

Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness

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BRING COMPASSION TO YOUR PAIN

Compassion is a warmhearted sensitivity to suffering—from subtle mental or physical discomfort to agonizing pain—along with the desire to help if you can. Giving compassion lowers stress and calms your body. Receiving compassion makes you stronger: more able to take a breath, find your footing, and keep on going.

You get the benefits of both giving and receiving compassion when you offer it to yourself. Much as you can see the burdens and stresses of others, you can recognize these same things in yourself. Much as you can feel moved by their suffering, you can be touched by your own. You can bring the same support to yourself that you'd provide for someone else. And if there's not much compassion for you coming from others, it's more important than ever to give it to yourself.

This is *not* whining or wallowing in misery. Compassion for yourself is where you start when things are tough, not where you stop. Research by Kristin Neff and others has shown that self-compassion makes a person more resilient, more able to bounce back. It lowers self-criticism and builds up self-worth, helping you to be more ambitious and successful, not complacent and lazy. In compassion for your own pain is a sense of common humanity: we all suffer, we all face disease and death, we all lose others we love. Everyone is fragile. As Leonard Cohen sang: "There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in." Everyone is cracked. Everyone needs compassion.

Challenges to Self-Compassion

Yet self-compassion is challenging for many of us. One reason has to do with how our nervous system works. The brain is designed to be changed by our experiences, particularly *negative* ones, and especially those that occurred in childhood. It's normal to internalize the ways that your parents and others have treated you—which might have included ignoring, belittling, or punishing your softer feelings and longings—and then treat yourself in the same way.