

# SELF-COMPASSION MEDITATION FOR PARENTS

Difficulty: **CASUAL** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **10 MINS**



## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

For many parents, parenting is one of our greatest sources of joy. Yet parenting can also be difficult at times, causing us to feel self-critical and uncertain about whether we are doing well as parents. On top of this, a survey of 2,200 parents across the U.S. found that 90% of mothers and 85% of fathers have felt judged by other parents and strangers for the ways they parent their children, which may only exacerbate self-criticism.

Yet self-criticism and self-blame are counterproductive. Research finds that self-criticism is related to parenting styles that are not beneficial to children.

For this reason, it's essential that we as parents give ourselves grace when things don't go as we hope. Practicing greater compassion toward ourselves can help us cope with challenges more effectively, and it has been linked to greater well-being, more effective parenting practices, and better outcomes for children. This meditation is part of a brief compassion-focused therapy program that successfully reduced self-criticism among parents and improved children's social-emotional life and behavior.

## TIME REQUIRED

This practice takes less than 10 minutes a week.

## HOW TO DO IT

When you're feeling self-critical about your parenting, this meditation can help you cultivate a warmer and more compassionate attitude toward yourself.

This practice draws on a guided meditation created by the Compassionate Mind Research Group.

We recommend listening to the audio of this guided meditation in the player below. We have included a script of the practice to help you follow it yourself or teach it to others.

If you aren't listening to [the audio](#), take pauses to just breathe, close your eyes, or be in the moment for as long as you need. Don't worry about doing it wrong; simply be present and refer back to the script as needed.

*In this practice, you will learn to cultivate compassion for yourself. To begin this practice, choose a moment when you are unlikely to be disturbed for a while and you can sit comfortably. Always remember to respect the process and prepare the body.*

*Get comfortable in your chair, feet flat on the ground and chest open, opening up the diaphragm. This is adopting a compassionate body posture.*

*Focus on your soothing, rhythmic breathing with the air coming in through your nose and gently into your diaphragm, and out through your nose again.*

*Remember that this is breathing slightly deeper and longer than you would normally.*

*Notice the feeling of your mind slowing down and your body slowing down.*

*Remember, as we go through the exercise you may find your mind wondering. Do not worry about that; just gently and kindly bring it back to the task we are doing. Just breathing in and breathing out.*

*Now bringing to mind your compassionate self, with its qualities of wisdom, strength, and commitment, try to create a picture of yourself in your mind's eye as if you are looking at yourself from the outside.*

*Focus a sense of compassion on you. You as a fellow human being. As arrived in this world doing the best you can. And that sometimes is confronted with difficult feelings or life circumstances and feeling overwhelmed and stressed.*

*Now, with a compassionate voice and voice tone, keep this image of yourself in your mind as you breath in and out and say the following on the out-breath:*

*May I be free from suffering,  
May I be happy,  
May I flourish,  
May I live with ease.*

*If at any point you feel pulled into those difficult feelings or life circumstances, come back to the compassion itself that stays with a sense of authority, kindness, strength, and wisdom.*

*May I be free from suffering,  
May I be happy,  
May I flourish,  
May I live with ease.*

*For a few moments, just practice saying those things, directing those feelings to yourself on the out-breath: free of suffering, to be happy, to flourish, and to live with ease.*

*Don't worry if you can't remember them all, just focus on the ones you can.*

*May I be free from suffering,  
May I be happy,  
May I flourish,  
May I live with ease.*

*When you feel ready, let the image of yourself fade. Spend a minute or two reflecting on the feelings that have arisen in you. Notice how that feels in your body, and for a few moments just be without paying attention to anything in particular, and when you feel ready you can just open your eyes and gently stretch your body.*

## **EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS**

Kirby, J. N., Hoang, A., & Ramos, N. (2023). A brief compassion focused therapy intervention can help self-critical parents and their children: A randomised controlled trial. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 00, 1- 19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12459>

One hundred and two parents were randomly assigned to either participate in a compassion focused therapy program or to join a waitlist. Up to three months after the program, the group of parents who participated were less self-critical and their children showed fewer challenges (difficult emotions like unhappiness or tearfulness and relationship problems like being picked on or bullied) compared to the parents on the waitlist.

## WHY TO TRY IT

Self-compassion directly targets self-criticism. When we are self-compassionate, we don't respond to ourselves harshly when things go wrong. Instead, we reassure ourselves by remembering that no one is "perfect." At the same time, we recognize that our children—just like all children—will make mistakes, and that is part of the learning process. The kindness that we show ourselves reduces any feelings of shame that we might experience, and this allows us to respond more effectively to the situation and to our children.

## SOURCES

[James N. Kirby, Ph.D.](#), The University of Queensland

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

