



# Ageing and self-compassion

**'Self-compassion is simply giving the same kindness to ourselves that we would give to others' (Christopher Germer).**

**Dr. Kristen Neff identifies 3 elements of self-compassion:**

- » Self-kindness versus self-judgement
- » Common humanity versus isolation
- » Mindfulness versus over-identification

This means consciously extending kindness to self, understanding that there is common humanity in suffering and having the ability to pay attention to the present moment without judgement. People high in self compassion may be more likely to act proactively, accept assistance from others, adapt to change and take responsibility for their own personal wellbeing.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, organisations, staff, families, friends and residents living and working in the Aged Care sector witnessed and experienced, unprecedented distressing circumstances. The effects of these experiences are likely to be felt well into the future.

Developing skills in self compassion may help to reduce the sense of powerlessness and futility that has occurred in the community at large.

As we age, we are more likely to experience losses and stressors such as the death of a partner or friend, declining mental and physical health, dependency on others or a lowered ability to engage in enjoyable and fulfilling activities.

**Given the physical and mental difficulties that accompany ageing, developing or increasing self-compassion may help older people to:**

- » View their experiences and challenges as part of the human experience.
- » Recognise strong emotions and have the ability to 'sit with' or tolerate them.
- » Ask for help or clarification such as asking others to repeat themselves or assist with personal hygiene.
- » Be more willing to accept the use of aids such as walking frames, hearing aids, or using memory tricks.
- » Practice gratitude, remember fondly or recognise what they still have.



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## Strategies to develop self-compassion (From Kristen Neff self-compassion.org).

### » How would you treat a friend?

Would it be possible to talk to yourself as you would a friend?

### » Self-compassion break

When you feel emotional discomfort say to yourself, 'This is a moment of suffering, suffering is part of life, may I be kind to myself'.

### » Exploring self-compassion through writing

Writing to yourself compassionately about things you don't like about yourself or feel shameful about.

### » Supportive touch

Touch such as; placing a hand on your heart, activates the parasympathetic nervous system and helps us to feel calm.

### » Changing your critical self-talk

Notice your self-critical voice and try to soften it's words and tone.

### » Self-compassion journal

Keep a daily journal and write things down such as any difficult experience that has caused you emotional pain or discomfort.

### » Identifying what we really want

Think of kind ways to motivate yourself rather than self-criticism.

### » Taking care of the caregiver

Make sure you recharge your batteries so that you have enough energy available to give to others. (See self-care for workers fact sheet).

Download the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement's **MyGrief** App for immediate information about how to receive bereavement support or how to support someone who is grieving. Contact the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement's Aged Care & Covid-19 tollfree number to get support and information on **1800 222 200**.