



Healing the Wounds of Inner Shame Transcript

The topic of this presentation is, Healing the Wounds of Inner Shame. Before we begin, I want to take a moment and give an overview of what we plan to cover during this presentation. We will discuss the meaning of shame as well as the impact that it has on one's physical and psychological wellbeing. We will also talk about how feeling shame can impact caregiving. Lastly, we will discuss recognizing your shame triggers, how to increase shame resilience, and explore ways of healing shame. We have an activity at the end, so please stay tuned in.

Shame is a common emotion that we all have experienced in our lives. It is something that unites us; as we all have our own silent struggles with shame. You may ask; "What is shame and where does it come from?" Shame is a painful emotion that can cause you to have negative thoughts about yourself and lead you to feel that you are flawed or less than. Shame can create long lasting wounds that can negatively influence many aspects of your life and how you perceive yourself as a human being. Sometimes shame comes from someone else's perception or thoughts about you. This perception may cause harm to your pride and your own thoughts about yourself. Shame can make you believe that who you are is not enough or that you are broken, wrong or unworthy.

Let us take a moment to examine the difference between shame and guilt. Shame and guilt are two different emotions that can be confused with one another. When you experience shame, you are feeling that your whole self is wrong. When you feel guilty, you are recognizing that you have done something wrong. Shame makes it difficult to find a solution when you are believing that you are the problem and can make it extremely difficult to feel positive about yourself. The difference between shame and guilt is that guilt describes something you have done that you do not feel good about. Shame refers to an identity or how you view yourself as a whole person.

I want you think about a time that you felt shame. Were you feeling physically sick to your stomach or have a racing heartbeat? Did you feel insecure or have a feeling of smallness? Did you feel that you are not good enough or have repeated thoughts about how you can never do anything right? Did those thoughts cripple you into feeling poorly about yourself and your capabilities? Did you attack yourself with self-blame? What caused this reaction and how did it make you feel?

Feeling shame can cause physical and emotional reactions. Physical symptoms of shame can feel like chest tightness, stomach sickness, racing heartbeat, and a heightened level of stress. You may experience flushed skin and want to avoid eye



contact when feeling this way. You may also feel small, undeserving, or unworthy. This may result in you having anger towards yourself or can cause you to lash out in anger and blame towards others. Shame can cause the good feeling you have about yourself to wilt away. All these feelings are stress inducing which is detrimental to your wellbeing. What do you feel physically or emotionally when you feel shame? How do you know when you are feeling shame?

Shame is an overwhelming painful feeling that causes you to believe that you are flawed. Shame can also make you feel that you are unworthy of acceptance and belonging. Research shows that shame can cause you to withdraw, hide, or conceal yourself from others. As a result, you may cut yourself off from friendship or connecting with others. You may avoid vulnerability and feel scared to share your true self with the world. You may also be prone to suppressing your emotions. If you feel shame because of something that happened to you; this may result in you keeping your thoughts and feelings wrapped up inside which can lead to further issues and poor coping skills. How do you recognize when shame is influencing how you behave or function? How does feeling shame impact your ability to cope with past or ongoing stressors?

As mentioned earlier, shame can be created through the lens of others and their perception of how they view you. Shame may also be caused when someone belittles or downplays your efforts or achievements. Can you recall a time where you felt shame due someone else's thoughts about you or who they think you are? What did the person say to cause you to fall into shame and feel poorly about yourself? Shaming comments may be conveyed in repeated statements such as, "Why are you doing it that way?" "What were you thinking?" "That won't work" or, more directly, "No matter how much you try, you won't be as good as them."

The truth of the matter is we all have experienced shame and we all have been shamed by someone. Shaming comments can be deliberate and have the purpose of making you feel small. There are also times that those comments can be accidental but can still trigger shame. Regardless of how those messages are delivered; it does not lessen the hurt felt.

When you are in shame, you often have the intense need to protect yourself by any means or to save face. This touches upon how your reaction to shame may revert to the innate fight, flight, and freeze response. Have you ever felt shame and wanted to run and hide? Or was there a time when you felt shame and you lashed out and may have caused shame in someone else? Being judgmental, argumentative, and critical of



others are just some ways that many people manage this internal conflict. Rather than recognize and accept shame; they may use anger to hurt or lash back to make another feel ashamed.

Have you recognized that you have done something similar in effort to avoid that undesirable feeling even if you caused shame in someone you love and care for? Or have you found that your own harsh inner critic has hardened you into being critical of others? Shaming behavior can become a reflex for a person to fight against feeling ashamed and powerless by becoming combative and critical of others. It's a protection with painful consequences for all concerned. Ultimately, feeling shame can cause further shame; and this can be a vicious cycle.

When shame results in self-attack; it can feel overwhelming and all encompassing. It can wash over you completely and can be difficult to notice or combat directly. Shame is difficult to recognize and recover from. When you are feeling shame; it can have many emotional outcomes such as feelings of envy, anger or rage. You may feel anxious or struggle with depressed feelings such as sadness, loneliness, depletion, and emptiness as a result of being shamed. You can see just how easily shame can become destructive. Shame is toxic and can be a paralyzing overall assessment of self. When severe, shame can form the lens through which all self-evaluation is viewed and potentially damage your spirit.

Research suggests that people who live with shame are more likely to relapse back into problematic behaviors. For example, people who struggle with alcoholism are more likely to relapse back into drinking if they experience shame. People who are ashamed of their behavior sometimes purposely continue to engage in that behavior because they don't believe that change or healing is possible. Shame can be the reason people choose to not take steps towards healing. Furthermore, people who live with shame believe that they are worthless and so they often begin to treat themselves as such by engaging in behaviors that they know are bad for their health and well-being.

Feeling shame is a signal that your positive feelings for self-have been interrupted. The following are warning signs that shame may be taking over: you may have a sense of low energy; you may feel tension in your body, you may feel anxious and unsure of yourself, you may become irritable, sad, or tearful, or you may become critical and judgmental of others. Explore if shame is influencing these reactions in you. If you struggle with feeling this way, just know that you are not alone and that you can regain your power.



Let us take a moment to examine how shame impacts caregiving. We know that caregiving can be one of the most stressful life events that people may experience. Many have disclosed feelings of fear, stress, and shame as a caregiver. The stress of being open to criticism can be disheartening and overwhelming. Unfortunately, like parenting, caregiving is often subjected to much criticism, and everyone appears to be a critic. Chelsea, a caregiver shared experiences with feeling shame. Chelsea related, “My dad died two years ago. It was sudden and unexpected. My family was heartbroken, especially my mom. She has been sick for what feels like forever, and he was the one who took care of her. Now we take care of my mom. Or, I should say, I take care of my mom. My older brother is far too busy with his important life. My older sister’s role is to observe and critique my every move. About six months ago, my husband and I realized we could no longer do it. Neither physically nor emotionally. We decided to put mom in an assisted living facility close to our house. Well, my brother and sister were appalled. My sister said, “I can’t believe you’re going to put her in a prison.” My brother said, “Absolutely not,” in this very matter of fact tone. Of course, they both said, due to their hectic lives, they couldn’t do any more than what they were doing. When I told them we had no choice, they said it was cruel and they wouldn’t help pay for it. She is still living in her house. I still go over there every day on my lunch break or after work. My brother and sister choose to think everything is perfect, even though my mom is getting worse and it’s getting more dangerous for her to live by herself. And me, my marriage is on the rocks, my boss is always angry, and I’m at my personal breaking point.”

Chelsea’s story illustrates many of the challenges of caregiving, being critiqued, and feeling shamed. In this situation, the shame she felt altered her decision; something that she felt was necessary for several reasons. When you experience shame, your ability to maintain your power is jeopardized as shame often causes feelings of confusion, helplessness, fear, or anger. As expected, this could have a negative impact on your judgement. When you are overwhelmed with shame, you may question the decisions or actions that you once would have made without any hesitation.

There are many reasons why you may feel shame in your role as a caregiver. Some people may even feel shame in having such a role or being connected to someone with challenging needs that they feel are viewed negatively by society. How is shame triggered in you as a caregiver?

Shame has the tendency of hitting you where you are most vulnerable. A caregiver or a parent may feel shame when their care is being questioned. A person



going through financial hardships may feel shame when their spouse acknowledges something that their neighbor has but is beyond their means. In short, your insecurities can lead you into falling into a “shame trap.” Negative early life experiences can fuel or breed such insecurities that result in shameful feelings. How has your family expectations or childhood experiences influenced or shaped your feelings of self? Are the expectations of others or early life experiences helpful or detrimental to your overall self-assessment? Are you holding yourself to expectations that are too high? These are important questions to ask when thinking about what triggers your shame.

Research suggests that your early experiences with shame are often stored in your memories as traumas. This explains why you often have painful physical reactions when feeling criticized, rejected, ridiculed, and shamed. When you experience something in the present that triggers an old trauma, it can feel retraumatizing. For many, it can cause a feeling of helplessness and smallness when you feel shame. It can be difficult to identify shame as the main issue when trying to manage these intense feelings. It is important to recognize these feelings and explore the source of where they are coming from.

Here are some important things to think about when examining your shame triggers. How realistic are my expectations? Can I be all these things all the time? Am I describing who I want to be or am I internalizing other’s expectations of me? Am I feeling shame now because of being hurt in my early life? What was the message then that is triggering shame now? Have you ever been told, you can’t think for yourself, you aren’t smart, you are too emotional, you are weak, you don’t look good? Those messages as well as many others can foster shameful feelings and can be triggers for you. Now that we have discussed recognizing shame, let us explore how to move forward towards healing.

It is important to consider that becoming familiar with a difficult emotion means getting interested and curious about it, like you might do when visiting a new city. Take it slow, uncovering new “territory” a bit at a time instead of trying to get to know it all at once. As you do, you learn that you can sit with uncomfortable feelings that will eventually pass. Over time, you will develop resilience, self-knowledge, and trust in yourself. As the presentation continues, you will learn about key tools that can help you better understand your shame.

Patience is one important tool in the healing process. Shame is about a person’s identity as a human being. Since the wounds from shame are frequently deep and long lasting, it will take a little while to feel better. Impatience can be a problem as you deal



with shame. It is natural to want relief from that feeling as quickly as possible. Just hearing about shame as you listen to this presentation can temporarily seem to intensify the problem. Most of all, you want your shame to go away so that you can feel your right to exist in this world. While this is completely natural, you could end up shaming yourself even more by rushing too quickly to “fix” your shame.

A critical tool for understanding your shame is building self-awareness. Shame is not easy to notice or face. After all, who wants to study exactly how you hold yourself in contempt? Many people dread the terrible feelings of self-hatred that lie deep inside them and are embarrassed to admit that they have such thoughts. Healing your shame will take courage. You will have to examine your shame even though your natural impulse is to hide from it.

How does someone improve their self-awareness of shame? As mentioned earlier, you can take notice of the signals that your body is sending to you. Clues that shame is lingering include blushing, loss of eye contact, sudden loss of energy, or even a rapid deflation of the self. You can also listen carefully to your thoughts, especially the automatic insults that you may give yourself. Shame can also be detected in your actions. If you isolate from yourself or others or withdraw verbally or emotionally, you may feel shame. Shame may also cause you to feel paralyzed, drive you to be a perfectionist or cause you to be highly critical of the people around you.

It is important to also consider your defenses against shame. When you experience shame, you often develop survival strategies that lessen your awareness of shame. These defenses minimize immediate pain at the cost of ignoring reality. Take a moment to pause and think about the common defenses that you might be using to shield your awareness and attention to your shame. Some common defenses include denial, withdrawal, rage, perfectionism, and arrogance.

To understand your shame, you must be able to identify its originating source. Shame has many sources; like your genetic and biological make up, your family of origin, society’s expectations and demands, current relationships, and your own self. It is valuable and necessary to sort through these because each may lead to different healing strategies. You might even discover your shame is related to more than just one source.

The final healing ingredient is acceptance. You must accept your shame before you can move towards healing it. That is reality. Remember, acceptance does not equate to liking your feelings of shame but instead it serves as a measure of acknowledgment and respect for its existence. Shame cannot be wished away because



it is painful. It cannot be willed away through being tough. Most certainly, your shame will not go away by fearing it, hating it and fighting it. In fact, it could even grow stronger if you fight it.

Acknowledging and accepting your shame is a process of growing self-awareness and acceptance that may be short or long; it may take minutes or months. It may apply to your whole life or to a specific event and you may find yourself taking 2 steps forward and 1 step back. However, if you can meet your shame with acknowledgement and acceptance, you can work towards healing. You must respect every part of yourself, including your shame to discover your love for yourself.

Now that we have talked about identifying and understanding your shame, we need to discuss how to heal it. Self-compassion is very important for your healing. Compassion can lead you to forgiveness, which frees shame. Having compassion for yourself is no different than having compassion for others. There are three core elements tied into the practice of self-compassion. These elements include mindfulness, self-kindness or gentleness, and recognizing your common humanity or connectedness.

Self-compassion or self-love may be a foreign concept for you. Self-compassion can best be defined as kindness toward the self, which entails being gentle, supportive, and understanding. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable, so they tend to be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences.

Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to your negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. It requires a willingness to observe your negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. When you deny yourself of this awareness, you deny your reality which can increase personal suffering in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism. Instead, when this reality is accepted, you can meet it with sympathy, kindness and will help you to reach greater emotional stability.

Over the last decade, research has consistently shown a positive correlation between self-compassion and psychological well-being. People who have self-compassion also have greater social connectedness, emotional intelligence, happiness, and overall life satisfaction. Self-Compassion has also been shown to correlate with less depression, shame, and fear of failure.



Self-compassion has been identified as necessary for having a healthy relationship with yourself and with others. For example, how you treat yourself reflects how you let others treat you. If you're unkind to yourself, you create a standard for what you are willing to accept and tolerate from others. Or, if you hold yourself to impossible standards and never give yourself the benefit of the doubt, chances are you will have trouble doing so for others. As a caregiver, if you are geared toward neglecting yourself while caring for others it can lead to an uneven balance that will eventually take its toll on you. However, when you can demonstrate true compassion for yourself, that compassion then supports healthy, balanced relationships.

So, how might you begin to practice the three core elements of self-compassion? The first element is the practice of Mindfulness. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental receptive mind state in which you observe thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. You cannot ignore your pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. Mindfulness requires that you are not "over identified" with thoughts and feelings. Meaning that you are not clinging to them or blowing them out of proportion. This can cause you to become caught up and swept away by negative reactivity. This practice asks you to become a curious observer of these thoughts and feelings which is very different than being swept up in them.

It is important to be gentle with yourself throughout this process of openly observing these painful feelings. Try to consider what a child might want or need in a hurtful situation. That child could be your own, or you could imagine yourself as a child. Although many adults do not have compassion for themselves, they are often able to recognize that a child who has been hurt wants and needs to be hugged or held. Much progress can be made by giving yourself the very same compassion that one might give to a child. You can also think of the way that you would treat a good friend, or even a beloved pet, and then begin treating yourself accordingly.

Connection to others is another path that promotes healing. Isolation is a common reaction to feelings of shame. The more deeply you are shamed, the more likely you are to hide your thoughts, feelings and actions from others. Shame, however, can best be addressed when you come out of isolation and communicate with others. In general, damage from shame begins to heal when that shame is exposed to others in a safe environment. You may draw upon the courage to let others see the parts of you that you condemn. Not every person can be trusted with your shame. Above all, a trustworthy person is one who will not add to your shame or humiliation. A good person to share shame with is someone who can also sit quietly with your shame, without fear or disgust. When you take this risk, and when that person who sees your shame



accepts rather than condemns you, you will gradually gain confidence and belief that you are fully human.

Because you may have difficulty talking about yourself, you will need to make the commitment to reach out to others at the very times when you feel least acceptable. You will need to move towards others even if you are terrified of rejection. At the same time, you will need to protect yourself by seeking non-shaming persons with whom to share, so your acts of courage will not be met with damaging attacks.

Just as you would with any goal, it is important to take the time to periodically reflect on the progress that you are making towards the process of healing your shame. While it is important to keep in mind that the healing process is not linear and there will be some days where you feel like you have taken steps forward and other days where you may feel as though you have taken steps backwards. It is important to evaluate your overall progress towards the healing process to better understand what is working and the areas in which you could maybe use further support.

We would like to end this presentation with a mindfulness activity to assist you on your journey towards healing your shame. We encourage all to participate in this meditation to practice utilizing those key ingredients and steps to move towards healing. Remember to be kind and gentle with yourself, know that you are not alone, and that you can regain your power!

Take a moment to find a comfortable position in your chair and just get settled into your space.

You might put your hand over your heart as a reminder to be present with whatever is happening right now with kindness.

Turn your attention to the wavelike sensation of breath, wherever you can feel that more easily. Chest, belly, nostrils, or the body as a whole sitting here breathing. Right now, as you settle into your surroundings and into breath, you are safe.

See if you can notice any physical sensations of tension, tightness or discomfort your body may be carrying for you in this moment.

See if you can turn toward the tension or the difficult emotion as you would turn toward a beloved friend. See if you can turn toward yourself like a beloved friend.



And now, drop into the sensations and the emotions and just listen. Allow yourself to observe whatever is happening right now in your heart and remember your breath.

Ask yourself this question and really listen for an answer

What is one thing I long to hear right now? If I could have a good or loving friend whisper something into my ear during moments like this, what would I long to hear?

See if you can imagine what that would be.

Let the loving words that you long to hear wash over you like a cleansing rain.

Kindness and compassion can wash away the tension and harsh criticism.

There is a safe pool of loving-kindness that you can return to deep within.

Return to this healing place when you need to remember that you are loved.

This is a practice of "lovingkindness." You are identifying what it is you might wish for yourself. It can take the form of words or an image. Take a few moments to offer yourself the words you long to hear.

Allow yourself to sit in this space for a moment while you gently welcome the words and images that arrive to your mind.

If you don't arrive at any words or images, just ask yourself, "What do I long to hear?" This is a "loving-kindness" practice in itself.

And now taking another moment to bring your awareness back to your breath, the sensation of your body, and taking your time; return your attention to the room when you are ready.

Thank you.

Shame can undermine your efforts, your energy and most importantly can chip away at your belief in yourself as a valuable being. The words of shame don't need to continue to define you. There is healing in recognizing its influence, understanding where it comes from and seeking the support, self-acceptance and compassion that will melt away its influence. We thank you all for your participation and hope that today's group has ignited a spark towards healing your inner shame. Please know that you are



not alone in your shame or journey towards healing. Remember that healing is not a linear process and to be gentle with yourself along the way.

For support on your healing journey, or any other caregiving needs that you may have, know that you can contact the Caregiver Support Line.