions. The first component, mindfulness, helps us disentangle from what’s bothering us. The second component, common humanity, is an antidote to the loneliness that may come with social distancing. When we recall that we’re not alone no matter what we’re going through, things become more bearable. The third component of self-compassion, self-kindness, is an antidote to fear. Kindness regulates fear through connection and warmth, similar to what we might experience with a dear friend.
2. **Soothing Touch** – We are less likely to receive physical expressions of kindness when we are in self-quarantine but we can still comfort ourselves with touch. Don’t be shy about offering yourself a hug, or by gently placing a hand over your heart, when you need it the most. (Just be mindful about touching your face, please.)
3. **Giving and Receiving Compassion** – Although we need to physically distance ourselves from others because of the coronavirus, we don’t need to emotionally distance ourselves. Connection feels good. We can stay in compassionate connection with others by following our breath – breathing compassion in for ourselves and out for others. This can be practiced at home or with others, on the cushion or in caregiving settings.
4. **Being with Difficult Emotions** – Isolation is not natural for human beings. Just being alone with ourselves for an extended period of time usually brings up challenging emotions. Labelling what we’re feeling while we’re feeling it calms the body, finding the emotion in the body anchors the experience, and responding to ourselves with compassion is the connection we’ve probably needed all along.

5. **Soles of the Feet** – This practice anchors our awareness in the present moment when we feel emotionally overwhelmed. The pandemic can be re-traumatizing for some people, for example, if feeling all alone or unsafe triggers traumatic memories. When we feel overwhelmed, it may be helpful to *anchor our awareness in the sensations of our feet on the floor*. We can redirect our attention away from our thoughts to the point of contact between our body and the earth, helping to ground and settle ourselves.
6. **Affectionate Breathing** – Another helpful practice for helping to ground ourselves when we feel overwhelmed is tuning in to the soothing rhythm of the breath. We can allow ourselves to be caressed by the gentle internal rocking motion of the breath in a way that is calming and soothing.
7. **Self-Compassion in Daily Life** – We don't need to practice meditation to experience self-compassion. Simply asking ourselves, "How do I care for myself already?" is a self-compassionate act, and actually doing something nice for oneself is even better. For example, when we're sequestered in our homes, we can still listen to music, dance, read a book, Skype with friends, or play games with family members.
8. **Compassionate Body Scan** – When we find ourselves scanning for signs of the coronavirus in our own bodies, the body begins to feel like an alien and we need to befriend it. We also need to remain friends with our bodies when they are stricken with the virus because the body is doing the best it can and it needs our support. The Compassionate Body Scan is a way to become more intimate and comfortable with our bodies no matter what condition we may be in.
9. **Core Values** – The usual ways that we find meaning in life are likely to be interrupted by social distancing. That doesn't mean that we have to let go of what is most meaningful to us. If you found meaning by providing financially for your family, perhaps you can still provide for your family – emotionally – until you return to work? If you enjoyed meeting with friends, perhaps you can still meet with them online, maybe even with greater interest and understanding? Remaining connected to our core values and finding ways to stay true to them in the midst of disruption is an act of self-care.
10. **Savour Walk in the fresh air** -This practice involves letting yourself fully enjoy and take in what is beautiful or interesting to you – the bark of a tree, bird song, the smell of a flower, seeing the world with fresh eyes. Gratitude is another way of cultivating joy – noticing the small things that enrich our lives that we tend to overlook—running water, morning sunlight, chopping vegetables. The list is endless.

Of course, a single self-compassion practice will not immediately change your life. Self-compassion is learned slowly. The fruit of self-compassion practice is learning how to hold our struggles and ourselves in a loving embrace, just as we are. Self-quarantine can be like a retreat, albeit involuntary, and it's an excellent time learn the practice of self-compassion. Thank you for keeping the flame of compassion burning during these anxious times, and please stay safe.