

SAARA AHTOLA • KAISA TANSKANEN • EMMA LINDEGREN • HEIDI ROUHIAINEN



# I AM GOOD ENOUGH – A GUIDE TO SELF-COMPASSION

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Saara Ahtola, Kaisa Tanskanen, Emma Lindegren, Heidi Rouhiainen & HelsinkiMissio

Layout and Design: Marke Koo Kaikkonen | Cover Logo: Juuso Harvala

Translation: Laura Rasmussen | Voice for the guided practices: Eric Baumgardner

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## FOREWORD

I AM GOOD ENOUGH

– A GUIDE TO  
SELF-COMPASSION

This online publication explores self-compassion—a psychological skill and approach that, according to numerous studies, can reduce mental distress, increase psychological well-being, and help you become the guide of your own life.

Compassion-focused therapy and self-compassion have proven helpful for many people struggling with anxiety, depression, high self-criticism, eating disorders, and various other mental health challenges. In my own practice and in the groups I've led, I've had the joy of witnessing people who have developed a more self-compassionate attitude toward themselves. As a result, their quality of life has shifted in a positive direction. Studies, along with my own experiences with clients, have reinforced my belief that developing self-compassion may be one of the wisest decisions we can make for our mental well-being.

Self-compassion is both valuable and useful, and this online publication is a great resource for you who wish to learn more of it. Saara, Kaisa, Emma and Heidi have worked for years in the field of self-compassion, and their expertise is clearly reflected in the content of this publication. Within this guide, you will find key perspectives, ideas, and exercises that can help you take steps toward a more compassionate attitude toward yourself.

The renowned self-compassion expert Chris Germer once said that “a moment of self-compassion can change your entire day, but a string of such moments can change the course of your life”. I hope you have an enjoyable reading experience and many self-compassionate moments from this day forward on your own journey of self-compassion.

With warmest regards,

Ronnie Grandell

Occupational Health Psychologist, Leadership Coach, Author  
[www.itsemyotatunto.com](http://www.itsemyotatunto.com)

## DEAR READER

### I AM GOOD ENOUGH

– A GUIDE TO  
SELF-COMPASSION

Would you like to build a kinder relationship with yourself and let go of excessive demands and self-criticism? Do you treat a friend more kindly than you treat yourself? Do you speak more harshly to yourself than to others? Do you forgive others for their mistakes and imperfections, yet blame yourself in similar situations?

If your answer is yes, take a moment to yourself and continue reading. I Am Good Enough – A Guide to Self-Compassion introduces you to self-compassion—a gentle, learnable way of relating to yourself.

The need to develop tools for strengthening self-compassion among young people emerged from the daily work at HelsinkiMissio's Crisis Services for Youth. An increasing number of young people seeking counseling at the Crisis Services for Youth share feelings of inadequacy that lie behind their exhaustion and mental distress. They describe how they feel they must always be the best version of themselves, leaving no room for mistakes or setbacks. There is a constant pressure to be efficient and productive in various aspects of life. The intense pressures young people experience appear to be both internal and external, including those imposed by society.

In 2017, Crisis Services for Youth began developing the I Am Good Enough group model, which focuses on strengthening self-compassion among young people. Today, the model has become an established part of HelsinkiMissio's youth counseling and crisis help. The I Am Good Enough concept originated at the World Village Festival in 2017, where Crisis Services for Youth invited visitors to write a compassionate message to themselves on a heart-shaped sticky note.

We have created this guide so that more and more young people can discover self-compassion and acquire tools to strengthen this evidence-based skill that supports well-being. This work has required a great deal of self-compassion, which we are continually learning to practice in our own lives. The guide is based on our extensive professional expertise and experience in the field, and its writing has also drawn on various sources, which can be found at the end of the guide.

This guide has been created for you with compassion. It serves as your guide on your journey of self-compassion. It provides insights, information, and suggestions that encourage you to develop a kinder relationship with yourself. You don't have to read it all at once; we recommend tackling it in amounts that feel comfortable for you. You can enhance your journey of self-compassion with printable exercises and audio practices. Feel free to skip these if they don't seem helpful to you; you know what works best for you.

Wishing you a fulfilling journey with this guide!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thanks to the language editor, layout designer, and graphic designer.

A special warm thanks to the brave young people who have sought help from the Crisis Services for Youth. This guide is dedicated to you.

Helsinki, 15 May 2025

Saara Ahtola  
Kaisa Tanskanen  
Emma Lindegren  
Heidi Rouhiainen

I AM GOOD ENOUGH

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*I place my hand on my shoulder  
and say well done!  
Well done my faithful friend*

*Today I won't linger  
over my list of demands  
I won't allow my soul to be tormented*

*I won't even pause  
to admire others' achievements  
comparing my worth  
to their heights or depths*

*I am not shorter taller worse  
better dumber or wiser than others*

*I am enough  
content  
good enough for myself  
just as I am.*

**Kesken** – Elina Salminen



## SELF- COMPASSION



# 1 SELF- COMPASSION

*Take a moment to consider how you would react if a friend reached out to you and opened up about a challenging situation in their life. They may have for instance experienced a loss, fallen seriously ill, or been betrayed. Your friend is sad and in tears. You might empathize with their situation, as if you could feel their suffering and feel compassion for them.*

*Your compassionate response might show in such a way that you too would become emotional and show understanding toward your friend. You might say to your friend, for instance, that anyone would be shocked by what happened and it's no wonder if it feels especially terrible right now. Perhaps you would comfort your friend and let them know you are there to support them. You would tell your friend that they can talk to you about their feelings whenever they need to.*

## 1.1 SELF-COMPASSION – KINDNESS, MINDFULNESS, AND COMMON HUMANITY

What comes to your mind when you think of the word compassion? You might recall supporting a close friend or family member through a tough time, providing them with understanding and comfort. Compassion refers to the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes and treat them with kindness and support. Compassion can also be defined as the sensitivity to notice the suffering of others and a commitment to reducing it. We often show compassion toward one another without even realizing it, yet many of us struggle to extend that compassion toward ourselves.

According to the pioneering researcher and teacher of self-compassion, Dr. Kristin Neff, self-compassion consists of three main elements that help clarify this otherwise somewhat abstract concept. **The first element is self-kindness.** Self-kindness is expressed through active and compassionate self-care. We need self-kindness particularly when life is tough and we encounter suffering. Our suffering typically increases if we are too harsh and critical of ourselves during these times.

What does taking care of yourself mean to you? Are you aware of your needs? What do you long for at different moments in your life, and do you do things that are important to you? In what ways do you show that you care for yourself? How do you comfort yourself during difficult moments?

**The second element of self-compassion is mindfulness,** which means living intentionally in the present moment. Mindfulness involves the ability to notice when we are suffering, and become aware of the emotions, thoughts, bodily sensations, and ways of acting associated with those moments. The key is that we don't overly identify with these experiences but instead strive to face them with acceptance and openness.

Mindfulness, the ability to be fully present, is in fact essential for recognizing the situations where we need compassion toward ourselves. For this reason, even the smallest moments in everyday life—where we pause without external distractions and tune into our own experience—can be incredibly important for identifying our needs and learning self-compassion. In the fast-paced rhythm of modern life, this might mean slowing down for a moment, taking short breaks, and practicing this in everyday situations, such as when going from one place to another or waiting in a checkout line.

**The third element of self-compassion is common humanity.** When we struggle or face challenges, we often feel a sense of loneliness or isolation. The key message of common humanity is that our suffering

connects us with others, rather than separates us from others. We all have the need to be loved and accepted, and feel like we belong, just as we are. We all experience setbacks, difficult emotions and challenges at some point in our life. All people suffer.

The human mind is prone to making judgments, which can lead us to compare ourselves with others. We may often fear that others judge us negatively. Thus, our minds are structured in a way that makes us susceptible to self-criticism. This tendency is universal. Additionally, we are influenced by the culture around us, which often idealizes performance and conveys a message of relentless self-discipline. We may have grown up with the mindset that punishing ourselves for our mistakes is the best way to learn and improve. **However, the key message of self-compassion is that, in our shared humanity, we are all worthy of self-compassion—both toward ourselves and others.** It is not fair to leave ourselves out of the radar of compassion.

When beginning to practice the skill of self-compassion, it is helpful to explore how you relate to yourself in varying situations, especially in difficult ones where compassion is needed the most. You can write down your thoughts, name your emotions, and sense how they feel in your body. Try to become aware of how you talk to yourself—that is, what your inner dialogue is like. Perhaps you will notice that, especially in difficult moments, you treat yourself more harshly than those close to you. You may also realize that someone close to you has consistently criticized you, which has influenced how you treat yourself.

As you explore your own way of treating yourself, you might also notice how compassionately your loved ones or others around you treat themselves. How hard we are on ourselves varies from person to person. You may wonder why this is? There isn't just one explanation. Typically, the experiences we've accumulated over our lifetime have an impact on us. For example, you may have learned that you must stay strong in moments of suffering. Failure might mean inadequacy to you, making self-criticism feel deserved. In these moments, your coping mechanism might involve hiding or denying difficult emotions from yourself to avoid appearing weak to others. When things go wrong, you may find yourself nearly automatically blaming yourself, rather than seeking to understand the situation and the factors that might have influenced it.

The coping mechanisms we have learned and developed over time shape the way we show compassion to ourselves. Being harsh on ourselves is rarely a conscious choice.

## 1.2 CHALLENGES AND BELIEFS BLOCKING THE PATH TO SELF-COMPASSION

You may notice different beliefs and opinions of self-compassion arising as you read this guide. It is good to approach them with curiosity and kindness. When we talk about self-compassion, we talk about how we relate to ourselves, which can understandably stir a wide range of emotions within us.

**Learning self-compassion isn't always easy, and it may involve internal and external obstacles, which is a natural, deeply human experience.**

Becoming aware of these obstacles can be essential in learning a new skill. If you have never been met with compassion in your relationships, showing compassion toward yourself might feel challenging, to say the least. You might even find yourself wondering if you are worthy of self-compassion. The mind may resist change and cling to familiar ways of relating to oneself. Accepting one's own humanity, along with life's difficult emotions and imperfections, can also feel difficult. For some, practicing self-compassion may trigger false beliefs, such as the idea that self-compassion means selfishness, laziness, or giving up on one's dreams and goals.

It is also good to acknowledge that practicing self-compassion may generate difficult emotions or bring up memories of painful moments where you were not met with compassion. This is a natural and human response. If this happens, consider how you can support yourself in these situations. Learning to practice self-compassion is a lifelong journey, and it may include various phases; in some stages of life it may feel easier than in others.

When beginning to practice self-compassion, it's helpful to start in moments when you feel relatively neutral, as learning new skills is often easier in such circumstances. Once you have practiced this new skill in calmer situations, it may more likely come to mind also in more challenging situations. If you notice after a challenging situation that self-compassion was far from how you treated yourself, don't worry. Acknowledging the challenges is the first step in the process.

Self-compassion isn't something we should just power through, ready to criticize ourselves for any mistakes we make along the way. Instead, self-compassion gives us inner strength; it's about supporting and encouraging ourselves through all of life's moments, both good and bad.

### 1.3 WHY IS SELF- COMPASSION IMPORTANT?

Why is it important to develop self-compassion? Numerous studies have shown that self-compassion is an important skill for our mental well-being and resilience. Being compassionate towards oneself can alleviate depression, anxiety, and stress. It can also enhance our life satisfaction, proactivity, and sense of social belonging. Self-compassion predicts a better ability to cope with challenges without becoming discouraged. According to research, self-compassion is also associated with higher performance and achievement. Self-compassion is something that builds our connection to others, and it may strengthen our relationships. Studies show that self-compassion also increases compassion toward others.

### 1.4 YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR SELF- COMPASSION

How you treat yourself truly matters. You might discover that you can accomplish more meaningful things by being kind and encouraging to yourself rather than by being critical and harsh. **Self-compassion is not an inherent trait we are born with, but a skill that anyone can develop.** While we may not be able to change our past experiences, we can practice new ways of relating to ourselves. You may begin by challenging your traditional ways of relating to yourself and how you treat yourself. This could mean, for example, learning to speak to yourself in a more encouraging and gentle manner.

You can also plan self-compassionate actions into your daily routine. Instead of demanding perfection from yourself, for instance expecting to manage all household chores perfectly when you're feeling tired, you might give yourself a break and do less cleaning some weeks, allowing yourself longer breaks with your favorite book. You can practice self-compassion daily by making choices and decisions in your routine that consciously take into account your own resources and needs. It's best to start practicing in situations and through small actions that feel the easiest for you.

Developing a compassionate attitude toward oneself may sometimes require persistent practice and efforts that can even feel painful. Self-compassionate behavior is a consciously chosen way of acting in the best interest of oneself and one's needs. This can occasionally feel challenging and troublesome. It's important to recognize that self-compassion is not the same as mere desire. Treating oneself kindly does not mean giving in to every desire and completely abandoning all responsibilities.

Imagine a situation where you feel down, frustrated, and tired. You might feel like staying in bed, watching shows, and neglecting household chores. You know that it's a craving you can indulge in every now and then, but to keep your home in order, you need to keep up with your household tasks. Sometimes self-compassion means letting go of those momentarily desires that you realize will be harmful to you in the long run.

Hopefully, you feel inspired to explore your relationship with yourself from a gentler and kinder perspective. You, as your own unique self, are worthy of receiving respectful, appreciative, and compassionate treatment from both others and yourself.

## EXERCISE

### ACT OF SELF-COMPASSION

This exercise helps you identify situations where you treat yourself harshly and where you could benefit from practicing self-compassion. It also encourages you to consider ways to show compassion to yourself.

- A. Reflect on a challenging or difficult situation where self-compassion might be helpful to you.** Write down the situation.

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- B. Plan an act of compassion for yourself** for the upcoming week. Consider different ways of being kind to yourself. Perhaps you could let yourself have a little break amid a busy schedule or maybe treat yourself in some way? Write down your plan and decide when you will carry it out. You might even set a reminder in your calendar. Remember, self-compassion can also be small acts!

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## GUIDED PRACTICE

### GENTLE TOUCH

This activity helps you pause for a moment and try out a gesture or touch that evokes self-compassion.



**Listen to the exercise.**

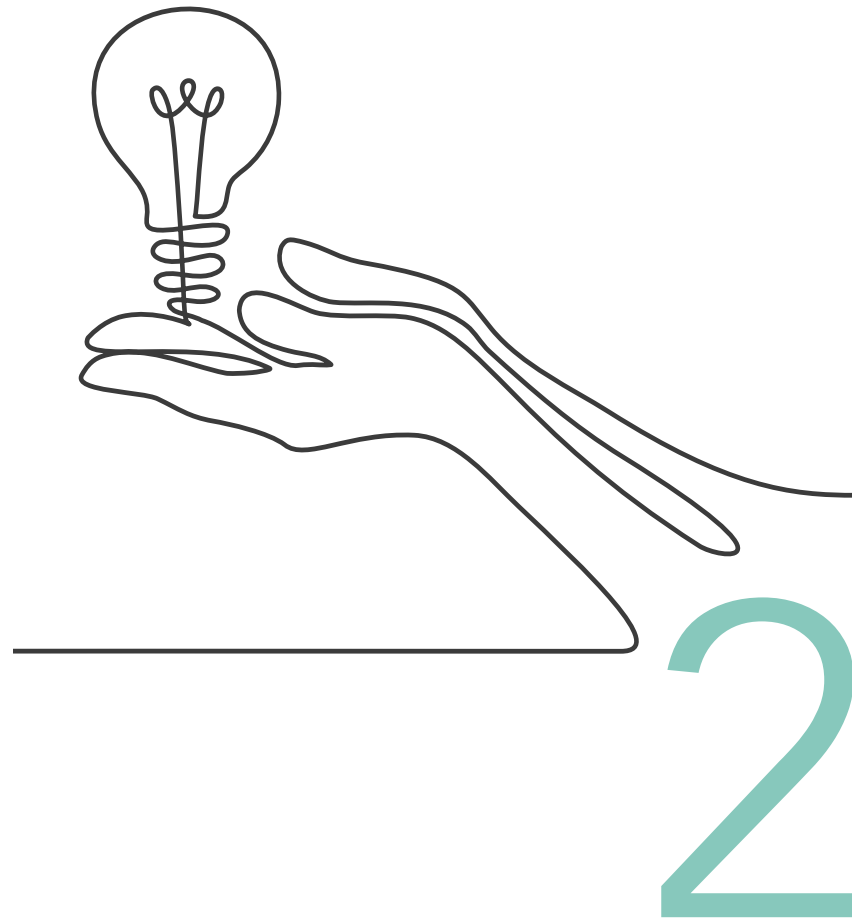
Find a comfortable position that allows you to relax. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to do this exercise; just do it in a way that feels right for you today.

Begin by gently tuning into how your body feels right now. Do you notice any areas of tension? Where can you feel ease or comfort? Now, gently turn your attention to your breathing. Observe its natural rhythm. Is your breathing calm or perhaps a bit quicker? Do you breathe deeply or shallowly? There's no need to change anything about your breath; simply notice it as it is in this moment. Let your breathing flow as it naturally does. Take a moment to feel the flow of air near your nostrils as you breathe. How does the air feel? Is it slightly cooler as you breathe in and warmer as you breathe out?

Next, place one hand on your chest or abdomen. You can also place it on your shoulder, if it feels more comfortable for you. Focus on your hand and the sensation of touch. Can you feel the warmth of your touch? Imagine your hand as a gentle, safe, and caring presence, bringing comfort to this moment. Let yourself simply feel the warmth of your hand. If any thoughts or emotions arise, or if you feel different sensations in your body, that's okay. Notice them, then gently bring your attention back to the soothing touch of your hand. You can stay here for a little while longer.

When you're ready, slowly begin to end the exercise. Gently move your hand away. Open your eyes and start to move your body a little. Finally, take a moment to thank yourself for setting aside time for this practice.

CLEAR GOAL TO  
SUPPORT THE  
DEVELOPMENT  
OF SELF-  
COMPASSION



## 2 CLEAR GOAL TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF- COMPASSION

**Self-compassion is warmth and well wishes directed toward oneself. It is worth practicing, as self-compassion helps reduce suffering.**

The first step on the path of self-compassionate thinking is to pause and take a moment for yourself. It's about giving space to your own body and mind. Taking a moment for yourself may sound easy, but can be surprisingly challenging to put into practice amidst various demands. For particularly conscientious people, pausing can be difficult because fulfilling obligations often takes precedence over personal needs. If it has been a long time since you last took a moment to listen to yourself, it may also be challenging to understand what your mind and body are communicating. Therefore, it's important to be patient and persistent. Think of it as getting to know yourself again. Give yourself time and space; this is the simplest way to take care of yourself.

Observing is an important step in building self-compassion. At this moment, you become an observer of your own thoughts and feelings, as well as your bodily sensations. It is about asking yourself how you're doing. In observing, you do not evaluate qualities such as goodness or badness. The purpose of observing is simply to direct your attention to yourself and to observe with curiosity what is happening in your mind and body right now. It is crucial to distinguish observing from judgment; observing is about accepting and becoming aware.

***Take a moment to reflect on the moments when you are typically harsh on yourself instead of treating yourself with self-compassion. When do you speak to yourself harshly? Perhaps you can recall a moment or a recurring situation where you have been unfair to yourself. It may also be that you haven't yet identified the moments where you are unfairly critical of yourself. In that case, over the next week, you can pay attention to challenging situations and feelings in which you are unnecessarily harsh on yourself and speak negatively to yourself. You can make brief notes about these difficult situations, which you can use as a reference as you continue reading this guide.***

## 2.1 SET A PERSONAL GOAL THAT IS ACHIEVABLE

**Now that you have identified the moments in which you treat yourself unfairly, you can start to make a shift toward being more compassionate to yourself.** You have now become aware of the situations in which you are likely too harsh or critical of yourself. You may have also noticed that you would never treat others as harshly as you treat yourself in similar situations.

Setting a clear goal can help build a more self-compassionate relationship with yourself. It is crucial to understand what you want to change. The more specific the goal is, the more likely it is to be achieved. The goal should be as simple, clear and specific as possible. The more goals you set for yourself, the less likely they are to be fulfilled. This is something that is good to keep in mind. You should first set and achieve one goal before moving on to the next.

A self-compassionate goal could be for example:

- When I fail, I will comfort myself instead of blaming myself.
- I allow myself a small moment each day when I have permission to enjoy my life.
- I thank myself daily for three things.
- I allow myself to be unproductive during my downtime; it's not laziness but a way to take care of my well-being.

These are just examples. You will best know the type of goals that suit your situation best. Write down your specific goal, as doing so will make it feel even more tangible.

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*Towards great dreams  
we walk with  
hundreds of simple steps*

**Kesken** – Elina Salminen

## HARMFUL SELF-CRITICISM



### 3 HARMFUL SELF- CRITICISM

#### 3.1 WHAT IS HARMFUL SELF- CRITICISM?

*Imagine that you have failed in something that is important to you. You didn't get the job you wanted, you performed poorly in an exam or at work, or you behaved awkwardly in a social situation. After the event, someone starts criticizing you by saying: "I can't believe how badly you did! You will never succeed! You were born to fail! What made you think you could make it? Now everyone knows how inadequate you are. How could you even say something so stupid?"*

How do you think these words would affect you? Would they make you more determined and ready to try again, or would they leave you feeling even more down and defeated?

We often speak to ourselves like the critical person in the example, especially in situations where we haven't achieved our goals or we haven't fulfilled the expectations we have for ourselves. The term harmful self-criticism is used when our internal dialogue becomes overly harsh and condemning. It can be recognized by the fact that it targets one's entire sense of self or self-worth, and it is highly negative and emotional in nature. Harsh, critical self-talk isn't necessarily linked to just moments of performance, but can be a constant companion in our life, always reminding us of our imperfections. The harsh, critical voice might comment on our appearance, our personality traits, what we have done, or what we haven't done.

Studies show that harsh self-criticism affects our well-being negatively in various ways. How we speak to ourselves is not irrelevant.

While reading this, you may notice the need to defend your critical self-talk and highlight how it is needed in order for you to push yourself and achieve your goals. It might also feel scary to think about what will happen if you let go of the way you speak to yourself. Will you become lazy and inefficient, or will you give up all the goals you have set for yourself? Do you even deserve to be kinder to yourself?



## 3.2 ROOTS OF HARMFUL SELF- CRITICISM

**When it comes to self-criticism, it is important to remember that the way we relate to ourselves has likely been necessary or even crucial at some point in our lives.** Being critical of ourselves may have helped us adapt to life circumstances or maintain crucial connections with those around us. Often, these internal voices have been with us for a long time, even since childhood, and in them we might recognize traits of people close to us, of their way of speaking to us or to themselves. However, currently, that same attitude may cause us significant suffering, and our greatest wish might be to free ourselves from that inner critic.

Harmful self-criticism can also be seen as anger that is misdirected at oneself. This idea is based on the notion that self-criticism often stems from difficult emotions, such as disappointment, shame or feelings of inadequacy, which may have originally been related to external circumstances, incidents, or relationships. When these emotions have not been expressed or processed constructively, they may have turned inward and manifested as self-criticism. The hatred toward oneself may have served as a protective emotion and perhaps provided a sense of control, offering a feeling of security.

**It is important to recognize that—in addition to relationships and various life experiences—many factors in our environment can contribute to self-criticism.** Along with our immediate surroundings, we are also influenced by the broader society and its values, culture and trends. After all, we are social beings by nature and do not exist in a vacuum, untouched by the influence of our environment. Our individualistic society, with its culture of competition and consumerism, can shape the expectations and demands we place on ourselves. These attitudes, demands and criticism can become internalized, influencing our well-being in many ways. Additionally, the increased use of technology and social media can amplify feelings of inadequacy and serve as fuel for the self-critical inner voice.

Self-criticism is often closely linked to a tendency towards perfectionism. According to perfectionism researcher Thomas Curran, perfectionism is not merely a pursuit of excellence but often involves a fear of failure and judgment from others. Perfectionism can be directed inward and manifest as overachievement and constant self-critical evaluation. It can also be directed at others, where we judge them critically and expect too much from them. A third form of perfectionism is socially prescribed perfectionism, where an individual feels pressure from the surrounding society to be

### 3.3 TRANSFORMING SELF-CRITICISM: FROM HARMFUL TO CONSTRUCTIVE

perfect and meet others' expectations. At the core of a perfectionist's experience is often the belief that "I am not enough" and the need to hide this from others. For some, this belief can lead to compensating through overachievement, while for others, it results in underachievement due to fear of failure. According to Curran, the phenomenon of perfectionism has become more prevalent in recent decades, especially in Western societies.

It is important for us to recognize our mistakes and learn from them. This awareness is essential when it comes to personal growth. Nevertheless, harmful self-criticism should be distinguished from constructive self-criticism, which is a more compassionate and supportive approach to our imperfections. Constructive self-criticism is directed at the matter or action at hand, and it is possible to learn from it.

The critical person from the example above could phrase their words differently. Instead of accusing and blaming, they could say: "It's too bad you didn't get the job. I bet you feel frustrated and disappointed. It could be that the other applicants were more qualified or had more experience. Maybe next time you could prepare yourself even better for the interview?". Afterwards, they would give you a hug and make you a warm cup of tea.

### 3.4 COMPASSION AND SUPPORT ALONGSIDE CRITICISM

**Could it help us if we changed our approach to self-criticism instead of trying to get rid of it or control it?** If we recognize the underlying intention of criticism as an innocent effort to keep us safe and connected to others, does that already change something? Could we introduce self-compassion alongside self-criticism in a way that, over time, those old voices become less valid and less important?

When the inner critic takes center stage in our minds, offering ourselves compassion can make a big difference. Consider whether you could allow yourself some compassion and comfort. How would you offer yourself consolation in moments of suffering or setbacks? What are the encouraging words you could say or actions you could take to support yourself in moments of need?

Take a moment to consider the following: do you really miss your inner critic? Or would it be easier to move forward and see if you could be kind to yourself even in the moments of failure or struggle? Would it be possible to build a new kind of relationship with self-criticism and introduce self-compassion alongside it?

## EXERCISE

### CHALLENGING YOUR CRITICAL SELF-TALK

First step is to pay attention, without judgment, to situations where you start criticizing yourself. Besides your critical self-talk, consider what else happens in these situations. Take a moment to reflect on a past situation where your inner critic has taken over.

The situation

(e.g. "I behaved awkwardly in a new social situation")

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## >> EXERCISE

Self-critical thoughts

(e.g. "Why did I say something so stupid? I'm hopeless with new people")

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Emotions related to your self-critical thoughts

(e.g. shame, anger, disgust)

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Actions (e.g. "I'll stay home and will never even try to make new friends")

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## >> EXERCISE

Next, consider the following:

What would have helped me feel better or calm my thoughts in this moment?  
How could I have comforted myself?

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How could I have reshaped my self-critical thoughts into constructive self-criticism,  
while also bringing compassion alongside?

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Remember not to beat yourself up for sometimes being harsh and critical toward yourself.  
You're only human, after all, and you're still in the process of learning a new, kinder, and more sustainable way to treat yourself.

## GUIDED PRACTICE

### COMPASSIONATE PRESENCE

In this exercise, you can practice treating yourself with kindness, using the guidance of a compassionate presence.



[Listen to the exercise](#)

Make yourself comfortable. Close your eyes if that feels right for you in this moment, or choose a point to focus your gaze on.

Think of a compassionate being or presence in your life—someone who has shown you warmth, kindness, and encouragement. This could be someone you know, someone who made you feel safe and accepted. It may also be an imagined person, an animal, or even a natural element. Someone who accepts you fully, feels warmth toward you, and provides protection.

Begin with a few slow, deep breaths. If you feel a sense of calm and warmth during this exercise, allow yourself to enjoy this comfort. Start by focusing on your gentle breathing for about a minute, noticing how your body grows still and relaxed.

Take a moment to think about the being that represents warmth and compassion to you. Someone who would care for you deeply. This could be a person you know, someone you've admired without knowing personally, or even a mythic character or someone from a book or movie. It could also be a pet if that feels right for you. Aim to bring to mind someone who embodies compassion in a meaningful way. If several figures come to mind, choose one for this exercise.

Imagine this being in your mind: what do they look like? What expression do they have on their face, and what tone of voice do they use? Notice their warmth, acceptance, and kindness toward you. Picture this warmth flowing toward you, wrapping you in a gentle embrace. For a moment, try to see yourself through their eyes—kindly, with acceptance, appreciation, and compassion.

## >> GUIDED PRACTICE

### COMPASSIONATE PRESENCE

Now, step back into yourself and listen to the being offering you complete forgiveness for everything your self-critical mind may blame you for. You have been fully forgiven for everything. This person or being sees you as a whole person, here and now. To them, you are perfect in this moment. They hold you in complete acceptance, seeing you just as you are—your strengths, areas for growth, and imperfections included.

You are perfect as you are in this stage of your journey.

In this stage in your journey, you are perfect.

You are perfect with all of your thoughts and emotions.

Now, hear this being expressing their deep appreciation for you: I hold you in high regard, exactly as you are, here and now, at this stage of your humanity.

Listen to their gentle words:

I hope you can accept yourself just as I accept you.

I hope you treat yourself with acceptance and compassion.

I wish you joy and moments of happiness.

I wish you love in your life.

I wish you peace of mind.

I wish you a rich and meaningful life.

Now, allow this compassionate being to recede, gently shifting your focus back to your breathing. Take a few slow, deep breaths. When you are ready, open your eyes at your own pace, moving your hands and feet as you thank yourself for taking the time to do this exercise. You've done something valuable for your own well-being.

*No longer do I ask  
if I deserve  
if I achieve  
if I am enough  
to someone*

*I have my permission  
to be happy  
to be kind  
to myself*

**Kesken** – Elina Salminen



## THE BURDEN OF SHAME



## 4 THE BURDEN OF SHAME

### 4.1 WHY DO WE FEEL SHAME?

**Imagine that you've made a mistake at work. Your boss brings it up at your weekly team meeting with all your teammates. When your boss points out the mistake, everyone's eyes turn to you. How embarrassing! You feel like fleeing the scene, but all you can do is look down and wait for the moment to pass.**

Shame is an important social emotion. Shame guides us in learning necessary social norms that help us fit in. The role of shame is to protect our relationships by preventing actions that might harm those connections. It also reminds us of our responsibilities, as shown in the previous example.

We start experiencing feelings of shame already at an early age. There are many factors that affect how we deal with shame; for example, the culture we're born in, the atmosphere at our childhood home, stress factors in the family, major life changes and traumatic experiences. Shame is fueled by feelings of rejection and emotional abandonment—in other words, the feeling of being deprived of essential connection. For example, recurring experiences of being disregarded or left out typically deepen internalized shame. Also, our personal temperament can affect how we develop feelings of shame. Shame can move from one generation to another, or affect bigger groups of people, such as minorities.

To some of us, shame is a natural emotion that doesn't restrict us from living our lives. Just like any other emotion, shame is not a dangerous emotion, yet feeling it can often be painful and pervasive. It is particularly the pervasiveness of shame that distinguishes it from guilt; guilt is targeted at our actions, whereas shame affects our entire being. Shame can activate the threat system in our body; we may want to fight, flight—or freeze completely.

Trying to avoid the painful feelings of shame can lead to trouble. It can make us withdraw from contact, isolate ourselves, and hide our body. It can lead us to hide in our shell and shrink ourselves. We may retrieve ourselves from sharing our opinions or expressing our needs, or make us attack others or ourselves. The rejection of shame builds facades, makes us constantly perform, and breaks our connection to ourselves and to others, thus increasing our feelings of loneliness. Avoiding shame can be so effective and automatic that we don't even recognize what we're dealing with. Shame can hide behind other emotions, making it difficult to recognize it.

## 4.2 AM I GOOD ENOUGH?

Shame is closely tied to the feelings of inferiority or inadequacy, as well as the thought of being judged by others. “What do they think of me?” our inner voice might ask. We have a built-in need to belong, to be seen, and to be accepted despite our imperfections. However, this creates a painful contradiction since we don’t want to be seen in a negative light. “What would they think of me then? No one would like me,” the inner voice would continue. Being seen as a whole involves the risk of rejection and exclusion.

At times, shame is overemphasized and becomes a part of our sense of self. A shame-based identity is formed which can restrict one’s life in various ways. At the core of shame-based identity is a deep sense of being faulty, wrong or worthless. In this way, shame is connected to the feeling of inadequacy—the constant feeling of not being good enough—and to perfectionism, the constant striving to raise the bar in hopes of acceptance.

## 4.3 SELF-COMPASSION: AN ANTIDOTE TO SHAME

Shame typically draws us away, makes us hide, and cuts off our connection with others. The contradiction is that shame grows in hiding. Hiding away and isolating ourselves brings only brief relief, but in the long run, hiding makes shame grow even stronger. Therefore, instead of avoiding it, getting to know shame, talking about it, and coming forth with it can help build a new kind of relationship with shame.

**Dr. Chris Germer, a clinical psychologist and co-creator of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program, talks about shame as a painful but innocent emotion that calls us to be kind to ourselves.** What does this mean? If we think of a coin where shame is on one side, what is found on the other side of the coin? On the other side, there is a universal wish to be loved. We are born in this world with the innocent wish to be loved, and it stays with us throughout our lives. Shame arises when we have experienced situations where we haven’t been met with the love and appreciation we have longed for.

What if, instead of avoiding shame, we could turn toward it, look at it with curiosity, and try to connect with the innocence and longing for love that lie behind it? A new approach to shame could change our experience with the emotion and make it less painful. Exploring this new perspective on shame could be meaningful. Take small steps by starting with milder, less intense feelings of shame, always keeping a self-compassionate perspective.

The elements of self-compassion mentioned in the first chapter function as the antidote to shame. What if, in the moment of shame, we would remember to treat ourselves with kindness, tenderness and compassion instead of criticism? Rather than isolating ourselves, we would remember the power of common humanity; the fact that there are others, too, that feel this way and therefore, I am not alone. Instead of clinging to thoughts and emotions, we could strengthen our ability to be fully present in the moment; to notice and recognize our thoughts and how our body feels, but to choose to only observe them and let them pass.

**The power of self-compassion, which lies at the heart of this guide, is the perfect tool**

**—an antidote—for overcoming shame.** When you learn to show compassion toward yourself as you do to others, you will also reduce the feelings of isolation and loneliness that can be harmful to your well-being. Embracing self-compassion also helps restore our connection to others, which, in the end, is the only way to be truly seen and accepted—just as we are.

## EXERCISE

### RECOGNIZING FEELINGS OF SHAME

Pay attention to moments in which you feel a sense of shame arise. Write down these situations.

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Next, consider how avoiding shame impacts your behavior (e.g. by causing you to isolate, overperform, or turn your frustration on others or yourself).

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Consider small actions in everyday situations where you could act against your automatic shame response (e.g. expressing your thoughts or wishes openly, keeping your head up even when you feel like looking down, or sharing something about yourself that you'd prefer to hide).

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## GUIDED PRACTICE

### FACING SHAME

This guided practice helps you face feelings of shame and direct compassion toward both yourself and the difficult situation.



**Listen to the exercise.**

Sit comfortably in a chair, finding a relaxed position where the soles of your feet are firmly grounded on the floor. Close your eyes if it feels right for you at this moment, or choose a spot to rest your gaze on. Begin by taking a few slow, deep breaths in and out.

Now, bring to mind a situation that has stirred up feelings of shame in you. Multiple situations might come to mind, but for this exercise, choose one. Imagine observing the situation from a slight distance, as if you're watching it from the outside. Picture the situation as vividly as possible. Where are you? Who is with you? What is happening in this moment? What details do you notice?

Notice what happens in your body as you recall this situation. Pay attention to where your breath is coming from. How do your hands feel? Your feet? What sensations are present in your abdomen? What do you observe about your posture? Also, notice what your body feels inclined to do. Do you feel uncomfortable, like you might want to leave the situation or protect yourself? Simply pause here to observe the sensations in your body without judgment or the need to change anything.

Continue to hold this image in your mind. Slowly deepen your breathing, using it to calm your body. Inhale through your nose, and exhale slowly and gently through your mouth. What do you notice? Can you now try to open your chest and gently adjust your posture? Keep the mental image with you. What do you observe now about your body and this mental picture? What emotions are arising within you? What thoughts are coming to your mind?

## >> GUIDED PRACTICE

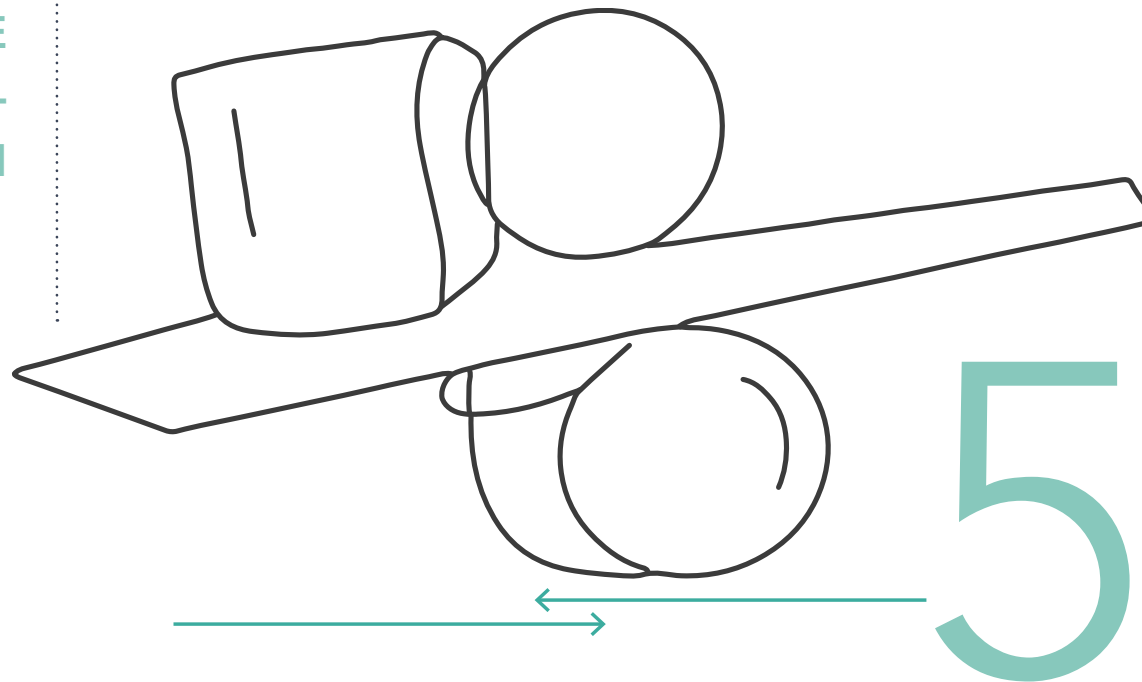
Stay with this image, and consider what compassionate words you might say to yourself in the midst of the events that brought on these feelings of shame. What kind of compassion would you have needed in that moment? What would you have wanted to hear? Share this important message with yourself.

Now, you can gradually let go of the image and return to your body. Move a little, shake out your limbs, stretch. Thank yourself for doing this exercise and for facing your feelings of shame. When you're ready, you can open your eyes.

Afterwards, you might consider whether you could share the situation you pictured here with a close, trusted person in your life.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary school writing paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THE POWER  
OF SELF-  
COMPASSION  
– TENDER  
AND FIERCE  
SELF-  
COMPASSION





## 5 THE POWER OF SELF- COMPASSION – TENDER AND FIERCE SELF- COMPASSION

*We live in a world of various challenges and possible threats. Structural factors within society and our environment can influence our well-being—for better or worse. Throughout our lives, we are part of different groups and relationships that significantly impact our well-being. We face external demands, whether from those close to us or broader societal expectations and pressures. Western society, in particular, emphasizes individual responsibility and opportunity, with the thinking that everyone is the architect of their own happiness.*

**Many people experience significant pressure to perform and strive to be a better version of themselves.** These external pressures and demands can become internalized, leading to increased stress and feelings of inadequacy. We may start to think things like “I am not enough. There is something wrong with me.” But what if the problem lies in an environment that is, in some way, flawed and unreasonable? It is completely natural to start feeling unwell in an environment that is detrimental to us.

Self-compassion is often seen as a friendly and gentle way of relating to ourselves. This is an important side of self-compassion, but not the only. **The American self-compassion expert Kristin Neff has introduced the concept of two sides of self-compassion: the tender side and the fierce side.** Fierce self-compassion is especially needed when our suffering is related to an injustice or issue in our environment (e.g. racism, inequality, violence, unreasonable demands or pressures etc.).

According to the traditional gender norms in our society, women are typically expected to be gentle, with less emphasis on being assertive or self-protective. For men, on the other hand, assertiveness is often encouraged, with less focus on tenderness or sensitivity. To fully thrive, we all need both the tender and fierce side of self-compassion—regardless of gender.

According to Neff, the main elements of tender self-compassion include kindness towards oneself, common humanity and mindfulness. These were described in chapter 1. In fierce self-compassion, these elements take on a slightly different form. Kindness manifests as **braveness** and desire to protect oneself in difficult situations and to genuinely care for one’s own needs. Common humanity

appears as **empowerment**, fostering a drive to connect with others. Mindfulness takes shape as **clarity**, as the ability to envision and recognize one's situation accurately, allowing one to see the need for change.

From time to time we might find ourselves in situations where tender self-compassion alone is not enough. We should not try to use tender self-compassion to endure a situation that causes us suffering. In the long run, if a distressing situation doesn't change, it leaves us in an unsustainable state. In such cases, fierce self-compassion can be invaluable. This assertive and protective side of self-compassion is associated with encouraging action, driving change, and finding ways to relieve suffering for ourselves or others through practical steps. Fierce self-compassion also lays the foundation for tender self-compassion to manifest in our lives. It is important to stand up for our right to humanity and compassion.

Fierce self-compassion is closely tied to positive aggression. The word aggression is often associated with violence, but they are not synonymous. Aggression is not an action, it's an emotion. Many have only experienced the attacking side of aggression but not its constructive, protective side. **Aggression is the life energy that helps us to claim our space in the world and drives us forward in life.**

Positive aggression helps us set boundaries, defend ourselves, and pursue what is important to us. It is an emotion that empowers us to firmly say yes and no.

**Fierce self-compassion can manifest in the following ways:**

- Setting boundaries for yourself and holding on to them
- Defending yourself
- Assertive action
- Addressing problems directly
- Working for what is important to you, including goals and changes
- Paying attention to your own needs
- Making difficult decisions
- Joining with others in shared pursuit of change

## 5.1 EXAMPLES OF FIERCE SELF- COMPASSION

Through fierce self-compassion, we can aspire to change our living environment and thus actively impact our own and others' well-being. At times, we need fierce self-compassion in relation to other people or societal problems, and at other times, it can be directed at ourselves. For instance, if you notice that your own actions negatively impact your well-being, it is essential to be able to set boundaries for yourself and take care of yourself in that way. Below are a few examples of experiences that demonstrate fierce self-compassion and situations where it can be beneficial to us.

"I have noticed that by consistently ignoring my needs and by putting others before myself, I feel worse and increase my own suffering. I want to value myself and be on my side. I often think about what I need to change in my own behavior. I already face many challenges, so I don't need to make things harder by treating myself poorly. I will reflect on what needs to change and confidently move forward in that direction."

"I have noticed that in a certain relationship, I repeatedly struggle with difficult emotions. I feel that someone close to me is treating me unfairly and keeps crossing my boundaries. I'm becoming aware of the anxiety that is caused by this relationship. I don't deserve to be treated this way so I will bring it up and make changes in the relationship if needed."

"I have noticed that climate crisis and its possible consequences make me anxious and scared. It is important for me to take care of myself, others, and the environment. I recognize that it is natural to feel fear when facing an unknown threat. I will consider what I can do for our environment. I will make necessary changes in my own life to protect the climate: I will openly discuss my concerns with others, and I may join others in raising awareness about the need for climate action."

## 5.2 FIERCE SELF- COMPASSION AND BOUNDARIES

Setting boundaries is an essential aspect closely tied to fierce self-compassion. Healthy boundaries protect and nurture relationships and the well-being of those involved in them. When our important boundaries are violated, it often leads to conflict and difficult emotions. We can establish boundaries in relationships with others, around specific topics of conversation, in behavior patterns, or in our relationship with ourselves.

Melissa Urban, the author of *The Book of Boundaries*, explains that boundaries are about openly communicating what is important to you, and, additionally, what others should take into account when engaging with you so that you can keep yourself and your relationships safe and healthy. Often, people may choose to endure inner conflict (e.g. frustration, anxiety, dissatisfaction, overthinking) rather than risk a potential, and possibly imaginary external conflict.

Take a moment to reflect on this in your own life. Do you avoid expressing what's important to you because you fear it might lead to conflict? Do you find yourself feeling anxious or frustrated afterward; emotions that might actually make your relationship more challenging?

When it comes to boundaries, clarity is a form of kindness. It is important to have the courage to clearly express one's boundaries, leaving no room for guessing.

Sometimes it's also important to set boundaries in relation to oneself. When creating boundaries with oneself, it's helpful to recognize possible obstacles. You might want to consider what prevents you from acting in a way that aligns with what is important to you. How could you build your life in a way that makes it easier to stay true to your boundaries? Involving others in this task can be useful—sometimes we need external support and the right amount of pressure to live according to our values.

Setting boundaries can be especially important in situations where our distress is caused by environmental factors, such as societal demands or expectations. Establishing boundaries in order to support our well-being can serve as a healthy act of rebellion against these expectations.

When considering setting boundaries in your life, you can reflect on the following questions:  
What will I make room for in my life when I establish this boundary with others or myself?  
If I don't set this boundary, what are the consequences for my well-being?

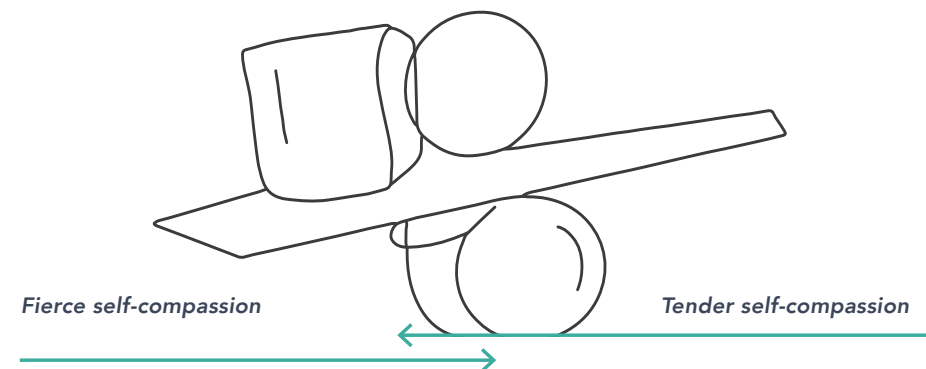
### 5.3 FINDING BALANCE BETWEEN TENDER AND FIERCE SELF- COMPASSION

For our well-being, it is essential to know how to use both tender and fierce self-compassion. It's most beneficial for us when we maintain a good balance between the two. It is important that we have the ability to face life's unpleasant emotions and challenges while directing a warm, accepting light of compassion toward ourselves. If we lack tenderness and lean only on the fierce side of self-compassion, we may end up with an aggressive way of acting, and a tendency to ignore challenging emotions and our inevitable imperfections. On the other hand, if we lack the fierce side of self-compassion and struggle to protect ourselves or our environment in harmful situations, it is unlikely for any change to occur, and the situation sustaining our distress will persist.

Here's a summary of both sides of self-compassion.

**Tender self-compassion:** *I recognize when I'm struggling or having a hard time. I want to take good care of myself, and I treat myself with kindness and compassion.*

**Fierce self-compassion:** *I have an active role in my life. I want to protect myself and motivate myself toward things that are important to me. I take action and make choices that support my well-being.*



## EXERCISE

### PRACTICING FIERCE SELF-COMPASSION

Take a moment to reflect on the thoughts you have of fierce self-compassion and its role in your life. Do you recognize an imbalance between tender and fierce self-compassion in your life? Which side comes more naturally to you?

Reflect on your life and consider in which areas fierce self-compassion could help you. Think about how you could implement fierce self-compassion in these situations. Create a plan below.

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**LIST OF  
SELF-  
COMPASSIONATE  
RIGHTS**

1. I have the right to be myself.
2. I have the right to fail.
3. I have the right to make mistakes.
4. I have the right to say no.
5. I have the right to ask for help.
6. I have the right to receive help.
7. I have the right to be insecure.
8. I have the right to be imperfect.
9. I have the right to accomplish less.
10. I have the right to relax.
11. I have the right to do nothing useful.
12. I have the right to treat myself with dignity.
13. I have the right to be loved.
14. I have the right to love.

**Can you think of more rights for yourself?**

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*I am greater than I understand  
stronger than I comprehend*

*Raised  
by my burdens  
Forged  
by my pains  
The sum of my trials*

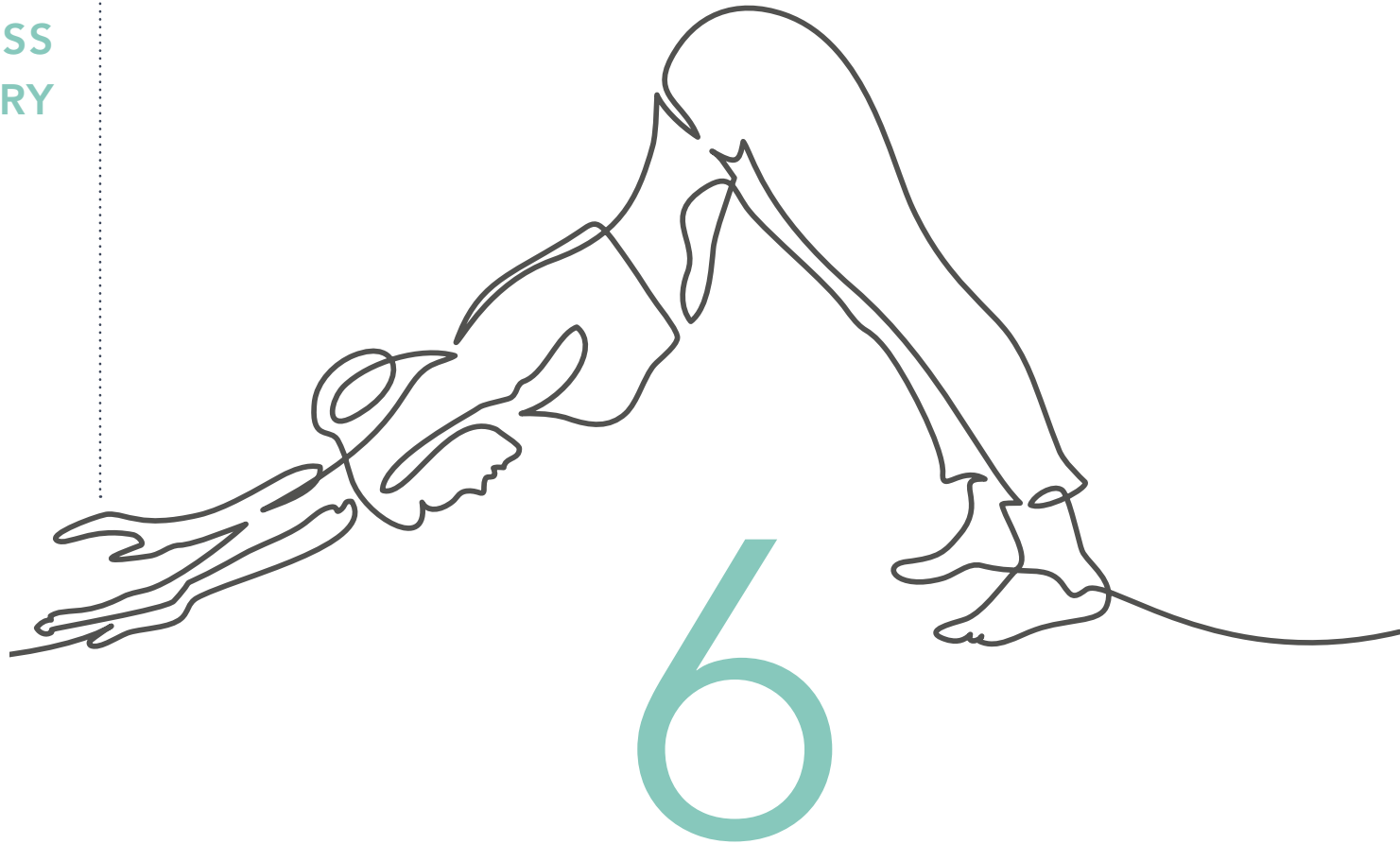
*I am solid, stern and heavy  
Bent by the most skilled*

*A warrior revived from shadows  
Sword at my side*

**Kesken** – Elina Salminen



6  
EMBODIMENT  
AND STRESS  
RECOVERY



## 6 EMBODIMENT AND STRESS RECOVERY

### 6.1 STRESS BOOSTS ALERTNESS AND PERFORMANCE— TO AN UNHEALTHY EXTENT, AT TIMES

#### **Let's not forget the body—our physical state influences our ability to feel compassion**

**toward ourselves and others.** If your body is in an overstimulated fight-or-flight mode or physically exhausted, it is difficult to show self-compassion toward yourself. This is an important insight in practicing self-compassion. Our nervous system is easily overstimulated in today's fast-paced environment, which overwhelms us with constant stimuli and limitless choices. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the body and stress recovery when aiming to take care of our well-being.

Our ability to tolerate stress varies from person to person, and it is also dependent on our entire circumstances in life. Therefore, it is pointless to compare how much one should endure or when to rest in comparison to someone else. According to current views, positive stress is a beneficial form of stress that helps us navigate challenges and achieve success. When compared to our resources, positive stress is seen as a suitable amount of stress that doesn't strain all our resources. Excitement is a good example of positive stress that is rarely perceived to be strenuous. Having the need to recover from excitement might sound strange, even though positive stress also strains our body and requires recharging.

The ultimate goal of stress is to boost our alertness and performance so that we can manage challenging tasks and situations better. However, if stress persists for a long time, it starts to strain us and becomes harmful. Performance turns into a struggle at the limits of our capacity, and hanging on becomes increasingly difficult. Research shows that prolonged stress decreases brain health, which in turn weakens our thinking, behavior, and physical health. When stressed, our thoughts become more anxious, our actions less predictable, and our physical health begins to decline more easily than under normal circumstances. Negative stress reduces the overall quality of life.

## 6.2 OUR BRAIN'S MISSION TO KEEP US SAFE

We challenge our brains with stress, but our brains also challenge us in return. Our brains are in fact wired to notice the negative in our environment more easily than the positive. Throughout history, being highly attuned to dangers has been crucial for survival. Today, life-threatening dangers are rare, yet our brains haven't adapted to this change. They still operate much like those of our prehistoric ancestors, whose everyday lives were centered on staying alive.

The brain's desire to protect us remains a vital trait in dangerous situations, but since our circumstances have become safer, the amount of so-called false alarms has increased. When we confront a danger, the area of the brain that contributes to emotional processing (the amygdala) sends a distress signal to the command center of the brain (the hypothalamus), which activates the release of stress hormones into the bloodstream. As a result, all systems of the body are activated, and we experience an increase in performance and arousal. **Increased arousal refers to a psychological and physiological state of vigilance.** This ancient stress response has been crucial for our survival, but when stressed or overstimulated, these false alarms are triggered more easily, adding to our burden. Constant pressure to excel and perform, and long-lasting, high demands elevate our state of alertness, which disrupts cognitive processes and causes the brain to opt for a so-called fast-track shortcut for thinking. When using this shortcut, people tend to react automatically rather than make conscious decisions, responding in a primal manner like our prehistoric ancestors.

## 6.3 THREAT SYSTEM AND SOOTHING SYSTEM

**It's important for us to be aware of how our everyday circumstances and lifestyle challenge our brains.** The brain is programmed to help people survive, but especially as the false alarms become more frequent, they may unnecessarily disrupt our sense of safety. The brain's threat system is activated by external threats when necessary, such as in near miss situations in traffic. However, our biological threat system cannot distinguish between internal and external threats. This means that our threat system can also be triggered by unpleasant thoughts in situations where we are completely safe externally. Worrying, catastrophic thinking, harmful self-criticism, or for example conflicts in relationships can activate our threat system, as if we were in danger. When this happens, stress hormones increase, our state of arousal rises, and negative emotional experiences become more pronounced in our minds. Our ability to think clearly declines.

**The body's state of arousal influences how we interpret reality.** A state of high arousal (hyperarousal) is characterized by strong emotional reactions, restlessness, and anxiety, whereas low arousal (hypoarousal) is often marked by feelings of exhaustion or stagnation. Fluctuations in arousal are a normal neurological phenomenon and support our ability to cope with the demands of everyday life. Getting to know our built-in threat system and our own fluctuations in arousal can help us better understand the reactions and sensations of both our mind and body.

When we feel unwell, we often try to resolve our distress through thinking. **However, in these challenging moments, it is more important to first focus on calming the body.** In a state of perceived threat, the body is working to ensure our survival, which is essential in an emergency. Only when the body recognizes that there is no actual threat does it become possible to use our thinking to find clarity or understanding and work through the situation. In addition to the built-in threat system, we also possess an innate soothing system, which we can influence through our actions. When the soothing system is activated, the body's state of emergency subsides, and our nervous system realizes we are not in immediate danger. It was a false alarm—we are safe.

Often, in a challenging situation, relief comes when we become aware of everything happening within us, manage to calm the body's reactions, and create some distance from challenging emotions and thoughts. Within our window of tolerance—a state of optimal arousal—our thinking and self-regulation abilities are at their best. At this point, we feel a sufficient sense of safety in our body, allowing us to approach even problematic situations from multiple perspectives. Our soothing system has been activated, bringing calm to both the body and mind.

**It's also important to remember that humans are inherently social beings—wired to co-regulate—and that connection with others can be a powerful resource in challenging situations.** Regulating our state of arousal may involve relying on the presence of another person who provides a sense of safety and helps us feel better. Whether through someone's calming presence, a hug, a phone call to a friend, or sharing our feelings through messages—these are all valuable resources for navigating tough moments.

## THREAT SYSTEM

The body's threat system activates when an internal or external threat is detected. The purpose of the threat system is to help us protect ourselves.

Possible reactions to the activation of the threat system:

- fight (attack)
- flight (avoid)
- freeze (shutdown)
- depression or stagnation
- submission

## SOOTHING SYSTEM

When there are no internal or external threats to defend against, the body's soothing system is activated. The soothing system is associated with peaceful states—feelings of being calm, peaceful and relaxed.

The soothing system can be triggered by various experiences, such as:

- having nothing to do
- absence of threats
- close relationships
- pets
- being comforted
- being in nature
- calming the body (e.g. breathing, touch or warmth)
- self-compassion

## EXERCISE

### HOW CAN YOU PROMOTE YOUR HOLISTIC WELL-BEING?

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions and consider how you can promote your own physical and emotional well-being. You can make some notes below. You can also create an action plan tailored to your own daily life.

- How does stress affect me? What are typical fluctuations in arousal for me?
- How do I recognize when I'm in an optimal arousal state?  
What does it feel like in my body and mind?
- In whose company do I feel relaxed and able to be my authentic self?
- What activities do I long for when I want to unwind or calm down?
- What activities make me feel energized and happy?
- Could I make practical changes to recharge and recover from stress in my daily life?

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*What if everything turns out well  
what if life falls into place  
quietly striving towards something better*

*What if the nightmares of the night  
are only light shadows  
walking in the light  
towards happy endings*

*And what if it's not just me  
who untangles the messy threads of life*

*What if I just hold on  
while someone else  
helps me weave them together*

**Kesken** - Elina Salminen

LIFE WORTH  
LIVING





## 7 LIFE WORTH LIVING

*Imagine yourself far into the future, at a very old age.*

*You look back on the life you've lived. What do you see?*

*Are you satisfied with how you've lived your life?*

*What do you perhaps wish you had done differently?*

*What do you wish there had been less of? What do you wish there had been more of?*

*Take a moment to reflect on this vision.*

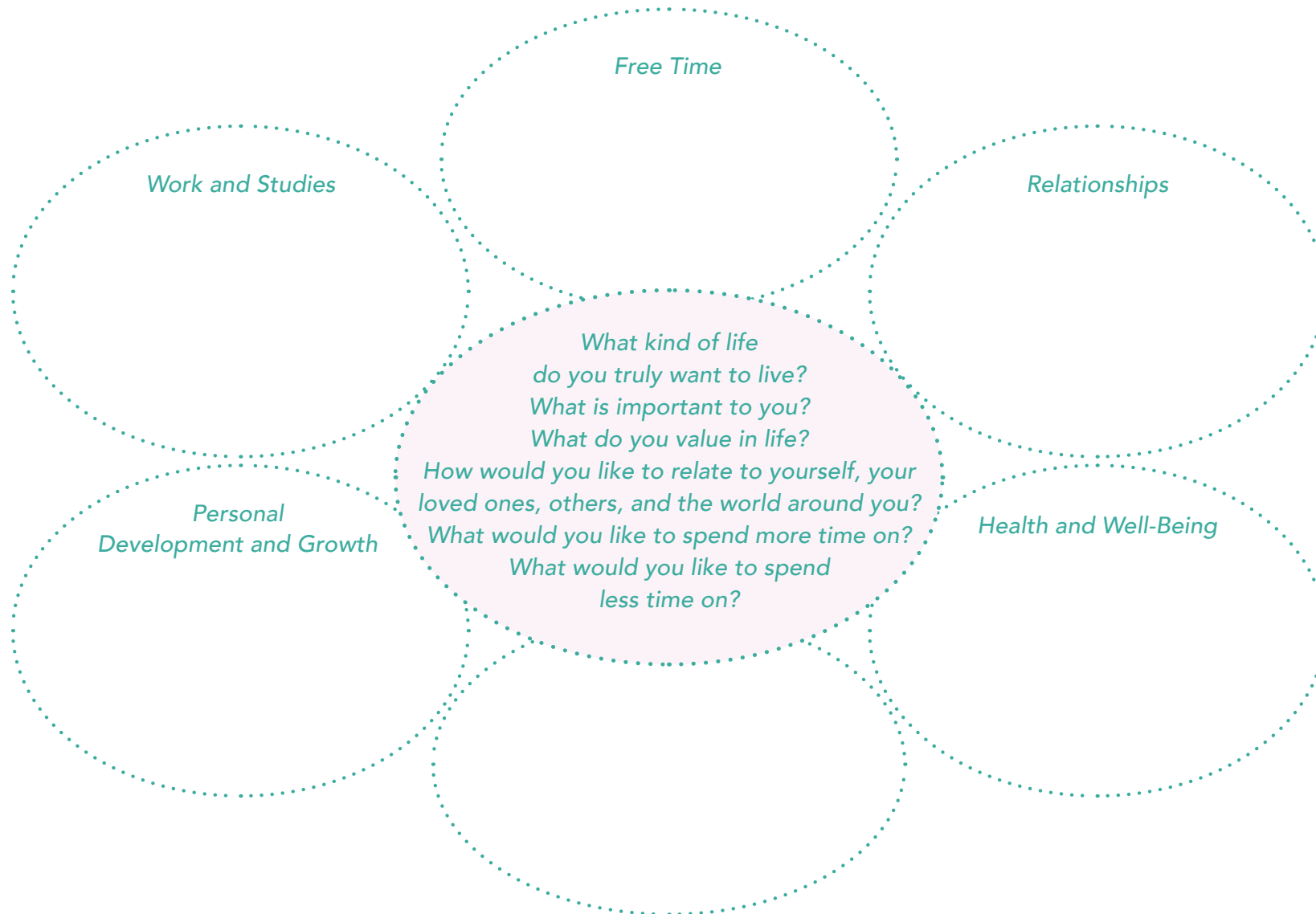
### 7.1 VALUES LEAD THE WAY TO MEANINGFUL LIFE

By answering the questions above, you may already have an idea of what your personal values are—what you find important in life and what kind of life would be meaningful and fulfilling to you. Values shape our behavior, guiding us in how we want to live. Strengthening our values and acting in alignment with them can enhance our well-being and life satisfaction. Clarifying our values can also make it easier to navigate difficult choices in our lives. This is why it's beneficial to pause and reflect on where your personal values are guiding you. Are your daily actions aligned with your values, or are they steering you away from them?

## EXERCISE

### CORE VALUES MAP

Take a moment to reflect on the core values map below. In the spaces, write what is important to you in different areas of life. If needed, you can add in the empty space another area of life that's important to you.



## >> EXERCISE

Well done for taking a moment to reflect on your values. Now, revisit your answers and honestly consider why each aspect is important to you.

### **Ask yourself:**

Is this truly my own value, or is it influenced by the values of my family or society?

Would I still hold this in high regard even if no one knew about my choice?

Also, consider whether something important to you (e.g. appearance and looks) might be tied to a deeper value (e.g. a need for acceptance). If needed, adjust your core values map based on these reflections.

## 7.2 TURNING VALUES INTO ACTIONS

### EXERCISE

Now you've hopefully gained some clarity about what is important to you and what your **core values are**. This should help you put your values into practice. Take another look at your core values map.

#### ALIGNING ACTIONS WITH VALUES

Select key aspects from your core values map that you'd like to strengthen in your life. **Reflect on what you wish to see happen in relation to this area** and think about actions that could help enhance the role of this aspect in your life. For example, if your aspect of choice is taking care of yourself, actions might include scheduling a moment for rest or booking a doctor's appointment. Write these aspects in the first column of the table below.

Next, think about **what you will do to make this happen**, such as "clear space in my calendar for a little break of rest" or "call the health center tomorrow morning." Write down these concrete steps in the column on the right.

What I wish to see happen:

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Concrete steps I will take:

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## >> EXERCISE

Think about which of the concrete steps you've listed feels most achievable and start moving toward a life that reflects your values by acting on that step.

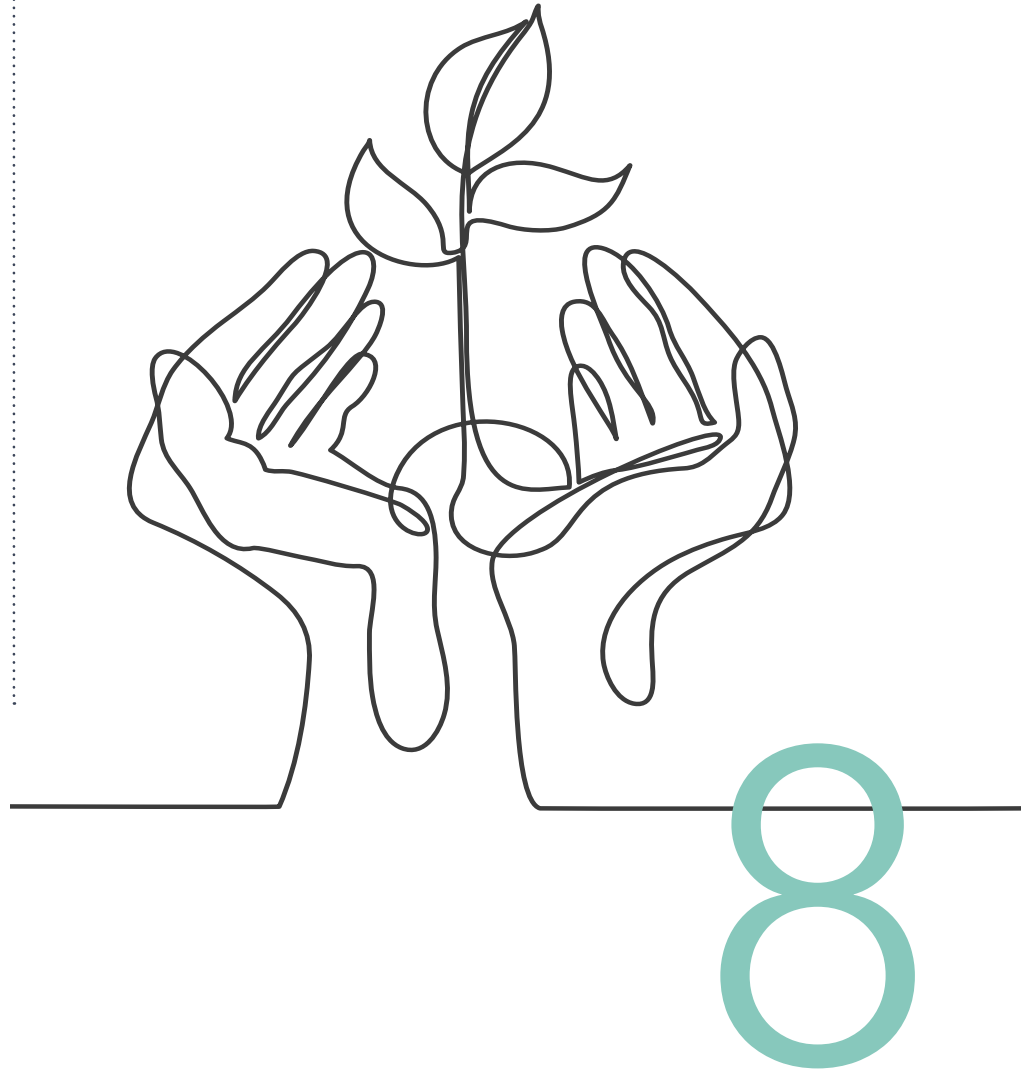
[illegible]

*In difficult moments  
We can never  
stay the same as before  
but must either adapt  
or change*

*When adapting we walk  
in the steps of others  
When changing we walk  
our own path*

**Kesken** - Elina Salminen

CHANGE  
CHALLENGES  
US TO  
EMBRACE  
THE NEW



## 8 CHANGE CHALLENGES US TO EMBRACE THE NEW

### 8.1 UNDERSTANDING CHANGE AND ITS CHALLENGES

Take a moment to reflect on a change you've made in your life or yourself that has felt particularly challenging. It can for example be a change in your lifestyle. Maybe, in order to increase physical activity and take better care of your health, you've started walking to work instead of taking the convenient, easy, and fast bus ride. Or it could be a new way of behaving in your relationships. Perhaps you've learned to say no to suggestions you don't have time for, don't feel like doing, or simply don't want to do. Before, though, you'd agree to requests from loved ones without hesitation in order to avoid causing disappointment or hurt feelings. You might have practiced this in order to avoid overstraining yourself and to make more time in your life for things that align with your values and bring you joy. You've probably noticed that making a change can be challenging and requires conscious effort. The journey may include setbacks, but a clear goal motivates you to keep moving forward.

**Change is a process in which something becomes different from what it was before.** Change can occur naturally on its own or as a result of deliberate effort. It can happen both consciously or unconsciously. None of us can avoid change. Numerous factors beyond our control constantly influence the changes occurring within us and in the world around us.

In this guide, change refers to conscious and intentional effort toward treating yourself and your actions with more kindness than you are used to. At the beginning of the guide, you set a goal for yourself. Change becomes easier to achieve when you first consider the direction you want to take and how your goal can be reached.

Changing familiar thought patterns, attitudes, or behaviors is a process that includes different phases and is rarely straightforward. Why is that? Our personality, way of thinking, and behavioral patterns are shaped throughout our lives to make it as easy as possible to coexist with ourselves and our surroundings. Many of our habits are beneficial, but some can be harmful. Even harmful habits serve a purpose,



## 8.2 NAVIGATING DIFFERENT STAGES OF CHANGE

helping us maintain our psychological balance. Change can threaten this sense of balance, even when we know that a more compassionate approach would promote our well-being better than a harsh and guilt-driven one. The mind's natural response to perceived threats is to avoid them. For this reason, your own mind may initially make it harder to implement change.

### **Change requires reflection, preparation, action, maintenance, and managing setbacks.**

According to one theory, the phases of change can be divided into precontemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance stages. In the precontemplation stage, it is common not to recognize the need for change or feel ready to pursue it. Alternatively, you might sense the need for change but doubt whether it's achievable. In the contemplation stage, you acknowledge the necessity of change and may weigh its potential benefits and drawbacks. In the action stage, you begin to move toward the change, setting goals and planning strategies to achieve them. Finally, the maintenance phase involves sustained effort toward your goal and navigating any relapses or setbacks. It's important to note that these stages often don't progress in a linear fashion. You might find yourself revisiting earlier phases before moving forward again.

In this context, a relapse refers to returning to old habits of treating yourself—falling back into harmful self-criticism instead of compassion. Relapses are normal and part of the human experience. While we cannot avoid them, we can consider strategies to manage them. What will you do when you notice yourself being harshly self-critical during a difficult moment? Could you call a close friend or family member to gain some distance from your self-critical thoughts? Or perhaps you could go for a walk and listen to calming music?

Let's break down the concept of change into smaller parts. In the early stages of change, you have intentions related to the change and its consequences—thoughts, beliefs, hopes, and expectations. These can be both positive and negative. A positive expectation might be the hope

that your experience of anxiety will ease as you learn to be kinder to yourself. A negative expectation could be the fear that becoming more self-compassionate might make you lazy or unproductive. Expectations can also manifest as concerns, such as worrying that you might not succeed in making the change.

Change can also be viewed as behavior—actions that lead toward the desired change. This behavior, in turn, is influenced by the factors described above: your thoughts, emotions, expectations, and beliefs. Negative emotions, in particular, can be powerful obstacles to change, affecting your behavior in ways that may steer you away from your goal instead of toward it. For example, if you fear becoming lazy or unproductive, you might hesitate to even try. You may have planned a compassionate action for the coming week, but fear and the unpleasant thoughts associated with it—such as believing that relaxing or taking a break equals giving up or failing—might cause you to abandon your plan. This might temporarily ease your fear of becoming lazy but does nothing to support the development of a more compassionate mindset. Therefore, change requires challenging habitual patterns and confronting difficult emotions and thoughts rather than avoiding them.

### 8.3 AM I CAPABLE OF THIS?

**One key factor when pursuing change is your perception of your own capability.** Capability refers to how probable you perceive the change to be. Naturally, your sense of capability may be lower if you've experienced failures or setbacks when trying to make significant changes in the past. For instance, you may have repeatedly tried to give up a harmful habit without success. However, this doesn't mean that your sense of capability cannot be strengthened. You can approach the situation by acknowledging that your past experiences may influence your confidence—perhaps diminishing it—while actively focusing on the possibilities of succeeding in the present moment. Success is just as possible as encountering another setback or failing to achieve the change you desire.

You have now realized that many factors influence change and its implementation. **It's also important to consider the impact of the circumstances around us.** Our society and culture contain various expectations and commonly accepted norms about how we should approach our free time, education,

and work. Pursuing self-compassion is more challenging in a performance-driven environment than in one where softer values are emphasized. In the latter, human well-being is valued as important in itself, and the recognition we receive is not as strongly tied to how productive, results-oriented, or efficient we are. **Regardless of the atmosphere in your environment, you—and each one of us—have the right to compassion and kindness toward yourself.**

Finally, take a moment to reflect on your current resources and daily life. Working toward change requires a relatively stable life situation and sufficient energy. Overcoming obstacles to change is most effective when you're not deeply exhausted or overwhelmed, and when your mind isn't consumed by major crises or turmoil. It's important to begin working on yourself when the timing feels right, even if you need a little encouragement to take the first step.

When embarking on the journey of change, it's helpful to remember that you can set goals of varying sizes. **Ultimately, self-compassion is about rather small but meaningful actions: the willingness to observe what is happening within you, especially in difficult moments, and the conscious choice to relate to yourself with kindness, warmth and encouragement.**

In challenging moments, could you take a metaphorical step back and say to yourself: "Hey, I see you're struggling/suffering right now. How could I help you?" Practicing self-compassion skills is valuable in all kinds of situations, whether dealing with small setbacks or significant challenges. By consistently—and compassionately—practicing this skill, these responses can gradually become habits that are deeply ingrained in how you relate to yourself.

## EXERCISE

### MOVING FROM COMFORT TO GROWTH

In the diagram below, there are four concentric circles. The diagram can help you notice when your actions are different from usual, when you're treating yourself more kindly, and taking steps toward change. This occurs in the learning zone and growth zone. When are you, in turn, in your comfort zone? In the comfort zone you're following old habits, demanding too much from yourself, or criticizing yourself in a harmful way. The fear zone, on the other hand, represents the reality that in order to enter the learning zone, you must also face difficult emotions and thoughts. You can move forward toward change by accepting that learning a new way of relating to yourself can bring up feelings of uncertainty.

You can acknowledge and allow these feelings but, despite them, continue to take self-compassionate actions. Acting out of fear, however, may keep you stuck in your old patterns, such as demanding too much from yourself or criticizing yourself for mistakes.



## >> EXERCISE

- a.) What are the actions that push you to the learning zone? In other words, what are the actions that align with your values and strengthen self-compassion?

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- b.) What are the actions that keep you in your comfort zone?

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- c.) What helps you get through the fear zone? What or who do you need to support you?

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## >> EXERCISE

### WHAT PROMOTES OR HINDERS CHANGE?

Reflect and write down the factors that help you move forward and the ones that hold you back in your journey of change.

What **promotes** change?

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What **hinders** change?

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## EXERCISE

### SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANGE

What meaningful outcomes will you achieve through change? Write down your thoughts below.

When I am more compassionate towards myself, I...

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## EXERCISE

### SUPPORT PERSON

**Who could support you in your journey of change?**

Reach out to this person and share with them your work with this guide and the goal you have set for yourself. Together, reflect on how this person could assist you on your path toward achieving your goal and developing a more compassionate attitude toward yourself.

## AFFIRMATIONS

*Vulnerability can be a source of relief and growth.*

*I am allowed to be imperfect.*

*I deserve love.*

*This is not the end of the world.*

*I don't always have to succeed.*

*Even small steps matter.*

*I am valuable and unique.*

Can you come up with more affirmations to support you in difficult moments?

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## GUIDED PRACTICE

### LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

In this practice, we will cultivate compassion and kindness, first toward others and then toward ourselves.



#### Listen to the exercise

Start by taking a moment to settle into a comfortable position.

Close your eyes, if that feels right for you, and let your body relax.

Focus on your breath—gently coming in and softly going out. Allow your breath to bring calmness to your mind and body.

Spend about a minute here, simply noticing your breathing.

Now, bring to mind someone you care about deeply. This could be a family member, a close friend, or a beloved pet. Picture them clearly in your mind, and if it feels natural, let a soft smile form on your face. As you hold this person in your thoughts, reflect on how they, like all of us, want to live a happy and safe life. With warmth and kindness in your voice, silently offer them these wishes:

*May you have a life filled with meaning and purpose.*

*May you experience health and safety.*

*May you be kind to yourself.*

*May you accept yourself just as you are.*

Next, shift your focus to yourself. Bring to mind that you, too—just like your loved ones and all people—want to live a happy and safe life. If it feels right, place a hand over your chest as a gesture of self-compassion. Now, repeat these same wishes for yourself, speaking to yourself with as much kindness as you can in this moment:

*May I have a life filled with meaning and purpose.*

*May I experience health and safety.*

*May I be kind to myself.*

*May I accept myself just as I am.*

If you find it difficult to feel warmth for yourself, that's okay. The intention to be kind is what matters most. If your mind wanders, gently guide it back to these affirmations. Let's repeat these wishes once more, focusing on yourself:

*May I have a life filled with meaning and purpose.*

*May I experience health and safety.*

*May I be kind to myself.*

*May I accept myself just as I am.*

Now, bring to mind someone you feel neutral about—perhaps a coworker, a barista at your favorite café, or someone you pass by often but don't know well. Picture this person and remember that they, too, want to live a happy and safe life. Silently offer them these same wishes, with kindness in your heart:

*May you have a life filled with meaning and purpose.*

*May you experience health and safety.*

*May you be kind to yourself.*

*May you accept yourself just as you are.*

Finally, broaden your focus to include a wider group of people—your family, your community, your country, or even the whole world. Imagine this collective group and offer them these wishes:

*May we all have lives filled with meaning and purpose.*

*May we all experience health and safety.*

*May we all be kind to ourselves.*

*May we all accept ourselves just as we are.*

## >> GUIDED PRACTICE

Now, gently bring your awareness back to your breath.  
Take a few deep, calming breaths:

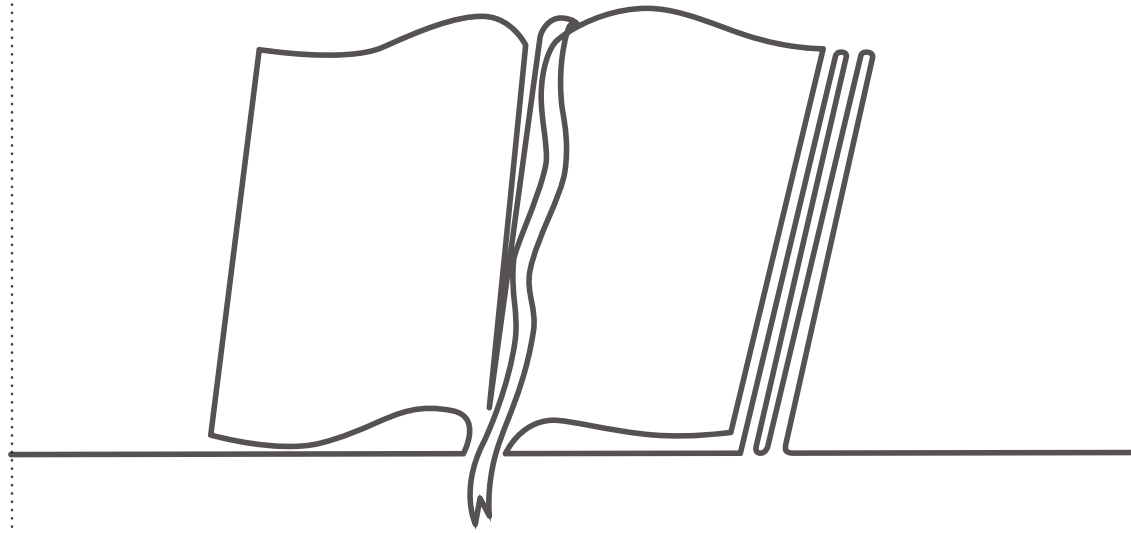
IN... AND OUT... IN... AND OUT.

As this practice comes to a close, take a moment to thank yourself for showing up and dedicating this time to your well-being. When you're ready, slowly open your eyes and return to your day.

*Who would then  
give up their freedom  
once they've finally  
dared to spread their wings  
and given the wind  
permission to carry them*

**Kesken** - Elina Salminen

TOOLS FOR  
DEVELOPING  
SELF-  
COMPASSION



9

## 9 TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING SELF- COMPASSION

### 9.1 MY STRATEGIES FOR DIFFICULT MOMENTS

**The skill of self-compassion can be summarized in three steps.**

First, you need to recognize your own suffering, meaning you must notice when things are difficult. Then, you need an intention, a desire to offer support and understanding to yourself. Finally, you should have various methods that work for you, tools you can use to fulfill your intention and actively take care of yourself during tough moments.

What methods work well and feel pleasant to you?

What techniques have you tried while working with this guide, and what observations have you made about them?

## EXERCISE

### MY STRATEGIES FOR DIFFICULT MOMENTS

Write down your strategies in the list below and return to them when needed. Please note that some of the strategies should be very concrete and easily accessible in your daily life.

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