

# Conversations About COMPASSION

“Cultivate compassion all day and every day. Now, when things are difficult it’s time to practice.” —Karen Armstrong

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION FACILITATOR AND PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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## About This Guide

**T**his guide is designed to help you explore the power of compassion in your own and others' lives by providing tools for facilitating conversations about compassion in your community, organization, business, or school.

This guide contains a series of vignettes that explore

- What compassion is
- The compassionate instinct
- Self-compassion
- Cultivating compassion
- Compassion in action

We've also included suggested questions to spark discussion around the essays, videos with accompanying discussion questions, suggested home practices, and resources for further exploration.

Use the guide as a way to explore compassion and compassionate action personally or with others. For personal exploration, turn to page 10 and begin. For information about group conversations, including facilitation, see pages 4–8. If you're a group participant, turn to page 9.

We invite you to use or adapt any of the material so that it works best for you and/or your group. We hope that you find this guide useful, and thank you for your interest in compassion.

## The Power of Conversation

During the Fetzer Institute's four-year Campaign for Love & Forgiveness, which included hundreds of facilitated conversations in seven cities across the country, our research revealed that participation in conversations made a difference in participants' awareness, attitudes, and actions around forgiveness.

Seventy percent of those who participated in campaign conversations reported that they would be more likely to

- Forgive themselves for mistakes
- Forgive others who are close to them
- Consider offering forgiveness as a response to a difficult situation
- Talk with friends about forgiveness or being more forgiving
- Choose to forgive someone rather than be angry at them

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

## FACILITATOR AND PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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### Introducing the Conversations

**T**he goal of conversations about compassion is to encourage participants to think and talk about compassion, with the hope that this will bring about meaningful change in attitudes and behavior. For example, we hope that participants will practice more self-compassion and integrate more compassionate actions toward others in their everyday life.

Based on our experience with the Campaign for Love & Forgiveness, we learned that holding at least four conversations gives participants time to become familiar with the topic and build trust, one with another, allowing the conversations to deepen over time. You may choose whether to lead the conversations in the order the material is presented or modify it, depending on the experiences, needs, and desires of your group. Drawing from facilitator surveys, we recommend that the conversations take place over a period of four to twelve weeks, and last at least two hours each.

Between conversations, participants will have the opportunity to practice and add to what they are learning via the essays and suggested home practices.

In keeping with the Fetzer Institute's belief that individual transformation can lead to societal change, we hope that as participants learn about different aspects of compassion and practice more compassion in their own lives, there will be a ripple effect into communities. We witnessed this during the Campaign for Love & Forgiveness when, for example, some communities created Gardens of Forgiveness or dedicated a Red Bench in a public space where people met to share stories of love and forgiveness. Perhaps there is a difficult issue in your community where a focus on compassion could play a role (for example, finding ways to bring compassion into discussions of policies toward people who are homeless, or dealing with racial tensions).

# For Facilitators

## Facilitator's Role

**A**s facilitator, your role is to create a welcoming, safe, and comfortable environment for participants. You may want to recognize the courage it takes to share stories and feelings surrounding the topic of compassion, and make participants aware that the subject matter may trigger powerful emotions. Ask the group to honor these emotions as they arise. You can also research additional resources and offer them to those who may wish to more deeply explore personal issues outside the conversations. You will likely find that by sharing your thoughts and experiences, you will be modeling the kind of sharing and conduct that will keep the conversations respectful, purposeful, and enjoyable.

If extremely powerful emotions or conflict should arise among participants, addressing them in a way that honors both those involved and the group at large is important. If a conflict threatens to derail the group in a way that would not illustrate the concepts being discussed, or if the conflict is taking up too much of the group's time, you could ask those involved to set aside time after the session for further exploration or mediation, and/or make yourself available for private conversation on the matter as you are able. If someone is consistently disrupting the group, you may ask that person privately to re-evaluate his or her reasons for joining the conversations. Maintaining safety and order for the entire group is most important, even as the constructive exploration of conflict within the group can be beneficial to everyone's learning.

It is also possible that an individual will express emotions that may be better explored outside of the group, with a counselor or other professional. Prepare your group for the potential that deep and unexpected emotions may arise that cannot be resolved by this group.

We include in this guide a suggested list of shared agreements for you and your participants. They may be read at the beginning of each conversation, to set the tone and create a framework for sharing, and they can be amended, expanded, or rewritten by your group, as desired. Since participants will be doing a lot of listening, there's also a page on the nature and value of focused listening. You may read this with participants at the first conversation and briefly discuss how focused listening can in itself be an act of love.

## Conversation Format

**A**s facilitator, you'll be responsible for making sure that the conversations start and end on time, following a format and agenda you decide upon (allowing for changes and new directions that may arise as the conversations progress). Below is a suggested format for a two-hour conversation. You also have the opportunity to adjust the conversations and the suggested activities to suit the culture, age, ethnicity, etc., of the group.

**1. Prepare.** Review this guide and familiarize yourself with the concepts. Read the essays and view the clips ahead of time.

**2. Arrive early.** On the day of the conversation, make sure the room is ready for participants (enough chairs, arranged in a circle or around a table for conversation, proper ventilation and temperature, water, flip charts, paper, writing utensils, working video/audio equipment, nametags, signs, etc.). Give yourself as much time as you need to prepare. You might take a few moments to center yourself before people arrive, and set an intention or vision for how you wish to guide the conversation.

**3. Begin the conversation on time.** This sets a precedent and honors those present.

**4. Officially welcome the group and introduce yourself.** At the first conversation, it's important to acknowledge the courage and goodwill of those who have chosen to participate. You can also acknowledge any nervousness or anxiety that people may feel about joining the conversations. The facilitator acts as a group voice at times like this, and you can exemplify honest sharing by mentioning any feelings you may have about leading the conversations. You might also say something brief about why you chose to facilitate these conversations, and what you hope to achieve.

**5. Invite participants to briefly introduce themselves.** It's best to keep this concise, with participants stating their names, where they live (or work, or go to school, etc., depending on the group's identity), and a sentence about how they are feeling about being part of the conversation. You can say that there will be more time later for actual discussion. This kind of "lightning check-in" at the beginning of each conversation allows people to momentarily release whatever thought or feeling might distract them from being present to the group. An example: "My name is Lily and I live in Springfield. I'm stressed because I had to rush to get here, and I'm kind of nervous because I don't know what to expect."

**6. Announce the format.** Give everyone a sense of the conversation's flow and ending time. Remind them where bathrooms are and if there are snacks available, and encourage them to take care of themselves during the conversation (stretch if they need to, get a drink of water, etc.). You may wish to build in a break midway.

**7. Distribute and review the guide.** Note the suggested home practices.

## Conversation Guidelines

**R**ead the suggested guidelines or create your own. This establishes a code of conduct for the group and allows everyone to feel responsible for honoring that code. We have provided suggested guidelines, which you and your participants can amend and/or expand for your particular needs, or use as a reference in creating your own list. Over time we've learned that it's useful to read the guidelines for at least the first two conversations. After the agreements are read aloud by all who wish to read, you can ask whether anyone has a question or need for clarification, and address any of those needs. You may also wish to take a group vote on the guidelines.

**1. Center the group.** This helps people “land” in the room, and invites calm and focus. Ideas include a minute of silence with closed eyes, a brief meditation on breath and body awareness, an invitation to silently pray or set an intention, or your own preferred centering technique. Participants could also meditate on compassion itself—where they experience it in the body, how it feels, what images or thoughts come to mind, etc. You could also invite them to think about a time when someone offered them compassion, and how it felt. Afterward you could verbally end the centering practice, or ring a soft chime to bring everyone's attention back to the group. Another possibility is to set the tone with a quotation on the subject of compassion. You might suggest that participants bring in a quotation of their own for this purpose. If you sense a desire among participants to share about the centering, you can invite them to do so briefly.

**2. Introduce the vignettes.** This guide includes five vignettes or short essays: About Compassion, The Compassionate Instinct, Self-Compassion, Cultivating Compassion, and Compassion in Action. They provide background and context for the conversations and include an overview of relevant research. The essays may be read during the conversation sessions or by the participants on their own time.

**3. Lead activities for the conversation.** There are suggested video clips for each conversation that can be used in addition to the vignettes to trigger conversation. For each clip, this guide includes suggested discussion questions. You will likely also have your own ideas for group activities, depending on your conversation format and the group's makeup. Have a few alternative exercises in mind for anyone who may need them (e.g., if someone feels uncomfortable about sharing something personal out loud, they could write about the topic instead), and allow participants to skip or alter any exercises that make them uncomfortable.

**4. End activities and move to a moment of silence.** This allows everyone to briefly “digest” the conversation and identify their feelings in the moment. Again, verbal instructions and/or a soft chime could mark the start of this closing meditation.

**5. Close the conversation with the group.** You and the participants can offer brief statements about how you feel at the end of the conversation, and/or what you might take away from the experience. Encourage participants to use the guide as a way to keep the conversation alive and expand upon their learning, and invite them to read the next essay in preparation for the upcoming session. Remind everyone of the next conversation date, and allow a few minutes for any questions/comments that participants may have as they leave.

*Simply put, there is nothing, nothing in the world that can take the place of one person intentionally listening or speaking to another.*

—Jacob Needleman

## Conversation Guidelines

Guidelines or shared agreements among group members help to keep conversations orderly, respectful, and conducive to honest sharing. Feel free to customize this list or generate your own guidelines. You can vote on your guidelines at the first conversation, and refer to them as needed throughout the remaining conversations.

- We agree to hold confidential what is shared in this room. If we encounter a conversation partner outside this room, we will respect his or her privacy.
- We intend to balance sharing and listening, allowing everyone to participate, and we'll pass whenever we wish.
- When someone is speaking, we'll allow him or her to speak uninterrupted, and refrain from giving unsolicited feedback, advice, or commentary.
- We commit to using "I" statements as often as possible when we share.
- We will assume good intentions on everyone's part, agree that we may disagree at times, and learn together about respecting differences.
- If an exercise makes us uncomfortable, we can skip it or ask the facilitator for an alternative.
- We intend to attend all four conversations, and begin and end our conversations on time.
- We will listen with focus and attention.
- Other agreements unique to our group.

## Listening with Focus and Attention

You might take a few minutes to discuss the value of listening, and share experiences where you really felt heard or listened to someone who needed to be heard.

A discussion about good listening skills might include these points

- Listening with an open heart and mind
- Allowing the speaker to finish his or her thoughts and sentences, even when we feel impatient to speak
- Accepting that the speaker feels what he or she feels, no matter what we think, and refraining from "correcting" the speaker's feelings
- Listening with no agenda other than to be a sounding board for someone who needs to speak
- Imagining that we are speaking and listening to ourselves
- Listening without trying to solve or fix a problem, unless feedback or advice is sought
- Other skills, as suggested by your group

# Participant's Role

Your willingness to join these conversations indicates that you have an interest in exploring the power of compassion in your own life. We hope that you will feel comfortable sharing your experiences in a way that honors your need for privacy and discretion, while surfacing insights and sharing experiences and stories that will give you opportunities to delve deeper into the topic and inspire others.

You may find during the course of these conversations that you touch upon issues in your life that could benefit from outside counseling. Your facilitator may have referrals or suggestions.

Also in this guide are practices that you can try at home, to sustain the conversations between meetings and see what kind of impact they can have on your life in general. It is likely that those around you will feel the effects of your involvement in this work, even if you do not discuss it with them, and that it will awaken you to the power of compassion to transform your life.



*Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.*

—Leo Buscaglia

*Since birth, we have been able to resonate with other human beings.*

—Piero Ferrucci

## About Compassion

### What is compassion?

Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

—Merriam Webster Dictionary

1. Suffering together with another, participation in suffering; fellow-feeling, sympathy.
2. The feeling or emotion, when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it; pity that inclines one to spare or to succour.

—Oxford English Dictionary

*Years ago I sat in a public park in the darkest depression I have ever experienced. Crying and rocking back and forth [when] a Latino man who spoke little English gave me his mat and blanket, saying to me "Your home, my friend." I am where I am today because of that mat and blanket.*

—Spencer Christensen, San Rafael, Calif., from the Charter for Compassion

In a world where examples of widespread suffering are ever-present, why would we want to experience the suffering of others? It's enough to experience our own suffering. Perhaps it's because, as Spencer experienced, an act of compassion expands our ability to cope and touches us, often beyond what we can verbally express. All of a sudden, our pain is shared and we are seen.

True compassion is one of the great gifts of life. It arises from the understanding and awareness that we are all connected.

Not only that but, as human beings, we are, in fact, wired to be empathic—to attune ourselves to others' emotional states. And empathy, accompanied by a desire to relieve another's suffering, is compassion.

The gift Spencer received was offered spontaneously. "Your home, my friend," may have been the sweetest words he'd ever heard. Compassionate acts, like the one Spencer experienced, are typically not done out of self-interest, but because feeling another's pain compels a response to relieve it.

Being compassionate has been shown to boost our health, reduce stress, improve our work environment, and be an antidote to our increasing isolation. Not only that, but it seems to be contagious!

While researchers are finding that compassion is an inherent part of our nature, it is one among many competing emotions. Many other emotions—fear, sadness, grief, anger, hurt—can provoke the very suffering that we experience when we feel compassion. It is, however, because we suffer that cultivating compassion can yield such benefits.

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## Suggested Questions and Activities for the Group

1. Ask group members to share an indelible memory of compassion.
2. Have group members talk about a person or people in their lives who modeled compassion for them.
3. Ask group members to talk about a character in a movie or book who exemplifies compassion.

## Suggested Video

Malaysian Kids Talk About Compassion (3:14)  
[www.blog.ted.com/2009/11/video\\_malaysian.php](http://www.blog.ted.com/2009/11/video_malaysian.php)  
A series of interviews with Malaysian students sharing what compassion means to them and what acts of compassion they've recently witnessed. Ask the group the same questions the students answered.

Ubuntu by Global Oneness (8:17)  
[www.globalonenessproject.org/videos/ubuntu](http://www.globalonenessproject.org/videos/ubuntu)  
This clip explores "ubuntu," an African philosophy of interconnectedness and compassion.

1. Share reactions to the concept of ubuntu as described in the film. Ask if anyone was familiar with ubuntu before seeing this clip and if so, how.
2. In the US, do we have a prevailing philosophy that dictates how we treat others? What key learning do group members draw from their family, culture, or spiritual traditions about how to treat others?
3. Ask if and how learning the Golden Rule has played or may play a role in how they navigate life.

## Suggested Home Practices

1. Spend a day "tuning into" how people around you are feeling.
2. Spend a day consciously "doing unto others as you'd have them do unto you."
3. Think of key events in your life that have caused you suffering and what that has taught you about empathy and compassion.

## Resource

Charter for Compassion  
[www.charterforcompassion.org/](http://www.charterforcompassion.org/)  
Using her TED Prize award, author Karen Armstrong's wish to help create, launch, and propagate a Charter for Compassion came true. This website is one of the tools that is bringing that wish to fruition.

*The Golden Rule requires that we use empathy—moral imagination—to put ourselves in others' shoes. We should act toward them as we would want them to act toward us. We should refuse, under any circumstance, to carry out actions which would cause them harm.*

—Charter for Compassion

*In the beginning,  
there was  
compassion.*

—Robert Wright, author  
and Schwartz Senior  
Fellow at the New America  
Foundation

*Effective cooperation  
requires being  
exquisitely in tune  
with the emotional  
states and goals of  
others.*

—Frans de Waal,  
primatologist and author

## The Compassionate Instinct

**W**here does compassion come from? Is it a standard-issue human trait? Biologists, primatologists, neuroscientists, and psychologists are uncovering more data suggesting that compassion is indeed an evolved part of human nature. Dacher Keltner, professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley and co-director of the Greater Good Science Center, and colleagues in the field call this “the compassionate instinct.”<sup>1</sup>

**Empathic primates.** In formal experiments as well as compelling anecdotes documenting primate (and other animal) behavior, there is mounting evidence that our close animal relatives experience and express empathy. A poignant example is the story primatologist Frans de Waal recounts of Kuni, a bonobo (member of the great apes) in Twycross Zoo in England, who picked up a wounded starling that had flown into a window, took it to the highest point in its enclosure, unfolded its wings, and carefully released it. Not only did Kuni respond with empathy and compassion, but she did so toward another species, in an appropriate and tender way.<sup>2</sup>

Empathy serves a purpose in social cultures like ours and those of our primate relatives. For innately social beings that survive and thrive in community, empathy plays a major role in facilitating communication and collaboration. Without it, we and other primates lose key components that perpetuate our very existence: caring for our young and for the vulnerable, helping, and cooperating with one another. But what is behind this emotion and behavior we share with our animal relatives? Nature? Nurture?

Your brain (and body) on compassion. Scientists are finding that when we feel compassion it triggers areas of our brains associated with positive emotions and pleasure as well as the production of oxytocin, a hormone that promotes nurturing, trust, generosity, and long-term bonds. Research is also revealing that compassion is instrumental in activating the vagus nerve, which is linked to our tendencies for caretaking, kindness, and compassion.

In humans, one of the deepest bonds—between parent and child—reveals an important window into the biological basis for compassion. In an experiment, Jack Nitschke, PhD, professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, found that mothers who viewed photos of their babies not only experienced feelings of compassion, but there was a distinct response in a region of their brains associated with positive emotions.<sup>3</sup>

In another study, neuroscientists James Rilling and Gregory Berns from Emory University found that the act of helping someone triggers activity in areas of the brain that fire when we experience pleasure or receive rewards.<sup>4</sup> A similar response was noted in a study by Joshua Greene and Jonathan Cohen of Princeton University, who asked subjects to contemplate harm being done to others.<sup>5</sup> These findings reveal that our brains naturally respond to our children, to vulnerability, and to suffering.

But research on our compassionate instinct doesn't end with our brain's response. Another finding is the role of the vagus nerve in activating feelings of trust, compassion, gratitude, love, and happiness.

“Our research and that of other scientists,” says Keltner, “suggests that activation of the vagus nerve is associated with feelings of caretaking and the ethical intuition that humans from different social groups (even adversarial ones) share a common humanity. People who have high vagus nerve activation in a resting state, we have found, are prone to feeling emotions that promote altruism—compassion, gratitude, love, and happiness. Arizona State University psychologist

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Nancy Eisenberg has found that children with high-baseline vagus nerve activity are more cooperative and likely to give. This area of study is the beginning of a fascinating new argument about altruism: that a branch of our nervous system evolved to support such behavior.”<sup>6</sup>

Another fascinating piece of this puzzle came out of a study also conducted by Keltner that suggests that compassion may actually be contagious. When someone is kind, offers affirmative gestures like a smile or a forward lean, Keltner found that research subjects not only felt good, they felt like returning the kindness.<sup>7</sup> Why? Because these kind acts triggered the body to produce more oxytocin, a hormone that has been shown to promote long-term bonds and increase trust, generosity, and nurturing behavior.<sup>8</sup>

Other evidence that points to compassion’s being an evolved part of human nature is the ability to communicate compassion through nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and touch. Eisenberg has identified a specific facial expression associated with compassion, while Keltner found that research subjects could discern compassion simply from the touch of someone who was expressing it.<sup>9</sup>

The accumulated research suggests that we’ve not only been capable of empathy for eons, but that compassion is rooted in our brains and nervous systems, supporting our social nature and our

need to protect the vulnerable among us. While selfish and aggressive tendencies are certainly part of our makeup, this growing field of research provides a more well-rounded and hopeful picture of human nature.

## Suggested Questions and Activities for the Group

1. Discuss the story of Kuni. Was her behavior surprising to you? Have group members witnessed other animal behaviors that seem to display empathy? Watch *The Mystery of Love* video segments ([www.themysteryoflove.org/vid\\_public.php](http://www.themysteryoflove.org/vid_public.php), less than one minute each) of primatologist Frans de Waal discussing altruistic behavior, and friendships within groups of primates, as well as the similarity between humans and chimpanzees. What are group members’ reactions to the videos?
2. Discuss what role empathy plays in family and work life. Ask group members to share what cues they look for in someone’s face, voice, or body language to determine whether they are feeling empathy or compassion. What is their initial reaction to others’ vulnerabilities?
3. Have group members share a recent experience when someone was kind to them. How did it make them feel? Did they feel like being kind to someone else as a result?

### ***Mirror, mirror...***

A groundbreaking finding in recent years is a new class of brain cells called mirror neurons. These neurons fire whether we perform an action ourselves or witness someone else performing an action. Scientists point to mirror neurons as the possible foundation for social behavior, empathy, culture, imitation, and language acquisition, as well as a key to understanding autism.

Humans apparently have even more evolved mirror neurons than other animals, allowing us to understand not only others’ actions but their intentions as well. “Mirror neurons allow us to grasp the minds of others, not through conceptual reasoning, but through direct simulation. By feeling, not by thinking,” explained Giacomo Rizzolatti, a neuroscientist at the University of Parma,<sup>10</sup> who led the team doing this pioneering research.

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## Suggested Video

Daniel Goleman's TED Speech (13:17)  
[www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/daniel\\_goleman\\_on\\_compassion.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/daniel_goleman_on_compassion.html)

Daniel Goleman, psychologist and award-winning author of *Emotional Intelligence* and other books on emotional intelligence, challenges traditional measures of intelligence as a predictor of life success.

1. Goleman says that the new field of social neuroscience has identified mirror neurons in our brains that act like a neural Wi-Fi, allowing us to feel with others. Have you experienced this? Share what happened.
2. Describe a memorable experience with compassion.
3. What do you “get” from giving to others? To charitable foundations? Why do you give?
4. What triggers you to turn your emotions off? Talk about a recent situation when you tried to turn your emotions off and what happened. How might you be more present to these encounters in the future?

Robert Wright's TED Speech (16:57)  
[www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/robert\\_wright\\_the\\_evolution\\_of\\_compassion.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/robert_wright_the_evolution_of_compassion.html)

Robert Wright uses evolutionary biology and game theory to explain why we appreciate the Golden Rule (“Do unto others...”), why we sometimes ignore it, and why there are indicators that, in the near future, we may be motivated to follow it.

1. What is your reaction to Wright's discussion of exceptions to the universal application of the Golden Rule?
2. Discuss how globalization and our interdependence have affected these exceptions or “nonzero sum” relationships with others.

## Resources

Greater Good Science Center  
[www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/)

The Greater Good Science Center studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. Their website highlights groundbreaking scientific research on compassion and altruism.

*The Compassionate Instinct: The Science of Human Goodness*, edited by Dacher Keltner, Jason Marsh and Jeremy Adam Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 2010)

## Self-Compassion

If we eavesdropped on the continuous thread of commentary in others' minds, I imagine we'd be surprised at how cruel we are to ourselves. In fact, if self-criticism were a disease, it would likely dwarf other epidemics. If, like so many others, you are your own worst critic, you know what psychological distress this relentless mental criticism can cause.

Cultivating self-compassion is probably the best way to combat this source of suffering. In fact, people with greater levels of self-compassion have less anxiety and depression, increased psychological strengths and positive emotions, a greater ability to forgive, and are better able to navigate difficult life events.

If self-compassion were a commodity, ads for it might feature a soft breeze blowing through a tropical paradise in your mind. So what is self-compassion and how does it differ from self-esteem?

According to a Duke and Wake Forest University study published several years ago, self-compassion involves recognizing your own suffering, feeling moved to respond to it with kindness, understanding that you are not suffering in isolation, and cultivating a practice of mindfulness.<sup>11</sup>

Although a dictionary definition of self-esteem describes it as "a confidence and satisfaction in oneself,"<sup>12</sup> in Western culture, self-esteem is often based on a comparison of self to others and is tethered to our successes and failures—rising and falling with our latest accomplishment, acquisition, mistake, or failure.

On the other hand, self-compassion is not dependent on differentiating and separating ourselves from others, but on seeing our interdependence, our common humanity, fragility, and imperfections.<sup>13</sup> Understanding that our progress in life is built on both success and failure, self-compassion provides a soft place to land each time we fall—as we inevitably do. It also puts our failures and faux pas in perspective—we are all imperfect and bound to make mistakes or encounter misfortune. In a framework of self-compassion, it is easier to be kind to ourselves.

In fact, according to Kristin Neff, a researcher in the field, "Research indicates that in comparison to self-esteem, self-compassion is associated with greater emotional resilience, more accurate self-concepts, more caring relationship behavior, as well as less narcissism and reactive anger."<sup>14</sup>

Mindfulness, the third element of self-compassion, can be an antidote for harsh self-criticism. It helps us cultivate acceptance by becoming a neutral observer of negative thoughts and emotions. Practicing mindfulness can help us disengage from an emotional response to an event, de-escalate our self-criticism and painful emotions, and allow us to navigate challenges with equanimity and perspective.

Self-compassion isn't subject to the winds of fortune or misfortune. It encompasses and allows both, providing a ballast with which we can experience the ups and downs of life. By allowing our imperfections while acknowledging we're worthy and lovable, self-compassion nurtures human possibility.

*A pearl is a beautiful thing that is produced by an injured life. It is the tear [that results] from the injury of the oyster. The treasure of our being in this world is also produced by an injured life. If we had not been wounded, if we had not been injured, then we will not produce the pearl.*

—Stephan Hoeller

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## Suggested Questions and Activities for the Group

1. Ask whether group members are more familiar with self-esteem or self-compassion. What did group members learn to value as they were growing up?
2. Discuss the three components of self-compassion: kindness, interconnectedness, and mindfulness. Which do people have the hardest time with?
3. Have group members pair up and discuss their biggest stumbling block to practicing self-compassion. When the large group reconvenes, have anyone who wishes to describe their stumbling block and what they might do to cultivate more self-compassion.
4. Have group members pair up and share how they currently practice self-compassion and what they can commit to practicing more often. When you ask individuals to share how they practice self-compassion, list their answers on a whiteboard or flip chart. Ask participants to write down their commitments to themselves.
2. Think of someone you admire for having a strong, balanced, healthy view of themselves. Ask what they do when they make a mistake or when confronting their imperfections. Do they have an inner critic? How do they react or respond to their inner critic? Are they compassionate with themselves? If so, how?
3. Think of yourself as a child or infant. When you are self-critical, what would you say to yourself if you were your own loving parent?
4. Write down the experiences, mistakes, or imperfections that trigger your inner critic. List as many people as you can think of who've had similar experiences, and/or made these mistakes. Remind yourself that imperfection is part of our human condition. As Rodney Smith, an Insight Meditation teacher, says, progress is achieved at the "rate of one step and one body length."
5. For one week, pay attention to what you say to yourself when you make a mistake. When you become aware of your inner critic starting in, begin to observe how you are feeling and what you are telling yourself. Avoid fueling or resisting the critique or the emotion—just observe it.

## Suggested Videos

Mark Leary, Professor, Psychology & Neurobiology,  
Duke University  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAifaBhh2xo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAifaBhh2xo)

1. Discuss the differences between self-esteem and self-compassion as discussed by Dr. Leary.
2. How does self-compassion contribute to resilience?
3. What has been your experience with self-esteem vs. self-compassion in helping you navigate difficulties in your life?

## Suggested Home Practices

1. Create two columns on a piece of paper or in an online document. In column one, write a list of your greatest obstacles to self-compassion. In column two, write a hypothetical response to each stumbling block as if it comes from someone who loves you—a parent, friend, partner.

## Resources

Self-compassion: A Healthier Way of Relating to Yourself  
[www.self-compassion.org/](http://www.self-compassion.org/)  
Information and resources on self-compassion, including exercises, meditations, and research.

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC)

[www.marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22](http://www.marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22)

MARC fosters mindful awareness through education and research to promote well-being and a more compassionate society. A series of mindful meditations is available here.

## Cultivating Compassion

Offering an act of kindness in the face of suffering is a powerful and sometimes daunting practice. Our first instinct may be to turn away, to avoid the pain, to react in a way that we think protects and distances ourselves. Yet to witness our own or others' pain and reach out in kindness is not only an act of compassion, it expresses our profound connection to each other.

Pain and suffering can trigger fear, anger, hopelessness, and despair, leaving us feeling alone and isolated, or it can bring us together, like our collective response to the southeast Asian tsunami, and the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile.

In our culture, it is easy to think we can avoid suffering by succumbing to the distractions or indulgences of everyday life, diverting attention from harsher realities. More seductive still, we can get lost in a cloud of thought that plunges us deeper into isolation and our separation from others.

In fact, our ego or sense of self—the thoughts that differentiate us from others—while a natural part of being human, can contribute to our feeling separate, vulnerable, fearful, and polarized. Protecting that sense of self can cause us to view the world in terms of us and them and override our empathic tendency. We only need glimpse the latest news to see examples. At the extreme, focusing too much on ourselves breeds anxiety and depression, while connecting with others can actually boost our health and well-being.

Distracting ourselves, with work, TV, or alcohol, for example, is a natural, protective reaction, but pain and suffering remain. By witnessing and accepting the world as it is, we are able to respond with honesty, clarity of purpose, and compassion. For most of us, this takes ongoing effort and practice. But being fully present during our moments of pain or despair provides a profound opportunity to communicate immediately and directly from the heart—as it breaks open and connects us with one another.

### Compassion and...

#### Parenting.

Researchers are identifying how parents and other adults can promote compassion in children, though their findings are probably not a surprise. What we currently know is that children who feel secure in their attachment to their parents tend to display sympathy toward their peers, while children from abusive homes are less empathic. Researchers have also found when parents respond to their child's misbehavior by encouraging them to think about the impact of their actions and how they have harmed others, it seems to nurture compassion in their children. Not surprisingly, a study on altruism confirmed that teaching by example works for compassion too.<sup>15</sup>

#### Education.

"The neural circuitry that allows us to pay attention, calm ourselves, and attune to others' feelings all takes shape in the first two decades of life. If we leave that shaping to chance, kids can grow up with a range of deficiencies in these key life skills that can trouble them throughout life, in their relationships and at work," writes Daniel Goleman.<sup>16</sup> Social and emotional learning sets children up with tools to manage their own emotions, relate well to others, demonstrate responsible decision making, and navigate their school, work, and family life more successfully. These programs have been shown to improve positive behavior, reduce negative behaviors, and even improve student performance on standard achievement tests.

*The research suggests that individuals—from children who may engage in bullying to people prone to recurring depression—and society in general could benefit from such [lovingkindness] meditative practices.*

—Richard Davidson,  
Psychiatry and  
Psychology Professor,  
University of Wisconsin,  
Madison



# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

*Compassion isn't simply opening a spigot and coating everything in a treacly, all-purpose goo. It requires a gut hunch that whatever I do unto others, I do unto myself. It calls for appreciating not only what comforts us, but what pierces us.*

—Marc Ian Barasch in  
*Field Notes on the Compassionate Life*

A University of Wisconsin study led by neuroscientists Richard Davidson and Antoine Lutz suggests compassion can be cultivated by concentrating or meditating on the loving feelings we have toward close family members.<sup>17</sup> The findings support Davidson and Lutz's working assumption that through training, people can develop skills that promote happiness and compassion.<sup>18</sup>

Cultivating compassion asks that we return to that initial instinct of "fellow feeling," be open to our own and others' suffering, and practice forgiveness, kindness, and gratitude. Compassion returns us to something that is not only a key part of our social nature, but part of our survival: our connection to each other and to our heart.

"It is not about assuming a new self-image or manufactured persona; it is about being compassionate naturally, out of what we see, out of what we understand," writes Sharon Salzberg in *The Force of Kindness*. "Compassion is like a mirror into which we can always look. It is like a stream that steadily carries us. It is like a cleansing fire that continually transforms us."

## Qualities that underpin and support living a compassionate life

**Empathy.** "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [...] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it," said Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Empathy is a central theme in this enduring story. The characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* illustrate the power of our moral imagination to gain a glimpse into another person's life and circumstance and, in that moment, open to a new understanding of them, of ourselves, and our interconnection. Our ability to feel empathy for others lays the foundation for being kind, charitable, and compassionate. The more we can personalize others' experiences, the more we challenge misperceptions or generalizations of others and begin to understand the "other" as ourselves.

**Facing suffering.** We all suffer. Opening to our own and others' suffering is not easy. It's a natural response to turn away or avoid it. As painful as things can get, we can take a risk, share our pain, and use suffering to bring us closer. It's a way of deepening our understanding of and connections to each other. Practicing mindfulness (see Self-Compassion for more information on and links to resources on mindfulness) can help us experience our suffering without clinging to it, avoiding it, or projecting it onto others. It can help us change our relationship to our own and others' suffering, gain perspective on painful emotions, and better navigate difficult experiences with clarity, awareness, and perspective.

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

*Research suggests that the areas in the brain associated with forgiveness are often deep in the emotional centers... rather than in the areas of the cortex usually associated with reasoned judgments... To help people forgive, help them steer clear of dwelling on how fair a transgression was or how just a solution might be. Instead, get people to see things from the other person's perspective.*

—Everett Worthington in  
*The Compassionate Instinct*

**Forgiveness.** Forgiveness provides an opportunity for transformation, both individually and collectively. It not only contributes to emotional, mental, and physical well-being, but it offers the possibility for change, redemption, and restoration—for hope and love to blossom from pain and suffering. It can stop a cycle of hurt and create opportunity where there seemed to be none. Most of all, it has the potential to heal and open our hearts to love, as well as strengthen and build our capacity for compassion and understanding.

**Kindness.** Through small and large acts of kindness, we breathe life into the practice of compassion. Whether given or received, kindness can soften our frame of mind and open our heart, both to ourselves and others. Despite its reputation for being warm and fuzzy, kindness is not about creating a façade of niceties, but instead, expressing that deep understanding that we are all interchangeable, we are all connected. Being kind, too, can reduce stress and positively affect our health and well-being. According to Keltner, “Engaging in five acts of kindness a week—donating blood, buying a friend a sundae, giving money to someone in

need—elevates personal well-being in lasting ways.”<sup>19</sup> It’s a good practice to return to—again and again—as we cultivate our own unique approach to compassion.

**Gratitude.** Gratitude brings into focus what we often take for granted and elevates it to a place of importance and value. It can balance our compassionate actions with a grounding in humility. Being grateful is an acknowledgment that life is a process of give and take, that none of us has all we will ever need or want, and that none of us will leave this life without experiencing difficulty. Practicing gratitude returns our focus to what we hold dear, to the gifts we receive in whatever form they come to us. It, too, is good for our mental, emotional, and physical health. People who are grateful are happier, healthier, less stressed, and more socially connected.<sup>20</sup>

**Play.** Even in the most serious of moments there may be room for play or laughter. It allows us to be more expansive, creative, and even more connected to others. Play is about exploration, not perfection. In practicing compassion, we will make mistakes, experience difficulty, and witness pain and suffering. Bringing play into our lives opens up space where we can be more free, more authentic, and more accepting of our imperfections and those of others. In play we are able to experience our own and others’ joy in a collaborative dance of affirmative empathy. As we cultivate compassion, we must remember to also cultivate play.

*If you want others  
to be happy, practice  
compassion. If you  
want to be happy,  
practice compassion.*

—His Holiness  
the Dalai Lama

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

## Suggested Questions and Activities for the Group

1. Ask group members to break into pairs and share with one another examples of how their thoughts inhibit them from behaving compassionately. Are there any triggers or beliefs that feed those thoughts? Come back together and ask people to share their insights with the larger group.
2. Ask group members how they cultivate empathy. Are there any practices they find helpful and/or do on a regular basis? Share stories with the group.
3. Ask group members to share how they've dealt with an emotionally or physically painful situation in their lives. Were they able to connect with others during that time? What inhibited or helped those connections? What might they do to navigate painful experiences in the future and/or help others through times of suffering?
4. Have group members share a memorable experience of kindness.

## Suggested Video

Seva Café: Love All, Serve All (4:01)  
[www.globalonenessproject.org/videos/sevacafe](http://www.globalonenessproject.org/videos/sevacafe)

This clip features Seva Café, where the concept of service (seva) takes the form of a “pay it forward” restaurant and where every meal is cooked and served with love.

1. How do you think the “pay it forward” approach affects how people feel about working or dining at the Seva Café?
2. How might we incorporate this “circle of giving” in our everyday life?

## Suggested Home Practices

1. The next time you watch a movie or read a book that contains a character whose behavior or demeanor you dislike or find repulsive, try viewing the world from that character's perspective. Does it shift your perception of them?
2. Think of someone who has caused you pain. From your perspective, write a brief description of what happened. Now imagine that you are the other person in the situation and write or record a description from that person's perspective, as well as what may have motivated them to behave the way they did. How are the two stories different? Have you ever thought about the situation from the other person's point of view? Does it allow you to have more compassion for that person?
3. Practice Buddhist Lovingkindness Meditation. There are many online resources for this meditation. Beliefnet includes a seven-minute meditation led by Sharon Salzberg, author and co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society, [www.beliefnet.com/Health/2000/07/Opening-The-Heart.aspx](http://www.beliefnet.com/Health/2000/07/Opening-The-Heart.aspx).
4. Practice mindfulness meditation. Examples of these types of meditations are available at [www.marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22](http://www.marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22).
5. Schedule a regular time to enjoy something funny—a video, joke, story, image—or to play. Get it on your calendar.

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

## Resources

A Campaign for Forgiveness Research

[www.forgiving.org/](http://www.forgiving.org/)

This site includes information and scientific research on forgiveness.

Forgive for Good

[www.learningtoforgive.com/](http://www.learningtoforgive.com/)

Dr. Fred Luskin's site provides information and resources on the benefits of forgiveness.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

[www.casel.org/home.php](http://www.casel.org/home.php)

CASEL's mission is to establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education. Resources and reviews of curricula are included on this site.

Greater Good Science Center

[www.greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu)

Greater Good highlights groundbreaking scientific research into the roots of compassion and altruism. The site and magazine include research and information for parents.

Inner Resilience Program

[www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/](http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/)

Linda Lantieri's Inner Resilience Program focuses on cultivating the inner lives of students, teachers, and schools by integrating social and emotional learning with contemplative practice.

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

[www.prevention.psu.edu/projects/](http://www.prevention.psu.edu/projects/)

[PATHSCurriculum.html](http://PATHSCurriculum.html) (information)

[www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/](http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/) (info and purchase)

PATHS is a research-based violence-prevention curriculum that promotes social and emotional learning, character development, and bullying prevention, and builds the problem-solving abilities and other life skills required for positive relationships.

Roots of Empathy (ROE)

Watch a video here: [www.rootsofempathy.org/roots\\_new\\_site/Video.html](http://www.rootsofempathy.org/roots_new_site/Video.html)

ROE's mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

Seeds of Compassion

K-12 curriculum here: [www.seedsofcompassion.net/why/curriculum.asp#k-2](http://www.seedsofcompassion.net/why/curriculum.asp#k-2)

In 2008, Seeds of Compassion kicked off a broad-based collaboration to address the local and global need for the social and emotional well-being of children.

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

*There's no  
prescription that's  
sold that can heal  
you like compassion.*

—Todd Rundgren,  
“Compassion”

*Where there is no  
sense of community,  
there can be no love.*

—Socrates

## Compassion in Action

One person, one school, one workplace, one organization, one mosque, one temple, or one church at a time. That's the way we can spread compassion.

Practice it. Teach it. Talk about it. Tweet about it. Bring it into full focus in your life. We know compassion can be learned. We know compassion can be taught by example. Find an example, and be an example!

Here are a few great examples to start with.

### Transform Personal Suffering

Having survived the civil war in Sudan and ten years living in refugee camps, Samuel Garang Akau is helping to ensure that children experiencing similar suffering have the opportunity for a better life. One of the “Lost Boys of Sudan” and a Stanford graduate, Garang Akau co-founded New Scholars, a small nonprofit that provides scholarship funds to help children living in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in northwest Kenya attend a private high school. Akau was also a founding member of the Stanford chapter of Students Taking Action Now: Darfur (STAND), whose mission is to end the genocide in Darfur.<sup>21</sup>

### Teach Empathy and Compassion

*Research has shown that we can successfully teach children how to overcome and manage emotions such as fear, hatred, anger, and anxiety. SEL [social and emotional learning] programs have proven that children can develop lifelong abilities such as self-awareness, anger management, impulse control, and positive qualities such as empathy and compassion.*

—Mark Greenberg, SEL Pioneer, Penn State College of Health and Human Development

Roots of Empathy, a K–8 program started in Canada by author and educator Mary Gordon, uses a specialized curriculum focusing on learning from and interacting with neighborhood parents and their newborn baby to increase empathy and emotional literacy and reduce bullying, aggression, and violence. Karen Tetrault, a participating teacher, shared how one fourth grader was deeply affected by the lessons. “One day, Tetrault came across a student from her Grade 4 class in the hallway, crying. It was a girl who was known to participate in various types of relationally aggressive behaviour, such as gossiping and forming cliques to exclude others. She told Tetrault she had just been mean to another child on the playground and it had made her think of Kaison, their Roots of Empathy baby. She had thought of herself treating the baby the same way and it made her feel terrible.”<sup>22</sup> This powerful experience seemed to be helping the roots of empathy take hold in this young girl.

### Teach Kindness and Pay It Forward

“It was the idea of throwing a little pebble into a pond and seeing how far the ripples would go,” said Andy Smallman, instructor of the Puget Sound Community School online kindness course. Class members worked their way through assignments that asked them to do something kind for themselves and then enlarge that circle to those they love, those they know, and then strangers. Students found lots of ways to be kind, including leaving homegrown pears for passers-by, picking up trash, and leaving a gift card on the windshield for a young unemployed mother. Chris Falskow, a board member at the school, said, “If more people realize what they do with their acts of kindness... we will live in a better place.”<sup>23</sup>

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

## Compassion Works at Work

*Organizations that are able and willing to foster a psychologically well workforce and work environment are at a distinct competitive advantage.*

—Thomas Wright, professor of management, Jon Wefald Leadership Chair in Business Administration, Kansas State University

After Robin's husband died and while she was extremely distraught, she made a call to her employer, Zappos.com. Her manager calmed her, told her to focus on herself and her family, and gave her "every single one of her phone numbers" to call day or night in case she needed anything. Zappos even offered to cater the reception after the service for her husband. When Robin returned to work, she found her coworkers receptive and supportive as she continued to grieve. "Zappos was my refuge and healing place that gave me everything I needed to continue with my life," she wrote. Research is backing up Robin's experience, showing that encouraging authentic connections at work is a good idea.<sup>24</sup> According to research conducted by Jane Dutton, professor of psychology and business at the University of Michigan, "Employees who'd experienced compassion at work saw themselves, their coworkers, and the organization in a more positive light."<sup>25</sup> In fact, Thomas Wright, professor of management at Kansas State University, noted that psychological well-being accounts "for 10 to 25 percent of an employee's job performance and was predictive of positive employee evaluations up to five years in the future."<sup>26</sup>

## Bring Compassion with You

Lynne Soraya (nom de plume) remembers how her teacher's kind response to an angry outburst helped her believe in herself and find the strength to face her classmates with her head held high. Soraya, who lives with Asperger's Syndrome, was in the midst of an art project in her sixth grade class. After Soraya had created a sculpture of one of her cats, a classmate came around to collect and store the artwork. As the sculpture was being transferred to a box, the sculpture fell and broke. As Soraya tried to reconstruct it, she and her classmate—who was trying to clean up—argued. The argument crescendoed when Soraya could no longer contain her anger and frustration. She screamed, pounded the table, and then began weeping and rocking. When Soraya came out of the fog of anger, she heard her teacher calmly reassure her. "When I stood to go, I was startled to realize my teacher and I were alone in the classroom. The rest of the kids were clustered by the classroom door, slack-jawed and staring," she wrote. It was her teacher's unwavering support and "comforting squeeze" that helped her realize "that if I was questioning my own worth and abilities, she wasn't. And I knew in that moment, I couldn't give up."<sup>27</sup> It takes one person to set an example and to make a difference. Wherever you are—at school, at work, at home, on the street, in the store—don't underestimate how powerful a small act of kindness and compassion can be.

## **Tell Inspiring Stories: *Would-Be Robbers Foiled by Kindness***

Not everyone will react to a traumatic or desperate situation as Mohammad Sohail and Julio Diaz did. But stories of compassion like these keep compassion and the possibility of compassion top of mind.

**Mohammad Sohail:** When a man entered Mohammad Sohail's convenience store in Shirley, New York, waving a bat and yelling, "Give me the money," Sohail grabbed a rifle and pointed it at the would-be robber. The man dropped the bat and fell to his knees. "I'm sorry. I have no food, no money. My whole family is hungry. Don't call the police. Don't shoot me," he said. Realizing the man's predicament, Sohail didn't call the police. He gave him some advice—never to rob anyone again—\$40 and a loaf of bread. Months later, Sohail received an envelope containing \$50 and a note explaining how desperate things had been for the man and his family. He wrote that he now has a good job and a new baby and is doing well and staying out of trouble. "You gave me forty dollars thank you for sparing my life. Because of that you change my life," he wrote.<sup>28</sup>

**Julio Diaz:** Leaving the subway one night, Julio Diaz was robbed by a teenager wielding a knife. Diaz gave him his wallet, but he also offered the young man his coat, saying if he'd be out all night, he'd need to keep warm. Diaz ended up having dinner with the young man, getting his wallet back, and even getting the teenager to relinquish his knife. The young man was surprised to see that Diaz was nice to everyone at the restaurant. Summing up the incident, Diaz says, "If you treat people right, you can only hope that they treat you right. It's as simple as it gets in this complicated world."<sup>29</sup>

Start a compassion epidemic—one action, one person at a time!

## **Suggested Audio/Video/Blog Entry**

Peace Pilgrim, [www.peacepilgrim.com/](http://www.peacepilgrim.com/) (8:27)

[www.youtube.com/user/peacepilgrimvideo](http://www.youtube.com/user/peacepilgrimvideo)

In this 1977 interview with "Peace Pilgrim," who walked more than 25,000 miles on a personal pilgrimage for peace and vowed to "remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace," talks about her philosophy and life as a pilgrim.

1. Peace Pilgrim talks about human potential. Do you feel you are living your potential? If not, how might you move more into your potential?
2. Peace Pilgrim talks about a spiritual growing up that "takes you from the self-centered life...into the life governed by the nature which is centered in the good of the whole, which sees you as part of the whole and works for the good of the whole..." What is your world-view and how does that affect your capacity for compassion?
3. "We constantly create things through thought... You will attract the things you fear... I'm always thinking about the best that could happen." What have you noticed about your thinking in relation to your actions? What techniques have you used to shift your thoughts to allow you to be more compassionate?

NPR StoryCorps, Ky-Anтре Compton and Stuart Chittenden (1:37)

[www.storycorps.org/listen/stories/ky-antre-compton-and-stuart-chittenden](http://www.storycorps.org/listen/stories/ky-antre-compton-and-stuart-chittenden)

Compton, 11, and Chittenden, 38, met through the youth mentoring program Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Compton thought the relationship would "ruin his summer." Instead, they've learned from and taught each other.

- There are many themes related to compassion in this conversation. What most impressed you about Compton's and Chittenden's relationship and conversation?

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

PBS NewsHour Report on Social & Emotional Learning (8:04)

[www.learningmatters.tv/blog/on-the-newshour/stop-think-act-the-program/2301/](http://www.learningmatters.tv/blog/on-the-newshour/stop-think-act-the-program/2301/)

Producers John Tulenko and Cat McGrath of Learning Matters spotlight Brooklyn's PS 24 social and emotional learning (SEL) program. The story also explores how SEL affects children's behavior and education and features Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*.

1. How did you learn about expressing emotions and being empathic? Did you learn through formal lessons, examples, stories? Your parents, teachers, other adults?
2. Are there any lessons or stories that stand out that you'd like to share?
3. Are you aware of SEL programs in local schools in your area? How might you advocate for these programs?

Mark Nepo's blog entry "Life Around the Fire"

[www.threeintentions.com/2010/03/01/life-around-the-fire/](http://www.threeintentions.com/2010/03/01/life-around-the-fire/)

1. Read this moving blog entry recounting a profound, heartbreaking moment of spontaneous compassion during the death march Elie Wiesel and many others endured as they stumbled toward Buchenwald.
2. Discuss the questions Nepo calls forth in his blog entry—questioning what compels us to act compassionately, even in the most dire circumstances and at our own peril.

TED.com Talk: Derek Stivers: How to start a movement (3:10)

[www.ted.com/talks/derek\\_sivers\\_how\\_to\\_start\\_a\\_movement.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement.html)

With help from some surprising footage, Derek Stivers explains how movements really get started. (Hint: it takes two.)

- Share your experiences with being a leader or follower. What did it take to be a leader? How might you be a leader in demonstrating compassion?

## Suggested Home Practices

1. Find and share stories of compassion in your home, workplace, school, place of worship, or community. Write an opinion piece for a newsletter, a blog entry, social network update, or a letter to the editor about someone who demonstrates compassion.
2. Encourage your community to become part of the Compassionate Action Network Compassionate Cities campaign, [www.my.compassionateactionnetwork.com/group/10yearcampaignforcompassionatecities](http://www.my.compassionateactionnetwork.com/group/10yearcampaignforcompassionatecities).
3. If you're interested in getting compassion into the schools, check out some of the curricula listed in the resources section. Use it or recommend that it be used in your schools, youth, and/or religious organizations.



# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

## Resources

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

[www.casel.org/home.php](http://www.casel.org/home.php)

CASEL's mission is to establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education. Resources and reviews of curricula are included on this site.

Inner Resilience Program

[www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/](http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/)

Linda Lantieri's Inner Resilience Program focuses on cultivating the inner lives of students, teachers, and schools by integrating social and emotional learning with contemplative practice.

Foundation for a Better Life

[www.values.com/teaching-values/7-Compassion](http://www.values.com/teaching-values/7-Compassion)

This foundation exists to encourage people to do good. Their site includes quotes and stories of "everyday compassion heroes."

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

[www.prevention.psu.edu/projects/](http://www.prevention.psu.edu/projects/)

[PATHSCurriculum.html](http://PATHSCurriculum.html) (information)

[www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/](http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/) (information and purchase)

PATHS is a research-based violence-prevention curriculum that promotes social and emotional learning, character development, and bullying prevention, and builds the problem-solving abilities and other life skills required for positive relationships.

Random Acts of Kindness

[www.actsofkindness.org/](http://www.actsofkindness.org/)

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation is a resource for people committed to spreading kindness. It provides activity ideas, lesson plans, project plans, teacher's guide, project planning guide, publicity guide, and workplace resources on the Web.

Roots of Empathy (ROE)

Watch a video: [www.rootsofempathy.org/roots\\_new\\_site/Video.html](http://www.rootsofempathy.org/roots_new_site/Video.html)

ROE's mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

Seeds of Compassion

K-12 curriculum: [www.seedsofcompassion.net/why/curriculum.asp#k-2](http://www.seedsofcompassion.net/why/curriculum.asp#k-2)

In 2008, Seeds of Compassion kicked off a broad-based collaboration to address the local and global need for the social and emotional well-being of children.

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## Additional Resources

We are grateful for the many organizations and resources that promote love, forgiveness, and compassion. We invite you to explore the list below and to add your own to the pages that follow.

### Conversation Resources

#### Conversation Cards

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

Each of the 52 cards provides a quote to ponder, questions to discuss, and a suggested action for incorporating more love, forgiveness, and compassion in your life. The deck can be used for personal inspiration; to spark conversations among family, friends, or colleagues; for book discussion or support groups; and/or to challenge you to be more loving, forgiving, and compassionate. Free from the link above while supplies last.

#### Conversation Facilitators Share Tips via Podcast

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

Two seasoned conversation facilitators share tips on how to lead conversations on love and forgiveness, including how to manage group dynamics, creating a safe space for sharing, using the conversation cards mentioned above, and how young people respond to the conversations.

#### Forgiveness Experts via Podcast

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

In separate podcasts, forgiveness experts share research, experience, and thoughts on the power of forgiveness. The podcasts feature Frederic Luskin, PhD, author of *Forgive for Good* and director of the Stanford Forgiveness Projects, and Everett Worthington, Jr., PhD, author of *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving*. Dr. Worthington is a licensed clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University.

#### Let's Talk About It: Love and Forgiveness

[www.programminglibrarian.org/ltai/discussion-themes.html](http://www.programminglibrarian.org/ltai/discussion-themes.html)

This program from the American Library Association examines contemporary life and

culture through literature, offering selections from our culture's most outstanding works. Be sure to check out the full list of themes and corresponding resources, including these three that were developed with the Fetzer Institute in support of conversations about love, compassion, and forgiveness.

- Love and Forgiveness in the Light of Death
- Love and Forgiveness in the Presence of the Enemy
- Love, Forgiveness, and Wisdom

#### Love, Forgiveness, and Compassion Conversation Guides

[www.fetzer.org/resources](http://www.fetzer.org/resources)

These guides are designed to help group facilitators and individuals explore the power of love, forgiveness, and compassion. Each resource includes suggested questions, essays, videos, home practices, and resources for further exploration.

### Media

#### *Forgiveness: A Time to Love and a Time to Hate*

[www.helenwhitney.com](http://www.helenwhitney.com)

Scheduled to air on PBS in 2011, this documentary's dramatic and moving stories introduce real people who have faced a horrific tragedy and have struggled in their hearts to forgive. Produced by Paul Dietrich and award-winning producer, director, and writer Helen Whitney, with major funding provided by the Fetzer Institute.

#### *Krista Tippett On Being* (previously *Speaking of Faith with Krista Tippett*)

[www.onbeing.org](http://www.onbeing.org)

*On Being* is a new kind of conversation about religion, spirituality, and large questions of meaning in every aspect of life. Hosted by Krista Tippett on public radio, this weekly show is also available by podcast.

#### *The Mystery of Love*

[www.themysteryoflove.org](http://www.themysteryoflove.org)

A documentary exploring love in marriage, family, community, science, forgiveness, the search for the divine, friendship, even war. Actor, playwright, and author Anna Deavere Smith hosts this two-hour special produced by the Independent Production Fund, with major funding provided by the Fetzer Institute.

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPASSION

## ***The Power of Forgiveness***

[www.journeyfilms.com](http://www.journeyfilms.com)

This documentary examines the power of forgiveness in alleviating anger and grief caused by the most dramatic transgressions imaginable and those that are more commonplace. Among its subjects the film features families of victims from the tragedy of 9/11 and forgiveness education in Northern Ireland, where forgiveness has been a way of life for generations. Produced by Journey Films, with major funding provided by the Fetzer Institute.

## **Websites**

### **Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education**

[www.ccare.stanford.edu](http://www.ccare.stanford.edu)

This center, housed at Stanford University, undertakes rigorous scientific study of the neural, mental, and social bases of compassion and altruistic behavior. It draws from a wide spectrum of disciplines, especially neuroscience, psychology, economics, and contemplative traditions.

### **Center for Investigating Healthy Minds**

[www.investigatinghealthyminds.org](http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org)

Located at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the center conducts rigorous interdisciplinary research on healthy qualities of mind such as kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and mindfulness. The CIHM engages in research and outreach with the goal of cultivating healthy qualities of the mind at the individual, community, and global levels.

### **Charter for Compassion**

[www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org)

Using her TED Prize, author Karen Armstrong is making her wish to help create, launch, and propagate a Charter for Compassion come true. This website is one of the tools that is bringing that wish to fruition.

## **Fetzer Institute**

[www.fetzer.org](http://www.fetzer.org)

The Fetzer Institute engages with people and projects around the world to help bring the power of love, forgiveness, and compassion to the center of individual and community life. Find project information, resources, videos, news, and upcoming events on this site.

## **Forgive for Good**

[www.learningtoforgive.com](http://www.learningtoforgive.com)

The website of Dr. Fred Luskin, director of Stanford's Forgiveness Projects, provides information and resources on the benefits of forgiveness.

## **Greater Good Science Center**

[www.greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu)

Based at the University of California, Berkeley, the center studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. This site highlights groundbreaking scientific research on compassion and altruism.

## **The Institute for Research on Unlimited Love**

[www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org](http://www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org)

The Institute focuses on the science and spirituality of the unselfish love that shapes the lives of people who find energy and joy in the compassionate service of others. Information about the institute's activities, publications, and funding is available on this site.

## **Self-Compassion: A Healthier Way of Relating to Yourself**

[www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org)

This site, developed by Dr. Kristin Neff, associate professor of human development and culture at the University of Texas, Austin, provides information and resources on self-compassion, including exercises, meditations, and research.

## **Spirituality & Practice**

[www.spiritualityandpractice.com](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com)

This site shares ways to practice spirituality in everyday life and includes book, audio, and film reviews; ideas and links for 37 essential practices; and e-courses for spiritual growth and self-improvement. Spiritualityandpractice.com offers resources from multiple faiths and belief systems.

Notes



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