

Activity: How do I treat a friend?

- This is a 25-minute activity to notice how we speak to others who are having a hard time, especially to close friends.
- Ideally, this can be done in a group setting with someone asking the questions. But you can also do it with a partner or alone, giving yourself time to pause and ponder your answers.
- As you think about your answers, notice what you hear and feel.
- As you imagine words you say to someone having a hard time, feel free to think of the words in your own language.



If you feel comfortable, please close your eyes, or maybe look down and listen to the questions. If you're doing this activity alone, ask the questions aloud. Allow yourself to ponder the questions.

- Think about various times when a close friend was suffering in some way—maybe something difficult happened to them, or they experienced a failure, or for some reason they felt badly. How do you typically respond to your friends in these situations?
(pause)
- When your friend is having a hard time, what do you say? What tone of voice do you use? What is your body language? What do your eyes say to your friend? How do you want to make them feel?
(pause)
- Now, think about various times when you were suffering in some way, such as experiencing misfortune or failure, or for some reason you were feeling badly. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations?
(pause)
- When you are having a hard time, what do you say? What tone do you use with yourself? What is your body language? How do you want to make yourself feel?
(pause)
- Now, you might take some time to compare how you typically respond to your friends versus yourself. Do you notice a difference in how you respond to yourself and others? If so, what's the difference?

When you're ready, you can look up or open your eyes.

If you're in a group, you can break into pairs and take turns sharing as little or as much as you like about what you noticed. Take care to listen to your partner. What was it like to hear what you would say to a friend compared what you would say to yourself?

If you're doing this alone, you may want to journal about what it was like to hear what you would say to a friend versus what you would say to yourself.



- What did you notice about how you speak to a friend? What do you want your friend to feel from you when they are having a hard time?
- What did you notice about how you speak to yourself? How do you feel when you speak to yourself this way?
- If you noticed that you speak to your friends with kindness, caring or compassion, but not yourself, can you imagine trying to speak to yourself in the way you speak to a friend?

Congratulations! You now have one foundation – like a house – of mindful self-compassion.

The first tool is noticing how you talk to yourself. Once you notice how you talk to yourself, you can choose how you talk to yourself. You can choose to bring kindness to the way you talk to yourself.

There are good reasons we have cultivated a critical voice. We may use it to motivate ourselves to get done all the things we need to get done, to protect ourselves from the criticism of others, or for other reasons. The point of this exercise is to notice the voice. For some of us it is so familiar that we don't even notice it any more.

Once we become mindful of the critical voice, we have the choice of replacing it or answering it with more self-compassionate words. We may find that self-compassionate words actually motivate or protect us more than the critical words.

Facilitator note: Neff and Knox research in 2016 suggests that 78% of the general population in the USA are more compassionate toward others than themselves, 6% are more compassionate to themselves than others, and 16% are about equal.