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# Be Kind to Yourself: the Power of Self-Compassion

## **Cindy Lopez:**

Welcome to Voices of Compassion, CHC's podcast series providing courage, connection and compassion. I'm Cindy Lopez and today we're talking about a topic that everyone needs to hear a little more about. We can all probably agree that what our world needs right now is a little more compassion. Sometimes we might find it easy to show compassion for others, but when it comes to ourselves, it's a different story. Self-compassion greatly increases our emotional resilience. Make sure to listen in to this episode to hear Dr. Pardis Khosravi, Licensed Clinical Psychologist at CHC, as she talks about the power of self-compassion. This is one you really don't want to miss. So as we think about being kind to yourself and the power of self-compassion, I know that as a psychologist, you meet and talk with people every day about what they're going through right now, and especially through the lens of COVID. So what are you seeing in your work and why do you think this topic of self-compassion is so important right now?

## **Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Yeah, I think that's a great question. Mental health really is going to be one of the biggest issues in this pandemic that we're going to be facing in 2021 and has been throughout the last year as well. And I think that the challenges this pandemic has brought on just from you know, lack of social connection or trying to balance work from home and distance learning for our kids or even just you know, trying to find toilet paper at the store. We've had to adjust to so much so quickly, and it is truly impressive how resilient the human race is and how we found really unique ways to cope, but I think there's also this tendency that we all have to be very self-critical and to judge ourselves very harshly. I mean, I can't tell you how many times I've heard parents or kids say things like, oh, I should be doing more. Or, you know, I saw on social media that my friend is making bread or learning this new skill and I'm over here just trying to make sure my kid gets on Zoom for their class. And so people I think are beating themselves up for not being good enough parents or good enough employees or you know, and in reality, surviving is good enough right now, just getting through the end of this pandemic is really good enough. And so I think that's where self-compassion comes in and is really, really important. We know from research that people who practice self-compassion, they cope better with adversity, they're more resilient and they're happier. And so that's why I'm so glad that we're talking about this today.

**Cindy Lopez:**

Can you talk a little bit more about what is compassion? What is self-compassion?

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Yeah, absolutely. Let's start with compassion for others cause I think that is something we are more used to practicing and is more familiar to us. So if we think about what it means to have compassion for somebody else, we first must notice that they're suffering, right. We must first have to have that awareness and then we must be moved by their suffering so that we can respond to their pain with warmth and with caring. And then we offer that understanding and that kindness to them rather than judging them. And self-compassion is exactly the same thing, it's just directed at ourselves. So it means acting in the same way towards ourselves when we are suffering or when we make a mistake. So instead of judging or criticizing ourselves for our shortcoming, which we all do, self-compassion means being kind and understanding to ourselves. And so, it doesn't mean you know, we're not going to try to change or try to improve ourselves, but we're doing that because we care about ourselves, not because we feel like we are worthless or unacceptable as we are. So having compassion for ourselves also means that we're honoring and accepting our humanness. Things don't always go the way we want them to, we all get frustrated, we have losses, we make mistakes, we bump up against our limitations and that's just part of the human condition, right, that's a reality that's shared by everybody. And so with self-compassion, what we're trying to do is open our heart and our mind to this reality instead of constantly fighting against it. Instead of constantly telling ourselves well we shouldn't have made that mistake or we shouldn't have done this thing, that's fighting against it, when in reality we all make mistakes. And so the more that we can feel compassion for ourselves and for each other, you know the happier we will be and the more resilient we will be.

One of the leading researchers of self-compassion, Dr. Kristin Neff, whose work is fabulous, she breaks self-compassion down into three parts that I thought was really helpful as a way to think about it. And so what she says is the first part is mindfulness. You have to be aware of your suffering in order to be compassionate, right? You have to have that moment where you stop and say, wait a second, this hurts, this is really hard, this is the moment where I need compassion. And then we need, the second part is self-kindness, so being warm and understanding to ourselves when we suffer or we fail or we feel inadequate instead of that self-judging, self-critical voice that we have inside our heads. I often will tell people well, what would you say to a friend who was going through that similar situation, right, and then try to direct that same kindness to yourself. And then the third piece is that common humanity piece. We often, when we're suffering, we think that we're the only ones, or when we make a mistake we think that we're the only ones, but really that is the human condition. And so self-compassion also

involves recognizing that suffering in that personal inadequacies are part of that shared human experience that we are not alone, that everybody feels this way. And so I think that's a kind of nice way to think about all of the different elements of self-compassion.

**Cindy Lopez:**

Thank you, Dr. Khosravi that was really comprehensive. I appreciate all the points you brought into that and one in particular that you said about practicing self-compassion doesn't mean that you're kind of complacent about your own personal growth. And I liked how you said you know that the self-compassion is a motivator for personal growth and transformation.

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Yeah, I'm glad that you're highlighting that because it's actually fascinating, there's so much research that shows that people who score higher on self-compassion actually they make more change and they are more successful when they try to make change in their lives.

**Cindy Lopez:**

That's really interesting. So obviously we've just said why compassion is so valuable. I'm really glad that we're taking the time to talk about it today. and I think we can all agree that it is [but] why is it so hard for us?

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Yeah, great question. I think, you know, most people that I talked to, they know that it's valuable, but then it's hard to put that into action. I think there's a couple of reasons for that. I think one of the big reasons is what we were just talking about, that people feel that they need to be self-critical in order to motivate themselves or better themselves, right. There's this worry that if I'm compassionate to myself when I make a mistake or fail in some way, but then I'm going to become complacent, right, I'm not going to change, I'm not going to improve. And so we think we need to beat ourselves up for mistakes or for not doing something because that's the way that we will change, but it's actually counterproductive because research shows that self-criticism is linked very strongly to low mood and depression and depression lowers motivation. And so it actually, when we are beating ourselves up, criticizing ourselves for mistakes in an attempt to change what we're actually doing is making it harder for ourselves to change.

Our brains are really adept at protecting us. And so when we are trying to avoid failure, often what our brains will do is then place that blame on other people, and it's not that we're doing it consciously, right. It's a very subconscious process, but our brain is trying to protect ourselves, so we're going to like, you know what that was so-and-so's fault,

that's why that happened or that's why I did that. And so that as you can imagine, gets in the way of self-improvement right. If we can't take responsibility for our part in things, then how are we ever going to change it? And so that's where I was saying research really shows us that self-compassion is linked very strongly with change.

And so people who are kinder to themselves, they're better equipped to make progress towards their goals. Because if we're not spending our time and energy shaming ourselves, we have all of those resources to face our struggles head on, so that's one. And I think the other big reason that a lot of people struggle with self-compassion is that they equate it with selfishness. I think and I've heard this from a lot of folks that they worry that any time spent caring for themselves automatically means that they're neglecting everybody else, right, but that's not true, they're not mutually exclusive. We can be kind and compassionate to others and to ourselves. So it's not an either or thing it's more of like a both and, right; I can both be compassionate to myself and to others. And so I think about that you know pretty popular saying that you can't pour from an empty cup. I think self-compassion actually increases our bandwidth for thinking about others if we are at the same time able to take care of ourselves.

**Cindy Lopez:**

Thank you for tuning in! Just a note, before we continue on with today's episode, we hope you're following us on social media, so you don't need to wait a whole week between episodes to get engaging, inspiring and educational content from CHC. Our social handles are linked on our podcast webpage at [podcasts.chconline.org](http://podcasts.chconline.org).

I think most people don't want to make mistakes, they want to avoid failure and I think the concept of self-compassion really lends itself to saying, it's okay to make a mistake and it's okay to fail because in order to grow we need to be able to feel comfortable and safe in our environment so that we can take risks.

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Yeah absolutely.

**Cindy Lopez:**

I also am reminded of Dr. Joan Baran, who as you know, is a psychologist here at CHC. When we did a session with her a while ago on parenting, she was talking about "my good enough is good enough." So, how about talking about some strategies or tools that our listeners could use to develop self-compassion or to work on self-compassion.

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Yeah, self-compassion takes practice and it's not something that comes naturally for

most of us. And so as you begin to practice self-compassion, I think a little bit of a catch 22, it's important to have self-compassion for yourself, you learn to practice. But I think it's also helpful to just start with some guided exercises that really walk you through the steps until it becomes a more automatic way of thinking. On Dr. Kristin Neff's website, that will be linked in the show notes, she has a lot of really wonderful guided meditations and other exercises that vary in length, so there are short ones that you can do if you know you have five minutes, and those longer ones. And that's I think, a really great place to get started. And so one of the ones that she talks about that I really like is to walk through the three parts of self-compassion with yourself. So in those moments where you notice, oh, I'm being self-critical let me try the self-compassion thing or even if you just want to build it into your daily routine of you know I'm gonna think about this for five minutes every morning or five minutes before I go to bed. It doesn't have to be anything long, I know we're all busy, it can be five minutes, but in those five minutes to really stop and say to yourself like okay, let me start with the mindfulness part, right, because awareness comes first. So gently ask yourself: what is the pain or the difficulty that needs your attention at this moment and just acknowledging whatever that is, the pain, the emotions, whatever comes up for you as you think about that. And then as you think about that to practice the self-kindness.

So again, that's where, imagine what you would say to a friend, you know, what might you say to somebody else? How might you support or encourage somebody else in that same moment and then wrapping it up with that common humanity piece, right. Remind yourself of how natural it is for hard times to arise for all of us. So that might sound like saying to yourself, you know, I'm not alone or we all struggle in life or it makes sense that I would feel this way. And so just kind of walking through the three parts of self-compassion can be helpful in helping us reframe or shift our thinking, and then there's lots of variations of that. So I do encourage our listeners to check out Dr. Neff's website, she has a ton of different exercises. And then the other resource that I really, really like for those who want to dive a little deeper is Dr. Germer's Book, it's called "The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion," and I believe that will also be in the show notes, but it's a really wonderful book about how to incorporate this mindful self-compassion into our daily lives and how to reframe these self-critical judgmental thoughts, into kinder thoughts about ourselves while still moving towards change and improvement, right, because again, self-compassion is not complacency.

**Cindy Lopez:**

Those are great and I appreciate the references to those resources as well and we will list those in the show notes on the website. A lot of our listeners are probably parents and so as a parent, we know that compassion is important for our kids too. How do I as a parent model self-compassion for my kids?

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Yeah, great question, I think one of the biggest things that we can do as parents is to model that use of self-compassion, compassionate language, when we are speaking with our kids. We're trying to shift their self-talk to be more self-compassionate. And so, you know, instead of I'm dumb, it might be teaching them to say, I'm still learning or if they mess up in their soccer game or whatnot you know I tried my best, or I tried my best and I can practice to get better. And so teaching them that they are trying their best and to have kindness for themselves and then using that exact same language when we're talking to them too. So when they bring home that bad grade being very intentional in our language with them, right. So it might be responding to them with oh, you know, it looks like you tried your best and you studied really hard and what are we going to do differently for the next test. Again, we're not letting them off the hook for the bad grade, but at the same time, we're infusing that self-compassion or that compassion for them into what we're saying.

I was talking to one of my friends who's in education and she was saying, one of the things that they do in her classroom is that they do a series of exercises sort of around this topic, but one of the ones that she finds kids respond to the best is asking them to brainstorm words that they would like to hear from a friend when they mess up. And then in you know some sort of artistic fashion putting that on you know a poster board or something, let the kids have fun with it, get creative. And then put that up in their bedroom or put it up somewhere in the house where they can see it. And so when they're doing that negative self-talk, bringing them back to that visual and saying, wait a minute, what words can we use right now? Like you messed up and this is what you would want a friend to say to you, so can we say it to ourselves? Or brainstorming, helping them brainstorm actions to show themselves more compassion.

**Cindy Lopez:**

Yeah, hearing you talk also reminds me of Carol Dweck's work, Carol Dweck out of Stanford, DWECK, who has done a lot of work on growth mindset. For the classroom, instead of I screwed up or instead of I'm so dumb reframe that and say, I'm going to make sure that I spend more time studying ahead of time, next time, so I feel a little bit more prepared. So there's those kinds of growth mindset self-talk is important too and that's basically what you were referencing. So as we wrap up our time today Dr. Khosravi, I'm wondering if there's one thing that you hope our listeners take away from this episode? What would that be?

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

If there was one thing, I think it would be that self-compassion is not selfish or self-indulgent, it's not self-pity, it's not us being complacent, right. I think that's the big

takeaway because I think that's where people get the most stuck. And I think once that understanding is there then the practice becomes a lot easier. I want people to really think about this idea that self-compassion is just about being kind and caring to ourselves as we are to others, often so that we can be there for those who need us. And so you know, we're all struggling right now, this is a really incredibly hard time and we're all doing our best and that is enough and I think if we can carry that mindset through these coming days, then hopefully that eases the burden, just a little bit.

**Cindy Lopez:**

Thank you so much for making the time to be with us.

**Dr. Pardis Khosravi:**

Absolutely, thank you for having me.

**Cindy Lopez:**

To our listeners, thank you for joining us and we hope that you will listen in again next week, when we have a new episode on our Voices of Compassion podcast series. Until then we hope that you remember to be kind to yourself and exercise a little self-compassion.