

## Kindness and Compassion, Part 2

Compassion is the ability to understand the emotional state of yourself or another. It's sometimes confused with empathy, but compassion also includes the desire to end or reduce the suffering of others. Research shows that being compassionate can improve your health, emotional well-being and your relationships. Some scientists say that we even have a "compassion gene" that's vital to our survival.

### Practicing compassion

Compassion is something you need to practice. It's sometimes difficult to extend compassion to yourself and to people you may not like or who are different from you. Sometimes, life gets in the way and our ability to give or receive compassion is reduced. With practice and focus, we can choose to cultivate compassion.

When practicing compassion, start with yourself. You'll have a hard time being compassionate with others if you can't be compassionate to yourself. Praise yourself for your successes, and forgive yourself for mistakes.

It's usually easier to have compassion for someone we love. When your friend is sick or your sister loses a job, compassion is simple. We feel their pain and want to relieve it. Part of compassion is knowing when you can do something to help fix the pain and when you need to just sit with the person and be there in the pain with them. Assess the situation. You don't need to try to give a solution to every problem.



Compassion for strangers is inherent, according to researchers. Even newborns in a hospital nursery will cry when another baby cries. Practicing compassion for a stranger isn't about developing a new skill, but reacquainting yourself with an instinct you were born with.

Compassion can boost your bonds with others and make you happier. Giving or receiving compassion can:

- Make you healthier because the happier you are, the easier it is to commit to healthy habits
- Decrease your stress levels
- Put your own challenges into perspective

Performing random acts of kindness can help you experience the joy of compassion.

Sources: huffingtonpost.com\*, scientificamerican.com\*, greatergood.berkeley.com\*, mindbodygreen.com\*, psychologicalscience.org\*, cc-sd.edu\*, mayoclinic.org\*

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