

Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind

By Dr. Kristen Neff

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Over the past decade, there has been an emerging interest in compassion and its promotion within Westernized society. During this time, a number of books devoted to the topic of compassion have been written from the perspective and inclusion of Buddhist philosophy or from the angle of integrating compassion into the practice of psychotherapy and other helping professions. Examples of these books include *The Lost Art of Compassion: Discovering the Practice of Happiness in the Meeting of Buddhism and Psychology* by Lorne Ladner; *How to be Compassionate: A Handbook for Creating Inner Peace and a Happier World* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama; *The Compassionate Mind* by Paul Gilbert; *Compassion Focused Therapy* by Paul Gilbert; and *Creating a Life of Meaning and Compassion: The Wisdom of Psychotherapy* by Robert Firestone, Lisa Firestone, and Joyce Catlett. Regardless of the perspective, these books provide readers with insight and information about compassion and the importance of practicing it as a way of life. In his book *The Compassionate Mind*, Dr. Gilbert devotes a chapter to the discussion and transformation from self-criticism to self-compassion. However, it is not until recently that a book has emerged which discusses and explores the topic of self-compassion in full detail. Dr. Kristen Neff covers this subject in her work entitled *Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind*.

In her book, Dr. Neff helps the reader understand self-compassion and its importance. She clarifies the essential components which make up compassion, as much of this is also discussed throughout her research. In addition, she explains benefits of and constructive reasons for considering self-compassion, and she applies it to various life domains to which we all can relate due to our humanity. Finally, Dr. Neff ends her book with a beautiful illustration of the ways we can emerge 'for the better' when we are on the other side of our difficult times and when we have incorporated self-compassion into our lives as a means of coping with 'life on life's terms'.

Beyond the information provided throughout the book, Dr. Neff integrates her personal and professional experience pertaining to self-compassion, and such 'openness' helps the reader understand the applicability of self-compassion regardless of one's specific circumstances. For example, she outlines some of her experiences which led her to become interested in self-compassion and provides insight into some of the ways she has used it within her life since being at the University of Texas – Austin. Such information helps the reader understand and see the genuine congruence of Dr. Neff's commitment to self-compassion which takes place in both her personal and professional life.

Of particular interest was Dr. Neff's explanation and insight about the ways self-compassion can be taught to children and loved ones. In her book, she provides a clear example of how the techniques of self-compassion can help children having a hard time or living with autism. This excerpt is particularly powerful, because it is the reviewer's perspective that the construct of compassion and self-compassion have much applicability and value in the lives of

individuals with disabilities, although it is an area greatly under-addressed within the research. Furthermore, it is my belief and understanding that self-compassion has an untapped but powerful role: it can serve in healing the lives of individuals with disabilities given some of the personal experiences they sometimes encounter.

Two other areas noteworthy of consideration include the potential connection between forgiveness and self-compassion and Chapter 12, which explains the ways self-compassion can be used to change peoples' lives. Forgiveness and self-compassion are of interest because often times people are told they should let hurt and injustices go – they should just move on. Yet, people are not always given accurate information about what it means to truly forgive or how to honor themselves as they are trying to work their way through the personal pain they experienced. Part of this lack of knowledge and permission may be due to society's own discomfort with the expression of peoples' emotional and mental pain. Nonetheless, promotion of forgiveness and self-compassion seem to have particular relevance. Dr. Neff points out in one of her studies that self-compassionate individuals are more likely to forgive those who have hurt them compared to their less self-compassionate. Granted, the connection between forgiveness and self-compassion is still relatively new; this initial research provides another reason for people to consider both forgiveness and self-compassion as a means for better living.

Also of relevance is Dr. Neff's discussion pertaining to self-compassion as a means to transform an individual's pain into joy. While some people may cognitively know this is possible, allowing it to take place within their lives is something entirely different. Further compounding peoples' situations is the reality that some may not believe or feel their life will turn around when they are in the trenches – a human experience faced by many at one time or another. Yet it is through the effort of trying to stay open to their experiences and to reframe negative events that people may learn from their experiences or see the positive aspects among the negative, which helps them learn and practice self-compassion.

People are likely to have many different reasons for learning about compassion and self-compassion. Whether someone is curious about or interested in learning about self-compassion, or just wants to better understand the meaning and value associated with the concept, Dr. Neff's book is recommended. Her explanation of self-compassion is easy to comprehend and understand, and the information is accessible to a lay audience. Her work promotes the reader's understanding of its utility for all of mankind because, regardless of who and where we are, all us of are likely to experience hurt and pain at some point and will feel the need to comfort and soothe ourselves.



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