

Transcript for Episode 201. Fierce Compassion with Kristin Neff

Kristin Neff: [00:00:00]

Sometimes self-compassion means standing up saying, no, you're treating me unfairly or drawing boundaries and protecting yourself.

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Diana Hill: So today on the episode we have Dr. Kristin Neff, who many of you may know as one of [00:02:00] the lead researchers in the area of self-compassion and Jill listened to the episode. I'm curious, Jill, what was your reaction to it?

Jill Stoddard: well, I got so much out of this episode and. If I'm being totally honest, you know, I have read a lot of Kristin Knapp and studied her and included her in, in my books. So I wasn't sure what, what would be new. And I just loved that she was talking about the fierce side of compassion, rather than just this more gentle side of compassion.

I just, I got so much. I would have bet that I didn't realize I was going to get out of it. There was a lot of cool new stuff in here. And some of the things that were new to me, um, were terms that the two of you use quite a lot based on Buddhism and I think maybe other Eastern traditions. So things like yin and yang, which I know, you know, most of us have heard, but maybe don't know exactly what they mean, Kali and Durga.

So I thought what might be helpful, for listeners is [00:03:00] if maybe you helped us to understand what those terms mean. And then there's like a little bit of foundation before jumping into the episode.

Diana Hill: Yeah, absolutely. and I think, you know, I think Kristin uses those terms as more metaphorically than the religious component associated with them. And by no means, am I an expert in Chinese philosophy or, uh, in, um, some of these Eastern principles, but. The term comes from a Chinese philosophy and it really is this balance.

So the idea that sometimes, what seemingly seems separate actually can be complimentary. And it's the idea of dualism. So for example, the yin part of the yang, and you can think about that symbol. That's like a circle with the squiggle through it, and it has one black and one side is black and one side is white and there's a little bit of white and the black and a little bit of black and the white.

The inside of the union is really often referenced [00:04:00] as sort of the more passive or tender qualities in nature. And in ourselves, sometimes those are associated with what's described as the feminine qualities and that the belief that everybody has, feminine, and masculine qualities inside of themselves,

Folks maybe even done like yin yoga, where you hold a pose for a really long time and you, have to just really relax into the pose. But I think of yin as the sort of letting go that there's no effort, and sometimes it's also the going inward and with compassion.

There is an aspect of the tenderness of turning towards ourselves with kindness, which is the first part of compassion that Gilbert has talked about in terms of turning towards the suffering, whether it's in yourself or another being willing to, to turn towards the second part of compassion is the taking action about it.

And that's the yang. So in the yang part of this dualism, it's about. Taking action, energy movement [00:05:00] doing something about the suffering that we experienced. And for me, I think a really good example of the balance of union was when I interviewed Kristy Hagans, who was one of my mentors and the founder of black safe spaces a while back.

And she talked about in the face of her own racial trauma, showing up as a warrior and how she used that sort of warrior energy, both to protect herself. Both in like a tender way, but then also using it to take action to protect others. So I think that's a good example of this balance.

Jill Stoddard: So would you say that when Kristin is talking about fierce compassion, is that word fierce? More yang?

Diana Hill: Yes. I would say this is yang? and that's why she's bringing up. Also, we talked about these goddesses and for me, so actually one of the practices that I took back a lot during COVID was chanting and kirtan, that was something I did a number of years ago, but I like brought that back in. And so for me, when I chant I'm actually chanting two aspects of myself.

[00:06:00] Things inside of myself that I want to cultivate. Right. So when we're talking about these goddesses, so Kali, who is a Hindu goddess who sticks her tongue out and her eyeballs are like coming out and she's like stands naked with like Juul is all over her. She's like a goddess of fierce anger, right. That she has a sister.

Guy. Who's like the mother goddess, who is the protector. And I think for women in particular accessing our anger and then what do we do with it? That fierceness, for me, it shows up with. My kids are in baseball and some of the coaching practices make me really angry. And I feel like this urge just go yell at the coach. But if I did that, that would be all Kali energy. Right. And it probably wouldn't go over well. Right. If I went and yelled at the coach that was yelling, but actually pulling in some of this other tender side, which is the side that is. Like centered and, um, and also caring and act acting from both this balance.

And I often think of [00:07:00] balance is more as a verb than a noun, right? Like it's your, if you've got a lot of yang, you need to add a little yang, if you got a lot of yang, you need to add , a little bit of yin and that it's constantly going back and forth. And I think Kristin talks a little bit about that in the episode as well.

Jill Stoddard: yeah, she does talk quite a bit about it. So this I think is really helpful to have this scaffolding and understand where those terms are coming from and, and how listeners can think about them as they're listening to this episode today.

Diana Hill: So it's a real treat to have Dr. Kristin Neff on the show today. Many of our listeners have heard us talk about Dr. Neff's, next work, as well as probably studied it on our own in the area of self-compassion. She is currently an associate professor of educational psychology at the university of Texas at Austin.

And she's a real pioneer in the field of self-compassion research, conducting the first empirical studies on self-compassion almost 20 years ago. She's the author of the book. Self-compassion the [00:08:00] proven power of being kind to yourself in conjunction with her colleague, Dr. Chris Germer, we've had on the show in the past, and she's developed an empirically supported training program called mindful self-compassion, which is taught by thousands of teachers worldwide. They coauthored the mindful self-compassion workbook and teaching the mindful self-compassion program, a guide for professionals. And today we're going to talk about her newest work, which focuses on how to balance self-acceptance with the courage to make needed.

Change is such timely work and it's called fierce. Self-compassion how women can harness kindness to speak up, claim their power and thrive. It's a real honor and delight to have you on welcome. Hm.

Kristin Neff: Oh, thanks, Diana. I'm happy to be here. Yeah. Thanks for having me.

Diana Hill: Yeah. And you know, fierce compassion is aimed particularly at women and focuses on the importance of taking courageous action to alleviate suffering. And in the book you write about why it's important that we both tenderly [00:09:00] accept ourselves while also needing to be fierce. And I'm wondering if we could start with this, what you describe as the yin and the yang of compassion.

Kristin Neff: Right. Yeah. And by the way, I didn't come up with this idea. The idea of fierce compassion is something that's been talked about in Buddhism. Um, but not so much necessarily fear, self compassion.

So that's maybe the little twist I put on it, but, um, certainly in Buddhist thought, there's been a lot of dialogue about the fact that compassion isn't just acceptance.

I mean, it is acceptance, especially acceptance of people, human beings is flawed and they make mistakes and they're still worthy of kindness and care, but that doesn't mean our actions are acceptable. Right? Apparently there's a story that someone asks, um, the Dalai Lama. What do you do about child pedophiles, who was giving a talk on compassion?

And he said, What do you mean? What do you do you feel when jail and you throw away the key? You know, just because the person is worthy of compassion doesn't mean we can't, we don't need to stand up to their actions. [00:10:00] So, um, and I'd always been very fascinated by the idea of fierce compassion in my, in my Buddhist practice.

And then what happened is, you know, over the years doing research on self-compassion, I realized that most people tend to think of self-compassion in terms of its tender side. So the way I define tender self-compassion, this is, or the nurturing, gentle, accepting energy of self-compassion. Has the ability to kind of accept ourselves, even if maybe we don't accept our behavior to unconditionally support ourselves, it's warmth, it's kindness and about soothing and comforting.

Um, but you know, self-compassion, isn't always gentle sometimes for instance, I see the me too movements and the black lives matter movement as self-compassion movements, right? Sometimes self-compassion means standing up saying, no, you're treating me unfairly or drawing boundaries and protecting yourself.

And that's a really important part of self-compassion. Sometimes [00:11:00] it means, you know, getting angry if someone's harming you in some way saying, you know, that's not okay. And really drawing on that fierce energy or providing for ourselves, you know, especially women we're. So socialized, always meet others' needs.

Sometimes self-compassion means I need to meet my needs to, I need to actually do something I need to act. I need to change something so that I can be fulfilled. And then probably the biggest one, the biggest misconception is around motivation. You know, people think self-compassion means just again, accepting ourselves.

It does, but they also again think is accepting our behavior. In fact what the research shows overwhelmingly is that self-compassion is a motivator. Self-compassion prompts us to do things differently when we want to improve, or we're doing we're engaged in behavior that's unhealthy or the desire to meet our goals.

Uh, so I decided I wanted to write a book on this, action oriented side of self-compassion and I, and I like to call it the yin and [00:12:00] yang of self-compassion because, um, unfortunately people tend to think of these energies, the nurturing and the kind of agentic energies as masculine and feminine.

and I liked the terms of union yang because it captures the same thing without necessarily tying it to gender. Right. Yan is more of the accepting, nurturing side of life. yang's one of the powerful action oriented side of life. And the reason it's so important not to define it by gender. And also why I wrote this book for women. Is because, uh, so society actually genders these things, right? Society doesn't allow men to be tender. I mean, they get called name. They can names get called sissies. And this really harms men, men are cut off from a lot of their emotional intelligence because of the fact that they aren't allowed to be nurturing and tender as children.

And that, that really harms men, but women on the other hand are socialized the other way. They aren't allowed to be fierce. They aren't allowed to get angry. You know, people don't like powerful, [00:13:00] competent woman as evidenced by, you know, why we still won't have a female president. You know, there's a lot of, um, gender bias against showing this fierce, powerful side.

If you're a woman and women can feel uncomfortable, getting angry, partly because people don't like them when they're that way. And partly as a result of the me too movement when I really thought, yeah, okay, this is what's happening. My sisters were rising up when we're saying no more, you know, we aren't going to take it anymore.

And they realized that a book aimed, particularly at woman could be really helpful at this moment in history to really help us counter the gender role socialization that is suppressed our power, at least try to, you know, and it's not working anymore and I'm not going to stand for it. No one else does either.

Diana Hill: In the book, you start with talking about, uh, gender roles, but you can't really talk about sexism without talking about racism, right. And sort of the intersectionality there and how the feminist movement has actually played a [00:14:00] role in racism and oppression. So I'm curious your thoughts on fierce compassion when it comes to women of color and to changing, you know, more than just, you know, women's rights movements, but also in terms of other forms of oppression,

Kristin Neff: Absolutely. So that's why I'm so excited about fear, self, and fierce compassion, because. You know, some people have kind of criticized. I don't think it's really fair personally, but criticize the mindfulness movement for being too much about sitting on your couch and attaining happiness and wellbeing, but not changing broken social systems.

And there are a lot of our social systems are broken. They've always been broken. We're just paying more attention to it. You know, systemic racism, wealth inequality, global warming, right? So it's not enough just to focus inward in terms of healing and growth. We need to also harness our energy to alleviate suffering by changing the external world, things that are wrong with the world.

And this is where fierce compassion and [00:15:00] self-compassion, and by the way, in some ways there's no difference because even if I'm not a person of color, When there's racial oppression, that also harms me. So in some ways, this whole idea of self and others is kind of an illusion. We're all part of the same system.

And therefore we need to alleviate harm no matter who is being harmed. Right? So any form of oppression, whether it's based on sexual, um, sexual orientation or gender identity or race or class or religion, or, you know, any, any form of oppression harms us all. And so I really think that being able to tap into the power.

A fierce compassion and it is powerful. It is a powerful energy. You know, I talk about Kali in many ways as being the symbol of this fierce compassion or Durga, a lot of these, uh, Hindu goddesses, which are very, very fierce and what they do at Kali. She's got severed heads in her hand and it seems so horrible, but what [00:16:00] she symbolizes is, um, the destruction of the illusion of separation. That's what she's focused on. And so when you use this powerful energy to cut away the illusion of separation, you know, the illusions and, um, wrong headedness, it leads to things like systemic oppression. Then that's actually a good thing. And, uh, so I really think that this is something we need to harness, but we always need both.

We always need both. So for instance, just look at oppression. If so, I'm kind of both. Oppressed and the oppressor, right? So I'm a woman. So I've got experience being part of an oppressed class and I'm a white person. So I've experienced being part of a privileged class. You know, I've got other identities as well, but we need both fierce and tender compassion and both inward and outward.

So, um, in terms of being part of an oppressed group, you need a lot of tender compassion to hold the pain of it, you know, and this is, this pain is generational, right? It goes way back. So to be able to [00:17:00] open, we don't want to just get angry about it as a way of covering up the pain. We also want to make sure we do what we can to heal from some of the pain of this.

This is where the tender self-compassion comes in. But we also want to do something about it, right? Fight. So be brave, stand up, you know, sometimes even risk people, not liking us. People give us a lot of blow back when we stand

up to an entrenched power structure. So we need that bravery, the strength to commit, to making things different.

Um, and then as part of a group, that's, you know, historically oppressed others, again, you need that tender self-compassion to hold the shame of it. Right? Why, why do people not like to acknowledge that they're part of the problem because it hurts. It's shameful, you know, it's painful. So you need the tender self-compassion to open to the pain of that.

And again, you need the fear self-compassion to commit to doing something about it. So, and this is again, not only internally in terms of changing yourself, but also changing externally. So I am really [00:18:00] hoping, you know, we'll see, but I'm hoping this will make a small contribution to the work being done in the world because it's, cause again, this isn't just ideas.

These are tools. These are practices. This is something you can do. They actually strengthen these skills. It's a skillset fierce and tender self-compassion.

Diana Hill: Well, there's certainly a fierceness to you. And I feel like there's a, um, there's something that happens. I think as women get into their fierceness where there's this strength that shows up and thinking about Kali and Durga, when I was in graduate school, that was probably one of the first times that I really made contact with my fierce compassion.

I actually withdrew from graduate school and went to a yoga program. Cause the GRA cause I was in a unhealthy place and I was given a mantra to Durga. And what's interesting about Durga is she's this Hindu goddess that sits upon a lion. She's a mother energy, she's a goddess mother goddess and she has eight arms.

And in those arms she holds weapons. Okay. But what's interesting about these [00:19:00] weapons. There are things like a shield and an arrow and a sword, but the sword it's for intelligence, right? And the, and she holds a conch shell, which is used to make a sound like the primordial sound of using your voice.

Right? So this combination of mother energy and fierceness, which not only is in Hindu mythology, the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet she's also another really interesting one that is about fierce, um, fierce motherhood. My name Diana is after the Roman goddess of the hunt. She's the the Huntress, but also is the, um, the, protector during chow

Kristin Neff: It's a feminine energy. That's the interesting thing,

even though women are socialized not to have it. So you might say we're socialized away from our authentic selves.

Or the metaphor I use in my book is mama bear, which is something that is in every, almost every culture. You know, it doesn't have to be Hindu goddesses. And that's why I like it because it's actually a feminine energy. A woman have access to it, especially [00:20:00] with regard to protecting their children or protecting their loved ones.

You know? So that's why, so, so you might say of tender self-compassion is like mother metaphorically. Fear self-compassion is like mama bear. And so we have

it inside of us, And so the whole idea is we just need to make that U-turn and tap into this energy to help ourselves as well as others.

Diana Hill: we have it inside of us, but we're also afraid of it. And I had this combination.

And other people are afraid of it. And I had this conversation with women. I had, um, women over while our boys were all playing and we, I was reading your book and I'm like, help me out. We got to talk about, um, this, this concept of anger. And I want to read some of the things that the women that I, these women, mothers, all, you know, pretty much in their forties, diverse backgrounds, uh, talked about in terms of their experience of anger. So one woman said it's a full body experience and I want to do damage. I want to physically hurt another person.

When I get angry, another woman, said, anger looks really ugly. And I [00:21:00] feel shame after another woman said, I have a hard time getting in touch with my anger. And I've probably only felt anger once in the past decade. And I wonder what it's disguised as,

and then another woman said it takes a lot for me to get angry.

But when I do, I go into full rage, I'm furious. So I'd love to talk a little bit about women and anger, our messaging around anger and, and also how we can reclaim our anger in a way that is compassionate and actually an agent for change.

Kristin Neff: Yeah. Yeah. So a lot of my, the book is about, you know, my struggles with anger. I don't, I, I'm not like an anger management expert. I'm not writing the book as someone who's like, figured it out. You know, I'm actually, you know, very honest in the book. This is something I struggle with. I am more yang than yin.

Um, I access my anger pretty easily, but sometimes it's not balanced enough. And, you know, as a mindfulness teacher, as always kind of like, okay, I need to use my mindfulness to work with my anger and, [00:22:00] you know, want to, uh, it was kinda more of a make space for my anger. I didn't judge my anger, but I didn't honor my anger either.

And it was when I was working, I was working with anger and I was doing work with some of the archetypes and I realized. Th this part of me, this is my power source. You know, this is what has allowed me largely to accomplish a lot of the things I've accomplished in my life. It's a good thing. That doesn't mean that you want to, you know, harm people with that.

Absolutely not. But the energy itself is a positive, productive force of life. And so I actually bought a picture of Kali and I put her over my meditation cushion and like started thanking her. I'm really appreciating that energy. And I think women don't usually they don't have a healthy relationship with anger because from the time we're literally, we're, we're told it's ugly.

You know, when you're angry, uh, we're also told us abnormal for girls to be angry when boys and girls [00:23:00] are upset with the research shows is mothers interpret their boys upset, And this is anger and that's okay. Men or boys

are allowed to be angry, but girls are it's interpreted as sadness is like invalidated.

They aren't allowed to be angry. So it's not reflected back to us. So very early on, we start to think, okay, I'm not supposed to be angry. I'm ugly when I'm angry. People don't like it when I'm angry. So either we press it. A lot of people repressed our anger, which is not helping. And sometimes it comes out like a self-criticism like internalized anger.

It's actually not good, not to be at all in touch to their anger or what happens is people don't identify as being angry and they bottle it up and they bottle it up. And then when they really get angry, they just explode. Right. It's just like so extreme. And then they feel guilty and chain instead of, you know, what we really need to do.

And again, not that it's easy to do. I'm not pretending it's easy, but what we need to aim for is harnessing our anger for good. [00:24:00] Right? So anger can be constructive. It gives you focus. It allows you to be brave. It suppresses the fear response. It energizes you. If it's focused on alleviating suffering If you look at the black lives matter movement started by a woman, you know, or the me too movement. We should be angry. You know, th these are these behaviors, racism, sexual harassment, sexual assault. It is not okay. And we need the power of our anger to stand up to it, but we need to make sure that was focused on alleviating suffering, which means focusing on the behavior, not tolerating the behavior as opposed to harming people, right?

Cause if you start getting hostile people and harming people with the anger, then it's no longer in the service of alleviating suffering. And so that's really the dividing line. And again, it's, it's easy to forget. It's easy to get knocked off balance. But it's possible to do it songs. That's clear your criteria.

This is causing suffering, or is this alleviating suffering, and this is a [00:25:00] very powerful tool for alleviating suffering, energizing you, making you brave when it's properly aimed. Um, but you, you gotta work with it. And here's the thing. People won't like it, people we think about who benefits from the system where women are nice.

They're self-sacrificing they do what other people want. They aren't, they don't want too much of themselves. They don't stand up for themselves that really serves patriarchy. Doesn't it? And it's like, if we don't want the system anymore, that means we're going to have to be willing. To have people, you know, some people will respect it. Some people may not like it as much. And that's the thing with self-compassion is you, aren't so dependent on other people liking you to get your sense of self-worth, you know, you can be more self-sufficient.

So it it's, it's pretty radical. It really is, you know?

Diana Hill: in fierce compassion, you share a lot about your personal history, [00:26:00] a lot, everything from, you know, picking up where you left off and talking about compassion and how in your first, you know, your first marriage, how that led you to self-compassion.

But, But, you go deeper in talking about your experience of, of being a mom to Rowan, who is a child with autism, to, uh, your experiences at work and, uh, seeking promotions in the academia to your experience as a single woman. And finding self, self love, and really seeing that your, your wholeness and happiness doesn't depend on a man

Kristin Neff: and also the sex predator.
who

was really ration. Yeah, no, I do. I, so I I'm really personal. My first book was the same way. I've gotten so much feedback from, from people saying that's what made my books so valuable that it's not like I'm this guru telling people, you know, what the right thing to do that, but sharing my story, it really allowed them to go deeper into it. So

I, I wanted [00:27:00] to make sure that I was equally vulnerable in my second book. It's just kind of who I am. Um, but yeah, so I I lay it all out there. Thank God. I'm a self-compassion teacher, not a mindfulness teacher. I like to joke.

Diana Hill: In some ways, that's the end of compassion, right. Of that vulnerable. I mean, if you talk about Durga again, she has a barefoot that she puts out, you know, on, on her, on her lion, there's this barefoot facing forward. And there's this vulnerability to you with also this fierceness.

And I'm curious about how, you know, if we take, for example, the workplace, because actually in an academia and one of the places where you was very dominated by men, uh, white men in particular, uh, being a fierce woman in the workplace, I imagine you've gotten a lot of pushback in that. And then also you've talked about your own self as having some bulldog energy that you've had

Kristin Neff: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Right. And yeah, so it's not, it's not. Hmm. How do I put this? So I can see myself clearly in, sometimes it is [00:28:00] out of line. I'm not going to pretend it's not right. So I tend to be a little reactive by nature is partly why I have a mindfulness practice. I'm just wired that way that Chris grimmer, Mike, good call.

Like he just says, Christian, you're just wired. That way is whatever my physiology. Um, and I haven't mastered it. I've got, I can work with it. I can apologize. You know, it's like it's workable, but it's still there
Um,

Diana Hill: and he's, so yin,

Kristin Neff: I'm more yang than yin and he's too yang,
we're both, both, but, you

know? Yeah. And so it has gotten me in trouble, but it's, for instance, I know that people, if I had been a man, they wouldn't have reacted so negatively to me being really first, since I can be really blunt, especially if I give my opinion on, you know, someone says something that I think doesn't make sense in academic argument.

I'll just say it, the men did that. People didn't even think about it, but a woman it's like, oh, that was blunt. You know, and these are all these unconscious biases really affect people's perceptions. and so, and that's why, again, you [00:29:00]

need both sides of self-compassion because I it'd be nice if people like me, but I don't need them to like me, you know, I wanna, I wanted to do what's right. I want to help people. You know, my whole life is devoted to helping people. It's not like I don't care about other people. But that's the freedom it gives you is you aren't so dependent on what other people think of you, which is, which is really a freedom. So I'm not. So I can be very, very authentic. And again, sometimes maybe I could be a little more politic or a little more polite and something, I still work on, you know, I like every day I commit to trying to make sure my actions don't harm other people.

So you work with it. So again, I used to kind of have a little bit of shame around this, especially because you hear I'm a mindfulness and compassion teacher, but this is, this is a revelation that led me to write this book is that first of all, it's bigger than me. It's really not about me. I mean, I'm serious.

[00:30:00] Every woman, I talk to feel something shifting there's something, shifting it. My friend would say the trans personal level. It's like something in the air. You know, the me too movement, just things are, women are at a different place in

Diana Hill: well, we have a woman of color as a vice president. I mean, something's shifting,

Kristin Neff: I'm being shifted

Diana Hill: not enough, but something is shifting. Yeah.

Kristin Neff: things, but also, but even I think there's just something, I think every woman I talk to can just feel it. It's almost like we're in, we're ready for something different. I it's happening already. And this is Olympic. Part of the more women are able to claim that mama bear, which is again, that Kali, that Durga, which are actually feminine energies, which scare the bejesus out of us and scare the bejesus out of other people. But it's in us. And I really think women have access to this in a way that if we really work with it, who knows what will happen. And, you know, and again, we [00:31:00] need to harness it, harness kindness. We don't want to just let it run rampant, you know, and unfocused. That's why, if it, if it comes to the place of compassion, that's why I think this is so cool.

The idea of fear self-compassion because it is a face of love. It is a face of kindness. And that follows in the footsteps of the great social justice leaders like Gandhi or Martin, the king that used love as the power, their social justice movements. And then this is really where the harnessing of fierceness for compassion leads to. So it's not even a new idea, you know, it was just kind of repackaged a little bit,

Diana Hill: Yeah. Well, I think that, you know, for women that are mothers, they probably can relate to that, that fierceness of protection. That really, what is the function of anger is to protect. And I remember when I was studying DBT a long time ago and learned, we learn about the different functions of anger and dialectical behavior therapy.

And, and there was always [00:32:00] this, you know, what Marsha Linehan would teach is that, you know, anger is there to protect, but also there's a time to gently avoid. And, and that there's this balance of knowing the wisdom to know

the difference right. Of when to show up as a strong protector and then also when to gently avoid to protect yourself as well.

Kristin Neff: Yeah.

and it's awesome. Matter of balance. And then, so some of my practices, I don't know if you did them when reading the book, but are actually about help allowing the energies to merge and integrate, which is kind of difficult because they feel really different. But like if you open to it and my personal practice, I've found that if I intentionally say, allow my fierceness and tender, please, no, please allow my fierceness and tenderness to merge it, integrate it almost like you got to ask for it. You almost have to give it permission. It's strange. I mean, this is going to start sounding Moomoo, but in a way, it doesn't operate at the level of logical thinking, right. It happens at the energetic level. Uh, and the more we do [00:33:00] that and then I call it carrying force. In the book, you know, which is really the yin and the yang integrated.

And ultimately they need to be integrated. That's where we're headed.

Sometimes we need to go left. Sometimes we need to go, right. And they're both tools and we need to know when to use them. and so really I don't have all the answers, my ideas, here's some tools that I think are really useful. And then what you need to ask yourself is what do I need in this moment?

And, but really ask it honestly, and authentically, sometimes you need fierceness. Sometimes you need tenderness, but if you don't even know it as a possibility, how are you getting, be able to use it, to help yourself?

Diana Hill: I'd love to back to, um, the meeting to movement and gosh, the conversations that came up around that time with both my clients and my friends, and it just was this outpouring of oh wow. You know, much most women have,

Kristin Neff: Almost every [00:34:00] woman you talked to with my story that I tell in there, it's not unusual. You would think it would be, but it's not,

Diana Hill: How would you use fierce compassion and this union of compassion to respond either in the moment, if you can, in the moment or after the fact

Kristin Neff: Well, yeah. So, so that's what happened with me. The story share, there was someone, you know, who was someone I knew. And I had supported who turned out to be abusing women who worked with them, including a yang woman who was very close to us, kind of like a. She's almost like a daughter to me, you know, it was really close.

I knew her from very yang and I was just, I was enraged. I access Kali like that, but, you know, interesting, like unpacking it as unraveled all of the different woman's reactions. And to first of all, first of all, why didn't I see it earlier?

Because in some ways it was, my yin was too powerful. He was a great guy. He did a lot of great work in the autism world. People don't want to see what they don't want to [00:35:00] see, you know? And, uh, and th the whole thing with women is like, yeah,

he's a bit of a latch, but that's just the way men are. I mean, think about how much we've excused in the past for that's just the way men are, you know, you just don't, you just kind of avoid him.

You don't really, you don't confront it instead of saying, Hey, this isn't right. You know, that's that, okay. That that's the way that men are. They shouldn't be that way that's our socialization that we need to question and we need to say, I'm not going to, I'm not going to buy into it.

You know? I think it's my personal feeling is I know I'm not waiting for men to come around. I hope they do. I'll do everything I can raising my son and all that. And I think men need to change, but I'm not going to wait for it to happen. You know, I'm going to say, I'm sorry. That was not acceptable. If behavior is unacceptable.

And I think as women, we have to do that in addition to everything else. And part of that is by owning our fierceness. And it [00:36:00] is, it is kind of a political act. We're saying, I'm sorry, we aren't going to do it anymore. No, is like the collective woman's no, Nope. That's no more than that. No. You know, and we can say that we have to be willing to say that.

Diana Hill: You talk about in the book, sort of this bind that women are in, in terms of likeability and competency

and that, and I, and I found this even just with myself in terms of, as I'm moving out, into promoting a book or growing my career in different ways, how, as soon as I start to step into more competency or self-promotion type of roles, how that's looked upon, like as a negative thing.

And then I need to backtrack a little bit and be like, don't be so big. You know, don't put yourself out there so much to be likable and that it really prevents women from being able to pursue what they care about in some ways, because if they're, if they're, if they're too [00:37:00] competent, they're not going to be liked.

Kristin Neff: Yeah, it is. It's horrific. If you look at the research literature and this all unconscious P if you ask people who's more competent men or woman people nowadays actually saying women are a little more competent, but unconsciously, they tend to assume that women are less competent. And if it's very clear that she's competent, they tend to like her less.

And so One of the ways to do that is to, um, if you balance the competence with the tenderness, if you balancing in and yang, the fierceness and the tenderness, and you actually spend intentional time and energy displaying, nurturing quality, it tends to mitigate that the dislike, but, you know, I suppose.

You know, cause I've, I've suffered from that. And people like at my work that it was too self promoting. Cause they didn't like how successful I was and kind of, you know, and part of me is like, well, how dependent are you going to be on other people liking [00:38:00] you? It's not like you don't, you can't care about it all. But again, you know, what are you going to choose at the end of the day? Authenticity, are you going to be so dependent on people liking you and you know, whose opinion you you're good friends with people who really know you and love, you will like you, you know, hopefully you can find a partner who loves you for who you are.

And a lot of us value choice. But also we got to start supporting each other because women are the worst women are especially likely to dislike competent

women, even more so than men. And so that's why, in some ways the conversation is with women, we need to see what's happening. We need to call attention to it.

It's not just the men, you know, women. We, we, we need to look clearly at how we participate in the system. And the only people we can really change is ourselves. And of course, we try to do what we can in the world, but there are some things you have to give up, you know, but for [00:39:00] me, that's what self-compassion gives you your sense of self-worth.

This is we've shown this in the research. Your sense of self-worth is less contingent. On popularity on other people liking you and that's freedom. That's allows you to be a strong, powerful, authentic person doing what makes you happy in life?

Diana Hill: One of the conversations that I was having with one of my co-hosts Jala Schonbrunn she's, she's actually interviewing Angela Duckworth this week. Who is, uh,

yeah. So who's one of the main researchers in the area of grit. And we were like, I wonder what Kristin and Angela would have to say about this. And then, and then I kept on reading your book and I'm like, oh, Kristin talks about how she's a friend with Angela.

Kristin Neff: Angela thinks self-compassion is probably one of the most important traits to develop grit. because what is it that gives you the strength to keep going, even when things are difficult, self-compassion you know, that there are the things as well. It's not the only thing, but it's an [00:40:00] important ingredient.

Diana Hill: And maybe we should pause here and define self-compassion because we've been talking about it this

whole,

this whole

time that we need to rewind and say, like, what is self-compassion what, what is your definition through research

Kristin Neff: Well, so the easy definition is compassionate in general is concerned with the alleviation of suffering. So self-compassion is that concern turned inward, treating yourself like you'd treat a good friend or a loved one when they were struggling or suffering in some way, but it has three components.

Uh, mindfulness is actually the foundation of self-compassion because you, first of all, you need to be aware. Of your suffering, you know, and this can be big suffering or little suffering, anything in between. You need to be aware of it. So like, if a friend keeps on calling you up saying, Hey, I need to talk.

I'm having a hard time that I'm too busy. You blow off your friend, you can't give your friend compassion. So the first thing is awareness. Um, and you need to, uh, kind of to be able to validate that this is hard for yourself. If you just shove it down and stuff it down and not complain, you're not going to be able to [00:41:00] give yourself compassion.

On the other hand, mindfulness has some perspective and balance built into it. Some equanimity built into it. So if you're like you're lost or fuse with your suffering, you know, this is like you're lost in the storyline or the drama. Then there's no space to step out. If yourself would say, wow, you're having a hard time.

Can I help? So we need this kind of perspective and spaciousness and awareness that mindfulness provides kind of as the foundational step. And then again, we need to respond with kindness, support, warmth care. What can I do to help again, this, this motivation to help in some way, and then really important. Uh, what makes it compassion and not pity? It's a sense of interconnectedness, right? The word compassion and Latin to suffer with as an inherent sense of, Hey, I've been there. If I have compassion for someone else and with ourselves, it's like, yeah. Other people have been here too. It's not just me. I don't feel isolated.

It's not feeling sorry for myself. It's just recognizing yeah. Failure, mistakes struggled. [00:42:00] This is part of the human condition. I don't feel so alone in this. And so in my model and my measurement as well, all three components are in there. and yeah, so the research is just phenomenal in terms of, it provides better mental health, less negative mind states like depression, anxiety, stress, uh, suicidal ideation, uh, more happiness, uh, hope life satisfaction.

It increases motivation. It helps with body image. It increases physical health because mind, body connection. The research shows that it's a, it's a powerful strength and source of emotional resilience is kind of like a type of coping emotional regulation.

Diana Hill: and it seems that, you know, so the research on self-compassion has been really style rocketing over the last few decades, really originating with you. I mean, you're the pioneer in this, but there's also, um, you know, I, I've gotten really interested in compassion focused therapy, Paul Gilbert's work, and we've had him on the show a couple of times.

And

his his approach is about the flow of compassion. So not just [00:43:00] compassion for yourself, but your ability to receive compassion from others and your ability to give compassion. And it seems that the research has also really pointing to these different components of compassion feed, and are intertwined with each other, that when we're compassionate towards ourselves, we can also be more compassionate towards others and vice versa.

That having compassion for others can feed into self compassion. In your book, you write about how self-compassionate in particular is really difficult,

Kristin Neff: right. So, so if you just look at the plain old correlation is actually not that high between self-compassion and compassion for others. And that's completely explained by the fact that people who are there's a lot of people who are really hard on themselves, who are very compassionate to others.

So they don't necessarily go hand in hand. But what the research shows is, the more you give yourself compassion, it does increase compassion for others, not

a lot just because people are almost at ceiling. People are so compassionate to others. It's not as much room to grow. And it also [00:44:00] really helps burnout. So it reduces what they call compassion, fatigue or caregiver fatigue. So it allows you to sustain giving compassion for others. Yeah. And I think Paul's Paul's approach is definitely right. I mean, in my, I mainly focused on self compassion just because that's been my interest and it is the hardest of them.

Not just, not just the west and the east as well in China, for instance, self-compassion training is really big because in China they're taught to criticize themselves Confucian approaches. So, so it depends on what Eastern country you're talking about but it's definitely not just a Western problem.

Um, Buddhist and Buddhist countries where they really practice Buddhism. It's less of a problem because the idea of self and other interconnection is more prevalent. Um, but in places like China or Taiwan, it's actually, uh, we've we found that

Thailand had the highest levels of self-compassion Taiwan had the lowest levels and the United States was in between.

So you have to be a little nuanced. I'm talking about east [00:45:00] and west.

Diana Hill: Yeah. Yeah. So one of the areas that you talk about later on in the book is around relationships and in particular women and relationships, and you've had a, you've had a ride, you've had a ride of it. And, uh, and I'm sure that that ride has really informed you in terms of your perspective on women, in relationships and compassion.

Self-compassion can you

Kristin Neff: Yeah, Yeah, no. So that's um, so my, my second marriage didn't work out and yeah, so I'm, uh, currently single and, um, and a lot of my friends are in a similar position, you know, they, we, they were married and had kids and they're divorced and, um, you know, it was hard to find a relationship with someone who can, yeah, it's just hard to find a relationship with someone who's available.

Who's emotionally mature. Who's, you know, has done their work. Who's aware I'm certainly not alone in this. and but what I really. [00:46:00] Started to see you as, um, there was still kind of the desire to find someone model I'm still like open to finding someone. It's not like I've given up on finding someone, but what I really started to see was it at a very deep, unconscious level. My sense of being a valuable woman was predicated on having a man in my life. Right. Because it's, it's so entrenched this idea of the spinster, so, and who doesn't, I mean, P O all the women are you dating someone, you know, so excited about who you're seeing, what's he like? And so much of that is built into what, what makes us valuable as a woman?

man.

They may want a relationship, but they don't need one. It's not like built into their DNA. Like somehow their worthiness is dependent. And having a partner the way it is for women.

Diana Hill: And this starts super early. I mean, I

work with 20 and 30 year olds that are having their they're feeling so much stress [00:47:00] around finding a man. If there are heterosexual women or finding a relationship by a certain age that this is some way going to determine their success as a human.

Kristin Neff: And so that's really, one of my practices led me, like, I'm not buying it anymore because I've really? um, come to see that. Completeness is not come from a man, you know? That's not where whole this comes from. Wholeness comes from within. And of course, when you go inward outward to the big interconnection, you know, wholeness comes from being part of life. And that's the spiritual part of self-compassion comes in. Wholeness comes from having an open heart wholeness, realizing that we're part of something much larger than ourselves and our value.

Isn't determined by a person saying, I love you. I can, you are so special because that's fragile. I mean, it lasts for a while. So some people are lucky and God bless them in this wonderful that happens. Some people are lucky enough to find a partner [00:48:00] and it lasted a whole lives, the happy relationships, but that's not the majority.

Right. And so do we really want our happiness to depend on that? You know, or do we find our happiness elsewhere? And then, you know, it's not like instead of relationship, then if we do have a relationship, then we'll just have that much more to give in the relationship.

It's been a

hard one for me, but I'm really, I'm not going to honestly say I'm single.

I would love relationship if it happens, but my happiness isn't dependent on it. And that I couldn't have even said that maybe in five years ago. So I'm really proud of myself. It's freedom. It's real freedom.

Diana Hill: I think a lot of people will just really resonate with that and feel an exhale and hearing that. And I think about there's a concept that I'm thinking more and more and writing more on about is in striving and how we get caught up in our striving, whether it's striving for an achievement goal or striving for a career goal or striving to have a child or striving to be in a [00:49:00] relationship or striving for all these things that are outside of ourselves.

And, and it leads us into these, these cycles of, uh, disenchantment dissatisfaction

and that ultimately there's a different type of striving that you're talking about here with there's compassion. You're talking about striving towards values or striving towards like a greater good or, or striving something bigger. I've gotten really interested in how does shift our striving into a more values oriented, um, compassion based. Less competitive more, collaborative interconnectedness

Kristin Neff: sometimes it can get off out of balance.

So you need too much, you know, without enough yang can be complacency too yang without a human could be striving. And instead of really talk about how to bring balance,

hi, this is Diana here, and I have some upcoming events that you might be interested in at inside LA. I'm going to be offering a series of courses on act and really it's for the general public and practitioners that are interested in deepening [00:50:00] their practice of act in their life.

On Sunday, June 27th, from three 30 to 5:00 PM. I'm going to be exploring acceptance. And on Sunday, August 29th, I'm going to be exploring values, rich living. So I hope that you can meet me there. And for parents and educators, I have two webinars coming up with Julie Bogart.

One is on psychological flexibility and parenting, and the other is on compassion in parenting. You can find out all my events at [Dr. Diana Hill.com/events](http://Dr.DianaHill.com/events).

Kristin Neff: So in writing this book, I mean, I've really felt like it's bigger than me, you know, it's not, I don't always feel like it's not me. Kristin Neff, writing the book, making, you know, the series. It's kind of like when you, when you, when you find it, when you, I mean, very, very fortunate to have a cause, so to speak, I've got a purpose in life, which is to spread the word of self-compassion and to help people through it.

And when you have that, not that, I mean, it might, you [00:51:00] go get some the way and I've got an ego and I have to watch it and all of that and prick it and all those things. It's not like I don't have an ego, but it's really, it's not about me, you know? And that, and that again, that is the freedom of self-compassion it actually, it really makes the self part of self-compassion not even really there. It's about helping about being part of something larger than yourself being part of this great unfolding of whatever is unfolding. Uh, and to do that. you don't need a partner. You don't need people to like you to think you're nice. Um, you know, you didn't, you need relationships to function and obviously you want relationships and E you know, you want to have healthy, loving relationships.

Of course you do, but it gives you freedom not to be so dependent on those things.

Diana Hill: As you're talking about that, I'm thinking about the concept of choice, because I actually [00:52:00] like to choose niceness. Sometimes, but it's not chosen for me because I'm under the control. I'm not under the contingency of niceness to get what I need in the world, but it's more about

Kristin Neff: Manipulative. Yeah.

Diana Hill: But it's more about choosing nicest because I want to be nice here. Like I actually want to be loving or kind, or there's a sweetness that sometimes I want to step into and that that's, but it's not a manipulative sweetness.

Kristin Neff: It's a natural progression. Yeah. That's right,

Diana Hill: Natural expression

Kristin Neff: I'm actually am amazing, really bulldog, but I'm actually quite sweet and generous context, you know, it's like, I'm kind of talking from my fear side, but Yeah.

I'm also very, very tender as well.

Diana Hill: Yeah.

Kristin Neff: loving, very affectionate. Um, and, and that's the thing is allowing each side to be, they're not prioritizing one side of us over another because people want us to be that way, you know, but again, I'm a little more yang than, and so for me, it's, it's all about balance and sometimes I need to balance more the other side.

I think everyone's different again, sometimes you [00:53:00] need to go less. Sometimes you need to go, right?

Diana Hill: And it's contextual in some context, I'm very yang and then other contexts I'm very yen and it depends on the

Kristin Neff: Like with my son. I'm very, you know what I mean?

Diana Hill: yeah.

Kristin Neff: Except if anyone threatens my son, then talk about mama bear. Right. And so, but that's wonderful. We should be celebrating this. And, and so this is why I think my, my book is written for women in particular, just because of all the gender roles, socialization that tells us that this half of the insides. Great. Wonderful. But they onside, I don't know if I like it that much. It's like, oh yeah. Well, don't care if you don't like it. This is who I am.

Diana Hill: Oh yeah, no, I like my yang she's she's emerging. As I, as I emerged into my more fully into my forties, my hair cut here. She cons my Huntress. Yeah.

Kristin Neff: past menopause, then it's really the time when it can just come forward, you know? It's great.

Jill Stoddard: We've had a number of guests who want to offer you our listeners discounted access to some of their [00:54:00] fantastic programs. So if you want to learn powerful practices for happiness, calm, and wellbeing, we have several offerings from Rick Hanson. If you want app based behavior change, you can check out Judd brewers apps for anxiety eating well and smoking cessation. Or you can learn how to be a calmer parent with mindful mama mentor hunter Clark fields. So go to our website off the clock, psych.com and visit our offers page where you will find access to free courses and discount promo codes.

Diana Hill: Okay. So we have to talk about compassionate mess, which is how your last chapter is basically, a compassionate mess. Uh, so can you describe what you mean by that?

Kristin Neff: Yeah. Yeah. So this is actually a quote that Chris and I, like, I think broad down was the one who said it, but I just love it, which is the goal of practice is simply to become a compassionate mess. Right. So what does that mean? That your goal isn't to be perfect, your goal isn't to get it [00:55:00] right.

You know, your goal is simply to bring compassion to whatever's arising in the moment, whether you get it wrong or right. You know, and, and that is an achievable goal. So I, again, I'm still a mess. I still get it wrong. You know, I tried it. Get it right. As much as I can, but I'd probably a little better than I used to be, but not a lot.

So whatever, but I am pretty good at bringing compassion almost immediately to whatever mess I'm in or whatever mess I've caused. Um, and so it's an achievable goal that you hold any mistakes you make, anytime you get it wrong, you know, it's not like you achieve balance and you stay balanced. It's like you achieve balance and then you fall off.

Your goal is just the process of bringing compassion to whatever happens. Um, and there can be a lot of satisfaction in opening your heart. You know, the goal is to get it right. The goal is to open your heart. And [00:56:00] once that's your goal, then this is an achievable goal.

Not every, Not every, moment,
but a lot of

Diana Hill: it's like tuning a guitar, you know, musician has to pick up the guitar and tune it. Over the course of their whole lives and to guitars, just get out of tune naturally by just sitting around. So

the process of compassion is the, or self-compassion is the, to, you know, noticing when we're out of tune and tuning back in.

And sometimes that you need to turn it right to fierce, or you need to turn it left to yet to more tender. But, you know, I was, I was thinking about last night, we, um, oftentimes right before bed is with two kind of elementary age kids before bed can be a stressful time. And, uh, my husband, I both raised our voices with our kids around the mess of our home.

It's Sunday night, we're stressed. Right. And, and then I climbed into bed with my little one and we were, we were reading and I, I read from them, read to them from techno Hans, some of his stories at night. My kids love him and his teachings. And one of the teachings in there [00:57:00] was, um, A child had asked him, how old are you?

And techno Han said, well, I'm
2,600

Diana Hill: years old. Cause I'm in the lineage of the Buddha and I'm 110 years old because I'm in the lineage of my father. And I'm six years old because I'm in the lineage of you talking to you right now. And I feel like that sort of the moment of like compassion is like, we're very yang and we're very old.

So you're very, you're very, you're very yang and you're very old crystal and your teachings.

Kristin Neff: Yeah.

behavior as well. So there's

Diana Hill: Yeah,

Kristin Neff: wise is what I'm saying with two year olds,

Diana Hill: yeah, exactly. And we're just continuations of all of it and that's, that's just being in process with it. So, well, I, um, you know, it's just been a, it's been

an honor to have you on today and to share some of your work with our listeners, but you know, the, the thread of Kristin Neff travels.

So for those that want to learn more about your offerings, uh, can you share with us how people can learn about you and what you're [00:58:00] offering?

Kristin Neff: Yes, the easiest way is just a Google self-compassion. My website is self-compassion dot org, but you spell it any way. You'll come to me and I've got, um, I've got guided practices, meditations. I have videos. I have a lot of information on self-compassion. You can take the self-compassion test to see if you, maybe this is something you want to work on on those research articles. If you're interested in that and the links to my books to buy. So that's probably the best place to start. And then also the center for mindful self-compassion, which is the nonprofit I started with Chris grimmer. That's really kind of the training wing of self-compassion where you can take courses online.

And there's just a lot available.

Diana Hill: Thank you for what you've dedicated your life and your career to a lot of fierceness too, and compassion. So thank you for writing this book and for who you are.

Kristin Neff: .

you. Thank you. Wonderful.

[00:59:00]**Diana Hill:** thank you for listening to psychologists off the clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patron.

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Kristin Neff: Was I too fierce for ya?

Diana Hill: No. I think it's good.