

Self Compassion: Hugging Practice

One easy way to soothe and comfort yourself when you're feeling badly is to give yourself a gentle hug. It seems a bit silly at first, but your body doesn't know that. It just responds to the physical gesture of warmth and care, just as a baby responds to being held in its mother's arms. Our skin is an incredibly sensitive organ.

Research indicates that physical touch...

- ✓ Releases oxytocin
- ✓ Provides a sense of security
- ✓ Soothes distressing emotions
- ✓ Calms cardiovascular stress.

If you notice that you're feeling tense, upset, sad, or self-critical, **try giving yourself a warm hug, tenderly stroking your arm or face, or gently rocking your body.** What's important is that you make a clear gesture that conveys feelings of love, care, and tenderness.

If other people are around, you can often fold your arms in a nonobvious way, gently squeezing yourself in a comforting manner. You can also simply imagine hugging yourself if you can't make the actual physical gesture.

Notice how your body feels after receiving the hug. Does it feel warmer, softer, calmer?

It's amazing how easy it is to tap into the oxytocin system and change your biochemical experience.

Try giving yourself a hug in times of suffering several times a day for a period of at least a week. Hopefully you'll start to develop the habit of physically comforting yourself when needed, taking full advantage of this surprisingly simple and straightforward way to be kind to ourselves.