

Embracing Self-Compassion as a Teacher

Counseling Partners of Los Angeles



Free Teacher Counseling

CPLA offers counseling for its partner schools' teachers, faculty, staff, and principals.

Interested in receiving 4 free, virtual, and confidential sessions from a trained mental health clinician? Reach out to teachers@counselingpartnersofla.org for a referral form. You help so many. You deserve help too.



About CPLA

The mission of Counseling Partners of Los Angeles is to support at-risk and under-served students living in Los Angeles by providing a low-cost, school-based program that delivers essential counseling and support services students and teachers need in order to grow toward their full potential emotionally, intellectually, morally and socially.



Putting on your oxygen mask first...

It may seem counterintuitive, but in order to have compassion on our students and foster an empathetic learning environment, we must first care for ourselves. Those who work at schools have big hearts and want to help students, but they often deplete themselves in the process. There is a way to help students that doesn't leave you ragged. Starting with self-compassion and having that overflow to our students is very effective at creating a conducive learning environment.* By reading this newsletter, we hope you will be able to take a breath and find a moment to be kind to your body, mind, and spirit.

*Resource used:

Fowlin, J., Sandhu, B. & York, S. (2021). Self-compassionate Teaching: Putting on your Oxygen Mask First. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved [January 10, 2024] from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/self-compassionate-teaching/>.



What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion is comprised of three aspects: mindfulness, self-kindness, and common humanity. Mindfulness is the act of nonjudgmentally paying attention to your inner experience and staying present. Having self-kindness is the act of soothing and comforting yourself when you come upon stress or are upset. Common humanity is knowing that your mistakes and circumstances are shared by many people across the globe and that you are apart of a vast network of individuals who experience similar things. Self-compassion can be visualized as putting on the oxygen mask in an airplane before putting it on a child or someone under your care. If you don't have kindness for yourself and your experiences, you won't be able to adequately care for others. However, having self-compassion doesn't mean you deny failures or avoid responsibility; it means nonjudgmentally identifying the error, acknowledging and allowing space for associated emotions to come up, and acknowledging that others may make the same mistake.



"In a world marked by judgment and anger, having compassion for yourself and others is a radical act."



How do I have self-compassion?

Developing a practice of self-compassion is more akin to taking preventive vitamins than pain killers. By making a habit of it, we set ourselves up for an easier time when stress comes our way. Some practical ways to have self-compassion include:

- When you are feeling overwhelmed in class, take a breath and kindly tell yourself you are doing your best.
- When you feel alone in your experience of certain emotions, you can gently redirect yourself to remember that people all over the world may be feeling or have felt this way before. You are not alone in your shared human emotional experience.



- Check out self-compassion guided meditations in your down time. Make it a practice to listen to one a day and see how it infuses your thought process during the day. Check out HeadSpace. It's FREE for educators: <https://www.headspace.com/educators>
- Make a list of ways you can be more mindful during the day. This could look like eating your lunch slowly (if possible!) instead of shoving it down or taking a mindfulness walk on your break.

The ways we can practice self-compassion are endless, but there is a common theme. They all involve paying attention to our inner experience while treating ourselves with kindness and seeking solace in knowing that we are not alone in our experience.

What does this have to do with teaching?

"Self-compassion allows us to be 'self-full' so we can extend the same kindness to our students and be true to ourselves. We can view ourselves like a car - if there is no gas (self-empty) the car will not drive or perform effectively. Self-compassion allows us to operate from a place of responding to ourselves and others versus reacting. Therefore self-compassion benefits us and those around us."

—Julaine Fowlin, Becca Sandhu and Samantha York, Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

Reflection Exercises

Resource: "Self-compassionate Teaching: Putting on your Oxygen Mask First", Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching.

Mindfulness:

Self-Focus

- What am I feeling right now?
- How can I give my emotions room to breathe without over-exaggerating or over-identifying?

Student Focus

- How are my students feeling right now?
- What activities or strategies can I incorporate to allow me to be more aware of how students are feeling?

Self-Kindness:

Self-Focus

- What do I need in this moment?
- How will I respond to meet my identified need?
- What steps can I take to respond to this need vs. react?
- Am I capable of meeting my own need, or do I need external help?

Student Focus

- What do my students need in this moment?
- How will I respond to meet the identified need?
- What steps can I take to respond to this need vs. react?
- Am I capable or willing to meet the need myself, or do I need to utilize available resources like counseling?

Shared Humanity:

Self-Focus:

- How can I recognize the common humanity in this process and remind myself that these experiences and feelings are not unique to me?

Student Focus:

- How can I deal with situations that are far removed from my own experience?