Self-Compassion Worksheet

Part 1. My self-compassion break

Item	Entry
Name	
Counselor or therapist	
Date	

When something is hard, I can take a short break and treat myself the way I would treat a good friend. I bring the situation to mind, notice which part of my body holds the feeling, and say three short things to myself. I choose words that feel true to me.

My words for noticing that this is hard

Include: a short phrase that says this moment is painful, such as "This feels heavy right now."

My words for remembering that other people struggle too

Include: a short phrase that connects me with other people, such as "Many people have been through something like this."

My words of kindness to myself

Include: what I would say to a good friend in the same situation, said to myself, such as "I can be gentle with myself today."

A gentle touch that comforts me

Include: a gesture that feels soothing to me, such as a hand on my chest, a hand on my upper arm or holding my own wrist.

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Part 2. My self-compassion break log

Each time I take a break, I write down what was happening and rate how upset I felt before and after, from 0 to 10.

Day	What was happening	Upset before *0 = calm* *10 = very upset*	Upset after *0 = calm* *10 = very upset*	What I noticed
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

When I will take a break

Include: moments when I tend to be hard on myself, such as after a mistake or at the end of a long day.

If I am in crisis

If I am in danger or thinking about suicide, I call 911 in the United States or Canada. Elsewhere, I call my local emergency number. The numbers and people I will contact:

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Part 3. Before I write my letter

A compassionate letter is a letter to myself about something I am struggling with, written in a warm and caring voice. I can write it in my own way, and I can write more than one.

What I am struggling with

Include: the situation, the feelings it brings up and what I usually say to myself about it.

The voice I will write in

Include: an imagined friend who accepts me completely; me, writing to a close friend with the same worries; or the kindest part of me, writing to the part of me that is hurting.

Kind things a good friend would say to me about this

Include: words of understanding and encouragement I would offer a friend in my place.

My letter can:

- show that I understand why this is hard,
- remind me that other people struggle with this too,
- speak to me warmly, the way a good friend would,
- leave out blame and “shoulds,” and
- suggest one helpful step I could take.

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Part 4. My letter

My letter

Include: a greeting, the letter in the voice I chose, and a closing.

When I read my letter again

Include: when I read it, how it felt and anything I would add.

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Clinician guide: using the self-compassion break and the compassionate letter

- **When it fits.** Use the worksheet with clients who meet their own struggles with harsh self-criticism. Neff (2003) describes self-compassion as being kind to oneself, seeing one's pain as part of shared human experience and holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness, and the self-compassion break gives each part a short phrase, often paired with a gentle, comforting touch (Neff & Germer, 2018).
- **Start small and choose words together.** Practice the break in session first, with a mild to moderate problem, so the skill builds gradually. Help the client choose words that ring true, since some people choose the word struggle over suffering, or support over kindness. If no kind words come, ask what the client would tell a close friend facing the same trouble (Neff & Germer, 2018).
- **Expect some discomfort.** Being kind to oneself can stir up old hurts, which Neff and Germer (2018) call backdraft: feelings such as grief or shame, thoughts of being alone or a failure, or aches in the body. Describe it as a natural part of the process, slow down, and help the client turn attention to the breath, nearby sounds or the feet on the floor. When soothing touch feels uncomfortable, try a firmer gesture or holding something warm and soft (Neff & Germer, 2018).
- **Shape the letter.** Compassionate letter writing belongs to both compassion focused therapy and Mindful Self-Compassion (Gilbert, 2010; Neff & Germer, 2018). First letters may lack warmth, so read the letter together and help the client find a warm tone that shows understanding and encouragement and leaves out advice and "shoulds" (Gilbert, 2010).
- **Fill in the crisis box together.** The log asks how upset the client feels, so complete the crisis box before the first week of practice. Ask about thoughts of suicide as part of your usual assessment, and follow your setting's crisis protocol whenever a situation involves risk.

Adapted from the descriptions of the Self-Compassion Break and the Compassionate Letter to Myself in Neff and Germer (2018) and of compassionate letter writing in Gilbert (2010). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Tomás (a fictional client)

Tomás, 34, is a high school science teacher in outpatient therapy for depression who criticizes himself harshly when a lesson goes badly. His therapist, J.P., introduced the break at his fifth session, on December 9, 2026, and Tomás kept the log and wrote a letter over two weeks. Tomás, his therapist and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. My self-compassion break

Item	Entry
Name	Tomás
Counselor or therapist	J.P., therapist
Date	December 9, 2026

My words for noticing that this is hard

Today was rough, and I feel it in my chest.

My words for remembering that other people struggle too

Every teacher has lessons that fall flat.

My words of kindness to myself

I can talk to myself the way I would talk to a new teacher I was mentoring.

A gentle touch that comforts me

A hand on my chest at home. Holding my own wrist in the staff room.

Part 2. My self-compassion break log

Day	What was happening	Upset before *0 = calm* *10 = very upset*	Upset after *0 = calm* *10 = very upset*	What I noticed
Day 1	My class ignored the lab rules.	7	4	Shoulders loosened a little.
Day 2	A parent's angry email.	8	6	Held my wrist. Less awkward.
Day 3	Replaying the day in bed.	6	3	Fell asleep sooner.
Day 4	Principal observed. I froze.	8	5	Remembering others helped.
Day 5	Good day. No break needed.			
Day 6	Snapped at my brother.	7	5	Hard to be kind about this.
Day 7	Planning next week's labs.	5	3	Less dread afterward.

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When I will take a break

Right after a lesson goes badly, and at night when I replay the day.

If I am in crisis

Call 911. My sister, Ana, is my emergency contact.

Part 3. Before I write my letter

What I am struggling with

When a lesson goes badly, I tell myself I am a bad teacher and replay it all evening.

The voice I will write in

An imagined friend who knows me well and is always kind to me.

Kind things a good friend would say to me about this

You care about your students. Every teacher has hard days. You stayed calm when the projector failed.

Part 4. My letter

My letter

Dear Tomás,

I know Friday's observation felt awful, and I can see how much you care about your students. Many good teachers have days like this. You stayed calm when the projector failed, and two students stayed after class to ask questions. Maybe ask Ms. Reyes to look over the lab plan with you on Monday. I am proud of how hard you keep trying.

Your friend

When I read my letter again

Sunday night. I teared up a little, then felt steadier. I would add a line about asking for help.

J.P. had Tomás practice the break twice in session with a mild problem before he tried it at school. When the hand on his chest felt awkward, they tried holding his wrist, and J.P. explained that old feelings sometimes come up when people are kind to themselves. At session 7, Tomás read his letter aloud, and they agreed that he would reread it on Sunday nights.

References and further reading

Gilbert, P. (2010). *Compassion focused therapy: Distinctive features*. Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-44807-9.

Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity, 2*(2), 85–101.

Neff, K., & Germer, C. (2018). *The mindful self-compassion workbook: A proven way to accept yourself, build inner strength, and thrive*. Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-2678-9.

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