Self-Love and Healing from Trauma

Kay Colbert, LCSW
Self-Love and Healing from Trauma

What do you hope to take away?
Self-Love and Healing from Trauma
7:00 – 8:30

1) Define Self-Love

2) Research on Self-Love, Self-Compassion

3) Define Trauma

4) How can Self-Love Help to Heal Trauma?

5) Trauma & Addiction

6) Questions, Comments
Self-Love

The Missing Piece

- Self-Esteem
- Self-Worth
- Self-Compassion
- Loving Kindness
- Natural Self-Affirmation
- Paradoxical Self-Acceptance
Self-Love

The Missing Piece

Including ourselves in the circle of compassion

Treating ourselves with the same kindness, care & concern that we would treat a good friend

Asking: What do I need in this moment?
Self-Love

Sinful?
Self-Love

Narcissistic?
Self-Love

Selfish?
Self-Love

Weird Touchy-Feely-Buddhist Thing?
Sinful?

♥ Love thy neighbor as thyself

If it is a virtue to love others as a human being, then I should love myself as a human being.

Being thankful, and appreciating the person who God has made in you, created in his own image.
Self-Love

Not the same as self-esteem. High self-esteem considered good, but this is often confused with high accomplishments, being BETTER THAN others, putting others down, “one-up.”

When we fail, then we lose the self-esteem & feel bad about ourselves.

Better than self-esteem: self-love steps in when things are not good, when you may not be judging yourself positively, when self-esteem may be failing you.

Narcissistic?
Self-Love

Self-love, self-compassion is not a way of judging or evaluating ourselves, it is a way of embracing ourselves kindly, flaws and all.

It’s not how are we better than others, but how are we the same. Not constant social comparison or ego-defensive aggression.
Self-Love

Not self-indulgent.
If we can keep our own hearts open, we have more available to give to others. In order to have compassion for others, we have to have compassion for ourselves.

Selfish?

Only the person who has faith in himself is able to be faithful to others.

- Erich Fromm

Self-Love

- Paul Tillich Christian philosopher & theologian

Judaism starts with the premise that each human being is created in the image of God. With such a lofty starting point, self-respect is therefore every human’s birthright.

- Rabbi Noah Weinberg
Self-Love

Love: kindness
a deep sense of caring

Compassion: Sameness: Connection with others

Underneath we all want to happy & we want to be free from suffering – this person, just like me, has same basic needs.
“If your mother did not know how to love herself, or your father did not know how to love himself, then it would be impossible for them to teach you to love yourself. They were doing the best they could with what they had been taught as children.”

- Louise L. Hay
You don’t need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself.

- Thich Nhat Hanh
Self-Compassion Research

Kristin Neff, PhD
UT Austin
Researcher on self-compassion & its benefits

self-compassion.org

**self-kindness** – treating ourselves with kindness instead of harsh self-judgment. Treat ourselves like we would treat a good friend.
common humanity – how am I the same as others? being human is imperfect & that is the shared human experience, the connection we have with others. We often feel isolated in our suffering & our imperfections & this is psychologically damaging.
Self-Compassion

mindfulness – being with what is in the present moment. If we are suffering, we have to be aware of it. This often comes from harsh self-criticism. We often aren’t even aware of our Self-Critic.
Self-Compassion

well-being – research shows that self-compassion is strongly related to mental well-being. Less depression, anxiety, perfectionism. Also correlated with increase in happiness, life satisfaction, motivation, self-responsibility, making healthy lifestyle choices, feeling more connected with others, better interpersonal relationships
for more info:

The Space Between Self-Esteem and Self Compassion: Kristin Neff at TEDxCentennialParkWomen

Kay Colbert, LCSW, 2014
Loving Kindness
with
Self-Compassion
Exercise

from: Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) for Professionals,
Kristin Neff, PhD, & Christopher Germer, PhD
Trauma
simple PTSD – single event as adult
complex PTSD – multiple traumas, often as child
“big T” & “little t”
According to the US Dept of Veterans Affairs:

1) disaster & terrorism
2) military trauma
3) violence & other trauma

According to National Child Traumatic Stress Network:

complex trauma
domestic violence
early childhood trauma
medical trauma
natural disasters
physical abuse

refugee & war zone trauma
school violence & crises
sexual abuse
terrorism
traumatic grief


Kay Colbert, LCSW, 2014
“Trauma is an experience that overwhelms our ability to cope and leaves our relationships and our brains with the challenge of finding a way to remain integrated and functioning well.

Healing – becoming whole – can be seen as a process of integration, linking neural circuits that have become disconnected during overwhelming events in a person’s life.”

Dan J. Siegel, MD
DSM-5 Criteria

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder –

Criterion A: Stressor

The person was exposed to: death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence, as follows: (1 required):

1) direct exposure
2) witnessing in person
3) indirectly
4) Repeated or extreme indirect exposure to aversive details of the event(s), usually in the course of professional duties (e.g., first responders, collecting body parts; professionals repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse).

(American Psychiatric Association, 2013)
DSM-5 Criteria

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder –

Criterion B: intrusion symptoms

event is persistently reexperienced in following ways (1 required):

1) Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive memories. Note: Children older than six may express this symptom in repetitive play.

2) Traumatic nightmares. Note: Children may have frightening dreams without content related to the trauma(s).

3) Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks) which may occur on a continuum from brief episodes to complete loss of consciousness. Note: Children may reenact the event in play.
DSM-5 Criteria

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder –
Criterion B: intrusion symptoms

event is persistently reexperienced in following ways (1 required):

4) Intense or prolonged distress after exposure to traumatic reminders.

5) Marked physiologic reactivity after exposure to trauma-related stimuli.
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder –
Criterion E: alterations in arousal & reactivity

Trauma-related alterations in arousal and reactivity that began or worsened after the traumatic event: (two required)

1) Irritable or aggressive behavior
2) Self-destructive or reckless behavior
3) Hypervigilance
4) Exaggerated startle response
5) Problems in concentration
6) Sleep disturbance
Trauma

Other symptoms can include:

- trouble with relationships: codependency, love addiction, love avoidance
- poor boundaries: can’t say no, put up walls
- “anxiety”: anxiety, panic, dissociation
- “thoughts racing” – flashbacks, dissociation
Trauma

Symptoms can include:

• trauma-induced hallucinations – can be mistaken for psychosis

• alcohol & other drug use/abuse – to numb feelings, emotions

• paranoia – persistent fear of unknown “bad things” happening

• sleep problems – nightmares, can’t sleep
People with trauma often have negative feelings & thoughts about themselves.

responsibility: defective
I’m a bad person, I’m not lovable, I’m not good enough

responsibility: action
I should have done something, I should have known better, I should have done something
Trauma

People with trauma often have negative feelings & thoughts about themselves.

safety / vulnerability
I can’t trust anyone, I can’t protect myself, I’m not safe

control / choices
I am not in control, I am powerless, I can’t stand up for myself, I can’t trust anyone, I can’t get what I want
Trauma & Self-Love
Trauma & Self-Love

“. . . support for the notion that trauma survivors, particularly those with PTSD, may benefit from incorporating elements of self-compassion into treatment.”

“. . . self-compassion may be worth integrating into trauma treatment, particularly in addressing self-criticism and rumination.” (p. 558)

Trauma & Self-Love

• be aware
  physical sensations?
  emotions?
  automatic thoughts?
“trauma . . . can never be fully healed until we also address the essential role played by the body. We must understand how the body is affected by trauma and its central position in healing its aftermath.”

Trauma & Self-Love

Find where you can feel your emotion in your physical body. Where can you feel it most strongly?

Imagine softening that part of your body, allowing the physical sensation to linger without fighting it, directing a little loving energy to that spot on your body.

Since emotions are a web of mind and body reactions, changing one part of the web can affect the rest.

Source: Why Accepting Pain May Heal You: An Interview with Christopher Germer, PhD, by Elisha Goldstein, PhD, Mindfulness & Psychotherapy, 2010. Retrieved from PsychCentral.com
Trauma & Self-Love

• just notice, label

• instead of stuffing, denial, distraction with unhealthy reactions, or just suffering through it

• turn towards, incline towards, allow sensation to linger, lean in with kindness, soften edges
Trauma & Self-Love

• Comfort yourself:
  ➢ this is a moment of suffering, discomfort
  ➢ it’s understandable, normal
  ➢ suffering is part of life
  ➢ everyone has suffering
  ➢ I can be kind to myself
  ➢ I can accept myself as I am
Trauma & Self-Compassion

Christopher Germer, PhD
clinical psychologist
Harvard Medical School

mindfulselfcompassion.org
Trauma & Self-Love

“And when we’re in a mindset of mindful compassion, a little space grows around our destructive emotions that allows us to make positive changes in our lives.”

- Christopher Germer

Source: Why Accepting Pain May Heal You: An Interview with Christopher Germer, PhD, by Elisha Goldstein, PhD, Mindfulness & Psychotherapy, 2010. Retrieved from PsychCentral.com
“... we don’t need to dive headfirst into our difficult emotions to transform them with compassion—we only need to touch them.”

When we label an emotion, especially with “tender attention” rather than “worried attention,” the emotion seems to lose its sting.

Brain imaging studies show that labeling reduces the fear response of the amygdala, the part of the brain that signals danger.

Source: Why Accepting Pain May Heal You: An Interview with Christopher Germer, PhD, by Elisha Goldstein, PhD, Mindfulness & Psychotherapy, 2010. Retrieved from PsychCentral.com
Trauma & Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is relating to the experience that arises in your awareness.

When the experience of suffering arises, you might feel pain, fear, sadness. You can relate to that experience in a compassionate way.
Trauma and Substance Abuse
Trauma and Substance Abuse

Alcohol & other drugs
other compulsive behaviors
often used when something triggers past trauma.
Numbing, avoidance, temporary pain management.
Connection obvious but may be missed.
Rates: Of clients in SA treatment, 12% - 34% PTSD; more will have experienced trauma

Up to 2/3 of all people in drug treatment report childhood physical, sexual or emotional abuse

Women in SA treatment, 33% - 59% (or higher)

Higher prevalence for females: 30 – 59% of women in drug treatment meet criteria for PTSD

Trauma and Substance Abuse

- Rate of PTSD 2-3 times higher for women in drug treatment compared to men in drug treatment.

- Women who are victims of both sexual and physical abuse are twice as likely to abuse drugs.

- Gender: women typically sexual or physical childhood trauma, men combat or crime.

- Self-medicating, numbing out. In 2/3 of cases, PTSD first, then SA.

Women prisoners with trauma history/PTSD more likely to be re-incarcerated

When trauma is untreated, substance abusers drop out of treatment at high rate

Women with PTSD abuse the most severe substances and are vulnerable to relapse for both conditions and repeated trauma

PTSD or trauma symptoms do not go away with abstinence; in early recovery, may be more acute.

Treatment as usual for either d/o may be problematic: exposure, 12 step, benzos)

Benefits to responding to unpleasant experiences in a mindful & accepting way instead of trying to reduce, avoid, or resist the experience with alcohol, drugs or other behaviors.

We may not be able to eliminate all triggers, cravings or emotions that lead to relapse, but we do have a choice in how we relate to these experiences. Self-love, self-compassion can help us respond more skillfully to challenging situations.

Source: G. Alan Marlatt, Sarah Bowen, & M. Kathleen B. Lustyk, in Wisdom & Compassion in Psychotherapy, Christopher Germer, PhD, & Ronald D. Siegel, PsyD, Guilford Press, 2012
Trauma
Treatment Strategies

• practice grounding, relaxation & coping strategies daily

• Somatic Experiencing

• EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing)

• PIT (Post Induction Therapy)

• group therapy (Seeking Safety, MBSR, MBRP, MSC)

• intensive workshops & retreats (run by licensed professionals, treatment centers)

• Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
Trauma
Treatment Strategies

• Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)
• Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)
• yoga, Trauma-Sensitive Yoga
• Tai Chi, Chi Gong, etc.
• meditation
• Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
• Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP)
• Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC)
Trauma

Treatment Strategies

- hypnotherapy
- good self-care
- exercise
- acupuncture
- massage
- medications (non-addictive) to treat symptoms (discuss with your physician)
Trauma & Self-Love

Trauma can cause

• alienation from oneself & others
• expectations of further bad things
• rupture of normal connections & relationships with others

Self-Compassion can

redevelop these connections in a positive way

Source: John Briere in Wisdom & Compassion in Psychotherapy, Christopher Germer, PhD, & Ronald D. Siegel, PsyD, Guilford Press, 2012
**Trauma & Self-Love**

Self-Kindness can

help us soothe & nurture ourselves when confronting our pain instead of being angry or disappointed when life falls short of our ideals

help us acknowledge our problems & shortcomings but without judgment so we can do what is necessary to help ourselves

Source: Christopher Germer, PhD, & Kristin D. Neff, PhD, Self-Compassion in Clinical Practice, Journal of Clinical Psychology: In Session, Vol. 69(8), 1-12(2013).
Trauma & Self-Love

Self-Compassion can

help us accept we can’t always get what we want or be who we want

and we are not alone in this we all have imperfections & failures

this connects us with others

Source: Christopher Germer, PhD, & Kristin D. Neff, PhD, Self-Compassion in Clinical Practice, Journal of Clinical Psychology: In Session, Vol. 69(8), 1-12(2013).
Trauma & Self-Love

Self-Compassion can

↓ reduce depression, anxiety, stress, cortisol levels

↓ reduce extreme reactions, negative emotions

↑ increase accepting thoughts about self, emotional regulation, forgiveness of self, compassion for others

↑ increase optimism, curiosity, personal initiative, motivation, life satisfaction, emotional connection with others

Source: Christopher Germer, PhD, & Kristin D. Neff, PhD, Self-Compassion in Clinical Practice, Journal of Clinical Psychology: In Session, Vol. 69(8), 1-12(2013).
Trauma & Self-Love

“…we can still be crazy after all these years. We can still be angry after all these years. We can still be timid or jealous or full of feelings of unworthiness. The point is…not to try to throw ourselves away and become something better. It’s about befriending who we are already.”

– Pema Chödrön

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken ceramics with gold. This technique expresses profound esteem in which the damaged object is held by using precious gold in the repair. The object is seen as having greater beauty than it had in its undamaged condition.
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References


Kay Colbert, LCSW, 2012
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References


