

# Self-Compassion, Wellbeing, and Happiness

Mitgefühl mit sich selbst, Wohlbefinden und Glücklichsein

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### Abstract

*This article discusses the growing evidence that self-compassion is an important source of wellbeing. First, it defines self-compassion as a way to relate to the self and a pathway to eudaimonic happiness. Next, it reviews the research on self-compassion as an important indicator of intrapersonal wellbeing. Also, it discusses the literature linking self-compassion to interpersonal wellbeing. Finally, the article considers the emerging research suggesting that self-compassion can be learned.*

### Zusammenfassung

*Der Artikel widmet sich der zunehmenden Belege dafür, dass Mitgefühl mit sich selbst eine wichtige Quelle für Wohlbefinden darstellt. Zuerst wird das Selbst-Mitgefühl als eine Art, mit sich selbst umzugehen und als ein Weg eudaimonischen Glückgefühls definiert. Es folgt ein Überblick über Studien zu Selbst-Mitgefühl als ein wichtiger Indikator von intrapersonalem Wohlbefinden. Weiters wird die Literatur diskutiert, die Selbst-Mitgefühl mit interpersonalem Wohlbefinden in Verbindung bringt. Zuletzt werden neu erschienene Studien erwähnt, die Selbst-Mitgefühl als erlernbar bezeichnen.*

There is growing evidence that self-compassion is an important source of happiness and psychological wellbeing (Barnard & Curry, 2011). Neff (2003b) has operationalized self-compassion as consisting of three main elements: self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. These components combine and mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind. Self-kindness entails being gentle, supportive and understanding towards oneself. Rather

than attacking and berating oneself for personal shortcomings, the self is offered warmth and unconditional acceptance (even though particular behaviors may be identified as unproductive and in need of change) rather than treating oneself with harsh criticism or judgment. It also involves actively soothing and comforting oneself in times of distress. Common humanity involves recognizing the shared human experience, understanding that all humans fail and make mistakes, that all people lead imperfect lives. This enables one to develop a broader and more connected perspective with regard to personal shortcomings and individual difficulties, rather than feeling isolated in one's imperfection. Mindfulness, the third component of self-compassion, involves being aware of one's present moment experience of suffering with clarity and balance, neither ignoring nor ruminating on negative aspects of oneself or one's life experience. Self-compassion can be directed towards the self when suffering occurs through no fault of one's own – when the external circumstances of life are simply painful or difficult to bear. Self-compassion is equally relevant, however, when suffering stems from one's own imprudent actions or personal failures.

Self-compassion is an important source of eudaimonic happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). While the hedonic approach to happiness involves pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain, eudaimonic happiness involves finding purpose and meaning in one's life. Self-compassion does not avoid pain, but rather embraces it with kindness and goodwill, generates a sense of wellbeing that is rooted in the experience of being fully human. In this way, self-compassion is reminiscent of Maslow (1971) and Rogers' (1980) conceptions of a healthy personality, which emphasize unconditional self-acceptance and striving to reach one's full potential.

Although self-compassion generates positive emotions toward the self, it doesn't do so by judging the self as 'good' rather than 'bad'. In this way, self-compassion differs markedly from self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to