

Kristen Neff on Self- Compassion and “Parts”

“Dear friends,

The term "self-compassion" suggests that we give compassion to a "self" that is a single entity. In fact, the term should probably be "selves-compassion" (if Webster's dictionary would allow it), because we have different parts of ourselves that suffer in unique ways.

"Parts" are clusters of thoughts/emotions/behaviors that often form in childhood. We have hidden parts that carry the burden of scary and difficult emotions like shame, fear, hurt and grief. We have protector parts with the job of keeping us safe, in part by preventing ourselves from feeling these scary emotions. Protectors may be inner critics who keep us in line, warriors who get angry at others, or else managers who use obsessive thinking and problem solving to try to control situations.

When a particular part is triggered, it tends to take us over so we can't see outside of the worldview of that part. For instance, when my ashamed part is triggered, I feel unworthy. When my warrior part is triggered, I become convinced that others are bad or wrong. When my inner critic is triggered, I feel I can't do anything right. When my obsessive thinker is triggered, I get caught in storylines of my own making.

Albert Einstein said, "You cannot solve a problem with the same mind that created it." We need to step out of our parts so that we aren't limited by their immature perspectives. Fortunately, we can use compassion to relate to our parts in a loving and accepting way. Compassion doesn't come from a part but comes from our core - known in various traditions as our Self, our Buddha nature, higher self, or true nature.

When we relate to a triggered part from a place of compassion, we become dis-identified with the part. If I feel compassion toward the part of me that feels hurt, for instance, I become bigger than this young part. Not only am I hurt, I am also the compassion that feels moved by my pain and wants to help. I can disentangle from my hurt part and see the larger picture of what's happening with more complexity.

In order to work with our parts, we must first use mindfulness to notice that we're triggered. There are often physiological clues such as shaky hands, elevated heart rate, or constriction in the body. Then we can step outside of the part by saying something like, "I am aware that a part of me is triggered."

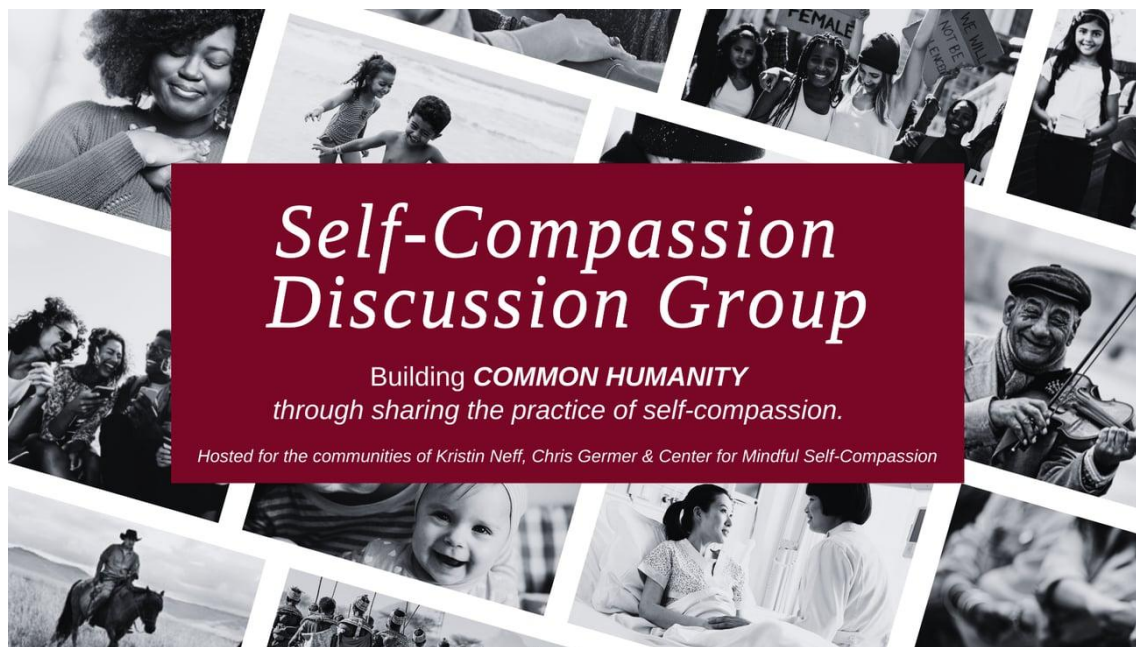
Next, we can direct words of kindness and compassion to the part such as "I'm sorry you're hurting, but I appreciate your efforts to help me. What do you need?" Often our parts need

a sense of love and belonging and safety. We can offer that with assurances such as "I'm here for you, I won't abandon you."

When we're compassionate to our parts, they lose their grip on us. We gain greater clarity and can make wiser choices.

For those who are interested in learning more about parts and how they operate, I'd highly recommend checking out an empirically-supported approach called Internal Family Systems developed by Richard Schwartz (and his best-selling book [No Bad Parts](#)).

To support you on your self-compassion journey, you can find additional practices, upcoming events, resources, and more information on self-compassion [here](#).



Have you joined our Self-Compassion Discussion Group on Facebook? The Self-Compassion Discussion Group is for building common humanity through shared experiences and the practice of self-compassion. The intention for the group is to be similar to an open discussion board, in the efforts of trying to build a community of those interested in self-compassion. Hosted for the communities of Kristin Neff, Chris Germer & Center for Mindful Self-Compassion. [Click here to join!](#)