

Compassionate letter to oneself, modified for marginalized or traumatized peoples

People who have been marginalized, invalidated, devalued or traumatized in the culture-writ-large are often saddled with difficult emotions and places that need to be named and brought to attention and relationship. Grief, anger, shame and other difficult emotions circulate unless met with compassion. Basic human needs for safety, belonging, wellness and understanding of identity have not been met. The following exercise can help you cultivate a more compassionate, encouraging voice internally to meet this suffering. Also, speaking with validating friends, community members or a therapist are very helpful modes of healing. Try whichever one of these appeals to you, or all three.

From a Friend to Yourself

- Think about an imaginary or real friend or benevolent figure who is unconditionally wise, loving and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see these broken places, including what you don't like about the world or your journey in it. This friend recognizes the difficult conditions of your suffering, the limits of human nature, and is kind, accepting, validating and forgiving.
- Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this person, focusing on the qualities of your true self that have been subordinated or marginalized by the dominant culture. How might they name the ways your true self has been subordinated or marginalized? What would this friend say to you from the perspective of unlimited compassion? How might this friend suggest being with this distress? What words would they use to give you what you need, right now? How might they suggest you use your agency? And if you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, how might these suggestions embody feelings of care, encouragement, nurture and support?
- After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back to it and read it again, really letting the words sink in. Feel the compassion as it pours into you, soothing and comforting you. Love, connection and acceptance are your birthright. You can cultivate them within yourself and in the world.

From Yourself to a Friend

- Write a letter as if you were talking to a dearly loved friend who was struggling with the same difficulty that you are. What words of compassion and support would you offer? How would you name their basic needs that are not being met in this moment? How would you soothe them in a moment when these needs of our common humanity and specific identities are not being met? Then go back and read the letter, applying the words to yourself.

From Your Compassionate Self to Yourself

- Write a letter from the perspective of your own compassionate self. This part of you would like to help you because they care deeply about you. The intention behind your compassionate self is "I love you and I don't want you to suffer." Put the letter away and read it to yourself later on. You can even ask a friend to mail it back to you in a SASE after some time has passed.

Modified by Ravi Chandra, M.D. from the Mindful Self Compassion program developed by Kristin Neff, Ph.D. and Christopher Germer, Ph.D.