Just as I am

The practice of self-compassion and care

A guided journal to free yourself
from self-criticism and feelings of low self-worth

Developed by:
Julia Armstrong, MSW, RSW
Queen's University,
Kingston, Ontario

This program is based on clinical and personal experience as well as empirically supported interventions to help you relate to yourself with more flexibility and kindness.

While this resource was created with Queen's students in mind, I am hopeful that it is shared with anyone who may benefit.

Queen's University | STUDENT AFFAIRS
STUDENT WELLNESS SERVICES

Finding support

While this resource is designed to help alleviate inner struggles that can cause low mood and anxiety, it is not intended to replace mental health treatment.

If you are in acute distress or concerned you may be struggling with significant difficulties, find someone to talk to.

Some things to watch out for:

- Problems sleeping
- Appetite changes
- Prolonged low mood
- Using restrictive dieting, vomiting, or excessive exercise to cope
- Problems arising from alcohol consumption, drug use, or screen time
- Desiring or attempting to harm yourself
- Significant relational conflict or social isolation

You are the best person to decide when it is time to reach out, but others may be the first to notice and express concern. Hear them out.

If you are nervous about talking to someone:

- You are *never* alone in your suffering. There is a good chance that many of your peers are struggling too.
- Many students feel nervous about seeing a counsellor for the first time but are generally glad they went.
- You may either come alone or bring a friend to any counselling appointment.
- You decide what to share and what to leave out.
- Unless there are imminent safety concerns, everything you say is confidential. As counsellors, we take this *very* seriously. Whenever possible, we will work with you if we have to consult with others regarding your safety.

If you are looking for more help, you will find a list of resources – both local and web-based – at queensu.ca/student wellness.

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Welcome

It is pretty easy to feel at peace with ourselves when we are validated by a peer or professor or when we get the mark we were hoping for. But, what happens if we don't meet our own or others' expectations? Or, what if something devastating and unexpected happens? Often, these unpredictable circumstances really throw us; we may begin questioning our self-worth and doubting our abilities. The harsh inner critic just won't shut up. Fear and shame can take up lots of space in our world, clouding our perception of ourselves and others. We end up sabotaging our efforts to do better, and the cycle continues.

Struggle and suffering are inevitable, especially if we wait for external circumstances to tell us that we are ok. This is because disappointments, mistakes, and unexpected circumstances are a central part of the human experience. We cannot avoid them.

The key to stepping off of the roller coaster is recognizing that we have infinite self-worth *just because we exist.* No bad mark, past mistake, or put-down can change that. We may know, at the intellectual level, that we are worthy of love and acceptance. Why, then, is it so hard to *feel* this love for ourselves? Why are we constantly looking to others for validation and reassurance? Why are we able to be kind to our friends when they mess up but cannot do the same for ourselves? It is almost as if our head and heart are living in completely different worlds. A gap exists between what we think and what we feel.

This journal is intended to help bridge the gap between what you know in your mind and what you feel in your heart so that you can begin to tap into the essence of who you are. This essence, your true worth, cannot be shaken by the circumstances in your life.

More specifically, reading and using this journal can help you:

- face your current difficulties head on using mindful awareness
- soothe yourself when you need it most, and
- navigate the difficulties you face with more courage, confidence, and inner peace

Expect to feel some discomfort when exploring these pages. It is normal to want to avoid facing our inner world. The urges often come in the form of anxiety, frustration, sadness, boredom, fatigue or restlessness. Recognize when you feel the urge to quit, then do what feels right to soothe yourself. This could include putting the book down for a while, taking lots of breaks, or talking about the process with someone you trust. When you offer yourself what you need in the moment, you are practicing self-care and compassion, which happens to be the purpose of this journal.

Making this journal work for you

Some thoughts on how to make this journal worthwhile for you:

- You might find it helpful to explore the practices with the support of a friend, mentor, or counsellor. Or, you may prefer to engage with the material in solitude. Whatever you choose to do is just fine.
- You may want to begin with the section that feels easiest for you.
- If you find that a chapter or practice doesn't speak to your experience, just skip it. Yep. That's right. No required reading here.
- It may be helpful to break grammar and spelling rules when writing to allow thoughts to flow more freely.
- It's important to read the sections and actually *try* the practices that resonate with you. Practice is the only way to change the relationship you have with yourself.
- Try a practice a few times when you are feeling relatively calm. Then, when you are more familiar with the practice, you can use it during more difficult times.

- It may feel like a practice is not working if you don't notice changes in your thoughts or feelings right away. Having doubts is normal and ok, but try not to let them inhibit your progress. Change that matters takes time, so you can expect some movement that is "two steps forward, one step back."
- Try a practice wholeheartedly at least three times before deciding whether it's worth continuing in your daily life.
- If you would like to deepen your self-care practice, see page 44 for some recommended readings, online resources, and smartphone apps.

Remember: The goal of these practices is to cultivate compassion for yourself in whatever state you currently occupy. No one else is going to be evaluating this writing, so you don't have to either.

You are worthy of the same love, compassion, and kindness that you give to others. Try not to get in your own way.

Most importantly, have fun! Try bringing some playfulness and enthusiasm to the practices.

Practice 1: Seeing the goodness

If a person were to see you as you really are, what would he or she most appreciate or enjoy about you?

As a start, here are some qualities that may ring true to you:

Enthusiastic, spirited	Intuitive	Expressive
Amusing	Disciplined	Persistent
Gentle	Sensitive	Industrious
Loyal, committed	Encouraging of others	Organized
Determined	Well-groomed	Physically fit
Logical	Open-minded	Appreciative

Now, choose one quality that resonates with you. How did you come to embody that quality?

In the space below, tell a story that goes along with the quality or the process that you have gone through to embody it.

Choose another quality that you can see in yourself:

Enthusiastic, spirited	Intuitive	Expressive
Amusing	Disciplined	Persistent
Gentle	Sensitive	Industrious
Loyal, committed	Encouraging of others	Organized
Determined	Well-groomed	Physically fit
Logical	Open-minded	Appreciative

Can you think of any other qualities that you have? List them here:

Choose one, and tell the story of how you came to embody that quality.

Practice 2: Core worth vs. outer layers

Adapted from Schiraldi, G. (2001).

Take a moment to reflect on how you feel about yourself right now. Are you full of self-doubt, regret, pride, or satisfaction? Or, is there another way to describe where you are? Try to express in words how you are feeling without exaggerating or minimizing your current reality:

How I feel about myself today:

What has been influencing these feelings lately? *Circle* all that apply:

Physical strength	My marks today	Selfishness
Intelligence	Being right	Selflessness
Academic achievements	Daily self-evaluation	My feelings
Friendliness	Productivity	Capability
Creative ability	Confidence	Who likes me
Past mistakes	My weight	How others treat me
My thoughts	Social media 'likes'	Lack of experience
What my parents say	What I'm wearing	My behaviour

The list you just read through is made up of *outer layers*. These are circumstances, events, and performance that are *separate from your core self*. It has become normal to confuse the external circumstances of our lives with our identity and worth, even though the core of who we are is unchanged by these outer layers.

I am enough: Unconditional human worth

As you consider the list of outer layers in the previous journal entry, are there any that you question? For example, it may be easier for you to see that "My weight" is an outer layer but harder to see "Selflessness" in the same way. Or, you may view "Academic achievements" as central to your self-worth but don't put much importance in "Physical strength." No two people will read the list of qualities in the same way.

It is common to have various reactions to the exercise. Some people are relieved when they realize that all of those outer layers do not determine their worthiness. Others may be surprised to discover that they are basing most of their self-worth on outer layers. You may also find the exercise confusing and wonder, "If my thoughts and behaviour don't determine my worth, what does?"

If you are in doubt that *you are worthy just because you exist,* regardless of the outer layers, take a moment to consider:

What do you think makes a newborn baby worthy of love and affection?

Newborns have not accomplished anything, gotten good or bad marks, or made or lost any friends. And, what about the other outer layers? Babies are quite cute, but they sure haven't figured out how to clean up after themselves or speak politely! Yet, we do not question their worth as human beings. Most people have no trouble loving an infant unconditionally. The reason we love infants so freely is because we do not attribute their worth to the outer layers. Instead, we view them as complete and worthy just as they are at this moment. It's harder to see ourselves in that way, because we have gotten into the habit of looking at the outer layers instead of the core for our sense of worth.

We often blame our core self for our present shortcomings and difficulties, even though *the core is completely separate and unchanged by the outer layers.* Our core self and the outer layers are mutually exclusive. One does not influence the other. The mistakes you have made in your life do not decrease your core worth. The courageous and virtuous things you have done do not increase your core worth.

The outer layers are ever-changing and often outside of our sphere of influence. Who we are today has arisen from many external circumstances such as upbringing by our parents, genetic and environmental conditions, and the expectations of others around us. In contrast, the core of who we are is unchanging and unconditionally worthy. It's like the spirit we love in a newborn baby. Nothing will ever change our core worth, even if all of our outer layers wither away.

As humans, we are worthy because we exist and share a common humanity. Just like newborn babies, all of us have an inner core separate from our fleeting thoughts, urges and feelings. We are no more or less worthy of love than our best friend or a stranger in a coffee shop. We are no more or less worthy of love than we were as an infant.

Practice 3: Getting in touch with your core self

When we are feeling bad about ourselves or frustrated by our present circumstances, we often forget that we share these experiences of suffering with the rest of humanity. It becomes easy to lose touch with our core worth. All people struggle, but when it's us, we often think we're the only ones.

Here are some ways to practice experiencing your core self apart from all the outer layers:

1. Think about the way you might look at a friend if you were trying to comfort him or her. Next time you look in the mirror, make the choice to look into your own eyes with love. When you find your gaze moving toward flaws in your face or clothing, return back to your eyes. See if you can look with true understanding and affection toward your core self. Spend some time here, even if it is uncomfortable.

Reflections after trying this practice:

2. When someone annoys or criticizes you, see if you can picture that person as a tiny baby looking for affection and love. “This person needs love and care just like I do.”

Reflections:

3. Do something you love to do for about an hour. If thoughts arise such as “I should be doing something else” or “this is boring, pointless” etc., see if you can simply observe the thoughts, allow them to be there, and keep doing what you love.

Reflections:

Continued on next page

Getting in touch with your core self (cont'd.)

4. When you are struggling, simply stop and acknowledge that, without trying to change the situation immediately or criticizing yourself for having difficulty. Instead, remind yourself, "Suffering is something that all people experience. I can stay here with this discomfort for a moment."

Reflections after trying this practice:

5. Try an Eastern wisdom practice, called *Tonglen*. The next time you're having a hard time, take a moment to imagine all of the humans in the world who may be struggling in the same way that you are. Breathe in, feeling the pain that you and so many others are feeling. Breathe out, showering all people, including yourself, with love and compassion.

Reflections:

I.
Body Work

First things first: Finding a relaxed state again

When we are in the throes of anxiety, fear, or anger, the body engages its natural *stress response* in order to limit focus and engage with a perceived threat. When this system is engaged, it becomes nearly impossible to soothe ourselves, think rationally, and make decisions congruent with our values. We are stuck with few options: fight, flight, or freeze.

Fortunately, every human body is equipped with a balancing system to the *stress response* called the *relaxation response*. One of the best ways to start caring for your body and begin the process of cultivating self-compassion is to practice engaging this natural, calming process.

It doesn't take too much work to engage the *stress response*, especially when three papers are due and there's a big exam next week. Finding the *relaxation response* when we need it most can be a bit more challenging. It takes practice to bring these two systems into balance.

The next two practices are meant to be calming and soothing, so you may wonder why it's "not working" if you still feel anxious after the first try. Like all practices, the relaxation response become more effective over time. Try the next two practices at least three times before deciding if they are right for you. If you find that you prefer to listen to calming music or a soothing voice other than your own, there are many guided breathing and relaxation tracks on YouTube.

Practice 4: Soothing breathing

One of the most accessible routes to the relaxation response is your natural breath:

1. Find a comfortable seated position
2. Place your hands on your lap or belly
3. Take a slow breath, feeling your belly expand
4. Breathe in 1…2…3
5. Out 1…2…3
6. Experiment with a breath pace that feels soothing to you

You can try this practice as soon as you wake, even before you get out of bed. Try it for two or three minutes each morning for a week. Then, see if it becomes more natural to integrate into your daily routine. It's a great thing to do before any potentially stressful activity (studying, meeting a new group of friends, taking an exam, starting an essay, speaking up in a tough tutorial).

What are some dreaded or stressful things you have to face?

What's an easy way to remind yourself to breathe a bit beforehand?

Practice 5: Finding a calming scent

It can help to pair the *soothing breathing* practice with a soothing scent. The reason for this is because the part of the brain that senses smell is connected to the limbic system, which is responsible for both the stress response and the relaxation response. When a smell associated with calm is near, it encourages the body and mind to soften and release tension.

1. When you're practicing *soothing breathing*, put on your favourite lotion or smell a scented candle.
2. Try this for a week or so right when you get up in the morning.
3. Carry your soothing scent around and use it when you need a calming moment.

What are some of your favourite aromas? (Some popular calming scents include lavender, sandalwood, and chamomile, but any pleasant smell will do.)

Choose one, and try pairing your calming breath work with this scent.

A bit about Sleep

Getting more sleep is one of the best ways to begin expressing love and care for yourself. It's amazing the kinds of problems that can arise from not getting enough: trouble focusing, irritability, depressed mood, anxiety, appetite changes, confusion. The list goes on.

How do you feel when you haven't gotten enough sleep?

Humans get the best sleep when it is dark outside; our systems are designed to sleep when the sun is down. If you are finding yourself tired and unable to fall asleep at night, try *the sleep challenge*, on the next page, for a week or so.

Practice 6: The sleep challenge

- Try setting an alarm (or two) for 20 minutes earlier than usual. It's a lot easier to begin getting up earlier than it is to fall asleep before you're tired. See if you begin to feel drowsier at night after a few days of earlier wake times.

What time do you want to start getting up in the morning?

- Did you have a 'bedtime routine' when you were a kid? Has it disappeared? Find a few low-energy things to do at around the same time and in the same order every night. Some possibilities include reading a novel or magazine, taking a bath, or simply doing some *soothing breathing* (page 16).

What would you like your bedtime routine to include?

- If you like to relax by surfing the net at night, try doing this earlier in the evening, BEFORE your bedtime routine. Less stimulation before bed allows the mind time to settle down.

What time do you want to turn your computer off each night?

- Keep your phone and computer as far away from your bed as you can manage. A lot of smartphones have a "do not disturb" feature that you can program for certain hours. This a great idea if you're tempted to text until you fall asleep.

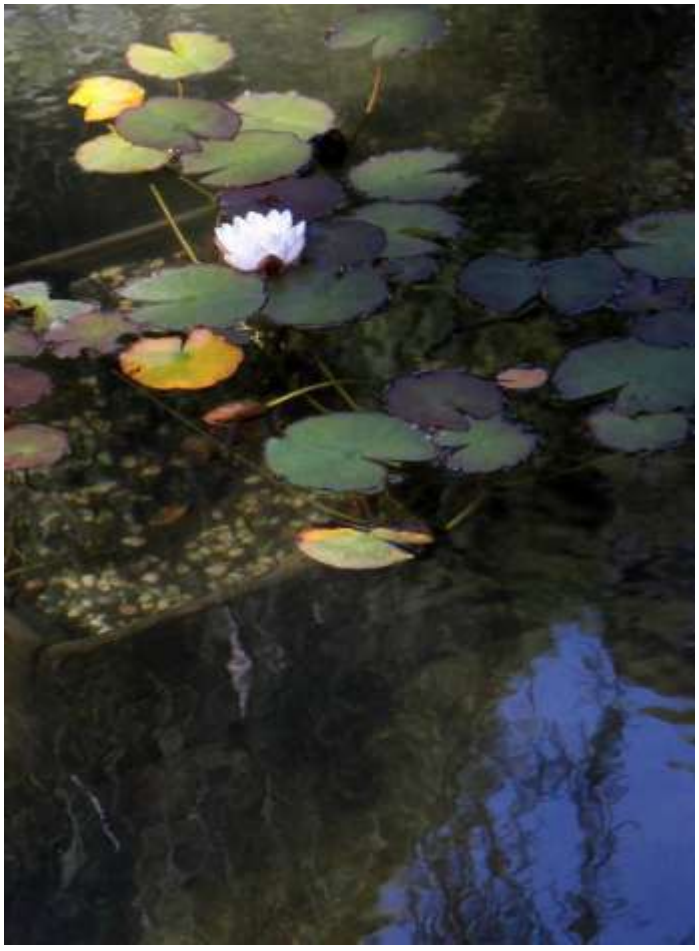
Where can you put your computer and phone while you sleep?

- When in bed trying to fall asleep, imagine yourself sinking deep into the mattress. Feel the covers over you and any other physical sensations you feel. Observe thoughts as they arise, but let them pass and return your attention to your body.

A bit about exercise

For many people, regular exercise has been shown to be *just as effective* as medication for improving mood (Mammen & Faulkner, 2013). We all know it's something we're supposed to do. However, the reality is that knowing something to be true does not make it easy to integrate into our daily lives. Finding the time, energy, and motivation to exercise regularly can be really tough.

Try the next practice, *making a change with compassion*, to encourage yourself to care for your body.



Practice 7: Making a change with compassion

Adapted from Neff, K. (2009). Exercises to Increase Self-Compassion: www.self-compassion.org.

Do you, like many of us, try to motivate yourself to exercise using criticism? What do you tend to say to yourself? (ex: I'm too lazy, too overweight, too impulsive…)

How does this judgment make you feel? What does it make you want to do?

Now, imagine your best friend or a caring mentor or teacher. What is the message of support and encouragement that you need to hear from this friend?

Are there any changes to your feelings or motivation after hearing a different voice in your head?

It will likely take more than this one journal entry to get in the habit of speaking to yourself more kindly. Next time you find yourself trying to motivate yourself with a harsh inner critic, see if you can shift the voice to something more supportive and encouraging. You may begin to feel a bit better and, therefore, be more likely to treat your body with care.

For more practices like this one, see page 26.

Searching for soothing

Most of us have at least one behaviour that we wish we had more control over. Mine happens to be eating too much sugar. I often don't realize that I need to take a step back and observe what I need until *after* half of the carton of ice cream has mysteriously disappeared!

Many of the not-so-healthy behaviours we engage in arise from our attempt to soothe unpleasant feelings and discomfort. We turn to food (either over- or under-eating), drugs, alcohol, screen time or other addictive behaviours when we are uncomfortable but unaware of our actual needs. These 'vices' provide powerful short-term relief, but they thwart our ability to truly soothe ourselves. In addition, addictive behaviours facilitate a vicious cycle of intense urges and crashes, leaving us vulnerable to feelings of emptiness and regret.

A way to free yourself from this deeply unsatisfying process is through awareness and compassion.

Awareness is freedom. Once you know what you need in the moment, it's much easier to soothe yourself. The next practice, *a self-soothe diary*, is designed to help you become more attuned with your body's needs.

Compassion means finding more sustaining practices to care for yourself. It could be the listening ear of a friend, a few words of kindness to yourself, or a short walk. Try the previous practice, *making a change with compassion*, and the Mind and Spirit sections for ideas.

Practice 8:

Here, you can keep track of your needs and the ways that you soothe yourself.

This practice can help you begin acting with more awareness and compassion.

I have an urge to: (over- or under- eat, drink, purge, use drugs, zone out online…)	*Intensity of urge:* (From 1-5)	*Physical needs:* (hungry, thirsty, exhausted, sick…)	*Feelings:* (lonely, bored, angry, sad, scared, excited…)
Eat something sweet	4	Exhausted after a long day	Lonely, bored
Eat more sweets	5	Hungry	Worried/anxious

A self-soothe diary

What I need to soothe myself: (food, water, sleep, connection, play, self-expression…)	*What I did:*	*Feelings after:* (numb, guilty, sad, lonely, peaceful, proud, relieved, satisfied…)	*Do I want to repeat or change this behaviour?*
Sleep, time to relax, a friend	Ate ½ a carton of Rocky Road	Numb, bloated, guilty	Change
Relaxation, breathing	Ate some cereal, listened to some music, soothing breathing (p. 16)	A little less anxious, relieved	Repeat

II.
Mind Work

Practice 9: The inner critic

Think back to a time that you were critical of yourself. It could be a time you made a mistake, didn't meet a personal goal or ideal, or lost your keys or wallet.

If your self-critical thoughts were personified, what would their facial expression look like?

Is the inner critic physically bigger or smaller than you?

What is the critic's tone of voice?

Does he or she remind you of anyone?

Getting in touch with the critical voice in your head can often generate feelings of anger, shame, or sadness. Often people identify their inner critic as a sort of bully. It is common to be reminded of people from your past or present who were critical of you or your efforts.

Practice 10: Imagine

Imagine for a moment that you wake up tomorrow and your inner critic is gone.

How would your world be different? What would you notice first?

Sometimes, we imagine only good things coming from getting rid of the inner critic. But, it's also normal to have some mixed feelings about saying goodbye to that nasty voice in our head:

- I won't achieve what I want for myself.
- It will mean I'm lazy or soft.
- I don't know who I am without the critic.
- I don't deserve to treat myself with kindness.
- I don't know who to replace the critic with.
- I'll miss the critic when it's not there.

What is holding you back from letting your inner critic go?

The critic: Things to consider

If you think: "I don't deserve to be treated with kindness."
Consider this: Yes you do. If you don't believe it or feel it, you can read the section "I am enough: Unconditional human worth" (page 9) and try some of the practices there.

> As humans, we are worthy because we exist and share a common humanity.

If you think: "I don't know who to replace the critic with."

Consider this: The Spirit Work section on page 30 is a good place to go from here if you're struggling with this one. It takes practice to find another way to speak to yourself.

If you think: "I won't achieve my goals. Speaking kindly to myself will make me lazy."
Consider this: Often, we think that we have to be critical toward ourselves in order to reach our goals. We associate success with striving and an inner voice that is harsh and unrelenting. The reality is quite the opposite. The tone of voice that we speak to ourselves affects our motivation and actions. Harsh inner dialogue can actually engage the brain's stress response (see page 15) in the same way that a stressful event can, leaving us feeling stuck, scared, and helpless (Welford, 2013). In contrast, studies have shown that being spoken to with compassion encourages healthier choices (Adams and Leary, 2007). This is because when the relaxation response is engaged, rather than the stress response, we are able to think rationally and make sound decisions.

Practice 11: Looking deeper at the critic

Is your inner critic really the best coach for you?

Why or why not?

If your inner critic does have your best interests at heart, do you think it's going about things in the right way?

If not, how would you prefer that this inner voice speak to you?

III.
Spirit Work

The Concept of Self-Compassion

There is a part of all of us that is insecure, suffering, and in need of compassion. We may find it easier to extend love and understanding to others who are struggling, but we often ignore this need in ourselves. When things go wrong for us, we often either willfully ignore our suffering, or we criticize it. "Get it together!" we say, "Things aren't that bad. What's wrong with you?!"

There is also a part of us that believes when things go wrong for us, it's all our own fault. We often ignore the multitude of external factors outside of our control, and instead simply blame our core self for the problem. Instead of offering love and support to ourselves in these times, our inner critic usually steps up to the plate and replays the familiar bully track.

The truth is, however, that all humans (including you) are worthy of happiness and inner peace. At the very least, we are all worthy of acknowledgement and acceptance when we are suffering. Any care that you would provide to a friend, acquaintance, or even a stranger can be directed inward, especially in times of distress. This is self-compassion.

The steps of self-compassion

Adapted from Neff, K. (2009). Exercises to Increase Self-Compassion: www.self-compassion.org

The three steps of self-compassion are:

1. *Stop to recognize* your pain using mindful awareness: "I am struggling in this moment and that's ok."
2. *Acknowledge* that suffering is part of the human condition: "I am not alone."
3. *Offer* yourself soothing gestures and words of acceptance and love

The next several pages will help you to practice these three steps so you can become more compassionate toward yourself during difficult times.

Mindful awareness

The essence of mindful awareness is to pay attention to your moment-to-moment experience with curiosity and non-judgment. It means loosening your grip on your thoughts and evaluations and experiencing a moment for what it is.

Easier said than done!

Most of us do not spend a lot of time in mindful awareness. Instead, we're accustomed to using old patterns and critical inner dialogue to get us through the day. For example, have you ever gotten to class and forgotten how you got there? Or, have you walked into the grocery store only to forget what you went in to buy?

Distractions (both internal and external) make it very difficult to experience even just one moment. Try not to get discouraged or berate yourself when the mind wanders. Even the most seasoned meditators get lost in thoughts and feelings. It's impossible not to. One of the primary purposes of mindfulness practice is to become more aware of when we're caught up in our thoughts. When you find yourself lost in thought, see if you can bring your attention back to your object of focus *trying not to criticize yourself* for losing focus. Do this again, and again, and again. If you do happen to fall into patterns of judgment and self-blame (we all do at times), notice that it's happening, and try not to judge yourself for judging.

Practice 12: Breath awareness

This is a form of mindfulness practice where the breath is the object of focus. It differs a little bit from the *soothing breathing* practice (page 16). Instead of focusing on finding a calm pace of breathing, the goal here is to simply observe whatever your breath is doing at any moment. There is no desired outcome. The point is to be with whatever is arising in the moment.

1. Take one deep, slow breath.
2. Breathe out as slowly as possible so you can feel the lungs empty. Allow them to refill by themselves.
3. Begin to breathe normally, noticing your rib cage rising and falling.
4. If it helps, you can quietly say to yourself: "rising…falling" or "in...out."
5. Whenever you get lost in thought, see if you can gently acknowledge "thinking" and come back to the sensations of your breath.
6. When you struggle, remind yourself: "whatever is happening now is ok."

Reflections:

Practice 13: Mindful walking

In this practice, the purpose is to be aware of the present moment by focusing on the larger movements of the body. This practice can be very helpful when you find yourself worrying about something like an upcoming test or preoccupied by a past interaction with a friend or professor. You can try it the next time you are walking to class:

1. While you walk, imagine that your attention is *always moving down* toward your legs and feet.
2. Feel any sensations as you walk. You may also notice the wind on your hands or face.
3. Any time you find yourself forgetting about this practice, gently acknowledge you are thinking and come back to the sensations of walking.

Reflections:

Practice 14: Watching emotions come and go

Sometimes, when we allow the distractions of our lives to subside, intense and often unpleasant emotions come to the surface. It is almost as though the practice of moving away from distraction gives these feelings a chance to move toward us.

When this happens, see if you can observe the emotion with some objectivity and come back to your object of focus (breath or walking). If the emotion is strong enough to take all of your attention, you can try sitting with the feeling and watching as it intensifies, changes, and eventually subsides.

This process alone can be healing. Even the most unpleasant and intense emotions do not have to feel permanent and unworkable. Instead, they are moving, shifting, flowing, and always changing.

Reflections:

Practice 15: Finding your compassionate voice

Adapted from Gilbert, P. (2007). The Compassionate Mind Foundation. www.compassionatemind.co.uk

One of the ways to soften the relationship with yourself is to cultivate a compassionate inner voice or image. You can draw on this image any time you are facing a difficult time or when you recognize that you are stuck in self-criticism or shame. While this image is going to be completely personal and unique to you, try to give your image certain qualities, including:

Non-judgment, Warmth, Wisdom, and Strength

How would you like your caring, compassionate image to look? (What kind of posture and facial expressions would this person embody?)

What tone of voice does this compassionate image have?

How would you like your compassionate image to relate to you?

How would you like to relate to your compassionate image?

Practice 16: The letter

Adapted from Neff, K. (2009). Exercises to Increase Self-Compassion: www.self-compassion.org

Choose an area in your life that triggers feelings of inadequacy. Perhaps it could be one of those "outer layers" from page 7 (grades, what my parents say, my weight, capability, who likes me, etc.):

What feelings arise for you when you get in touch with this part of yourself?

Continued on next page

The letter (cont'd.)

Think of an imaginary friend who is able to see your true worth, apart from the externals. If you did the previous exercise, *finding your compassionate voice*, feel free to draw on the image you just wrote about. He or she is unconditionally loving, accepting, and compassionate and can see all of your strengths and shortcomings. Consider how this friend feels about you as a human being; reflect on the fact that you are loved just as you are, no matter your faults and imperfections. This friend understands you and all of the circumstances of your life. There is not an ounce of judgment or criticism in the friend's voice or actions.

Cultivate the image of this friend. Take four belly breaths. Sit with the friend for a while, allowing him or her to shower you with love, acceptance, and compassion.

Now, write a letter to yourself from this friend. If you choose, you can focus the letter on the aspect of yourself you wrote about earlier. What would he or she want you to know about the "flaw" from the perspective of unconditional love and compassion? How would this friend remind you that you, like all humans, are worthy of love and have both strengths and weaknesses? If the friend believes some possible changes might help you, how might he or she go about suggesting these changes in a way that embodies non-judgment, warmth, wisdom, and strength?

Date:

Dear ,

Practice 17: A moment of compassion

Adapted from Neff, K. (2009). Exercises to Increase Self-Compassion: www.self-compassion.org.

The following exercise is based on *the steps of self-compassion* (page 32).

It is very portable and can be used any time you are feeling badly about yourself or are facing a difficult situation.

1. *Stop to recognize your pain* using mindful awareness: "I am struggling in this moment and that's ok."

2. *Acknowledge* that suffering is part of the human condition: "I am not alone."

   Now, place your hands on your heart or belly and feel the warmth you have to share. Get in touch with your *compassionate voice* (page 37).

3. *Offer* yourself soothing words of acceptance and love: "May I be kind to myself in this moment."

   You could also choose a meaningful phrase that speaks to you from the earlier writing exercises. Just ask yourself: "What do I need to hear right now?"

Final reflections

Take a few moments to reflect on your experience of working through this journal. Feel free to use the *practice log* on the next page to remind yourself of the practices that are most helpful to you.

Since beginning this journal practice, what have you have discovered about yourself?

What do you hope to remember going forward?

Practice Log

Here, you can keep track of the practices that resonate with you so you can turn to compassion when things get hard.

Practice	*Page#*	*Helpful? (Y/N)*	*When is it best to use this practice?*
Seeing the goodness	5		
Core worth vs. outer layers	7		
Getting in touch with your core self	11		
Soothing breathing	16		
Finding a calming scent	17		
The sleep challenge	19		
Making a change with compassion	21		
A self-soothe diary	23		
The inner critic	26		
Imagine	27		
Looking deeper at the critic	29		
Breath awareness	34		
Mindful walking	35		
Watching emotions come and go	36		
Finding your compassionate voice	37		
The letter	38		
A moment of compassion	41		

Resources for self-care

Books

Anxiety

Lynne Henderson: *The Compassionate-mind Guide to Building Social Confidence: Using Compassion-focused Therapy to Overcome Shyness and Social Anxiety* (New Harbinger, 2012).

Awareness

Christopher Germer: *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions* (Guilford Press, 2009).

Sharon Salzberg: *Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation: A 28-Day Program* (Workman Publishing, 2010).

Body image and eating

Linda Bacon: *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth about your Weight* (BenBella Books, 2010).

Susan Albers: *Eating Mindfully: How to End Mindless Eating and Enjoy a Balanced Relationship with Food* (Hew Harbinger, 2003).

Perfectionism

Brene Brown: *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Hazelden, 2010).

Pavel Somov: *Present Perfect: A Mindfulness Approach to Letting go of Perfectionism and the Need for Control* (New Harbinger, 2010).

Self-compassion

Kristin Neff: *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself* (William Morrow, 2011).

Continued on next page →

Resources (cont'd.)

Free Smartphone Apps

Headspace: A 10 day program with short, guided meditations
Calm: A simple relaxation resource with guided tracks and calming sounds
HealthyMindsApp: A good mood tracker and journal resource
SmilingMind: Brief Mindfulness practices and meditations

Websites

www.self-compassion.org:

www.theselfcompassionproject.com:

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Self-Compassion:

Referenced Works

Adams, C. & Leary, M. (2007). Promoting self-compassionate attitudes toward eating among restrictive and guilty eaters. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology,* 26, 1120-1144.

Mammen, G. & Faulkner, G. (2013). Physical activity and the prevention of depression: A systematic review of prospective studies. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 45, 649-657.

Schiraldi, G. (2001). *The Self-Esteem Workbook*. Oakland: New Harbinger.

Welford, M (2013). *The Power of Self-Compassion: Using Compassion-focused Therapy to end self-criticism and build self-confidence.* Oakland: New Harbinger.