

Exploring Self-Compassion through Letter Writing

Everybody has something about themselves that they don't like; something that causes them to feel shame, to feel insecure or not "good enough." It is the human condition to be imperfect, and feelings of failure and inadequacy are part of the experience of living.

Try thinking about an issue that tends to make you feel inadequate or bad about yourself (physical appearance, work or relationship issues, etc.).

- How does this aspect of yourself make you feel inside—scared, sad, depressed, insecure, angry?
- What emotions come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself?
- Please try to be as emotionally honest as possible and to avoid repressing any feelings, while at the same time not being melodramatic. Try to just feel your emotions exactly as they are—no more, no less.

Now think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting, kind, and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspect of yourself you have just been thinking about.

Reflect upon what this friend feels toward you, and how you are loved and accepted exactly as you are, with all your very human imperfections. This friend recognizes the limits of human nature and is kind and forgiving toward you. In his/her great wisdom this friend understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened in your life to create you as you are in this moment. Your particular inadequacy is connected to so many things you didn't necessarily choose: your genes, your family history, life circumstances—things that were outside of your control. Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend—focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for.

- What would this friend say to you about your "flaw" from the perspective of unlimited compassion?
- How would this friend convey the deep compassion he/she feels for you, especially for the discomfort you feel when you judge yourself so harshly?
- What would this friend write in order to remind you that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses?
- And if you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, how would these suggestions embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion?

As you write to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend, try to infuse your letter with a strong sense of the person's acceptance, kindness, caring, and desire for your health and happiness. After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back and read it again, really letting the words sink in. Feel the compassion as it pours into you, soothing and comforting you like a cool breeze on a hot day. Love, connection, and acceptance are your birthright. To claim them you need only look within yourself.