

# Foreword

In this delightful and fun-filled workbook, kids can learn how to deeply care for themselves and to manage stress in a world that is rapidly changing. Unfortunately, kids in general are experiencing higher rates of distress than ever before, leading to a national emergency in mental health for children and youth. This is happening at a time when kids should be immersed in critical stages of learning.

Whether they are facing trauma because of abuse, significant losses, everyday anxiety about the pandemic, or peer pressure, kids need even more support now at a time when we are facing significant shortages in mental health resources.

This is why self-compassion is such a valuable tool for young people; self-compassion means being a good friend to yourself when you are struggling. It is an opportunity for kids to make compassion a superpower that can help with some of the scary and uncomfortable parts of being young. Ask any kid about the bullies at school or the pressures of social media!

Research shows that self-compassion can reduce anxiety, worry, and stress in teens when they learn to practice self-care, and it also reduces suicidal ideation. Studies also indicate that kids are happier, thrive, and function better when they build the emotional resources through self-compassion that help them face life difficulties. Mindfulness helps kids to focus their attention in the here and now and has the potential to quiet the mind and reduce negative thoughts and emotions. Self-compassion focuses on warmth so that kids can be kind, supportive, and accepting of themselves. This warmth, plus the mindful awareness, has the capacity to help kids deal with the tough stuff in life and reach their full potential. Research shows that the encouragement and constructive criticism through the lens of self-compassion are more effective motivators than harsh self-judgment, helping kids to develop a growth orientation and learn from failure as a part of life.

The powerful practices offered in this workbook can help kids build emotional strength and resilience, especially in times of distress. Kids can learn many wonderful meditations and activities that are age appropriate and drawn largely from the Mindful Self-Compassion for Teens program (MSC-T), an adaptation of the adult

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) program created by my colleague Chris Germer and myself.

There is no doubt that kids will benefit from the teachings in this workbook. It is an invaluable resource for teachers, parents, pediatricians, and other professionals who work with children. Every child and every parent should have this workbook in their library and every classroom would benefit from integrating these practices into their curriculum.

Kristin Neff, PhD

# A Letter to Parents and Professionals

This workbook was created to give parents, caregivers, therapists, and teachers an accessible, engaging way to introduce the skills of mindfulness and self-compassion to elementary school-aged children. While each activity can be pulled from the workbook and stand alone, the richest experience will come in taking children through the workbook from beginning to end. This will allow them to develop some basic skills in mindfulness and self-compassion at the beginning of the workbook before tackling more challenging subjects and meditations that require a little more practice and skill, found later in the workbook, such as taming the dragon of big emotions.

The workbook is based on a six-week, online mindful self-compassion program for kids and their caregivers, *A Friend in Me*, which we created. This program introduces children to mindfulness and self-compassion and develops their ability to befriend themselves and others, even in difficult times and challenging circumstances. This program is adapted from the teen program *Mindful Self-Compassion for Teens*, the only authorized adaptation from the adult *Mindful Self-Compassion* program, created by Chris Germer and Kristin Neff.

Because mindfulness is a practice that brings us into the present moment, we wanted the workbook activities to invite the hearts and minds of children into a felt sense of their present moment experience. Therefore, we included fun and engaging activities that can take place outside the workbook, including yoga poses, crafts, and outdoor activities to invite children to awaken their senses and connect with the world around them.

We invite the adults that use this workbook with children to engage fully with them in the activities. Several of the activities are ideally completed with another person. We learn in relationship and community, so there is nothing so inspiring for a child than to see an adult learning along with them, modeling the skills as well as valuing them. This also gives children a chance to see that they are not alone in the challenges they face and the big emotions they feel. Struggle is a shared human experience and it helps children to treat themselves with kindness when they see that they are not the only ones in need of compassion.

From time to time, activities will need adult supervision and guidance for safety, such as using scissors or going for a walk. These are noted in the workbook.

We realize children are differently abled. If you come to activities that aren't suited to your child, make adjustments so they can enjoy them in their own way. Meet children where they are, listening to how they are responding to the activities. And remember that mindfulness is a *practice*. These activities are designed to help children develop their awareness muscle so they can recognize when they are struggling and turn toward themselves with kindness and compassion. Children will continue to grow and develop their practice in their own time.

We invite you to go through the practices and workbook activities with a light touch. Hopefully, this is just the beginning of their mindfulness journey, so join us in making the workbook an accessible and fun-filled opportunity to get started on this path.

Warmly,

Lorraine Hobbs, MA

Amy Balentine, PhD

# A Letter to Kids

Dear Kids,

*We are so glad that you are trying out activities in this workbook that make it easier to be a good friend to yourself. We want all kids to know that we all have big emotions and tough times and sometimes feel like giving up or losing it. Through the activities, art, crafts, and meditations in this workbook, you will learn to treat yourself and others with kindness. And you will learn to pay attention to yourself and the world around you in a new way. This will help you work through hard times by encouraging and calming yourself instead of being really hard on yourself or others.*

*We invite you to give everything in the workbook a try. In addition to the activities in this workbook, some helpful audio tracks are available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/50645>. Here, you can also find printable templates to help you make fun crafts and games.*

*Act as if you have never done anything like this before. Be curious. When we give things a real chance, they can sometimes surprise us. When you're really curious about something you are interested in, you take the time to investigate it. That is the secret of mindfulness.*

*May you make kindness your superpower and find a good friend in yourself!*

Lorraine and Amy

# CHAPTER 1:

## Learning to Be Kind to Yourself

**Have you ever noticed** when someone you care about is injured that you really want to help them? For example, you might ask them if they're okay or you might get them help. When you want to help someone in need, you are showing compassion and being a friend. Compassion is something that everyone needs, including you. Everyone has difficult moments in life and can get their feelings hurt when someone says or does something unkind.

Did you also know that you can be a good friend to yourself in the same way you are to others? In this chapter, you will learn how to take care of yourself when you need it the most. This is called *self-compassion*, which is like putting on a warm jacket or getting a hug from someone you love. The great thing about self-compassion is that it is always there for you, and you don't have to earn it or compete for it. It is like a friend who motivates you to do your best and, when you fail, picks you up to help keep you going.

# Activity 1

## “Could I Use Some Self-Compassion?”

As you're learning to become a friend to yourself, here is an opportunity to see how much self-compassion you already give yourself. **Please circle the answers that describe you the best.**

**1. When I fail at something, I usually:**

- a. Try again*
- b. Give up*
- c. Cry or get angry and yell*

**2. When something bad happens to me, I usually:**

- a. Talk to someone who understands*
- b. Feel all alone or feel bad about myself*
- c. Blame others*

**3. When someone is unkind to me, I usually:**

- a. Do something soothing and kind to make myself feel better, like listening to music*
- b. Say mean things or criticize myself*
- c. Say mean things to them and try to get back at them*

**4. When I feel afraid to talk to others, I usually:**

- a. Try to encourage myself*
- b. Shy away and avoid them*

*c. Act like I don't care about them*

**5. When I'm in a challenging situation, I usually:**

*a. Take a few deep breaths to relax myself*

*b. Back out or feel too sick to go on*

*c. Fail on purpose*

**6. When I compare myself to others, I usually:**

*a. See how we all have a hard time sometimes*

*b. Don't think I'm good enough*

*c. Put others down*

Can you guess which answers are examples of self-compassion? If you guessed it's the "a" answers, you are right. You may have circled a few of these. The "b" and "c" answers are common ways that kids handle difficulty. No matter what you circled, this workbook will give you some great tools to help you handle struggles and big emotions and learn how to be kind to yourself.

So now, you can begin your journey by learning to breathe with kindness.





## Activity 2

### Rainbow Breathing



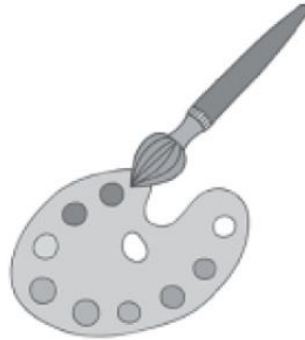
**Rainbow Breathing** is a way to care for yourself and a great way to start your self-compassion journey. As you focus on your breath, you may notice how your mind and body naturally settle and become calm.

This practice focuses on breathing while you paint the colors of the rainbow into the sky and into the earth. Stand with your feet hip-width apart and planted firmly on the ground and your arms by your sides and your palms turned out.

1. Imagine all the colors of the rainbow spread across the fingertips of both hands.
2. As you inhale, raise your arms up toward the sky, painting the sky with the colors of the rainbow.

3. Bring your arms all the way over your head and then turn your palms out and lower your arms as you exhale, bringing the colors of the rainbow down into the earth and into your heart.
4. Repeat this three times, inhaling, exhaling, and painting the sky.

Next you will learn another way to calm yourself while sitting at your desk.



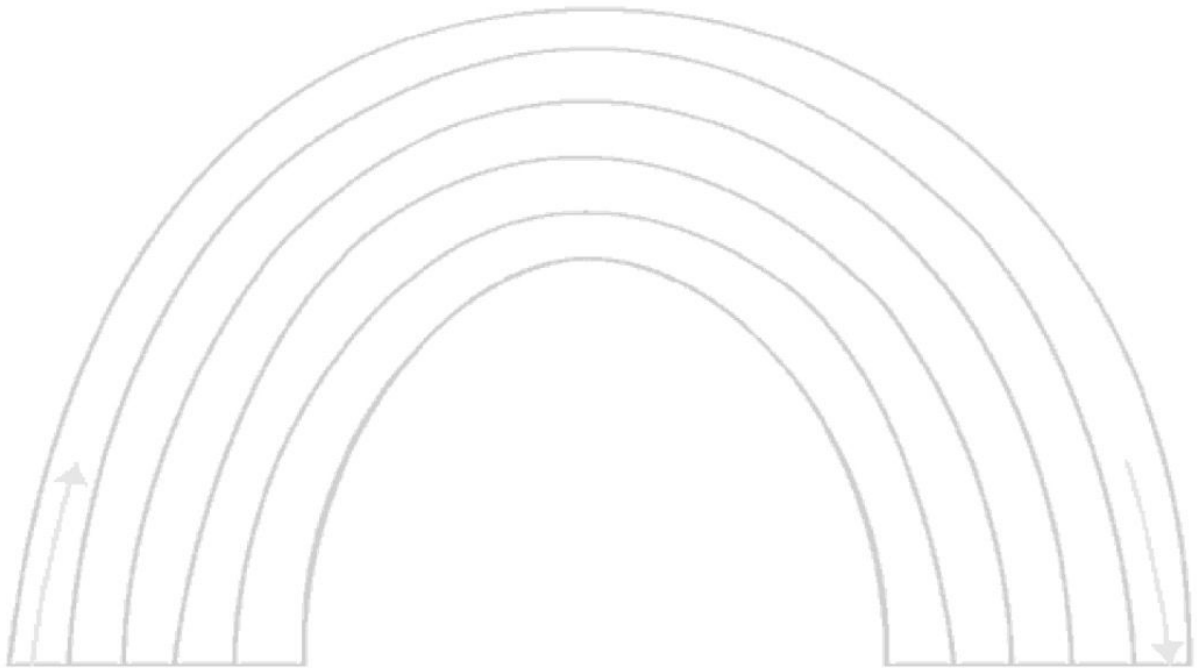
You can download an audio track of this practice at <http://www.newharbinger.com/50645>.

# Activity 3

## Follow the Rainbow

**First, color in each arc of the rainbow with a different color of your choice.**

**Then, trace each color with your finger, starting with the up arrow as you breathe in. Then, as you breathe out, move your finger around the rainbow to the down arrow. Trace each of the colors, inhaling and exhaling to help calm you.**



# Activity 4

## How Can You Be a Friend to Yourself?

Now, take some time to learn more about how to be a good friend to yourself. **Choose a situation from this list and circle it:**

- Your friend didn't get invited to a party.
- Your friend didn't get on a sports team.
- Your friend got into trouble at school.
- Your friend failed a test.
- Your friend got left out and was sitting alone at lunch.

Close your eyes and think about what actions you could take to show your friend kindness if this happened to them. Write down what you could say. **Write down what you could do to comfort them.**



---

---

---

---

---

---

Now, close your eyes and think about how you might treat yourself if this happened to you. **Then, write down in the speech bubble what you would say to yourself or how you would treat yourself.**

What if we could be as kind and gentle with ourselves as we are with our friends and family when things go wrong? This is what self-compassion is all about—learning to be kind and gentle with ourselves.

