**Tips for practice from Dr Kristin Neff**

Self-compassion is often a radically new way of relating to ourselves. Research shows that the more we practice being kind and compassionate with ourselves, either using informal practices such as the Self-Compassion Break, or formal meditation practices such as Affectionate Breathing – the more we’ll increase the habit of self-compassion.

There are a few tips to practicing self-compassion that are important to keep in mind for novice and experienced practitioners alike. Self-compassion is a practice of goodwill, not good feelings. In other words, even though the friendly, supportive stance of self-compassion is aimed at the alleviation of suffering, we can’t always control the way things are. If we use self-compassion practice to try to make our pain go away by suppressing it or fighting against it, things will likely just get worse. With self-compassion we mindfully accept that the moment is painful, and embrace ourselves with kindness and care in response, remembering that imperfection is part of the shared human experience. This allows us to hold ourselves in love and connection, giving ourselves the support and comfort needed to bear the pain, while providing the optimal conditions for growth and transformation.

Some people find that when they practice self-compassion, their pain actually increases at first. We call this phenomena backdraft, a firefighting term that describes what happens when a door in a burning house is opened – oxygen goes in and flames rush out. A similar process can occur when we open the door of our hearts – love goes in and old pain comes out. There are a couple sayings that describe this process: “When we give ourselves unconditional love, we discover the conditions under which we were unloved” or “Love reveals everything unlike itself.” Fortunately, we can meet old pain with the resources of mindfulness and self-compassion and the heart will naturally begin to heal. Still, it means we have to allow ourselves to be slow learners when it comes to practicing self-compassion. And if we ever feel overwhelmed by difficult emotions, the most self-compassionate response may be to pull back temporarily – focus on the breath, the sensation of the soles of our feet on the ground, or engage in ordinary, behavioural acts of self-care such as having a cup of tea or petting the cat. By doing so we reinforce the habit of self-compassion – giving ourselves what we need in the moment – planting seeds that will eventually blossom and grow.