

# Teaching Self-Compassion and Self-Care

The Power of **AND**

University of Wisconsin  
Eau Claire

## THE IMPACT OF PRACTICING TECHNIQUES

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### INTRODUCTION

Self-compassion and self-care are critical components for longevity in the profession of Social Work. It is often discussed, but seldom experienced in classes. This leaves students feeling uncertain as to how to successfully practice self-care and compassion or what techniques are known to work.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

Does discussing the benefits of different techniques of self-care and self-compassion combined with practicing the techniques improve students' self-reported stress levels and self-compassion.



### QUESTION EXAMPLES

Almost Never 1 2 3 4 5 Almost Always

1. I frequently neglect my diet?
2. I frequently complain that I am disorganized?
3. I tend to keep everything inside?
4. I frequently put things off until later?
5. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.
6. When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance.



### PROJECT DESIGN

Students enrolled in SW 481: Social Work Internship and SW 482: International Social Work Internship, self-selected to participate in the study. Two sections of the course (23 students) received the intervention and practiced the activities. The third section (11 students) did not. The research design utilized mixed methods of qualitative data (short answer reflection) and quantitative data through pre- and post-surveys. Students completed a survey adapted from the "Are you stressed" assessment tool developed by Dan Johnston, PhD (2010) and the Self-Compassion Scale developed by Katherine Neff, Ph.D. (2003).

### PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Adult Coloring
- Body Scan Meditation
- Interaction with Animals
- Physical Activity (Walk)
- Interaction with Nature
- Intentional Journaling
- Mandala Creation
- Breathing Techniques



### BACKGROUND

The profession of social work relies on a professional Code of Ethics established by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The NASW Code of Ethics (2017), under Ethical Standard 4.05(a), addresses the importance of a social worker's ability to manage their "personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties" to utilize the best judgement when making decisions for those whom the social worker is professionally obligated. For a social worker whose professional judgment is impaired due to one or more of the above-mentioned life challenges, the NASW Code of Ethics (2017) outlines steps social workers may take to remedy the situation. These include but are not limited to seeking consultation, seeking the assistance of professional help, adjusting workload, or potentially terminating their practice. (National Association of Social Workers (2017). Code of Ethics (Ethical Standard 4.05(b). Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>).

The social work education is beholden to provide direction to social work students that encourages the development of coping strategies to assist with the inevitable stressors of the profession (Iacono, 2017). The topic of self-care, or the idea that for social workers to have longevity and happiness within the profession they must have balance (Smullens, 2013), is discussed in social work courses and throughout the curriculum. According to Cox and Steiner (as cited in Jackson, 2014) when encouraged to practice self-care, social work students are left feeling confused about what self-care means. Monk (2011) contends that teaching students how to understand and practice self-care is an institutional responsibility of social work schools. Iacono (2017) argues that "many social work students approach the end of their formal training unprepared to utilize self-care approaches to prevent burnout" and suggests that one method of doing this is through the implementation of activities that teach students self-compassion.

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