



EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN'S COACHING

## **The Incredible Power of Self-Compassion** **Dr. Alison Miller, Tiara Managing Partner and Program Coach**

We all want to feel good about ourselves. We want to feel worthy, loved, secure, and accomplished. And we certainly don't want to feel inadequate, unworthy, insecure, ashamed, or disappointed with ourselves. Yet at times, feeling good about ourselves eludes us and negative thoughts and emotions crowd out the positive ones. When this happens how do we aim to feel better?

Very often the strategies we use to feel better actually backfire and hold us back from being confident, joyful, and able to claim our worth and place in this world. For example, we work harder and longer hoping someone will notice what an "excellent" employee we are. Or we keep giving and giving until we are exhausted in the hopes that other people will appreciate and validate us. Some of us seek perfection in our bodies, performance, or homes as a way to avoid critique and subsequent bad feelings, while also hoping we will be redeemed once and for all as "good enough." These kinds of strategies become part of our persona; a way of being in the world designed to keep others from seeing aspects of ourselves we believe need to be hidden. But when positive feedback or success comes, we attribute it to the persona, not our true selves, and we can end up feeling like the inadequate fraud we were trying to cover up in the first place. It is like we are living on a hamster wheel seeking redemption, not realizing that no matter how much we hustle for validation of our worthiness and goodness, the wheel is never going to get us there.

So how can we get off the hamster wheel? How we can truly feel good about ourselves? How can we come home to ourselves as a place of self-love, nurturance, and reassurance? The answer is self-compassion. Self-compassion is about expressing kindness from ourselves to ourselves and having a nonjudgmental attitude towards our shortcomings. It is about valuing ourselves and granting ourselves permission to be human.

Self-compassion is essential to the quality of our lives and yet there are few places in our society where it is discussed or encouraged. In fact, when you talk about self-compassion publicly, people often express doubt about whether it is possible or fear that it is self-indulgent and will lead to laziness and a lack of motivation to take positive action in their lives. Quite the opposite is true. Self-compassion is about loving yourself and being kind to yourself even when you make mistakes or don't live up to what you or others expect. It is about freeing up the energy bound in self-critique and the drive to prove ourselves so we can take action in areas of our lives that authentically matter to us.

Research shows that people can develop a compassionate stance towards themselves. Such self-compassion has a multitude of positive effects such as greater self-confidence, optimism, reduced depression and anxiety, improved relationships, and even weight loss (ah, you were hoping I would say that, weren't you?). How do you become self-compassionate? According to Kristin Neff who studies self-compassion at the University of Texas, there are three essential components of self-compassion:



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mindfulness, self-kindness, and recognition of our common humanity. Each of these components can be practiced and cultivated over time.

**Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is being in the present moment with curiosity about our own experience without preconceived notions or interpretations. Mindfulness serves the development of self-compassion by allowing us to be a witness to our own self-critique and pain. Begin to observe your own mind. What self-judgments do you make? Do you put yourself down for not being smart enough, the way you ran a meeting at work last week, for forgetting your best friend's birthday, or for yelling at your spouse? Observe what is painful or difficult in your life. Are you struggling with money? Have you been arguing with your family? Do you feel uncomfortable in your own body? Do you feel ashamed of past behavior? The practice of mindfulness is about recognizing what is present in our lives now without ignoring it, exaggerating it, or getting lost in a story about it. When you notice your pain, see if you can stay present without numbing yourself or running from it. Challenge yourself: Can I be here now in the presence of this pain? When we bear witness to our pain and acknowledge its very existence without fleeing from it, we set the stage for the second core component of self-compassion: self-kindness.

**Self-kindness:** Self-kindness is about being gentle and understanding with ourselves rather than judgmental and critical. It is **not** about letting ourselves off the hook or being complacent. We still reserve the right to discern changes or improvements we want to make in our lives. We just do so without self-loathing and harsh critiques. Self-kindness is about more than letting go of self-judgment. It is also about reaching out from within ourselves to ourselves offering comfort, understanding, and support. You stop seeing yourself as a problem to be fixed, but rather as a valuable human being worthy of care. Think about a person you love. When he or she is hurt or in need, how do you feel? Take a moment and close your eyes thinking about this person being in pain. Allow yourself to connect with the compassion and love in your heart. Feel the compassion and love coming out of you like a light shining on this person. Once you feel it, take a deep breath and imagine that light slowly turning and shining back to you. Send loving kindness back to yourself. It might sound like, "I know today was very difficult for you. I see you are hurt and feeling scared. It is not easy being human. What do you need right now? Do you have a request of yourself or someone else?" This practice may seem strange at first, but if you want to be kinder to yourself, you need to practice kindness.

**Recognize Our Common Humanity.** Recognition of our common humanity is feeling connected with others in the experience of life rather than feeling isolated and alienated by our suffering. There is a tendency to feel we are the only ones experiencing pain or having certain difficulties in life. This sense of isolation fuels the belief that something is wrong with us leaving us vulnerable to the harshness of our inner critic. In truth, all human beings experience pain. Imagine we had 1,000 people in a room and they were asked to stand if they ever experienced the following: doing something they regretted, feeling inadequate and not up to an important task, not liking what they see in the mirror, hurting someone they love, or failing to achieve something. If the 1,000 people were being honest, virtually all 1,000 would stand for each stated experience. The emotion of compassion comes from the recognition that human beings are imperfect. When we recognize our common humanity, we can see that feelings of



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inadequacy and disappointment are shared by all. Such recognition helps grant us permission to witness our own pain and respond to it with kindness rather than self-judgment or behavior designed to avoid pain.

Self-compassion is a process and a life journey for us all. In time and with committed practice to bring self-compassion into your life, you will create the capacity to more fully support and love yourself and the power to live a peaceful, joyful existence.

To learn more about self-compassion, please join me and Tiara Managing Partner and Program Coach Peg Rowe for our September [Teleconnect: The Incredible Power of Self-Compassion](#) on Tuesday September 13<sup>th</sup> at 2:30pm ET, 1:30pm CT; 12:30pm MT, 11:30am PST. In this 45-minute session you will have the chance to learn more about what self-compassion is and tangible practices you can readily apply to increase self-compassion in your life.

In October, Tiara is offering you an opportunity to delve deeply into self-compassion in the [TeleSeries: The Incredible Power of Self-Compassion](#) over the course of 4 sessions. We will explore how you can greatly expand self-compassion in your life and begin to alter the very ground of your being and relationship you have with yourself. You will learn to cultivate mindfulness and self-kindness practices. I hope you will join us for what I believe will be a profound inquiry into loving ourselves and living well. Each session is 45 minutes on October 4, 11, 18, and 25<sup>th</sup> at 2:30pm EST, 1:30pm CST; 12:30pm MST, 11:30am PST.