

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is a practice to help you be kind, caring, and understanding to yourself when you are having a hard time.

Why Practice Self-Compassion?

Practicing self-compassion can:

- Help you cope in tough times.
- Help you show kindness and compassion to others.
- Improve your mental health and well-being.
- Improve your life satisfaction and happiness.

Take a Self-Compassion Break

There are many ways to practice self-compassion. Here is one way:

1. Take some time to think of a situation where you've felt uncomfortable emotions.
2. Become aware of the emotions you feel and what you feel in your body. Say to yourself:
 - This hurts.
 - Ouch.
 - This is hard.
 - _____.(Choose the option that fits you the best, or create one of your own.)
3. Know that you are not alone. Say to yourself:
 - I am not alone.
 - Other people feel this way.
 - This is part of life.
 - _____.(Choose the option that fits you the best, or create one of your own.)
4. Be kind to yourself. Place your hand over your heart. Feel the warmth of your hand against your chest. Say to yourself:
 - May I be kind to myself.
 - May I be strong.
 - May I be patient.
 - May I forgive myself.
 - May I _____.(Choose the option that fits you the best, or create one of your own.)



You can practice the three steps of self-compassion when you are experiencing uncomfortable emotions or are going through hard times.

Adapted from: Exercise 2: Self-compassion break. (Dr. Kristin Neff, 2020)

Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*

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- Item #: SC002. Version: 01. Created: 2020-05. Next Review: 2022-05

Gratitude

Gratitude is a practice that can help you focus on what you have, rather than what you don't have. Practicing gratitude not only makes you feel good, it's important for living a healthy life.

Why Practice Gratitude?

Experiencing gratitude can help you reset your mind or cope with challenging thoughts and feelings. In fact, feeling grateful is good for you. It can help you focus on and appreciate when something good happens, whether it's big or small. It can also improve connections with yourself, others, and who or what you view as greater or ultimate.

Practicing gratitude can:

- Improve overall sense of well-being.
- Promote positive thoughts and feelings.
- Strengthen relationships and sense of connection with others.
- Increase spiritual awareness.

How to Practice Gratitude?

Gratitude can be practiced in many ways, including journaling, prayer, and meditation. One way to practice gratitude is through mental subtraction.

1. Take a moment to think about a positive event in your life (e.g., an achievement, special trip).
 - Remember this event and what made it possible.
 - Consider what could have gone differently and stopped this event from happening.
 - Write down all of the possible events and decisions—large and small that may have changed the outcome.

2. Imagine what your life would be like now if this event didn't happen.
 - Remind yourself that this event actually did happen and think about the good things it's brought you. You may also want to write these down.

3. Appreciate that these benefits were not certain in your life.
Allow yourself to feel grateful that things happened how they did.

Try to take 15 minutes each week to do this, focusing on different positive events each time.

Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- How was this practice for me?
- What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?
- What surprised me?

Adapted from: *Mental subtraction of positive events: How to appreciate what you have by imagining your life without it.* (Greater Good Science Center, 2020).

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Lament

Lament is a spiritual way to process suffering through expressing grief or loss, desire, trust, and gratitude.

Why Practice Lament?

Practicing lament in tough times can help you shift from “unbearable suffering” to “bearable suffering”.

It can help you:

- Express your emotions freely, without judgement.
- Know that you are not alone in feeling this way.
- Engage with your inner suffering and voice your questions.

How to Practice Lament

Think about a current struggle or source of personal suffering and begin to move through the four expressions of lament: grief or loss, desire, trust, and gratitude. You can use the examples below or make some that are meaningful to you.

You may choose to begin this practice with an Address in Faith.

This practice is adapted from the classic form of lament. Classic lament begins with an Address in Faith—a call or question to who or what you view as sacred or ultimate.

I Grieve

- Why? or Why is this happening?
 - Why _____?
 - I grieve the changes from my normal life.
 - I grieve the loss of _____.
- (Rest in a moment of silence.)

I Trust

- I trust my ability to adapt.
 - I trust in those around me.
 - I trust _____.
 - I trust _____.
- (Rest in a moment of silence.)

I Desire

- I desire courage in the face of my fears.
 - I desire meaning and hope.
 - I desire _____.
 - I desire _____.
- (Rest in a moment of silence.)

I Give Gratitude

- I give gratitude for this moment.
 - I give gratitude for the gift of life.
 - I give gratitude for _____.
 - I give gratitude for _____.
- (Rest in a moment of silence.)

Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*

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Breath Meditation

Breath meditation is an awareness practice that helps to bring you back to the present moment.

Why Practice Breath Meditation?

Breath meditation can:

- Develop a sense of grounding and connection.
- Improve concentration.
- Decrease anxiety and depression.
- Improve overall sense of well-being.

How to Practice Breath Meditation

There are many different ways to practice breath meditation. Here is one example:

1. Begin with a brief silence.
2. Get comfortable.
 - Find a comfortable position with your back upright.
 - Relax any areas of tension.
 - Rest your hands where they feel comfortable.
3. Breathe naturally.
 - Feel the natural flow of your breath as it comes in and goes out through your nostrils. In and out; in and out.
 - Let your breathing be as natural as possible. Don't try to control or change your breath, simply observe it.
 - Notice where you feel your breath in your body (e.g., nostrils, chest, abdomen).

You may notice that your mind has wandered to thinking about other things, this is normal. Gently direct your attention back to focus on your breathing.

4. For a minute or two, just notice your breath in silence.
 - Continue this breathing practice for as long as you feel comfortable.

Adapted from: Awareness, Exercise 5: Breathing sensations. In Sadhana, a way to God: Christian exercises in eastern form. (Anthony De Mello, 1978).

Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*



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Contemplative Reading

Contemplative reading is a spiritual practice that opens you to deeper connection and meaning or wisdom through reading short pieces of sacred or inspirational writing.

This practice can be done alone or as a group. When done with others, it can help develop shared meaning and values.



How to Practice Contemplative Reading?

1. Choose a short piece of sacred or inspirational writing or an object that has meaning for you.

- Slowly read or look at the object and ask yourself:
 - *Which word or phrase connects with me right now? or What about this object catches my attention right now?*
- Pick a word, phrase, or part of the object that your heart feels drawn to, rather than something you feel like you should choose.

(You may choose to write down your answers.)

2. Slowly read the piece of writing or look at the object again.

- Ask yourself:
 - *How does this word, phrase, or object relate to my life right now?*
- Think about and/or write down any thoughts you have.
- Notice what catches your attention. It's okay if nothing comes to mind.

(You may choose to write down your answers.)

3. Slowly read the piece of writing or look at the object one last time.

- Ask yourself:
 - *What am I being asked?*
 - *Am I being asked to trust? Accept? Do something?*

(You may choose to write down your answers.)

Adapted from: *The African Bible Study Method*. (Takoma Park Presbyterian Church, 2018).

Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*

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Contemplative Reading is a descriptive term for the practice known as Lectio Divina. For more information see: Hall, T. (1988) Too deep for words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina. Paulist Press, pp.36-56.

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Item #: SC002. Version: 01. Created: 2020-05. Next Review: 2022-05

Finding the Feeling

Finding the feeling is a spiritual practice that helps you recognize, experience, and understand your emotions.

Why Practice Finding the Feeling?

This practice can help you to become more comfortable with experiencing strong emotions. Being able to name, know, recognize, and understand your feelings can help build emotional resilience.

How to Practice Finding the Feeling?

- First, find a comfortable space to sit. Set a timer for 10 - 20 minutes.
- Take time to focus on your breathing. Notice each breath in and each breath out.
- After a few minutes, think of a past event or memory that brings up a strong emotion for you. The emotion may be comfortable or uncomfortable.
- Get to know your emotion.
 - Where do you feel it in your body (e.g., chest, throat, head)?
 - What does it look and feel like (e.g., round, square, smooth, rough)?
 - Is it hot or cold?
 - Is it heavy or light?
 - Does it stay still or move?
- Breathe in and out as you get to know this emotion.
- Continue this practice until your time is up.

After your practice you may still feel an uncomfortable emotion and that is okay. This will pass. You may also notice that the emotion is lighter. Take time to think about how this emotion may have changed for you.



Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*

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Item #: SC002. Version: 01. Created: 2020-05. Next Review: 2022-05

Labyrinth Walking

Labyrinth walking is a spiritual practice that helps you to be in the present moment through walking a single winding path with one entrance that leads to a centre and back out. The labyrinth can be approached as a prayer or a symbolic journey.

Why Practice Labyrinth Walking?

Labyrinth walking can help you to feel calm, focused, and connected. It can also help balance your spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical well-being.

Other benefits of labyrinth walking include:

- Feelings of calmness and relaxation.
- Improved focus.
- Reduced anxiety and stress.
- Insight.

How to Practice Labyrinth Walking?

You can practice walking a labyrinth at home by tracing a finger labyrinth (see page 2).

1. To begin, breathe slowly in and out. Notice how you are feeling.
2. You may want to bring a question, concern, or goal with you to think about. When you are ready, place your finger at the start of the labyrinth.
3. Trace the labyrinth with your finger. Take your time. There's no right or wrong way to go through a labyrinth.
4. Be mindful and focus on being present in where you are right now. Trust yourself and your path.
5. When you reach the centre of the labyrinth take as much time as you need to think about your experience.

You may want to repeat this process as you trace your way out of the labyrinth.

Where Can I Find a Labyrinth Near Me?

Labyrinths can be found by contacting faith communities, community centres or organizations, and spiritual retreat centres in your area.

Labyrinths can also be found in many healthcare facilities. While in a hospital you can connect with a certified spiritual care provider to see if a labyrinth is available.

For more information about Alberta Health Service's Spiritual Care, go to: www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/page13213.aspx

"Walking the labyrinth is a spiritual discipline that invites us to trust the path, to surrender to the many turns our lives take, and to walk through the confusion, the fear, the anger, and grief that we cannot avoid experiencing as we live our earthly lives."

Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress



Photo from: The Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs, Calgary, Alberta

Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

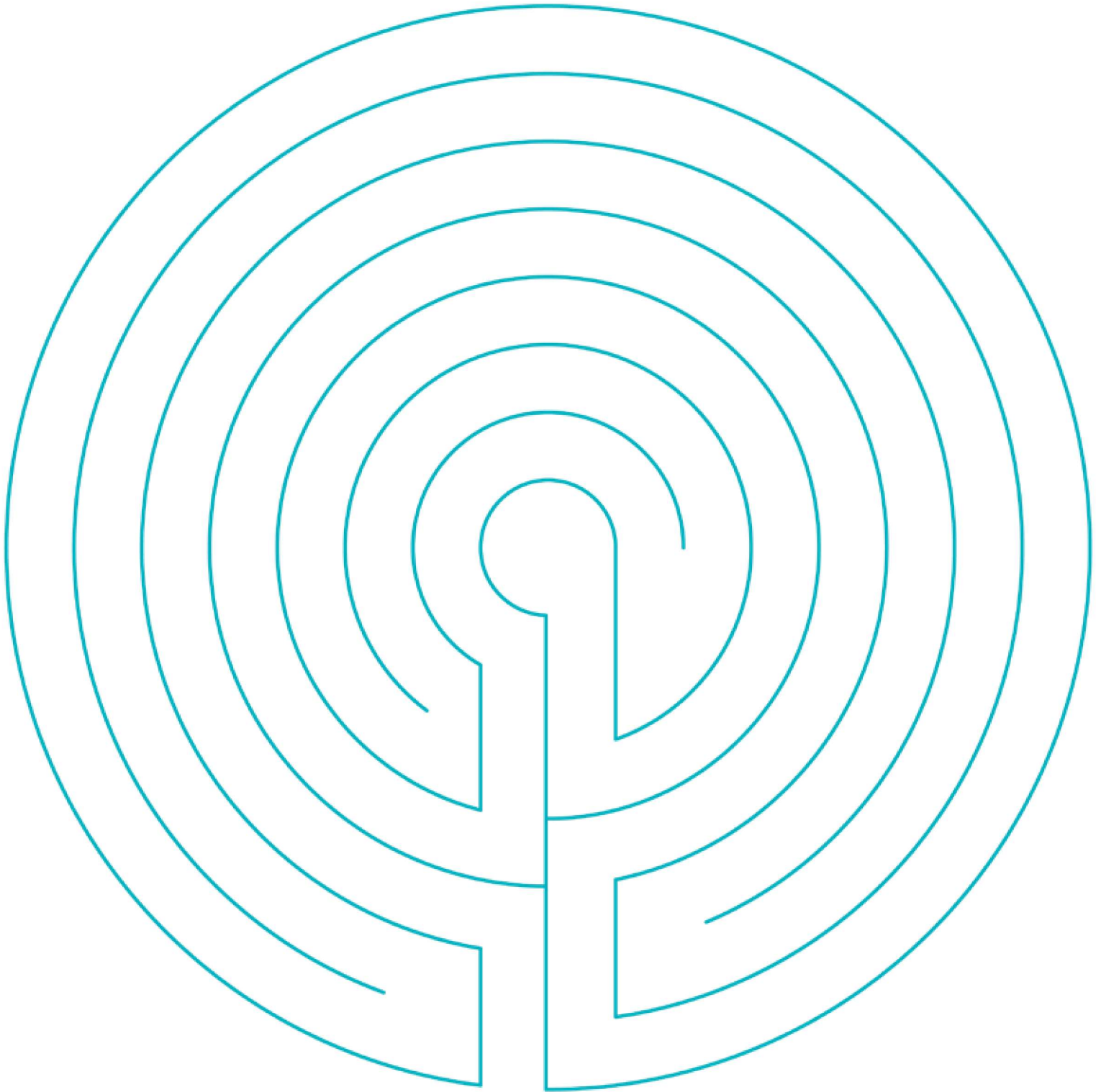
Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*

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- Item #: SC002. Version: 01. Created: 2020-05. Next Review: 2022-05

Finger Labyrinth



Mantras

Mantras are a spiritual practice in which a sacred word or sentence is repeated over and over. It's a form of meditation that can support spiritual wellness and coping.

Why Practice a Mantra?

Practicing a mantra can improve spiritual well-being and connect you with what is meaningful in your life.

How to Practice a Mantra?

1. First, decide on your mantra. It may be helpful to think about a recent experience or a situation and how you would like to respond to it. Examples include:
 - I trust.
 - I am grateful.
 - I am open.
 - I am present.
 - Maranatha [mar-an-at-ha].
 - Aum or Om.
2. After choosing your mantra, sit down with a straight back and close your eyes. Move each part of your body to where it's most comfortable.
3. Be aware of your breathing but do not change it. Allow your breathing to be as it is.
4. When you are ready, begin to repeat your mantra over and over, either out loud or in your mind. If your thoughts begin to wander, bring yourself back to your mantra. This may happen many times during your practice.

Continue your mantra for 5 to 30 minutes. You may wish to slowly increase the time spent on your mantra as you become more comfortable with the practice. Notice how your ability to focus on your mantra improves over time.



Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*

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Taking and Sending

Taking and sending, or tonglen in Tibetan, is a spiritual practice that helps you see and acknowledge painful situations while creating meaningful connections with others.

Why Practice Taking and Sending?

Taking and sending can help you find courage through a deep sense of connection when things feel uncertain. In doing this practice, you may begin to feel care and love for yourself and others.

How to Practice Taking and Sending?

1. Rest your mind.
 - Rest your mind for a moment. Try to connect with your heart and mind. Breathe.
2. Begin visualizing (e.g., creating and seeing an image in your mind).
 - Breathe in feelings of heat, darkness, and heaviness. Breathe out feelings of coolness, brightness, and light.
 - Breathe in completely, taking in the pain of others and uncomfortable energy.
 - Breathe out, sending out positive energy and helpful thoughts.
 - Do this until visualizations are in sync with your breathing.
3. Focus on a real situation.
 - Focus on a painful situation that is real to you. Breathe in the uncomfortable energy, breathe out positive energy.
 - Try this for someone you care about and wish to help.
 - Try this for your own pain, and for others who may feel the same kind of pain.
 - Breathe in the uncomfortable, breathe out the positive.
4. Extend compassion.
 - Continue to breathe in the uncomfortable and breathe out the positive. Extend the wish to help others who may feel this type of pain.
 - As you breathe out the positive, extend this wish to everyone, everywhere.

Adapted from: *How to Practice Tonglen*. Lion's Roar. (Pema Chödrön, 2019)



Reflection

After practicing, it can be helpful to reflect on your experience.

Ask yourself:

- *How was this practice for me?*
- *What are my thoughts, feelings, emotions?*
- *What surprised me?*

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Item #: SC002. Version: 01. Created: 2020-05. Next Review: 2022-05