

Counselor's Corner



The Self-Compassion Issue

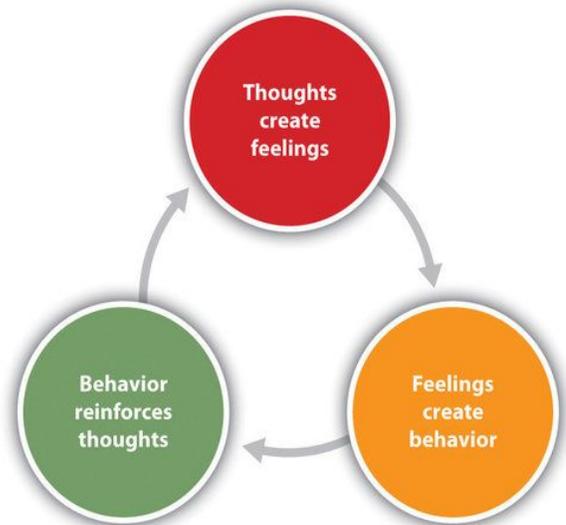
Self-compassion is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. Self-compassion entails being warm towards oneself when encountering pain and personal shortcomings, rather than ignoring them or hurting oneself with self-criticism. Self-compassion has nothing to do with judging yourself positively, it's a way of relating to yourself kindly- embracing yourself as you are, flaws and all.

Self-compassion is an important tool for stress management, emotion regulation, and self-care. In this issue we will focus on how to use the power of our thoughts, and self-compassion to promote emotional well being. As our district continues the work around Emotional Intelligence, we hope to provide parents with additional strategies to help you increase your own "EI"!

Thoughts-Feelings-Behaviors

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (Beck, 2011) is based on the principle that thoughts

influence feelings, feelings influence actions, and actions influence our results, or life circumstances. In other words, situations don't *make* us feel certain ways. People don't *make* us feel certain ways. It's how we interpret (or think about) situations or things people say or do that influences how we feel.



Parent Example: You're trying to get your child out the door in the morning, and they refuse to get dressed in a timely fashion. After multiple requests for them to hurry up, you realize you're all going to be late. You notice yourself having the thoughts "My child never listens to me, I'm not an effective parent". These thoughts may lead to feelings of frustration, embarrassment, or shame.

Child Example: Your child returns home from school and shares a conflict they had with a good friend. Your child verbalizes their negative thoughts out loud, and says "I have absolutely no friends, no one likes me at school". These thoughts have likely led your child to feel sad and upset.

Thought Strategies

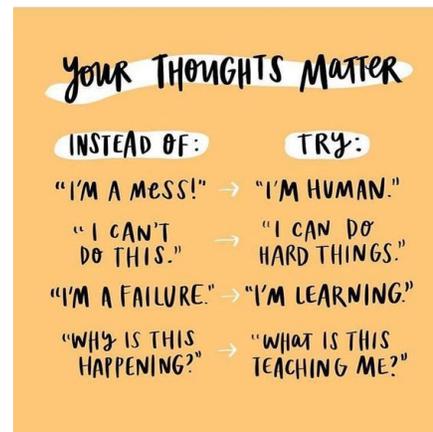
In the example above, the negative thoughts are that parent or child's *interpretation* of the situation. Negative thoughts can be so automatic that we may not even notice we are thinking about

them. Below are a few tips for noticing and managing your automatic negative thoughts!

- **Use Present Moment Attention (Mindfulness)-** Taking a few moments to focus our attention on our breath can allow us to notice our negative thoughts. You might try to visualize your thoughts as leaves floating down a stream, or clouds passing by. Noticing and allowing thoughts to go in their own time can be helpful. Do not try to push them away- that can make them stronger!
- **Challenge Your Negative Thoughts-** Asking yourself or your child the following questions can help you challenge the negative thought- *Is this thought helpful? Is this thought 100% true? How would someone else view this situation? Is this thought fact or opinion?* In the parent example above, you might answer by thinking, “No, that thought isn’t helpful, it’s not 100% true, the thought is only an opinion and not a fact, and I know I am often an effective parent and mornings are particularly difficult”. In the child example above, it may be helpful to validate your child’s feelings by saying “Sounds like you had a really tough day. I imagine you feel really sad about the fight with your friend.” You can help your child challenge their negative thoughts using the same questions. It may be most effective if you bring up the idea of challenging negative thoughts with your child at a neutral time, not in the midst of a crisis.
- **Look for Reoccurring Themes-** Begin to notice the themes of the stories you tell yourself. Are you always doubting your abilities? Are you often thinking the worst will happen? Our automatic negative thoughts often fall within categories called “cognitive distortions”. Common cognitive distortions include *Catastrophizing*, assuming the worst is happening or will happen, *Jumping to Conclusions*, predicting the future outcome of an event, *Mind Reading*, assuming you know what others are thinking, and *Mental Filtering*, only paying attention to certain types of evidence, and ignoring important facts.
- **Practice Gratitude-** As discussed in our last edition of Counselor’s Corner, our minds are primed for negativity. It can be helpful to note what you’re grateful for amidst difficult situations, like the earlier

example. Perhaps you’re grateful that *most* mornings your family gets out of the house on time, or that your child listens to your requests and follows through the majority of the time. Maybe you even make time to express gratitude for your child’s health, or for your availability to be present for your child’s morning .

- **Model Thought Strategies-** Children will be more likely to try strategies that they see their parents modeling. It can be helpful for children to hear when you’re noticing your own negative thoughts aloud. You may also model what it sounds like as you challenge them.



Strategies for Self-Compassion

- Remind yourself of your strengths.
- When experiencing difficult emotions, ask yourself what you need at that moment.
- Practice positive self-talk.
- Talk to yourself the way you talk to someone you love.
- Make time for the activities that bring you joy, and participate in them *mindfully*.
- Forgive yourself for not being perfect.
- Make a list of the ways you’ve grown, and the struggles you’ve overcome.
- Remind yourself of your common humanity. Everyone experiences difficult emotions, and everyone experiences suffering. You’re never in it alone.