



In our circles we are exploring ways to maintain our compassion in our interactions with our children, family members and those we count on to support us. It turns out that coming from a mindset of compassion greatly adds to our ability to parent and our own life satisfaction. Our goal is to be able to lessen our child's distress while maintaining our well-being, in other words, to grow our **compassion resilience**.

Simply put, **compassion** is concern for the wellbeing of others. It includes both the awareness of others' distress and a desire to lessen it. At the same time that we want to lessen another's distress, we also understand that we cannot "fix" another person's pain. This article helps us explore what compassion looks like in action.



### 1. Notice – Be present in the moment and able to recognize signs of distress.

This may seem like an obvious and simple step. In our fast-paced lives it is probable that we walk by pain all the time without recognizing it. Noticing requires that our minds be present and mindful of our environment and the people in it. Being present is a choice. We can decide to be focused on the here and now. And, sometimes, the people raise up in such a way that we are brought into the present without our direct choice!



### 2. Self-check - Be aware of your initial thoughts and feelings.

Once you become aware of someone else's distress, the compassionate next step is to turn inward! We do this to become aware of how our biases and past experiences are forming our first emotions and judgements related to the other person in that moment. Initial judgements are natural and, yet, often not accurate. This moment of turning inward allows us to set aside our initial ideas and emotions in order to gather helpful information.



### 3. Seek understanding – Listen with curiosity to understand the other's perspective.

Once you have set aside your initial feelings and judgements, seek to understand what it might be like to experience the situation from the other person's perspective. As you listen (rather than speak!), you try to remain in a place of curiosity. You do not need to feel agreement. Your goal is to gain some understanding of how they see and experience the distress, focusing your attention on their feelings and strengths.



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#### 4. **Increase empathy – Genuine concern based on your connection to the feelings you have come to understand.**

When you are able to understand something about what it might feel like to stand in another's shoes, you are experiencing empathy. Empathy leads to a growing desire and intention to help. Keep listening for understanding if empathy seems out of reach.



The goal of being compassionate towards others' suffering might lead us to believe that we need to first decide if what someone is feeling deserves the label of suffering. This process could put us in a place of judgment rather than openness and curiosity. As we step out of judgment, we become more open to understanding another's feelings and connecting to a place within ourselves when we experienced similar feelings. That is empathy. Empathy does not necessarily mean connecting to a similar experience that led to the feeling.

Many have found the following [3 minute video clip](#) to be a helpful and fun explanation of empathy in real-life terms. Thanks to Brené Brown for her work in this field of study.

#### 5. **Decide your next best action – Work with the person to figure out what would be helpful to them.**

This step often requires us to go back to step number two – a self-check. Once we feel that we can relate to the other's feeling, it may be second nature for us to jump to offering advice. The hard truth, for those of us who want to fix the world or just reduce our child's suffering, is that our solutions very rarely are helpful to the other person. A better approach to compassionate action is to first offer support, not solutions or personal wisdom. You might ask, "How can I be helpful to you in this moment?" We can also ask, "What worked for you in the past when you experienced something like this?" If they seem out of solutions themselves and you want to share some advice, always ask permission first, "I have some ideas, would you like to hear them?"



#### 6. **Take action – Do what you promise and do not promise what you cannot do.**

Once you have done the work of steps 1-5, you act on what you and the person have decided is the compassionate action that you **CAN** take and that the **PERSON BELIEVES** will be helpful to them.



*(These steps are from the combined works of Monica Worline and Beth Lown)*



*In each pre-reading document, we will offer self-care strategies to support compassion resilience.*

## Commonalities Practice to Build Compassion

Try this five-step exercise when you are with your child, family member or another person and feelings of compassion seem out of reach. Do it discreetly and try to do all the steps with the same person. You can begin by simply bringing someone to mind. Eventually you can do this when you want to bring yourself out of a place of judgment in a tough interaction with another person. At the root of it all, we are all human beings who crave attention, recognition, affection, and above all, happiness.

With your attention geared to the other person, tell yourself:

Step 1: "Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in their life."

Step 2: "Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in their life."

Step 3: "Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness and despair."

Step 4: "Just like me, this person is seeking to fill their needs."

Step 5: "Just like me, this person is learning about life."

*Adapted from [this resource](#).*



## Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue