



## Why Being Hard on Yourself Is Holding You Back

### THE SURPRISING POWER OF SELF-COMPASSION

By Katy Romita, Director of One Small Stone

If I could have flashing neon lights on this article, I would. Self-compassion is such a powerful way to help ourselves that it deserves real attention.

That said, I wouldn't be surprised if you're rolling your eyes and thinking something similar to what I thought when I first heard about self-compassion: Self-compassion is weak. Self-compassion is for people who don't want to accomplish very much and are just looking to give themselves a pass.

It turns out that social scientists, like Dr. Kristin Neff and Dr. Chris Germer, have studied this and found that the opposite is true: when we practice self-compassion, we achieve more than when we berate ourselves. Self-compassion creates room for learning, resilience, and growth.

Self-compassion can support us in parenting, careers, relationships—any area of life.

**Example:** Here's a comparison of two scenarios from sports that helped me understand how it can work. See what you think!

**SCENARIO 1:** You play terribly in an important tennis match. When you walk off the court, your coach says: "Wow, you were awful. I can't believe how badly you played. Your playing was pathetic and no one will ever want to play with you again."

**SCENARIO 2:** Now imagine this instead. You walk off the court—after playing the exact same mistake-filled match—and the coach says: "That looked like a really hard match for you. I can see you were struggling. We've all had days like that. Take tonight to get some rest, and tomorrow let's regroup to see what we can learn from this."

It probably won't surprise you that research shows the second scenario—the one with a compassionate coach—leads to better outcomes. This isn't just true for external coaches; it's also true for the way we talk to ourselves. Being a compassionate coach to yourself isn't weak. It creates the conditions for strength to emerge.

#### TRY IT

When you're feeling bad and notice yourself slipping into negative self-talk (which is a habit for many of us – so if you relate, you're in good company!), try walking through these three steps of self-compassion, based on Dr. Kristin Neff's research.

Note: It can help to practice when you're not very upset, so it's easier to access when emotions are running high. Call to mind a small, everyday mistake (nothing major or traumatic) for a trial run through the three steps below:

#### 1. MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness here means clearly acknowledging what happened without repressing it and without spiraling into an overblown story. Simply name the hard moment. You might say to yourself things like, "That was really hard for me." "I messed up." "I feel bad right now."

#### 2. COMMON HUMANITY

Common humanity reminds us that everyone makes mistakes. Struggling doesn't mean you're flawed—it means you're human. Somewhere, someone else has made a similar mistake and felt a similar way. You might say: "I'm not alone." "Other people have felt this way." "This is part of being human."

#### 3. TALK TO YOURSELF LIKE A GOOD FRIEND

Offer yourself the same words you'd say to someone you care about. From the mindfulness step, notice what you're feeling and what kind of support would help. Then, say those words to yourself. This might mean saying things like, "I'm so sorry you are feeling this way." "You are still a wonderful person." "Tomorrow will be better." It may feel awkward at first, but like any skill, it gets easier with practice.

These 3 steps are not so different from the coach in the second scenario. She acknowledged the challenge, shared common humanity, and gave support. That's it. We're just learning to coach ourselves in a way that leaves room for growth.

Self-compassion doesn't mean letting yourself off the hook or ignoring mistakes. It means meeting yourself with honesty and kindness so you can actually learn and move forward. Just like a good coach, a compassionate inner voice helps you recover faster, try again, and grow stronger over time. It helps us to be our best selves, which not only feels good but also is the best for those around us. It all ripples out.

Katy Romita helps people stop "shoulding" all over themselves and start reconnecting with their own innate wisdom and beauty. Known for her warm, down-to-earth style, Katy makes calm and clarity accessible, even in the chaos, through meditation, therapeutic art, sound healing, yoga nidra, and reiki.

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