

COMPASSIONATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Compassionate accountability marries two concepts that are often viewed as mutually exclusive. However, compassion, or the act of feeling and demonstrating concern is what I call a ‘feeder principle’ - in other words it serves to nourish every other principle that life is built upon. Without compassion, honesty risks descent into reckless self-righteousness and loyalty a decline toward resentment. The principles that individuals uphold as a measure of their life code are only words if the action of their meaning is not visible.

As women we are often raised to put the caretaking of others before the care of ourselves. (If you identify as a man or somewhere else on the identity spectrum you can still probably find yourself in this struggle). The concept of compassion has historically been gendered as a ‘feminine’ trait which ipso facto places it on the wrong side of the *value added* gender equation. As a rule rather than the exception humanity has placed greater importance on masculine identified virtues or behaviors and compassion has not been one of them. Compassion is also sometimes described as ‘caring’ and as women often have the role of caretaker it is easy to see why compassion is described as something that is often given to others rather than something we display toward ourselves. However as the old saying goes; we cannot give what we do not have, however hard we might try to dress that up! So to give compassion *from* the heart we have to experience it *in* our heart. We have to know the kindness to show the kindness in any way that is authentic and durable. And, we have to *want* to express that compassion inward before it has weight in the hands of anyone else.

So what then is self-compassion? Well according to this definition by Kristen Neff the 3 faces of self-compassion include:

“(a) self-kindness—being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical, (b) common humanity—perceiving one's experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating, and (c) mindfulness—holding painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them. Self-compassion is an emotionally positive self-attitude that should protect against the negative consequences of self-judgment, isolation, and rumination (such as depression). Because of its non-evaluative and interconnected nature, it should also counter the tendencies towards narcissism, self-centeredness, and downward social comparison that have been associated with attempts to maintain self-esteem. “ (Neff, 2003)

So Neff makes a distinction between self-compassion and self-absorption or selfishness, which, as someone who has experienced partner betrayal, you might be hyper aware of.

The word accountability is as tethered to misuse as the word compassion. Some dictionaries even use the word ‘blame’ in partial definition of the word accountable. However, accountable does not mean blame any more than compassion can be something only demonstrated toward others. Compassionate accountability is a commitment to kind self-truth telling. It is the act of stepping up to the authorship of your life. It is the gentle re-establishment of faith bounded by principles that you protect just as much for yourself as you do for others. It is the courage to act heroically when the person to be rescued is you.