Awaken Self-Compassion to Cope With Stress

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As you feel the academic pressure near the end of the semester, you may also begin to experience other end-of-year stress that involves family and holidays. Trying to balance school and personal life especially during this time of the year can sometimes be very overwhelming. When dealing with stress, do you find it easier to empathize with other people and tell them to take it "one day at a time" while it's difficult to tell yourself the same thing? Do you find yourself being kinder to others, but being more critical of yourself when faced with similar struggles? If so, here are two ways you can awaken self-compassion.

Compassion toward your physical self.

When do you know your body is under stress and how do you care for it? It may be tension in the neck, shoulder, chest, or stomach area. It may also be in the form of aches and pains along with other physical discomfort. To bring compassion for yourself, begin by identifying the areas in your body that are tense and need care. Then soften and loosen up these areas. Adding the practice of deep breathing will help relax your body as you tell yourself to stretch your neck, lower your shoulders, expand your chest, or soften your belly. Other ways of self-care such as taking a nap, eating nutritious food, or exercising fit into the group of being compassion toward your physical self.

Compassion toward your mental self.

When you feel stressed, your mind may be occupied with worries or racing thoughts. Some thoughts may be negative or self-critical in nature; others may contain self-blame or ruminations of "I should" or "I should have." While some people argue that motivation comes with strict or harsh words, it is usually unhelpful and hinders mental health in the long term. To foster self-compassion in your life, allow unwanted thoughts to come and go. Imagine watching leaves flowing down a river with each leaf representing a disturbing thought you want to let go of. If thoughts are too strong, you can gently repeat a short expression to calm your mind. Some common ones are "this too shall pass," "may I be safe," "may I be kind to myself right here right now," or "allow myself to give the compassion I need in this moment." These phrases offer a good starting point for cultivating self-compassion. Ultimately, you may want to be able to create and have several of these statements available to cope with stress.

Now that you have a glimpse of what self-compassion is and how to foster it physically and mentally, give yourself permission to begin this process by making a conscious choice to be kind to yourself.