

#04

Understanding Shame

Survivors of child sexual abuse often experience persistent and intense feelings of shame, despite the truth that you did nothing to warrant that shame.



Each Saprea Support Group meeting begins with 'Group Leader A' reading the script while participants follow along. The script will be the same for every group meeting. **To find the script, visit saprea.org/support-groups.** Below are the additional meeting materials for this course.



To watch the intro video for this lesson, scan the QR code or go to <https://vimeo.com/showcase/10293739>.

Group Activity

FOSTERING SELF-KINDNESS

It's often easier to show compassion towards others than towards ourselves. This is why a great place to start with self-compassion is to **treat ourselves with the same kindness we would treat a friend**. For example, think of a time when you've had a friend who was struggling in some way. Maybe they had a misfortune, failed at something, or felt inadequate. Reflect on the following questions:

- How did I respond?
- What did I say?
- What tone did I use?
- What were my posture and nonverbal gestures?
- What emotions did I feel?


Now, think of a time when you were struggling in some way. Consider the same questions as listed above. What are differences between how you responded to a friend versus how you responded to yourself? Fostering self-kindness helps to close the gap between those differences. It involves teaching yourself that the warmth, sympathy, and kindness you granted your friend is the type of compassion you deserve to feel towards yourself. The activity below can help you get started.

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 Think of a time when you were struggling with feelings of inadequacy or shame.**

What thoughts did you experience during this time? Were any of those thoughts connected to shame? (“I am annoying to be around,” “I am destined to be alone,” “I am incapable of success.”) What emotions accompanied these thoughts? Sadness? Embarrassment? Frustration? What physical changes did you notice? Shortness of breath? A tightness in the chest? A rush of heat to your face?
 - 02 Think of an inner companion who is kind and loving.**

This companion is one who offers you empathy and understanding and shares words of comfort and encouragement. Your inner companion might be based on someone you know such as a friend who showed you compassion in the past. Or your inner companion could be a public or historical figure or perhaps a character from your favorite book or show. You might also consider basing your inner companion on something that invokes feelings of peace and joy—perhaps words, a presence, an image, a figure, or a belief. Whatever you choose, take some time to create a kind and loving companion who is always with you.
 - 03 Consider what your inner companion would say to you during your moment of suffering.**

Similar to how you showed compassion to your friend when they were struggling with something, your inner companion shows empathy and encouragement to you when you feel the pain that comes with experiencing shame. Rather than viewing your struggles with criticism and condemnation, your companion sees you as you are: a human being who has endured hardships and is doing the best they can. They may offer words of encouragement such as “You are doing your best,” “You are doing enough,” “You have been through a lot,” and “It’s okay to feel this way.” Perhaps their words are similar to the phrases you expressed to your friend during their time of need.
-  **Disclaimer:** You may not feel that you are in the headspace to see things through your inner companion’s lens or to explore what they would say to you when you are feeling shame. If that is the case, don’t worry. Instead, continue referring to words of encouragement you would share with a friend who is suffering.
- 04 Write down the phrases your inner companion would say to you and keep them someplace safe.**

When you notice shame influencing your thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, or behaviors, you can reflect on these phrases to help remind you about self-kindness. Perhaps you prefer to say these words of encouragement out loud, or maybe you’d rather repeat them in your mind. Each time you reaffirm the kind and loving phrases of your inner companion, you are moving closer towards feelings of self-compassion and away from shame, self-blame, and judgment.

Grounding Exercise

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Positive affirmations are sentences you say to yourself to remind you of your value, how far you've come, and how capable you are of continuing your healing journey. They can serve as an anchor to this moment, as well as a tool to nurturing self-compassion.

So let's begin.

Activity Steps

- 01** Select an affirmation from this list or choose one of your own.
 - I am enough.
 - I am learning to love myself.
 - I choose happiness.
 - I am moving forward on my healing journey one choice at a time.
 - I have strength and power to take whatever comes my way.
 - I can do challenging things.
 - I am grateful for this day and the many possibilities it affords.
 - I deserve compassion, kindness, and understanding.
- 02** Repeat the affirmation in your mind as you inhale and exhale, envisioning the words as your anchor to the present.
- 03** As your mind wanders, gently redirect it back to the affirmation, noting your attention with patience and curiosity.
- 04** Continue this exercise for 1–2 minutes. As you do so, you might choose a new affirmation to focus on or stick with the same one—whatever works best for you.
- 05** When you are finished, allow yourself a few paced breaths, imagining feelings of warmth and compassion flowing through you.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

If you are interested in learning more, we invite you to explore the following articles in the Online Healing Resources section of our website at saprea.org.

- **SHAME AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**
- **SELF-COMPASSION**
- **CHALLENGING COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS**

NEXT TOPIC:

#05



INTRODUCING MINDFULNESS

Healing from child sexual abuse involves the practice of Mindfulness, which is purposefully paying attention with kindness and curiosity to the present moment.