

The Self-Compassion Alphabet

How to Be Kind to Yourself from A to Z

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A

Accept

Accept yourself as you are in this very moment. Like any of us, you are on a journey to reclaim your wholeness, to heal childhood wounds, and to manifest your destiny. You are not here to be perfect or to get life right. You are here to be a purveyor of love and that love must begin within yourself—for yourself—before you can offer it to the world.

B

Believe

Believe that you are deserving of your own goodwill. The Buddha taught that you may search the entire world over and not find anyone more deserving of your loving-kindness than yourself. Trust that this path of self-compassion has opened for you right now because you *do* need to live more gently and kindly with yourself.

C

Commit

Commit to your own well-being. Make a solemn vow that, from this moment forward, you will do your very best to take good care of yourself. Despite any hopes that others will nurture you or care for you, no one knows what you really need to be healthy and happy better than yourself.

D

Desire

Are you willing to change, really change? Most of us say we are but, if we're honest, we want any change to happen quickly and to be painless! Cultivating self-compassion feels wonderful, yet, in the early stages, it is also a bit of "work." You must be willing to let go of what no longer serves you; what keeps you overwhelmed, stressed, or feeling badly about yourself; stuck in a disempowering job or empty relationship. You must be willing to give yourself what you need to be well.



Explore

Explore mindful awareness. Mindful awareness is essential when it comes to growing self-compassion. A simple practice of mindfulness invites us to stop, look and listen. To pay attention to two very important elements in any given moment: What is going on inside of us (which body sensations, thoughts and feelings are present), and what is going on around us in our immediate environment (how we are reacting or responding to that). Mindfulness asks that we spend as much time as possible in the present moment—not just to feel more peaceful, but to be vitally aware of what is arising so we can choose how to respond to life with grace and ease. And to be compassionate with ourselves!



Feel

Feel each of your emotions fully, with awareness. Name and acknowledge your most predominant emotions because they determine the quality of your life—moment by moment. Good self-awareness is key to living a self-compassionate life. Know what you are feeling when you are feeling it and allow this awareness to help you make kinder choices for yourself.



Gentle

“Gentling down” means softening toward yourself, especially when life feels difficult. Allow yourself to take deep breaths, to let go, to sit, to be. See yourself with soft eyes in the same way you would regard a dear one who is caught in struggle. See yourself through self-compassionate lenses, offer yourself empathetic phrases, for this is a moment of suffering, and you are doing the best you can.



Hold

Hold yourself in tender embrace when you are struggling with life as it is. Wrap imaginary arms around yourself or give yourself an actual hug, just as you would your dearest child who is feeling hurt, weary or frustrated. Mother yourself in the best possible way and be an excellent self-caregiver. Soothe and comfort yourself.



Inquire

When in doubt about what to do in any situation, ask yourself, “What is the kindest thing I can do for myself in this moment?” Then, inquire more deeply. The first answer that comes may be from the ego, and, as we know, the ego often provides quick solutions that are sourced in fear. Pausing, breathing, and allowing your awareness to

drop into your heart center will bring a more accurate response; an answer from the depth of your being. You can trust this wisdom. Your heart knows best.



Joy

Does the thought of another day bring you joy? Bring up feelings of gratitude? Your true nature is joy, and if you are not feeling joy regularly, something may be amiss. Perhaps you are overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, or worried. These are indicators that you need comfort and care, and, ultimately, a more peace-filled approach to life. As you grow in self-compassionate awareness, you learn how to reduce the drama by responding differently to it. Over time, you may eradicate worry and anxiety by the consistent use of self-compassionate practices. You can retrain your brain to respond with equanimity, rather than with stress and fear, to what life presents. Self-compassionate awareness helps joy return.



Kindness

It is not selfish or self-centered to love yourself. You are a human being just like everyone else who needs love and thrives because of it. If you do not have some degree of love for yourself, you will not take good care of yourself. If you are feeling less-than-loving toward yourself, visualize yourself as you were when you were a child—tender and sweet. That little child still lives within you and she is deserving of your love. Extend your goodwill to her and know that by doing so, you are embracing your whole self—as you were then and as you are now.



Love

Love yourself—more. The poet/playwright Oscar Wilde wrote, “To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance.” To romance someone means to do all the things that will help love flourish. You can engage in a love affair with yourself in the same way and create a climate where self-love, self-respect, and self-love grow. You can romance yourself by being generous with your time and attentive to your needs. Just as you would a prospective romantic partner, get to know yourself on the deepest level so your relationship with yourself is authentic and true.



Minimize

Minimize unreasonable expectations. Expect less of yourself when it's call for. We live in a culture that promotes high achievement in all things. Don't buy into the message that you must be the best at everything. Perfectionism is a form of self-abuse. Foster skillfulness in the areas of your life that are important to you and let go of the rest.

Claim and relax into what you're good at. What you are doing in this moment may be enough.



Non-Judgment

Judge yourself less; love yourself more. When you are struggling with any strong emotion, stop, take a few complete breaths, and be present to yourself as things are in the moment. Acknowledge the difficulty of this moment. Do not judge it or yourself. It is what it is, for now, a moment in time. Place your hand over your heart, continue to breathe, and set the intention to calm yourself. Feel the comforting warmth of your hand, remember your good wise heart, and trust that you have the ability to calm and center yourself, even in the most challenging moments.



Open

Open your heart to yourself. Many of us are very hard on ourselves. We expect more of ourselves than we do of others. We hold ourselves to exceptionally high standards. Are you one of those? If you had a friend who was struggling in this way, you might say to her, "Take it easy on yourself." But do *you* do this for yourself? When you are having a difficult time, befriend yourself. Be as generous and kind to yourself as you would your best friend. Allow yourself to be fully human when life feels difficult. Be as kind-hearted to yourself as you would anyone else.



Please

It's alright to please yourself. Taking pleasure in things is not selfish. We all want to be happy and, truth be told, there are certain things we can do to pave the way to personal happiness. Enjoying simple pleasures, like pampering your body for comfort when it needs it; savoring the beauty of nature to uplift your spirit; eating food that both delights and nourishes. Pleasures like these can calm you, reminding you that life is good and enjoyable.



Quiet

Sequester yourself when you need to. You do not always have to be "on." In fact, being able to step away from the fray and into a quieter setting—or a quiet space within yourself—is an act of self-care. We live in a too-noisy world. With so much sound and input coming at us all the time it is difficult to discern what we might need to be kinder to ourselves. If you are an introvert who requires more silence to maintain inner harmony, then honor yourself for that. Learn to meditate so you are better able to relax

and let go, even for short spans of time. Cultivate the ability to hold a space of inner quiet into which you can rest to spend time with your precious self.

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Rest

Do you get enough sleep? Do you take time for rest or naps? Today, most American women report that on any given day they feel exhausted. So much to do, so many roles to play! Doctors tell us that we need 7 – 9 hours of sleep each night to be at our best. Rest is not only necessary for optimal energy, but also a vital part of any self-care regimen, and good self-care is an act of self-compassion.

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Self-Care

Good self-care is the cornerstone of a life rooted in self-compassion. If you love and respect yourself enough, you will care for yourself on all levels—body, mind, heart, and spirit. A self-compassionate person knows what her body needs to be well: nutritious food, exercise, and adequate rest. She knows what her heart-mind needs to feel relaxed and at ease. She knows what her spirit needs to feel inspired and aligned with the Sacred. She recognizes what she should do (that’s a “good should”) to make sure that she feels harmonious and happy inside herself. And she does this! That’s good self-care.

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Trust

The better you know yourself, the more you will trust your inner wisdom. Having a regular spiritual practice helps—a period of quieting or contemplation each day to calm yourself; to stay in touch with your inner being. Without such a practice, it is difficult to hear what your body-mind is trying to tell you about what you need to be well and happy. We have many “voices” inside of us that make suggestions all day long about what to do. Spending “time in” helps us recognize these voices. With self-awareness, we can choose to listen to those that urge us toward healing and wholeness.

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Understand

Understand yourself. Show yourself the empathy that you would offer someone in a similar situation. Why are you any different from them? This person is doing the very best they can, and life has been difficult for them. It is the same for you, though it may be easier initially to be tender and generous with others; more difficult to extend the same gentle touch or reassuring words to yourself. At this point in time, acknowledge that it may be easier for you to give than to receive. Vow to be a “kind receiver.”

V

Value

When you value yourself, does it mean that you think too much of yourself? That you are self-centered or selfish? Not necessarily. I imagine that you take good care of the things you value—children, friends, pets, and family heirlooms, to name a few. You safeguard them because they are special to you. You are just as precious. There is only one of you in the entire universe. You are beautifully made and lovingly crafted. Make life choices that honor your value.

W

Wait

Patience is a virtue, we all know this, and it is a virtue that fosters self-compassion. Learning how to “gentle down” takes time. Inner change does not happen overnight. Let us be patient with ourselves as we embody the practices that will help us lead more ease-filled lives. When you are feeling impatient with yourself or others, bring your focus to your breath. Breathing in patience, breathing out irritation, is helpful. If we can kindly wait with whatever is happening—breathing, breathing—letting go of expectations and judgments, we will awaken one day to find ourselves more patient with all things. And more accepting of ourselves!

X

“X-Tend”

Extend kindness to others. As you grow in self-compassion, this will feel natural to do. To make eye contact and offer a smile to someone who crosses your path. To speak more purposefully with strangers, inquiring about their well-being. To offer a gentle touch on the shoulder to someone who appears troubled. The deep care you have begun to extend toward yourself cannot stay housed within you. It needs expression and will find spontaneous ways to make its way into the world. Our own loving-kindness fills the well of our being so we do not need to be concerned about depletion. There is plenty to give to others from the overflow.

Y

Yes

Say “yes” to yourself and your needs. It is skillful to recognize your limits; to acknowledge what you can and can’t do. It’s wise to admit that something might not be in your best interest (in alignment with your time or energy). It’s important to pay attention to how any demands placed upon you affect your peace of body, mind, heart and spirit. Whatever drains you, move away from that. What enlivens and nurtures you,

move toward that. Saying “no” to someone or something that does not serve you well frees you to say “yes” to yourself in healthy new ways.

3

Zeal

Have zeal for your journey. Zeal has been defined as “great energy or enthusiasm,” especially for a project or cause. Could your life be that cause? Self-compassion invites you to renew your energy, refine your focus, and be excited about being you! You, as you are uniquely made. You, as a gifted individual, who has much you can contribute to the greater good. Be on fire with possibility! Remember who you really are, embrace your light and goodness, and be a flame for others so they can find their way to healing and wholeness, too. Heal yourself and you will play a vital role in the healing of the world.

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