Self-Compassion in Psychotherapy

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Objectives

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● Participants will be able to differentially define self-compassion, self-esteem, and self-worth.

● Participants will demonstrate an understanding of components of self-compassion and how they affect the psyche.

● Participants will identify how mindfulness of body, thought and emotion contribute to psychic distress or comfort.
Self-compassion is key because when we're able to be gentle with ourselves in the midst of shame, we're more likely to reach out, connect, and experience empathy.

— Brené Brown —

Why self-compassion?
What IS Self-Compassion?

Compassion means “to suffer with”
Recognition that you’re experiencing suffering and being kind to yourself in that moment
Self-compassion is a practice of goodwill, not good feelings. We’re not trying to make bad feelings go away or pretend they aren’t there. Just holding loving space for ourselves when we do feel negative emotions.
What Self-Compassion Is NOT

● Self-pity emphasizes egoistic feelings of separation

VERSUS

● Self-compassion emphasizes connection to others through suffering
What Self-Compassion Is NOT

Self-indulgence
We fear that self-compassion will be letting ourselves off the hook. And if we let ourselves off the hook, we’ll never change or we’ll get away with “bad” behavior.

VERSUS

Self-compassion
People who practice kindness to themselves actually show MORE capacity for growth and change.
What Self-Compassion Is NOT

- Self-esteem
  - Self-esteem forces comparison to others
  - Requires us to be “better than” in order to feel good

Two major issues with attempting to raise our self-esteem
1. We’ll never be better than everyone at everything
2. In areas where we do excel narcissism or self-
Self-esteem Versus Self-worth
Self-esteem Versus Self-worth

Self-esteem is what we THINK
Self-worth is how we FEEL

“The longest journey that a man must take in his lifetime is the 18 inches from his head to his heart.”
What Self-Compassion Is NOT

Weakness

Weakness is: faulty, flawed, defective, deficient
Vulnerability is uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure
Self-compassion can enhance our feelings of self-worth by increasing our connection to others
Self-Compassion - Kristin Neff

Self-kindness
Common humanity
Mindfulness
### Self-compassion is a practice!

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Self-Kindness</th>
<th>Self-Judgment</th>
<th>Common Humanity</th>
<th>Isolation</th>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Over-Identification</th>
<th>Overall Score</th>
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Average overall self-compassion scores tend to be around 3.0 on the 1-5 scale, so you can interpret your overall score accordingly. As a rough guide, a score of 1-2.5 for your overall self-compassion score indicates you are low in self-compassion, 2.5-3.5 indicates you are moderate, and 3.5-5.0 means you are high. Remember that higher scores for the Self-Judgment, Isolation, and Over-Identification subscales indicate less self-compassion, while lower scores on these dimensions are indicative of more self-compassion (these subscales are automatically reverse-coded when your overall self-compassion score is calculated.)
Mindfulness is the foundation upon which we can build self-compassion skills. Mindfulness skills are improved by meditation.

What gets in the way of cultivating your own meditation practice?
Mindfulness of the Body

Observing strong emotions with openness and acceptance increases our capacity to tolerate these emotions and decreases emotional reactivity. Strong emotions have physical sensations and thoughts associated with them. Goal is to help clients understand how acceptance leads to less stress and pain.
Mindfulness of Thought

If we can’t change the content of a thought, we can change the way we relate to that thought. (Steven Hayes) Instead of believing in a thought or trying to argue against it, we can notice it with curiosity. Emotions are made up of bodily sensations and thoughts/perceptions. Emotions are INFORMATION
Meditation Break
Self-Compassion in Therapy

Where do we start?
Unlocking client’s capacity for compassion: loving-kindness meditation or tonglen
1. Begin sending love and compassion to self
2. Shift love and compassion to a dear friend
3. Send compassion to a neutral person
4. Send compassion to someone who has harmed us
5. Send compassion to all beings
Utilizing Self-Compassion in Therapy

- Psychic circulation - the ability to simultaneously care for ourselves during times of suffering while cultivating our happiness (Tim Desmond)
- Must cultivate skills to tolerate suffering!!
  - When we bring attention to suffering:
    - We can embrace it in a way that heals
    - We can be overwhelmed and feel worse (backdraft)
Science and Self-Compassion

- Affective Neuroscience, Jaak Panksepp
  - Basic emotional circuitry shared by all mammals
  - Care Circuit: generates oxytocin and endogenous opioids to create calm and content feeling
  - From a neuroscience perspective - activating the Care Circuit while simultaneously activating a distressing memory actually transforms that memory -- through a process called memory reconsolidation -- so that it becomes less distressing.
Embracing Suffering with Compassion

● Step One
  ○ Turn attention towards suffering

● Step Two
  ○ Focus on bodily sensations, NOT THOUGHTS
  ○ We can’t bring true compassion to our feelings unless we begin with acceptance of what is

● Step Three
  ○ Actively direct compassion towards suffering
Practicing Self-Compassion

- Bring to mind a recent memory where you experienced suffering or pain
  (Try to make this memory fairly benign. Not a traumatic memory.)
- Place your hand on your heart, or fold your hands and hold them in your lap.
- Think of this moment of pain and suffering, and actively give yourself love while you do so.
  - You can repeat the phrase “May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may you be loved.”
  - Or you can visualize the pain as a heavy stone and the self-compassion as a white or golden light. And as the light shines on the stone, the stone shrinks in size and weight.
What came up for you?
What gets in the way?

“It feels cheesy…”

“I’m not worthy of self-compassion.”

“I’ll be letting myself off the hook.”

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” - Carl Rogers
Next Steps in Self-Compassion

Modularity - the mind is made of different “parts”
Notice different parts of self (often a critic and a victim)
Acknowledge and give compassion to each part
   What would you say to the critical part of you?
   What would you say to the victim part of you?
Inner critic is NOT the enemy - attend and befriend rather than fight
Guiding Clients in Compassion Practices

Can I get a volunteer to play the client?
Self-Compassion Resources

Kristin Neff - *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*
  [http://self-compassion.org](http://self-compassion.org)

Sounds True - Self-Acceptance Project (FREE video series)

Tim Desmond - *Self-Compassion in Psychotherapy: Mindfulness-Based Practices for Healing and Transformation*

The Institute for Applied Compassion -
  [http://www.timdesmond.net/](http://www.timdesmond.net/)
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