

Self-compassion in Autistic adults

Many Autistic people experience mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, trauma and low self-esteem. Social difficulties, rejection, stigma and lack of acceptance from others can contribute to these mental health problems. Self-compassion is a way to build self-acceptance and resilience and better manage the impact of these negative experiences.

Our purpose
a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

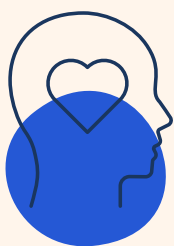
What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion involves treating yourself with kindness, care and understanding, especially during difficult times. Rather than reacting with harsh self-criticism when facing challenges or feeling inadequate, it means responding with warmth and acceptance. Importantly, self-compassion is a skill that can be developed and strengthened over time with consistent practise.

Self-compassion has three main components:



Mindfulness



Self-kindness



**Common
humanity**

Mindfulness is paying close attention to how you feel and what you think without being too hard on yourself. It means being aware of what you're doing, thinking and feeling right now, instead of getting caught up in the past or worrying about the future. It's tuning into your surroundings and your thoughts and feelings with a calm and open mind.

Self-kindness means being gentle and understanding with yourself, especially when things don't go as planned. It's about treating yourself the way you would treat a good friend – with care, patience and encouragement – rather than being overly critical or harsh.

Common humanity is about realising that you're not the only one who faces tough times or makes mistakes. Recognising that everyone (Autistic and non-Autistic), at some point, has had challenges and setbacks can help you feel less alone when you are going through a difficult time.



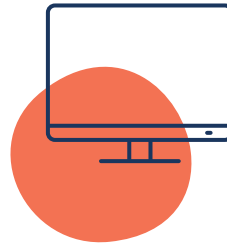
What research tells us about self-compassion among Autistic adults

In the **first phase of their work**, researchers from the Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP) found that:

- Autistic adults tend to report lower self-compassion than non-Autistic adults
- Autistic women may be especially vulnerable to reduced self-compassion
- higher self-compassion is associated with better mental health outcomes in Autistic people
- receiving an autism diagnosis in adulthood can facilitate self-understanding and self-compassion.

The researchers then conducted a **pilot study** involving 39 Autistic adults, which found that:

- online self-compassion programs show promise for enhancing resilience and well-being in Autistic adults.



Self-compassion programs for Autistic adults and clinicians

The Aspect Self-compassion Program for Autistic Adults (ASPAA) is the world's first self-guided online program to help Autistic adults become more self-compassionate. It was co-produced by ARCAP researchers with the support of Autistic advisors.

There are two versions of ASPAA:

A **free version** for Autistic adults.



A **clinician version** for therapists, psychologists and mental health professionals to support Autistic clients to become more self-compassionate, which can be purchased for a small fee from the Aspect online shop.



Based on the idea of a different **brilliant**[®], Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.