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## Cultivating Compassion

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# Cultivating Compassion

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## Abstract

Fostering compassion in a divided community is essential to the wellbeing of its members, and creating a sense of community. Although we come from different culminations of experience, privilege, genetics, and influence and can be divided across race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or class, our humanity is what connect us. After a literature review and compilation of recent scientific studies, we recognized there was much to be said and done about compassion. Ultimately, we can take a few steps in order to cultivate compassion: communicating with others, practicing empathy, finding commonalities, giving and advocating for others, to name a few.

## Why Compassion?

In 2018, many social, political, economical and cultural issues divide us, as citizens. There seems to be divisions along race, class, immigration status, gender, sexual orientation, and political affiliation, to name a few, which bare the fault lines in an already divided country. A major deficit in helping others is our inability to understand and empathize with such a diverse population. For example, instead of dismissing other's plights and distresses, we could create a more welcoming and inclusive community by taking the time to understand the causes of the conflicts that are responsible for the divisions. Therefore, cultivating compassion for others can help to foster understanding, minimize fear, and bring communities together.

Compassion helps to heal the wounded society that cries for help. Compassion might be what we need to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive communities that we lack.

**"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."**  
- Dalai Lama XIV, The Art of Happiness



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## Goals

- To define the importance of compassion in society
- To find viable steps that can be taken to increase compassion on micro and macro levels

## Methods

- Compile current scientific studies regarding compassion
- Examine the role of compassion in current events
- Synthesize information into tangible steps to improve compassion in society



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## Next Steps

### Practicing Self-Compassion:

- Regardless of what or who increases our compassionate feelings - we are more likely to increase our compassionate acts (Condon, P., & DeSteno, D. (2011)).
- The practice of compassion meditation through programs like CCT, predicts an increase in overall happiness, increase in empathetic concern, and greater identification with humanity (Stanford University's The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (2017); Brito-Pons, G., Campos, D., & Cebolla, A. (2018)).

### Communicating with Others:

- Communicating with others is the first step in spreading understanding and compassion. It stems from our evolutionary responses: Interacting with people triggers our empathetic response and makes us better partners (Hare, B. (2017)).

### Finding Commonalities:

- Even if we increase superficial commonalities, we are more likely to feel compassion towards others (Valdesolo, P., & DeSteno, D. (2011)).

### Giving to Others:

- Prosocial and positive actions are contagious. The more you surround yourself with others who radiate empathy and care, the more likely you'll feel empathy for others. When you see someone doing a positive act, you are more likely to do a positive act for someone else (Vianello, M., Galliani, E. M., & Haidt, J. (2010); Fowler, J. H., & Christakis, N. A. (2010)).

### Suspending Your Judgement:

- Take a step back from what you initially believe about someone. We all have biases that cause us to stereotype others, what matters is that we can acknowledge and reevaluate those biases. Talk to others and listen - you'll see that your initial reaction is often incorrect.

### Volunteering:

- Volunteering is the cornerstone of compassionate acts. Volunteering through various outlets (soup kitchens, animal shelters, non-profit organizations etc.) gives a person the unique opportunity to connect with others in the larger community and the ability to give to others from a place of complete, honest kindness.

### Advocating for Others:

- During a theatre production, audiences are influenced by the information that the play delivers and they feel the experience of others. Audiences are able to view and internalize the hardships of others, which ultimately opens their minds to imagine the lives of others. To see others suffer and endure in a play format, allows the audience to safely assess how disadvantaged people carry themselves - allowing the audience to feel a deep sense of compassion (Friedersdorf, C. (2017, June 28)).
- Campaigns, such as the Women's March and #MeToo movement, have caused more women to gain their voice against inequality, creating a sense of sameness in order for people to empathize with one another, and fueled more women to find their voice in political power (Bisram, J. (2018, February 28); Burke, T. (2018)).

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