

Introducing the Practice of Self-Compassion to Children

Gabi Garcia, LPC

In today's hypercompetitive achievement oriented world, children often internalize the message that their worth is attached to their accomplishments and that messing up or falling short is something to be ashamed of, rather than simply a normal part of life. This can lead to critical self-talk, and to children thinking they are not good enough.

I was inspired to write *Listening with My Heart* because I have experienced firsthand the gift of self-compassion, because as a counselor working in the schools I see the pressures that children are under and their struggles with issues around self-worth, and because I saw that self-compassion was often missing from what we teach children. I believe giving children tools to help them learn to be friends to themselves is vital. It is my hope that *Listening with My Heart* can be a part of that process and that self-compassion, like mindfulness, will become a practice that we teach our children at home, school and our therapy offices.

Self-compassion can support the well-being of children by helping them to build emotional resiliency. You can help your child cultivate self-compassion by:

Helping them become aware of their emotional experiences. Encourage them to name what they're feeling and to pay attention to the physical sensations that accompany their feelings. Validate their experiences and let them know that whatever they are feeling is okay.

Reminding them that disappointment, setbacks, etc. are a part of growing up. It's important for children to understand that making mistakes is normal. This doesn't mean they aren't responsible for their actions, but they can take responsibility compassionately.

Helping them become aware of their self-talk when things don't go the way they want or expect. Critical self-talk can leave kids feeling shame or embarrassment or believing that they are not good enough. If you notice this happening with your child, ask them to think about what they would say to a friend who had the same experience. Talk about the importance of treating themselves the way they would someone they care for. You can also help them find words or phrases that would feel comforting to them when they're having a hard time.

Modeling self-compassion. Kids pay attention to how we deal with our own frustrations and shortcomings. Every mistake we make is an opportunity to model kindness and compassion for ourselves.

You can find child-friendly self-compassion activities at gabigarciabooks.com