



Issue 4: May 26, 2020

OUR MISSION

Adolescent Counseling Services (ACS) empowers youth in our community to find their way through social-emotional support and by building safe, accepting communities.

WHO WE SERVE

Adolescent Counseling Services (ACS) exists to support the wellbeing of all teens, tweens, and young adults ages 10-25 in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties.

OUR HISTORY

Founded in 1975, ACS currently implements four core programs in Santa Clara and San Mateo County communities:

Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment

Community Counseling

On-Campus Counseling

Outlet

Self Compassion Tips for Youth and Parents

During this stressful time, learning new coping strategies can be overwhelming, yet it can also be precisely the time when we need new tools more than ever. Self-compassion is an impactful resource in times of stress, grief, and immense overwhelming feelings, but it can be easily misunderstood.

Dr. Kristen Neff, a researcher that defined the elements of self-compassion in her groundbreaking 2003 work tells us that it has the same qualities as compassion for others, but turned inward. It involves the clear seeing of our own suffering, a caring response to our suffering that includes the desire to help, and recognition that suffering is part of the shared human condition.

The components of self-compassion are conceptually distinct, tapping into different ways that individuals emotionally respond to suffering. Dr. Neff defined them as:

- 1. Self-Kindness**
- 2. Common Humanity**
- 3. Mindfulness**

Self Compassion Applies to Parenting

Parents: your state of mind affects your children. When we are overwhelmed and anxious, our kids (even teenagers) pick up on it and can then themselves be overwhelmed and anxious. This right here could be a moment to judge yourself, you might be saying to yourself: ugh, now I have to worry about my anxiety about the virus affecting my kid? This is an opportunity for self-compassion right here. Instead of self-judgment you can say to yourself: "I'm hurting and scared about this virus. It's really scary at times and I don't have any control of it. It makes sense that I'm anxious. The whole world is anxious right now."

Going through this process can ease your anxiety. And the best way to teach your child self-compassion is to model it for them. Additionally, here are some easy things you can do now:

Tips for Parents

- **Take a Mindfulness Walk.** Either alone, or with your child. Notice and talk about what you see -- the sky, the trees, the sidewalk the dogs you see as you go. Only focus on what's right in front of you.
- **Re-frame Chores as a Mindfulness Practice.** Instead of being resentful or overwhelmed that you have another load of dishes to wash, focus on the feel of each dish in your hand - the texture, the weight, of how the temperature of the water feels on your hands, of the sensation of soap bubbles.



Helping Teens Change Critical Self-Talk

A big part of becoming more compassionate with ourselves is by changing the way in which we speak to ourselves. As noted above, we can help ourselves by learning to be less judgmental of ourselves and by being able to comfort ourselves in the same manner we would a friend. This exercise will help you or your teen begin to be able to lessen the critical voice and bolster a compassionate one.

Changing your internal self-talk won't happen overnight. The way we have learned to talk to ourselves has formed over many years and will take a while to change. The exercise listed to the side should be repeated several times to help enact change on one's self-talk. So stick with it over the course of several weeks.



Tips for Critical Self-Talk

- **Simply Notice, or be Mindful of, when you are being Critical of Yourself.** During this step you simply want to take note of when you are being critical of yourself and what you are saying to yourself. This might include the manner in which you are being critical and the context in which it is happening. Remember that during this step you are just being mindful of what the self-critical statements are and are not trying to change it yet.
- **Speak back to the Critical Voice with a Compassionate Voice.** Speak with your critical voice by expressing your understanding and empathy for how it is feeling and acknowledge how painful it is to be spoken to in this way.
- **Re-frame the Critical Comments and Observations of your Critical Voice.** Try to view the situation from a more positive angle, as if you were trying to be compassionate with a friend. Validate feelings that were felt and think of what you might need to help alleviate some of the stress or worry from the situation instead of focusing on how you did things “wrong”.



Resources

Lastly, let me leave you with this quote from Dr. Neff that so evocatively shows us that our underlying emotional state matters when motivating our children: “So why is self-compassion a more effective motivator than self-criticism? Because it’s driving force is love, not fear.”

There are many other self-compassion practices in these articles here (link: <https://centerformsc.org/10-self-compassion-practices-for-covid-19/>) and here (link: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_parents_need_a_little_self_compassion).

You can find more about this activity and take a look at more worksheets and exercises at the below link. <https://positivepsychology.com/self-compassion-exercises-worksheets/>

Any other additional questions or concerns regarding self-compassion, please feel free to contact Catherine Wohlwend via email at catherine@acs-teens.org

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