

# Compassion in the workplace: It starts with you!

## Authors:

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*"Never look down on anyone unless you are helping them up."* – Jesse Jackson

The concept of compassion is both simple and complicated. The three components of showing compassion to others are:

- cognitive: 'I understand your problems';
- affective: 'I feel what you feel'; and
- motivational: 'I want to help you with this'.

In an organization where compassion is [embedded in the culture](#), we see stronger bonds between employees and these connections are a protective factor against stress and burnout in the workplace. In addition to emotional wellbeing, evidence shows that employees who spend a few minutes socially interacting with colleagues have more steady blood pressure and heart rate. Improved employee health translates to improved attendance at work and improved quality of life outside of work.

Showing compassion to others in the workplace means engaging in authentic communication, offering encouragement, initiating genuine interactions and generally being aware of how your colleagues are doing in the workplace. Being a [compassionate leader](#) and colleague is often much easier than showing compassion to ourselves. [Self-compassion](#) is the foundation for showing compassion to others.

## What does self-compassion look like?

Self-kindness, a sense of common humanity and mindfulness are the core components of selfcompassion.

Vulnerability and imperfection are innate characteristics of being human. Self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared and common human experience. Being mindful allows you to engage in non-judgemental awareness - see things just as they are – neither ignoring nor over identifying with your experiences. Mindful awareness provides you the opportunity to show compassion to yourself. Consider the words and ways you show compassion towards others and provide comfort. Imagine directing these same words and activities towards yourself – this is part of self-kindness.

### Try this self-compassion exercise:

Think of a behaviour you want to change

- Recall a time when you have used self-criticism in hope of finding motivation to change.
- What personal characteristics did you criticize in hopes of realizing a positive change?
- How and what are you feeling when you are using self-criticism to motivate yourself?
- NOW, come up with a kinder, gentler method of self-motivation
- Think about what this message to yourself would be – how it would identify the behaviour you want to change, while still carrying a positive or encouraging tone (similar to the way you would encourage a colleague or family member).
- Reflect on what and how you are feeling when you are using self-compassion to motivate yourself.

Try these [self-compassion meditations and activities](#) developed by Dr Kristin Neff and bust the following MYTHS about self-compassion

- Self-compassion makes us weak and vulnerable
- Self-compassion is really the same as being self-indulgent
- Self-compassion is really a form of making excuses for bad behaviour
- Self-criticism is an effective motivator

**“Compassion for others begins with kindness to ourselves.”** Pema Chodron

### Resources for you

- Sign up for virtual [Resilience at Work \(R@W\) workshop](#) to learn how to boost your resilience.
- Managers, supervisors, leaders (and anyone!) can sign-up for [Employee Psychosocial Checkin training](#) to support staff in psychological distress in the workplace.
- Visit PHSA’s [Supporting Our Workforce page](#) for articles, resources, and tools that provide psychosocial support during COVID-19.