

HOLSTEE

Compassion Guide.

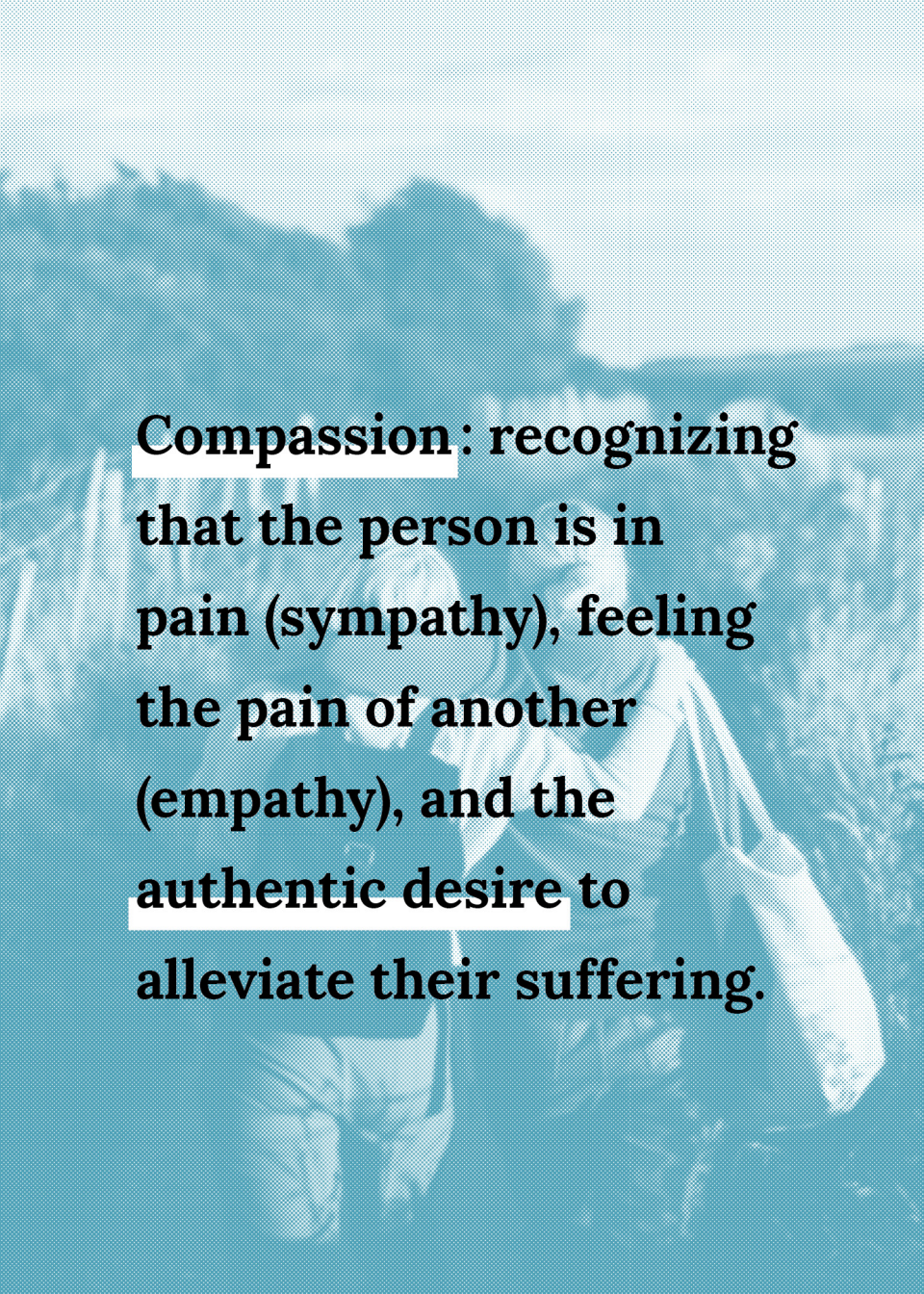


We all share an undeniable
interdependence. When
we try to understand and
ease pain, we set in motion
a wave of infinite love and
possibility.

Warm-up

We'll begin by reflecting on what compassion actually is. We can show compassion to ourselves, to those immediately around us, and even to those on the other side of the world. Distinct from empathy, and more nuanced than simply being nice, compassion requires feeling and action.

When reading this breakdown of compassion, who comes to mind? Maybe someone in your life, a figure from history, a character from a book. Jot down the names of those individuals and list their positive qualities.



Compassion: recognizing that the person is in pain (sympathy), feeling the pain of another (empathy), and the authentic desire to alleviate their suffering.

Thought Starters

You don't need us to outline all the ways in which we're lacking in compassion in our world today. We see it in the news, in our daily interactions, and in the media we consume. But one of the best ways we can bring compassion into our lives and those around us is simply in the way we talk to one another — more specifically with the use of **Nonviolent Communication (NVC)**. Guided by the Center for Nonviolent Communication and its founder, Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg, here's a short overview. We'll begin by breaking down the **Four Components**:

1) Observation: Noticing concrete things and actions around us without judgment or evaluation, which helps us stay in the present moment, break patterns of assumption, and avoid leading with critique.

Observation with evaluation:

My friend is always flaky and won't answer my calls or texts.

Observation without

evaluation: *My friend didn't answer my call or text yesterday.*

Tip: Avoid using words like *always, never, frequently, or rarely* – be specific.

2) Feeling: Our emotions and sensations in the present moment, expressed with honesty. When we begin a sentence with “I feel...” we're not necessarily expressing a feeling, we may be describing a thought about how someone is or tends to behave towards us.

Expressing a thought: *I feel that my friend is ignoring me when she doesn't answer my calls.*

Expressing a feeling: *In this moment, I feel sad and maybe even a little lonely.*

Tip: Avoid using: *that, like, and as if* – these often signal thoughts, not feelings.

3) Needs: How our needs are or aren't met shapes our experiences. We often see our feelings as caused by someone or something, but in doing so we place blame. The goal is to distinguish between a stimulus (a person or event) and the cause (the met or unmet needs) behind the feelings.

Placing blame: *You make me upset when you ignore my calls.*

Identifying a need: *I feel sad because I really wanted to spend time with you but couldn't.*

Tip: *The hard work of compassion is in trying to understand hurtful actions in a way that helps us move forward with empathy.*

4) Request: A clear and present request for concrete action that can be carried out in the given moment. This request should be made simply, precisely, and without making a demand.

Unclear demand: *I wish you would stop ignoring me all the time.*

Making a request: *Would you be willing to set a date we can spend time together this week?*

The Four Components of NVC come together in this simple model:

When I see that _____ I feel _____ because my need for _____ is/is not met. Would you be willing to _____ ?

This is the core of NVC, and may feel daunting or even cheesy at first. Begin with one component — maybe expressing feelings instead of thoughts, or reflecting on your needs with honesty.

Take a moment to mentally fill in the blanks above using a recent scenario you found yourself in or an imagined future conflict. How might it change your interaction?

**“We are each made for goodness,
love and compassion. Our lives
are transformed as much as the
world is when we live with these
truths.” – DESMOND TUTU**

A Friend In Me

Dr. Kristen Neff is a researcher, writer, and Co-Founder of the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, and has spent much of her life studying self-compassion and developing programs to help people relate to themselves with greater kindness. Based on her research, **Dr. Neff breaks self-compassion into three elements:**

1. SELF-KINDNESS VS. SELF-JUDGMENT

Self-compassion entails seeing ourselves as imperfect and responding with kindness when confronted with failure, suffering, or feelings of inadequacy. Self-compassion urges us to accept that things will not always go as we hope, that we can't always be or get exactly what we want — and that's OK.

2. COMMON HUMANITY VS. ISOLATION

Our challenging moments often bring up feelings of isolation — that we're the only one experiencing hurt, making mistakes, or feeling pain. But our vulnerability and fragility is what makes us human, and recognizing that helps us feel connected to a larger human experience. Dr. Neff writes, "having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness."

3. MINDFULNESS VS. OVER-IDENTIFICATION

This element of self-compassion is all about seeking equanimity in our emotions. Like so many aspects of our lives, self-compassion is all about balance. We shouldn't avoid or deny negative feelings, but try to receive them without judgment. At the same time, we should be mindful not to get caught up in them.

One exercise Dr. Neff recommends for practicing self-compassion is to reflect on how you treat a close friend when they are suffering. Often, we're quicker to accept and forgive a friend for their flaws and mistakes than we are our own.

Step One: Reflect on your life in this moment. What are your challenges and weaknesses? What are your biggest pain points?

Step Two: Imagine how you would respond if a close friend was feeling and experiencing those exact things. What would you say? How would you feel as they confided in you? What words of comfort or encouragement would you offer?

Dear friend,

Our human compassion binds us the one to the other – not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.

– NELSON MANDELA

Discussion

Use these questions as a starting point for dialogue with friends and family about compassion. We know it's not always easy to dive right into the hard questions, so we created a few different question levels. We challenge you to try out whatever level feels right to you.

LEVEL ONE: GET STARTED

Is compassion learned or inherent?

What actions or activities make a person more compassionate?

LEVEL TWO: GET HONEST

Do you find it more challenging to be kind to yourself or others?

When was the last time you had to forgive someone?

LEVEL THREE: GET DEEP

Is humankind becoming more or less compassionate?

Do intentions matter more or less than actions?

Review

To help you keep these ideas and reflection questions at the front of your mind this month, here's a short recap:

1 Feeling and action. While we sometimes use the words compassion and empathy interchangeably, compassion *involves* empathy, but also the desire to act on that feeling to try and alleviate someone else's pain or suffering.

2 A tool to connect. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is an incredible tool for understanding and expressing our feelings in order to more compassionately resolve conflict.

3 Avoid placing blame. In moments of conflict, identifying our needs (and the feelings that come when those needs are met or unmet) is key. This step helps us avoid placing blame on the other and leading with judgment or criticism.

4 Start with the self. According to researcher Dr. Kristen Neff, self-compassion involves showing ourselves kindness in the face of failure, seeing our suffering as part of our larger humanity, and seeking equanimity in our emotions.

This kit is inspired by our readings from the [Center for Nonviolent Communication](#), [Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg](#), [Dalai Lama XIV](#), [Nelson Mandela](#), and [Dr. Kristen Neff](#). For further reading and curated resources on this topic, check out [**holstee.com/compassion**](https://holstee.com/compassion).

Open mind. Open arms. Open heart.