

# Solving Difficult Problems with Compassion

## A Ten-Step Process



**When we are facing difficult problems, particularly in situations involving others, our defense mechanisms often become activated.** When that happens, our thinking is compromised, just when we need it the most. Secondly, we tend to sever our connection to and caring for others, just when we and they need it the most. Expansive, creative thinking goes out the window. Psychological safety evaporates and coldness or acrimony moves in. We get stuck.

**The following ten steps outline one way to use compassion and self-compassion as an antidote to these two big problems.** Make this your own, over time. Change or modify the steps to suit you. At first these steps may seem awkward, difficult, contrived. This is new, and new doesn't feel natural. Stay with it. Be patient. Keep practicing.

**If you keep practicing, over time you will begin to do this *naturally*.** You won't need a form. You won't need to think about it. You will do it. And to great, positive effect. You will flourish and will support the other people around you in doing the same. Open heart, strong spine, clear mind.

Step 1. **Identify:** Identify the challenging situation you want to work with. Name it.

Step 2. **Describe:** In 2-3 sentences, describe the situation.

Step 3. **Tune In:** Notice the bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts that arise as you describe and reflect on this situation.

Step 4. **Capture:** Write down what you notice. "Name it to tame it," as the saying goes.

Step 5. **Turn Inward:** Notice the aspects of this that are *hard* for you. *Turn in to* this "hardness" or to this, you could say, "suffering."

Step 6. **Practice Self-Compassion:** Say the following four statements three times, while holding this difficulty, hardness, or suffering in mind.

- This situation is hard for me.
- Situations like this are common and a part of being human.
- May I be kind to myself in this moment.
- May I give myself the compassion I need.

*After repeating these four statements three times, notice your internal state... sensations, feelings, thoughts.*

Step 7. **Turn Outward:** Consider the parts of this that must be hard for *the other* person or people involved--*their* fears, worries, thoughts, etc.

- See if you can see things from *their* vantage point, even (and especially) if you think they are *wrong*.

- See it from *their* perspective... especially their fears, worries, thoughts... including what *they* are thinking about or how they are seeing *you*.
- In considering their perspective, you aren't validating it. You are simply trying to see the situation and you through *their* eyes. From *their* perspective.
- This can be exceptionally difficult. Our *ego* and our *defense mechanism* may strongly resist this. This is natural. And these two things—our ego and defense mechanism—are part of the problem. So, let them struggle a bit with this. There's a new sheriff in town. You. The higher part of you.

Step 8. **Capture:** Write down what the other person might be experiencing, fearing, thinking, etc.

Step 9. **Practice Compassion:** Practice compassion for the suffering of the other person or people involved.

- Keep in mind that no matter whether this other person or these other people are *wrong*, just like you, they want to be happy and free from suffering.
- As misguided as you think their approach may be, they are doing their best to do exactly that in this situation. They are trying to be happy and free from suffering.
- The key thing to remember is that, just like you, this situation is hard for them. They are suffering. They are afraid or angry or frustrated or whatever, so they, too, are suffering.
- It is this *suffering*, not their position or behavior you disagree with, that you want to practice compassion for.

Say the following four statements three times:

- May this person or people be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
- May this person or people be happy.
- May this person or people be healthy.
- May this person or people live with ease.

*After repeating these four statements three times, notice your internal state... sensations, feelings, thoughts.*

Step 10. **Reflect:** Step back from the situation, shifting and hopefully elevating your vantage point... perhaps using the compassion practices above to "lift up" your awareness and perspective:

- Are your *defense mechanisms* now more activated, or more relaxed? How is that for you? Is that helpful, or not? Write this down.
- Are you *thinking* differently about this situation or the people involved? If so, in what ways? Any new solutions arising? Write this down.
- Are you *feeling* differently towards this person or the people involved? If so, in what ways? How does this state feel? Write this down.
- If there were one thing you could now go do to better approach this situation, what would that be? Do you want to do this? How? Write this down.
- After taking that action... what did you learn? It isn't so much about whether that new action "worked." What did you *learn* about *yourself*? Journal about this, and honor that you are learning.