

BUILDING SELF-COMPASSION

The problem with being hard on yourself is it becomes ingrained and automatic that most of the time you will barely notice it is happening. So, the first thing you need to do is start catching yourself when you do it. Take some time to think about how you can build self-compassion.

01

Notice and record

A good place to start is to take an inventory of the most common things you say to yourself. For example, 'You should have worked harder on that', 'Why didn't you know that?' The list is endless but when you start to record these instances, you will notice a theme or a number of regular self-judgements.

02

What's the kindest thing you can say to yourself?

Start replacing each criticism with a dose of motivating self-compassion – something you *would* say to a close friend. Phrases such as:

‘That was a really tough situation, you did do your best with what you had/knew at the time.’ ‘Okay, I may not have done great there, but what’s the learning for next time?’

‘I love and accept myself exactly as I am.’

‘I am just human and a work in progress like everyone else.’

Or my favourite:

‘What’s the kindest thing I can do for myself/say to myself at this moment?’

03

Comfort yourself

When we are hard on ourselves we go into a flight-flight-freeze response – we will be feeling anxious because of the stress hormone cortisol that is pumping through our body.

A great way to come out of that negative, judging place (and into a kinder, more motivating one) is to physically comfort yourself. I learned this technique from the queen of self-compassion Kristin Neff, in her book *Self Compassion*. She says that by doing something she calls a Hugging Practice, we literally self-soothe our way out of the flight-flight-freeze response, and all of the self-judgement that brings. Hugging releases oxytocin in the brain, which immediately reduces stress levels and makes us feel calm, content, trusting and secure.

The next time this happens, give yourself a hug. If there are people around, or you are in a meeting, you can wrap your arms around one another in a way that is not too obvious, and give yourself a squeeze. And if even that is not possible, you can imagine hugging yourself, and this will also give that immediate calming effect.