



## Acts of Kindness

### Self-compassion

It is an often repeated refrain of mine in my coaching and personal life, that we need to practise self-compassion as we navigate our days, because there are so many situations in which we take a battering (figuratively speaking). Given these ‘batterings’ take place already and are largely beyond our control, let’s not join the chorus and batter ourselves.

This choice – to resist beating up yourself – is a definitive act of kindness. As well as external forces to contend with, we have our own inner voices, based on the many influences and people we have experienced since childhood. To be aware of these voices in a moment when we might feel ‘under siege’ and yet to choose to listen only to the ones which soothe and refocus us, is a learnt skill and one we owe ourselves to cultivate.

Dr Kristin Neff works extensively in the field of self-compassion. I love her compassion break exercise which can be done efficiently and elegantly in a moment, or savoured in a more prolonged, mindful way. Grace me with your attention while I remind you of it:

- **Mindful:** bring to mind your situation in which you need self-compassion; be aware that suffering is present.
- **Humanity:** remember your humanity; this is part of life; you are not alone; others feel it too; recognise that it is part of being human.
- **Tenderness:** place your hands over your heart; with their warmth on your body, remind yourself of your distress; support your hands with words of kindness, warmth or support, for example, “It’s okay to be imperfect; I am here for you; you can get through this; I love you” (if you hesitate to find the words for you, think of the words you would say to a friend and then say them to yourself).
- **Reward:** After this exercise, make time to choose a reward – a walk, a word with a friend, a tea. Just do it.

For me, just writing down the words of this exercise acts like a salve. The words chosen – ‘mindful’, ‘humanity’, and ‘tenderness’ – each have a resonance that seeps into my spirit. Following through by applying this exercise to myself in a time of need, I recognise and appreciate is an act of kindness indeed. At its completion, I am able to turn my focus outwardly once again, to be of service and benefit to others, having restored myself. Won’t you try it?