



Self Compassion for Mothers



“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

Dalai Lama

There are many useful activities which help to foster self-compassion, a practice of regarding ourselves with the same compassion we would extend to anyone else in our lives, but which can be hard when we are used to being critical of ourselves. Dr Kristin Neff is a pioneer in this area, and shares many exercises and guided meditations on her website: <https://self-compassion.org>

For busy mothers, rather than assign tasks to be added to the to-do list, I find it helpful to consider quick and easy ways to begin to explore self-compassion. One such way is an exercise from Dr Neff: Supportive Touch. When we receive touch, our parasympathetic nervous system is activated, helping us to feel safe and calm. Your body does not differentiate between this touch from another person, or your own hands, so you can experience the benefits even whilst on your own, or when busy caring for small children.

Hand-on-Heart

- When you notice you're under stress, take 2-3 deep, satisfying breaths.
- Gently place your hand over your heart, feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand. If you wish, place both hands on your chest, noticing the difference between one and two hands.
- Feel the touch of your hand on your chest. If you wish, you could make small circles with your hand on your chest.
- Feel the natural rising and falling of your chest as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
- Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

Some people feel uneasy putting a hand over the heart. Feel free to explore where on your body a gentle touch is actually soothing. Some other possibilities are:

- One hand on your cheek
- Cradling your face in your hands
- Gently stroking your arms
- Crossing your arms and giving a gentle squeeze
- Gently rubbing your chest, or using circular movements
- Hand on your abdomen
- One hand on your abdomen and one over heart
- Cupping one hand in the other in your lap

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