



USE WITH:

Individual students, small group, or whole class



GRADE LEVEL:

Middle school or high school



CONTEXT:

Remote friendly

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

# Treat Yourself With Compassion

Encourage students to extend compassion to themselves in the same way they would to a friend.

Created by [Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley](#)

## Description:

Students will engage in an exercise to illustrate how they might treat themselves less kindly than they would treat a friend during difficult times. This can help them to be kinder to themselves and deal more effectively with challenges.

Prep time needed:

**5 minutes**

Est. time to complete:

**15 minutes**

## Steps:

1. Ask students whether they've ever noticed how they respond to themselves when something doesn't go well, such as failing a test, letting a friend down, or forgetting to keep an appointment. Do they feel sad or angry at themselves?
2. Explain to students that research suggests people are usually harder on themselves than they are on others. Rather than motivating us to succeed, this often makes a mistake or stressful situation even more stressful, to the point that we'll simply avoid new or challenging experiences for fear of failing and facing a new wave of self-criticism.
3. Tell students that they're going to do an exercise that will help change the way they respond to themselves when they make a mistake.

4. Have students take out a sheet of paper or open a blank document on their computer. Provide opportunities for students to capture their thoughts in other ways, such as art, video, or audio.
5. Tell them: First, think about a time when a close friend of yours felt really badly or was struggling in some way. For example, maybe they got a bad grade, were teased by someone, or their parents were getting divorced. How do you respond to your friend in these situations (if you're at your best)? Please record what you typically do and say, and note the tone in which you talk to your friend.
6. Now have students think about times when they felt badly about themselves or were struggling. Ask them: How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Please record what you typically do and say, and note the tone in which you respond to yourself.
7. Ask students if they notice a difference, and if so, why. What factors or fears lead them to treat themselves and others so differently?
8. Have students record how they think they would feel if they responded to themselves when they're suffering in the same way they typically respond to a close friend.
9. Remind students that the next time they are struggling with something, they can try treating themselves like a good friend and see what happens.

### **Tips for Educators:**

- Some students may find it more challenging than others to treat themselves with compassion. Use the knowledge you have about your students to support them according to where they might be in the process of showing themselves compassion.
- Consider modeling this exercise for students by sharing a completed reflection to make them feel more comfortable.

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### Inspired by:

1. Neff, K. D. & Germer, C. K. (2013). A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the mindful self-compassion program. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(1), 28-44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.21923>