



Be Peace. Choose Peace. Create Peace.

CHOOSE EMPATHY AND COMPASSION CULTIVATION

What is Empathy and Compassion Cultivation?

Compassion helps us connect with others, mend relationships, and move forward while fostering emotional intelligence and well-being. Compassion takes empathy one step further because it harbors a desire for all people to be free from suffering, and it's imbued with a desire to help. Compassion is simply a kind, friendly presence in the face of what's difficult. Its power is connecting us with what's difficult and it offers us an approach that differs from the turning away that we usually do. We begin with empathy— that feeling of connection and acknowledgement of the commonality of the human condition.¹

Empathy is at the heart of what it means to be human. It's a foundation for acting ethically, for good relationships of many kinds, for loving well, and for professional success. It's also key to preventing bullying and many other forms of cruelty.² Separate from pity, compassion involves developing the ability to acknowledge and alleviate suffering. Compassion cultivation involves a process of relating to oneself, others, and the world from a place of greater understanding, joy, and purpose.³

How do people learn Empathy and Compassion Cultivation?

Self-compassion involves treating yourself the way you would treat a friend who is having a hard time, even if your friend blew it, is feeling inadequate, or is just facing a tough life challenge. The more complete definition involves three core elements that we bring to bear when we are in pain: self-kindness, common humanity (the recognition that everyone makes mistakes and feels pain), and mindfulness.⁴

To understand empathy and compassion cultivation in everyday life, we must first practice self-compassion. When we realize that we are simply human and mistakes are common, we can extend this understanding to others. As long as you have an inner voice beating you up for your inevitable imperfections, you'll find it difficult to be compassionate with others when they reveal their humanness.⁵

Once we have cultivated self-compassion, we are more able to put ourselves in others' shoes, and eventually, go beyond self-reference. In other words, practice shifting your perspective away from exclusively thinking about how something affects you and recognizing their own individual experience.⁶ Then, we can further our practice by fostering kindness, active listening, and an active presence.

How do people implement Empathy and Compassion Cultivation?

¹ How to Be More Compassionate: A Mindful Guide to Compassion. (2022, July 6). Mindful. <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-be-more-compassionate-a-mindful-guide-to-compassion/>

² 5 Tips for Cultivating Empathy. (2021, December 13). Making Caring Common. <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-families/5-tips-cultivating-empathy>

³ Goldin, P.R. & Jazeiri, H. (2017). The compassion cultivation training (CCT) program. The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science. DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190464684.013.18

⁴ Mindful, Ibid.

⁵ Rankin, L. (2021, January 21). 10 Easy Ways To Cultivate Compassion. MindBodyGreen. <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-23406/10-easy-ways-to-cultivate-compassion.html>

⁶ Ibid.

Empathy begins with the capacity to take another perspective, to walk in another's shoes. But it is not just that capacity. Empathy includes valuing other perspectives and people. It's about perspective-taking and compassion.⁷

As a key component of individual and societal wellbeing, compassion is a positive orientation towards suffering that can be enhanced through training. Compassion training can be adopted at any age and involves training the mind to develop specific skills in order to relate to others and to ourselves, and making a conscious effort to think and act in a compassionate manner. While everyone has, to some degree, a level of compassion, for some it can be beneficial to develop these skills further through training and practice.

Fortunately, developing compassion does not require years of commitment and can actually be advanced quite rapidly. In a study by Mantelou and Karakasidou (2017), it was found that even a short seven-minute intervention was enough to increase feelings of closeness and connection, improve compassion, and life satisfaction when compared to those who received no compassion training. This short "compassion break" can be completed by simply taking a moment to pause and relax one's body, taking calming and deep breaths, and then picturing someone who is close to you, someone toward whom you feel a great amount of love. Notice how this love feels in your heart. Perhaps you feel a sensation of warmth, openness, and tenderness. As you become more comfortable and experienced you can extend your thoughts of love and compassion to acquaintances, strangers, and even those you don't like.⁸

For what types of circumstances is Empathy and Compassion Cultivation suited?

Empathy and Compassion Cultivation is well suited for developing positive social and emotional behaviors among people who use it. This practice can significantly benefit professionals working in human service settings. Similarly, a growing body of research suggests that cognitive-based compassion training can operate as a promising prevention strategy for adolescents at-risk of substance misuse and other challenges.⁹

Does Empathy and Compassion Cultivation work for preventing or controlling aggression or violence?

Practicing empathy and compassion cultivation allows us to practice understanding others and to heal from unreleased trauma and anger. Instead of framing another's actions in terms of self-reference, we can shift our focus to recognizing the humanness of that person and how mistakes are just a typical part of the human experience.

Cultivating empathy and compassion for others teaches us to respond with understanding, rather than anger or aggression. Putting ourselves in another's place also helps us understand that everyone has a different worldview (including nonhuman beings), and that it's crucial for fostering peacefulness within yourself and around you. Compassion is other-centered and a shift in attention to others can alleviate negative self-focus in depression to a more positive other-focus

⁷ Making Caring Common, Ibid.

⁸ Mantelou, A., & Karakasidou, E. (2017). The effectiveness of a brief self-compassion intervention program on self-compassion, positive and negative affect and life satisfaction. *Psychology*, 8(4), 590-610.

⁹ Kirby, J.N. (2017). Compassion interventions: The programs, the evidence, and implications for research and practice. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*. (90), 432-455.

DOI:10.1111/papt.12104

¹⁰ Houston, E. B. (2022, July 25). 12 Best Compassion Training Exercises & Activities. PositivePsychology.Com. <https://positivepsychology.com/compassion-training/>

in compassion. Additionally, compassion can ameliorate negative symptoms of social isolation and outrage.¹⁰

Where else might I go to learn more about Empathy and Compassion Cultivation?

- [Positive Psychology](#)—12 Best Compassion Training Exercises & Activities
- [MindBodyGreen](#)— 10 Easy Ways To Cultivate Compassion
- [Mindful](#)— How to Be More Compassionate: A Mindful Guide to Compassion
- [Making Caring Common of the Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)— 5 Tips for Cultivating Empathy
- [Institute for Human Education](#)— 9 Strategies for Cultivating Empathy and Compassion in your Classroom
- [Compassion Cultivation Training© \(CCT™\) | Compassion Institute](#) – Compassion Cultivation Training program developed by researchers at Stanford University that offers Continuing Education (CE) credits for a variety of health professionals

[Peace Through Action USA](#) activates and equips Americans to implement practical peaceful solutions to aggression and violence in their communities and our country. We are a national-scope, charitable, civic and social capital-building organization.

Have a suggested addition to this information sheet? Send it to inbox@peacethroughaction.org.

[Sign up for our email](#)

[Post our website to Facebook](#)

[Tweet our website](#)

[Post our website to LinkedIn](#)

[Subscribe to our YouTube channel](#)

[Give](#) money to support Peace Through Action's mission delivery activities

[Choose](#) opportunities to take part in our #PeaceBeginsWithWe campaign

¹⁰ Houston, E. B. (2022, July 25). 12 Best Compassion Training Exercises & Activities. PositivePsychology.Com. <https://positivepsychology.com/compassion-training/>