



A Guide to Overcoming Shame

“Shame is the lie someone told you about yourself.”

—Anais Nin—

Shame is a topic that frequently comes up among survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Overcoming shame is a crucial part of healing from any traumatic experience.

- Shame is based on a negative sense of self or a belief that you inherently lack worth. Instead of *doing* something bad, you may believe that you *are* bad.
- The limbic system triggers shame as a survival response, much like anxiety. When you're suffering from trauma, however, it's permanently "on" and instead of helping you, it ends up hurting you.
- Shame is a personal experience for the fact that it's internal. It's a response about yourself to yourself.
- When you try to apply meaning to your abuse, especially as a child, it can lead to thought patterns or negative self-talk which then reinforces the shame.
- Shame first arises in the context of relationships. If you were mistreated as a child, then how could you learn to value yourself and know your worth?

Practice Self-Compassion

- Write a self-compassionate letter (look at the accompanying handout).
- What would you say to a friend? Be as kind to yourself as you would be to a good friend in the same situation.
- Reflect on times when compassion or empathy were given to you, or by you.
- Practice compassionate meditations that allow you to reflect or meditate on words you've longed to hear.

Suggested Reading

The Gift of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are by Brene Brown