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Cultivating Compassion for Competition: A Psychological Skills Workbook for Irish Dancers

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CULTIVATING COMPASSION FOR COMPETITION:
A PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS WORKBOOK FOR IRISH DANCERS

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Master's Project

Kinesiology & Clinical Mental Health Counseling

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Cultivating Compassion for Competition: A Psychological Skills Workbook for Irish Dancers

Irish dancers are expected to perform to the best of their ability in the dance studio and on stage, making preparation key for Irish dancers training for competitions. To reach their best performance, practicing psychological skills training and learning ways to be self-compassionate can help Irish dancers mentally prepare for these big performances. In this workbook, Irish dancers will be introduced to mental exercises on how to be self-compassionate while training, gaining numerous benefits, including increased mental strength and well-being. A self-compassionate approach will be taken to psychological skills training (PST) to help Irish dancers incorporate mental exercises into their training as they strive for optimal performance.

What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion is having the ability to be kind and caring to oneself rather than using judgment and criticism; it is treating yourself just as you would treat a friend who is having a hard time (Willard, Abblett & Desmond, 2018). There are three components to self-compassion that help one become more kind and caring to themselves:

1. **Mindfulness** is being aware of the present moment, nonjudgmentally.
2. **Self-kindness** is being kind to yourself rather than being self-critical when you make a mistake or experience failure (e.g., “I keep making mistakes, but I know I have been taught tough choreography before, and it will take time to learn. I can do this”).
3. **Common humanity** is recognizing that all humans make mistakes and fail at times throughout life (e.g., “I am not the only dancer who has struggled with rhythms before”).

Benefits of using self-compassion include:

- Improving well-being
- Regulating emotions
- Increasing internal motivation
- Increasing optimism and happiness
- Decreasing anxiety and depression
- Enhancing relationships

Self-compassion will help you overcome difficulties with enhanced resilience and inner strength. Research has also shown that self-compassionate athletes engage in healthier behaviors (e.g., eating and drinking to meet your body's needs). Self-compassionate athletes also tend to have enhanced caring relationships compared to athletes with low self-compassion (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff, 2009). You may think you need to be strong, tough, and hard on yourself to be a top competitor to reach your high standards and goals. Self-compassionate individuals have just as high personal standards and goals; they just are not hard on themselves if they make a mistake or experience hardship (Neff & Germer, 2012). You also may think that self-compassion is for wimps or that it will make you lazy and selfish. However, self-compassion helps individuals stay motivated and relate to others. Through this workbook, you may find that being self-compassionate during your training brings you to a position of strength and self-love when faced with any challenge. You will also gain the benefits when being self-compassionate that you will not find when being self-critical or judgmental. To obtain a better understanding of how being self-compassionate can be of benefit for your well-being and performance, try the following exercise.

How do I Treat a Friend?

This exercise, modified from Neff and Germer (2018), can help you gain a better understanding of how being self-compassionate can be of benefit for your well-being and performance.

Take a moment and close your eyes and think back to a time where you were struggling in some way during your dancing career. Reflect on the following questions:

- How did you respond to yourself during this struggle?
- What did you say to yourself?
- What tone of voice did you use?
- How would you describe your nonverbal gestures and posture?

Now think back to a time when you saw a friend at dance struggling in a similar way and reflect on the same questions:

- How did you respond to your friend during this struggle?
- What did you say to your friend?
- What tone of voice did you use?
- How would you describe your nonverbal gestures and posture?

Exercise Reflection:

- Did you notice any differences between how you treated yourself and how you treated a friend? When most people complete this exercise, they are surprised by how poorly they treat and talk to themselves while they tend to be more compassionate toward others.
- What emotions did you notice as you completed this exercise?

Finding ways to be self-compassionate can help during situations such as the one you came up with in this exercise. Reflecting on this exercise, you are introduced to self-awareness, which is the knowledge of your emotions and actions in how you respond to yourself and others during difficult times. Self-awareness is a fundamental aspect of being self-compassionate and performing at your best. Through this workbook, you will find similar reflections to help build your self-awareness as you find ways to be self-compassionate.

What is psychological skills training?

Psychological skills training (PST) aims to help a dancer reach optimal performance and enjoyment in dance by learning to control internal processes, including thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations through mental exercises (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). PST can help dancers regulate thoughts and behaviors in sport by using mental exercises such as self-talk, relaxation, arousal control, and goal setting (Gross, Moore, Gardner, Wolanin, Pess, & Marks, 2016). These mental exercises will be integrated with a self-compassionate approach throughout the workbook to enhance both your performance and well-being.

Some benefits to using psychological skills training include:

- Improving performance
- Improving cognitive processes
- Setting effective goals
- Building self-confidence
- Improving concentration

PST Reflection:

Think back to your performances over the past year. These performances could have been done in the dance studio or on stage. Reflect on the following questions:

- What was your best performance over the past year?
- What was your worst performance over the past year?
- What percentage of the difference in your best and worst performances were due to your physical skills?
- What percentage of the differences were due to your mental skills?
- Looking at your mental skills percentage, does it reflect on how much time you spend on your mental approach when training? (e.g., if the difference between your best and worst performance was 50% mental, does your current training reflect 50% mental training?)

Modified from Mack and Casstevens (2007), this reflection can help any dancer become aware of their current use of mental skills while preparing for competitions and see how essential the mind can be to dance at your best. You may have also noticed the difference between how much of your performance is mental and how much you have been working on your mental skills. This workbook will introduce mental exercises for you to practice while you prepare for competition.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook contains seven sections of self-compassion based psychological skills training that can help improve your performance and well-being. Within each section, an introduction will discuss key concepts within the section along with section expectations. Each section will have a reflection followed by mental exercises with practice guidelines for you to incorporate the exercises into your training. Exercises can be completed at your own pace, and it

is helpful to go in order of the workbook as exercises build upon one another. Helpful tips will be given with each exercise to help you practice correctly. Many parts of this workbook may feel therapeutic to you, but it is not therapy. If you are experiencing any current mental health challenges, please utilize these mental exercises with a mental health professional.

Practice Record

I highly encourage you to keep track of your mental practice while you are training. You can keep track of your practice either utilizing a notebook, phone, or computer. Keeping track of your mental training progress will be key to helping you best prepare for competitions. Tracking your mental practice allows you to see how much effort you are putting towards your mental preparation, and it will help tell you which mental exercises are working best for you and your performance. I recommend updating your practice record after every practice, so your thoughts and reactions are fresh in your head to record. A suggested format could look like this:

Practice Record

Name of Mental Exercise:	
1. How was the practice helpful or meaningful?	
2. What were some challenges?	
3. Would you like to include this as part of your mental training consistently?	

Section Wrap-up

Similar to learning a new dance skill, learning new ways to train your brain will take practice. The following sections will introduce a variety of mental exercises to try and practice. Remember to move through each exercise at your own pace while being self-compassionate. Keep the three components of self-compassion in mind through each exercise by:

- **Mindfulness** – Staying in the present moment during mindful exercises (only reflect on memories or the future when instructed).
- **Self-kindness** – Speak kindly to yourself, not self-critically, through every exercise.
- **Common Humanity** – Every human has strengths and weaknesses. You are not alone.

Section 1: Setting the Stage

Goal Setting

Goals are what you are aiming to accomplish, and they are an important part of improving performance and staying motivated. Setting different types of goals can provide you with the focus and direction of where and how you want to improve your dances. Goal setting can help keep you motivated as checking in with your goals can provide feedback on your progress in achieving your goals.

Being self-compassionate is an important part of goal setting, as it can help you balance your time and energy while you are striving for your goals. When you set goals, you can focus on a specific part of your performance that you want to improve while creating a timeline that helps you balance your time and energy efficiently. Because you can manage your time and energy more efficiently, you are more likely to offer yourself self-compassion by taking better care of yourself. Having this balance of time and energy, along with self-care, can help make achieving goals easier.

Keeping the components of self-compassion in mind (i.e., mindfulness, self-kindness, and common humanity) will make the goal setting process seem less overwhelming and will result in being less hard on yourself. Being self-compassionate when you are setting goals can include treating yourself with kindness (not judging yourself or being self-critical) and remaining focused on what you can achieve, especially if you are having difficulty meeting your goals. Goals help you stay in the present moment (i.e., being mindful) by guiding you to think about what you are doing as you work toward achieving goals. You are not alone in achieving your goals as other dancers are setting goals as well (i.e., common humanity). Dancers will have

various goals and ways to achieve their goals, resulting in different progression rates. With this in mind, it is essential to keep focused only on the goals you choose to set.

Process, Performance, and Outcome Goals

There are three different types of goals you can set. Utilizing a combination of three has more advantages than setting just one type of goal (Filby et al., 1999).

1. **Process goals:** specific aspects of a skill that one improves upon
(e.g., practicing pointing my toes on my jumps four days a week. At each practice I will jump with each one pointing my toes to at least 48 bars of music)
2. **Performance goals:** improving upon one's previous performances over time
(e.g., pointing your toes three of the six times you jump during one dance and improving to five out of six times you point your toes on your jumps in your soft shoe round)
3. **Outcome goals:** specific results at a competition (e.g., aiming to place at the next competition)

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant & Timely (SMART) Goals

- **Specific:**

You want to make sure to state your goals in a precise way relating to your performance. For example, you may have a goal of wanting to improve your hard shoe round. As this is a broad goal, you can try and find a specific part of your hard shoe round that you want to improve. The following questions can help you narrow down the specific goal you want to work towards.

- What do I want to accomplish?
 - E.g., To improve my hard shoe round, I want to improve my flexibility for my front clicks so I can kick to my head.
- Who is involved?
 - E.g., My dance teacher can help me find ways to increase my flexibility and strength to improve my front clicks.
- When do I want it to happen?
 - E.g., I will achieve this in six months, before regionals.
- Where will it be done?
 - E.g., I will work on my front clicks when I practice at home and when I practice at the dance studio.
- Why am I doing this?
 - E.g., I am doing this to improve an important skill in my hard shoe round that will affect my scores at competitions.
- **Measurable:** Describe how you will track your progress?
 - E.g., I can keep track of how often I am working on my flexibility and front clicks (i.e., stretching and drills) by keeping notes in my phone. I will take videos to measure the height of my clicks once a week.
- **Attainable:** Make sure your goal is challenging to work toward. Your goal should push you to improve, but is obtainable, even if challenges arise during the process. You want to avoid goals so high that they become stressful.
 - E.g., Right now, my front clicks are slightly above my waist. I know in six months, I can increase the height on my front clicks to my head.

- **Relevant:** Is this goal worthwhile to meet your needs?
 - E.g., Flexibility is an important aspect of my dancing. When I compete, judges often leave written comments about improving my flexibility. I can gain points in my hard shoe round if I fix this skill, and it is important to increase my placements at competitions.
- **Timely:** Make sure to set a time limit of when you would like to reach your goal.
 - E.g., In six months, I will reach this goal of improving the height on my front clicks.

Helpful Goal Setting Tips (modified from Monsma, n.d.)

- Write down your goals
 - Writing goals allows you to look back at them to monitor progress.
 - You can write goals on post-it notes to hang in sight during practice or set the goals as the wallpaper of your phone.
- Set long-term goals and short-term goals
 - You can set short-term goals as tiny steps towards reaching your long-term goals.
 - For example, if you want to improve your front click height, you can set:
 - A long-term goal of having your clicks reach your head in six months.
 - As a first step, you can set a short-term goal of having your clicks reach above your waist in one month.
 - You can set another short-term goal to have your click reach your chest in three months.

- Set both practice and competition goals
 - More time is spent in the dance studio than on stage at competitions. Make sure to set goals for both environments.
- State your goals in the positive rather than the negative
 - Instead of stating, “I want to stop feeling tired at the end of my dance,” you can positively state, “I want to increase my stamina so that all three steps of my dance feel energetic for my hard shoe round by November.”
- Seek support from others to encourage you in your process towards reaching your goals
 - Parents, dance teachers, close friends, personal trainers, sport psychologists’ nutritionists are all examples of support.
 - Brainstorm any additional support that may be helpful while you strive for your goals.

Goal Setting (modified from Arnold, 1999, p. 5)

A first step to setting SMART goals is to create an image of your ideal dancer self. Your ideal dancer self is an image of the type of dancer you want to be every day in and out of the dance studio. Creating this image of yourself can help while you are setting and reaching your goals. Take a moment and reflect on the following questions on what characteristics you want as your ideal dancer self. Be kind to yourself while you create an image of who you want to be as a dancer.

- How do you want to act on your good days?
- How do you want to act on your bad days?
- How do you want to act when you are at practice?
- How do you want to act at competitions?

Using the chart below, what are some words that describe your physical and mental ideal dancer image?

Physical Characteristics (e.g., flexible, graceful)	Mental Characteristics (e.g., ambitious, confident)
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-

Next, take a moment and brainstorm some strengths and weaknesses related to your dancing. This reflective exercise can help your self-awareness about yourself and your dancing that you may not have realized before. With self-awareness, you can better understand what type of goals will be most meaningful to set, along with using your strengths to help you reach your goals.

In the chart below, brainstorm some of your strengths and weaknesses. These strengths and weaknesses should involve the physical and mental aspects of your training. Remember to keep a self-compassionate approach as this is not a time to be hard on yourself, but to be kind and mindfully aware of where you stand with your current dancing and training habits.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Physical (e.g., flexible, difficulty with posture)	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Mental (e.g., ambitious, procrastinate)	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.

After completing the reflections above of your ideal dancer image and your strengths and weaknesses, you can begin to fill out the goal-setting worksheets below using a combination of process, performance, and outcome goals. To set effective SMART goals, start brainstorming what you would like to achieve with your dancing.

Begin filling out the worksheet by stating your long-term goal. Next to the word timeline, place the date that you would like to reach your long-term goal. The box next to timeline is a checkbox for when you have reached this goal. Below your long-term goal, list short-term goals that will be steppingstones toward reaching the long-term goal. There are five spaces available, but you do not need to fill out five spaces, only what you feel is important to reach your long-term goal. Alternatively, you can add additional lines and have more short-term goals. Next to the word timeline on the short-term goal line, place the date you would like to reach these short-term goals. As you complete the short-term goals, you can check the goal off your list. Once you have created these long-term and short-term goals, you have a checklist available to make sure your goals are SMART, followed by questions to help keep you on track during difficult times.

Long-term Goal #1:

Timeline:

Short-term Goals:

1. Timeline:

2. Timeline:

3. Timeline:

4. Timeline:

5. Timeline:

<p>Specific? What exactly do you want to accomplish? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Measurable? How will you know when you have reached your goal? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Attainable? Is the goal challenging enough, yet attainable? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Relevant? Is this goal worthwhile? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Timely? Does your goal have a beginning and end? <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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What resources will you need?

What challenges may arise when you are reaching your goal?

How can you overcome these challenges?

Long-term Goal #2:

Timeline:

Short-term Goals:

1. Timeline:

2. Timeline:

3. Timeline:

4. Timeline:

5. Timeline:

Specific? What exactly do you want to accomplish? <input type="checkbox"/>	Measurable? How will you know when you have reached your goal? <input type="checkbox"/>	Attainable? Is the goal challenging enough, yet attainable? <input type="checkbox"/>	Relevant? Is this goal worthwhile? <input type="checkbox"/>	Timely? Does your goal have a beginning and end? <input type="checkbox"/>
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What resources will you need?

What challenges may arise when you are reaching your goal?

How can you overcome these challenges?

Long-term Goal #3:

Timeline:

Short-term Goals:

1. Timeline:

2. Timeline:

3. Timeline:

4. Timeline:

5. Timeline:

Specific? What exactly do you want to accomplish? <input type="checkbox"/>	Measurable? How will you know when you have reached your goal? <input type="checkbox"/>	Attainable? Is the goal challenging enough, yet attainable? <input type="checkbox"/>	Relevant? Is this goal worthwhile? <input type="checkbox"/>	Timely? Does your goal have a beginning and end? <input type="checkbox"/>
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What resources will you need?

What challenges may arise when you are reaching your goal?

How can you overcome these challenges?

Section Wrap-up

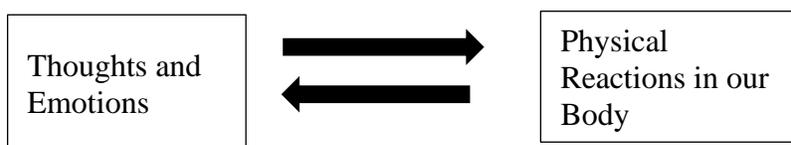
In this section, you learned how to set effective goals for your dancing. Remember to have your goals in sight every day as a reminder to check in with your goals. While you check in with your goals, you may find that you need to revise your goals or need additional support to help you achieve your goals. Revising goals and seeking support from others is part of the process of setting goals as you progress or feel stuck. During these times that you feel stuck, you should not be self-critical, but self-compassionate. As you continue through the sections of this workbook, you will find strategies of how to be self-compassionate during your training while you reach your goals.

Section 2: Reflect, Relax, and Rinse

How you feel emotionally can have a significant impact on how you feel physically. Reflect on how you feel when you are waiting to perform standing side stage at a competition. Do you feel a sense of excitement? Perhaps you feel confident and ready to show everyone how hard you have been working on your dances? On the flip side, you may have experienced nervousness, shaky legs, tense muscles, sweaty palms, or nausea. Sometimes you may feel overly energized and other times sluggish before performing.

Using self-compassion during these exciting and nerve-wracking events can help you treat yourself with kindness and acceptance. Self-compassion can also help with understanding your emotions and how to respond kindly. The following exercises will help you reflect on how you are currently feeling and will assist with preparing for performances by finding ways to relax and focus on what is important during tense moments. All of these exercises help you gain a better idea of how your mind and body connect. As a result, you can approach a performance feeling mentally and physically aware, relaxed, and prepared.

The Mind-Body Connection



In the following exercises, you will explore the mind-body connection while paying attention to your body in the present moment. You can change thoughts and emotions by creating certain physical body movements. Inversely, your thoughts and emotions can often be observed in your body. Examples of this connection are shown in the following exercises.

You will begin this section with a reflection of how your emotions are currently impacting your body and performance. Five exercises will follow the reflection building upon one another, starting with breath awareness, then slowly moving to incorporate awareness of different parts of your body to gradually become aware of your whole body. The terms “mindfulness” or “being mindful” are mentioned often throughout this section as it is a component of self-compassion. Being aware and mindful of your emotions, thoughts, and body are the first steps toward being self-compassionate. Being mindful is being aware on purpose, moment-by-moment without being judgmental (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). These exercises are the foundation of building self-awareness and self-compassion into your mental training. The reflection will require a form of writing (i.e., pen and paper) or your phone to keep records. You will notice the rest of the exercises in this section are relaxing and require nothing more than your time and full attention on yourself.

Reflection

Observe & Identify Emotions (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 17)

The aim of this reflection is for you to become aware of identifying and labeling your emotions in relation to your dances. You can gradually learn to pay attention to your emotions in relation to your dances by taking small steps in noticing emotions while completing skills, steps, then full dances.

How to observe & identify emotions:

1. During your next dance practice, pick a skill from your dance (e.g., jump, turn). Perform the skill you chose and take a moment after the skill is completed to reflect on any emotion you identified and felt. Use the practice chart below to keep notes.

2. Next, choose one of your dances and choose a 16-bar step (e.g., 1st, 2nd, or 3rd step).
Perform your step and reflect on any emotions that you identified with while dancing.
Then notice how the step physically felt. Record using the practice chart below.
3. During practice, complete a full dance and reflect on how you emotionally and physically felt using the practice chart below.
4. At your next competition, take a moment to reflect on each of the dances you perform.
Similar to your practices, you can keep track of your reflections in your journal (handwritten or on your phone). For competitions, it is best to wait until you have completed all of your performances before completing the reflection to help keep focused on your dancing.

Practice Chart:

Day & time:	
What skill/step/dance did you perform?	
What emotions did you feel?	
What did you feel in your body?	
How did your performance feel? (e.g., good, bad, shaky, not enough energy, too aggressive)	

Competition Chart:

Competition:	
What dance were you performing?	
What emotions did you feel?	
What did you feel in your body?	
How did your performance feel? (e.g., good, bad, shaky, not enough energy, too aggressive)	

Once you have taken time to observe how you emotionally, mentally, and physically feel while dancing, take a moment and reflect on the following questions:

- Do your observations align with your ideal dancer image mental characteristics discussed in the last section? If not, what do you think was missing to reach that image?
- Do your observations align with your ideal dancer image physical characteristics discussed in the last section? If not, what do you think was missing to reach that image?
- What emotions were associated with performances that went well?
- What emotions were associated with performances that did not go well?

Do you have any strategies of your own that may help with managing your emotions for your performance?

Through this reflection, you have learned how to slowly become aware of your emotions and how your emotions affect your performance level. With this emotional awareness, you can better understand how you want to be feeling emotionally before a performance. Keeping this reflection in mind, the following exercises will introduce ways to help you manage your

emotions in practice and competition environments. You can use this practice chart multiple times during practice and throughout several practices. Keeping track at home or your dance studio is beneficial, and you can write in your chart or on your phone in between breaks or after practice.

Exercises

Centering Rhythmic Breathing (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 15)

This exercise aims to help you center your awareness and attention. Centering your awareness is a first step toward utilizing self-compassion and learning to be in the here and now. As you complete this exercise, you will learn to be aware of the present moment while slowing down both your mind and body. While you are slowing down your mind and body, you can truly pay attention to the present moment.

There are many benefits to utilizing deep centering rhythmic breathing for performance:

- Helps with relaxing before and during a performance
- Gives a burst of oxygen to your blood and energy to your muscles
- Unites your mind and body
- Enables you to focus on the present if feeling anxious or worried
- Reduces tension in muscles

How to take a deep breath and center:

1. Find a quiet place to sit and feel comfortable. Sit with your spine straight and adjust as needed throughout the exercise.
2. Close your eyes and bring your awareness to your breath. Notice each inhalation and exhalation. Notice how your chest or belly rises and falls. Feel yourself letting go and allow yourself to notice the sensations of breathing.

3. If your mind wanders, simply notice that happening. Gently and kindly bring your awareness back to your breathing.
4. Once you are comfortable and are aware of your breath, you can begin breathing more deeply.
5. Pretend your stomach is a balloon you are trying to fill up as you inhale and count to four in an even rhythm. Hold your breath for the same count of four and exhale for four counts.
6. Find an even pace or count that works for you (i.e., you may find with practice that you can increase your counting to five or six).
7. Develop a slow rhythm as your attention remains on your breath. Notice yourself starting to feel more relaxed and centered.
8. Take a moment and think to yourself, “I am proud of myself for trying something new and relaxing” or “I took time out of my day to care for myself in a new way.” Give yourself credit for taking the time to care for yourself in a moment of present awareness.
9. When you are finished and feel relaxed, slowly bring awareness through the rest of your body and open your eyes.

Exercise Reflection:

- How did your body feel after taking a few deep rhythmic breaths?
- Did you notice your mind wander while breathing?
- Were you able to bring kindness to yourself when you brought your focus back to your breath? (e.g., were you able to use kind words (i.e., “it is OK that my mind wandered”) and tone (i.e., soft, non-critical) toward yourself?)

A benefit to this exercise is that you can take deep centering rhythmic breaths at almost any time of day. You may find that it is helpful before performances to manage nervousness during a part of your dance where you have a moment to take a long breath (e.g., rhythm sections of hard shoe dances) or after a performance to help relax and control your breathing. This exercise is also great to help quickly bring your mind to the present moment and help you focus on your next task during practices and competitions. Practice taking deep centering breaths every day, especially while at practice, and keep track in your practice record.

Notice your Body (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 28)

To perform at your best, you have to have your mind and body prepared. Taking time before you perform to notice how your body is feeling can help you perform at your best. This exercise helps you pay attention to what your body is feeling and what it may need before a performance.

How to notice your body:

1. Bring your body to a comfortable position. You can stand, sit, or lay down.
2. Close your eyes and take a few centering rhythmic breaths.
3. Be mindful (i.e., fully aware) while you place your full attention toward your body as you reflect on the following questions.
4. What do you notice about your body temperature? Are you warm or cold?
5. What do you notice about your muscle tension (e.g., your legs, shoulders, face)? Are you too tense or too relaxed?
6. Do you notice any other sensations on your body? Any sensations of your weight, center of gravity, numbness, or tingling.

7. What about other senses?
 - Do you hear any sounds?
 - Are there any scents you can pick up on?
 - Do you taste anything?

Exercise Reflection:

- Was it easy or difficult to remain focused on your body?
- What were some ways you were able to bring back your focus to your body when your mind strayed?
- What were you thinking or saying to yourself as you were observing your body? Were there judgmental phrases (e.g., “I should have spent more time warming up, my muscles are too tight”) or words of kindness (e.g., “My body feels good. I should continue to stay warm by stretching”)?

This exercise brings awareness to your body. Noticing how your body feels, you can be self-compassionate in how you take care of your body. If you noticed an unhelpful sensation before a performance (e.g., feeling too cold, tense, uncentered), you can help your body by finding ways to give your body what it needs to perform your best (e.g., taking a jog, stretching, taking a deep centering breath). You can use this exercise before and after practices and competitions. It is just as important to take notice and care of your body after a performance as it is before. Practice noticing your body every dance practice and keep track in your practice record.

Mind-body Posture (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 34)

How we think and feel is connected to our physical body. For example, when we feel sad, the emotion can make observable changes on our body through slumped shoulders, a frowning facial expression, and physical sensations felt throughout the body. Self-compassion involves the

interconnectedness of our mind and body. Being aware of our changing body postures and facial expressions is an important step toward becoming self-compassionate. In Irish dancing, posture is one of the most important and unique aspects of the dance form. This exercise can help bring your focus to improving posture and your awareness of your body while treating yourself kindly.

How to be aware of your posture:

1. Take a moment and focus on your body's current posture.
2. Stand with legs hip-width apart with your spine straight and knees relaxed, not overly locked.
3. Turn your attention to your upper body, roll your shoulders back, and let your shoulder blades sink into your back.
4. Hold your head upright and lift your chin slightly. You want to feel your body is supported and relaxed.
5. Bring awareness to your facial expressions.
 - Let go of any tension around your jaw by opening and closing your mouth gently a few times.
 - Soften the muscles around your eyes and forehead.
 - Bring to mind anyone or anything that brings you warmth and relaxation as you experience your facial expression naturally responds to this memory.
6. Notice how your posture and facial expressions feel for a moment.
7. Once you are carrying yourself in this position, experiment with ways you can give yourself a physical compassionate gesture to yourself. Perhaps it could be holding your own hand or holding one hand over your heart as you provide yourself with support and reassurance.

Exercise Reflection:

- Were there aspects of your posture that you had not noticed before? (e.g., the tension in your face)
- Did you notice any thoughts that influenced your posture in a particular way?
- How were you able to give yourself support and reassurance?

How you present yourself to the judges and hold your posture throughout your dance is an important aspect of Irish dancing. With the mind-body connection, having an awareness of your posture and how you hold yourself influences how you feel. If you notice yourself physically standing relaxed and confident, you will mentally feel relaxed and confident. You can use this exercise before and after practice and at competitions. This exercise may be beneficial while waiting side stage before your performance or after a hard practice. Practice mind-body posture every dance practice and keep track in your practice record.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (modified from Bourne, 2010, p. 86)

This exercise will bring awareness to your full body. Completing it can help you when you are feeling tense or overly energized. You will relax your body by tensing and releasing muscle groups. You will learn where you hold tension in your muscles, which is important in Irish dancing to help with your energy levels, muscle movement, and reaction times (e.g., staying sharp). Relating to the mind-body connection: a relaxed body can lead to a relaxed mind.

Helpful tips:

- Try to find a quiet place and set aside 15-20 minutes to complete this exercise
- Loosen any tight garments, take off any shoes, jewelry, glasses or contact lenses
- If you feel any pain/discomfort or have an injury, do not tense that muscle group or stop altogether

How to do progressive muscle relaxation:

1. Find a comfortable position either lying or sitting down
2. Allow your attention to focus only on your body. If you begin to notice your mind wandering, gently bring it back to the muscle group you are working on
3. You will want to tense each muscle group hard, but not so hard that you are straining your muscles
4. You should hold the tension for five seconds and relax for ten seconds. Notice the contrast between the tension and the relaxation in your muscles
5. It may help to have someone read the following script to you slowly and calmly as you first complete this exercise. You may also record yourself reading the script and play it back to complete the exercise

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script:

- Take a deep breath through your belly, hold for a few seconds, and exhale slowly. Breathe again, as you notice your stomach rising and your lungs filling with air. As you exhale, imagine the tension in your body being released and flowing out of your body. Take one last breath as you feel your body relaxing.
- As you go through the exercise, remember to keep breathing.
- Begin with directing your attention to your toes on your left foot, curl them by pointing your toes to the floor, and feel the tension build in the arch of your foot. Hold for five seconds and let go of the tension by relaxing the muscle.
- Tense your right foot as you feel the tension build in your arch, hold for five seconds, and release, letting your feet feel heavy on the ground. Take a deep breath.

- Next, direct your attention towards your calf muscles on both legs. Squeeze your calf muscles by pointing your feet down towards the ground through the ankle area as if you were standing on your tippy toes. Feel the tension in your calf muscles for five seconds, and slowly let your calves relax.
- Have your legs fully extended and flex your feet with your toes reaching towards your face and gently push your heels into the floor as you feel the tension build in your hamstrings for five seconds and relax.
- With your legs still extended, squeeze your thigh muscles by straightening your legs and feel the tension build on top of your legs. Hold the tension for five seconds, and as you release, feel your legs relax deeply and heavily into the floor.
- Take a moment to notice your body and how your legs and feet feel. Take a deep breath and relax as you enjoy the heaviness of your legs and feet.
- Inhale as you gently arch your lower back and feel the tension in your back muscles for five seconds, slowly release as you feel your back relax.
- Tighten the muscles in your stomach by sucking in, hold for five seconds, and relax, take a deep breath.
- Tense your upper back by gently squeezing your shoulders back in an attempt to make your shoulder blades touch, hold as you feel the tension and relax.
- Now lift your shoulders up as if they could touch your ears. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, feeling their heaviness.
- Take a deep breath in and hold for five seconds as you feel the tension build slowly with each count in your chest. Exhale, blowing out all the tension. Take a moment and feel your body and legs fill with heaviness and relaxation. Breathe in and out.

- Now tighten your triceps by extending your arms out and locking your elbows. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.
- Flex your biceps. Feel that buildup of tension. You may even visualize that muscle tightening. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, enjoying the feeling of limpness in your arms.
- Bend your hand back, hyperextending your wrists, hold for five seconds, and let your hands hang or rest loosely.
- Now tightly, but without straining, clench your fists and hold. Feel the tension build, relax, and let the fingers fall or rest loosely. Take a moment and notice your whole body releasing any tension or stress you may be holding.
- Tighten the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can. Hold for about five seconds. Release feeling the tension fall away.
- Next, tighten your eye muscles by squinting your eyelids tightly shut. Hold for 5 seconds and relax.
- Now smile widely, feeling your mouth and cheeks tense. Hold for 5 seconds, and release, appreciating the softness in your face.
- Breathe in and out. Let go of all the stress and tension in your body.
- Imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading through your body, beginning at your head and going all the way down to your feet.
- Feel the weight of your relaxed body and let it go limp. Breathe in and out naturally.
- You may scan your body for any remaining tension and go back and tense and relax those muscles.
- Take one more moment to fully appreciate the relaxation filled throughout your body

- Slowly open your eyes and move your body.

Exercise Reflection:

- What did you notice about your body as you completed this exercise?
- Did you notice any emotions or thoughts as you completed this exercise?
- Did you notice more tension in specific muscle groups?
- Was it easier to relax certain muscle groups compared to other muscle groups?

As you complete a full body progressive muscle relaxation for the first time, you may notice that a specific muscle group carried more tension than others (e.g., legs, shoulders). After completing this exercise a few times, you will become more aware of your tension areas. You can shorten the exercise to release muscle tension faster by focusing on key muscle groups. For example, if you notice that your legs and shoulders hold more tension than other muscle groups in your body, you can take a few deep breaths and tense and release those specific muscle groups. In the future, whether it is before a performance or you have limited time to complete the whole exercise, releasing tension from your leg and shoulder muscles can be done quickly as opposed to relaxing your whole body. You can practice this exercise before bed or while traveling to competitions. Be careful practicing a full progressive muscle relaxation before practices and competitions as it can be very relaxing. Shortened versions targeting your tense muscle groups may be beneficial before performances. Practice progressive muscle relaxation every day and keep track in your practice record.

Compassionate Body Scan (modified from Neff & Germer, 2018, p.89)

This exercise will help you notice your body with warmhearted attention. While paying attention to your body, one part at a time, you will become aware of sensations. With this exercise, you can show gratitude and kindness to your body by taking the time to notice your

body and saying some words of gratitude and kindness for what it does for you. Gratitude is being thankful and appreciating what your body can do for you (e.g., “I am grateful for my feet as they help me walk and dance”). This exercise is a mindfully based, as the focus is on your body’s sensations and abilities along with how to be aware and kind to yourself in the present moment.

Helpful tips:

- Try to find a quiet place and set aside 15-20 minutes to complete exercise
- Remember to be kind to yourself and not be self-critical by recognizing saying soothing words to your body (e.g., I am grateful for my hands and their ability to let me write)
- It may help to have someone read the following script to you slowly and calmly as you first complete this exercise. You may also record yourself reading the script and play it back to complete the exercise

How to complete a compassionate body scan:

1. Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down.
2. Take a deep breath filling your belly with each inhalation and deeply exhale.
3. Start with your feet and take notice of any sensation (warm, cold, tingling) you may be experiencing. You may also move or wiggle your toes and ankles while you show gratitude for all the hard work your feet endure while you dance, run or walk. (e.g., I am grateful for my feet and their ability to let me dance). Take time to appreciate all that they can do.
4. Next, move to your legs, scanning from your ankles up to your hips. Notice any sensations in your legs and give a moment of gratitude for all they do. Take a deep breath.

5. As you move up your body towards your shoulders, take notice of any sensations through your belly and chest. Your chest is the source of your breathing, heart, love, and compassion. Take the time to fill your chest with awareness, appreciation, and acceptance.
6. Continue with noticing sensations and sending gratitude to your body as you continue scanning to your upper body, including your arms and hands.
7. Offer compassionate awareness (i.e., kindness and mindfulness) to your eyes, nose, and lips. Send gratitude to your cheeks, jaw, and chin, for they help you eat, speak, and smile. When you reach your forehead, you can send some appreciation and gratitude to your brain for working 24/7 on your behalf.
8. When you have completed your body scan, give your body a final shower of appreciation, compassion, and respect from head to toe.

Exercise Reflection:

- How was this body scan for you? What did you notice?
- Was it easier to feel sensations in some parts of your body more than others?
- Were you able to be compassionate to your body through the body scan, or were there body parts that you judged?

For the days that you may feel overwhelmed or particularly hard on yourself during dance practices, this exercise can help you notice your body and show appreciation and gratitude for what it does for you. You can practice this exercise at any time, although you may find quick benefits to using it during difficult practices. Practice the self-compassionate body scan during practice and keep track in your practice record.

Section Wrap-up

The purpose of this section was to introduce the mind-body connection in how your emotions affect your body during a performance by using mindfulness. The five exercises presented in this section can be practiced during dance practices and kept track of in your practice record. As you practice these exercises, notice any benefits you feel (e.g., calm, happy, focused). When you have practiced enough and feel comfortable using the exercises, then you can begin to use them in a competitive environment.

Section 3: Brainwork to Footwork

As an Irish dancer, you may have experienced days where it seems like everything you are doing is going wrong, and every thought is negative. On the contrary, you have probably experienced days where you felt ecstatic, happy, and performing optimally throughout practice or competition. To help yourself during these difficult times or to re-experience those positive days, you need to first become aware of your body, which you learned to do in the previous section. You also discovered in the last section about the mind-body connection along with ways to be aware of that connection. Your mind produces all sorts of thoughts and images seemingly, whether you want your mind to or not. Being aware of thoughts and images in your mind influences how you feel and perform just as being aware of your body does.

Self-kindness and the way you talk to yourself is another aspect of self-compassion. The goal of this section is to bring awareness to your thoughts and inner voice to learn how both can impact how you feel. Mindfulness is the ability to pay attention in the present moment and the ability to return to the present moment nonjudgmentally when your thoughts drift away (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The rhythmic breathing in the previous section is a mindful exercise to help pull you back to the here and now and is a good first step to practicing mindfulness. This section contains one reflection and two exercises focusing on thought awareness and change that build on the exercises that focus on body awareness in the previous section. You will use these exercises to focus on what types of thoughts tend to come into your head while dancing and learn ways to move past any self-critical thoughts to focus on self-compassionate thoughts, which will help you reach your best performance.

Reflection

Observing & Labeling Thoughts (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 60)

How you think directly influences your dance performance, which makes being aware of your thoughts so important. This reflection aims to pay attention, identify, and label your thoughts. During your next dance practice, take a moment to reflect on the following questions. Your responses can help you gain a better awareness of what you may be feeling when you are performing and how you would like to feel to perform at your best.

How to observe & identify thoughts:

1. Choose one of your dances and pick a 16-bar step (e.g., 1st, 2nd, or 3rd step) to perform. Complete your step and reflect on any thoughts that you identified before you started dancing your step, and while you were dancing. Also, reflect on how the step physically felt. Record using the practice chart below.
2. During practice, complete a full dance and reflect on your thoughts throughout each step of the dance. Record using the practice chart below.
3. At your next competition, take a moment to reflect on each of the dances you perform. Similar to your practices, you can keep track of your reflections through writing or on your phone. For competitions, it is best to wait until you have completed all of your performances before completing the reflection to help keep focused.

During Practice:

Day & time:	
What step/dance were you performing?	
What thoughts did you experience before beginning your dance?	
What thoughts did you experience in your first step?	
What thoughts did you experience in your second step?	
What thoughts did you experience in your third step?	
Did these thoughts work for you or against you during your performance?	
Describe a specific time when your thoughts were more helpful during the dance than at other times.	

During Competition:

Competition:	
What dance were you performing?	
What thoughts did you experience before walking on stage?	
What thoughts did you experience in your first step?	
What thoughts did you experience in your second step?	
What thoughts did you experience in your third step?	
Did these thoughts work for you or against you during your performance?	
Describe a specific time when your thoughts were more helpful during the dance than at other times.	

Once you have taken the time to observe your thoughts during your performance, take a moment, and reflect on the following questions:

- Did your thought observations align with your ideal dancer image discussed in the first section? If not, what do you think was missing to reach that image?
- What did you notice about your thoughts and how it related to your body being able to perform?

Through this reflection, you are slowly becoming aware of your thoughts during different parts of your dance and how your thoughts influence your performance. Becoming aware of your thoughts helps you recognize which ones work in your favor to perform well. Keeping this reflection in mind, the following exercises will introduce ways to help you consider your thoughts in a self-compassionate way in practice and competition environments. You can use this practice chart multiple times during practice and throughout several practices. Keeping track at home or your dance studio practices is beneficial, and you can even write your chart down or use your phone in between breaks or after practice to keep track.

Exercises

Self-Critical vs. Self-Compassionate Thoughts (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 74)

In the observing and labeling thoughts reflection, did you come across thoughts underestimating yourself and your abilities? (e.g., “I do not belong in my dance level” or “I am so much worse than my competition”). These thoughts are your inner critic. When you are self-critical, you are telling yourself disapproving and negative comments. Common humanity is a component of self-compassion and is a reminder that you are human and experience both the good and bad in life. As a part of being human, it is important to remember that everyone is going to experience self-critical thoughts, self-doubt, and mistakes. Instead of responding to

these hardships by underestimating or criticizing yourself, it is important to remember your worth. Be careful of how you label yourself; avoid self-critical thoughts. Below are examples of how one can respond to making mistakes with either a self-critical or self-compassionate thought.

Self-Critical Thoughts	Self-Compassionate Thoughts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I made some mistakes during my dance 2. I did not place at the competition as a result 3. I am a terrible dancer 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I made some mistakes during my dance 2. I did not place at the competition as a result 3. I feel frustrated, but I know through this difficult time, I can perform better to achieve a better result. I need to talk with my dance teacher and make a plan

From this example, you can see how a self-critical thought can result after a mistake or not reaching a goal, but it does not offer any kindness or support to yourself. Through the self-compassionate thought, you can see the three components utilized in the dancer's final statement.

- Mindfulness is the awareness of emotion in the present moment (e.g., "I feel frustrated").
- Self-kindness is words of encouragement of acknowledging both the difficulty and opportunity for improvement.
- Common humanity is efforts of reaching out for support (e.g., dance teacher) as a reminder that the dancer is not alone in their performance pursuits.

The following steps can help you utilize self-compassionate thoughts during times of hardship to help you stay positive and motivated as you progress toward your goals.

How to have self-compassionate thoughts:

1. Using the reflection in this section, take note of any self-critical or negative thoughts you have experienced.
2. Focusing on the mindfulness component of self-compassion, see if you noticed any statements that were not in the present moment. Develop an alternative thought that is in the present. The following is an example in the chart below:

Mindfulness	
Self-Critical Thought	Self-Compassionate thought
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have never finished my dance without feeling tired.” • “I will always miss my clicks.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I feel frustrated with my endurance.” • “I missed my click.”

There are a few differences between the examples of the self-critical and self-compassionate thoughts in the chart above. One difference is the self-critical thoughts used the words “have,” “will,” “always,” and “never.” These words indicate that something is about to happen or has happened. If your thoughts are reflecting on past performances or future performances, then those thoughts are not reflecting mindfulness or staying in the present moment.

Notice how the self-compassionate thoughts are in the present moment. Being mindful does not mean the thoughts need to be positive, just present. The first example of a dancer stating they have never finished a dance without feeling tired places a self-critical label on themselves and their dancing. In the self-compassionate thought, they were able to identify with a present emotion about their endurance. The self-compassionate statement does not

indicate that they have always felt this way or that they will feel this way; it is just their present observations. The second example shows how a dancer who has a self-critical thought that claims they “always miss their clicks.” The self-compassionate thought of “I missed my click” of helps the dancer stay in the present moment. Practice your thoughts that you have experienced with your dancing in the chart below.

Mindfulness	
Self-Critical Thought	Self-Compassionate thought
•	•
•	•
•	•

- Looking at the common humanity component of self-compassion, see if you noticed any statements that made you feel alone or that you were the only one to make a mistake. The following is an example in the chart below:

Common Humanity	
Self-Critical Thought	Self-Compassionate thought
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I was the only one at dance class tonight that could not remember the second step.” • “I am going to be alone at the upcoming competition this weekend as no one from my dance school will be there.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am not the only dancer who makes mistakes with choreography, and many other dancers probably forget their steps as well.” • “I am sure other dancers have gone to a competition without their friends before. I can always call my dance friends for support when I arrive at the competition.”

Making a mistake and not achieving goals can be challenging at times to handle alone, as shown through the self-critical thoughts. With common humanity, it is important to remember you are never alone in your experiences. If you happen to make a mistake at dance class, even if you were the only one to make a mistake in that particular class, it is important to remember that all dancers have had experiences similar to yours in making mistakes. Remembering that you are not alone and seeking help from others (e.g., dance teacher, parent, friend) is helpful during difficult times and can help you best prepare for competitions. Practice your thoughts that you have experienced with your dancing in the chart below.

Common Humanity	
Self-Critical Thought	Self-Compassionate thought
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

4. Self-kindness is a component of self-compassion that focuses on being kind and understanding of yourself. See if you noticed any self-critical statements about yourself that were not kind or understanding and notice ways to be self-compassionate. The following is an example in the chart below:

Self-Kindness	
Self-Critical Thought	Self-Compassionate thought
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I was the worst dancer in the competition.” • “There’s no way I will recall at nationals with all these great dancers.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know this was a tough “dancing day,” but with practice, I will be able to perform better next time.” • “I have made a lot of progress with my dancing. If I continue to focus on my goals and not others, I can continue to focus on dancing my best.”

When you are noticing ways to be self-compassionate in response to self-critical thoughts, you can pretend that a friend had told you the self-critical thought as you choose a way to respond compassionately to that friend. These compassionate thoughts are not focused on positively responding to the self-critical thoughts, but responding soothingly. For example, the first self-critical thought of “I was the worst dancer in the competition” does not need to be rephrased positively to “I was the best dancer in the competition.” Instead, the compassionate thought of “I know this was a tough “dancing day, but with practice, I will be able to perform better next time” can help soothe the dancer experiencing the self-critical thought. This example is similar to helping a friend with the same self-critical thought. Practice your thoughts that you have experienced with your dancing in the chart below.

Self-Kindness	
Self-Critical Thought	Self-Compassionate thought
•	•
•	•
•	•

Exercise Reflection:

- Which component of self-compassion was the easiest for you to respond to your self-critical thoughts compassionately?
- Which component of self-compassion was the most difficult for you to respond to your self-critical thoughts compassionately?
- Did you notice any emotions as you responded compassionately to your self-critical thoughts?

- Did you notice any physical sensations as you responded compassionately to your self-critical thoughts?

Through this exercise, you were able to use your awareness of your self-critical thoughts and learned how to respond to them in compassionate ways. When thoughts of self-criticism appear relating to your dance performance, it can be beneficial to reflect on ways to respond to your self-criticism with self-compassion. Your self-compassionate thoughts can positively influence your emotions and motivation compared to self-critical thoughts. You can practice by writing your self-critical thoughts down and responding to them in self-compassionate ways. As you practice responding to your self-critical thoughts on paper, you can start to notice self-compassionate ways to respond to your thoughts while at practice and competitions in your head. These self-compassionate thoughts can help you through difficult times or when you experience any self-doubt. Make sure to keep track of when your practice responding to your self-critical thoughts with self-compassionate thoughts in your practice record.

Take a Self-Compassion Break (modified from Neff & Germer, 2018, p. 34)

This exercise is helpful during times of struggle and is excellent to use in practice environments as it utilizes the three components of self-compassion. You may use some of the self-compassionate thoughts from the previous exercise to help you during this time when you may need some more self-kindness and support.

How to take a self-compassion break:

1. Close your eyes and reflect on a skill or dance with which you have or are currently struggling with.

2. Say to yourself in a kind tone, “This is a moment of suffering.”
 - Other variations you can use:
 - “This is really difficult right now”
 - “This hurts”
 - “This is stressful”
3. Take a few deep centering rhythmic breaths for yourself and let the words sink in.
4. Then say, “suffering is a part of life, and other dancers feel the same way.”
 - Other variations you can use:
 - “I’m not alone”
 - “This is how it feels when people struggle in this way”
5. Take a deep centering rhythmic breath as you let the words sink in.
6. Finally, say to yourself, “May I be kind to myself in this moment and give myself the kindness that I need.”
 - Other variations you can use:
 - “May I be strong”
 - “May I be patient”
 - “May I accept myself for who I am”
7. Take a deep centering rhythmic breath as you let the words sink in.
8. Repeat the phrases to yourself as many times as you need for it to sink in.

Exercise Reflection:

- Were there specific phrases that helped you shift to a mindful moment?
- Were there any kindhearted words you were able to say to yourself as if you were to say them to a friend as you reflected on a struggle?

- Did any new phrases come to mind that was helpful to you?

This exercise is great to use when you have experienced any hardship in your dance practice or competition. You can use this exercise immediately after a difficult performance or practice to help you remain in the present moment and soothe yourself before you perform another skill or dance. This exercise will help you move into the right headspace to perform well. Try practicing a self-compassion break the next time a difficult experience happens at dance practice and see how you emotionally and physically feel before attempting another skill or dance. Make sure to keep track in your practice record.

Section Wrap-up

In this section, the exercises helped you become aware of your thoughts, whether they fill your mind with kindness or criticism. Learning ways to help respond to your self-critical thoughts during tough times or during times of stress is essential as your thoughts affect how you feel and how you perform. Changing your thoughts from being self-critical to self-compassionate can change your perspective after experiencing hardship or self-doubt. Adding compassion by staying in the present moment and helping motivate yourself to improve and reach your goals as you realize you are not alone. Keep track of your thoughts throughout practice, notice which inner-critic thoughts may be hindering your performance and practice responding to them with compassionate thoughts by writing them down until you feel comfortable responding to your thoughts in your head.

Section 4: Choreographing Compassionate Imagery

Imagery is creating or recreating a performance in your mind that you want to practice or perform by utilizing all of your senses. Imagery is a versatile exercise that can be used in any setting, whether you are about to compete, completed a performance, or during practice. This exercise is a form of mental rehearsal that takes place entirely in your head. Some benefits of using imagery are:

- Improving self-awareness
- Improving performance
- Building concentration
- Building self-confidence
- Reducing stress and anxiety

In the previous sections, you learned ways to become aware of your body and thoughts along with how they work together in helping you perform your best. In this section, we will build on this awareness to practice your dances and dance skills in your mind while noticing how you want your body to feel and what thoughts you want to be in your head. Through a reflection and three exercises, you will learn ways to utilize your awareness of your mind-body connection and ways to be self-compassionate as you practice imagery. Self-compassion is tied into these exercises by remaining aware of the present moment and sending yourself words of kindness.

Reflection

The Magic Mind-Body Connection (Modified from Arnold, 1999, p. 50)

When you are practicing imagery, the muscles in your body are firing on a small scale. For example, when you see a perfect first step of your dance in your head, your body is training its muscles to do a perfect first step. This exercise will show how powerful your thoughts are and

how they affect your body. If you find it challenging to complete this exercise, try taking a few deep centering breaths to help relax and refocus your thoughts on the task at hand.

The Magic Mind/Body Connection:

1. Find a necklace with a charm on it or find a string and a washer bolt to attach to the string. The heavier the charm or object on the string, the better this exercise will work.
2. Sit in front of a table and place your arm as if you are going to arm wrestle someone.
3. Hold the string between your index finger and thumb with the weight hanging towards the table.
4. Focus on the weight with all of your concentration.
5. Now with your imagination only and not moving your body, imagine the weight moving side to side very clearly in your head.
6. The weight will begin to move by how you imagine it. Try changing the direction of the weight to forward and back, clockwise, and counterclockwise just using your head. You can even try to bring your weight to a total stop in movement. The clearer your thought, the faster the weight will change direction.

Once you have taken time to observe this mind-body connection, take a moment, and reflect on the following questions:

- How did it feel to see how powerful your mind is?
- What thoughts helped you precisely move the charm or object?

In this reflection, you can see how powerful the mind-body connection is and how the awareness you built in the previous two sections can help you with this section in bringing your

best performance. As you practice the following exercises, keep this reflection in mind in how your thoughts directly influence your body while you practice your dances in your head.

Exercises

Compassionate Imagery (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 113)

Imagery is a way for you, as a dancer, to imagine yourself in your head dancing to the best of your ability and as your ideal dancer self. Adding self-compassion while you imagine your dance offers self-kindness, warmth, and support in the present moment. Taking the awareness you have formed about your mind and body from the previous sections, you will learn to complete your dance to the best of your ability in your head. If you find difficulty completing this exercise, try taking a few deep centering breaths to help you relax and refocus your thoughts on the task at hand.

How to complete compassionate imagery:

1. Find a quiet place where you feel comfortable and close your eyes.
2. Take a few centering breaths focusing on your body in the present moment.
3. In this present moment, inhale thinking about the compassionate qualities you have discovered about yourself (e.g., kind, empathetic, warm, supportive) and let it flow through your body as you exhale.
4. Select a skill you want to improve. Recognize the order of movements and actions needed to do the skill correctly.
5. Think about where you would perform this particular skill, such as in a dance studio or competition environment.
6. Set the scene in your head by making your imagery as vivid or as real life as you can make it. Focus on your senses:

- What do you see around you?
 - Your dance shoes, dance dresses, colors in the dance studio, the people around you
 - What noises do you hear?
 - The sound of dance shoes tapping, the music, the judges' bell, clapping, talking
 - Can you associate any smells or tastes in the environment?
 - The smell of sports drinks, hairspray, or self-tanner
 - How do you feel physically and emotionally?
 - Feel the confidence, the relaxation, excitement, feel the way your feet feel in your shoes, feel the stage under your feet
 - Notice your balance, muscles, and movements. How do they feel?
 - Feel your muscles being warmed up, where the tension is in your body, feel your center of gravity.
7. Try to view yourself in an internal or first-person point of view.
- Try seeing everything from your own eyes and feel your own body complete the movements (It is OK if you feel more comfortable viewing your dance as if you were an audience member).
8. Take the skill from the beginning and rehearse it in your head to the best of your ability. Make sure to focus on the best performance technique.
9. Remain in control of your imagery. If you cannot control aspects of a movement or make a mistake, open your eyes, take a deep breath, and try again from the beginning.

Exercise Reflection:

- What parts of this exercise seemed easy for you? Any parts that seemed difficult?
- Did you notice any words of self-kindness as you completed your dance in your head?
- Were you able to stay in the present moment as you practiced? If your mind wandered, were you able to gently bring yourself back to the present moment?

Imagery is an exercise that you can use almost any time, especially before or after competitions and during practices. You also can use imagery while traveling or right before sleeping. Imagery is a great exercise to use when you are physically feeling tired as you can practice dance repetitions in your head without putting your body through the repetitions. These mental reps can help build muscle memory, as shown through the magic mind-body connection reflection. As you complete reps in your head, your mind is sending signals to your muscles just on a smaller scale as if you were practicing physically. Taking a self-compassionate approach of remaining in the present moment, using soothing self-talk, and remembering you are not alone in your practice is an important part of practicing imagery. As you practice and feel more comfortable with imagery in a quiet environment, you can start practicing with dance music either in the dance studio before your turn or at home using headphones. Make sure to keep track of when your practice imagery and take note in your practice record.

Imagery Self-Talk & Choreography (modified from Arnold, 1999, p. 57)

How we talk to ourselves influences the way we perform. For example, if you were performing and said to yourself, “I hope I do not mess up” or “I hope I do not crash into the other dancer on stage,” you are most likely not thinking confidently. Confident self-talk can help you treat yourself with kindness while improving your performance. Three types of statements are discussed below to help with confidence and self-kindness for performance.

- **Mechanical statements:** Statements reminding you of the mechanics of the skills you are performing (e.g., “arms down,” “breathe,” “fully lift”)
- **Energy statements:** These are statements that promote an emotional response (e.g., “Push here,” “move,” “sharp,” “relax”)
- **Self-kindness statements:** these statements encourage self-compassion and confidence (e.g., “I am ready,” “I have done this before,” “I am in control”)

You can brainstorm what statements or words can help you at each step of your dance. Use a combination of mechanical, energy, and self-kindness statements to help you through each step. You also may bring in any self-compassionate thoughts from section four that you found to be beneficial to your performance. An example chart is shown below.

Dance: Hornpipe	Mechanical, Energy & Self-Kindness Statements
First Step	Move, big click, shoulders back, smile, I got this
Second Step	I am in control, listen to the music, stay loud
Third Step	I have plenty of energy, smile, have fun, push

From this example, you can see a variety of statements that can help a dancer through each step of their dance. Each statement comes from a compassionate approach as it helps the dancer stay in the present moment and remain kind to themselves. Choose one of your dances and try picking a few go-to statements that work best for you and your steps. Each step you perform should have short and simple phrases such as the phrases listed above, even if it is just one word to help keep you focused in the present on how you want to be feeling and performing.

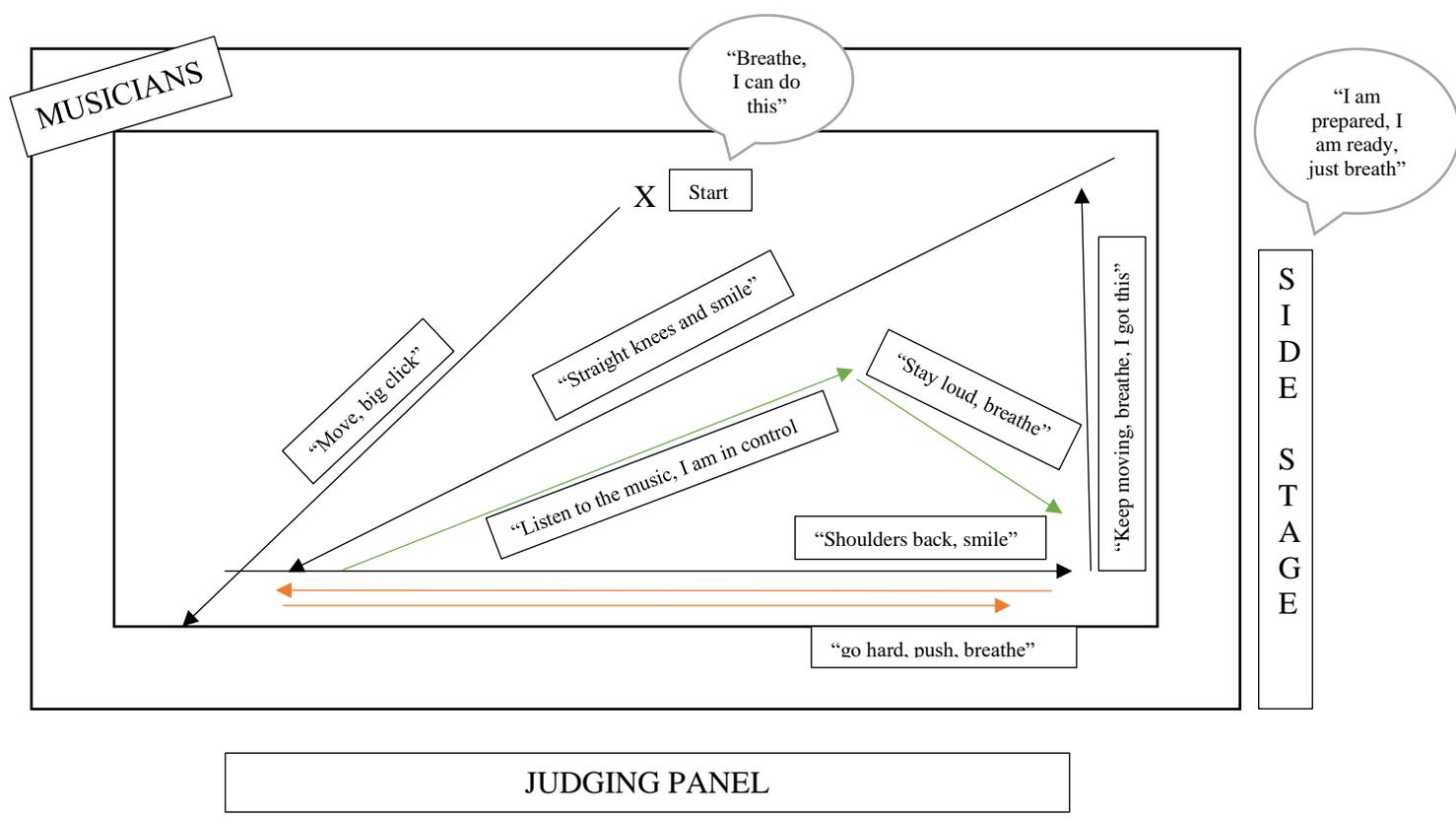
Dance:	Mechanical, Energy & Self-Kindness Statements
First Step	
Second Step	
Third Step	

You also may think of ways you may want to incorporate certain statements before and after your performance. If you do not wish to use specific statements at these moments, think about what you would like to focus on in these moments (e.g., talking to a friend, stretching, relaxation exercises). Below are examples of times you can use self-talk to help you stay relaxed, confident, focused for performance.

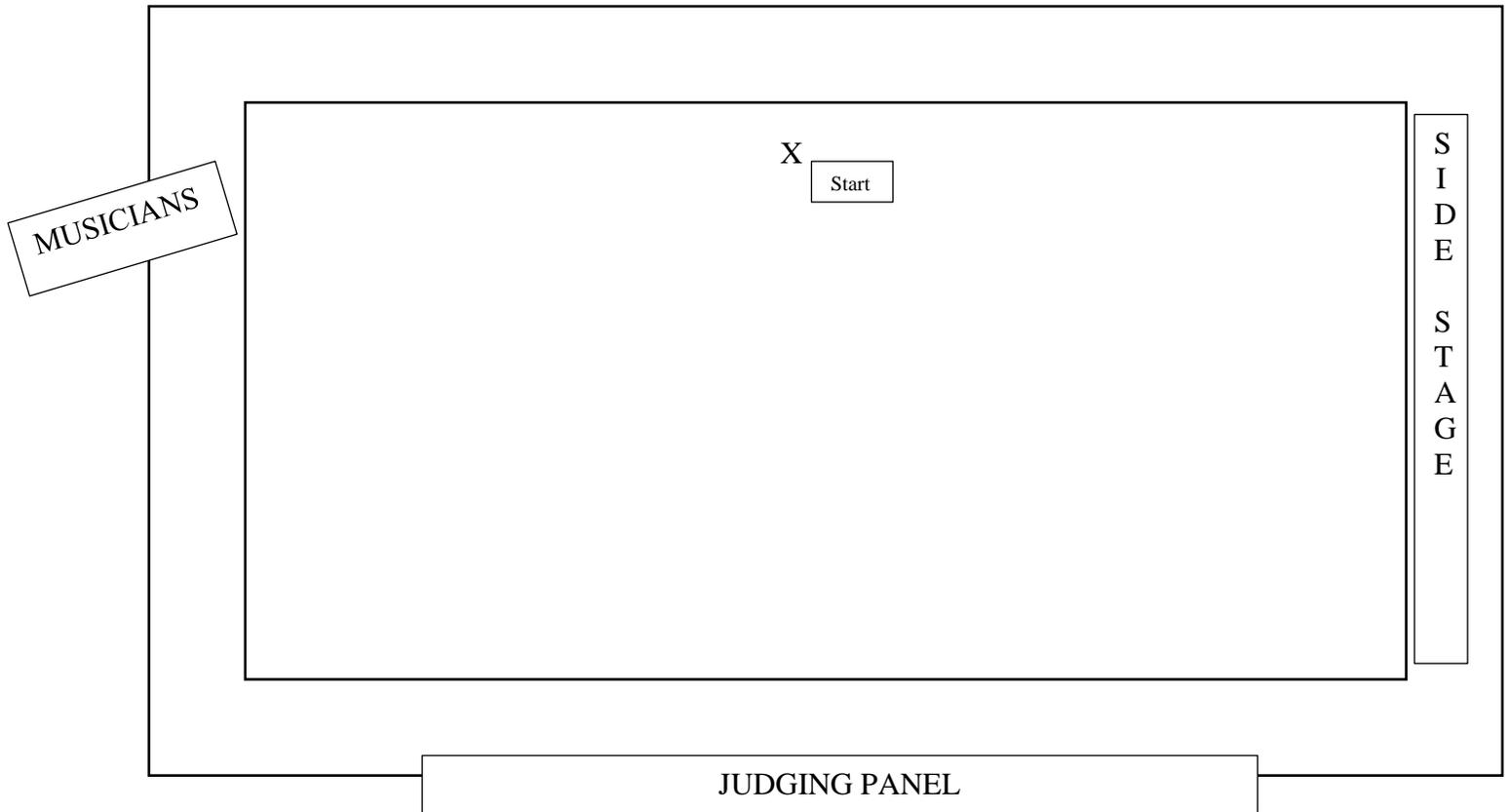
- Waiting side stage
- Walking on and standing before the judges
- The eight bars of music before you begin your dance
- The bow and waiting for the judges signal to walk off the stage

The following is an example of self-talk a dancer may use during a preliminary/championship level hornpipe.

- Black arrows: first step
- Green arrows: second step
- Orange arrows: third step



You can see in this diagram above how variations of the three different types of statements are throughout the entire dance. Using the chart and your completed statements that work for you and your dances, you can create your mental choreography diagram using a full sheet of paper. Keep in mind that you do not need to use as many statements, as shown above. For example, a hornpipe is much longer in time than a reel, which would have fewer statements than the example shown. You may also want to revise your statements to focus on the significant skills in your dance that you want to execute to the best of your ability. You can try mapping your mental choreography with statements below before trying your statements out at practice.



Exercise Reflection:

- Did you find it difficult to incorporate statements into your dances?
- How do the statements make you feel?

When you complete your diagram, you can use these statements in your choreography as you practice imagery in your head. It may be helpful to practice one step at a time, thinking about your floor pattern of your choreography and how you would like to incorporate the statements into your head and with what tone of voice. You can also use imagery to prepare your body and mind before taking the stage at a competition (e.g., your warm-up). Once you have practiced and feel confident practicing these statements in your head, you can start incorporating these

statements at dance practice. Once you feel confident at dance practice, you can start preparing for competitions using imagery and the statements you have practiced. The more repetition you use with imagery and compassionate self-talk, the more you will feel prepared, leading to increased confidence. Make sure to keep track of when your practice imagery in your practice record. If with practice, you do not feel comfortable using the statements you have created, you can try reducing and revising your statements.

Confidence Boosters (modified from Markway & Ampel, 2018, p. 39)

Whether you are training in the dance studio or walking onto a stage for a big performance, you want to feel confident in performing to the best of your abilities. Confidence allows you to be yourself while having a realistic view of your strengths and weaknesses. As your confidence increases, your self-doubts decrease. You are able to free your mind from worry when you are confident, giving space in your mind to be compassionate by being in the present moment, and being kind to yourself.

Take a moment and reflect on an athlete or dancer that you believe exemplifies confidence.

- What are some of their characteristics?
- What do they look like?
- How do they behave?
- Do these characteristics and images align with how you see yourself in your ideal dancer image?

Consistently practicing imagery and self-talk strategies discussed throughout the previous exercises are great ways to boost your confidence as well as your self-compassion. The following are suggestions to help boost your confidence while you are training and competing.

- Find a quote that helps you feel confident and place it somewhere so that you see it often (e.g., your phone wallpaper or bedroom door).
- Look at past videos or photos of your dancing that show confidence and take a moment to remember that feeling. You can also place it where you can see it every day.
- Practice in your dance dress or vest before competitions. While you have your dress or vest on, you can practice imagery. You can feel the dress or vest on your body while incorporating characteristics of confidence and self-compassion that you want to feel and display for your performance.
- Create a music playlist that helps you feel confident.
- Reward yourself (e.g., shopping trip, candy, swimming) when you overcome a fear (e.g., perform a new skill or take the stage at a big dance competition).
- Remember that you are not alone in feeling self-doubt. The most confident people experience mistakes, failure, and self-doubt too!
- Write down three positive characteristics about yourself and read them every day.
- Reflect on the following questions and go back to them and add additional experiences when you are feeling self-doubt or notice self-criticism:
 - Compliments I have received from others in dance:
 - Challenges I have overcome in dance:
 - A new dance skill that I have tackled:
 - A time that I was able to help someone else in dance:
 - Were there any themes you noticed throughout these responses?

- When you leave a dance class or a competition, write down three things that went well and three things that you want to continue to improve on (be kind to yourself on your improvements).
- Pay attention to your body language and how you walk and present yourself before a performance in the dance studio and on stage.
- Limit your social media use and see how it impacts how you compare yourself to others.
 - Do you notice whether you are being more compassionate or confident by taking breaks from social media?

Exercise Reflection:

- Is there another confidence booster that you use for performance?
- Were you able to brainstorm any additional confidence boosters for yourself?

Finding ways to help boost your confidence for performance is important. When you are competing, you want to feel prepared, along with being able to have your best performance. Try some of these confidence boosters at home or your next dance practice and take note of which ones make you feel confident. Once you feel comfortable using one of the suggestions, or a confidence booster of your own, try using it at your next competition and see how confident you feel.

Section Wrap-up

Using your mind-body connection, you learned ways to practice your dances in your mind, along with ways to utilize self-talk and boost your confidence. Over the next few weeks, find a time to practice imagery and self-talk daily and use some of these strategies in practice. Remember to keep aware of your ideal dancer image along with the awareness you have practiced with your mind and body. Keep track in your practice record which strategies work best for you.

Section 5: Turning Out to Others

Self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity are the three components of self-compassion. In this section, there is a focus on common humanity as it is important to remember that you are not alone as you are striving for your goals, training, experiencing hardship, or trying new exercises in this workbook. Irish dance is unique as you have an option to compete in both solo and team dancing. In solo and team dancing, there is no verbal communication involved when performing, which is different from other types of team sports (e.g., soccer, basketball) where verbal communication is frequent when performing. However, there are other ways to feel connected to others while you practice and perform. As you practice being self-compassionate, you are more likely to produce caring feelings for others, take responsibility for your actions in your relationships, and be more forgiving towards others (Silberstein-Tirch, 2019). Being self-compassionate leads to a sense of kindness towards others, which contributes to your own emotional and physical well-being.

This section will help you foster connectedness with others by extending compassion to them. The following reflection, along with three exercises, consists of self-talk, imagery, and meditations that help extend the self-compassion you have fostered for yourself to others.

Reflection

Remembering Compassion for Others (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2018, p. 128)

Through this workbook, you have learned ways to be self-compassionate and apply self-compassion to your training to help you dance your best. You also have learned about common humanity and its role in helping you be self-compassionate. Being self-compassionate will enhance relationships with others. With this reflection, you will attend to how you have brought compassion to others.

How to remember compassion for others:

1. In dance class or competition setting, reflect on a memory where you witnessed another dancer struggling. Reflect on this memory by answering the following questions:
 - When and where did this experience occur?
 - What was happening at the time?
 - What behaviors did you notice in the other dancer?
 - What response did you notice from the dancer as they experienced a struggle?
 - How did you have or show compassion for this dancer?
 - What did you say?
 - What tone of voice did you use?
 - What facial expression did you use?
 - What did you do?
 - What physical sensations did you have?
2. Holding onto the memory for a bit, notice the sensation of compassion and care for the other person. Take a deep breath and let go of the memory as you return to the present moment.

Once you have taken time to observe how you emotionally, mentally, and physically feel while dancing, take a moment, and reflect on the following questions:

- How did showing compassion for another dancer make you feel?
- Was it difficult for you to show compassion to this dancer at the time?
- If you were to witness the same dancer struggling today, would you show that dancer compassion differently?

The following exercises will help you show compassion to others, including your dance friends, teammates, and other supportive relationships that help your dancing. Having support from others and recognizing you are not alone in your training is important for your performance. When you are part of a team, you also want to be supportive of your teammates just as you would want support back from them. Using what you have learned about self-compassion and applying to others will lead to enhanced relationships and positive support that will, in turn, help your overall well-being and performance.

Exercises

Compassionate Support (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2019, p. 101)

This exercise channels your inner compassionate voice and how it can bring compassion to yourself and others during times of struggles or setbacks. Using self-compassion enhances your well-being and, in turn, helps those around you during these setbacks by showing compassion for others. Showing compassionate support to yourself and others by listening to the voice inside you that responds during difficult times can be similar to when you hear your coach providing you feedback to help encourage and move forward from a setback. In this exercise, you will use your compassionate voice to help yourself and others. You can build the strength and resilience of your compassionate voice through the following questions.

How to offer compassionate support:

1. Reflect on a coach, mentor, or dance teacher who has shown you compassion and support during difficult times.
2. Take a moment and reflect on a recent mistake or setback you have experienced with your dancing.

3. Answer the following questions as if the person you chose were to respond to you in a compassionate and caring way regarding your mistake or setback.
4. How might your person of support:
 - Remind you that mistakes, setbacks, and disappointments are part of being human?
 - Remind you that you are not alone?
 - Help you move forward and feel motivated?
 - Help you build on your characteristics and what you have done well?
 - Convey encouragement, support, or kindness?
 - What tone of voice would they use?
5. Next, take a moment and reflect on a dance friend or teammate who has made a mistake or has experienced a setback.
6. Answering the following questions by showing your compassion and support regarding your dance friend or teammate.
7. How might you:
 - Remind your teammate that mistakes, setbacks, and disappointments are part of being human?
 - Remind teammate that they are not alone?
 - Help your teammate move forward and feel motivated?
 - Help your teammate build on your characteristics and what they have done well?
 - Convey encouragement, support, or kindness?
 - What tone of voice would you use?

Exercise Reflection:

- Were there specific behaviors or words that stuck out to you as you reflected on how your person of support would help you during a difficult time?
- Reflecting on your person of support, have they influenced any of your answers to how you would respond to a teammate or friends during hard times?
- How did you feel when your person of support gave you compassionate feedback?
- Were there any differences between the way you and your person of support offered compassion to someone experiencing hardship?

This exercise helps you reflect on individuals who have been supportive and compassionate towards you during difficult times and take notice of how they were able to show their support. Having individuals who are supportive of your training in dance is important as they can encourage you to grow and foster positive relationships with others. You also were able to reflect on how you would offer some support, along with how others may show compassion in different ways. When you are training with other dancers or a part of a team, mistakes and setbacks are going to happen. How you and your teammates respond to each other influences how you can move forward and continue progressing toward your goals. The next time you are in practice and notice a teammate struggling, notice how you offer them compassionate support.

Teammates Values & Characteristics (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2018, p. 136)

When training with a team or among other dance friends, you may find that each of you have different goals, values, and characteristics. Each teammate may have different goals and may work at progressing toward them in different ways. Values are what your teammates find important (e.g., one teammate may value having fun on a team while another teammate values hard work and discipline). Each teammate will bring different personality characteristics as well

(e.g., one teammate may be very talkative and outgoing, while another is shy and calm). This exercise can help you, and your teammates better understand each other and offer compassion to each other while training.

How to discover teammates values and characteristics:

1. Start by setting a time that works for all of your teammates to gather in one space.
2. Sit in a circle with your team. Have a leader read the following questions out loud as the team responds by writing down their responses on a piece of paper.
 - What does being a teammate mean to you?
 - What strengths do you bring to the team?
 - What is important to help your team perform well?
 - What are some ways to bring compassion to your teammates?
 - When a teammate is in pain, how can you be there for them?
 - When you are caring for a teammate who needs help, how do you also take care of yourself?
3. Once everyone has completed their worksheet, they may share out loud their responses. Sharing can be done by starting with one teammate sharing in the circle and continue to have the teammates share moving clockwise around the circle.
4. As each teammate shares their responses out loud, the leader can take note of the responses on a large sheet of paper for the whole team to see.

Exercise Reflection:

- What are some of the important values that you found through your teammate's responses?
- What are three ways you can act on these values in the future with your team?

This exercise shows how compassion can take many forms. Noticing how you give compassion to others and receive compassion from others, along with how you take part in self-compassion can help you become your best self and enhance relationships with others. Everyone is going to experience hardship and difficulty at some point when training alongside other teammates. Learning how to respond to one another compassionately, recognizing your differences along with being self-compassionate during these times are important aspects to take notice to move forward with your training. Once you have completed this exercise with your team, see how you can be supportive to both yourself and others during difficult times in practice.

Giving and Receiving Loving-Kindness Compassion (modified from Neff and Germer, 2019, p. 65, 111)

According to the Dalai Lama, loving-kindness “is the wish that all sentient beings may be happy” (Neff & Germer, 2019, p.64). This exercise is a meditation that involves imaging while repeating phrases. Loving-kindness meditation often leads to improved self-talk and an enhanced mood as it decreases negative emotions (i.e., anxiousness and sadness) and increases positive emotions (i.e., happiness and joy).

How to complete a loving-kindness meditation:

1. Take a moment to find a quiet, comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. You may place your hand over your heart or any position that is soothing and supportive.
2. Take a deep breath. Take your time on the inhale, feel warmth and kindness flow through your body, and on the exhale notice how soothed your body feels.
3. Bring to mind a being that makes you smile (i.e., grandparent, friend, cat, or dog).
Someone you have an easy and uncomplicated relationship with.

4. Let yourself feel what it is like to be in their presence. Let yourself enjoy this good company.
5. Recognize how this being wants to be free from suffering, just like you and every other being. Repeat the following phrases silently slowly and gently:
 - May you be happy
 - May you be peaceful
 - May you be healthy
 - May you live with ease
6. Now add yourself in creating an image of yourself in the presence of your loved one, visualizing yourself together. Repeat the following phrases silently, slowly, and gently:
 - May we be happy
 - May we be peaceful
 - May we be healthy
 - May we live with ease
7. Letting go of the image of the loved one, let your focus your attention directly on yourself.
8. Giving yourself full awareness and support, noticing any stress an uneasiness, offer yourself the following phrases:
 - May I be happy
 - May I be peaceful
 - May I be healthy
 - May I live with ease

9. Lastly, take a few deep breaths and just rest quietly in your own body, accepting your current experience.

Exercise Reflection:

- What did you notice during the meditation?
- Was it easier to feel loving-kindness toward the loved one or yourself?
- Did you experience any challenging aspects during the meditation?

Many dancers find that it is easier to feel loving-kindness for loved ones than themselves.

This meditation helps you be self-compassionate while offering compassion to others. When you are practicing and are experiencing difficult times, it can be hard to be self-compassionate, and we can often forget about others who have been supporting us, as they can be experiencing difficulty as well. Taking the time to give yourself warmth and kindness while offering it to another helps improve your mood and well-being. It also will help you to continue striving toward your goals and best performance. As you practice this meditation, you can find compassionate phrases that work for you that you have discovered through previous exercises in this workbook (e.g., May I be free from hatred. May I not suffer. May I be happy). You may practice this meditation at any time. You may find it beneficial to try when you are having difficulty reaching out to others for support or being self-compassionate.

Section Wrap-Up

This section helped you take notice of how being self-compassionate and extending compassion to others can enhance your mood and relationships. During difficult times in your training, you may discover that being self-compassionate can be difficult. Giving and receiving compassion and support from others can help your dancing and well-being. Practice giving and receiving compassion during practice and take note of how you feel and if you are still self-compassionate during these times.

Section 6: Steps to Self-Care

The fundamental self-compassion question is, “What do I need?” (Neff & Germer, 2018, p. 100). As you have become more aware of your body, thoughts, and supportive relationships, you also will become more in touch with what actions and behaviors are most helpful for your well-being. Self-care is how we intentionally take care of our mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Michael, 2018). How you take care of yourself is often overlooked when training and focusing on your dance goals. However, self-care can be of support to you in your goals. Taking care of your mind and body leads to overall enhanced well-being and the ability to work toward your goals. This section includes a reflection and three exercises to help you recognize what you need and to offer yourself care. As you complete this section, remember that self-care is not forcing yourself to do something that you do not enjoy, rather it is finding enjoyment in taking care of yourself (Michael, 2018).

Reflection

Self-Compassion in Daily Life (modified from Neff & Germer, 2018, p. 61)

This reflection helps you focus on what you need physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally (e.g., connection with others). Self-care as a response to difficulty is self-compassion. The following reflections help you list ways you may already care for yourself.

1. Physically (Taking care of your body)

- How do you care for yourself physically (e.g., exercise, staying hydrated, being outside)?
- Can you think of new ways to release tension and stress that build up in your body?

2. Mentally (Increasing happiness, confidence, and motivation)

- How do you take care of your mind when you are feeling stressed (e.g., meditation, watch a funny YouTube video)?
- Can you think of new ways to help your stressful thoughts come and go more easily?

3. Emotionally (Soothe and comfort yourself)

- How do you care for yourself emotionally (e.g., journaling, painting, cooking, practicing mindfulness)?
- Is there a new way that you would like to try expressing emotions?

4. Relationally (Connecting with others)

- How and when does connecting with others bring you happiness (e.g., sending a text message, meeting up with a friend)?
- Are there other ways that you would like to connect with others?

Once you have taken time to observe how you physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally take care of yourself, take a moment, and reflect on the following questions:

- How often do you practice the self-care strategies you have listed above?
- Is there a particular area of self-care that you would like to spend more time on?
- What changes do you notice in yourself as you practice your self-care strategies?

It is important to remember that you would not have been able to live this long without taking care of yourself. However, when preparing for competitions, increased practice time can lead to less leisure time and more pressure on your mind and body. Intentionally using self-compassion practice in your everyday life, and dance can help you during difficult times in your training. The following exercises provide strategies for self-care you can use in daily life.

Exercises

Optimize Sleep Routine (modified from Silberstein-Tirch, 2018, p. 39)

As a human, not having enough sleep affects your mood and physical health. As a dancer, you are aiming for goals every day for your performances. Having a negative mood or poor physical health resulting from poor sleep can be detrimental to your mental and emotional well-being as well as having deteriorating effects on your body. Research has shown an immediate impact of poor sleep, showing decreased exercise performance and brain function (Mawer, 2020). This exercise will help with your sleep hygiene by improving your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

How to optimize your sleep routine:

1. Over the next week, keep track of how many hours you sleep each night. Also, take note of how you felt when you woke up. Over the week, you may find how many hours of sleep make you feel well-rested. Once you have found an amount that works for you, try keeping your sleep/wake cycle (i.e., the time you fall asleep and wake up) consistent.

Hours of sleep:							
How did you feel when you woke-up?							

2. Helpful tips:
 - Create an environment that will help you achieve restful sleep. Keeping the room temperature cool and reducing the noise and light in the room can be helpful. Making your sleeping space comfortable and relaxing by having soft linens and pillows and soothing scents such as lavender essential oils.

Exercise Reflection:

- What activity most helped you relax before falling asleep?
- What changes have you noticed since you implemented a sleep routine?

As a dancer preparing for competition, having a good night's sleep can change how you feel mentally and physically. As you create a sleep routine that works best for you, it is important to notice that every night may not look the same based on your day and time available. Because each night may be different, it is not the goal to finish every activity on your list, but to find a way to help yourself be relaxed and ready to sleep. As you practice techniques to help yourself feel calm before sleep, try to keep the same routine for competitions when traveling. The night before a competition can lead to nervousness, and using your sleep routine can help you focus on relaxation and having a good night's sleep, which can help you perform your best the next day.

Additional Ways to Practice Physical Self-Care:

- Eat healthy food regularly to maintain energy
- Exercise regularly
- Stretch regularly
- Attend doctor's appointments
- Pamper yourself through a massage, foot bath or manicure

Gratitude & Self-Appreciation (modified by Neff & Germer, 2018, p.164, 170)

Self-appreciation is the ability to take notice of the good qualities we have. This exercise helps you recognize and appreciate yourself, along with discovering your good qualities and how they influence others. This exercise also focuses on ways to be grateful in your life. When life gets busy, and training takes a lot of your time, you can easily lose sight of what is important.

Taking a moment to care for yourself by practicing self-appreciation and gratitude can have significant mental health benefits.

How to show self-appreciation and gratitude:

1. Find a quiet and comfortable place and close your eyes.
2. Take two deep centering breaths.
3. Think of five things you genuinely appreciate about yourself. Take your time and be honest.
4. Consider each of these positive qualities, one by one, and offer an inner nod of appreciation (e.g., internally saying thank you) for having these positive qualities.
5. Next, reflect on any person who has had a positive influence on you and helped you develop these positive qualities (e.g., friends, teachers)?
6. For each individual who has influenced your positive qualities, send them some appreciation and gratitude.
7. Next, write five big things in your life for which you are grateful (e.g., your health, friends)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

8. Now write five small things you are grateful for in your life that you typically overlook (e.g., buttons, tape, playing cards) for which you are grateful.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Exercise Reflection:

- Were you able to think of positive qualities about yourself?
- How did it feel to give yourself appreciation?
- Did self-appreciation feel easier when you gave others gratitude and appreciation?
- Did anything on your lists of gratitude surprise you?
- Was it easier to feel gratitude for the big things or the little things?
- Did you notice any changes physically or mentally as you completed these exercises?

Practicing self-appreciation and gratitude has many benefits, including taking better care of yourself physically and psychologically, feeling happier, and less stressed. Practicing self-appreciation and gratitude while you are preparing for competition is important so that you experience these benefits and take care of yourself. Try reflecting on these questions and practicing gratitude at least once a week and take notice of how you feel.

Additional Ways to Practice Mental and Emotional Self-Care:

- Take a break from electronics
- Self-reflection exercises through journaling
- Meditate
- Engage in hobbies (e.g., puzzles, gardening, cooking)
- Read a book
- Create a music playlist that makes you feel good
- Volunteer
- Watch a feel-good movie

Seek Out Support (modified from Flynn, 2018, p.136)

Seeking out support is important during times of difficulty. As you strive towards your goals, barriers may occur, and additional support on a specific aspect of your training can always be of help. This exercise helps take notice of the relationships you have in your life and how they may be helpful in different ways. Consider who is in your support network.

How to seek out support:

1. Reflect on people who can help in various roles in your life. Name someone who:
 - can pump you up when you are feeling down?
 - calm you down when you are feeling anxious or nervous?
 - can provide emotional support?
 - can give helpful and honest feedback?

Exercise Reflection:

- Are there other people of support that you can think of, and how may they help you?
- Was it easy to recognize people you can help you in these instances?

Having a support network can provide you with comfort, feelings of being connected, self-confidence, and overall well-being. Make sure to check in with the people you have listed from time to time, and do not forget to ask for help if you are ever feeling down or in need support. Part of taking care of yourself is reaching out for help and connecting with others when needed.

Additional Ways to Practice Social Self-Care:

- Be present with family and friends
- Visit a friend
- Plan a night out with friends
- Attend a school/work event
- Introduce yourself to someone new

Section Wrap-Up

In this section, you reflected on how you cared for yourself and learned new ways to practice self-care. You must remain aware of how your body and mind are feeling to best care for yourself. Try a new form of self-care from the suggestions the next time you feel you need to take care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, or relationally. See if you notice any changes in your body and mind. Notice if these changes affect how you feel training and preparing for competition. Keep track of when you are practicing self-care in your practice record and see if you notice any positive changes with your overall well-being and performance.

Section 7: Routines that Click

This section helps you create a personalized routine by putting your mental skills to work. A routine is a sequence of thoughts and behaviors that take place either before or after performances (Beckmann & Elbe, 2015, p. 114). Every round you perform at a competition counts, and taking the time to create routines that work for you is important in helping you prepare for your best performance. Many of the mental skills you have learned and practiced can be integrated into your routines. This section includes a reflection and an exercise to help you put together a routine that best works for you.

Reflection

Current Routine

This reflection provides you with an opportunity to think about ways you currently prepare for performance and competition. A characteristic of a routine is to have the routine carried out regularly and consistently (Beckmann & Elbe, 2015). Reflect on your practices and competitions over the past year. Are there any actions (i.e., thoughts or behaviors) that you consistently carried out the day of competition starting from the moment you wake up until you reach the stage? Write these in the chart below.

List of Actions Before Performance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••••

Once you have taken time to reflect on your current actions before a performance, take a moment, and reflect on the following questions:

- Was it difficult for you to find actions that you consistently completed before a performance?
- What actions do you think helped you the most in feeling prepared to perform?
- Are there actions that were unproductive or hurt your ability to perform at your best?

Taking the time to reflect on what actions helped your performance will be beneficial in creating a routine that will work for you in the future. The following exercise will help you create and implement routines.

Exercise

Pre-performance routines (modified from Taylor, 2012)

A pre-performance routine is defined as an order of relevant thoughts and actions in which an athlete engages in before their performance (Moran, 2016, p. 177). In this exercise, you will develop a training and competitive pre-performance routine. Taking time to make a routine that works for you and incorporates actions you are currently using can help you feel prepared for performance. It also provides you an opportunity to integrate self-compassionate exercises into a routine to help you reach your best performance.

How to make a training pre-performance routine:

1. First, reflect on your training sessions, whether they take place at home or in the dance studio. Make a list of all the items that you will need for the practice (e.g., dance shoes, tape, water) and all the things you need to do before practice starts (e.g., wear proper clothes, eat). Enter these in the chart below:

List of Items Needed for Practice:	List of Things to Do Before Arriving at Practice:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •

2. Take a moment to reflect on drills completed in class. How can you best prepare mentally (e.g., taking a deep breath, self-compassionate statements) and physically (e.g., proper warm-up) for these drills? Use the chart below to list short and specific ways to prepare your mind and body during practice:

Mental Preparation	Physical Preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

Pre-performance training routines are specific to helping you feel prepared, confident, and focused for practice. By taking the time to prepare items and actions that you need to do before practice, you are setting yourself up to have a more focused and productive practice. During practice, much time is spent on drills and skill repetition. Preparing your body mentally and physically by creating a short routine will help you remain focused during practice.

3. Next, you can create a pre-performance routine specifically for competitions. Make a list of all the items that you will need for the competition (e.g., dress, make-up, dance shoes)

List of Items Needed for Day of Competition:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••

4. From the reflection in this section, how did you best prepare mentally and physically for competitions? Below are some examples of how to prepare both mentally and physically:
- Listen to music
 - Relaxation (Deep breathing, shortened progressive muscle relaxation)
 - Practice self-appreciation and gratitude
 - Utilize imagery
 - Determine a time to eat (remember to give yourself enough time for food to settle)
 - Determine a time to use the bathroom before checking in and lining up. Find out where the restroom is before competition day to eliminate stress.
 - Would you like time alone or time with friends when preparing?
 - Take travel time into consideration as the morning of the competition may require travel time from hotel to venue.

Below is a chart to help you complete your pre-competition routine. Reflect on each time frame and how you would like to feel physically and mentally. Based on how you would like to feel, write the mental and physical exercises that can help you reach those feelings. Once you have found exercises that work for you, try integrating them in the last row of the chart so that they are in order of how you would like to complete the exercise on the day of the competition. You can create more than five spaces if necessary.

	Night Before Competition	Morning of Competition Before Arriving at the Competition Venue	Arriving at the Competition Venue	Waiting Side Stage
How do you want to feel mentally?				
How do you want to feel physically?				
What mental exercises can help you?				
What are some ways to physically prepare your body?				
Try integrating your exercises so that they are in order of how you like to complete them during these times:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

5. Once you organize your pre-competitive routine, you can first try it out at dance practice. Practice going through the pre-competitive routine that you created from the “waiting side stage” list. At your dance studio, you can practice this routine just as you would at a competition before you go to perform your dance at practice. You may find that some actions work, and some do not. This practice will allow you to change your routine so that it works best for you before doing it at a competition. Routines work best when used consistently, so continue to use your routine at dance practice so it will feel natural and help you feel prepared and confident when competing.

Exercise Reflection:

- Were you able to integrate self-compassionate exercises into your routine? If not, consider how to do that.
- Try your routine at your next dance practice. How does the routine make you feel?

Make sure to practice your routines and have a clear idea of how you would like to feel before a performance. Pay attention to how long your routines typically take. Once you have a time frame for your routine, you can utilize it consistently by planning and marking how much time you need before a performance to feel ready. It is important to keep in mind that despite how well you have prepared these routines, there may be changes that occur that are out of your control. A stage or a time change may occur without much warning. Be prepared to adapt during those times by picking out from your routine what is essential for you to feel physically and mentally ready for performance. Make sure to track how and when you use your routines in practice.

Section wrap-up:

The purpose of this section was to help you feel prepared before training and competition by integrating self-compassionate mental exercises into a set routine. Using your practice, take note of how your routines make feel before and after you perform and see if you notice any changes with your performance. Once you feel comfortable using your routine in practice, try it at your next competition. Reach out for support if you need additional help in completing your routine and preparing for your performance.

Final Thoughts

Throughout the reflections and exercises in this workbook, you have found ways to be self-compassionate and mentally stronger. Practicing these exercises over time will hopefully bring you closer to your ideal dancer self and your performance goals. Just like learning a new dance skill, you will have to keep practicing these mental exercises to keep mentally strong. As you continue training, there will be many ups and downs. Some days will feel great, and some days will feel not so great; either way, you will have the mental tools to help you continue to strive for your goals.

Building self-compassion is a way to overcome any barriers. Practicing self-compassion both in and out of Irish dance can lead to increased confidence, motivation, resilience; improved relationships; and less anxiety. As you move forward with your training, remember to be self-compassionate if you run into setbacks or challenges. Apply these tips to not let setbacks or difficulty stop you:

- Stay aware of how your mind and body feel
- Practice self-care
- Remember you are human
- Seek out support
- Give yourself credit
- Be kind to yourself

You can take a moment to express gratitude in a way you would like (e.g., text, gift, phone call, letter) to all the people in your life who have offered support and have made your life fun. You have worked hard throughout this workbook. Take the time to thank yourself and give yourself credit for offering yourself self-compassion while also trying new exercises, setting new

goals, and making changes to your training. May your training continue to practice self-compassion and mental strength.

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Appendix: A Review of Self-compassion and its Role in Sport Performance

What is Self-Compassion?

The word compassion has Latin roots with *pati* meaning ‘to suffer with’ (Sandstad, 2017). Compassion can be defined as “a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent” the suffering (McGehee, Germer, & Neff, 2017, p. 279). There are two parts to compassion, including the affective part of caring for the one who is suffering and a motivational part to relieve suffering while having the desire to enhance a person’s welfare. A compassionate individual who has an understanding and acceptance of suffering will have an authentic desire and motivation to help as they recognize the suffering as a shared human condition (Sandstad, 2017).

Self -compassion is the ability to be compassionate and apply it inwards toward the self. Although self-compassion has been a concept in Eastern philosophy for centuries, it is a relatively new concept in Western philosophy (Sandstad, 2017). The concept derives from the Eastern philosophical Buddhist principle that compassion is just as crucial for oneself as it is for others. Western culture commonly attributes compassion for others rather than for the self (Neff, 2003b). Self-compassion is being open to one's suffering while not disconnecting or disregarding it; instead, it is creating a desire to alleviate the suffering while using kindness to heal oneself. Being nonjudgmental and understanding to one’s pain, inadequacies, or failures is important for them to see how they are a part of the shared human condition (Neff, 2003a). In other words, self-compassion is being about subtraction, "letting go of unnecessary stress we impose on ourselves through self-criticism, self-isolation, and rumination" (McGhee et al., 2017, p. 288).

Three main components encompass self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. These three components of self-compassion, when taken together, can embody

a state of "loving, connected presence" (McGehee et al., 2017, p. 280). Self-kindness brings to light the ability to be gentle, warm, understanding, accepting, and supportive of the self. These characteristics of self-kindness are used when one is self-compassionate as opposed to using self-judgment or harshly criticizing oneself for failures or shortcomings that are personally experienced (McGehee et al., 2017). Through self-kindness, one can acknowledge and accept flaws, release regrets, disappointments, and illusions about the way things could have been (Reyes, 2012).

Common humanity is a component of self-compassion that involves identifying a shared human existence being part of the human condition, as all humans experience key events or characteristics such as growth, emotions, conflict, birth, and mortality. Recognizing the connection that all humans make mistakes, experience failure, and do not live perfect lives can alleviate the feeling of isolation that typically is experienced when a person is suffering (McGehee et al., 2017). "Self-compassion entails seeing one's own experience in light of the common human experience, acknowledging that suffering, failure, and inadequacies are part of the human condition and that all people—oneself included—are worthy of compassion" (Neff, 2003a, p. 87).

Mindfulness is another component of self-compassion that includes keeping painful experiences and thoughts in balanced awareness yet staying in the present moment and not ignoring the bad of the situation (Mosewich, Kowalski, Sabiston, Sedgwick & Tracy, 2011). Mindfulness can be described as "awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment-by-moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). It is necessary first to recognize suffering to turn compassion over to the self. Often people are too busy trying to solve problems or judging

themselves before noticing what suffering is occurring (Neff, 2011). Overidentification, on the other hand, occurs when one ruminates and obsessively focuses on negative thoughts, emotions, and experiences (Neff, 2009). An example of inner dialogue would be “*This* is a moment of suffering!” in a mindfulness state compared to overidentifying the negative experience with statements of “Why did I do it?” or “I cannot believe she said that” (McGehee et al., 2017, p. 281). Mindfulness has the benefits of allowing one to see thoughts and feelings just as thoughts and feelings before quickly overidentifying with thoughts and emotions that can lead to acting in regrettable ways (McGehee et al., 2017).

Benefits of Using Self-Compassion

Researchers have found physiological and psychological benefits of being self-compassionate. Neff (2009) describes a link between self-compassion and many components of psychological well-being, including happiness, conscientiousness, emotional intelligence, curiosity, optimism, wisdom, high levels of motivation, and social connectedness. Decreased rumination, anxiety, depressive symptoms, eating disorders, and perfectionism also were linked to high levels of self-compassion.

Gilbert and Irons (2005) examined how aspects of self-compassionate related behavior affect the brain. There are two positive affect (PA) systems in the brain, one focuses on doing/achieving, and the other focuses on anticipating rewards/successes. This second system links to social signals of affiliation and care. Social support, facial expressions, and voice tones all naturally activate this system of PA (Depue & Morrone-Strupinsky, 2005). Activating this system with affiliation and self-compassionate behavior of treating oneself with kindness, recognizing they are not alone, and being in the present moment, can initiate the body’s oxytocin-opiate system. This system regulates stress hormones and has been associated with

soothing, calming, and reducing the body's threat system. When one responds to failure in a self-compassionate way, the oxytocin-opiate system can be activated to regulate stress hormones. Similarly, if one responds to failure with self-criticism, they may activate the threat-defense system, which is activated during a threatening event (Gilbert & Irons, 2005).

Baldwin and Holmes (1987) found when participants failed a laboratory task and were primed with a relationship that was evaluative and critical, they were likely to show depressive-like systems and respond self-critically with self-blame for their failure compared to individuals who were primed with a warm and supportive relationship. Individuals who experienced warm and supportive relationships attributed their failure to their situation rather than their flaws, along with responding as less upset than those who experienced the self-critical relationships. The results of this study show how social relationships activate the brain's PA system and how individuals react to failures or shortcomings (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987). If social relationships influence emotional responses in this way when looking at how others are either kind or critical, then how individuals treat themselves with either kindness or criticism can have the same physical response.

Many positive psychological constructs have been associated with high levels of self-compassion. There is evidence suggesting that the benefits of being self-compassionate may be attributed to specific components of self-compassion. Hall, Row, Wuensch, and Godley (2013) found that each component of self-compassion had different relationships with physical and psychological well-being. Self-kindness and common humanity had a significant positive correlation with physical well-being and a negative correlation with depressive symptoms. Self-kindness and mindfulness also were found to be predictive of managing life stressors (Hall et al., 2013). The self-kindness component was the most significant predictor of physical well-being.

Hall et al. (2013) concluded that individuals who use more self-judgment than self-kindness might be less likely to participate in healthy behaviors, such as taking time to rest when sick or tired.

All three components of self-compassion were negatively correlated to depressive symptomology and perceived stress (Hall et al., 2013). Participants who engaged in isolating behaviors were more likely to experience self-critical thoughts and show depressive symptoms compared to self-compassionate individuals. Those who ruminated about shortcomings and failures also were likely to experience isolating behaviors and depressive symptoms (Hall et al., 2013). All three components of self-compassion were negatively correlated to perceived stress. Those who were able to show more compassion to themselves were more likely to engage in positive coping strategies to manage stress and better deal with negative emotions related to adapting to stress. Being able to handle stress contributes to both physical and psychological well-being (Hall et al., 2013).

Studies have examined self-compassion when associated with mental health and psychopathology, primarily among depression, anxiety, and stress. A meta-analysis found a large effect size of high levels of self-compassion being associated with low levels of mental health symptoms across 20 studies (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). These findings emphasize the importance of self-compassion for developing wellbeing, reducing depression and anxiety, and increasing resilience to stress (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012).

A crucial feature of self-compassion is a lack of self-criticism. Self-criticism is often a predictor of depression and anxiety (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Lockard, Hayes, Neff, and Locke (2014) found low levels of self-compassion may be more prevalent among those with anxiety than depression. This finding may occur because anxiety is perpetuated by low self-

compassion as anxious individuals may be in fear of making mistakes and lack self-compassion when they do make mistakes (Lockard et al., 2014).

Wasylikiw, Mackinnon, and Maclellan (2012) examined the role self-compassion has in women's perceived body image. Findings suggest that because self-compassion involves less self-criticism that regardless of one's body size and shape, one who is self-compassionate will be more accepting of their physical selves (Wasylikiw et al., 2012). High levels of self-compassion were strongly linked to women's body concerns as self-compassion was associated with less body preoccupation and low self-judgment.

Neff et al., (2007) examined the proposition that self-compassion could protect against self-evaluative anxiety. A mock job interview was conducted, asking participants to write down their weaknesses. Participants with a high level of self-compassion experienced less anxiety after the task compared to those with low self-compassion. People with high self-compassion used plural words such as we, us, and our, rather than first-person pronouns such as I, me, and mine. The use of plural words conveys less isolating language and more social references (e.g., share, friend, group). Using plural language and associating oneself with social references is associated with high self-acceptance and a greater sense of social integration of feeling connected with others (Neff et al., 2007).

Self-compassion may be compared to other positive self-concepts, such as self-esteem. A considerable amount of research has examined these two concepts related to psychological health. Self-esteem and self-compassion both can be sources of positive self-regard. Self-esteem entails self-evaluation of our worthiness and judgment that we are good as individuals. Self-esteem is also a source of self-evaluation, ego-defensiveness, self-confidence, and superiority that contributes to one's wellbeing (Neff, 2011). It is primarily built from the outcome of doing

well and not necessarily the cause of doing well (Neff, 2011). Self-compassion, on the other hand, does not involve self-evaluation and judgment toward the self.

Fennel (2004) noted that individuals with depression and longstanding low self-esteem are more likely to become harshly self-critical as their depressed mood becomes more severe. Low self-esteem results as one's focus narrows on the negative aspects of the self and negative experiences, which ultimately leads to a negative cycle of self-criticism and experiences. Interpreting a particular experience as a failure leading to self-blame and ultimately feeling worthless can lead to the possibility of feeling hopeless as if a change is not possible (Fennel, 2004). Overholser, Adams, Lenhart, and Brickman (1995) also found low self-esteem to be associated with feelings of depression, hopelessness, and suicidal tendencies.

Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, and Hancock (2007) conducted a study examining individuals' reactions when receiving ambivalent feedback from another individual. Participants, who were rated as having high or low self-compassion, were asked to introduce themselves while being video recorded. Half of the individuals were given positive feedback, while the other half received neutral feedback from someone watching their tapes. All the feedback given to the participants was bogus. Participants with high self-compassion seemed to be unflustered regardless of whether they received positive or neutral feedback. Individuals with high self-esteem responded defensively to neutral feedback, where individuals with self-compassion attributed the feedback to their personality. High self-compassion individuals recognize rather than deny that they may cause adverse life outcomes, but do not ruminate on the negative effects. Participants with high self-compassion also recognized the universality of rejection being part of the human experience. Individuals with low self-compassion and high self-esteem were more likely to be upset when receiving neutral feedback ("what, I'm just average?"). They were also

less likely to attribute the neutral feedback to their personality. Emotional resilience only was shown for participants with high self-esteem when the reviews were positive.

Although self-esteem has many benefits, individuals who use self-compassion have shown the benefits where self-esteem fails us (Neff, 2011). For example, when imperfections are experienced in life, whether humiliating or painful, self-compassion can bring a kind and caring reaction, whereas self-esteem relates to self-evaluating our self-image and comparing our worth to others. Self-compassion also allows one to take ownership of their flaws and understand their strengths and weaknesses. People with high self-compassion can be flexible and motivated to change when understanding and accepting oneself using self-compassion, which is essential for individuals who are trying to improve. Self-esteem can be resistant to change and can weigh one down in this sense (Neff, 2011).

Self-compassion has also been shown to enhance motivation (Neff, 2009). Often self-compassion can be confused with self-pity or self-indulgence. One who practices self-compassion does not have unmotivating characteristics such as a "poor me" attitude, exaggerated emotions, and becoming complacent with one's experiences. When one is self-compassionate, there is a sense of caring involved that entails wanting to treat the self in a gentle way that motivates one toward good health and well-being. Self-compassion motivates people to push through difficult challenges by trying hard and learning from mistakes; one who is self-compassionate is striving for happiness, well-being, and freeing oneself from suffering (Neff, 2009).

Neff, Hsieh, and Djitterat (2005) found a positive link between high levels of self-compassion and the use of mastery goals when examining motivation and self-compassion. Individuals using mastery goals learn by curiosity and desire by mastering tasks and

understanding new material with the perspective that making mistakes is part of the learning process (Neff et al., 2005). Individuals using performance goals are motivated by achieving success and avoiding failure (Neff et al., 2005). Looking at academic performance in a university setting, high levels of self-compassion in students were positively related to mastery goals. Students were more likely to see their academic failure as a learning opportunity and were more likely to stay focused on accomplishing their tasks at hand (Neff et al., 2005). By being self-compassionate, students are less likely to be self-critical or blow their failures out of proportion, which can be associated with high levels of self-confidence in learning and adopting mastery goals. A negative correlation was found among performance goals and self-compassion. This study shows how self-compassion can help one stay motivated healthily by being more likely to adopt mastery goals.

Breines and Chen (2014) examined how self-compassion can increase self-improvement motivation. Individuals with high self-compassion viewed personal weaknesses as changeable and had a strong desire to improve past shortcomings and failures. After performing poorly on an academic test, participants with high self-compassion were more likely to spend time studying for the next difficult test and reported being motivated to change their weakness (Breines & Chen, 2014). Self-compassion also had a positive relationship with self-efficacy and was negatively associated with procrastination. These findings reinforce the benefit of self-compassion being a positive characteristic of motivation and optimism.

"Wisdom refers to understanding the complexity of a situation and the ability to see our way through" and is another benefit to self-compassion (McGehee et al., 2017, p. 281). Since there is balanced awareness, and an increase in equanimity, using wisdom to see your way through a painful situation becomes possible. When being mindful, it is easier for one to see the

big picture and the complexity of a situation along with the options available. Being aware sets up situations for individuals to choose wise and compassionate actions (Mcghee et al., 2017).

Overall, there is a wide range of benefits from being self-compassionate that can help individuals' overall physiological and psychological well-being. Greater life satisfaction and positive mental health states are associated with high levels of self-compassion. All three components of self-compassion are negatively related to being self-critical and experiencing less mental health symptomology while being positively associated with being self-accepting, motivated to improve, and likely to cope and manage life stressors and failures.

Cultivating Compassion

Over the past 15 years, there has been an increase in the use of compassion-based interventions to increase psychological functioning and well-being (Kirby, 2016). There are currently six evidenced-based therapies that focus on cultivating compassion and can be applied to the general population (Kirby, 2016): Compassion-focused therapy, mindfulness self-compassion, compassion cultivation training, cognitively based compassion training, cultivating emotional balance and compassion meditations. Compassion-focused therapy focuses on two different focus points, including the motivation to engage with suffering and to alleviate and prevent suffering. There are three basic emotional regulation systems: the "threat/self-protect system, drive-reward system, and the affiliative/soothing system" (Kirby, 2016, p. 435). By utilizing breathing, imagery, mindfulness, and many other exercises, individuals can develop their compassionate selves while combating high levels of shame and self-criticism (Kirby, 2016). Braehler et al. (2013) found that after 16 compassion-focused therapy sessions, there was a clinical improvement of mental health disorders, with significant increases in compassion being significantly correlated with reductions in depression.

Mindfulness self-compassion (MSC, Neff & Germer, 2013) is a group program specifically for building self-compassion. The program is based heavily on mindfulness and meditations, including breathing, body scans, and exercises such as taking a self-compassion “break” (Kirby, 2016). Important aspects of the program are finding core values, managing difficult emotions, and differentiating between inner critic and compassionate self (Kirby, 2016). There are other aspects of mindful self-compassion in this program, such as showing gratitude (i.e., to be thankful), returning kindness, and savoring by enjoying and appreciating something completely. The mindful self-compassion program also focuses on acceptance by recognizing the reality of every situation without trying to change it. Both clinical and nonclinical populations can benefit from the program. Neff and Germer (2013) evaluated a single case study and found increased self-compassion, mindfulness, and well-being outcomes at the end of the program.

Compassion cultivation training (CCT; Kirby, 2016) consists of six steps including “settling the mind and mindfulness skills, experiencing loving-kindness and compassion for a loved one, practicing loving-kindness meditation and compassion for oneself, compassion toward others through embracing common humanity and compassion towards all beings and active compassion” (p. 443). The training includes “pedagogical instruction with active group discussion, guided group meditation, interactive practice exercises, exercises to promote feelings of open-heartedness and connection to others” (Kirby, 2016, p. 443). One also learns active compassion through CCT, which is a practice where an individual can imagine taking away someone’s pain and offering them joy. Jazaieri et al. (2014) found that CCT improves participants’ mindfulness, mental health, emotional regulation, and self-compassion.

Cognitively based compassion training (CBCT; Pace et al., 2009) was initially developed for undergraduate students to develop emotional resilience. The training pulls from Buddhist

tradition incorporating mindfulness and strategies to work on cognitive restructuring (Kirby, 2016). The eight stages CBCT include "developing attention and stability of the mind, cultivating insight the nature of mental experience, cultivating self-compassion, developing equanimity, developing appreciation and gratitude for others, developing affection and empathy, realizing wishing and aspirational compassion and realizing active compassion for others" (Kirby, 2016, p. 444). When evaluated by foster care teenagers who completed the training, there was positive qualitative feedback: CBCT was useful for managing daily stressors, but quantitative data did not back up these results (Reddy et al., 2013). In university students with depression, significant reductions in activity in the amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for processing emotions, was found after completion of this training (Desbordes et al., 2012).

Cultivating emotional balance (CEB; Kemeny et al., 2012) is a program aimed at building emotional balance. The program helps individuals by teaching them how to recognize the suffering of others and oneself, and to tolerate emotional distress effectively through new ways of managing emotions, which are all pathways to compassion (Kirby, 2016). Mindfulness, loving-kindness meditation, emotional psychoeducation, empathy, and compassion-based interventions are used. Kemeny et al. (2012) found that compared to a control group, female schoolteachers with no prior psychiatric disorders or meditation practice significantly reduced negative affect, rumination, depression, anxiety, and increased positive affect, mindfulness, and ability to recognize emotions in others.

Meditation is a common theme among all the current compassion-based programs. Compassion meditations and loving-kindness meditations are used in these interventions and often are combined in Buddhist practices (Kirby, 2016). Compassion meditations focus on wishing others to be free from suffering and pain. Loving-kindness meditations include caring

feelings toward the self, loved ones, acquaintances, strangers, those who experienced interpersonal difficulties and then to all living beings (Kirby, 2016). These meditations are used as interventions to settle the mind, improve mental health, and increase compassion to self and others (Kirby, 2016). Galante, Galante, Bekkers, and Gallacher (2014), through meta-analysis, found that the loving-kindness meditation was moderately effective in increasing compassion, self-compassion, and mindfulness, and decreasing self-reported depression.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction is an intervention designed to teach individuals to become more aware of thoughts, feelings, and body sensations and how to relate to them (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005). The intervention focuses on mindfulness and staying in the “here and now” nonjudgmentally. Individuals learn to let go of past and future fears and ruminations. Shapiro et al. found that individuals who participate in mindfulness-based stress reduction sessions reported decreased perceived stress and greater self-compassion compared to control groups (Shapiro et al., 2005).

Examining compassion-based programs, common exercises are used to cultivate compassion among the different programs. Meditations, body scans, and breathing exercises are common in helping individuals generate calmness and self-awareness of their thoughts and behaviors. The exercises also focus on self-kindness, mindfulness, and recognizing others. Specific variations of these exercises also focused on common humanity by reaching out and sending positivity to others. All of these exercises have been beneficial in helping individuals develop their compassionate selves.

Benefits of Self-Compassion in Sport

With evidence-based compassionate-based therapies showing success in helping individuals develop compassion for themselves, adapting these therapies to sport environments

can help athletes reach optimal well-being and performance. Studies have evaluated the benefits of self-compassion and have applied the concept in sport and performance environments.

Athletes will experience failures, mistakes, and not performing to their full potential at different points in time and all types of environments. These experiences can include missing a big play or losing a game to a close rival (Curran & Hill, 2018). Potential stressful situations specific to sport include body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, social comparisons, bullying, injury, coaching conflicts, fear of failure, self-criticism, and poor performance (Killham, Mosewich, Mack, Gunnell, & Ferguson, 2018; Mosewich, Sabiston, Kowalski, Gaudreault, & Crocker, 2019). These adverse situations often are accompanied by negative self-judgment, rumination, emotional disruption, and feelings of inadequacies (Mosewich et al., 2019). Experiencing adverse events can contribute to distress and psychological difficulties depending on the resilience of the athlete and how they respond to challenges. Resilience is the ability to negotiate, adapt, or manage significant stress and is an important characteristic to obtain in sport (Cowden, Meyer-Weitz, & Asante, 2016).

Being unable to cope well with failure can lead to poor mental health in athletes (Ceccarelli, Giuliano, Glazebrook, & Strachan, 2019). If athletes do not have adequate coping skills to handle distressing situations, dropout, negative emotional patterns, and poor performance can result (Mosewich et al., 2019). Mental health concerns often go undetected or are overlooked in athletes, making healthy coping skills important to prevent these negative consequences from occurring (Reardon & Factor, 2010). Learning ways to be self-compassionate in a performance setting can be beneficial by helping the athlete learn healthy ways to cope during times of suffering.

Whether an athlete is a beginner or performing at an elite level, negative experiences occur, and the ability to respond productively and healthily when faced with adversity is essential for their success and psychological resilience (Fletcher & Sakar, 2012). There are healthy and unhealthy forms of adjustment. When one responds to failure, it is beneficial to refocus on the task by finding ways to be confident and hopeful compared to adopting an attitude of misery and avoiding the task altogether (Lizmore, Dunn, & Dunn, 2017). Athletes often report emotional distress and use self-criticism, self-blame, obsession, and rumination (Ferguson, Kowalski, Mack, & Sabiston, 2014). Self-compassion has been associated with using self-kindness rather than self-criticism, which can help in times of emotional distress by promoting healthier responses and coping skills.

Ceccarelli et al. (2019) examined the psychological and physiological reactions to failure and the role of self-compassion. Emotional distress (e.g., self-criticism, blame, and rumination) can occur after a failure. This distress is highly associated with a chance of developing psychopathology (Ceccarelli et al., 2019). One's *fight or flight* response in the autonomic nervous system is engaged with responding to change in our environments. The parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system promotes *rest and digest* and is related to long-term health and restoration in the body (Ceccarelli et al., 2019). Athletes who recalled a failed sport performance and had high levels of self-compassion showed more regulated autonomic profiles by having an increase in parasympathetic nervous system activity (Ceccarelli et al., 2019). Developing self-compassion may help manage stress by engaging the parasympathetic response to help calm the autonomic nervous system that typically reacts to threat and danger. In a calmer mental state due to the parasympathetic system, athletes can psychologically adapt their responses to failure, including to accept, tolerate, and experience negative emotions rather than suppressing or

avoiding them (Ceccarelli et al., 2019). Enhancing self-compassion in athletes can help them control reactions to changing environments by better managing stress and failure, along with safeguarding their mental health.

Self-compassion can foster accurate and adaptive perceptions of poor performance. Self-compassion has a way of restructuring cognitions to perceive negative experiences less catastrophically, allowing athletes to handle negative emotions in a healthy manner (Neff et al., 2007). A study of university women athletes appraising stressful situations found athletes with high self-compassion showing the less extreme effect of emotion, whether it was a positive or negative situation. Athletes with high self-compassion also appraised negative experiences as less threatening and more controllable than those with low self-compassion (Mosewich et al., 2019). Athletes with high self-compassion and low levels of avoidance coping were more likely to take ownership of their actions than those with low self-compassion (Leary et al., 2007; Mosewich et al., 2019). Reis et al. (2015) found that women athletes were able to react, think, and feel in healthier ways after a sport failure when levels of self-compassion were high. When an athlete experiences poor performance, self-compassion can help with controlling negative emotional patterns and emotional disruption.

Self-criticism is a negative coping skill that can result from poor performance in athletics. In sporting environments, self-criticism is related to fear of failure and fear of negative evaluation (Mosewich et al., 2013). Killham et al. (2018) found that self-criticism was not a positive factor for women's optimal sports performance. Being critical toward oneself has a negative correlation with perceiving a positive performance by the athlete. Self-compassion can help buffer this self-criticism (Killham et al., 2018). Mosewich et al. (2011) looked at shame proneness (i.e., the likeliness for an athlete to feel shame or guilt) and authentic pride (i.e., the

likeliness for an athlete to not associate with shame while having positive self-esteem) in relation to self-compassion. A negative relationship between self-compassion and feeling shame proneness was found along with a positive relationship between self-compassion and authentic pride. There was a negative relationship between self-compassion and self-evaluative thoughts, objectified body consciousness, body shame, fear of failure, and negative evaluation (Mosewich et al., 2011).

From a performance point of view, self-esteem often is perceived as a positive characteristic for an athlete. Collins (2018) found that college students who participated in a sport before college reported high levels of self-esteem and happiness compared to students who did not participate in college athletics. Another study found that high self-esteem in sport was correlated with high self-esteem with peer-acceptance (Daniels & Leaper, 2006). Gustafsson, Martinent, Isoard-Gauthier, Hassmén, & Guillet-Descas, 2018 examined potential negative outcomes of having high levels of performance-based self-esteem which is described to fluctuate in response to setbacks or accomplishments. Athletes with high performance-based self-esteem were more likely to be vulnerable to stressful events such as adverse performance outcomes, burnout, or injuries (Gustafsson et al., 2018).

Self-compassion helps an individual's emotional stability and resilience (Neff, 2011). Leary et al. (2007) conducted a study comparing self-esteem and self-compassion by having participants imagine being in embarrassing situations, such as making a critical error in sport or performing in theatre and forgetting their lines on stage. Self-compassionate individuals were more likely to take the imagined experience less personally. They were also unlikely to feel embarrassed or incompetent while often making comments like "everybody goofs up now and then." Having high levels of self-esteem, however, did not help manage negative emotions or

calmness of the imagined experience that self-compassion did. Participants with both high and low self-esteem were likely to report thoughts such as "I am such a loser."

Self-compassion also can be beneficial for an athlete's well-being. Eudaimonic well-being and self-compassion were studied in women athletes. Carol Ryff's model describes the six different dimensions of eudaimonic well-being. These dimensions are being autonomous and independent, having mastery over one's environment and activities, having continued feelings of personal growth and development, having quality relationships with others, and acceptance of oneself (Ryff, 1989). Encompassing eudaimonic well-being in sport is for one to reach their highest potential in performance. Athlete's with high self-compassion and eudaimonic well-being took responsibility for one's actions and emotions and did not behave passively (Ferguson et al., 2014). The self-compassionate athlete's in this study were more likely to experience dimensions of eudaimonic well-being by taking the initiative and assuming responsibility for their actions and emotions.

Ferguson et al. (2014) interviewed women athletes about self-compassion and eudaimonic well-being in sport performance. One athlete explained that "when you are so negative toward yourself and so hard on yourself when you make a mistake...that's holding you back from reaching your full potential" (Ferguson et al., 2014, p. 210). Perseverance, not "throwing in the towel, and focusing on what one can do instead of focusing on weaknesses and therefore remain focused on what they can do were key points made by participants. These key points are aspects of self-compassion and convey how self-compassion can help one reach their full potential in sport. Responsibility and taking ownership of one's actions helped the participants reach their full performance potential. Self-compassion plays a positive role in helping with emotions and perseverance as the athletes can recognize their emotions yet stay in

the present moment focusing on the task at hand. Women athletes in this study focused on mindfulness and how to take a moment to notice what is happening when poor performance occurs. When athletes were self-compassionate and mindful, they took responsibility for their emotions and did not dwell on negative emotions by refocusing on improving to “fix” any weaknesses (Ferguson et al., 2014).

Self-compassion also can be a beneficial resource for athletes who perform with perfectionistic concerns. There are two types of perfectionism described as either concerns or strivings. Perfectionistic concerns are maladaptive responses where athletes’ focus on the fear of making mistakes and use self-criticism (Lizmore et al., 2017). Perfectionistic strivings set exceedingly high standards of performance and are associated with positive responses and outcomes in sport (Lizmore et al., 2017). Perfectionistic concerns are associated with maladaptive perfectionistic thinking that can have negative outcomes for athletes, including low coping skills and a high chance of burnout (Hill, Hall, & Appleton, 2010). After a poor performance in sport, athletes are more likely to experience self-compassion and optimism when perfectionistic strivings were heightened. Perfectionistic concerns were associated with pessimism and rumination. These findings line up with previous research indicating that self-compassion is negatively related to maladaptive perfectionism in believing that one is never good enough (Neff, 2003b). This study shows how being self-compassionate can help an athlete cope after a failure in sport in a healthy way.

There are benefits for both individual athletes and their teammates when using self-compassion. Self-compassion is often a concept that is seen as an individual experience, but recent research suggests that it could develop through one's social environment. For example, in an exercise setting, the presence of others with high self-compassion, especially common

humanity of recognizing that everyone fails and has their shortcomings, helped women with their own perceived body image (Berry, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2010). Women who had social support and learned that others had the same concerns as they did about their body image were able to take a more self-compassionate approach to their bodies (Berry et al., 2010). Social physique anxiety is when one feels apprehensive about one's figure while in the presence of others (Mosewich et al., 2011). Those with high self-compassion are less likely to have social physique anxiety. High self-compassion individuals are also more likely to feel less shame and practice self-kindness (Mosewich et al., 2011). Ingstrup, Moeswich, and Holt (2017) found parents, peers, coaches, sport psychologists, and siblings can impact one's ability to be self-compassionate. These individuals socially influence individuals in how they interact and respond to success and failure in sport. Social experiences, in combination with self-reflection of past experiences, can help with the development of an athlete's self-compassion. If one member of a team express similar concerns or share are high in self-compassion, this can lead to others on a team being less critical to themselves and developing self-compassion. Sandstad (2017) described self-compassion as having a ripple effect in a social environment. As one encounters pain and suffering with self-compassion and acceptance, they would be able to offer others the same compassion and acceptance.

Fontana, Fry, and Cramer (2017) examined relationships among athlete's perceived motivational climate and self-compassion in a sport setting. Adult wiffleball players who perceived their teammates as caring, treating each other with kindness and respect, along with focusing on helping each member of the team reach their potential; the team members were likely to reciprocate those same feelings to their teammates and coaches (Fontana et al., 2017). Being self-compassionate impacts interactions. As an athlete can recover from failure by being

self-compassion, those same feelings can be reciprocated to teammates creating a positive environment of kindness, respect, and helping each team member. Wasylikiw and Clairo (2018) found men collegiate athletes with high levels of team self-compassion were more likely to seek support and have higher levels of team cohesiveness. Having a high team cohesiveness brings a sense of community where team members are less likely to feel alone. These athletes were more likely to seek help and utilize self-compassion compared to a control group of men not playing on athletic teams. These high rates of self-compassion also were linked to low depression and self-stigma (Wasylikiw & Clairo, 2018).

When athletes are part of a team, feel nurtured, and have valued opinions, there is a positive effect on team interactions. An athlete in a compassionate team setting who views a teammate making an error, whether physical or mental, will be more likely to sympathize rather than blame the athlete (Fontana et al., 2017). Learning self-compassion from these social groups can assist with help-seeking behavior, learning self-kindness, and putting experiences into perspective (Ingstrup et al., 2017).

Interventions of Self-Compassion in Sport

There are many benefits to being self-compassionate as it helps athletes healthily cope with personal shortcomings and performance failures. Ingstrup et al. (2017) touched on how interpersonal relationships with parents, coaches, and peers can help one learn self-compassion. To this date, few self-compassionate interventions have been tailored to sport performance and athlete wellbeing. Mosewich, Crocker, Kowalski, and Delongis (2013) and Rodriguez and Ebback (2014) discuss the specific self-compassion interventions that have been studied in a sport setting.

Mosewich et al. (2013) utilized a self-compassion intervention that consisted of listening to a psychoeducation presentation and completing writing task modules over seven days. In the self-compassionate writing task, participants completed modules that included writing prompts on thinking about a negative event in a way that fostered the three components of self-compassion. These modules were intended to help athletes learn, apply, and practice self-compassion in sport. Athletes who completed these modules experienced low levels of rumination and self-criticism due to performance mistakes compared to the control group who did not complete the self-compassionate intervention (Mosewich et al., 2013).

Rodriguez and Ebback (2014) tailored five self-compassion interventions from Kristen Neff's website (www.self-compassion.org) to female collegiate gymnasts. Gymnasts completed exercises such as "How Would You Treat a Teammate?" by completing a writing assignment reflecting on an experience when a teammate felt bad about themselves or struggled at practice or competition. The gymnast would then write down what they would say to their teammate in the situation, including the words and tone of voice they would use. Gymnasts then were asked to reflect on their own experience of suffering and how they would respond to themselves. Comparing the responses to what the gymnasts would say to their teammate and themselves helped build awareness of their self-talk. The exercise also sheds light on the common humanity component of self-compassion as they can recognize specific experiences of other teammates suffering just as they have.

Self-Compassion Break was another exercise used to help identify the three components of self-compassion (Rodriguez & Ebback, 2014). While imaging a difficult situation, the gymnast was asked to recognize that they are in a moment of suffering, utilizing mindfulness. Next, they are told that suffering is part of life, indicating they were not alone in their suffering

(i.e., common humanity). Lastly, they say, “may I be kind to myself” utilizing self-kindness (Rodriguez & Ebback, 2014). These cues can be helpful to move past a frustrating or difficult moment in a performance. A drawback to the exercise is not every athlete has time to go through these cues while performing their sport but can utilize the skill right after a performance.

Identifying What You Want is another exercise for gymnasts to reflect using a worksheet to identify ways the athlete uses self-criticism as a motivator (Rodriguez & Ebback, 2014). The gymnasts were asked to create a kind way to motivate themselves (e.g., replacing “I am too lazy” with “I can change my sleeping patterns to feel rested take better care of myself”). This exercise can utilize self-awareness in reflecting on how they talk to themselves and learn ways to respond with self-kindness. The gymnast’s also realized they are part of the human condition and not alone in being self-critical. A Bead for Your Thoughts is another helpful exercise to help one recognize self-talk. Using different colored beads, gymnasts can place one color bead into a jar when they notice negative self-talk and criticism and another color bead for when they utilize positive self-talk or affirmations. This exercise also helps the athlete become self-aware when positive and negative thoughts occur and how they help or hinder their performance and emotions (Rodriguez & Ebback, 2014).

Self-compassion is Not Self-Coddling is an exercise to help athletes recognize that using self-compassion is not the same as self-indulgence or spoiling yourself (Rodriguez & Ebback, 2014). The exercise consists of reflective questions such as “Would you withhold water from yourself during a four-hour practice to be tough on yourself?” (Rodriguez & Ebback, 2014). These reflective questions are related to taking care of oneself, such as drinking water, having optimal sleep and nutrition, and can change the athlete’s perspective. Their perspective changes from thinking they will be less motivated if they take care of themselves to switch the

perspective that taking care of themselves will help them prepare for performance. The last exercise presented by Rodriguez and Ebback (2014) is Self-compassion is Prevention, which is aimed at promoting and maintaining well-being. Using a worksheet, gymnasts fill out prevention strategies when a particularly adverse outcome occurs. (i.e., not being in shape for preseason training resulting with a prevention strategy to keep up with offseason conditioning). Each of these exercises was tailored for gymnasts but can be adapted for various performance settings to promote, self-compassion, self-awareness, and well-being of the athlete. These five exercises resulted in positive reactions from both coaches and athletes (Rodriguez & Ebback, 2014).

Another self-compassion intervention for athletes is the mindful sport performance enhancement (MSPE; Kaufman, Glass, & Pineau, 2018). MSPE was created for athletes and coaches and consists of six 90-minute sessions. It was adapted from mindfulness-based stress reduction to increase mindfulness skills for performance (Kaufman et al., 2018). Each session builds on the previous session. The first session is "building mindfulness fundamentals." The leaders explain how mindfulness relates to sport and performance. The second session is "strengthening the muscle of attention" with a focus on five performance facilitators that lead to flow and peak performance. Session three is "stretching the body's limits mindfully" to connect body movements with awareness and consists of exercises that include mindfulness with yoga. Embracing "what is in stride" in session four, is paying mindful attention when the body is in motion and includes walking meditation. Session five, "embodying the mindful performer," and session six, "ending the beginning," focus on the full integration of mindfulness in sport and how to integrate mindfulness into performance.

Kaufman, Glass, and Ankoff (2009) evaluated MSPE with recreational athletes participating in archery and golf by investigating how the program affected their performance.

Overall, results showed the MSPE helped athletes with mindfulness, flow, and sport confidence with their sport performance (Kaufman et al., 2009). Collegiate athletes who completed a revised MSPE program experienced benefits both for their sport performance and everyday life.

According to qualitative findings, increased mental toughness, emotional regulation, confidence, and self-understanding, and decreased anxiety were found among athletes who completed the revised MSPE program (Mistretta et al., 2017).

Barriers to Using Self-Compassion Interventions in Sport

Despite the numerous benefits that research has found regarding self-compassion, there is still much hesitation in using self-compassion interventions in a sport context. For some athletes, self-compassion is perceived as a weakness or an indication that they are giving up and making excuses (Schellenberg, Bailis, & Mosewich, 2016). Athletes may believe that being self-compassionate means they are self-indulgent, that they do not care about failing or making a mistake, or they are letting themselves get away with anything (Schellenberg et al., 2016). In a qualitative study, women collegiate athletes expressed concerns that “using too much self-compassion might result in complacency and passivity” (Ferguson et al., p. 212). The athletes reported that being too kind and loving to yourself may lead to mediocrity in sport, believing that “it may be ok not to do your best,” and letting yourself off the hook by not pushing yourself hard enough (Ferguson et al., 2014, p. 212). Women athletes also reported that they often relied on and found it necessary to use self-criticism to be successful and achieve goals (Ferguson et al., 2014).

An athlete’s sport-related passion may influence their likeliness of utilizing self-compassionate exercises. Schellenberg et al. (2016) examined harmonious and obsessive passion in relation to being self-compassionate in sport. Harmonious passion has favorable outcomes

when pursuing a passion, such as positive affect, concentration, and flow. Athletes with high levels of harmonious passion have great use of self-compassion and low levels of fear following a failed sport experience. Obsessive passion has maladaptive outcomes, such as negative affect, anxiety, and aggression when pursuing one's passion. Athletes who are high in obsessive passion may be fearful of being self-compassionate and may be resistant to change even though self-compassion interventions may lead to positive outcomes (Schellenberg et al., 2016). An athlete's passion for sport can either promote or hinder being self-compassionate. An athlete with harmonious passion may be more inclined to try self-compassion or have high self-compassion. Contrary, an athlete with obsessive passion is likely to put themselves in distress during difficult times and may become fearful of being kind to themselves (Schellenberg et al., 2016).

Mental toughness is another barrier for athletes to use self-compassion interventions. Mental toughness often is described as a psychological edge that can help an athlete cope with demands and remain determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure (Jones, 2002). Although there are many commonalities between mental toughness and self-compassion, there are also maladaptive parts of mental toughness, such as being stubborn, self-critical, and self-judgmental (Wilson, Bennett, Mosewich, Faulkner, & Crocker, 2019). Andersen (2011) suggested that other detrimental aspects of mental toughness include athletes playing through injury, being unlikely to seek medical help, and not completing rehabilitation. Psychologically, athletes who are experiencing emotional difficulty may hide this difficulty from others or use unhealthy coping strategies due to fear of appearing soft or weak (Andersen, 2011). The pressure to appear emotionally and physically strong at all times may be a barrier to being self-compassionate.

Wilson et al. (2019) explored the elite women athlete's perception of mental toughness and self-compassion. One participant referred to the balance of mental toughness and self-compassion as "the zipper effect." This "zipper effect" was described as the ability to switch back and forth between "an intensely focused, mentally focused, mindset that used emotional avoidance regulation to then a self-compassionate mindset that fostered self-care and managing emotions" (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 66). Self-compassion and mental toughness were described by Wilson et al. (2019) as compatible processes that both require mindfulness. When self-compassion and mental toughness are balanced, they can help athletes with their mindsets for optimal athletic performance.

Psychological Skills Training

In the field of sport psychology, there has been a focus on providing athletes and coaches psychological interventions to help or improve performance. Psychological skills training (PST) includes imagery, self-talk, relaxation, arousal control procedures, and goal setting (Gross et al., 2016). The ultimate goal for PST is for an athlete to reach optimal performance by learning to control internal processes, including their thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). Much of PST is a collection of stress management and cognitive-behavioral techniques (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is psychotherapy that links thoughts, behaviors, mood, and physical reactions to one's environment while aiming to improve emotional regulation and mental health. Using CBT, an athlete can document automatic thoughts, situations, moods, images, and thinking patterns concerning sport performance. With this information, an athlete can work on strengthening productive thoughts and behavior that improve performance (Behncke, 2004).

There are many strategies in PST to help an athlete achieve optimal performance. Goal setting is a performance enhancement technique frequently used and is defined as “what an individual is trying to accomplish; it is the object and aim of action” (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981, p. 126). There are three main types of goals that can provide significant advantages to an athlete compared to using one goal strategy (Filby, Maynard, & Graydon, 1999). Performance goals are benchmark goals to help an athlete focus on improving physically, psychologically, technically, or strategically. Process goals focus on specific behaviors while performing. Lastly, outcome goals are focused on performance results and social comparison. Important aspects to setting goals include setting specific, moderately difficult, positive, and short and long-range goals. Setting goals for both practice and competition settings is beneficial for the athlete’s performance as well (Gould, 2015).

Self-talk is a cognitive strategy that utilizes verbalizations or statements directed toward the self (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). Self-talk statements can be both instructional and motivational (Hardy, 2006). For instance, an instructional cue word during a skill movement (e.g., “step, swing” in a tennis swing) can help the athlete remember key aspects of the movement. Positive self-talk has also been linked to increased motivation in athletes (Hardy, 2006). There are various exercises to help athletes control their self-talk (Williams, Zinsser, & Bunker, 2015). Thought stoppage is an exercise that helps the athlete become aware of counterproductive thoughts and uses a trigger (e.g., word “stop” or physical movement of clapping hands) to eliminate such thoughts. Reframing is another self-talk exercise that helps the athlete notice their negative thoughts and have it reframed into a different perspective to help rather than impede the athlete’s performance. Affirmations promote positive thoughts and attitudes towards oneself.

Imagery is another PST exercise that is beneficial for athletes' performance (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). Imagery is the creation and recreation of experiences in the mind (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). Using imagery has been associated with increased confidence, self-efficacy, attention control, and team cohesion (Westlund, Pope, & Tobin, 2012). Imagery is a versatile skill that can be used in a variety of contexts (e.g., before, during, and after a competition, practice environments, or with athletes with injuries). Using imagery daily at practice and before performances can help athletes get into the proper frame of mind, feel more relaxed, and increase kinesthetic awareness (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015).

An athlete's arousal level is an essential factor contributing to optimal performance. There are many techniques used to help enhance (i.e., "psych up") or reduce (i.e., "psych down") one's arousal level to prevent the athlete from being under- or over-aroused for their performance (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). A variety of breathing and meditation exercises can be used to assist athletes in reducing their arousal levels (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). Pep talks, self-talk, verbal cues, and music can help an athlete enhance their arousal levels (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). For these exercises to be effective, the athlete must have an awareness of their optimal arousal levels for performance.

Athletes may also experience burnout, which PST can help an athlete overcome. Athlete burnout is defined as a "multidimensional, cognitive-affective syndrome characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, and sport devaluation" (Raedeke & Smith, 2009, p. 410). Overtraining and not having the proper recovery time can lead to athlete burnout. Athletes experience various kinds of stress, including psychosocial stress and maladaptive perfectionism when performing. When an athlete experiences difficulty balancing sport demands and their ability to meet those demands, burnout is more likely to occur. Some

athletes may feel entrapped in their sport and feel they must continue participating because they have to and not necessarily because they want to (DeFreese, Raedeke, & Smith, 2015). Providing education to coaches in trying to be flexible to physical demands along with finding ways to keep the practice environment exciting can help athletes from burnout. Positive social support and PST are also key factors in assisting athletes from burnout (Smith, Pacewicz & Raedeke, 2019).

PST exercises discussed are concentrated on helping the athlete achieve optimal performance. The exercises also can be used to cultivate compassion. Using a combination of PST and self-compassion-based interventions, athletes could have the ability to use their mental skills with a compassionate focus and acquire many benefits as compared to just using one type of intervention.

Self-Compassion Based Psychological Skills Program for Irish Dancers

Since the theatrical show *Riverdance* (that showcases traditional Irish dance and music) became an international sensation in the mid-1990s, competitive Irish dancing has seen an increase in both the number of competitors and countries becoming involved in the sport. The Irish Dancing World Championships are held once a year and draws the world's best dancers through qualifying events during the year. Recent world championships have included over 5,000 dancers and 25,000 spectators from over 30 countries (Oireachtas Rince Na Cruinne, 2019). The sport requires an immense amount of strength and stamina, and due to the rise of participants, there are limited qualifying placements at competitions for the world championships. Competitions have become more intense, requiring increased training demands both in and out of the dance studio.

While physically, dancers are finding resources to become stronger, mentally, there is a lack of sport psychology resources available specifically for competitive Irish dancers to develop their mental skills and improve performance. Competitive Irish dancers are in a sport environment and face many of the same hardships athletes face, such as failure, injury, and negative emotions that can prevent peak performance and decrease mental health and overall wellbeing (Curran & Hill, 2018; Mosewich et al., 2019).

Research is limited regarding sport psychology and dance, despite the similarity dancers have with athletes across sports. Dancers will push themselves to their physical limits to master techniques (Noh, Morris, & Andersen, 2003). Dancers may also encounter a great deal of psychological stress when training, which can play a crucial role in injury risk (Williams, 2001). Demands from dancing also can impact mental health. Among ballerinas, high levels of anxiety were found in dancers as they increased in rank (Walker & Nordin-Bates, 2010). As a dancer increases in rank, so does the physical and psychological demands of performing optimally. Proper preparation, social support, and PST-related interventions helped ballerinas manage their anxiety (Walker & Nordin-Bates, 2010). Implementing psychological strategies specific to dancers can help manage the demands placed upon them and increase their performance and well-being.

Conclusion

Self-compassion has shown to have a great deal of benefits related to an individual's overall psychological, physiological, and interpersonal wellbeing both in and out of sport. Cultivating compassion through mindfulness, self-kindness, and common humanity has benefits for mental health and sports performance, including increased internal motivation, positive emotional coping skills, self-acceptance, and team cohesion. PST has many interventions for

optimal sport performance. However, self-compassion also enhances sport performance and makes up for where PST lacks. For example, self-compassion and mindfulness training has benefits of increased emotional regulation, mental health benefits, and perceived performance improvement, which can be related to increased confidence. Irish dancers experience similar demands to other athletes and have a lack of specialized mental preparation for their sport. Utilizing self-compassion strategies and integrating them into PST interventions can help enhance these benefits providing a more wholesome approach to training. A self-compassion program for Irish Dancers combining psychological skills training that focuses on compassionate goal setting, relaxation, thoughts, imagery, self-care, and routines can help these athletes gain the benefits of the constructs and interventions discussed.

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