

7 Tips for Cultivating a Loving-Kindness Practice

According to the Dalai Lama, loving-kindness is *“the wish that all beings may be happy.”*
Compassion is *“the wish that all beings may be free from suffering.”*

Cultivating loving-kindness and compassion helps to create a mind free from judgment, hatred, and ill will. Cultivating loving-kindness and compassion helps to develop the qualities of love, kindness, and compassion and establish peace and harmony in the heart and mind.

Research shows that loving-kindness and compassion practices help to reduce negative emotions like anxiety and depression, increase positive emotions like happiness and well-being, foster emotional intelligence, and increase altruistic behavior.

SEVEN TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR LOVING-KINDNESS & COMPASSION PRACTICE

1. It's common for people to find that it is easier to feel loving-kindness and compassion for a loved one than for themselves. In the guided practices offered here, we start with an easy person to love and then move on to cultivate feelings of loving-kindness and compassion for yourself, someone neutral, someone you have difficulty with, and then for everyone everywhere.
2. The phrases are not affirmations—for example, *“I'm becoming happier and healthier every day.”* We are cultivating good intentions, not pretending things are other than they are.
3. The phrases are designed to go to goodwill, not good feelings. The common reason for difficulty with loving-kindness meditation is that we have expectations about how we're supposed to feel. Loving-kindness practice does not directly change our emotions. Good feelings are an inevitable byproduct or side effect of goodwill. In the words of meditation teacher and author Sharon Salzberg, *“The purpose of loving-kindness and compassion practice is to cultivate the intention to embrace all parts of yourself and to overcome feelings of separation from yourself and from others. As these practices ripen, there is an actual felt-sense of warmth, good intention, and deep sympathy toward yourself and others.”*
4. The phrases should be said slowly: there's no rush. What matters most is the intention and attitude behind the phrases.



5. Many people struggle with loving-kindness and compassion practices. Sometimes the phrases that we use, like *“May you be happy and joyful,”* to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion don't ring true or feel strange or awkward. The phrases are just suggestions for you to experiment with. If the phrases work for you, great. If not, you are welcome to find or create your own phrases that feel more meaningful and authentic to you.
6. Be patient with yourself. If you feel discouraged by the lack of good feelings in the loving-kindness or compassion practices or difficult thoughts or feelings arise, you can bring kindness to your feelings of discouragement by saying, *“May I hold this too with loving-kindness and compassion.”*
7. You can do this practice daily, weekly, or ongoing as a core practice. You can do the full version or shorten the practice, for example, just focusing on a loved one or yourself. You can also do this practice in combination with your mindfulness practice, either at the beginning or the end. In that case, you may want to just do it for a few minutes.