Stanford’s Compassion Cultivation Training™

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Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) is an eight-week program designed to develop the qualities of compassion and kindness for oneself and for others. CCT integrates traditional contemplative practices with contemporary psychology and scientific research on compassion.

Cultivating:
Cultivating compassion goes beyond feeling more empathy and concern for others. It develops the strength to be with suffering, resilience in the face of life’s challenges, and the courage to take compassionate action. These qualities support a wide range of goals, from improving personal relationships to making a positive difference in the world. Cultivating compassion cultivation can also support one’s own health, happiness and well-being. Preliminary research suggests that CCT and similar programs can increase self-compassion and self-care, reduces stress, anxiety, and enhance connection with others.

Capacity:
Humans have a natural capacity for compassion. However, everyday stress, social pressure and life experience can make it difficult to express this capacity. This program was developed at Stanford University by a team of contemplative scholars, clinical psychologists, and researchers to provide a supportive environment, proper tools and steady care to develop the capacity to respond compassionately, consistently. This program includes: developing skills in how we relate to others and ourselves; intentionally choosing compassionate thoughts and actions; instruction, based on the science of compassion; daily mediation practices to strengthen the qualities of awareness, focus, compassion and courage; two-hour weekly classes that support dialogue in pairs and small group listening and communication exercises; supplemental reading, research; and practices for on the spot needs in daily life.

Resources:
Because compassion is a response to one’s own or others’ suffering, it is not unusual for these practices and class discussions to bring up strong emotions. If you are experiencing thoughts, emotions, or memories that you feel unable to process on you own, you may want to seek out psychological, religious, or other counseling.
Week 1: Settling and Focusing
Cultivating the skills of shifting attention from evaluating to experiencing and settling and focusing the mind and body through breath meditation. This step is considered as the foundation for the other practices in this program.
Guided Meditation: Breath Focus 18 min.

Week 2: The Natural Capacity
Learning to recognize how the experiences of compassion and kindness feel when they occur for a loved one. The meditation and practical exercises offered in this step aim to help practitioners recognize the physical and physiological signs of the feelings of warmth, tenderness, concern, and compassion towards a loved one.
Guided Meditation: Loved One 16 min.

Week 3: Self Compassion
Developing skills such as compassionate self talk, greater self-acceptance and self mentoring in the face of setbacks. Connecting with one’s own feelings and needs and relating to them with compassion is the basis for developing a compassionate stance toward others.
Guided Meditation: Self Compassion 16 min.

Week 4: Self Kindness
Learning to develop qualities of warmth, appreciation, joy, and gratitude for oneself. While the previous step focused on self-acceptance, this step focuses on developing appreciation for oneself. Specific exercises will be offered to remember what is most important.
Guided Meditation: Self Kindness 18 min.

Week 5: Common Humanity
Establishing the basis for compassion toward others through recognizing our shared common humanity, and appreciating the kindness of others and how human beings are deeply interconnected.
Guided Meditation: Common Humanity 19 min.

Week 6: Broadening Compassion
On the basis of the previous step, participants begin to cultivate compassion for all beings by moving from focusing on a loved one to focusing on a neutral person, then on a difficult person, and finally on all beings.
Guided Meditation: Broadening Compassion 18 min.

Week 7: Active Compassion
This step involves explicit evocation of the altruistic wish to do something about others’ suffering. This practice is known as Tonglen or “giving and taking”.
Guided Meditation: Active Compassion 17 min.

Week 8: Closing and integrated daily compassion cultivation practice
In this final class, the essential elements of all six steps are combined into an integrated compassion meditation practice that can continue to be done daily by participants who choose to adopt it.
Guided Meditation: Integrated Daily Practice 18 min.
Course Structure:

During this course, all participants are expected to practice 15 to 30-minutes of daily meditation at home, on the basis of recorded guided meditation instructions that progress step-by-step, culminating in the meditation of the final week, which is an integrated practice. This last meditation instruction is designed to be a daily compassion meditation for participants who wish to adopt it after the course is finished. In addition to these formal sitting meditations, course participants are instructed to undertake informal, ‘in world,’ practices, whereby they can apply the particular themes of the week to everyday life situations.

It is expected that the contemplative approach to cultivating compassion presented within these meditations will be complemented by other important aspects of the whole compassion cultivation program. In conducting the course, instructors may also offer:

a) Some basic psychological education pertaining to the dynamic interactions between thoughts, emotions, and feelings, and their relation to one’s well-being.

b) A cognitive reorientation of outlook, so that there is a deeper recognition of the value of compassion, especially in relation to one’s own peace and happiness, and healthy relations with others and the world, and so on.

c) Creative interactive practical exercises that could help evoke specific affective states relative to the theme of a particular step of the compassion cultivation program (for example, these could include sharing a story and exploring how a compassionate response to specific events could unfold).

1 For a book length presentation of the traditional Tibetan meditations on the cultivation of compassion, see Jeffrey Hopkins, Cultivating Compassion: a Buddhist Perspective (New York: Broadway, 200)

Course Website:

A username and password have been created for you in order to access the course website at (login.becompassion.org). This website is a private and password protected space where you can download guided meditations, access the course forum, and review supplemental materials like class handouts, research papers, articles, in class exercises and videos.

Login using the following credentials:

The first half of the email address you provided when registering for this course. Please do NOT enter the “@” simple or anything that follows it (ex. please don’t enter @gmail.com)

Username: (XXXXXX@example.com)

Password: becompassion (all lower case)

Please contact Adam Burn if you have any challenges with login.

Once logged in, select the link below “Enrolled Courses“, then click on the corresponding week (Week One, Week Two, etc.) to gain access to supplementary content. Materials will not be accessible for the upcoming week until the day of class. Content will gradually open up as the course progresses.
Some students find it helpful to download and print the documents each week in order to create a notebook where they can record their observations and reflections during the course.

**Download CCT Guided Meditations:**

The guided meditations for the course are available in MP3 format from the class website. You can stream the audio directly from the site or download the files for use on your portable device.

**Course Forum:**

This course also includes an optional online forum for added community offerings outside of class time. If you find that you have a question during the week that may be of benefit to the group, consider posting it here. The instructor will monitor this space and offer suggestions and feedback. If you have a comment that you would prefer to address privately, please email the instructor. You will also be able to find additional tips and useful strategies that may emerge through course discussion here.

*Please note that all content on this site, with the exception of the guided meditations, is optional.*

This material is provided for additional background in the event that you desire more depth in a given area. However, please place your primary emphasis on practice and experiential learning for the duration of the course.

Access to these materials will persist beyond course completion, so fear not if you don’t get to explore it all during the course — your login will still work as long as the site remains and you will be granted access to a special Alumni section following course completion.

If you require a certificate of completion, please note that this will automatically become available on the “Course” home page following our last class. You must have accessed each of the 8 weeks for the certificate to appear. Click the blue “Print Your Certificate!” button. A new tab or window will open and a page will take about 30 seconds to load. Your certificate should appear in PDF form with your name and date of completion listed.

**Participation Guidelines:**

*Your attendance at each class is crucial, as is daily meditation practice.* Each week's session builds upon the prior week's content. If you are unable to attend one or more classes, please consider participating at another time that may be more optimal for your schedule.

The context of this course is to evoke, recognize, and cultivate specific qualities that are natural to the human mind and heart, and to strengthen them in terms of skill acquisition. This is done through a combination of (1) greater understanding of one’s psychological processes, (2) reflective (meditative) exercises, (3) practical exercises aimed at evoking the desired qualities in the context of interaction with others, and, wherever possible and appropriate, (4) relating the practices to your day-to-day life.

These classes are not meant to be a therapeutic environment; participants agree to respect each other's emotional space so everyone feels comfortable and at ease. In the course of a class, however, if as a result of touching something within, such as deep emotional wounds, a fellow participant expresses powerful emotions, it is important to provide a supportive environment.

**Confidentiality:** Whatever personal stories are shared in the class must be treated as confidential. If, for the purpose of illustrating a point, some do wish to share a story with others, all information pertaining to the identity of the people involved, such as names, must remain anonymous.