

Activity: A Self-Compassion Exercise

Adapted from The Reality Slap, by Russ Harris



A Compassionate Hand

I invite you now to find a comfortable position in which you are centered and alert. For example, if you're seated in a chair, you could lean slightly forwards, straighten your back, drop your shoulders and press your feet gently onto the floor.

Now bring to mind a current, significant challenge. This might be something that's happening that you don't feel you have the skills to handle. Maybe it's on-going self-criticism. Maybe you are struggling to communicate your thoughts or feelings. Or, you find yourself frequently impatient.

Take a few moments to reflect on the nature of this challenge — to remember what happened, to consider how it is affecting you, and to think about how it might impact your future. And notice what difficult thoughts and feelings arise.

Now pick one of your hands and imagine it's the hand of someone very kind and caring.

Place this hand, slowly and gently, on whichever part of your body experiences the most pain. Perhaps you feel the pain more in your chest, or perhaps in your head, neck or stomach. Wherever it is most intense, lay your hand there. And if you're numb, lay your hand on the part that feels the numbest. (If you're feeling neither pain nor numbness, then simply rest your hand on the center of your chest.)

Allow your hand to rest on you, lightly and gently; feel it against your skin or against your clothes. And feel the warmth flowing from your palm into your body. Now imagine your body softening around this pain: loosening up, softening up and making space. If you're numb, then soften and loosen around that numbness. (And if you're neither hurting nor numb, then imagine in any way you like, that in some magical sense your heart is opening.)

Hold your pain or numbness very gently. Hold it as if it is a crying baby, or a whimpering puppy, or a priceless work of art.

Infuse this gentle action with caring and warmth — as if you are reaching out to someone you care about.

Let the kindness flow from your fingers into your body.

Now use both of your hands in one kind gesture. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Let them gently rest there, and hold yourself kindly. Take as long as you wish to sit in this manner, connecting with yourself, caring for yourself, contributing comfort and support.

After reading this scrip, continue this for as little or as long as you wish: five seconds or five minutes, it doesn't matter. It's the spirit of kindness that counts when you make this gesture, not the duration of it.