

***Resilient COMPASSION:***  
***The Science behind the wisdom of compassion training***  
Anna DeLong, LCSW, CEAP



UVA Faculty and Employee Assistance Program  
434-243-2643

This booklet was originally created in honor of valued UVA HSC employees:



*Thank you for all you do to care for patients and families served by UVA HSC. This information is being shared with you in honor of all your hard work and with tremendous gratitude for the kind, skillful, and attentive care you provide. It is hoped that by sharing the wisdom and power of compassion cultivation with you, that you will strengthen strategies to care for yourself as well as increase the potential that you will be nourished by your meaningful work.*



Joan Halifax, PhD

If compassion is so good for us,  
why don't we  
train our health care providers  
in compassion so they can do  
what they are supposed to do  
which is transform suffering?

*May this work be done in the spirit of  
generosity, not driven by ego, greed  
or delusion.*

*May Kindness sustain us, and prevail in  
conflict.*

*May COMPASSION guide us, and lead  
us to understanding.*

*May we rejoice in the successes of  
others,  
and remain unmoved by praise or  
blame.*

*(UPAYA Zen Center)*



A Lutz, R Davidson, et al. 2008-2009

University of Wisconsin

discovered there is a

**BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE**

**Between**

**COMPASSION & EMPATHY**

### **EMPATHY:**

- associated with **PAIN CENTER**
- releases stress hormones
- "I feel your pain!"

### **COMPASSION:**

- associated with **PLEASURE Center**
- releases progesterone, oxytocin, dopamine
- sets stage to be strengthened rather than weakened by stress
- supports immune, cardiovascular system
- anti-inflammatory
- anti-oxidant
- boosts positive sensations from social engagement



Tania Singer, PhD



Olga Klimecki, PhD

Max Plank Institute

**According to Singer, and Klimecki, leading researchers in the area of empathy and compassion.** “Healthcare workers or caregivers who are frequently faced with trauma victims can become intensely distressed themselves, feel overwhelmed and burn out. Brain scans have shown that similar areas of the brain are activated both in the person who suffers and the one who feels empathy.

**Empathy** helps us recognize and relate to suffering experienced in another. We may have a visceral (i.e. tears), or emotional (i.e. sadness), response to the suffering we witness. With empathy we are aware that we are feeling something because of what we are seeing another person go through. **We have self-other distinction.**

**Emotion contagion** is when we catch another's emotions/moods. With emotion contagion we **lose self-other distinction.** Emotion contagion is typically an **unconscious response.**

If exposed to too much suffering, empathy alone can lead to emotional contagion which is a set up for burnout.

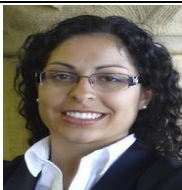


*“Empathy is really important for understanding other’s emotions...but there is a downside of empathy...**When we share in the suffering of others too much, our negative emotions increase** and this carries the **danger of emotional burn out....vicarious pain.**”*

**“So empathic suffering is a true experience of suffering. In order to avoid this, we need to transform empathy into compassion.”**

*“Research suggests **deliberate cultivation of compassion** offers new **copng strategies that foster positive affect** even when confronted with distress of others.”*

Singer, PhD; Klimencki, PhD



Hooria Jazaieri, LMFT  
Stanford University  
Medical School

### **DEFINITION of COMPASSION**

Compassion is a multi-dimensional process,  
unfolding in stages:

1. Awareness of suffering
2. Sympathetic concern
3. A wish to see the relief of that suffering
4. A responsiveness or readiness to help

**Empathy = “I FEEL your pain”**

**Compassion = “I want to alleviate your  
suffering.”** (K. McGonigal, PhD)

**COMPASSION =**  
**BALANCE of NERVOUS SYSTEMS**

***Compassion and Empathy begin the same way – with activation of the alarm center (pain center) in the brain. In the second phase of compassion, the vagus nerve is activated and calms the alarm system:***

- *People often report feeling more grounded and centered*

- *Everything slowsdown, (speech, actions, heart rate, respiratory rate). Even affects vocal cords*

- *Results in a balance of the nervous systems.*

Kelly McGonigal, PhD

**COMPASSION is A BALANCE OF OPPOSITES**



***We are activated and ready to respond***

***AND***

***grounded, centered and slowed down***

K. McGonigal, PhD

***WE CAN IMPROVE our ABILITY  
TO ACTUALIZE and SUSTAIN COMPASSION***

Tonia Singer's Program at the Max Plank Institute in Germany, and the Compassion Cultivation Training program at C.C.A.R.E at Stanford, (Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education) have pioneering programs in Compassion training.

Training in three specific areas increases activation of the compassion network.

These specific areas of training include:

- PRESENCE (mindfulness)
- PERSPECTIVE
- AFFECT

***“Prior to the compassion training, participants in the study showed brain activity in an empathic network associated with pain perception and unpleasantness; after the training, brain activity shifted to a compassionate network that has been associated with positive emotions and physiological responses.”***

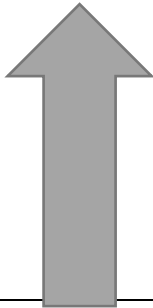
***“Although the negative emotions did not disappear after the compassion training; participants appeared better able to stay in touch with negative emotions from a calmer mindset.”***

Tania Singer, PhD

## BENEFITS OF COMPASSION

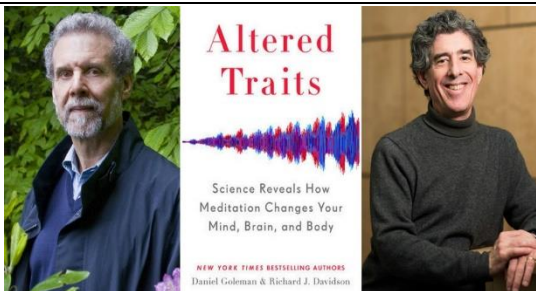


5 min compassion meditation



Improves  
immune  
system  
  
Boost in SIgA  
by as much as  
240%

K. McGonigal



Daniel Goleman

Richard Davidson

**“...compassion Meditation shows stronger benefits from the get-go; as few as seven total hours over the course of two weeks leads to increased connectivity in circuits important for empathy and positive feelings, strong enough to show up outside of the meditation state.”**

**Leads to:**

- **Greater positive feelings**
- **Pro-social behavior**
- **Reduction of Implicit bias**





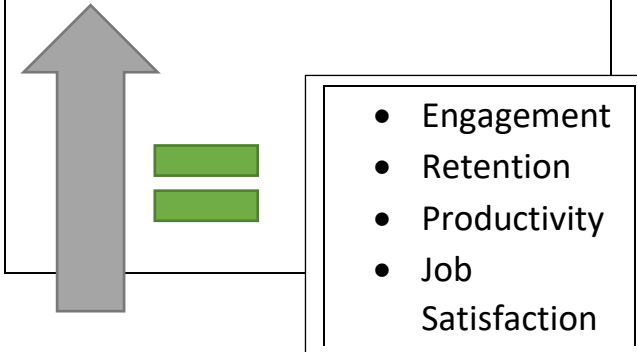
### Compassion is linked to:

- **Happiness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Resilience to stress**
- **Physical health and well-being**
- **Promotes social connections**
- **Key source of meaning and hope**
- **Powerful antidote to loneliness, social anxiety and isolation**
- **Compassion is contagious**



M. Worline, PhD; Jane Dutton, PhD  
Awakening Compassion at Work: the Quiet Power that  
Elevates People and Organizations

***When I experience compassion at work:***



- Engagement
- Retention
- Productivity
- Job Satisfaction

**WHEN PATIENTS BELIEVE THEY HAVE BEEN  
TREATED WITH COMPASSION:**

- **Faster healing of wounds**
- **Reduced pain**
- **Reduced anxiety**
- **Reduced blood pressure**
- **Shorter hospital stays**
- **Greater sense of trust**

Stanford, C.C.A.R.E.