

Compassion for Others

One of the ways that can support you to find compassion for others is to **see the child** in their eyes and face. There is something very softening when you look and really see that in that moment of the other's anger, criticism, or control, they are 5 years old again, trying to cope the only way they know how.

Keep in mind that compassion is not about agreeing or condoning, it is about knowing that, in that moment, there is something driving that other person that they may or may not even be aware of. Pema Chödrön, an American Buddhist nun, has some wonderful wisdom to share about boundaries and aggression in defining what she calls idiot compassion:

"Idiot compassion is when we avoid conflict and protect our good image by being kind when we should definitely say no. Compassion doesn't only imply trying to be good. When we find ourselves in an aggressive relationship, we need to set clear boundaries. The kindest thing we can do for everyone concerned is to know when to say enough."

When we are practiced in self-compassion, together with mindful awareness of the self-negating patterns within us, we are less likely to be hurt by others, and we can safely open our hearts to compassion. Others' words and actions hurt most when they find a hook with our own hurtful inner voice, our Dark Side. With compassionate mindfulness, we can better distinguish the voice of our Dark Side from our Spiritual Self and become less reactive with others and more able to have compassion for the suffering that is motivating their actions.

Try this compassion exercise taken from the book *Tonglen*, by Pema Chödrön as it is referenced in John Wellwood's book *Perfect Love Imperfect Relationships*. It contains both the elements of compassion and mindful awareness, as well as an enhanced sense of our oneness with all:

Walk down the street, perhaps for just one or two blocks, with the intention of staying as open as possible to whomever you meet. This is a training in being more emotionally honest with yourself and being more emotionally available to others. As you are walking...have the feeling that the area of your heart and chest is open. As you pass people, you might even feel a subtle connection between their heart and yours, as if you and they were linked by an invisible cord. You could think to yourself, "May you be happy," as you pass them. The main point is to feel a sense of interconnectedness with all the people you meet.

Notice without judgment the thoughts and feelings that arise as you pass each person.

Notice whatever you go through: fear, aversion, judging, shutting down, or opening up. Be kind and nonjudgmental toward yourself in this process as well.

This can be a good practice to do whenever you find yourself judging or blaming someone. Let that judgment be a reminder to say silently to that person, “May you be happy.” This is a great act of compassion for yourself as well, as it immediately reduces inner stress.

May YOU be happy!

How will you be more compassionate to yourself and others today?

Best-selling author Karen Armstrong shares **a simple daily exercise** to help you live a more compassionate life. Here’s a hint ... curiosity:

- <http://www.supersoul.tv/supersoul-sunday/how-you-can-live-a-more-compassionate-life>

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

If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

~Dalai Lama