



# Soften, Soothe, Allow

This process was created by Kristin Neff and Chris Germer of the [Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#).  
Most of the language here comes directly from their document, [Soften-Soothe-Allow.pdf](#).

## 1. Beginning with Breath and Kindness

Find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take *three relaxing breaths*. Place your hand on your heart for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and to bring kindness to yourself.

## 2. Labeling the Emotion

Let yourself *recall a mild-moderately difficult situation* that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, or a loved one in pain. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem—choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it. Now clearly visualize the situation. *Who was there? What was said? What happened?*

Now see if you can *name* the strongest emotion—a difficult emotion—associated with that situation: *anger? sadness? grief? confusion? fear? longing? despair?* Repeat the name of the emotion to yourself in a gentle, understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what he/she is feeling: “That’s longing.” “That’s grief.”

## 3. Bringing Mindfulness of Emotion into the Body

Expand your *awareness to your body as a whole*. Recall the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it the most. In your mind’s eye, sweep your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.

Now *choose a single location* in your body where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension or an achy feeling, like a headache. In your mind, incline gently toward that spot.

## 4. Soften, Soothe, and Allow

**Soften** into that location in your body. Let the muscles be soft without a requirement that they *become* soft, like simply applying heat to sore muscles. You can say, “*soft...soft...soft...*” quietly to yourself, to enhance the process. Remember that you are not trying to make the sensation go away—you are just being with it with loving awareness.

You can let yourself just soften around the edges, like around the edges of a pancake. No need to go all the way in.

**Soothe** yourself for struggling in this way. Put your hand over your heart and feel your body breathe. Perhaps kind words arise in our mind, such as, “*Oh my dear, this is such a painful experience. I’m so sorry it’s so hard for you right now*”.

If you wish, you can also direct kindness to the part of your body that is under stress by placing your hand in that place. It may help to think of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. You can say kind words to yourself, or just repeat, “*soothe...soothe...soothe.*”

**Allow** the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go as it pleases, like a guest in your own home. You can repeat, “*allow...allow...allow.*”

“*Soften, soothe and allow.*” “*Soften, soothe and allow.*” You can use these three words like a mantra, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness toward your suffering. *If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better.*

## 5. Easing back out...

When you’re ready, *slowly open your eyes*, letting your attention move out into the world around you.

**NOTE:** *If, at any point, you experience too much discomfort, become panicky or scared, stay with your breath until you feel better. If things are still too much, try opening your eyes, looking around the room to orient yourself, maybe looking at something that is comforting or soothing to you (a favorite piece of art or photo of a loved one or pet). You may even want to reach out to a friend, take a walk, have a cup of tea. Taking care of yourself, even if it means interrupting the process, is mindfulness in action. If the net effect of this practice is that you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, see [I have strong emotional \(or physical\) reactions](#).*