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Tender & fierce self-compassion

Two faces of the same care — both are needed.

Dr. Kristin Neff's more recent work distinguishes two complementary expressions of self-compassion. **Tender** self-compassion is the soft, comforting energy that holds you when you suffer. **Fierce** self-compassion is the active, protective energy that stands up for you, draws boundaries, and motivates change. A complete self-compassion practice integrates both.

<h2>Tender</h2> <p><i>Yin energy — being with</i></p> <p>Comforting. Holding yourself when you hurt. Soothing. Calming the nervous system. Validating. Saying "this is real, this matters". Accepting. Allowing the feeling to be here. Gentle. Speaking to yourself with warmth.</p>	<h2>Fierce</h2> <p><i>Yang energy — acting for</i></p> <p>Protecting. Saying no, drawing a clear boundary. Providing. Asking for what you need; meeting it. Motivating. Encouraging yourself to change or grow. Asserting. Standing up for your worth and values. Strengthening. Building courage and resolve.</p>
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When does each show up?

When you fail at something important...

Tender first — comfort the disappointment. Then **fierce** — encourage yourself to try again, learn, persist.

When someone treats you unfairly...

Fierce — protect yourself, set a limit, advocate for what is right. Then **tender** — hold the hurt that came with it.

When you are exhausted and depleted...

Tender — rest, soothe, allow. Then **fierce** — provide what you need; say no to what is draining you.

When you keep repeating a pattern...

Tender — meet the part of you that's stuck without shame. Then **fierce** — motivate the change you actually want.

References

- Neff, K. D. (2021). *Fierce self-compassion: How women can harness kindness to speak up, claim their power, and thrive*. Harper Wave.
Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2018). *The mindful self-compassion workbook*. Guilford Press.