



Opinion

HART TO HEART: Find mindful self-compassion for your self

By Anne Hart

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Educators who are teaching our children and who often put students before themselves need to take time for a little self-compassion.

Thanks to a free mindful self-compassion one-day workshop offered in Savannah starting this month, more educators can now learn how to do that.

The first free workshop is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 26 at Chatham County Division of Family & Children Services. Other dates for the free full-day workshop are offered through Oct. 28.

This training — a program by the Center of Mindful Self-Compassion — helps participants learn fundamental concepts and skills in mindfulness and self-compassion.

Self-compassion is treating yourself with the same kindness and understanding the way you would treat a good friend in times when you are struggling or confronted with personal failings. Mindfulness is what allows us to have spacious awareness and notice that in fact we are experiencing physical, emotional or mental pain.

While this column is focusing on how the workshop benefits educators, this free training is open to all residents, including law enforcement, medical and behavioral health providers, caregivers, students and community members.

Rebecca Burkhart, school counselor at Charles Ellis Montessori Academy, attended a mindful self-compassion workshop in January.

“Oftentimes we, as educators, push ourselves so much to give the very best to our students, to our schools, because we want them to learn and grow, becoming the very best version of themselves they can be,” Burkhart said. “What we often forget is our own self-care, and although we’ve heard time and time again ‘you can’t pour from an empty cup,’ we still struggle to find our own balance.”

Burkhart said she thoroughly enjoyed diving into a deeper understanding of mindful self-compassion.

“I’ve always strived to ‘treat others the way I want to be treated,’ but have never had that inward thought of how important it is to treat myself with the same kindness I want to give,” Burkhart said.

This workshop gave Burkhart the time to reflect on herself, on her own struggles and her needs.

“I enjoyed being fully present with my colleagues and also learning how to be more conscious of being fully present for myself,” Burkhart said.

Vira Salzburn is program director of Prevent Suicide Today with Chatham County Safety Net Planning Council Inc., which organized these workshops. Salzburn said mindful self-compassion is not about “fixing” yourself or making yourself feel better.

“It is about beginning to accept yourself as a human being with all your flaws and imperfections,” Salzburn said, “and learning to hold your pains and struggles with self-kindness rather than self-judgement.”

Benefits expected from encouraging such mindfulness, specifically in educators, include reduction of anxiety, depression, stress and an increase in self-confidence, optimism, curiosity.

“Our teachers, who deeply care about the well-being and education of the kids they serve, are always looking for tools that would help them be better at their jobs and grow, both personally and professionally,” Salzburn said.

Certainly, mindful self-compassion workshops will not solve all of our teachers’ problems.

However, as Salzburn said, “it will provide them with something they need — a space to pause, connect and be kind to themselves, and the skills to bring this loving connected presence into their classrooms.”

Such workshops are an example of the kind of potentially high-impact intervention our educators need.

The value of the MSC workshop is \$250 to \$500 per person, Salzburn said. But thanks to funding from Chatham County, the Georgia DFCS and Pitulloch Foundation, and in partnership with Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition and Gateway Community Service Board, organizers are able to bring this resource to our residents and schools at no cost to them.

“Taking one of our free workshops can help educators grow their mindfulness and self-compassion practice and begin to establish new approaches to difficult emotions, their own and those of others,” Salzburn said. “Our intention is to contribute to a system-wide culture shift and support the vision of the SCCPSS leadership in creating safer and more mindful schools.”

Why should Savannah educators attend one of the upcoming mindful self-compassion workshops?

“You will walk away feeling refreshed, recharged, and ready to be kinder to yourself,” Burkhart said, “which in turn will assist you in being a better educator, and a better person to your students, your co-workers, you family, and most importantly, to yourself.”

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