

Generating Self-Compassion

Sometimes it can be difficult to treat yourself as nicely as you treat others. I often ask clients who are particularly hard on themselves if they treat their children with the same level of criticism, pressure, and overall abuse that they treat themselves. Nine out of ten times they look at me with horror and say, “Of course not!”

For most people it’s easier to treat someone else lovingly than it is to extend that same compassion to one’s self. One of the purposes of this exercise is to help you see yourself as two different people: you and your five-year-old self.

Learning to positively relate to this “inner child” can significantly help with the development of self-compassion.

For those of you who have a difficult time conceptualizing the idea of an “inner child,” click on [this link](#) for a more scientific explanation.

Imagine yourself as a child. Visualize a time when you were feeling vulnerable, when you were being treated harshly, or when you were in some sort of emotional pain and needed to be comforted. Notice if there are any feelings coming up. Some people find it helpful to actually look at a photograph of themselves at a younger age. Think about how you would care for that child in the situation you imagined. What would you say to him or her? What steps would you take to comfort this child?

When I ask clients how they would treat themselves if they could go back in time to when they were young, they often respond: “I would hug her every day.” “I would let him know that everything’s going to be okay.” “I would take care of her and protect her.”

But you don’t need a time machine to take care of your younger self. That five-year-old version of you still exists in your right brain, as explained by the earlier link.

When you visualize yourself as this child, or you look at your younger self in a picture, remind yourself that this child is with you on a daily basis. When you beat yourself up, you’re beating up this child; when you tell yourself, “You’re never going to get better,” you’re terrifying this innocent kid.

Thinking about and caring for this child throughout the day can help you develop self-compassion. And changing the way you feel about yourself is the first step to changing the way you treat yourself.