

How To Work with Difficult Emotions

By Kristen Neff

Self-compassion involves mindful acceptance of our pain but also care and concern for ourselves because we're hurting. We can use self-compassion to help us work with challenging feelings in five specific ways when they arise. These are combined in a practice we teach in Mindfulness Self - Compassion called Soften, Soothe and Allow.

First, we can become aware of what we're feeling. We simply note what emotions are present, meaning we don't ignore them, but neither are we completely absorbed by them.

Second, it helps to become aware of our emotions as a physical sensation in our bodies. There's a reason we call them *feelings*, because all emotions have a physical as well as mental component. By working with our difficult emotions in our bodies, we make contact with them in a way that means we're less likely to be carried away by the storyline driving them.



Third, we can soften our bodies around the feelings so that we're holding them less tightly and more tenderly.

Fourth, we can soothe and comfort ourselves because we are hurting. This may involve placing a gentle hand on the place in our bodies where we're experiencing the painful feeling, and also saying words of kindness and support.

Finally, we can try to simply allow our difficult emotions to be there. Given that fighting and resisting our difficult emotions usually makes them worse and last longer – what we resist persist – letting go of our resistance means that they are freer to express naturally and fade away at their own pace.

When we use these strategies to work with difficult emotions, it provides incredible resilience. Research shows self-compassion reduces depression, anxiety, PTSD, and helps us cope with challenging events with greater ease.