

**Mayah's  
Legacy**

**THE  
KINDNESS  
CODE**

START SMALL. START NOW.

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# INTRODUCTION

*“Our task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”*

*—Rumi*

When we become mindful of our feelings and emotions after baby loss and respond to ourselves with compassion, kindness, and support in times of difficulty, things start to change. Despite our vulnerabilities, we can learn to embrace ourselves and our lives, thereby, providing ourselves with the strength needed to be courageous on our healing journey.

Individuals who are more self-compassionate tend to have greater happiness, life satisfaction and motivation, better relationships and physical health, and less anxiety and depression. They also have the resilience needed to cope with stressful life events. Learning to embrace yourself and honouring your moment of vulnerability gives you the resilience and courage to face another day. Self-compassion moves us closer to a place where our hearts respond with kindness to our pain.

Self-compassion emerges from the heart of mindfulness when we experience difficult moments in our lives. Mindfulness invites us to open to suffering with loving, spacious awareness.






## WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION?

*“Through self-compassion, we become an inner ally, engaged in patterns of behaviour that serve our higher self and cultivate a mindset that helps us to flourish.”*

—Keji

Self-compassion involves treating yourself the way you want others to treat you. Therefore the question is, how do you treat yourself when you feel inadequate or are facing a tough life challenge. Undoubtedly, society places great emphasis on being kind to our friends, family, and neighbours who are struggling. However, the same is not the case when it comes to us. Self-compassion is a practice in which we learn to earnestly befriend ourselves when we need it most—to become an inner ally rather than working against ourselves.

When we are in pain, there are three core elements we should bring to bear: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.





## SELF-LOVE

The sense of guilt people feel after baby loss is real. Guilt is a common emotion we feel after a loss. It may cause you to wonder what you might have done wrong or if there was something you could have done to prevent it from happening. Consequently, we are more likely to beat ourselves up rather than put a supportive arm around our own shoulder. Self-kindness is what counters this tendency; it makes us to care for ourselves, just as we would do to others. Rather than being harshly critical during these difficult times, we should be supportive and encouraging and aim to protect ourselves from harm. And instead of blaming ourselves, we should offer ourselves warmth and unconditional acceptance.

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## CONNECTED

A sense of interconnectedness is central to self-compassion. It's recognising that life itself is unpredictable, that everyone fails, makes mistakes, and experiences hardship in life. Self-compassion honours the unavoidable fact that life entails pain and suffering for everyone without exception. While this may seem obvious, it's so easy to forget.

When we lose sight of our interconnectedness, we feel isolated and alone in our suffering. But when we remember that pain is part of the shared human experience, every moment of suffering is transformed into a moment of connection with others. The pain I feel in difficult times is the same pain you feel in difficult times. Even though the circumstances or the degree of pain may be different, the basic experience of human suffering is the same.

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## PRESENCE

Mindfulness involves being fully aware of every moment's experience in a clear and balanced manner. It means being open to the reality of the present moment, allowing all thoughts, emotions, and sensations to enter awareness without resistance or avoidance.



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Why is mindfulness an essential component of self-compassion? Because we need to be able to turn toward and acknowledge when we're suffering, to "be" with our pain long enough to respond with care and kindness. While it might seem that suffering is blindingly obvious, many people don't acknowledge how much pain they're in, especially when that pain stems from their own self-criticism. Or when confronted with life challenges, people often get so caught up in problem-solving mode that they don't pause to consider how hard it is in the moment. Mindfulness counters the tendency to avoid painful thoughts and emotions, allowing us to face the truth of our experience, even when it's unpleasant. At the same time, mindfulness prevents us from becoming absorbed by and "overidentified" with negative thoughts or feelings, from getting caught up and swept away by our aversive reactions.

To be self-compassionate, mindfulness is the first step we need to take— we need presence of mind to respond in a new way.

## **THE THREE ELEMENTS OF SELF-COMPASSION**



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# WHAT SELF-COMPASSION IS NOT

Some social cultures don't promote self-compassion as a virtue, and many people dishonour the practice of being kind to themselves. There are many misconceptions about self-compassion. Let us look at some of them.

## **Ride or die for others is a sign of loyalty.**

Another big fear is that self-compassion will make us weak and vulnerable. In fact, self-compassion is a reliable source of inner strength that confers courage and enhances resilience when we're faced with difficulties. Self-compassion is showing up for yourself, being loyal to you, and embracing your divinity and humanity.

## **You cannot pour from an empty cup.**

Some worry that by being self-compassionate rather than just focusing on being compassionate to others, they will become self-centred or selfish. However, giving compassion to ourselves enables us to give more to others, especially as you cannot give others what you don't have. If your emotional and mental cup is empty, there is no way anyone else can share from it.

## **You Shouldn't Feel Guilty About Putting Yourself First**

Although many people fear that being self-compassionate is the same as being self-indulgent, it's just the opposite. Compassion inclines us toward long-term health and well-being, not short-term pleasure. Self-compassion encourages people to engage in healthier behaviours like eating well, sleeping well, and taking care of our mental, spiritual, emotional and physical needs.

## **Self-compassion is not about worrying about what others think.**

Self-compassion provides the courage required to admit mistakes rather than needing to blame someone else for them or spend time worrying about what others think. Self-compassion isn't about making excuses and not taking responsibility. Focusing on negative thoughts leads to decreased motivation and feelings of helplessness.

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Self-criticism tends to undermine self-confidence, leading to fear of failure. If we are self-compassionate, we will still be motivated to reach our goals—not because we’re inadequate as we are, but because we care about ourselves and want to reach our full potential.

Self-compassion is different from self-esteem. Although they’re both strongly linked to psychological well-being, they diverge in significant ways:

- While self-esteem is a positive evaluation of self-worth, self-compassion on the other hand, isn’t a judgement or an evaluation at all. Instead, self-compassion is way of relating to the ever-changing landscape of who we are with kindness and self-acceptance.
- While self-esteem requires feeling better than others, self-compassion on the other hand, requires acknowledging that we are all imperfect.
- Compared to self-esteem, self-compassion is less contingent on conditions like physical attractiveness or successful performance and provides a more stable sense of self-worth over time. It is also linked to less social comparison and narcissism than self-esteem is.

### **The Benefits of Self-Compassion**

People who are more self-compassionate experience greater well-being:

<b>LESS</b>	<b>MORE</b>
<b>DEPRESSION</b>	<b>HAPPINESS</b>
<b>ANXIETY</b>	<b>LIFE SATISFACTION</b>
<b>STRESS</b>	<b>SELF-CONFIDENCE</b>
<b>SHAME</b>	<b>PHYSICAL HEALTH</b>

Most of these benefits were tied directly to learning to be more self-compassionate and self-aware.



# INFORMAL PRACTICE: KEEPING A SELF-COMPASSION JOURNAL

Try writing a self-compassion journal every day for one week (or longer if you like). Journaling is an effective way to express emotions and has been found to enhance both mental and physical well-being.

At some point during the evening, when you have a few quiet moments, review the day's events.

In your journal, write down anything that you felt bad about, anything you judged yourself for, or any difficult experience that caused you pain. For each difficult event that happened during the day, try using mindfulness, a sense of common humanity, and kindness, to relate to the event in a more self-compassionate way.



### **Presence**

This will mainly involve bringing balanced awareness to the painful emotions that arose due to your self-judgment or difficult circumstances. Write about how you felt: sad, ashamed, frightened, stressed, and so on. As you write, try to be accepting and non-judgmental of your experience, without diminishing it or becoming overly dramatic.

### **Connected**

Write down the ways in which your experience was part of being human. This might include acknowledging that being human means being imperfect and that all people have these sorts of painful experiences. (“Everyone overreacts sometimes—it’s only human.” “This is how people are likely to feel in a situation like that.”) You might also want to think about the unique causes and conditions underlying your painful event.

### **Self-Love**

Write yourself using some kind, understanding words, just as you might write to a good friend. In a gentle and reassuring tone, let yourself know that you care about your happiness and well-being.

(“It’s okay. You messed up, but it wasn’t the end of the world.”)

### **Reflection**

After keeping your self-compassion journal for at least a week, ask yourself if you noticed any changes in your internal dialogue. How did it feel to write to yourself in a more self-compassionate manner? Do you think it helped you to cope with the difficulties that arose?

After this exercise, some people will discover that keeping a self-compassion journal is an effective way to help support their daily practice, while for others it may seem like a chore. It’s probably worth trying out for a week or so, but if journal writing isn’t your thing, you can skip the writing part. The important thing is that we practice all three steps of self-compassion—mindfully turning toward our pain, remembering that imperfection is part of the shared human experience. And thus, being kind and supportive to ourselves when things are difficult is expedient.



## P R E S E N C E

Mindfulness is the foundation of self-compassion. We need to step outside of our narrative of our suffering and turn toward our pain mindfully, to be able to respond with kindness. Mindfulness can be defined as “Stillness, movement, and awareness. It is being aware of the present-moment experience with acceptance.”

In many ways, mindfulness is a simple skill because it just requires noticing what’s happening while it’s happening, using all five senses. For instance, take a moment to try focusing on what comes through the door of each of your senses, one by one.

Mindfulness gives us mental space and with mental space comes the freedom to choose how we might like to respond to a situation. Mindfulness is especially important for self-compassion. When we suffer, mindfulness opens the door to compassion. Hence the need to practice self-compassion.



## HEARING

Close your eyes and take a moment to listen to the sounds in the environment. As you listen, allow the sounds come to you. Notice what you hear, one sound after another, with an inner nod of recognition. There is no need to name what you hear.

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## SIGHT

Rather than looking at one object, create a diffused view like a soft lens of a camera by looking to the wider scene of what's in front of you. Again, note whatever you see, one visual impression after the other.

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## TOUCH

Notice the sensation of touch where your body meets the chair or your feet touch the floor.

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## SMELL

Put your hand up to your nose and notice any scents arising from your skin.

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## TASTE

Notice if there are any tastes in your mouth right now, perhaps lingering from the last thing you ate or drank.





## LETTING GO OF RESISTANCE

Mindfulness doesn't just involve paying attention to what's happening in the present moment. It also involves a certain quality of attention—accepting what's happening, without being lost in judgments of good or bad. This attitude is often described as non-resistance. Resistance refers to the struggle that occurs when we believe our moment-to-moment experience should be other than it is.

Acceptance means that even though we may not like what's happening, we acknowledge that it is happening and can let go of the fact that things aren't exactly the way we want them to be.

How do we know when we're resisting? Some signs associated with resistance include being distracted, physically tense, getting lost in worry or rumination, overworking or overeating, feeling angry or irritated, or numbing out. These are ways we try to resist unwanted experiences. However, resistance isn't all bad, as without it we would be overwhelmed by the intensity of our lives. While resistance can help us to function in the short term, it can also have negative long-term consequences.



## WHAT WE RESIST PERSISTS.

Unfortunately, when we resist unpleasant experiences, they don't typically go away; instead, they just get worse.

When we fight our difficult feelings, we just add fuel to their fire. Pain in life, whether loss, worry, heartbreak, or hardship, is inevitable, and when we try to resist the pain, it usually just makes the pain more intense. It's this add-on pain that can be equated with suffering. We suffer not only because it's painful in the moment, but because we bang our head against the wall of reality—getting frustrated because we think things should be other than they are.

Another common form of resistance is denial. We hope that if we don't think about a problem or by ignoring it, it will go away. When we try to suppress our unwanted thoughts or feelings, however, they just get stronger. Moreover, when we avoid or suppress painful thoughts and emotions, we can't see them clearly and respond with compassion.

## WHAT WE CAN FEEL WE CAN HEAL.

Mindfulness and self-compassion are resources that give us the safety needed to encounter difficulty with less resistance. Just imagine how you would feel if you were overwhelmed, and a friend walked into the room, gave you a hug, sat down beside you, listened to your distress, and then helped you work out a plan of action. Thankfully, that mindful and compassionate friend can be you. It begins by opening to what is, without resistance.

- Mindfulness is a core component of self-compassion
- While mindfulness focuses primarily on acceptance of experience, self-compassion focuses more on caring for the victim.
- Mindfulness asks, "What am I experiencing right now?" On the other hand, self-compassion asks, "What do I need right now?"
- Mindfulness says, "Feel your suffering with spacious awareness." While self-compassion says, "Be kind to yourself in all situations."

Despite the differences, both mindfulness and self-compassion allow us to live with less resistance toward ourselves and our lives.



## SELF-COMPASSION AND OUR BODIES


We struggle to feel good enough in many areas of our lives, especially in our bodies. Our sense of self is closely identified with the body, so our physical appearance has a large impact on how we feel about ourselves.

Body image may be particularly important for women because the standards of female beauty are so high. Increasingly, women may feel less attractive after childbirth or experienced trauma during birth, and this has had an impact physically.

Self-compassion offers a powerful antidote to body dissatisfaction. A brief period of practicing self-compassion can help us feel less body shame, reduce the degree to which our feelings of self-worth are contingent on physical appearance, and help us appreciate our bodies as they are.

When we treat ourselves with kindness, warmth, and acceptance—even when the image we see in the mirror isn't perfect—we realize that we are so much more than this image. Instead of identifying with the body as the definition of who we are, we can see the bigger picture, realizing that our inner resources are most important. We can appreciate the amazing gift of life our body provides us, feeling our aliveness deep within our being.

With self-compassion, we can celebrate our bodies for what they still do for us, rather than how they merely look.





## EMBRACE DIFFICULT EMOTION

Life isn't easy. It often brings challenging situations and with them, difficult emotions such as anger, fear, worry, and grief. By a certain age, we learn that it doesn't help to run from our problems—we need to deal with them directly.

However, when we turn toward difficult emotions, even with mindfulness and self-compassion, our pain often increases at first and our instinct is to turn away. But if we are to heal, the only way out is to face them. We must have the courage to be present with emotional pain if we are going to live healthy, authentic lives.

Experiencing discomfort is a prerequisite for self-compassion, but we only need to touch emotional pain to cultivate compassion, and we can go slowly so we don't overwhelm ourselves. The art of self-compassion includes inclining gradually toward emotional discomfort when it arises.

There are five stages of acceptance when meeting difficult emotions, and each successive stage corresponds to a gradual release of emotional resistance.







**Resisting: struggling against  
what come.**

“Go away!”

**Exploring: turning toward  
discomfort with curiosity.**

“What am I feeling?”

**Tolerating: safely enduring,  
holding space.**

“I don’t like this, but I can  
stand it.”

**Allowing: letting feelings  
come and go.**

“It’s okay, I can make space  
for this.”

**Befriending: seeing value in  
difficult emotional  
experiences.**

“What can I learn from this?”





## GLASS HALF FULL.

By the time most people reach midlife, they become caregivers in one form or another. Some might be caregivers in their professional careers—doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, teachers—and others in their personal lives, caring for children, elderly parents, spouses, friends, and so on.

When we care for others who are suffering, the process of empathic resonance means that we feel their distress as our own. When we witness someone else in pain, the pain centres of our own brains become active. Empathic distress can be hard to bear, so it's natural to try to block it out or make it go away as we would do to any other pain, but the constant struggle can be draining and may lead to caregiver fatigue and burnout.

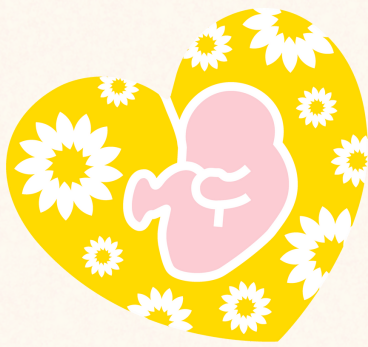
How do we know we've reached the point of burnout? Usually, there are signs such as being distracted, angry or irritated, restless or avoidant of others, having trouble sleeping, or experiencing distressing and intrusive thoughts. However, caregiver fatigue is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of caring. In fact, the more caregivers are capable of empathic resonance, the more vulnerable they may be to caregiver fatigue. Human beings are limited in how much vicarious suffering they can take on without becoming overwhelmed.

There are two main types of advice given to prevent caregiver burnout. One is to draw clear emotional boundaries between ourselves and those we care for. The problem with this approach, however, is that if you are a professional caregiver, emotional sensitivity is necessary to do an effective job, and if you are caring for a loved one say a child or a parent, the drawing of boundaries can harm the quality of the relationship.

The other type of advice given to prevent burnout is to engage in self-care activities. These are typically behaviours like exercising, eating well, spending time with friends, or going on vacation. While self-care is extremely important, there is a big limitation in the use of self-care strategies to deal with caregiving burnout. Self-care tends to happen off the job and doesn't help us during caregiving interactions themselves.

As we are told whenever we fly, that when there is a drop in cabin pressure, we need to put on our own oxygen mask first before we help others. Some caregivers may believe they should only be concerned with the needs of others and are often self-critical because they think they aren't giving enough. However, if you don't meet your own emotional needs by giving yourself compassion, you will become depleted and less able to give.

Importantly, when you calm and soothe your own mind, the person you're caring for will also feel calmed and soothed through her own empathetic resonance. In other words, when we cultivate peace within, we help all those we're in contact with to become more peaceful as well. Self-compassion helps caregivers to thrive in their caregiving roles.



# Mayah's Legacy

## **FURTHER HELP AND SUPPORT**

For more information about Mayah's  
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