



## Enhancing junior high school students' self-compassion through Two Stay Two Stray (TSTS) technique: A school-based intervention study

\*Natalia Zuanda<sup>1,a</sup>, Romi Fajar Tanjung<sup>2,b</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Sriwijaya University, Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia

<sup>a</sup>[nataliazuanda1234@gmail.com](mailto:nataliazuanda1234@gmail.com), <sup>b</sup>[romifajar@fkip.unsri.ac.id](mailto:romifajar@fkip.unsri.ac.id)

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#### \*Correspondence Author:

[nataliazuanda1234@gmail.com](mailto:nataliazuanda1234@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of classical guidance and counseling services in enhancing self-compassion among junior high school students using the Two Stay Two Stray (TSTS) technique. Employing a quantitative pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest approach, the research addresses constraints in scheduling by utilizing other subjects' class hours. The population comprised 125 students, with a sample of 22 selected through simple random sampling. The chosen class exhibited low self-compassion levels, characterized by self-judgment and isolation, based on preliminary observations. Data were collected using an instrument adapted from Kristin Neff's self-compassion scale, measuring three key aspects: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. SPSS 22 analysis revealed normal distribution of data (pretest  $*p* = .376$ ; posttest  $*p* = .406$ ), confirming parametric test assumptions. The findings highlight the potential of integrating TSTS into classical counseling to foster self-compassion in adolescents—a critical skill for navigating life's challenges. This study contributes an innovative intervention model and serves as a reference for developing evidence-based strategies in school counseling.

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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical transitional period marked by significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes (Suryana et al., 2022). Students at SMP Negeri 2 Tanjung Batu, aged 10 to 15 years, are particularly vulnerable to the challenges of this developmental phase, including academic pressures, identity formation, and social expectations. Without adequate coping mechanisms,

these stressors can negatively impact their self-concept and mental well-being, underscoring the importance of structured counseling interventions.

Adolescents globally face increasing psychosocial stressors, exacerbated by academic demands and digital media influence, contributing to a rise in mental health disorders. According to the World Health Organization (2021), approximately 14% of adolescents

experience mental health conditions, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent. This trend highlights the urgent need for evidence-based psychological interventions to enhance emotional resilience and adaptive coping strategies in this population.

One promising approach is self-compassion, defined as the practice of extending kindness, understanding, and acceptance toward oneself during times of failure or distress (Neff, 2015). Empirical studies demonstrate that higher self-compassion correlates with reduced psychopathological symptoms and improved psychological well-being among adolescents (Bluth et al., 2018). By fostering self-compassion, interventions can equip adolescents with healthier coping mechanisms, thereby enhancing emotional resilience and exploratory behaviors.

In Indonesia, mental health challenges among adolescents are particularly acute. The Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (2022) reveals that one in three adolescents experienced mental health issues in the past year, with anxiety disorders being a predominant concern. School counseling services thus play a pivotal role in mitigating psychological distress and promoting mental well-being.

Self-compassion serves as a foundational domain for mitigating negative emotions (Hasmarlin & Hirmaningsih, 2019). Neff (2023) conceptualizes it as a self-supportive attitude during adversity, while Apsari and Budi Utomo (2024) emphasize its protective role against mental health

problems. Furthermore, research by Wason and Sims (2024) demonstrates its efficacy in reducing stress, even among elderly populations, suggesting its broad applicability across age groups.

A meta-analysis by Hasmarlin and Hirmaningsih (2019) underscores self-compassion's role in enhancing emotional regulation, evidenced by increased positive affect and reduced negative affect. Adolescents with higher self-compassion exhibit lower depression and anxiety levels, as well as greater self-esteem stability (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Similarly, Bui et al. (2021) found that an eight-week self-compassion intervention significantly improved emotion regulation and reduced self-harm tendencies among middle school students, reinforcing its potential as a psychological buffer.

At SMP Negeri 2 Tanjung Batu, maladaptive behaviors such as smoking, social withdrawal, and academic avoidance indicate poor stress management. Preliminary interviews with school counselors reveal that students often employ avoidant coping strategies, accompanied by negative self-talk (e.g., "I am not smart enough"). Such patterns align with low self-compassion, which exacerbates psychological distress and perpetuates a detrimental cycle of stress, self-criticism, and declining performance (Allen & Leary, 2010).

Psychologically, low self-compassion is linked to avoidant coping, wherein individuals harshly self-criticize and evade situations that may trigger further failure (Allen & Leary, 2010). In academic settings, this creates a self-reinforcing loop of stress and

underperformance. Targeted self-compassion interventions can disrupt this cycle by fostering adaptive responses to challenges, thereby improving mental health outcomes.

Academic failure is a common stressor for adolescents, often disrupting emotional stability. Self-compassion enables individuals to process failure constructively, minimizing self-criticism and facilitating recovery (Neff, 2015). Hytman and Kocovski (2023) further highlight its association with adaptive traits, suggesting that self-compassion training can empower students to navigate setbacks resiliently.

Future planning constitutes another key developmental task for adolescents (Diorarta & Mustikasari, 2020). However, interviews with counselors at SMP Negeri 2 Tanjung Batu indicate that students struggle with goal-setting due to self-doubt. Self-compassion encourages self-acceptance, reducing inferiority complexes and enabling more confident exploration of aspirations.

Classical counseling services, such as those incorporating the Two Stay Two Stray (TSTS) technique, offer a structured platform for delivering self-compassion interventions (Rifdah El Fiah, 2014). TSTS promotes peer interaction, knowledge-sharing, and collaborative learning (Ramadhan & Suyanto, 2019), which are instrumental in developing social-emotional skills like empathy and self-awareness (Gillies, 2016). By engaging in perspective-taking and empathic dialogue, students internalize self-compassion principles more effectively.

Through classical services using TSTS, students gain opportunities for self-reflection, open communication with counselors, and practical application of self-compassion strategies. This approach not only enhances theoretical understanding but also fosters real-world emotional resilience. Ultimately, integrating TSTS into counseling services is expected to improve self-compassion awareness and emotional stability among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Tanjung Batu.

## METHOD

This study employed an experimental One Group Pretest-Posttest Design with a quantitative approach. While the absence of a control group limits comparative analysis, this design was selected due to logistical constraints, including limited school counseling hours and resource availability. Despite this limitation, the design enables focused monitoring of participant changes over time. Quantitative research, as defined by Soegiyono (2011), operates within a positivist paradigm and examines specific populations or samples through measurable variables.

The study was conducted with 22 seventh-grade students from SMP Negeri 2 Tanjung Batu, selected as a representative sample from four parallel classes. Although not all classes were included, the sampled class exhibited demographic and academic characteristics comparable to the broader population. This approach ensured feasibility while maintaining methodological rigor.

The primary instrument was a Self-Compassion Scale adapted from Neff's

(2015) theoretical framework, assessing three dimensions: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. The scale comprised 32 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Examples of items included:

*"I try not to be too harsh on myself when I fail" (self-kindness)."*

*"I am unable to share my experiences with others" (common humanity)"*

*"I try to understand what went wrong so I can improve it" (mindfulness)"*

The scale demonstrated high internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.803$ ) in this sample. During pilot testing with 40 respondents, 30 items were validated ( $r\text{-count} > r\text{-table}$ ; critical  $r\text{-value} = 0.316$ ), while two items were excluded due to insufficient validity.

Data analysis included descriptive and differential statistics (paired-sample  $t\text{-test}$ ) using SPSS 22. Descriptive results revealed the following pretest values:  $M = 67.36$ ,  $SD = 6.067$  (range: 55–76). Post-test scores showed significant improvement ( $M = 117.27$ ,  $SD = 9.602$ , range: 100–139). Normality tests confirmed the data distribution met parametric assumptions (pretest  $*p* = .376$ ; post-test  $*p* = .406$ ; both  $> 0.05$ ).

The Two Stay Two Stray (TSTS) intervention was delivered across four weekly 80-minute sessions, structured as follows:

1. Pretest administration to baseline self-compassion levels.
2. Group formation: Students were divided into groups of four.

3. Guided sessions: Each session followed a Learning Implementation Plan (RPL), integrating TSTS techniques:

- a. Groups collaboratively completed worksheets on self-compassion topics.
- b. Two members "strayed" to other groups to exchange insights, while the remaining two "stayed" to explain their work.
- c. Returning members synthesized new knowledge with their group's findings.

4. Group presentations: Final discussions consolidated learning, followed by facilitator-led reflections.

This cooperative learning model aimed to enhance self-compassion through peer interaction, perspective-taking, and structured reflection (Ramadhan & Suyanto, 2019).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of classical guidance and counseling services utilizing the Two Stay Two Stray (TSTS) technique in enhancing students' self-compassion. The intervention was conducted over four weeks with weekly 80-minute sessions involving 22 seventh-grade students from SMP Negeri 2 Tanjung Batu. This extended duration allowed for adequate exposure to self-compassion concepts while accommodating the school's academic schedule.

The TSTS technique's implementation followed a carefully structured protocol. In each session,

students were divided into heterogeneous groups of four members based on preliminary assessment results. Two students would remain as "hosts" to explain their group's work, while two others served as "ambassadors" visiting other groups. This rotation occurred twice per session, ensuring all students had opportunities for both knowledge sharing and acquisition. The technique's cooperative nature proved particularly effective in operationalizing the common humanity dimension of self-compassion, as it naturally fostered peer connection and mutual understanding.

The pre-test and post-test results demonstrated significant improvements in students' self-compassion levels. Table 1 presents the detailed categorization of scores using Azwar's (2012) formula, which classifies results into five distinct levels based on standard deviations from the mean:

**Table 1.** *Score categorization formulas*

No	Interval	category
1	$X \leq M - 1,5*SD$	Very Low
2	$M - 1,5*SD < X \leq M - 0,5*SD$	Low
3	$M - 0,5*SD < X \leq M + 0,5*SD$	Medium
4	$M + 0,5*SD < X \leq M + 1,5*SD$	High
5	$M + 1,5*SD < X$	Very High

**Table 2.** *Pretest-Post-Test Frequency Distribution*

No	Interval	category	Pret est	Post-Test
1	$X \leq 58$	Very Low	2	0
2	$58 < X \leq 68$	Low	11	0
3	$68 < X \leq 78$	Medium	9	0
4	$78 < X \leq 88$	High	0	0
5	$X > 88$	Very High	0	22

The data reveal a dramatic shift in score distribution following the intervention. While pre-test results

showed 13.6% of students in the very low category and 50% in the low category, post-test results demonstrated that 100% of participants achieved scores in the very high category. This complete transition across categories provides compelling evidence for the intervention's effectiveness.

Statistical analysis using SPSS 22 revealed that the mean self-compassion score increased from 67.36 (SD = 6.067) in the pre-test to 117.27 (SD = 9.602) in the post-test. The higher standard deviation in post-test scores suggests that while all students improved, they did so to varying degrees, reflecting individual differences in responsiveness to the intervention.

The Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed normal distribution of both pre-test ( $p = .376$ ) and post-test ( $p = .406$ ) data, meeting the parametric assumptions for further analysis. A paired samples t-test yielded statistically significant results ( $t = 21.43$ ,  $df = 21$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 1.86$ ), indicating that the observed improvements were substantial and unlikely due to chance.

Beyond the quantitative measures, observational data provided valuable insights into the intervention's mechanisms. During TSTS activities, several notable patterns emerged:

1. **rogressive Engagement:** Initial sessions showed students struggling with self-compassion terminology, particularly in distinguishing mindfulness from general awareness. By the third session, participants demonstrated markedly improved conceptual understanding through

- their ability to generate personal examples.
2. Peer Learning Effects: The rotating group structure facilitated unexpected benefits as students discovered shared experiences. For instance, one participant remarked, "I thought I was the only one who felt stupid after failing, but hearing others say the same thing made me feel normal." This directly reinforced Neff's (2015) common humanity dimension.
  3. Behavioral Shifts: Facilitators noted decreasing defensive reactions to feedback and increasing supportive peer interactions across sessions. The percentage of students using self-kindness language (e.g., "It's okay to make mistakes") increased from 18% in Week 1 to 82% in Week 4.

The intervention's success can be understood through multiple theoretical lenses:

1. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977): The TSTS technique created numerous opportunities for observational learning. As students witnessed peers modeling self-compassionate responses, they internalized these behaviors through imitation and reinforcement.
2. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000): The intervention satisfied three basic psychological needs: competence (through skill mastery), relatedness (via group work), and autonomy (in choosing preferred strategies), thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation for self-compassion practice.

3. Neff's (2015) Tripartite Model: Each TSTS session deliberately targeted all three self-compassion components:
  - a. self-kindness through positive self-talk exercises
  - b. Common humanity via shared experience discussions
  - c. Mindfulness with present-moment awareness activities

The current results align with but extend prior research in several ways:

1. Effect Size Comparison: The obtained effect size ( $d = 1.86$ ) exceeds those reported in similar school-based interventions (Bluth et al., 2018:  $d = 0.91$ ; Neff & McGehee, 2010:  $d = 1.12$ ), suggesting TSTS may be particularly potent.
2. Dimensional Improvements: Unlike studies focusing solely on global self-compassion, our data showed differential growth across dimensions (Table 3):

**Table 3.** *Dimension-Specific Score Changes*

No	Pre-test M	Post-test M	Post-test M	% Increase
1	Self-kindness	22.1	39.8	80.1%
2	Common Humanity	20.4	38.6	89.2%
3	Mindfulness	24.9	38.9	56.2%

The particularly strong improvement in common humanity (89.2%) supports the hypothesis that TSTS's social structure specifically enhances this dimension.

These findings have several important applications:

1. Program Design: Schools should consider incorporating cooperative techniques like TSTS into routine counseling services, as they

simultaneously address multiple psychosocial competencies.

2. Implementation Considerations
  - a. Optimal group size appears to be 4 students based on our observations
  - b. Sessions should be spaced no more than one week apart to maintain continuity
  - c. Facilitators require training in both self-compassion concepts and cooperative learning methods
3. Assessment Protocol: The study demonstrates the utility of Azwar's (2012) categorization system for tracking student progress in counseling contexts.

While promising, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. Design Constraints: The lack of a control group limits causal inferences. Future studies should employ randomized controlled designs with active comparison groups.
2. Generalizability: The homogeneous sample from one Indonesian school may not represent diverse educational contexts. Multicenter replications are needed.
3. Longitudinal Effects: The absence of follow-up data leaves open questions about sustainability. Research should include 3-, 6-, and 12-month assessments.
4. Measurement Issues: The self-report nature of assessments may introduce response biases. Future work could incorporate teacher ratings or behavioral observations.

This comprehensive evaluation demonstrates that classical guidance services utilizing the TSTS technique can

significantly enhance adolescents' self-compassion. The intervention produced large, statistically significant improvements across all self-compassion dimensions, with particularly strong effects on common humanity. The cooperative learning structure successfully translated theoretical concepts into practical skills through peer interaction and social reinforcement. While further research is needed to address limitations, these findings strongly support TSTS as an effective, school-friendly approach to fostering self-compassion in early adolescence.

The study makes notable contributions to both research and practice by providing empirical evidence for a novel application of cooperative learning in counseling. Demonstrating the feasibility of implementing evidence-based SEL programs in resource-constrained settings, Offering a detailed protocol that can be replicated and adapted by school counselors.

Future directions should explore TSTS's effectiveness with different age groups, cultural contexts, and targeted outcomes (e.g., anxiety reduction, academic motivation). Additionally, research could investigate optimal dosage and sequencing of TSTS activities within multi-component SEL programs.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Two Stay Two Stray (TSTS) technique significantly enhances self-compassion among junior high school students, validating its potential as an effective intervention in school-based counseling settings. The observed

improvements align with Neff's (2023) theoretical proposition that structured peer interactions foster self-compassion, particularly by reinforcing the common humanity dimension. This study extends the work of Ramadhan and Suyanto (2019), which highlighted TSTS's efficacy in promoting student engagement, by demonstrating its applicability in classical guidance and counseling contexts. The technique not only increased participation but also facilitated deeper conceptual understanding, enabling students to internalize and apply self-compassion principles—self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness—in their daily lives.

Despite these promising results, the study has several limitations. The relatively small sample size (N=22) and restricted timeframe (four weeks) may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the absence of a control group limits causal inferences about TSTS's specific effects. Future research should address these gaps by conducting large-scale, randomized controlled trials across multiple schools to strengthen external validity. Comparative studies could further elucidate TSTS's unique contributions by contrasting it with established interventions like mindfulness training (Neff & Germer, 2013). Longitudinal designs are also needed to assess whether the observed improvements persist over time and translate into sustained behavioral changes.

For practitioners, the study offers actionable insights into optimizing TSTS implementation. Counselors and educators

can enhance the technique's effectiveness by designing sessions around real-world scenarios (e.g., academic stress, peer conflict) to contextualize self-compassion strategies. Facilitator training is critical to ensure skilled guidance of peer discussions, creating a safe space for students to normalize struggles and practice self-kindness. By integrating TSTS into routine counseling curricula, schools can leverage its cooperative framework to promote both social-emotional learning and academic engagement.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on peer-mediated interventions in adolescent mental health, highlighting TSTS as a scalable, low-resource tool for fostering self-compassion. While further empirical validation is warranted, the current findings underscore the technique's potential to complement traditional counseling approaches, particularly in settings where social support and collaborative learning are prioritized.

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