

Helping Bereaved Understand Their Grief and Cultivate Self Compassion

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Today's Roadmap

- Welcome
- Essentials to Providing Grief Support
- Learn About the Importance of Self Compassion
- Self Compassion for the Caregiver

Essentials to Providing Grief Support

- 1. A Belief in Self as Instrument;
- 2. Empathetic Relationship Qualities;
- 3. An Open Learner Orientation
- 4. Effective Basic Counseling Skills
- 5. A Commitment to Good Self-Care

• *(Alan Wolfelt, PhD., Counseling Skills for Companionship the Mourner: The Fundamentals of Effective Grief Counseling)*



Best Practices in Providing Grief Support

- Know your why.
- Active listening and being present
- Not being judgmental
- Encourage clients to talk about their loved ones.
- Distinguish grief from trauma and treat or refer.



Actions to Support the Grieving Process

- Psychoeducation
- Grief rituals for processing the loss
- Support groups
- Strong social support from friends, family, counselor, and clergy
- Self-care practices.



Rituals (Kenneth Doka)

- Rituals of Continuity
- Rituals of Transition
- Rituals of Affirmation
- Rituals of Intensification



What is Self Compassion (Kristin Neff, Ph.D.)

- Treating yourself in the same way you would treat a friend you love when they are going through a difficult time.
- Self-compassion for grief is the practice of making skillful choices that will reduce suffering and improve the quality of your life.
- Self-compassion is about both awareness and action. Awareness that you are suffering and action to alleviate your own suffering.



Self Compassion in Grief

- An attitude of compassion, care, and kindness for self in body, mind, and spirit rather than harsh self-criticism or a “to-do “ list
- Unique to each person rather than a one size fits all
- A way to ease the effects of life challenges rather than a way to disconnect or build defenses.
- A personal practice that takes time to develop rather than a one-time event.
- An understanding that life is fragile, flawed, and imperfect rather than assuming perfection is the goal in life.





**What does
the research
say?**

Less negative mind states

Less depression

Less anxiety

Less negative self-image/body image

Higher immune function

Less afraid of failure

Increased motivation

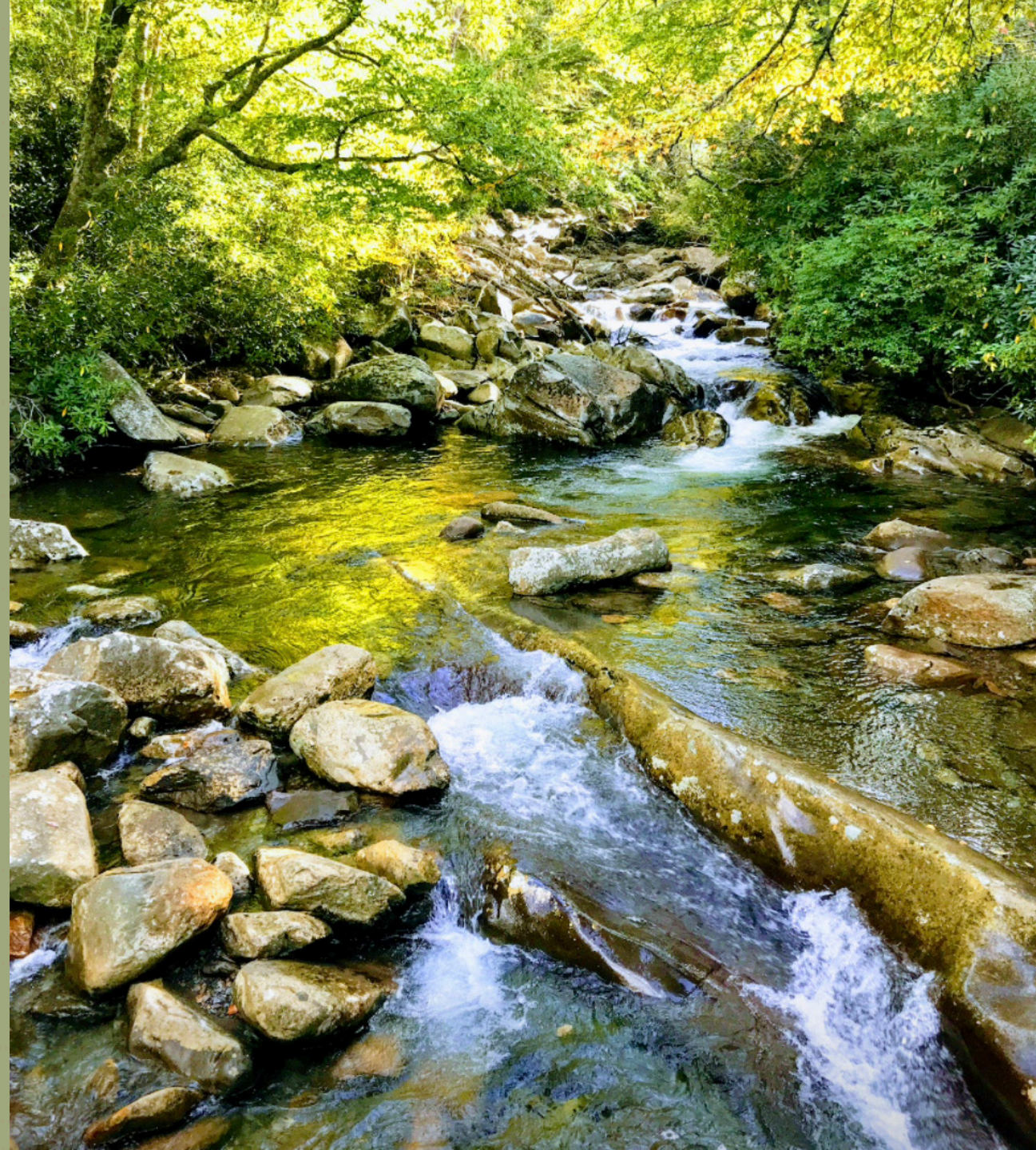
Components of Self Compassion

Self Kindness is being understanding, accepting, and compassionate to oneself rather than harsh or critical while sitting with the pain and suffering of grief.



Components of Self Compassion

Common Humanity is understanding and recognizing how we are more alike than we are different. All humans are flawed works in progress. Everyone makes mistakes, and experiences suffering.



Components of Self Compassion

- **Mindfulness** is being present and riding the waves of emotion as they come. practicing letting go of expectations that things be any different than they are right now.
- If we can't be present to our own grief then how can we offer ourselves kindness and understanding?



Practice: Self Compassion Break

- Think of a situation in your life that is difficult, and that is causing you stress. Call the situation to mind and see if you can feel the stress and emotional discomfort in your body.
- Now, say to yourself:
 - **1. This is a moment of suffering**
 - That's mindfulness.
 - **2. Suffering is a part of life**
 - That's common humanity
- Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands on your chest.
- Say to yourself:
 - **3. May I be kind to myself**
- You can also ask yourself, "What do I need to hear right now to express kindness to myself?" Is there a phrase that speaks to you in your particular situation, such as:
 - *May I give myself the compassion that I need*
 - *May I learn to accept myself as I am*
 - *May I forgive myself*
 - *May I be strong.*
 - *May I be patient*
- This practice can be used any time of day or night, and will help you remember to evoke the three aspects of self-compassion when you need it most.

(www.self-compassion.org)



Bringing all Components Together

- **Be present in your grief:** Mindfulness helps us ride the waves of grief as they come. Acknowledge what exists instead of denying, avoiding or criticizing to get away from the pain.
- **Remember that suffering and grief are both an important and inevitable part of being human:** You are not alone. Your support system can bring connection and even more important validation.
- **Meet your grief with kindness:** Be curious about what you are feeling. Sometimes we resist feelings of guilt, frustration, or relief resulting in them becoming stuck. Offer compassionate warmth, love, and unconditional acceptance



Letting Go of Resistance

- What we resist persists
- Suffering= Pain X Resistance
- What we can feel we can heal
- When we struggle, we give ourselves compassion not to feel better but BECAUSE we feel sad.

(The Mindful Self Compassion Workbook, Neff and Germer)



A serene landscape photograph featuring a dense forest of tall, dark evergreen trees. The sun is setting or rising behind the trees, creating a bright, golden glow that filters through the branches and illuminates the scene. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, dry grasses, some of which are in sharp focus. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and contemplative. The text "Self Compassion for the Caregiver" is overlaid in the center in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

Self Compassion for the Caregiver

“For someone to develop genuine compassion towards others, first he or she must have the ability to connect to one's own feelings and to care for one's own welfare...Caring for others requires care for oneself.” Dalai Lama



INTEGRATING SELF COMPASSION IN PRACTICE

- Research shows that self-compassion skills can benefit healthcare professionals and caregivers, allowing them to experience greater satisfaction in their caregiving roles, less stress, more emotional resilience, and decreased burnout.





Empathic Response

- **Empathy definition:** empathy is our feeling of awareness toward other people's emotions and an attempt to understand how they feel.
- Caregivers who stay in empathy have more negative effects: self-related, poor health and burnout, withdrawal, avoiding
- **Compassion definition:** compassion is an emotional response to empathy or sympathy and creates a desire to help
- Caregivers who grow compassion have more positive effects: other related concern, good health, a desire to help

Self Care vs Self Compassion

- Self Care is important, but it is what is provided OUTSIDE of providing care.
- Self Compassion can happen WHILE providing care.



Growing Self Compassion to Reduce Burnout

- Creating a Self-Compassion-Infused Self-Care Plan (Coaston, 2017)
- **Interventions for the Mind**
- *Mindfulness Practices, Professional Development, Intentional Positivity, Creative Writing, Journaling*
- **Interventions for the Body**
- *Nutrition, Exercise, Yoga, Environment*
- **Interventions for the Spirit**
- *Prayer, Finding Meaning, Connecting with the Earth, Expressive Arts*



Growing Self Compassion to Reduce Burnout

- **Several weeks of Loving Kindness Meditation (Compassion meditation)**
 - Increased brain activation in the compassion area (neuroplasticity)
 - Improved mood & well-being
 - Increased resilience (coping)
 - Increase in true altruism
 - Fostered compassion for the distress of others
- **Compassionate Body Scan**
- **Loving Touch**
- **Loving Kindness Phrases**
- **Self Reflection Journaling**



Thank you

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Resources

- Self-Compassion as Self Care for Grief: How being kind to yourself reduces suffering after loss, Heather Stang, MA
- [Gift of Self-Compassion Course: How to Tame Your Inner Critic and Increase Your Power to Thrive](#)
- Excellent website by Kristin Neff: www.self-compassion.org
- MSC: Mindful Self-Compassion is an 8 week program designed by Kristin Neff and Chris Germer to help individuals cultivate self-compassion. <http://centerformsc.org>.
- [Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself](#) by Kristin Neff, Ph.D.
- [The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions](#) by Christopher Germer, Ph.D.
- [Self-Compassion Step by Step](#) (audio training by Dr. Neff)
- Mobile Apps (more broadly for mindfulness of emotions):
 - [Calm](#)
 - [Moodnotes](#)
 - [Stop, Breathe, & Think](#)
 - [Insight Timer](#) (search guided meditations for "self-compassion")
- <https://www.hope-wellness.com/blog/how-to-move-through-grief-and-loss-with-kindness-and-self-compassion>