



CCARE | Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education

COMPASSION COURSE | Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online

SYLLABUS

Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online is an 8-week course designed to cultivate and strengthen the qualities of compassion, empathy, and kindness for oneself and others. The subject matter incorporates traditional contemplative practices with contemporary psychology and on-going scientific research on compassion and its effect on the human brain and psychology, as well as its effect on our capacity to connect authentically with our deepest aspirations and heart's desire.

Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online integrates a mix of direct instruction, experiential guided meditative practices that include visualizations and breathing practices, and in-class listening and communication exercises with partners and in small groups. Guided meditations will be provided online and can be downloaded. Please adhere to the sequence of the daily-guided meditations, as they are assigned. Their sequence is intentional.

Preliminary research suggests that **Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online** and similar programs can support one's own happiness and well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, increasing self-compassion and self-care, and enhancing awareness of our connections with others.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Apply basic mindfulness skills and utilize mindfulness meditation to stay present to self and others
- Apply learned compassion skills as a response to everyday needs and demands in personal and professional settings
- Utilize compassion practice with oneself and others for emotional regulation in the face of distress
- Utilize cognitive reframing with oneself and others from the compassionate stance of common humanity
- Explain the differences between empathy and compassion
- Describe how empathetic distress vs. compassion collapse leads to burnout
- Utilize evidence-based self-compassion meditation practices in the context of personal and professional relationships
- List three sources of resistance to the development of self-compassion
- Explain three ways to recognize resistance to compassion for and from others
- Understand physiological substrates of concentration and how this helps manage stress and anxiety



CCARE | Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education

COMPASSION COURSE | Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online

SYLLABUS

- Utilize current research studies on the effects and effectiveness of compassion practices

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE READINGS

- *Into the Magic Shop* by James R. Doty, MD
- *Awakening Compassion at Work* by Monica Worline, PhD
- *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, & Body* by Daniel Goleman PhD & Richard J. Davidson PhD

There will, in addition, be a compilation of writings and videos (made available to you online) that range from peer-reviewed to popular articles, to first-hand writings from ancient and contemporary compassion meditation experts. More details will be given during the first session of the course.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS/REQUIREMENTS/ASSIGNMENTS

We will begin each class with a short, guided meditation. A significant amount of learning in this course will happen in real time, during the class. Come ready to participate. *Please be prepared to be engaged and active throughout the class.*

This course will include:

- **Weekly assignments:** Real-time homework/daily life practices to help you cultivate the *experience* of responding to your daily life challenges with compassionate thoughts and actions.
- **Weekly meditation exercises:** Daily compassion meditation, visualization, and breathing practices. Guided compassion meditation recordings will be provided on the Student Resources webpage.
- **Weekly 2-hour classes:** To include informal lecture, discussion, in-class listening and communication exercises with partners and in small groups, and guided meditations.

SUMMARY OF TOPICS, TEACHINGS, AND PRACTICES

Each session will include:

- Practices to create habits of mind and heart
- Meditation: inclining the mind to inquiry
- Time to connect and share with other participants in Breakout Rooms for exercises



CCARE | Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education

COMPASSION COURSE | Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online

SYLLABUS

- Time for questions

Attendance is key, as is daily meditation practice

WEEK 1 | Introduction to the Course: Settling the Mind and Becoming More Aware

The first class is an introduction to the course content, instructors, and fellow students.

In-class discussions will include: What interests and motivates you to practice cultivating your compassionate heart? What intention brought you to the course? What is meditation and what is compassion?

In-class practices will include intention sharing and a few different breath-focused practices. An in-class discussion – questions, experiences, and observations regarding the practice – will follow each exercise.

WEEK 2 | The Power of Deep Listening

This class is designed to help us experience the felt experiences of caring, curiosity, compassion, and kindness as they naturally occur when we deeply listen. Deep listening helps us connect to the mental and physical processes that are the key components for the intentional cultivation of compassion in our hearts and minds.

The meditation and accompanying practical exercises are aimed at helping us recognize the physical and psychological feelings of warmth, tenderness, concern, and connectedness associated with the “experience” of compassion and loving-kindness, by deliberately evoking our feelings for a loved one.

WEEK 3 | Developing Compassion for Oneself - Part I

NOTE: The practices that are associated with self-compassion are spread over two weeks. This is because it can be (though isn't always) difficult or challenging to acknowledge our own needs and feelings and respond to them with compassion and loving-kindness.

In week three's class, we turn our attention to applying the feelings that characterize compassionate relating - such as warmth, tenderness, concern, and acceptance - towards ourselves. This is a crucial step in the training. When we can recognize and connect to our own feelings and needs, and nurture the process of relating to them with compassion, it can become a basis for cultivating genuine compassion for others, as well. Self-compassion helps us recognize that our struggles do not isolate us from others but are part of the human experience.



CCARE | Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education

COMPASSION COURSE | Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online

SYLLABUS

You will also be introduced to the concept of a compassionate image from which you can source your felt sense of compassion for yourself and others.

WEEK 4 | Developing Compassion for Oneself - Part II

In this class, you will be exploring what it means to truly be a friend to yourself, embracing your natural aspiration for happiness, and practicing gratitude.

We will cultivate loving-kindness for ourselves and focus on experiencing qualities such as heartfelt affection, warmth, and appreciation for ourselves and our lives, acknowledging our own aspirations for genuine happiness and well-being.

WEEK 5 | Recognizing Common Humanity - Broadening our Compassion for Others

In this class, we will open our minds and hearts toward a worldview of shared and common humanity, an developing appreciation for others.

We recognize the basic sameness of self and others with respect to our shared and fundamental aspiration for happiness and overcoming suffering. Our willingness to imagine ourselves in the shoes of another, to identify with their suffering, is a key component of empathy.

The second element of this week is cultivating an appreciation for the deep interconnectedness of ourselves and others, especially acknowledging how we all depend on many others for basic survival and well-being. By recognizing this interconnectedness, a sense of gratitude towards and connection with others is cultivated.

WEEK 6 | Recognizing Triggers and Dealing with Them (Self) Compassionately

In this class we continue to build that muscle of self-compassion by actively bringing work and life situations that trigger us to the course. We will learn about what triggers really are and how to be with them more skillfully by cultivating greater awareness, insight, understanding, and compassion.

We will also work with the different layers of response: through the mind (what we think), through feelings (how we feel), and through our body/somatic (what we sense).

WEEK 7 | Compassionate Communication (at Home and at Work)

In this class we will learn about mindful and compassionate communication and how our meditation practice helps us be more mindful in our responses.



CCARE | Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education

COMPASSION COURSE | Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online

SYLLABUS

In-class discussion will include: What is communication, really? How does awareness of context, or our own and other's needs build into better communication skills?

In this class we will learn about relational awareness, and about how to connect and reflect before automatically engaging in reactive speech. We practice attuning to what's most important and recognizing what's needed, in real life situations - as in our home and work environments.

WEEK 8 | Integrating Daily Contemplative and Compassionate Practices in Life and Work

In this final session, we explore how to integrate and support the habit of responding with compassion to the on-going ebb and flow of life's challenges, by merging all the previous steps into a single meditation practice.

We will be reviewing course material and grounding the themes. In-class discussion will include skills you now have to bring this work back into your community, and cultivating the heart at work and in life.

Finally, we will wrap up any questions and discuss next steps and resources to support continuing practice. It is through regular, continued practice that we awaken the heart of compassion and bring it into our lived experience. Through this practice we can reap the gifts of rich compassion development.

Possible next step: Applied Compassion Training

PARTICIPATION IN 8-WEEK COURSE

To benefit from **Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online**, requires participation. Having said that, it's key for you to listen to each week's guided meditations and make every effort to practice with them, along with the accommodating daily life practices.

The Student Resources tab for each week will be activated by noon Pacific Time the day following each class. Please follow the weekly schedule and don't hesitate to reach out if you need help.

DISCLAIMER: Whenever we open our hearts to the difficulties, losses, disappointments, and scope of human tragedies that are part and parcel of our shared human experience, we may encounter emotional challenges or obstacles. You will learn skills to work with these in class, but **Cultivating the Heart – Live/Online** is an educational course. It is not meant to treat psychological disorders. If at any time you experience serious psychological difficulty, we encourage you to seek competent professional help.