

PURPOSE

Students will explore compassion as an area of scientific study as well as personal inquiry, investigating their own motivations for cultivating compassion in a specific area of life.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Define what the Science of Compassion is and determine the different fields it draws from
- Identify one field or area of life domain of inquiry within the Science of Compassion to explore further (physical health, mental health, relationship health, societal health, emotional health, sense of purpose, and wellness)
- Construct a personal plan to explore compassionate responses in a specific area (health, wellness, purpose, relationships, etc.)

LENGTH

45 minutes

PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



Self-Regulation



Compassion
for Others

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Applying the Science of Compassion to One's Life reading handout
- Benefits of Compassion handout

CHECK-IN | 5 minutes

[PAUSE]s can be up to 10 seconds each

Attention Practice

- **"Let's prepare for a short attention practice. How do we want our body to be?"**
- **First we'll take a comfortable and upright posture. Then we'll keep our eyes on the ground or close them.**
- **Before we strengthen our attention, we'll do some resourcing or grounding to calm our bodies. Choose one of your resources from your resource kit, or you can choose a new one, or you can imagine one.**
- **Now let's bring our resource to mind. And let's see if we can just pay attention to our resource with our mind for a few moments, quietly. Or if you'd rather do grounding, you can do that instead. Whichever you choose, we're going to rest quietly and pay attention for a few moments.** [PAUSE]
- **What do you notice inside? If you feel pleasant or neutral, you can rest your mind on that.**
- **If you feel unpleasant, you can shift to a different resource, or you can ground. You can also change your posture but try not to disturb anyone else if you do that. Otherwise, just keep your attention resting with your resource.** [PAUSE]
- **Now let's become aware of our breathing. Let's see if we can pay attention to the breath as it enters and leaves our body.**

- **If you find paying attention to the breath uncomfortable, then feel free to go back to your resource or grounding, or just take a small break, making sure not to disturb anyone else.** [Pause for 15-30 seconds.]
- **If you ever get distracted, you can just return your attention to the breath. You can also count your breath.** [Pause for a longer time, such as 30-60 seconds or longer.]
- **You can strengthen your attention by focusing on sensations or by focusing on the breath. It's your choice — it's always up to you.**
- **What did you notice?"** [Invite students to share aloud.]

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION | 10 minutes

Activity Overview

The teacher will present on some of the benefits of compassion that have been explored in science. Students will rank these benefits based on what is meaningful to them. Topics covered can include health benefits, relationship and social benefits, psychological benefits, cultivating a sense of purpose or life meaning and societal benefits.

Instructions

"Remember last week we explored forgiveness and self-compassion? Let's review.

What is self-compassion?

Why or when might it be important for our well-being?

How might self-compassion be related to being compassionate towards others?

In recent years, scientists have been increasingly interested in exploring the potential benefits of compassion, particularly for health, relationships, and social well-being. Today we will learn about some of the benefits of compassion as suggested by this research."

Present science of compassion from the student handout/reading.

- **"What benefits did you expect to see but didn't see on the list of benefits?"**
- **What additional research would you like to see done on compassion?**

Next we will break into pairs or triads based on what you listed as most meaningful to you.

INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 15 minutes

Activity Overview

In small groups, students review reflection questions from the Science of Compassion Benefits worksheet. They then synthesize and record their responses on the worksheet

provided or on a piece of paper that is divided into three rows.

Instructions

Pair/divide students into groups. Provide time for students to review the reflection questions and then discuss in their groups. Students will record their group and individual responses on their sheet.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 15 minutes

Activity Overview

In this reflection students will personally connect with the benefits of compassion. Through an interpersonal reflection students will answer prompts to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of compassion.

Instructions

Review the benefits of compassion and allow time for reflection.

We are continuing to deepen our understanding of the benefits of compassion. To review, what are the benefits of compassion for yourself and others? Let's think about it in the context of:

- **Personal**
- **Social**
- **Systems**

Now, let's look at these prompts and reflect deeper.

If everyone were to act with compassion today, what might that do to shape the feeling or climate of a classroom?

[Allow time for discussion]

How might students interact with one another? [Allow time for discussion]

How might students respond if someone came into the classroom and was either looking or acting distressed?

[Allow time for discussion]

How might the teacher respond to students who expressed needs?

[Allow time for discussion]

How might students respond to each other when they appeared to need help or asked for help? [Allow time for discussion]

What could we do to make the fostering of a compassionate classroom a reality?

Teaching Tips

It can be helpful to ask clarifying questions to invite students into deeper reflection.

Applying the Science of Compassion to One's Life

Overview

In order to act compassionately we must first define it and make sense of what it means to us. The goal of SEE Learning is to create a more aware and compassionate world through the education of the heart and the mind. The below referenced enduring capabilities help us to move from a conceptual understanding to engaging in compassionate activities.

Understanding Others' Feelings and Emotions in Context

Understand others' feelings and reactions in relation to the situations in which they occur, and understand that, like oneself, others have feelings caused by needs.

Appreciating and Cultivating Kindness and Compassion

Value the benefits of kindness and compassion and purposefully nourish them as a disposition.

Appreciating and Cultivating Other Ethical Dispositions

Value and foster development of ethical dispositions and prosocial emotions such as forgiveness, patience, contentment, generosity, and humility.

The first capability is **Understanding Others' Feelings and Emotions in Context**. When an individual sees another person act in a way they do not approve of, it is natural to react with judgment. However when we seek to understand that another person's actions are spurred by an emotion this can lead to empathy and compassion rather than anger and judgment. The intention, of course, is not to excuse inappropriate behavior but to understand others and their emotions on a human level.

The next capability is **Appreciating and Cultivating Kindness and Compassion**. Compassion serves as a powerful guiding principle for ethical behavior that benefits oneself and others. In order for compassion to serve as a guiding principle we need to understand what compassion is and what it is not. We also need to value compassion as something that they wish to cultivate.

The third capability is **Appreciating and Cultivating Other Ethical Dispositions**. Some of these ethical dispositions include gratitude, forgiveness, contentment, humility, and patience. These ethical dispositions refer to inner qualities—rather than material possessions or accomplishments. A focus

Applying the Science of Compassion to One's Life

(continued)

on valuing people and appreciating how they have enriched one's life stands in opposition to self-promotion.

The Science of Compassion

The primatologist Frans de Waal points out that all mammalian and bird species require maternal care to survive, due to the fact that offspring cannot live on their own after birth, and he provides numerous examples of non-human species expressing empathy and engaging in altruistic acts (De Waal, 2010). Altruistic behavior in various species, including humans, creates reciprocal bonding. This means that we feel connected to others. Research shows us that this sense of connection supports survival and flourishing on both the individual and group levels. In bird and mammalian species, including the human species, compassion is therefore a matter of survival, which may explain why we respond so positively to it, even on a physiological level (De Waal, 2010).

In humans, a preference for kindness manifests at a very young age. Studies by developmental psychologists suggest that infants as young as three months of age prefer individuals who exhibit helping behavior to those who exhibit antisocial behavior.(Hamlin and Wynn, 2011). As one such researcher, Kiley Hamlin, notes, "Though we may think of them as interested only in their own desires, given the chance, toddlers under two [years of age] show generosity. We find them willing to share—to give their treats away. And this makes them happy." (Goleman, 2015).

Research shows that while there is a leveling off of reported satisfaction with life after a certain level of material well-being, there are strong links between gratitude and happiness in children, adolescents, and adults. Not only is gratitude related to greater life satisfaction, but a sense of appreciation for received benefits also increases prosocial behaviors (Froh et al, 2011).

Applying the Science of Compassion to One's Life

(continued)

The Benefits of Compassion

Extensive research has shown that engaging in compassion-based activities has significant physical, emotional, social, and relationship benefits.

- Academic Achievement and Learning (Hart & Kindle Hodson, 2004)
- Increased Happiness and Wellbeing (Pace, et al. 2009)
- Sense of Purpose and Selfworth (Neff et al., 2007)
- Improved Relationships (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009)
- Reduced Stress (Fogarty, et al., 1999 and Pace, et al. 2009)
- Improved Medical Outcomes (Lelorain, Brédart, Dolbeault, & Sultan, 2012)
- Increased Social Connectedness (Seppala et al., 2013)

References

De Waal, Frans, *Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*, Broadway Books; (September 7, 2010).

Duncan, L., Coatsworth, J., & Greenberg, M. (2009) A model of mindful parenting: Implications for parent-child relationships and prevention research. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 12(3), 255-270.

Fogarty, L., Curbow, B., Wingard, J., McDonnell, K., & Somerfield, M. (1999). Can 40 seconds of compassion reduce patient anxiety? *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 17, 371-379.

Froh, Jeffrey J., Emmons, Robert A., Card, Noel A., Bono, Giacomo, Wilson, Jennifer A. *Gratitude and the Reduced Costs of Materialism in Adolescents*. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 2011. 12:289-302.

Goleman, D. (2015). *A force for good: the Dalai Lama's vision for our world* (First edition.). Bantam Books.

Hamlin, J. K., & Wynn, K. (2011). Young infants prefer prosocial to antisocial others. *Cognitive development*, 26(1), 30-39.

Hart, Sura & Hodson, Victoria. (2004). *The Compassion Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning*. PuddleDancer Press.

Lelorain, S., Brédart, A., Dolbeault, S., & Sultan, S. (2012). A systematic review of the associations between empathy measures and patient outcomes in cancer care. *Psycho-Oncology*, 21, 1255-1264.

Neff, K., Kirkpatrick, K., & Rude, S. (2007). *Self-compassion and adaptive psychological functioning*. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41, 139-15

Pace, T., Tenzin Negi, L., Adame, D., Cole, S., Sivilli, T., Brown, T., Issa, M., & Raison, C. (2009). *Effect of compassion meditation on neuroendocrine, innate immune and behavioral responses to psychosocial stress*. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 34(1), 87-9

Seppala, E., Rossomando, J., & Doty, J.. (2013). *Social Connection and Compassion: Important Predictors of Health and Wellbeing*. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 80(2), 411-430

Graphic Organizer

Benefits of Compassion

Questions	Whole group summary response	Individual response
Of the benefits outlined within the presentation which do you find most appealing for you right now in your life?		
Why did you choose this domain and what does it matter to you (your small group)?		
How would your life be different specific to the domain you selected if you embodied and practiced compassion on a regular basis?		
If people in your life practiced compassion more regularly how would it benefit them, you, and others? Think of specific people and identify which domains they would experience benefit in and how would that occur?		