

MINDFUL SELF-COMPASSION

Skills Training Program and Pilot Study

Led by Christopher Germer, PhD and Susan Pollak, EdD

The Arlington Center
369 Massachusetts Ave.
Arlington, MA 02474
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Wednesdays, 7:30-9:30 PM
March 9, 16, 23, 30; April 6, 13, 20, 27
Retreat: Saturday, April 9, 1:00-5:00 PM

*For someone to develop genuine compassion towards others,
first he or she must have a basis upon which to cultivate compassion,
and that basis is the ability to connect to one's own feelings and to care for one's own welfare...
Caring for others requires caring for oneself.*

- Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama -

How do you typically react to difficulties in life—work stress, feeling rejected, physical problems, or financial hardship? As human beings, most of us instinctively fight negative experiences and find fault in ourselves when things go wrong: “This shouldn’t be happening!” “What’s the matter with me!?” Unfortunately, this tendency just adds stress to our lives and the critical self-talk defeats us before we know what’s happening. For example, the more we struggle to fall sleep, the harder it is to sleep; fighting with anxiety makes us feel worried all the time; and blaming ourselves for feeling bad just makes us depressed. But what would happen if, instead, you took a moment to calm and comfort yourself when you felt bad, just *because* you felt bad—much like you’d do for others? In other words, what if you learned the art of *mindful self-compassion*?

Self-compassion is a skill that can be learned by anyone, even those who didn’t receive enough affection in childhood or who find it embarrassing to be kind to oneself. Self-compassion is actually a courageous mental attitude that stands up to harm—the harm that we inflict on ourselves every day by overworking, overeating, overanalyzing, and overreacting. With mindful self-compassion, we’re better able to recognize when we’re under stress and face what’s happening in our lives (mindfulness) and to take a kinder and more sustainable approach to life’s challenges. Self-compassion gives emotional strength and resilience, allowing us to recover more quickly from bruised egos to admit our shortcomings, forgive ourselves, and respond to ourselves and others with care and respect. After all, making mistakes is part of being human. Self-compassion also provides the support and inspiration required to make necessary changes in our lives and reach our full potential.

Research has shown that self-compassion greatly enhances emotional wellbeing. It boosts happiness, reduces anxiety and depression, and can even help you stick to your diet and exercise routine. And it’s easier than you think. Most of us feel compassion when a close friend is struggling. What would it be like to receive the same caring attention whenever *you* needed it most? All that’s required is shift in the direction of our attention—recognizing that as a human being, you, too, are a worthy recipient of compassion.

In this program, you’ll learn:

- how to stop being so hard on yourself
- how to handle difficult emotions with greater ease
- how to motivate yourself with encouragement rather than criticism
- how to transform difficult relationships, both old and new
- mindfulness and self-compassion practices for home and everyday life
- the theory and research behind mindful self-compassion

- how to become your own best teacher

The Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) program is under development by Kristin Neff, the pioneering researcher in the field of self-compassion (www.Self-Compassion.org), and Christopher Germer, a clinical psychologist who specializes in mindfulness and compassion-based psychotherapy (www.MindfulSelfCompassion.org). It consists of eight, weekly, 2-hour sessions in a classroom/discussion group format, plus a 4-hour retreat. The current program in Arlington, MA will be co-led by Drs. Chris Germer and Susan Pollak. For more information about the instructors, please go to www.MeditationAndPsychotherapy.org

Spring 2011 Program

This will be the 4th time the MSC program is conducted. Past participants have found the program to be very useful in their daily lives, and pre-post evaluations indicated that the program significantly enhanced psychological well-being.

The Spring 2011 program is both a training program and a research study, so participants will be asked to commit to attending every session (one absence is okay) and to practice mindfulness or self-compassion exercises at least 40 minutes per day for the duration of the course, either formally at home or informally during the day. Practice is important for developing a new skill, but it's also important that the practice be enjoyable and easily integrated into your daily activities. Supporting your practice is the main focus of this training program.

Participants will receive:

- Weekly 2-hour classes in mindful self-compassion, plus a 4-hour retreat
- A complementary copy of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*
- Weekly handouts – meditation instructions and self-compassion exercises
- Two optional small-group meetings, one with each instructor, between sessions 2-5
- Access to a “google group” dedicated to supporting self-compassion practice between sessions
- An optional, private meeting with an instructor
- 6-month reunion (optional) meeting

The group will be limited to 26 participants. It will take place in seminar style, with chairs arranged in a circle. The MSC program is not group therapy, although participants are encouraged to share their experiences on the path of mindful self-compassion. The Spring 2011 program is exclusively for personal growth and development, not professional training. A professional training program will occur at a later date.

The Research Component

Participants are kindly asked commit to complete online outcome measures (1 hour) within one week of beginning and ending the MSC program, to fill out a weekly practice logs, complete an online mini-survey twice during the program (5 min), and also a 6-month follow-up survey (20 min).

Waiting List Control Group

Applicants will be accepted on a first-come-first-served basis, but 50% of the accepted applicants will be randomly assigned to a waiting list control group. People in the control group will be offered the MSC program in the Fall 2011 at no cost, or they can participate in a more convenient later program. In exchange, they need to complete the pre- and post- program evaluations in the spring as if they were in the group itself. (The Fall 2011 program will take place on Sept 14, 21; Oct 5, 12, 26; Nov 2, 9, 16. Retreat: Oct 22, 1-5 PM.) We need to have a truly random selection of participants in each group, so please do not ask for special consideration in this matter. Your understanding is greatly appreciated!

If you're interested in joining this program, please contact Chris Germer at ckgermer@gmail.com for an application. And, thanks!