

Under pressure: How  
self-compassion-based group  
work can address  
performance anxiety concerns  
among college students

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# What is Performance Anxiety?

- Performance anxiety is fear about one's ability to perform a specific task (Good Therapy, 2019).
  - It is also the apprehension and fear of the consequences of being unable to perform a task or of performing it at a level that will raise expectations of even better task achievement. (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.)
- Common symptoms of performance anxiety may include:
  - Excessive sweating, heart palpitations, chills, and elevated blood pressure
  - A feeling that there is a knot in the stomach
  - Increased errors during the performance
  - Shaking and nausea
  - Backing out of the performance (Good Therapy, 2019).
- For college students performance anxiety may emerge academically or in the form of some extracurricular activities.
  - Academically: test anxiety, participation in classes, presentations
  - Extracurriculars: athletics, performing arts, such as theater or marching band
- Because of these mounting pressures, it is no wonder that anxiety and stress are the top presenting mental health concerns among college students (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2021).

Item	11-Year Change	2010-2021	Lowest	Highest	2020-2021
<b>CCAPS-62</b>					
Depression	+0.23		1.59	1.82	1.82
Generalized Anxiety	+0.27		1.61	1.89	1.89
Social Anxiety	+0.25		1.82	2.07	2.06
Academic Distress	+0.19		1.85	2.04	2.04
Eating Concerns	+0.11		1.00	1.12	1.12
Hostility	-0.08		0.96	1.04	0.96
Substance Use	-0.18		0.59	0.77	0.59
Family Distress	+0.12		1.29	1.42	1.42

Source: CCMH 2021

# Brainstorm: What is Compassion?

**Compassion**

# Brainstorm: What is Self-Compassion?

**Self-Compassion**

# Neff's Definition of Self-Compassion



- Dr. Kristin Neff is the leading researcher on self-compassion and she defines it in 3 dual aspects:
  - Self-Kindness vs. Self-Criticism
  - Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification
  - Common Humanity vs. Isolation
- An assessment has been created to help clinicians better assess each of these aspects.
  - State Self Compassion Scale (SSCS)

# Why Self-Compassion?

- Self-compassion is a teachable skill (Ferrari et al., 2019)
- Previous research based mostly in university settings, indicating it is appropriate for this population (Neff 2020).
- There is significant evidence of self-compassion as a moderator for self criticism (Wakelin et al., 2021)
- Reduction in psychopathology including depression, anxiety, stress, rumination, worry and negative affect (Neff, 2018)
- Self-compassion interventions can be of particular benefit to college athletes (Mosewich et al., 2019). Athletes with higher self-compassion tend to have more self-determined motivation and more positive perceptions of performance (Barczak & Eklund, 2020)
- Self-compassion was found to be a strong predictor of successful emotional transition into college (Kroshus et al., 2020).

# Groups and Self-Compassion

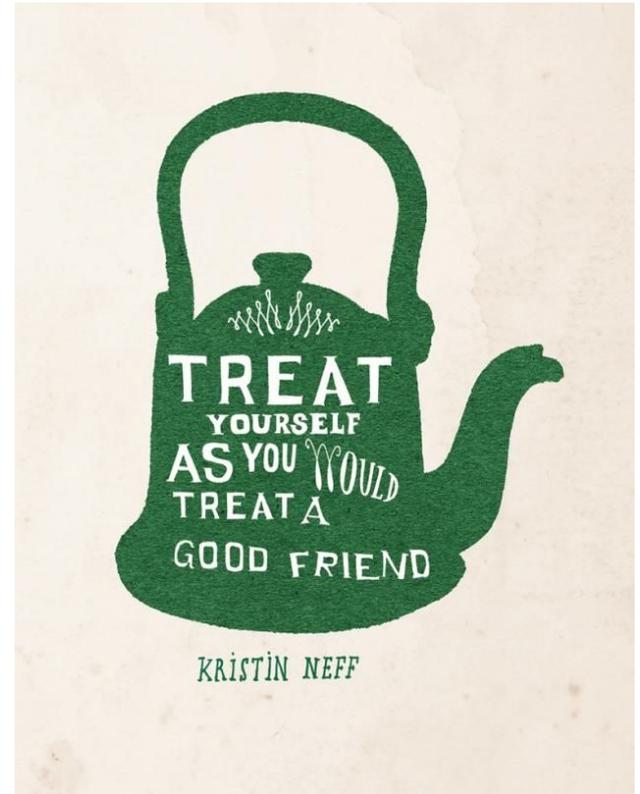
- Self-compassion interventions effects were stronger in group settings (Ferrari et al., 2019)
- As academic pressure mounts, college students can isolate (Mayo Clinic, 2021)
- Isolation and other symptoms of depression and anxiety are linked to burn-out (Barnett & Flores, 2016)
  - Burnout is one of a few factors associated with the college dropout rate (Bask & Salmela-Aro 2013)
  - The U.S.'s dropout rate is 40%, and results in \$3.8 Billion in lost earning every year (Education Data, 2021)
- Self compassion group interventions led to an increase in college students' feeling of connectedness (Smeets et al., 2014)
  - Increased levels of self compassion were correlated with increased levels of social safeness (Akin & Akin, 2014)
- Furthermore, ample evidence exists indicating the positive relationship between group and connectedness, belonging, decreases in loneliness, and decreased drop out rates. (Ferrari et al., 2019; Gold et al., 2019; Smeets et al., 2014; Pryce et al., 2019)

# Group Work with the Counselor in Mind

- Over the last decade demand in college counseling has increased steadily (CCMH, 2021)
  - Average utilization of college counseling centers was 10% in 2021
    - Max 15%, Minimum 6.6% (AUCCCD, 2021)
  - Prior to the pandemic counseling centers averaged 13% and is expected to return to this level or more (CCMH, 2021)
- Average Clinical Capacity for Universities is 194.8 (AUCCCD, 2021)
  - Clinical Full Time Equivalent average is 8.12, 65% of colleges have less than 8
  - Average caseload reported is 83.5 for FTEs and is in the mid range of CLI
    - 50% of colleges and universities were in the Mid to High Range of the CLI
- Utilizing group can allow for the increase CLI while limiting the burden on college counselors.

# Interventions

- Psychoeducation
- Specific Interventions
  - Talking to a Friend
    - [Writing Prompt](#) or Role Play
  - Self-Compassion Break
    - [Writing Prompt](#) or [Meditation](#)
  - [Loving-Kindness Meditation](#)
  - [Supportive Touch](#)
- Homework
  - Mindful Bracelet Swap (Smeets et al., 2014)
  - Self-Compassion Journalling
  - Personalized Self-Compassion Phrases





Questions?

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