



Center for
Mindful Self-Compassion

MSC Core Skills

COURSE HANDOUTS

COURSE LEADER(S)

DATE AND LOCATION

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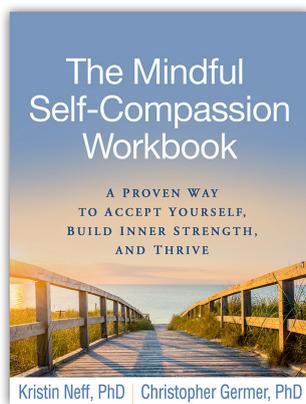


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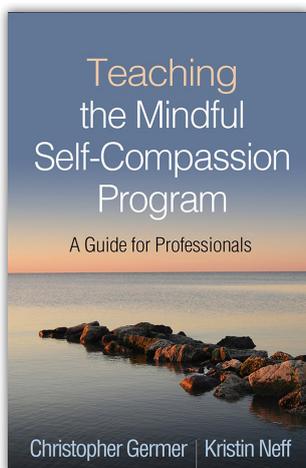
RELATED TEXTS



The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook

Published in 2018, *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook* (Neff & Germer) was designed as a companion to the MSC course and to introduce the general public to MSC. It includes much of the theory and practices taught in MSC, plus additional material on research and special topics.

The workbook contains writing exercises for home study and vivid stories of people using the techniques to address relationship stress, weight and body image issues, health concerns, anxiety, and other common problems. People who purchase the book have access to recorded meditations from the publisher's website.



Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion Program: A Guide for Professionals

Published in 2019, *Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion Program: A Guide for Professionals* [Germer and Neff] is the authoritative guide to conducting the MSC program. Germer and Neff review relevant theory and research and describe the program's unique pedagogy. Detailed vignettes illustrate not only how to teach the course's didactic and experiential content, but also how to engage with participants, manage group processes, and overcome common obstacles. The final section of the book describes how to integrate self-compassion into psychotherapy. Purchasers get access to the publisher's companion website with downloadable audio recordings of the guided meditations.

Note: *This book is not intended to replace formal training for teaching the MSC program.* To learn more about MSC Teacher Training, visit www.centerformsc.org/teach-msc/.



DEFINITIONS

Mindfulness

- ▶ “The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.” [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#)
- ▶ “Awareness, of the present moment, with acceptance.” [Chris Germer](#)

Acceptance

“Active, nonjudgmental embracing of experience in the here and now.” [Steven Hayes](#)

Empathy

“An accurate understanding of the [another’s] world as seen from the inside. To sense [another person’s] world as if it were your own.” [Carl Rogers](#)

Loving-Kindness

“The wish that all sentient beings may be happy.” [Dalai Lama](#)

Compassion

- ▶ “The wish that all sentient beings may be free from suffering.” [Dalai Lama](#)
- ▶ “Deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and other living beings, coupled with the wish and effort to alleviate it.” [Paul Gilbert](#)

Self-Compassion

“When we suffer, caring for ourselves as we would care for someone we truly love. Self-compassion includes: self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness.” [Kristin Neff](#)



THE SCIENCE OF SELF-COMPASSION

The three components of self-compassion

(Neff, 2003b)

- ▶ Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment:
 - Treating self with care and understanding rather than harsh judgment
 - Actively soothing and comforting oneself
- ▶ Common humanity vs. Isolation
 - Seeing own experience as part of larger human experience not isolating or abnormal
 - Recognizing that life is imperfect (us too!)
- ▶ Mindfulness vs. Over-identification
 - Allows us to “be” with painful feelings as they are
 - Avoids extremes of suppressing or running away with painful feelings

Yin and Yang of Self-Compassion

- ▶ YIN - “being with” ourselves in a compassionate way—comforting, soothing, validating
- ▶ YANG - “acting in the world” in a compassionate way—protecting, providing, and motivating

Physiological underpinnings (Gilbert, 2009)

- ▶ Physiological underpinnings of self-criticism
 - Threat defense system
 - Cortisol and adrenaline
- ▶ Physiological underpinnings of self-compassion
 - Mammalian care-giving system
 - Oxytocin and opiates

Research on self-compassion

- ▶ Explosion of research into self-compassion over the past decade
- ▶ Most research conducted with the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003a)

Self-compassion linked to wellbeing

(Zessin, Dickhauser & Garbadee, 2015)

- ▶ Reductions in negative mind-states: Anxiety, depression, stress, rumination, thought suppression, perfectionism, shame
- ▶ Increases in positive mind-states: Life satisfaction, happiness, connectedness, self-confidence, optimism, curiosity, gratitude
- ▶ Self-compassion leads to wellbeing by holding negative thoughts and emotions in loving, connected, presence

Self-compassion vs. self-esteem

(Neff & Vonk, 2009)

- ▶ Offers same wellbeing benefits without pitfalls
- ▶ Fewer social comparisons
- ▶ Less contingent self-worth
- ▶ No association with narcissism

Five main misgivings about self-compassion

- ▶ Is a form of self-pity
- ▶ Means weakness
- ▶ Will undermine motivation
- ▶ Will lead to self-indulgence
- ▶ Is selfish



THE SCIENCE OF SELF-COMPASSION

Is less self-focused

- ▶ Linked to less rumination and self-consciousness (Raes, 2010; Neff & Vonk, 2003a)
- ▶ Linked to more connectedness (Neff, 2003a)

Linked to coping and resilience

- ▶ More effective coping with divorce (Sbarra et al., 2012)
- ▶ Less likely to develop PTSD after combat trauma (Hiraoka et al., 2015)
- ▶ Better coping with chronic health conditions (Sirois, 2015)

Linked to motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012)

- ▶ Less fear of failure, more likely to try again and persist in efforts after failure
- ▶ More personal responsibility and motivation to repair past mistakes

Linked to healthier behaviors (Terry & Leary, 2011)

- ▶ More exercise, more doctors visits, safer sex, less alcohol use

Linked to more other-focused concern

- ▶ More caring and supportive relationship behavior (Neff & Beretvas, 2013)
- ▶ Less controlling and verbally aggressive
- ▶ More forgiveness and perspective taking (Neff & Pommier, 2013)

Early influences on self-compassion

- ▶ Secure versus insecure attachment (Wei, Liao, Ku & Shaffer, 2011)
- ▶ Parental criticism and family conflict (Neff & McGehee, 2010)
- ▶ History of sexual, emotional, physical abuse (Vettese et al., 2011)

Mindful Self-Compassion

(MSC; Neff & Germer, 2013)

- ▶ 8-week workshop (2.5 hours each session) designed to explicitly teach self-compassion
- ▶ Empirically demonstrated to increase self-compassion, mindfulness, wellbeing
- ▶ An empirically supported teen adaptation exists called Making Friends with Yourself (Bluth et al., 2015)



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PATHWAYS AND STAGES

Pathways to Self-Compassion

- ▶ Physical – Caring for your body
- ▶ Mental - Allowing your thoughts
- ▶ Emotional - Accepting your feelings
- ▶ Relational – Connecting authentically with others
- ▶ Spiritual - Nurturing your values

Stages of Acceptance

- ▶ Exploring – turning toward discomfort with curiosity
- ▶ Tolerating – safely enduring
- ▶ Allowing – letting feelings come and go
- ▶ Befriending – seeing the value in all experience

Stages of Progress

- ▶ Striving – struggling to feel better
- ▶ Disillusionment – when resistance amplifies discomfort
- ▶ Radical Acceptance – acceptance before change



MSC SESSION OUTLINE

MSC contains 3 core meditations, 4 other meditations, 20 informal practices for daily life, and 14 class exercises. Brief didactic topics accompany all these practices and exercises. Participants learn a wide variety of practices and the rationale behind them so they can discover what works best and be their own best teacher.

The program is carefully scaffolded so that the themes and practices of each session build upon the previous sessions. The sessions are:

- ▶ **Session 1 - Discovering Mindful Self-Compassion:** This session introduces participants to the course and to one another. Session 1 also provides the theoretical and research foundation of self-compassion along with informal practices that can be practiced during the week.
- ▶ **Session 2 - Practicing Mindfulness:** Anchors the program in mindfulness. Formal and informal mindfulness practices are taught to participants as well as the rationale for mindfulness in MSC. Participants learn about “resistance” and “backdraft” and how to manage backdraft. Sessions 1 and 2 include more didactic material than subsequent sessions in order to establish a conceptual foundation for the entire course.
- ▶ **Session 3 – Practicing Loving-Kindness:** Introduces loving-kindness as the practice of warming up awareness. Loving-kindness is cultivated before compassion because it is less challenging. Participants get a chance to discover their own loving-kindness and compassion phrases for use in meditation.
- ▶ **Session 4 - Discovering Your Compassionate Voice:** Broadens loving-kindness meditation into a compassionate conversation with ourselves, especially how to motivate ourselves with kindness rather than self-criticism. We also explore what “progress” means and encourage participants to practice compassion for themselves when they stumble or feel like they are failing to learn self-compassion.
- ▶ **Session 5 - Living Deeply:** Focuses on core values and the skill of compassionate listening.
- ▶ **Retreat:** A chance for participants to immerse themselves in the practices already learned. Some new practices are introduced, including ones that provide an opportunity for physical activity such as mindfully enjoying nature and compassionate walking.
- ▶ **Session 6 – Meeting Difficult Emotions:** Gives students an opportunity to test and refine their skills by applying them to difficult emotions. Students learn 3 strategies for addressing difficult emotions. The emotion of shame is described and demystified in this session because shame is so often associated with self-criticism and is entangled with sticky emotions such as guilt and anger.
- ▶ **Session 7- Exploring Challenging Relationships:** Themes of Session 7 are working with anger in relationships, caregiver fatigue, and forgiveness. Rather than trying to repair old relationships, participants learn to meet and hold their emotional needs, and themselves, with more compassion.
- ▶ **Session 8 – Embracing Your Life:** Brings the course to a close on a positive note with the practices of savoring, gratitude, and self-appreciation—three ways to embrace the good in our lives. To sustain self-compassion practice, we need to recognize and enjoy positive experiences as well. At the end of the course, students are invited to review what they have learned and what they would like to practice after the course has ended.



HOME PRACTICE

We recommend that MSC participants practice mindfulness and/or self-compassion at least 30 minutes per day, formal and informal practice combined. The purpose is to develop the habit of self-compassion. Here are some tips for maintaining a practice:

- ▶ Make your practice as easy and pleasant as possible—self-reinforcing.
- ▶ Start small—short practices can make a big difference.
- ▶ Practice during daily life, when you need it the most.
- ▶ Be compassionate when your practice lapses, and just start again.
- ▶ Let go of any unnecessary effort.
- ▶ Pick a consistent time to practice each day.
- ▶ Identify obstacles to practice and envision your way around them.
- ▶ Use guided meditations, read books, journal.
- ▶ Stay connected—practice in community.



BACKDRAFT

What Is Backdraft?

Backdraft refers to “distress that arises when we give ourselves compassion.” The experience of backdraft can be confusing for some practitioners but it is a key part of the transformation process. It helps to understand the nature of backdraft and to know how to respond to it.

“Backdraft” is a term that firefighters use to describe how a fire can intensify when fresh air is introduced through an open door. A similar effect can occur when we open the door of our hearts with self-compassion. Most of our hearts are hot with pain accumulated over a lifetime. In order to function in our lives, we needed to shut out stressful or painful experiences. However, when the door of our hearts opens and kindness flows in, old hurts are likely to come out. That’s backdraft. The discomfort we feel is not created by self-compassion practice—it’s simply being re-experienced and transformed by the power of compassion.

There is another metaphor for this process – warming up ice-cold hands. When our hands are numb from being out in cold and then they begin to warm up, we may experience pain for a short time. Numbness is also what we may feel toward old pains in our lives until we warm up our awareness with self-compassion.

How Do We Recognize Backdraft?

Backdraft can show up as any type of emotional, mental, or physical uneasiness. For example:

- ▶ Emotionally – shame, grief, fear, sadness
- ▶ Mentally – “I’m all alone.” “I’m a failure.” “I’m unworthy.”
- ▶ Physically – body memories, aches, pains

Often uneasiness appears out of nowhere and we may not understand why it’s happening. Sadness may appear while meditating, or perhaps a sense of vulnerability. Secondary reactions may also arise when we struggle not to feel backdraft. For example, we might go into our heads (intellectualize), become nervous, withdraw, space-out, or criticize ourselves and others. All these reactions are quite natural and can also be met with kindness and compassion.



BACKDRAFT

What Can We Do About Backdraft?

Below is a summary of approaches to backdraft that you will learn in MSC. However, please remember that you are the foremost expert on your life and what you need. You can begin by asking yourself “What do I need right now? “What do I need to feel safe?” Then, depending on what feels right to you, you may consider a few strategies in the following sequence:

1. Allow backdraft to percolate in the background of their awareness and see if it dissipates on its own.
2. Slightly reduce whatever practices you are doing if backdraft remains strong, and see what happens.
3. If backdraft remains too distressing, then practice mindfulness to regulate emotions
4. When all else fails, anchor your awareness in ordinary activities—doing normal things you enjoy.

Practice mindfulness to regulate attention:

- ▶ Label the experience as backdraft – “Oh, this is ‘backdraft’” – as you might for a dear friend.
- ▶ Name your strongest emotion and validate it for yourself in a compassionate voice (“Ah, that’s grief”).
- ▶ Explore where the emotion physically resides in your body, perhaps as tension in your stomach or hollowness in your heart, and offer yourself soothing or supportive touch.
- ▶ Redirect your attention to a neutral focus inside your body (e.g., the breath), or a sensation at the boundary of the body (e.g., sensations in the soles of your feet while walking), or a sense object in the outside world (e.g., ambient sounds). The further from your body you go, the easier it will be.

Anchor awareness in ordinary activities:

- ▶ You may feel the need to anchor your awareness in an everyday activity, such as washing the dishes, going for a walk, showering, cycling. If you happen to find the activity pleasant or rewarding for your senses (smell, taste, touch, sound, vision), allow yourself to savor it - mindfulness in daily life.
- ▶ Or you may feel the need to comfort, soothe or support yourself in a practical, behavioral way, such as by having a cup of tea, a warm bath, listening to music, or calling a friend - self-compassion in daily life.
- ▶ If you need further assistance, please make use of your personal contacts (friends, family, therapists, teachers) to get what you need.



As a graduate of MSC Core Skills, you are part of a growing worldwide community. Welcome!

The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, a non-profit organization founded by MSC Co-Creators Chris Germer and Kristin Neff, is dedicated to supporting your practice in a variety of tangible ways that are listed below. We would also like to cordially invite you to join the global MSC community by visiting our website at www.centerformsc.org. You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

On the website, you'll find:

- ▶ Freely available audio and video recordings by Chris Germer, Kristin Neff, and other senior MSC teachers
- ▶ The most up-to-date resources for supporting continuing practice
- ▶ Online offerings for continuing study and ongoing support and community-building
- ▶ A searchable database of teachers and programs worldwide
- ▶ Information on how to become a teacher of MSC
- ▶ Links to financially support our non-profit organization

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER MSC STUDY

- ▶ **Mindful Self-Compassion 5-Day Intensive or 8-Week Program (in person)** - Year round, global, multiple languages. The full MSC program provides complete immersion into the skills and concepts introduced in MSC Core Skills. It is also a pre-requisite for MSC Teacher Training. <https://centerformsc.org/course/>. *No pre-requisites.
- ▶ **Live Online Mindful Self-Compassion (online)** - 10 weeks, offered year round in multiple languages. LOMSC covers the same content as MSC programs offered in the in-person classroom and is taught live by a certified MSC teacher over 10 weeks. It is ideal for those people who do not have access to MSC in their area, who have commitments or mobility issues that make it difficult to leave home to do a course, or who would like an MSC refresher. *No pre-requisites. <https://centerformsc.org/lomsc/>
- ▶ **Mindful Self-Compassion Teacher Training** - Year round, global, multiple languages. CMSC supports prospective teachers in every step of their journey to becoming a Trained or Certified Teacher. Visit the CMSC website to learn more. *Pre-requisite: MSC 5-day intensive or 8-week program (The 2-Day Core Skills program does not meet this pre-requisite.) <https://centerformsc.org/teach-msc-2/>
- ▶ **Mindful Self-Compassion Silent Retreats** - Year round, global, multiple languages. In order to meet the growing demand for silent self-compassion retreats, CMSC sponsors retreats in a variety of locations around the world. These will fulfill the silent meditation retreat requirement for those wishing to train to teach MSC. www.centerformsc.org/course/category/silent-retreats-offered-by-msc-teachers/
- ▶ **MSC Circles of Practice (CoP)** - Weekly online, drop-in, hourlong practice sessions (Donation based) Continuing MSC practice in an easily accessible space online, on a weekly basis, and within a supportive, international community. *Pre-requisite: MSC Intensive or 8-week program. <https://centerformsc.org/msc-circle-of-practice/>
- ▶ **MSC Community for Deepening Practice (CDP)** - online community experience, 8 months, English. A place where MSC graduates can deeply re-explore MSC over the long term with a community of other graduates across the globe. A place for accountability, support, and challenge. Designed to fit within the framework of busy lives. *Pre-requisite: MSC Intensive, 8-week program, or Live Online MSC (LOMSC). <https://centerformsc.org/msc-community-for-deepening-practice/>

