

Story Block: Compassion

*Exploring the art and
science of Compassion*



in partnership with

H O L S T E E

Story Block: Compassion



As the natural ebbs and flows, uncertainty and oops of life occur, it is easy to become overwhelmed and anxious. This is where a little compassion comes into play. Personally, I often find that compassion towards others comes naturally; but, compassion towards myself can be a challenge. The concept of grace also comes to mind, one of my favorite virtues, along with courage, generosity, and presence.

Kristin Neff is the world's leading researcher on self-compassion. I love her three-part process to help us cultivate self-compassion. First, we need to be nice to ourselves. While this sounds cliché, it's simplicity is what works. When you start to ruminate in negativity, talk to yourself with the same care and attention you would give a best friend. Second, we need to accept what she call "common humanity." Challenges, anxiety, and stress often make us feel we are all alone. The reality, 'we aren't alone,' is simply a function of being alive and being human. Last, she encourages us to be mindful about our emotions and self-talk. Avoid dwelling on the negative, embrace reality as it's unfolding, and be present in the next moments of life.

Life isn't easy. Most of the time it's full contact.
Be nice, be kind, and be loving.

Ben

Compassion



In our state of perpetual “busyness” we’re constantly measured by how efficient and active we are. What is immeasurable is the impact and value of the slower — often invisible — acts of compassion that connect us.

Every act of compassion creates a ripple effect that expands beyond ourselves to beings large and small.

HOLSTEE

Compassion *noun*

com·pas·sion | kəm-’pa-shən

Sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary © 2020

In this guide, we explore how Compassion can enhance our relationship with ourselves and others.

On the following pages, we share poetry, philosophy, and a range of activities to help you reflect on the role Compassion plays in your life.

Dive into the modern teachings and scientific findings by Dr. Kristin Neff, Dr. Chris Peterson, and Dr. Heidi Wayment — just to name a few. Learn how to activate self-compassion, develop a “quiet ego,” and practice a loving-kindness meditation to lead a compassion-centered life.

Use this guide as a tool to grow your mindfulness practice and create deeper dialogue with your community.



Shoulder

A man crosses the street in rain,
stepping gently, looking two times north and south,
because his son is asleep on his shoulder.

No car must splash him.
No car drive too near to his shadow.

This man carries the world's most sensitive cargo
but he's not marked.
Nowhere does his jacket say FRAGILE,
HANDLE WITH CARE.

His ear fills up with breathing.
He hears the hum of a boy's dream
deep inside him.

We're not going to be able
to live in this world
if we're not willing to do what he's doing
with one another.

The road will only be wide.
The rain will never stop falling.

Warm-Up

We'll begin by reflecting on what compassion actually is. We can show compassion to ourselves, to those around us, and even to those on the other side of the world. Distinct from empathy, and more nuanced than simply being nice, compassion requires **feeling** and **action**.

Jot down the names of compassionate individuals and list their positive qualities. Then, underline the qualities you also see in yourself.

A large grid of dots for writing notes.



“Self-compassion entails both yin and yang — it is tender and helps us heal but it can also be fierce...”

DR. KRISTIN NEFF



Self-Compassion

“Put on your own oxygen mask first.”

This wisdom is worth applying outside the aircraft as well. Buddhist teachings remind us that we need to care for ourselves before we can properly care for others.

Modern science shows that, specifically, [self-compassion](#) motivates us more effectively than self-punishment. [Dr. Kristin Neff](#), researcher, writer, and Co-founder of the [Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#) even suggests that it should take the place of ‘self-esteem’ in our vocabulary. She says that it “offers the same protection against harsh self-criticism as self-esteem, but *without* the need to see ourselves as perfect or as better than others.” Self-compassion asks us **to see ourselves as whole and worthy of love** without being influenced by the judgment of others, whether those judgments are positive or negative.

In this section we’ll build ourselves up rather than cut ourselves down, be a true friend rather than our own worst enemy, and finally learn to practice more self-compassion.

The following exercise created by Dr. Neff will help us become more aware of our mental narrative, encourage flexibility of perspective, and become our own “[compassionate observer](#).”

Tip: Your body language and posture often reflect feelings, especially negative ones. Be aware of this and take note of how emotions look and feel in the body. It might help you understand what you’re feeling and better work through it.

The Criticizer, The Criticized, and The Compassionate Observer

For this exercise we recommend you sit in three different chairs to really connect with these conflicting parts of yourself and experience how each aspect feels in the present moment.

The Criticizer

Take a seat in the first chair. Think about a personal flaw or issue that comes up in your daily life. **Write down what the self-critical part of you is thinking and feeling.**

Example: “Why are you such a wimp?”, “How could you do (or not do) such a thing?” or “You aren’t assertive enough.”

Take a moment to note the **words** you use, the **emotions** you feel, and even the **body posture** you take in this seat.



“Love makes your soul crawl
out from its hiding place.”

ZORA NEALE HURSTON



“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

MOTHER TERESA



Quiet Ego

Drs. Heidi Wayment and Jack J. Bauer, authors and professors of psychology, have researched and written on the value of developing a “quiet ego.” When we have a quiet (but not silent) ego, we are able to do a better job of “listening to others as well as the self in an effort to approach life more humanely and compassionately.”

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

DALAI LAMA XIV

With their research, they created the [Quiet Ego Scale \(QES\)](#) to help us assess our tendencies and behavior. The more statements we find ourselves agreeing with on the QES spectrum, the more likely it is that we are leading satisfying, balanced lives with more non-defensive, flexible, and inclusive worldviews. The QES can also help us identify a few clear steps towards developing a quiet ego and living more compassionately.

Read through the following statements and mark a check ✓ next to any statement that you feel **you have a good handle on**.

Draw a [circle](#) around any **you want to focus on** with more intention.

Example: or

- I often [pay attention](#) when I am doing things.
- I feel a [connection](#) to all living things.
- I don't do jobs or tasks automatically, [I am aware](#) of what I'm doing.
- I [don't rush](#) through activities without being really attentive to them.
- I feel a [connection](#) with strangers.
- I feel a [connection](#) to people of other races.
- Before criticizing somebody, I try to [imagine](#) how I would feel if I were in their place.
- When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to [put myself in his or her shoes](#) for a while.
- I try to [look at everybody's side](#) of a disagreement before I make a decision.
- I find it easy to see things from [another person's point of view](#).
- For me, life has been a [continuous process](#) of learning, changing, and growth.
- I think it is important to have [new experiences that challenge](#) how I think about myself and the world.
- I have the sense that I have [developed](#) as a person over time.



“Better than a thousand meaningless statements
Is one meaningful word,
Which, having been heard,
Brings peace.”

GIL FRONSDAL



Nonviolent Communication

“Compassion brings us to a moment when we stop, and for a moment we rise above ourselves.”

M A S O N C O O L E Y

Humans are innately social creatures with a fundamental need to connect with others. So it's no surprise that the quality of our relationships is one of the best predictors of our overall well-being. As positive psychology superstar [Dr. Chris Peterson](#) put it, “Other people matter,” and compassion is exactly the kind of spiritual technology that helps us connect with those around us.

Reflect on a moment when someone offered completely unexpected kindness and compassion to you in a moment of need. **What impact did it have on you? Why?**

Thought Starter

You don't need us to outline all the ways in which we're lacking in compassion in our world today. We see it in the news, in our daily interactions, and in the media we consume.

But one of the best ways we can bring compassion into our lives and those around us is simply in the way we talk to one another — more specifically with the use of **Nonviolent Communication (NVC)**.

Guided by the [Center for Nonviolent Communication](#) and its founder, [Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg](#), here's a short overview.

We'll begin by breaking down the Four Components:

Observation

Noticing concrete things and actions around us without judgment or evaluation, which helps us stay in the present moment, break patterns of assumption, and avoid leading with critique.

With Evaluation:

My friend is always flaky and won't answer my calls or texts.

Without Evaluation:

My friend didn't answer my call or text yesterday.

Tip: Avoid using words like *always*, *never*, *frequently*, or *rarely* — be specific.



“Our human compassion binds us the one to the other — not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”

NELSON MANDELA



Loving-Kindness Meditation

Dr. Emma Seppala of [Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education \(CCARE\)](#) believes in a near-future where “the practice of compassion is understood to be as important for health as physical exercise and a healthful diet.”

CCARE researchers have found that our natural instinct to act with compassion can be improved upon with a compassion-centered and Buddhist-inspired “loving-kindness” meditation practice. In fact, Dr. Seppala and a colleague discovered that:

A seven-minute intervention was enough to increase feelings of closeness and connection to the target of meditation on both explicit measures, but also on implicit measures that participants could not voluntarily control; this suggests that their sense of connection had changed on a deep-seated level.

Tip: We recommend reading the instructions on the next two pages all the way through before starting, so that you can complete the exercise without needing to open your eyes and interrupt the meditation.

To begin, find a quiet, comfortable, and safe place where you can be free of distractions for at **least 7–10 minutes**. Find a position for your body that is upright, but not uptight, and then start guiding your awareness to your breath. Take 5-10 deep and soothing breaths, keeping your attention on the full length of your **inhale** and *exhale*.

First, direct your compassion toward yourself.

Repeat these phrases silently in your mind at a slow and comfortable pace at least **three times**.

MANTRA A

May I be well
May I be happy
May I be kind
May I be loved

Next, send a similar compassionate mantra to someone close to you.

Choose a best friend, family member, or even a pet and repeat the love and kindness mantras with them in mind. Repeat these phrases silently in your mind at a slow and comfortable pace at least **three times**.

MANTRA B

May you be well
May you be happy
May you be kind
May you be loved



“A truce can be called in your inner war. Peace is possible. Your old habits of self-criticism don’t need to rule you forever. What you need to do is listen to the voice that’s already there, even if a bit hidden — your wise, compassionate self.”

DR. KRISTIN NEFF



Reflect & Discuss

Use these questions for self-reflection or to spark meaningful conversations.

ICEBREAKERS

Describe a time when a stranger went out of their way to do something kind for you.

Is compassion learned or inherent?

Do you find it more challenging to be kind to yourself or others?

DEEPER QUESTIONS

When was the last time you had to forgive someone?

What is a small but powerful act of compassion?

When did you last connect with someone who has different political, spiritual, or cultural views than you?

Do intentions matter more or less than actions?





We are each made for goodness,
love and compassion. Our lives are
transformed as much as the world is
when we live with these truths.

DESMOND TUTU

