

Understanding Self-Compassion



For people who have a loud inner critique



By Khysandra Lee



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Welcome

If you've picked up this guide, chances are you're looking for a different way to respond to yourself, one that feels a little less critical and a little more kind. Maybe you've been carrying the weight of perfectionism, self-doubt, anxiety, or simply feeling like you're never "doing enough." If so, you're not alone.

I created this guide because I know how easy it is to practice kindness to others while being our own harshest critic. Over time, the inner criticism can leave us feeling exhausted, disconnected, and never quite good enough. This guide was created to help you begin changing that relationship with yourself.

Self-compassion isn't about pretending everything is okay or lowering your expectations. It's about learning to treat yourself with the same understanding, patience, and care that you would naturally offer someone you love. It's recognizing that being human means making mistakes, facing challenges, and experiencing difficult emotions, and that these moments deserve kindness, not judgment.

As you move through this guide, we invite you to approach yourself with curiosity instead of criticism. You don't need to have everything figured out. You don't need to be perfect. Take your time, revisit exercises whenever you need them, and remember that even small moments of self-compassion can create meaningful change over time.



Khysandra Lee

Founder of Elevate Resilience Therapy

Section 1

Understanding Self- Compassion

1.1

Self-compassion is the act of treating yourself with the same kindness, understanding and support that you would offer to someone you care about when you're struggling. We all have the ability to be kind, but it is easier to be kind to someone else than it is yourself. Self-compassion is hard because many people have learned to motivate themselves through criticism, pressure or perfectionism rather than kindness.

If your inner voice has been shaped by messages like “I should do better,” “I can’t make mistakes,” or “being hard on myself keeps me improving,” then responding to yourself with self-compassion can feel unfamiliar, even uncomfortable.

Self-compassion isn’t letting yourself off the hook, its giving yourself a safe place to stand while you figure out your next step. When we move through life through the lens of self-judgment, “I should have known better,” “i’m not good enough,” or “I always mess this up,” we reinforce the belief that there is something wrong with us. This kind of self-judgment may feel like we are holding ourselves accountable; however, it often leaves us feeling ashamed, stuck, or afraid to try again.

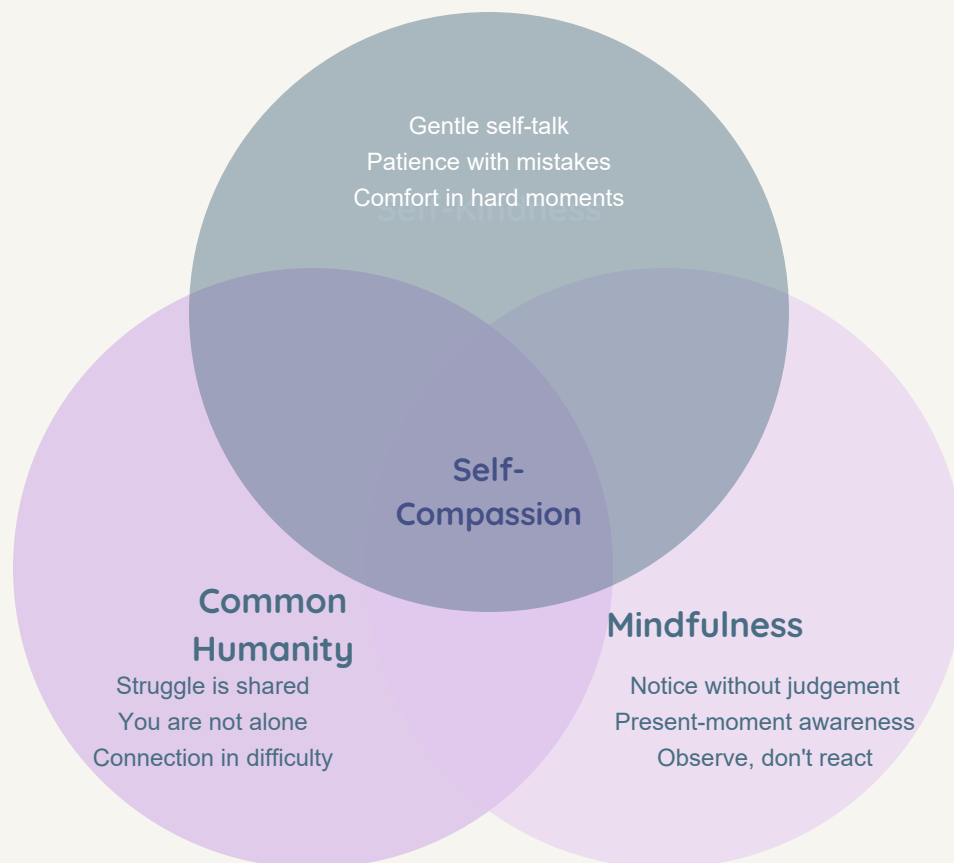
Self-compassion offers a different approach. It means acknowledging what happened honestly, while responding to yourself with the same patience and care you would offer someone else. It does not mean ignoring mistakes, avoiding responsibility, or pretending everything is fine. Instead, it creates the emotional safety needed to learn, grow, and make meaningful changes.

Self-compassion is hard because it asks us to treat ourselves differently from the way we may have been taught to treat ourselves. It requires replacing judgement with understanding and that change takes practice.

“Self-compassion isn’t letting yourself off the hook, its giving yourself a safe place to stand while you figure out your next step.”

1.2

Psychologist Kristen Neff is one of the leading researchers in the field of self-compassion and its practices. She describes self-compassion as having three main components; self kindness, common humanity and mindfulness (Neff, 2003).



For further reading on self-compassion by Kristen Neff, visit;
<https://self-compassion.org/books-by-kristin-neff/>

Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032>

1.2

The first pillar, self-kindness, involves responding to ourselves with care and understanding when we experience failure, pain or difficulty rather than responding with harsh self-criticism. For example, instead of saying “I’m such a failure for this mistake,” self-kindness might sound like “I made a mistake, but mistakes happen, I can learn from this and try again.”

The second pillar is common humanity, it is the recognition that struggles, imperfections and setbacks are part of the shared human experience. Rather than thinking, “I’m the only one that feels this way,” we remind ourselves that everyone faces challenges, makes mistakes and has setbacks.

The third pillar is mindfulness, it involves being aware of our thoughts and emotions in a balanced way. It means noticing our pain without ignoring it or being completely consumed by it. For example, we might acknowledge, “I’m feeling disappointed and frustrated right now,” without allowing that feeling to define who we are.

According to Neff (2003), these three elements work together to create a healthier way of responding to ourselves during difficult moments. Self-compassion isn't about avoiding responsibility, it's about approaching challenges with greater understanding, which can support learning and growth.

For further reading on self-compassion by Kristen Neff, visit;
<https://self-compassion.org/books-by-kristin-neff/>

Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032>

1.3

When I make a mistake, what is the first thing I say to myself?

Would I speak to a close friend the way I speak to myself when I fail?

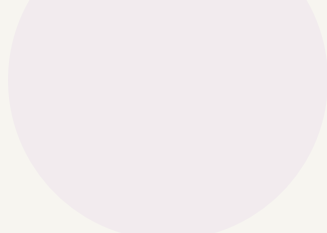
Do I tend to focus more on what I did wrong than what I can learn from the experience?

When I am having a difficult time, do I allow myself to acknowledge it, or do I push it away?

Do I believe my struggles are a sign of weakness or a normal part of being human?

Do I give myself permission to rest, make mistakes, or ask for support?

When I fall short of my expectations, do I respond with curiosity or criticism?



Can I accept that I am a work in progress?

Do I define myself by my mistakes or see them as experiences I can learn from?

Do I believe I am the only one struggling while others seem to have it together?

Does self-compassion feel natural, or does it feel uncomfortable or undeserved?

Do I believe being kind to myself will make me less motivated?

Section 2

Self-Compassion In Action



2.1

The Good Friend Exercise

It's easy to get stuck in the loop that you are the only one experiencing hardship and difficulty. Self-compassion helps you remind yourself that setbacks are a part of the shared human experience. The good friend exercise helps you respond to yourself with the same kindness, understanding, and encouragement you would naturally offer to someone you deeply care about.

Best for: stress, failure, imperfection, self-doubt, shame or difficult emotions.

How to try it: Ask yourself "what situation is causing me emotional pain right now," choose something that has been weighing on you, take a slow breath and write down what happened. Now, picture someone you deeply care about, imagine them in the exact same situation. Write down what you would say to them.

Consider these guiding questions:

- "What would I want them to know?"
- "What strengths would I remind them of?"
- "How would I comfort them?"
- "How could I help them see the bigger picture?"

Reflection Prompts

What did I notice about the difference between how I speak to myself and how I would speak to a friend?

Was it easier to offer compassion to someone else than to myself? Why might that be?

What is one kind thing I can say to myself today that I would say to a good friend?

2.2

The Self-kindness Pause

The self-kindness pause is a brief, intentional moment where you stop and offer yourself the same warmth and understanding you would give to someone you care about. It draws on all three pillars of self-compassion: mindfulness (noticing what you feel without judgment), common humanity (remembering that struggle is a shared human experience), and self-kindness (responding to yourself with gentleness rather than criticism). It can be used anywhere, anytime, and takes only a minute or two.

Best for: moments of stress, self-criticism, emotional overwhelm, or anytime you notice you are being hard on yourself.

How to try it: Pause and notice what you are feeling. Place your hand gently over your heart or chest. Say to yourself: "This is a moment of suffering" (mindfulness). Then say: "Suffering is a part of life, I am not alone in this" (common humanity). Then offer yourself kind words: "May I be kind to myself, may I give myself the compassion I need" (self-kindness). You can adjust the words to whatever feels most natural and soothing to you.

Some examples of other kind words:

- "I made a mistake, but mistakes are how I learn"
- "This is a lot to carry, it's okay, I feel tired"
- "Many people are navigating similar pain right now, I am not alone"

Reflection Prompts

How did it feel to acknowledge my feelings instead of pushing them away?

What changed when I reminded myself that suffering is a normal part of life?

What was it like to place my hand over my heart or chest? Did it feel comforting, unfamiliar, or something else?

2.3

Laugh It Out

Laughter can be a helpful coping mechanism for a difficult time. It is often the first thing to disappear when we are in a difficult moment, but it is a fast and effective way for your body to reset. It releases physical tension, saturates your system with fresh oxygen, and signals to your nervous system that you are secure enough to relax and explore.

Best for: feeling overwhelmed, stuck in a cycle of overthinking, feeling emotionally drained, or needing a quick mood boost or mental reset.

How to try it: Give yourself permission to take a short break. Choose an item, a meme, a clip, a picture, that reliably makes you laugh out loud every time. Spend a few minutes engaging with the one item you choose or go through multiple for further effect. Notice how your body and mind feel afterward.

Helpful tip: Create a file bank of reliable items that can be handy for a tough moment where you need a laugh to reset yourself.

Reflection Prompts

What did you use to find funny that often slips your mind?

How might I intentionally include laughter or playfulness in my daily life?

2.4

Self-Compassion Action

Self-compassion is more than kind thoughts. It is also expressed through kind actions, so your nervous system can feel the compassion and sense of safety. After offering yourself understanding and encouragement, the next step is to ask 'what do I need right now?' This exercise helps bridge the gap between self-compassion and self-care by identifying one realistic action that supports your emotions, physical or mental well-being.

Best for: Feelings of overwhelm, being emotionally drained, feeling stuck or unsure of what you need, and neglecting your own needs while caring for others.

How to try it: Take a few slow breaths and check in with yourself. Reflect on what you are experiencing physically, emotionally, and mentally. Imagine a close friend came to you feeling the same way you do right now. Ask yourself, 'What would you encourage them to do?' Consider how you can offer that care to yourself.

Remember: The important thing is to make it a compassionate action that you can realistically take within the next 24 hours.

Action examples: rest, drink water, go for a walk, set a healthy boundary, ask for help, take a break, practice forgiveness or celebrate one small win.

Reflection Prompts

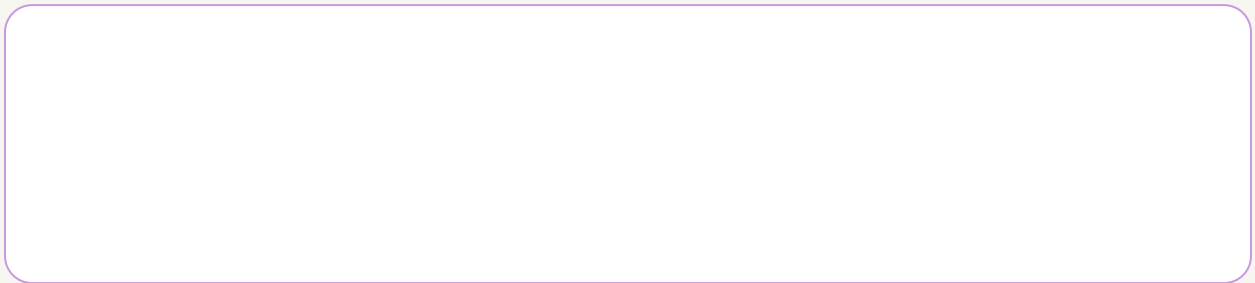
Do I need reassurance, connection, or permission to feel what I'm feeling?



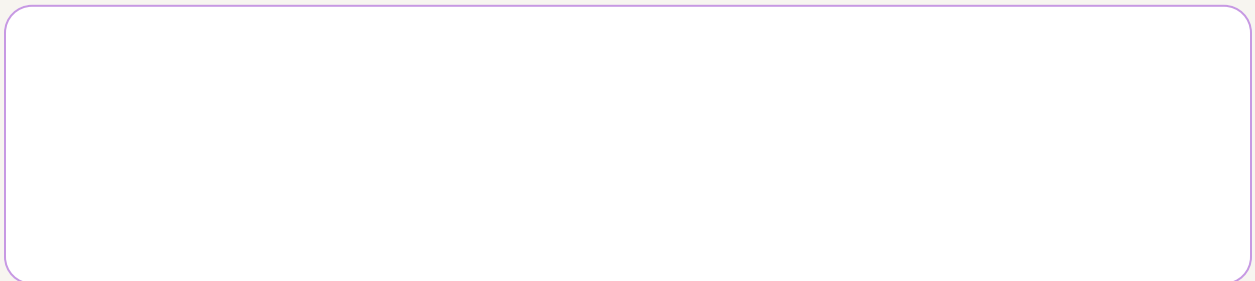
Do I need rest, nourishment, movement, or hydration?



Do I need a break, clearer boundaries, or to let go of unrealistic expectations?

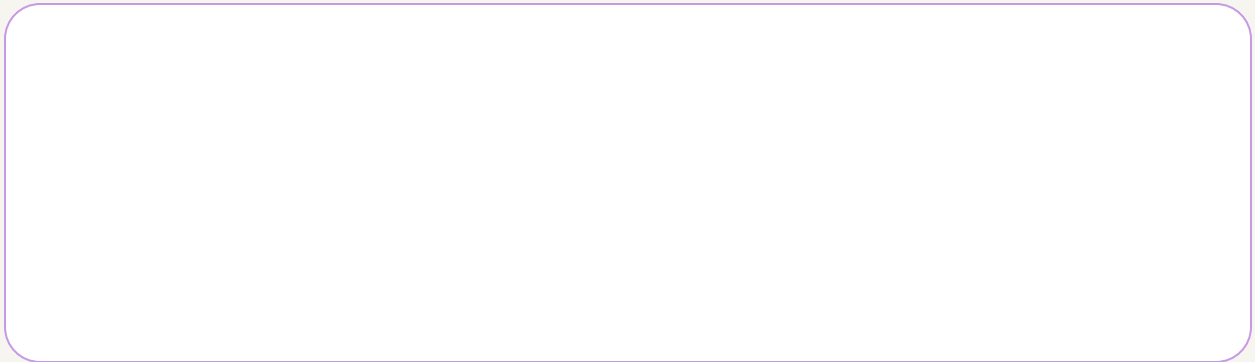


Is there one small task I can complete that would make today feel more manageable?



Reflection Prompts (continued)

Would it help to reach out to someone I trust or ask for support?



2.5

Compassionate Mirror Exercise

Self-reflection practice designed to help you develop a kinder and more supportive relationship with yourself. Many people naturally focus on flaws, mistakes, or what they need to improve, but this exercise encourages you to pause and recognize yourself with the same understanding and care you would show someone you value.

Best for: feeling overwhelmed, struggling with perfectionism, wanting to build confidence and self-acceptance.

How to try it: Find a quiet moment where you feel comfortable and free from distractions. Sit in front of a mirror and take a few slow breaths. Look at yourself with curiosity and kindness rather than focusing on appearance or judgment. Offer yourself a few compassionate statements, either silently or out loud.

Some phrases to try:

“I see someone who is doing their best”

“I can be kind to myself during difficult moments”

“I am allowed to make mistakes and continue growing”

“I deserve patience and understanding”

“I am human, I am allowed to make mistakes”

Reflection Prompts

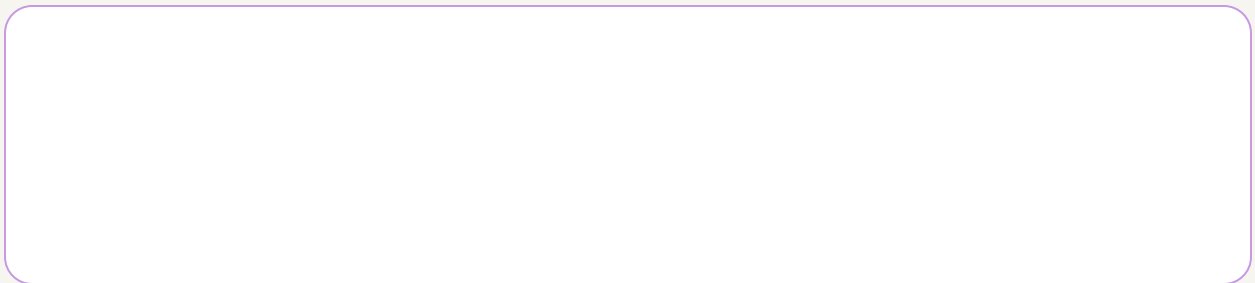
What is one thing I appreciate about myself that I often overlook?



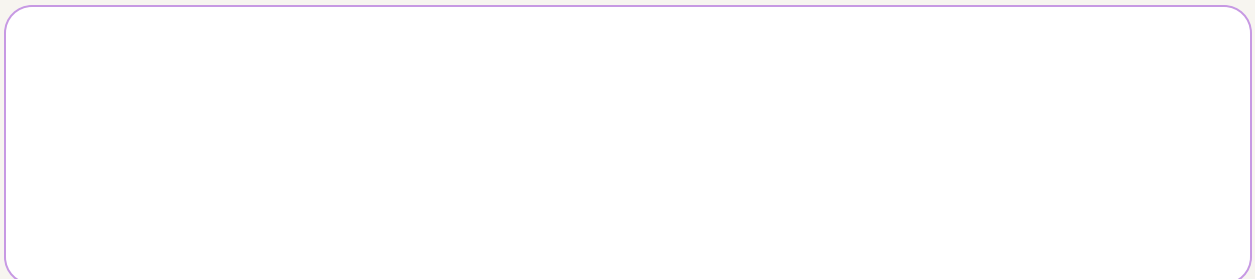
What would I like my inner voice to sound like during difficult moments?



How can I practice showing myself more kindness in my daily life?



What is one compassionate message I want to remember this week?



2.6

Celebrate Small Wins

This is a practice that encourages you to notice and appreciate your own efforts, progress, and resilience. Many people naturally focus on what went wrong, what they did not complete or what they could do better. This exercise helps you shift attention towards moments of success, growth, and personal strength, when in small moments.

Best for: The tendency to overlook accomplishments, being highly self-critical, focusing on mistakes, experiencing burnout or low motivation, and wanting to build a habit of recognizing progress.

How to try it: Write down three things you handled well today, regardless of how small they may seem. Focus on effort, choices, and moments of growth, not only outcomes. Practice avoiding dismissing your wins by saying things like “it was nothing” or “anyone could have done that.”

It could be as small as resting earlier, drinking water, stepping outside for fresh air or changing out of your pajamas, or big such as attending therapy or replying to a message you had been avoiding.

Reflection Prompts

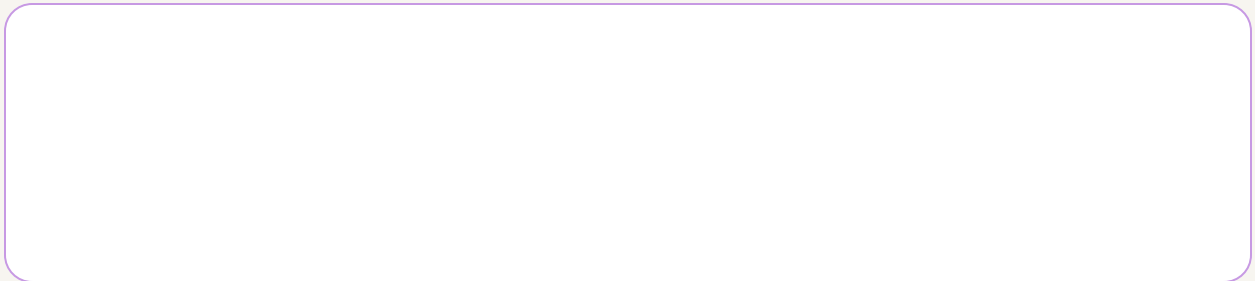
What are three things I handled well today?



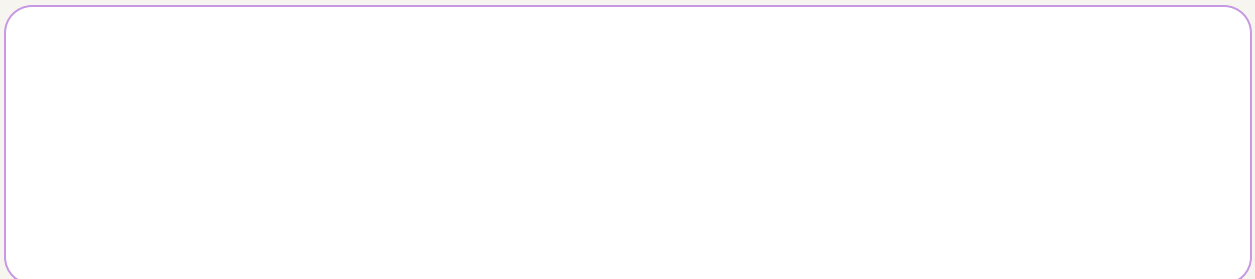
What effort or choice am I proud of, even if the outcome wasn't perfect?

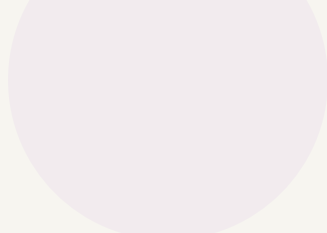


What is one small win I can celebrate right now?



How did I show up for myself today, even in a small way?





Section 3

Mapping Where You Are

3.1

Self-compassion is not something that people either have or do not have, it is a skill that can be developed and strengthened over time. Like any habit, it grows through awareness, practice, and intentional effort. By noticing our inner dialogue, understanding how we respond to challenges, and learning to treat ourselves with greater kindness, we can build a more compassionate relationship with ourselves.

The following activity is designed to help you reflect on where you currently are in your self-compassion journey. There are no right or wrong answers; the goal is simply to increase self-awareness and identify areas where you may want to practice more kindness, patience, and understanding toward yourself.



Mapping Where I Am on Self-Compassion

Elevateresiliencetherapy.ca

Today's Date:

Note to self:

Self-compassion means treating myself with the same kindness, care, and understanding I would offer to a good friend. There is no "perfect" place to be—just awareness and willingness.



Where I am today:



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Very Low
Self-Compassion

Very High
Self-Compassion

Highly self-critical, judge myself harshly, struggle to be kind to myself.

Often self-critical, find it hard to be gentle with myself.

Sometimes kind, but it depends on my mood or the situation.

A mix of self-compassion and self-criticism. I'm growing.

Generally kind and understanding with myself.

Very compassionate with myself most of the time.

I consistently treat myself with kindness, care, and understanding.



I am kind to myself when I...



I struggle with self-compassion when I...



What helps me be more gentle with myself?

My Strengths & Reminders

What are some of my strengths, qualities, or past wins I can remind myself of?



One small act of self-compassion I can try:

Reflection

What do I notice about where I am today?

What do I want to remember moving forward?



Self-compassion is a practice, not a destination. Be patient and gentle with yourself.

3.2

Self-Compassion Scale Check-In

Rate each statement from 1 (rarely) to 5 (almost always). Use the notes section to reflect on your response.

I speak to myself with the same kindness I would offer to a friend.

1 2 3 4 5

I allow myself to rest without feeling guilty.

1 2 3 4 5

I am often harder on myself than I am on others.

1 2 3 4 5

I focus more on my mistakes than my successes.

1 2 3 4 5

3.2

I recognize my efforts, even when things do not go perfectly.

1

2

3

4

5

I feel like I should always be doing better.

1

2

3

4

5

I allow myself to experience emotions without judging them.

1

2

3

4

5

I give myself time to process feelings instead of ignoring them.

1

2

3

4

5

I remember that struggles and mistakes are part of being human.

1

2

3

4

5



Closing Reflection

Before you close this guide, take a moment to reflect on the following:

Today I learned...

Right now I need...

One thing I appreciate about myself is...

My next compassionate step is...

What might change in life if I practice this regularly?

About Elevate Resilience Therapy

At **Elevate Resilience Therapy**, we believe that healing begins with compassion, connection, and understanding. Our sessions are authentic, collaborative, and judgment-free. There is no pressure to be "doing therapy right" or to have the perfect words. Some days you'll have lots to say, and other days you might not know where to start, and that's okay.



We'll laugh when it feels right, sit with the hard moments when we need to, and work together to help you build practical tools, self-understanding, and resilience. Think of therapy as a conversation with someone in your corner: supportive, genuine, and focused on helping you become the version of yourself that feels most aligned with who you are.

Thank you for taking the time to invest in yourself by working through this guide. We hope the exercises and reflections you've explored become tools you can return to whenever you need a reminder that you are worthy of kindness, patience, and care.

If you're ready to take the next step in your journey and explore therapy, we'd be honoured to support you.

Book a Free Consultation
ElevateResilienceTherapy.ca
Reach out to: ElevateResilienceTherapy@gmail.com
