

EPISODE 169**[INTRODUCTION]**

[0:00:02.7] PF: Welcome to Live Happy Now, the podcast to inspire you to live a happier life and give you the tools to make it happen. This is Live Happy Science editor Paula Felps and I'd like to thank you for joining us for a brand new season of Live Happy Now. This week's episode is brought to you by Momentous Institute, powered by the Salesmanship Club of Dallas and dedicated to building and repairing social, emotional health for kids since 1920.

Today on episode number 169, we're talking to Kristin Neff, who is going to tell us why we all need more self-compassion in our lives. Kristin is one of the world's leading researchers on self-compassion and coauthor of *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook: A Proven Way to Accept Yourself, Build Inner Strength, and Thrive*. In today's episode, Kristin shows us how self-compassion can improve our relationships and our overall wellbeing. Let's hear what she has to say.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:52.7] PF: Kristin, welcome to Live Happy Now. We're really excited to have you with us today because I think self-compassion is such an important topic today.

[0:01:00.7] KL: Great, I'm very happy to be here.

[0:01:03.2] PF: You know, your work in this area has been really groundbreaking and I wanted to know what had made you interested in studying this topic to begin with?

[0:01:11.2] KL: Well, you know, for me, it really started as a personal journey. I had learned meditation and the woman who taught my meditation class talked a lot about the importance of self-compassion. I started changing the way related to myself being a bit kinder, more supportive. It was amazing, and I saw the results almost instantly. I saw the huge impact with that little shift can have toward helping you cope.

I was going through some difficulties and it just really helped me cope. I just finished up my PhD at Berkeley and I was doing two years of postdoctoral study in self-concept development. It's been the general area. Then I was also doing a lot of work with self-esteem and getting familiar with the literature on self-esteem, which is the long and short of the self-esteem literature is it's good to have it, but it can be a real problem how you get it, like narcissist, people think they're better than others, or they're unstable, like they feel good one day, but the second they fail, or imperfect they lose their self-esteem.

As well as working in that length that I thought, "Well, self-compassion, it has everything self-esteem has to offer in terms of being linked to well-being and helping with coping," but it's not so contingent, it doesn't desert you when you fail. You don't have to be better than anyone else to have self-compassion, you just have to be a flawed human being like everyone else. I thought this is really a better way to look at the healthy self-concept. Then when I finally got a real job at UT Austin, I decided I wanted to research it and you might say the rest is history, so to speak.

[0:02:56.9] PF: Well, and it is history because it has become so pivotal in other people's research and other application sake. When you started this, did you have any idea that it even had the potential to become –

[0:03:09.5] KN: No. I really didn't. I must say I'm quite shocked. I mean, it's wonderful, it's wonderful that yeah, I just thought I could make some contribution, that this – I have to say mindfulness was already researched by then. It was still beginning, but really without the olive wreath great research on mindfulness, I think no one would have even taken self-compassion seriously. Because self-compassion builds on mindfulness and we can go into that later if you want, but because that path had already been the ground for that path had already been broken, I was just able to follow suit and expand that concept of mindfulness to include warmth and kindness and connectedness. I can't take credit for everything by any means, but yeah, I feel good. I was able to make a contribution and now it's just all over the place. It's amazing.

[0:04:00.4] PF: Self-compassion is so good for us, and your books explain it so beautifully and show all the benefits of it. If it's so good for us, why is it so difficult?

[0:04:10.8] KN: Yeah. There is a lot of reasons; one, very interestingly is there is a lot of myth about self-compassion. Our culture doesn't only support it. Actually, our culture's pretty

suspicious of it. It's not just the US. I mean, it varies culture to culture, but most people are suspicious of it, because they confuse it with self-pity. Or here's a big one, especially in the United States, we think somehow that we'll be complacent that we'll lose our motivation, we'll lose our edge, or we'll be weak for self-compassionate.

Again, all the research shows is actually exactly the opposite, self-compassion motivates us. We want to do our best if we care about ourselves. It's actually a source of strength, of course being supportive to ourselves is going to help us get through difficult times and cutting ourselves out. The research really clearly shows that for some reason, the culture hasn't caught up. If you think about it, it's maybe not so surprising, because 50 years ago, our parenting philosophy was spare the rod, spoil the child.

Think of that, we really used to think quite honestly that if we were kind and supportive and compassionate to our kids, they'd be spoiled brats. You use the cane to keep them in place. We've moved for with their parenting philosophy. Hopefully, most of us have, but we haven't moved forward with their philosophy for how we relate to ourselves, right? You might say how we parent ourselves, how we treat ourselves and we're struggling or need some support. I think they're just outdated notions, myths about what self-compassion will do to you.

That's why I think the research is so important. Once all those people say, "Oh, okay. The research is really does show it's going to help your motivation, not undermine it, you won't be a lazy slob, you'll actually eat better and exercise more that you'll take yourself. Okay, then you relax a little bit and then you're willing to give it a try." One of the reasons is we have these mental blocks to self-commit really fears of self-compassion put there by our culture.

[0:06:13.0] PF: When we're told it's like, "Toughen up. Suck it up buttercup," and just trudge through it. You talk about practicing self-compassion not only makes us feel better inside, it's going to make us better in our relationships. It's going to make us more motivated. Can you explain to us how that works?

[0:06:32.7] KN: Yeah, just look at coping. I mean, one of the big things about self-compassion, the reason people are so excited is it helps people cope, help cope with divorce, cope with cancer, or cope with just past trauma. It's a real source of strength and resilience. Why? If you

think about it, when you go into battle do you want an inner enemy in your ear telling you how crap you are, that you'll never do it, that you're no good?

[0:06:59.9] PF: That's probably not your best plan.

[0:07:01.9] KN: Or do you want that voice to be an ally? Have your allies of your back, okay, got your back, it's okay, you can do this. I'll help you in any way you can. In fact, for instance, we found with veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan that those vets were more self-compassionate. They're much less likely to develop PTSD than their comrades who are really hard on themselves, right? In fact, the level of self-compassion was more predictive of whether or not they developed PTSD to how much action they saw overseas.

[0:07:32.1] PF: Oh, interesting.

[0:07:33.2] KN: Think about. It's not just what you face in life. It's who you have at your back. Do you have your own back or not when things get tough? If the answer is yes, you're going to be stronger than if you don't have your own back, than if you're constantly cutting yourself down, feeling chained, because and adequate that really helps no one, right? Yeah, so that's one thing. Then again, some people think self-compassion is selfish, but I should just be focused on other people.

In fact, what we find is that people who are more self-compassionate, they make much better relationship partners. They're more giving and they're more forgiving, they're more supportive. Why? Well, think about it. If you expect your partner to meet all your needs, and if they don't meet your needs exactly as you want, then you can get really angry about it. That's not very good. The more you have for yourself, the more you can meet your own needs, actually the more you have to give to your kids, or your partners, or your friends, so it actually leads to less self-focus behavior. I mean, think about it; shame and self-pity. Are there any more self-focused states you can be in than shame –

[0:08:38.8] PF: Oh, my gosh. Yeah. It doesn't get you anywhere. You're just going around in a circle.

[0:08:42.1] KN: Exactly. Right. Self-compassion allows us to break free of our self-absorption with how inadequate we are, and actually just move on and start living our life.

[0:08:51.6] PF: What goes on in our heads that we can shift the conversation.

[0:08:55.9] KN: Right. Really, the first step in terms of temporal sequence of self-compassion is always mindfulness. You have to have awareness of what's happening. First of all, you have to be aware that you are criticizing yourself, and for some people this is so habitual they don't even notice, right? You get people to start looking at how do you talk to yourself when you're feeling scared or inadequate? Then go, "Wow," They get shocked, right.

The versus being aware. Again, but and we're in a balanced way and objective way and really noticing the pain that's there, like really tapping into, "Wow, that hurts. That's not very – It doesn't help me. It doesn't make me feel good." The first step is mindfulness. Then it's responding with kindness, right? Catching yourself and saying, "Hey, wait a second. Yeah, I've gained 10 pounds. Yeah, it doesn't make me feel good. But hey, this is only human and there's lots of reasons a lot of people gain weight. Maybe I've been using food to do with my issues."

The thing is kindness doesn't stop there, right? Kindness is yeah. It feels bad and you don't feel good in your body, maybe you would really feel better and maybe you would help yourself by trying to exercise more and eat better. It's not like because you're inadequate as you are now that I'm going to hate you if you don't do it. It's more like, "Hey, I care about you. Can we make some changes? Can I support myself to make some changes, so I feel better in my body?"

That's why in fact, they find self-compassion is really good for people who have eating disorders, because it uses this force of love and care to make changes, as opposed to fear, like if I don't do it, I can hate myself.

Then the last step really is, it's so important to remember that it's not just you; this thing of being human. At the definition of being human, this being imperfect, we don't want to believe it. It's so funny. It's like, we really think that maybe if I get it all right and get all the right degrees and marry the right person and do all these, then maybe somehow I can live a perfect life.

[0:11:03.5] PF: I'll be the first one.

[0:11:06.0] KN: That's not the plan we signed up for. There's a great meditation teacher named Rod Nair who just says, the goal of practice is simply to be a compassionate mess. It's like that's what –

[0:11:19.7] PF: I love that.

[0:11:20.3] KN: - we're aiming for. Yeah, we aren't aiming for perfection. It's impossible. I mean, the goal is just that, yeah, we're going to be a mess no matter how much medication we do, no matter how much we work out, no matter how successful we are, we're still going to be a mess because we're human beings. We can be a compassionate mess. We can hold that messiness and that pain, that imperfection, with the sense of kindness and supporting connectedness. That's actually what allows us to be happy, even in the midst of the mess. There's these feelings of kindness, love, connectedness, presence, these are really positive emotions and we can learn to rest our awareness and the compassion that holds the pain. It's really quite interesting. You can do this with practice.

[0:12:09.5] DS: It is important to note that it is a practice. It's not as if I can say, "I'm going to be self-compassionate and tomorrow I'm going to wake up and like angel sings, guys fart and I'm really good at this."

[0:12:22.2] KN: That's right. Yeah, it is a practice. By the way for some people, it's a little – I got to be honest here. For some people, it's a little harder journey than others. For instance, if your parents were really critical, or maybe even worse, right? Maybe they're abusive in some way, it can be more difficult path, because the models you had of what a loving compassionate response to pain should have been, maybe weren't there.

It can be a slower path, but the great news is it looks like anyone can do it. You may have to go slowly, maybe a bumpy road. You may have to dip your foot, the toe into the water of self-compassion and say, "Woo, that's too much," and then you close down.

[0:13:06.2] PF: It's too cold.

[0:13:07.5] KN: It's too cold. Right. That is true. I'm not going to lie. It's not easy for everyone. The thing is actually easier than you think in the sense that a lot of people, even with people severe trauma histories, they've somehow managed to learn how to be compassionate, maybe to a child, or a pet, or a friend. They actually have developed the skills at some part of their life. All that really self-compassion requires is giving yourself permission. It's going to be not easy, but what it requires is giving yourself permission and practicing using the same skill of kindness, support, compassion towards yourself.

[0:13:50.1] PF: Well, that's where your workbook comes in, which is the reason we're talking today. I love this, because you've given – over the years, you've given people so many great ways to access this information. I know you've written books, you've got audiobooks, you even teach an online course. Can you tell us what *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook* is?

[0:14:06.4] KN: Yeah. I mean, that's why I'm so excited. Self-compassion, I know for my research it works. I look at people who have it more and they they're better in all sorts of ways, but I've really been interested in how do we teach the skill? I mean, this isn't, like you say, this isn't rocket science. There are practices we can do, exercises we can do. Some of them involve meditation, but they don't have to. We find that people who don't to meditate, they can do just as well with other ways of practicing the skill.

The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook, I think, we've got how many practice? We have like 27, or some huge number of concrete things you can practice every day to start building these new neural pathways, this new habit of being kind to yourself. Basically, it follows our eight-week mindful self-compassion program, which is now taught all over the world. We decided not everyone has access to a teacher, or not everyone has the time to take an eight-week course. This is something you can do yourself at your own pace, and all the practices are there.

[0:15:14.2] PF: We're going to tell our listeners how they can learn more about it, and I think we give them a download to one of the exercises as well.

[0:15:21.2] KN: Great. I think that –

[0:15:22.9] PF: Yeah. As they're as they're leaving us today and as you're leaving us, what's the one thing that they can start today to become better at self-compassion?

[0:15:32.2] KN: Right. Okay, so the easiest most direct way is just to simply ask yourself the question when you notice you're speaking to yourself and kindly, would I save this to a friend? A friend I cared about? The answer is no, which probably is what would I say to a friend that cared about the exact same situation, and then just try it out with yourself. It may feel weird, it may feel fake, all that's okay. They just see what would it be like if we're able to not only say that we see from myself the same kindness I showed to those I care about, and then just see what happens.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[INTERVIEW]

[0:16:10.5] PF: That was Kristin Neff. In just a couple of moments, we're going to tell you how you can learn more about her mindful self-compassion workbook. First, we have an awesome guest in the studio today and that is Live Happy CEO, Deborah Heisz.

Deb, thanks for joining us.

[0:16:28.3] DH: Thank you, Paula. It's great to be here. I haven't done one of these in a while. I'm looking forward to it.

[0:16:32.8] PF: I know. Well, we couldn't start season four without having you stop in and talk to us, so I really appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule to swing by the studio.

[0:16:41.3] DH: Well, it's always a great fun to listen to the podcast and to be part of it is even more fun. This is still one of my favorite things that we do here at Live Happy. For all you listeners out there, and it's a real treat for me as well to be on this week's podcast.

[0:16:56.4] PF: Well, and speaking of treats, you have something new. It's a new column that you've introduced online, so I wondered if you could tell us a little bit more about it.

[0:17:05.7] DH: Yeah, it's a new column called Find the Good. It's based on the idea that many of us go through life focusing on what's bad in life, meaning the traffic on the way to the office, or the thing we just can't get done, or that annoying noise in the background. Whatever it is,

we're focused on things that are irritants, or antagonists, but the reality is there's so much in the world that is good and we're just not looking for it.

This column is based off of finding the good in the world. We do some summaries of some news items out there and point you out some good content that you can look at to fill your mind up with good stuff, but also start looking for the good and really, that's what the column is about.

[0:17:49.2] PF: Well, and what's so interesting we talk about this at Live Happy is looking for the good isn't – it's not like putting on rose-colored glasses, or putting on blinders. It's you're really changing the state of your brain when you start looking for the good.

[0:18:00.6] DH: Yeah, there's a lot of neuroscience that shows that when you look for the good, you actually rewire your brain. One of the things I usually advise people to do is to write down three good things that happen to them every day, because there was this great study and I wish I could remember off the top of my head who did it, but it's a study on when you start looking for the good every day, when you have to write it down, your brain will start looking for it. Suddenly, everything in the world just seems a little bit better. Once you start looking for it, you realize it's all around us.

[0:18:32.4] PF: Why was it so important for you to start putting this out there?

[0:18:35.9] DH: Well, it's something we've talked about a lot, but we haven't done a lot of connecting it to what's going on in the world. We talk about finding the good, but this is a leg up. The why now really is there's a lot of positive stuff that you miss in social media, on the news, in magazine articles. We talk about it for a minute or two, but then we go back to obsessing about politics, or whatever else it is that's driving us crazy. I really felt it was time to introduce something that really points people at look, this is good stuff you can see. This is the stuff you might have missed. It's never too late to do this, but it's also never early enough. I wish we'd done this at the beginning, but now's as good a time then to start.

[0:19:20.2] PF: How do you go about the good?

[0:19:21.8] DH: Really, it's all around us. Everything from watching in this first column, watching the World Cup, I'm a huge sports fan, I think. Everybody who works here knows that. I think many of the listeners may also know that based off of previous podcasts.

[0:19:34.9] PF: I have to say I was not surprised to hear that come out of your mouth.

[0:19:38.4] DH: Yeah, I don't think anybody actually is. Watching the World Cup, it isn't just about what's going on in the field, a lot of it's about the culture and the people around. There's this great thing where after the game, they were talking about it, the fans from Senegal and the fans from Japan stayed and helped clean up their section of the stadium. I mean, who does that? In the United States, go to a baseball game, it's like yeah, yeah, I can throw my peanuts and my hotdog wrappers on the ground and somebody else is going to clean up after me.

Really to think culturally, they stayed to clean up after themselves, that's just a phenomenal thing to really notice. Just stuff like that. You read a news clipping about somebody doing something good.

[0:20:19.6] DS: We need that reminder right now, because we – as you have mentioned, we focus too much on a lot of negativity that's going on right now. I'm really glad that you're bringing this to us. You're even giving our readers a way to get involved with that. Can you tell us how they can be a part of this column?

[0:20:38.0] DH: Yes. If you notice a neighbor, or a community group, something in your sphere of awareness that maybe we wouldn't be aware of, maybe it's because it's a local story, but if you notice something doing, or someone doing something inspiring, whether it's small or large, please e-mail us, e-mail your story to me at editor@livehappy.com. It's easy to remember, editor@livehappy.com with 'Find the Good' in the subject line.

Anything that you see or hear about that you think you may want to share, or you think we should share, whether it's video, stories online, whatever it is you're looking for, I want to see it, and we're going to share some of it in the column. Even more than that, you're going to be making the world a happier place, because you're making everybody here at Live Happy more aware of all the positive that's going on out there.

[0:21:24.4] PF: That's fantastic. Find the good. You can look for it online at livehappy.com. Deborah, I thank you so much for coming by and also for doing the column.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:21:35.2] PF: That's it for this episode of Live Happy Now. If you like what you've heard here today and want to hear more, go to Apple Podcast, or wherever you get your favorite podcasts, search for Live Happy Now and subscribe today, so you'll never miss an episode.

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That's all we have time for today, so please join us back here next week. Until then, remember to make every day a happy one.

[END]