“Having compassion for oneself is really no different than having compassion for others. Think about what the experience of compassion feels like. First, to have compassion for others you must notice that they are suffering. If you ignore that homeless person on the street, you can’t feel compassion for how difficult his or her experience is. Second, compassion involves feeling moved by others’ suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to “suffer with”). When this occurs, you feel warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way. Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly. Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience. ‘There but for fortune go I.’

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don’t like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a “stiff upper lip” mentality, you stop to tell yourself “this is really difficult right now,” how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?”

### Physiology of Self-Criticism & Self-Compassion

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Response</th>
<th>Stress Response Turned Inward</th>
<th>Self-Compassion Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>Self-Criticism</td>
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<td>Flight</td>
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<td>Freeze</td>
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**Operationalizing Compassion for Others:**
1. Seeing someone
2. Knowing something about what they go through
3. Caring about what they go through

**Operationalizing Self-Compassion:**
1. Employing Self-Kindness
   a. Actively soothing and comforting oneself
   b. Acting on the impulse or motivation to help oneself and alleviate suffering
2. Recognizing Common Humanity
   a. Seeing an experience as part of the larger human experience
   b. Feeling a sense of connection to others
   c. Recognizing that life and people are imperfect
3. Practicing Mindfulness
   a. “Being” with painful experiences
   b. Not suppressing or struggling with painful feelings

**Why Can Compassion Feel So Difficult?**
- **Self-criticism** is based on the “Threat Defense System”
  - This is a function of the “reptilian” part of the brain that is largely automatic and reactive in the midst of perceived threat and is responsible for the “fight, flight, or freeze” response of the sympathetic nervous system.
- **Self-compassion** is based on the “Mammalian Care-Giving System”
  - In contrast, this is the system responsible for the release of oxytocin and is associated with physical affection, gentle touch, and soothing vocalizations.
Passive & Active Components of Mindful Self Compassion

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Research Findings on Compassion for Self and Others:
- Compassion is linked to well-being:
  - More positive mind states
  - Less psychopathology
- Compassion is more effective than self-esteem:
  - Less social comparisons
  - Less contingent on self-worth or success
  - Not associated with narcissism
- Compassion predicts greater coping and resilience
  - Better healing after divorce
  - Better coping with PTSD for combat veterans
- Compassion is correlated with motivation
  - Less fear of failure and more likelihood of persisting following failure
  - More responsibility for past mistakes
  - Greater motivation to repair harms committed
- Compassion is connected to healthy choices and relationships
  - Less controlling or verbally abusive behavior
  - More willingness to compromise
  - More forgiveness and perspective-taking
  - More empathy and altruism

Self-Compassion Exercises:
- Soothing Touch
- Soothing Vocalizations
- Self-Affirmations
- Reflections on “How You Would Treat a Friend”
- Street Loving Kindness (Sharon Salzberg)
- Giving and Receiving Practice
- Labeling Emotions
- Awareness of Emotions in the Body
- Soften – Soothe – Allow
- Compassionate Letter to Myself
- Daily Self-Kindnesses
- Child’s Practice