



Coaching Network Talks

Self-Compassion and Giftedness

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March 22, 2016

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1. What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion can be defined as treating yourself kindly, the way you would treat a good friend. More specifically it consists of two specific skillsets:

- 1) being able to notice your suffering and turn towards it instead of avoiding it
- 2) being able to find an inner warmth towards yourself and alleviate your suffering

This can for example mean something like:

- talking to a supportive friend about the thing that is troubling you
- solving a problem if that is possible
- going for a run if that is something that has helped you in the past
- sitting with a difficult feeling such as sadness and holding yourself kindly until the unpleasant experience starts to shift

2. Why self-compassion?

Self-compassion carries a lot of potential benefits with it. Overall, the research on self-compassion indicates that it is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression and procrastination. Higher levels of self-compassion leads to higher satisfaction with life, greater resilience in the face of setbacks and a greater ability to learn from mistakes.

Self-compassion can be particularly useful for gifted individuals, especially when it comes to dealing with unpleasant experiences that are common for many gifted individuals such as perfectionism and self-criticism, a racing brain and rumination that our brains easily can shift into, as well as having the experienced sense of being an outsider.

3. Becoming more self-compassionate

On a meta level:

- **Strengthening our self-compassionate soothing system** over time through various compassion meditation exercises.
- **Identifying possibly difficult emotions** and situations and planning out new self-compassionate responses.
- Identifying personal standards, which are absolute and tend to cause distress (I must always work out 30 minutes a day) and **reformulating these standards** into more “functional” standards (My goal is to work out 5-50 minutes 5 times a week).
- **Befriending inner experiences** that are difficult and tend to “take us over”, for instance self-criticism or feelings of unworthiness. Befriending allows us to start associating feelings of safety with what previously was highly threatening.
- **Untangling emotional learning’s from the past** that still influence us today, causing emotional reactions (shame, unworthiness, anxiety) and triggering behaviors (overeating, surfing online, not standing up for oneself and so on). This can be done by processing memories that carry emotional messages and burdens which allows their emotional charge and behavioral impacts in the present to dissipate.
- Remembering that **self-compassion is a skill that can be strengthened**, and like any skill, it is good to start small and build from there. Don’t jump into the deepest waters right away, start in shallow waters and gradually build your ability. This way self-compassion can become a skill you rely upon in the middle of a distressing experience.

On a micro level:

- **Perfectionism:** Finding a self-compassionate way of relating to ourselves would include a) noticing when we are setting excessively high standards for ourselves and then b) finding a way to step out of that demanding way of relating to ourselves in that moment.
- **Self-criticism:** The self-compassionate approach to self-criticism includes noticing our self-criticism, and then finding a way to shift over into a kinder emotional experience towards ourselves while logically looking at the thing we are criticizing ourselves for through a compassionate self-corrective lens.
- **Racing brain and rumination:** Self-compassion can help us step out of ruminative thought patterns by noticing what is going on, and then holding ourselves with kindness until the body starts to calm down, which consequently also calms the brain down. This can metaphorically be compared to the process of an adult calming a child. When a child experiences distress, it will typically run to a trustworthy adult, who might pick the child up, hold the child with kindness and speak with a soothing voice tone. Soon enough the child's distress typically starts to dissipate. As adults, we can learn to provide ourselves with this inner support to a certain degree.
- **Feeling like an outsider:** The self-compassionate approach to this experience would be to notice whenever this experience is present, and then being able to compassionately remind ourselves that this is a common experience for gifted people, and that we aren't alone. We also have our own natural peer group, other gifted people.

Practical micro level tips:

- **Recognize moments when your mind is filled with self-criticism** and offer yourself compassion, for instance by breathing deeply and offering yourself kind words: "This is a tough moment for me. May I be kind to myself in this moment. May I have ease of being."
- Keep in mind that **giftedness comes with both great traits and abilities as well as challenges** like perfectionism, a racing brain and a sense of being an outsider. When these experiences occur, try to kindly remind yourself "this is what a gifted brain tends to do, it's not me per se, it's just my brain".

- **Daily self-compassion based meditation practices** are very useful for strengthening your self-compassion skill and easing self-criticism over time. For instance, research on loving kindness meditation indicate, that seven weeks of daily practice lowers self-criticism significantly for people who struggle with high self-criticism. (Shahar et al 2015, "A Wait- List Randomized Controlled Trial of Loving- Kindness Meditation Programme for Self- Criticism)
- If you find the practice of self-compassion difficult or find that you feel stuck, **seek out a coach or therapist who can help you** navigate the waters.
- **Seek out other people who are gifted.** This will be rewarding for you and the other person, and in those relationships you will see that you are not alone, you have peers.

Further resources for deepening your understanding of self-compassion:

Ronnie will be hosting a self-compassion group through the Intergifted Network. Stay tuned on the Intergifted Facebook page and website for more information.

Videos:

Kristin Neffs Tedx-talk: The space between self-esteem and self-compassion.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvTZBUSplr4>

Russel Kolts Tedx-talk on how compassion helps us deal with anger.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG4Z185MBJE>

Compassion for voices - A story of courage and hope. An example of how we can build self-compassion and live from that space over time.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRqI4IxuXAw>

Ronnie's Tedx talk : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLxoBF7IWNA>

Books:

Neff, Kristin, Self-Compassion. Stop beating yourself up and leave insecurity behind.

Gilbert, Paul. The Compassionate Mind : A new approach to life's challenges.

Engel, Beverly. It Wasn't Your Fault: Freeing Yourself from the Shame of Childhood Abuse with the Power of Self-Compassion.

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Learn more about Ronnie's work:

<http://rediscovering-yourself.com/>

<http://ltsemyotatunto.com> (in finnish)

Learn more about the Support Network: <http://intergifted.com/gifted-coaching/>

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