

# Three Steps Toward Self-Compassion



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Most people struggle with self-judgmental thoughts, it's really very common! There's a curious thing about these thoughts: if someone else were as mean to us as we are to ourselves, we would not let them get away with it. And yet, not only do we allow these self-judgments to be internally

spoken—often, we believe them.

It is possible, however, to cultivate more kindness for yourself, accepting yourself no matter what—even if you mess up, even if you're imperfect.

I've recorded a new guided meditation that cultivates this kind of self-compassion in the Ten Percent Happier app, influenced by my own practice and by Mindful Self-Compassion, a program construct that was originally developed by researcher Kristin Neff and psychotherapist Chris Germer. Here, I'll explore how the three elements of mindfulness, compassion, and the recognition of our shared humanity can help you work with your inner critic and cultivate more kindness for yourself.

## 1. Mindfulness: Notice Judgment

First, you can start cultivating self-compassion any time you meditate by mindfully noticing if you're being judgmental of yourself. Do you think you're not meditating in the right way? Do you think you're not a good meditator? Or maybe you're being judgmental about something else going on in your life. The first step to working with judgmental thoughts is to begin to notice them.

When you notice a self-judging thought arising in the course of the day or as you're meditating, see if you can label it in your mind as "judging" or "self-judgment." We label this not to judge ourselves for judging (!) but to make conscious the fact that our mind is engaged in judging right now, so that we can respond appropriately. There is actually a lot of freedom in being able to notice these voices coming and going. We don't have to be caught by them. They are thoughts passing through like clouds in the sky.

## 2. Compassion: Add Kindness

A second step is to add kindness to the mix. If you notice judgment arising, see if you can, on the spot, offer yourself a little bit of kindness in a way that makes sense to you. If it seems difficult, try bringing to mind someone whom you love, respect, or admire sending you kindness. Try to see yourself the way they might see you.

You can offer lovingkindness to yourself either in the moment or cultivate it through meditation. You can use the phrases from lovingkindness meditation, if they resonate with you: May you be safe and protected, may you be happy and peaceful, may you be at ease. Try saying them in the second-person, as if you're wishing kindness to yourself, or, again, imagining yourself as someone who does so. Or you can simply try, May I be happy...

If you prefer, you could imagine kindness almost as if it were pumping from your heart, through your body, like blood pumping through your veins. You might see images or colors. Imagine kindness moving through your body. We can be creative with this practice and explore and discover what makes sense to you.

Keep in mind that sometimes when we do this practice, we don't feel kindness. We may feel nothing, or we may feel some version of the opposite of kindness. See if you can identify what's actually coming up for you, rather than what "should" be happening, and see if you can be present with whatever is present, just noticing it. You might say to yourself something like, For whatever it is I'm feeling right now, can I hold this too with kindness? For whatever I'm feeling right now, can I hold this, too, with awareness?

### 3. Recognition: You Are Not Alone!

Finally, after noticing judgment and meeting it with kindness, you might try imagining a sense of shared humanity. In whatever way you're suffering or judging yourself, you are not the only one doing this! Most people struggle with feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. Just remembering this can often help.

You can also send out compassion and kindness to all people: millions, maybe billions of people on this planet right now who are in some way feeling like they have failed or are not good enough, or are unworthy. As before, you can use the phrases from lovingkindness meditation, or imagine the kindness flowing out from you to all the other human beings who share in this experience of self-judgment – meaning, everyone. Or you might simply wish others well: May we all be safe and protected. May we know we are loved. May we recognize the goodness within ourselves.

Remember, be gentle with yourself. Working with judgmental thoughts can be a lifelong practice, but over time, you will find that you take these thoughts more lightly. Believe it or not, self-compassion can ultimately become your default setting.

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