

Well@Work Podcast Season 2, Episode 13: Self-Compassion to Improve Well-Being

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is brought to you by grant from SAMHSA. On this episode, Emily Smith discusses practicing self-compassion and how this can improve your well-being. And now, Emily Smith.

Hello, I'm Emily Smith with the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. Compassion has been described as an emotional response to the suffering of others and the desire to help ease that suffering. Self-compassion means that we turn our view to ourselves and try to eliminate any suffering we may be undergoing. Suffering is a way to describe hurting; the hurt can be physical, like a paper cut, or it can be emotional, like when someone we love dies. Sometimes self-compassion comes easily, but there are times when it can be difficult. Have you heard the expression practice makes perfect? Well compassion is more like practice makes progress, perfection isn't as important as the act of becoming more compassionate. More importantly, compassion helps us to understand that perfection isn't necessary, doing our best is good enough. And, an added benefit, when we treat ourselves with kindness and compassion, it makes it easier to treat others the same way.

I have a friend named Cara. Cara is one of those people who look like they have it all together, she runs a business, works as an advocate for a cause she's passionate about, takes care of her kids plus anyone else in the community who asks for help, and I've never even seen her sweat. But last week she called me up and confessed she's struggling. As we were talking she kept saying she feels like a failure for asking for help, even though she's the first to offer help to others. I told Cara that I can relate to that and then shared how self-compassion has helped me to become less self-critical and focus less on perfection. Here are a few of the ways that can help you become more self-compassionate.

Tip one: find a friend within. On challenging days, try to treat yourself as you would a good friend. Imagine that you are speaking to a friend who is struggling with the same issues you are, what would you like to say to your friend? Whatever it is, you would likely say with kindness and compassion. Do the same for yourself. Acknowledge that you have made a mistake or faced a challenge and then choose to seek solutions, much like you would with a friend.

Tip two: zoom out. It can help to have some perspective as you act with compassion towards yourself and others. Someone once said "We shouldn't compare our behind the scenes with others highlight reels." Our individual experiences are not unique to us, others have experienced many of the same feelings. That sense of common experience can help us to see ourselves as part of something bigger, common humanity, which can lead to greater

compassion for ourselves and others. This sense of perspective can be challenging, we often see our interests first which can be isolating. By zooming out, we can see that others are with us and we are all connected, which can be very comforting.

Tip three: practice mindfulness self-compassion. Mindfulness teaches us to be in the moment, present and aware of our self and our surroundings. Research shows that using mindfulness self-compassion increases compassion, decreases anxiety, and helps improve our focus and our concentration. There are many ways to practice mindfulness self-compassion many take just a few minutes. One of my favorites is called Loving Kindness Meditation, find a link to it in the episode notes.

Tip four: take care of your body. In the body, self-compassion has been found to decrease the effects of inflammation, which has been found to cause some chronic diseases and to speed up the process of aging. Self-compassionate people have also been found to have a healthier lifestyle, this is likely due to the fact that self-compassion helps us to accept that setbacks are inevitable and to keep trying. As a result, we are more likely to eat more healthfully, stick to our plan to quit smoking, or to keep exercising. My final tip is to pay it forward. Being self-compassionate leads to more compassion for others, which has been shown to improve relationships with others. The ripple effect of treating ourselves with compassion, leads us to treat others with compassionate kindness, which can spread beyond our circle of influence, positively influencing many others.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast. Follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work, home, and school.