

The Art of Self-Compassion

Sr. Sophia Ali, BA (Psychology), BSW, RSW, PBDM

Not too long ago, I had the opportunity to take a course on Self-Compassion. Throughout the course, I found myself not actually enjoying it as much as I thought I would. I fell asleep during many meditations (which was an act of self-compassion, I later learned) and was not able to practice this fully. I found the course somewhat “dry” and “slow” but wanted to make sure I completed it so I stuck through it all. However, once the course was done and about a year later, I realized how much I changed. My mother often jokes that the course taught me how to say no. However, what I learned did change my perception about things. I was able to remember these practices during difficult moments and my reactions to many stressful moments were with calmness and compassion. Surprisingly, the art of self-compassion really did change me.

Whenever we have a friend who is experiencing a challenging situation, we are able to provide them with the support and kindness they need. Even if we do not have the answers to their problems, we listen, we talk and we continue to provide them with compassion. But how many times do we do that with ourselves? How many times are we kind to ourselves when we are going through a difficult time? Instead of being kind, we are usually harsh to ourselves and create higher expectations of how we should behave, how we should be able to fix the problem and that we ourselves are somehow guilty of the situation we are in. Allah (SW) states in the Quran: It is he who created death and life to test which of you are best in deed, for he is the Almighty, the Forgiving. Surat al-Mulk 67:2

As Muslims, we must remind ourselves that we will have tests. How we deal with those times is the true test but, how difficult is it sometimes to be patient? How difficult is it to not blame? How difficult is it to not hurt? These are all reactions that we all have when we are tested. The act of self-compassion allows us to acknowledge the pain we are going through. It does not change the situation but it gives us the opportunity to be aware of the painful situation and to tell ourselves, “it is okay.”

Our days and times are stressful. With the

advancement of technology, our workdays that were once 9-5, now never end. Stressors in our environment create situations where we feel overwhelmed. Taking some time to acknowledge days where we have anxiety because we have medical appointments, or we know we have a busy day at work, will help us recognize our challenging moments. Telling ourselves, “today will be a difficult day for me, but that is ok,” is the first step in being kind to yourself.

Once we are able to recognize the challenge and acknowledge it, we can then see what we need ourselves. Sometimes we need to go to the appointment with someone, and other times we need to be able to enjoy a walk by ourselves. But, only we can identify what we need. Others can provide suggestions but at the end, it is me who knows what I need for me. For some of us, culturally we have been trained to not say no. Sometimes our biggest need is to be able to say no and doing it with no guilt. No to the dinner party invite that would have kept you out of the house all weekend, no to the board meeting and no to that email that needed an immediate response. How do you do this without feeling guilty? Just remind yourself, “This is a challenge, and I may feel guilty but that is okay. I need to do this for me.”

If we were all able to take care of ourselves mentally and physically, we will be able to provide support for others. Does this mean we should always say no as an act of compassion? No, but we all have good moments where we are strong and weak moments. When we have our good moments, we are able to do all that we need to do and when we have weak moments, we know that we need to be kind to ourselves.

Kristen Neff, a guru in self-compassion, tells us that self-compassion is not self-pity. Self-pity is individual focused and self-compassion is humanity focused. With self-compassion, we recognize that others are also suffering and are also challenged. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence. Self-indulging is where you are defending your actions to watch TV or lie in bed all day. While that may be what you may need, it is done within a

limit with self-compassion. Your goal is to love you and that may not mean sleeping all day. Self-compassion is not self-esteem. It can impact self-esteem but these two things are vastly different. (www.self-compassion.org)

There are many ways to incorporate self-compassion. Each individual will find what works for him/her and what does not. Some suggestions are:

- Mindfulness exercises
- Breathing techniques
- Writing a letter to yourself
- Acknowledging your emotions
- Comfort yourself with a physical gesture, such as hand over your heart.
- Use compassionate wording:
 - ◆ This is a moment of being tested. Suffering is part of life. Can you add bullets to these points please
 - May I be kind to myself in this challenging moment?
 - May I give myself the compassion I need?
- Forgive yourself
- Accept the situation and the emotions
- Don't resist the pain. Accept it. Be with it. Don't change it. Allow for it.
- Be gentle with yourself when you make a mistake.
- Be your own best friend.
- Tell yourself you love YOU.

- Use loving words; don't be harsh to yourself.
- Remind yourself of the power of Allah (SW) - who is:
 - o Al Mutakabbir (*The Greatest Need to get the Arabic words*)
 - o Al Ghaffaar (*The Ever Forgiving*)
 - o Al Mu'izz (*The Giver of Honor*)
 - o Al Latif (*The Subtly Kind*)
 - o Al Ghafur (*The All Forgiving*)
 - o Al Muqit (*The Nourisher*)
 - o Al Wadud (*The Loving, the Kind One*)
 - o Al 'Afuww (*The Pardoner, the Effacer of Sins*)

Sometimes, though, we are challenged so much that we cannot find it in our hearts to be compassionate to ourselves. These are the times that we need to consider counseling and talking to someone who can help us work through our challenging moments. Counseling does not mean that we are weak or incapable of handling our issues; it means that we are wise enough to know when we need help so that we are able to be kind and compassionate to ourselves.

There is enough unkindness in the world - probably more than we really need. It is time to add kindness and compassion wherever and whenever we can - and we need to start by adding it to our own world, own lives and directing it to ourselves.

Facts about Confidentiality

Sr. Sophia Ali, BA (Psychology), BSW, RSW, PBDM

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1) Did you know that confidentiality is the act of keeping something secret?</p> <p>2) Did you know that all health care practitioners who are registered with their licensing bodies must adhere to confidentiality?</p> <p>3) Did you know that if health care practitioners did not adhere to confidentiality that their licensing body can investigate their practice, and if found guilty, could lose their license?</p> <p>4) Did you know that confidentiality means that we cannot discuss anyone's</p> | <p>case without his/her permission in the community?</p> <p>5) Did you know that organizations should have their own policies around confidentiality?</p> <p>6) Did you know that you have a right to let your health care provider know who you would like and would not like them to discuss your health care needs with?</p> <p>7) Did you know these are the only times when confidentiality may be broken:</p> <p>a. When or if the client may be an immediate danger to himself or others</p> | <p>b. When or if the client is endangering a population that cannot protect itself, such as the case of child or elder abuse</p> <p>c. As required by federal or provincial laws</p> <p>8) Did you know that the Quran mentions confidentiality also?</p> <p>“O you who have believed, do not betray Allah and the Messenger or betray your trusts while you know [the consequence]” [Quran, 8:27]</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|