

# Self-Compassion — Workbook

This workbook turns the Self-Compassion course into a real, measured practice built on Kristin Neff's three-component framework. Each section follows a course module, giving you the exercises, worksheets, and checklists to understand self-compassion, run the named Mindful Self-Compassion practices, soften your inner critic, and track your own change over weeks. Fill it in as you go, and the editable templates become your reusable self-compassion journal, Self-Compassion Scale tracker, and inner-critic transformation planner for the long term.

## What Self-Compassion Is: Neff's Three Components

Clarify what self-compassion actually is, separate it from self-esteem and self-pity, and understand the threat-and-care science behind it.

### Exercise: The Friend Test: How You Treat Yourself Versus a Friend

Use Neff's central exercise to expose the gap between how you treat a struggling friend and how you treat yourself. Be specific and honest, and let the contrast motivate the practice.

- Think of a time a close friend was struggling or had failed. What did you say to them, and in what tone of voice?

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- Now recall a recent time you struggled or fell short. What did you say to yourself, and in what tone?

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- What is the difference between the two responses, in words and in tone, and what would change if you treated yourself the way you treated your friend?

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- Which of the three components were you missing toward yourself: self-kindness, common humanity, or mindfulness?

### Worksheet: Map a Hard Moment onto the Three Components

Take one recent painful or stressful moment and break your reaction down by Neff's three component pairs, so you can see exactly which one to train. Compare your actual response with its self-compassionate opposite.

The hard moment (what happened)

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Self-judgment present? What harsh thing did I say to myself?

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Self-kindness alternative: what a kind friend would say instead

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Isolation present? Did I feel uniquely alone or defective?

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Common-humanity alternative: how this connects me to others who struggle

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Over-identification present? Was I swept away or exaggerating?

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Mindfulness alternative: the plain, balanced statement of what is true

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### Checklist: Clear Up the Confusions and Set Expectations

- I understand self-compassion is not self-esteem; it does not require succeeding or being above average
- I understand self-compassion is not self-pity; mindfulness keeps suffering in proportion and common humanity connects me to others
- I understand self-compassion is not self-indulgence; it wants my long-term wellbeing, like a caring parent
- I know harsh self-criticism activates the threat system and stress hormones, while self-compassion activates the soothing system
- I accept self-compassion is a trainable skill that takes consistent practice, not an instant transformation
- I will not use self-compassion to deny or gloss over real pain or real problems

## The Core Mindful Self-Compassion Practices

Practise the specific exercises from Neff and Germer's program: the Self-Compassion Break, soothing touch, the compassionate letter, and the compassionate friend.

### Checklist: The Self-Compassion Break, Step by Step

- Bring to mind a situation causing stress and let myself feel it in my body
- Mindfulness: say a phrase such as This is a moment of suffering, or This is hard right now
- Common humanity: say a phrase such as Suffering is part of life, other people feel this too, I am not alone
- Place a hand over my heart or use another soothing touch, feeling the warmth and gentle pressure
- Self-kindness: say a phrase such as May I be kind to myself, or What do I need to hear right now?
- Sit for a breath or two and let the gesture and words settle before returning to my day
- Use it in the moment, the instant I notice stress or self-criticism, not only during set practice times

### Worksheet: Find Your Phrases and Your Soothing Touch

Personalise the Self-Compassion Break so the words feel true in your own voice and the touch genuinely soothes your nervous system. Test several options and keep your favourites as your go-to cues.

My mindfulness phrase (names the pain without exaggerating)

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My common-humanity phrase (connects me to others)

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My self-kindness phrase (what I most need to hear)

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Soothing gestures I tried (hand on heart, self-hug, holding one hand, hand on cheek)

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The gesture that genuinely felt comforting and safe

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Did backdraft (old pain, tears, resistance) arise? What did I notice?

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How I will ground and ease off if backdraft surfaces (breath, feet on floor, shorter practice)

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### Exercise: Write Your Compassionate Letter

Write to yourself from the perspective of an imaginary friend who loves you unconditionally and sees your whole self. Use these prompts to draft the letter, then set it aside and read it back a day later.

- Name one thing about yourself that makes you feel inadequate, ashamed, or not good enough.

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- Imagine a friend who loves you completely and sees both your strengths and flaws. From their voice, how do they acknowledge the pain you feel about this, honestly?
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- From that voice, how do they remind you that this struggle is part of being human and shared by many, rather than a unique defect?
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- From that voice, what gentle understanding and what kind encouragement to grow do they offer, and what do you need most to hear?
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### Exercise: Meet Your Compassionate Friend

Borrow warmth from an imagined compassionate presence when self-directed kindness feels hard to access. Settle somewhere quiet, close your eyes, and work through these prompts.

- Who or what is your compassionate figure: a wise mentor, a beloved grandparent, a spiritual figure, a kind animal, or an idealised being of pure warmth?
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- Picture this presence with you. What do you sense about its care, its expression, its tone?
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- If it could say to you exactly what you most need to hear right now, what would it say?
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- How might you remember that this compassionate presence is an inner resource you carry, not only an imagined other?
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## Building and Sustaining a Daily Practice

Build a self-compassion habit that survives busy weeks, applies in real life, and avoids the traps that make it stall.

### Worksheet: Write Your Implementation Intention and Habit Stack

Turn intention into an automatic response using the if-then plan and habit stacking from the course. Anchor both an informal trigger and a short formal practice to cues you will reliably meet.

Informal practice I am starting with (usually the Self-Compassion Break)

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Trigger implementation intention: when I notice [self-criticism or stress], I will [practice]

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Short formal practice I will do daily (e.g. three minutes of loving-kindness or a compassionate body scan)

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Existing rock-solid habit I will anchor the formal practice to (e.g. after morning coffee)

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My physical self-compassion cue (e.g. one kind breath every time I wash my hands)

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Tiny minimum version for a bad day (e.g. one hand-on-heart and one kind phrase)

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How I will respond to a missed day without self-criticism

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## Exercise: Transform Your Inner Critic

Rather than attacking your inner critic, get curious about what it is trying to do and meet the fear underneath it. Pick one recurring self-criticism and work through these prompts.

- Write down exactly what your inner critic says, word for word, and describe its tone of voice.

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- What is this voice afraid would happen if it stopped, and what is it ultimately trying to protect you from?

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- What does the part of you being criticised actually need to hear right now?

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- Compose a compassionate response that meets the same fear with warmth and honesty, without agreeing with the cruelty.

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## Checklist: Self-Compassion First Aid for Daily Life

- After a mistake: name it plainly (mindfulness), remember everyone fails (common humanity), then ask what helps next (self-kindness)
- For shame: counter the I-am-uniquely-defective story with common humanity, shame's direct antidote
- For difficult emotions: soften around the feeling in the body, soothe with touch and a kind word, and allow it to be there
- Label the feeling out loud or silently, such as this is anxiety, to calm the threat response
- When caring for others, give compassion to myself too so the well does not run dry
- Run a thirty-second Self-Compassion Break the instant a hard feeling or harsh thought lands
- End the day with a gentle stocktake: where did I struggle, did I meet it with criticism or compassion, how could I be kinder tomorrow?

## Checklist: Avoid the Self-Compassion Traps

- I will go gently with backdraft, keep practices short, ground myself, and seek support if trauma is involved
- I will not turn self-compassion into a goal I flog myself for failing; failing at it is itself a cue to practise it
- I will use fierce self-compassion, boundaries and action, rather than soothing myself about a harmful situation I should change (no spiritual bypassing)
- I will let self-compassion acknowledge real pain rather than gloss it over (no toxic positivity)
- I will remember the evidence shows self-compassion increases responsibility and motivation, so I will not stay harsh out of fear of going soft
- If exercises feel hollow or worsen self-criticism in distress, I will scale back, be gentle, and seek appropriate support

## Measuring Your Self-Compassion and Seeing the Change

Establish a baseline with the Self-Compassion Scale, run a personal experiment, and interpret honestly whether the practice is working for you.

## Checklist: Set Up Your Self-Compassion Experiment

- Get the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS or the 12-item SCS-SF) and scoring instructions from self-compassion.org
- Take a baseline by scoring the SCS, and a short mood or wellbeing scale, for three to seven days before starting
- Note your six subscale scores, not just the overall, so you can see which component is weakest
- Choose core practices: the Self-Compassion Break informally plus one short daily formal practice
- Set the period: at least four weeks, up to eight, matching the MSC course length
- Decide in advance what would count as success and write it down
- Change only one major thing at a time, and plan to retest at the end and again two to four weeks later

## Worksheet: Baseline, Subscales, and Target Worksheet

Record your starting scores by subscale and your pre-set definition of success before you begin. Leave the final and change columns blank until the experiment ends, and compute differences yourself.

Baseline overall SCS score (1 to 5 average)

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Baseline self-kindness subscale

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Baseline self-judgment subscale (reverse-scored)

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Baseline common-humanity subscale

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Baseline isolation subscale (reverse-scored)

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Baseline mindfulness subscale

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Baseline over-identification subscale (reverse-scored)

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Baseline wellbeing or mood score

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Date baseline taken

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The one or two subscales I most want to improve

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My pre-set definition of success (specific scores and felt changes)

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Final overall SCS score (fill in at the end)

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Change in overall score (calculate yourself at the end)

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### Exercise: Interpret Your Results Honestly

When your weeks of data are in, read the trend rather than any single point and decide your next move. Pay special attention to the negative subscales, which often shift first.

- Looking across all your weekly scores, is your overall self-compassion drifting up, flat, or down, ignoring any single noisy point?
- Did the negative subscales, self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification, fall? These often change before the positive ones rise.
- Did you meet the definition of success you set in advance, and are you catching self-criticism earlier in daily life?
- If a subscale stayed stuck, which targeted practice will you add, for example more soothing touch for self-kindness, common-humanity phrases for isolation, or affect labelling for over-identification?

### Checklist: Build the Lifelong Relationship

- Keep the Self-Compassion Break as a constant informal reflex, anchored to moments of self-criticism
- Return to formal meditation or the compassionate letter when I need a deeper refill or a hard season hits
- Train my weakest component specifically rather than practising generically
- Include fierce self-compassion, boundaries and action, not only tender soothing

[ ] Re-measure with the SCS once or twice a year to check the habit is holding

[ ] Treat the practice as a relationship to tend, allowed to ebb and return, not a streak to protect

## Your Action Plan

1. Run the friend test and map a recent hard moment onto Neff's three components to see which one to train first
2. Get the Self-Compassion Scale from [self-compassion.org](http://self-compassion.org) and take a baseline, recording all six subscales, before starting
3. Learn and personalise the Self-Compassion Break: one phrase per component and a soothing touch that genuinely calms you
4. Write an implementation intention so the Break fires the instant you notice self-criticism, and habit-stack one short formal practice
5. Write and read back a compassionate letter to yourself about something that makes you feel inadequate
6. Transform one recurring inner-critic message by finding its fear and composing a warm, honest response
7. Use the daily first-aid moves for mistakes, shame, and difficult emotions, and end each day with a gentle stocktake
8. Watch for the traps, backdraft, the striving trap, and spiritual bypassing, and use fierce self-compassion when action is needed
9. Run the practice as a four-to-eight-week N-of-1 experiment, re-scoring the SCS weekly against a pre-set target
10. Retest at the end and weeks later, read the trend and the negative subscales, train your weakest component, and settle into a lifelong rhythm











