

Self-Compassion and Difficult Relationship Interactions

Dr. Kristin Neff
Educational Psychology Department
University of Texas at Austin

WORKING WITH ANGER BY MEETING UNMET NEEDS

This is an informal practice designed to transform hard feelings, especially anger, in current and past relationships.

- Please close your eyes and think of a relationship interaction that you're angry and bitter about.. Choose a situation that was mild to moderately anger-provoking, not traumatizing. Also, please choose a situation in which you feel the anger is not serving you any more, and you're ready to let go. Remember what happened in as much detail as possible.
- Now getting in touch with your anger, really feel it in your body. Try to fully validate your anger, knowing that it's completely natural for you to feel as you do.
- Now, if you were to strip away the anger and resentment (the hard feelings), what do you have left? *What are the soft feelings behind your anger?* Are you feeling...
 - Hurt?
 - Scared?
 - Lonely?
 - Sad?
- Now, digging even deeper, ask yourself, "*What is my unmet need?*"
- Seeing if you can release the other person for a moment and dive into your own experience. What is the universal human need that is generating the soft feeling? The need to be...?
 - Seen?
 - Heard?
 - Validated?
 - Safe?
 - Connected?
 - To be special?
 - Loved?

- Whatever you are feeling is quite natural. All human beings have these needs!
- If you'd like, putting your hand over your heart and giving yourself some love just because these feelings arise, not to make them go away.
- Now, seeing if you can meet your deepest needs directly.
 - If you feel unloved, can you tell yourself "I love you."
 - If you feel unseen, can you tell yourself "I see you."
 - If you feel alone, can you tell yourself "I'm here for you."
- If you're having trouble finding the right language, think about what you would say to a dear friend who expressed these same needs as you have? Can you say the same to yourself?
- In other words, giving to yourself now what you've been hoping to receive from others?

FORGIVENESS

FORGIVING OTHERS

- Contact the pain that this person has caused you, perhaps even feeling it in your body as residual stress.
- Offering yourself compassion for how you've suffered, perhaps saying: *"May I be safe. May I be peaceful. May I be kind to myself. May I accept myself as I am"*
- If it feels like you need to stay here, keep giving yourself compassion.
- If it feels right to try to forgive, seeing if you can now try to understand the forces that made this person act badly. Recognizing that it's only human to make mistakes. Consider if there were any environmental factors impacting what happened. For example, was he or she under a lot of stress at the time? Or consider the factors that may have shaped this person's personality (e.g., financial stress, difficult childhood, low self-esteem, cultural factors)
- Beginning to offer forgiveness to the other person, perhaps saying the phrase: *"May I begin to forgive you for what you have done, wittingly or unwittingly, to have caused me harm."*
- If it feels right, deciding not to be hurt like this again, at least to the best of your ability.

FORGIVING OURSELVES

- Take a few moments to consider how your actions impacted the other person and feel your regret and remorse.
- While opening to the truth of what you did, also recognizing that it's only human to make mistakes. Maybe you feel some shame. That's also human.
- Offering yourself compassion for how you've suffered, perhaps saying: *"May I be free from fear. May I be free from shame. May I be kind to myself. May I accept myself as I am"*
- If it feels like you need to stay here, keep giving yourself compassion.
- Now trying to understand some factors leading to your mistake. Taking a moment to consider if there were any environmental factors impacting you at the time. For instance, were you under a lot of stress? Or were certain aspects of your personality triggered in an irrational way, old buttons pushed?
- Now seeing if you can offer forgiveness to yourself, saying the phrase: *"May I (begin) to forgive myself for what I have done, wittingly or unwittingly, to have caused [this person] harm."*
- If it feels right, deciding not to make this same mistake, at least to the best of your ability.