

The Space Between Self-Esteem and Self Compassion
Kristin Neff at TEDxCentennialParkWomen

Kristin Neff: "I'm a self-compassion evangelist."

She's developing interventions to help people learn to be more compassionate to themselves in their lives.

Importance of treating ourself with the same kindness and concern as we would treat a friend.

Self-Esteem

- A global evaluation of self-worth
- A judgment – am I a good or a bad person?
- High self-esteem can be problematic – The problem is not if you have it; it matters how you get it:
 - In American culture, we have to feel special and above average
 - Being average is considered an insult
 - If all of us have to be above average at the same time, we find ways to puff ourselves up and put others down
 - Epidemic of narcissism in our culture – a lot of psychologists believe it is because of the self-esteem movement in the schools
 - Needing to feel better than others to feel good about ourselves
 - Also an epidemic of bullying
- Why do kids bully? To feel they are more powerful.
- Why prejudice? To enhance our own self esteem.
- We only feel good about ourselves when we succeed
- When we don't meet our standards, we feel awful
- Women invest their self-esteem in their looks
 - For girls, after 3rd grade, their self-esteem takes a nose-dive
- Treadmill to have to feel better than others to feel good about our selves

Benefits of Self-Compassion

- A way of relating to ourselves kindly, flaws and all
- Three core components
 - 1) Self-Kindness: Treating ourselves with kindness instead of harsh self-judgment
 - Like we would treat a good friend – with encouragement, understanding, kindness, empathy, patience, gentleness.
 - We are often harsher and more cruel to ourselves and say things we would never say even to someone we don't like very much.
 - 2) Common humanity
 - Self-esteem asks, "How am I better than others?" Self-compassion asks, "How am I the same as others?"
 - What does it mean to be human – to be imperfect, as people and our lives are imperfect?
 - That's the shared human experience
 - It's actually our imperfection that connects us to other people

- 3) Mindfulness
 - Being with what is in the present moment
 - Accept that we are suffering in order to give ourselves compassion
 - Often we are not aware of our own suffering, especially when it comes from our own harsh self-criticism
 - If we don't notice what we're doing to ourselves, we can't give ourselves the compassion we need.
- Why do we self-criticize?
 - We believe we need our self-criticism to motivate ourselves.
 - If we are too kind to ourselves, we will be self-indulgent and lazy.
 - Not true – self-criticism undermines our motivation.
 - Criticism activates the body's threat defense system, the reptilian brain – cortisol and adrenaline.
 - A double whammy – we are the attacker and the attacked.
 - Constant self-criticism leads to chronic stress and the body will eventually shut itself down and become depressed to deal with all the stress.
 - Depression is not the best motivational mind-state.
- Another way we can feel safe
 - Tapping into the mammalian caregiving system – which activates oxytocin and opiates.
 - Our bodies are programmed to respond to warmth, gentle touch, and soft vocalizations.
 - When we give ourselves compassion, we reduce our cortisol levels and release oxytocin and opiates, which are the feel-good hormones.
 - When we feel safe and comforted, we are in the optimal mind state to do our best
 - Easy to see when we think of this as the best way to motivate our children.

Research studies

- Self-compassion is very strongly related to mental well-being – less depression, less anxiety, less stress, less perfectionism.
- Equally strongly related to positive states like happiness, life satisfaction, greater motivation, taking greater self-responsibility, making healthier life-style choices.
- Also linked to having more of a sense of connectedness with others, better interpersonal relationships.
- Self-compassion offers the benefits of self-esteem without the pitfalls
 - Associated with strong mental health
 - Not associated with narcissism or constant social comparison or ego-defensive aggression
 - It provides a more stable sense of self-worth than self-esteem does as it's there
 - Just when self-esteem deserts you, self-compassion steps in and gives you a sense of value because you are a human being worthy of love in that moment

Remember to be a good friend to yourself. It's easier than you think, and it could change your life.

Notes taken from this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvTZBUSplr4>