



Many survivors experience shame and guilt. They are often thought of as the same thing but in reality they are different in important ways

Guilt: This is a feeling that we have done something wrong. This is often about actions we did or didn't take e.g.

I should have told about the abuse

If I had fought back it would have been better

I shouldn't have gone to that party and drank too much

Shame: This is when we see ourselves as bad or inferior and believe that other people will see us like that too.

This wouldn't have happened if I wasn't a bad person

I deserved this and bad things will keep happening

Don't let people get close/see the real you, they will know you are bad.

Why do survivors feel shame and guilt?

Researchers such as Paul Gilbert (e.g. 2010) have studied shame and guilt and worked out some strategies to deal with it. This work tells us that feeling shame and guilt is closely linked to abuse or neglect in childhood. Our view of ourselves as worthwhile is based on what people say to us and how they treat us. Kids, because their brain and understanding is only just developing tend to jump to the conclusion that bad things must be happening because they are not worthwhile. They start to feel ashamed of themselves and blame their behaviour for what happened (guilt).

Abuse Myths that make Shame and Guilt Worse

Myth 1: If I didn't tell someone about the abuse, I must have wanted it

The truth is that very few children tell (disclose) about abuse, trauma or neglect. It is complicated but for example we are wired to keep close to the people who are supposed to care for us, it's embarrassing to talk about, don't want to break up the family, abusers often threaten children if they break the secrecy, we might not know what is happening is wrong and sometimes abuse does feel nice (sexual feelings and feelings of being special). There is no justification for hurting or frightening other people.

Myth 2: If I experienced sexual arousal/pleasure I must have wanted it

The truth is the future of the human race depends on the fact that it feels nice to be touched 'down there'. We are built to respond to this with a good feeling. Our body can't tell if this is something that is ok (e.g. consenting adult sex) or abusive sexual contact with another person that you don't understand or perhaps chose. The feeling is normal even if what is happening is not.

Myth 3: I could have stopped it or left if I really wanted to

Abuse unfortunately is common as we have seen. If it was easy to stop this wouldn't be true. The reality is the abuser is generally more powerful and uses strategies to undermine the survivor. Consider the strategies that were used to keep you stuck in the situation AND the other barriers such as family pressure, no other choices, not understanding what was happening.

Compassion

Again, Paul Gilbert and his colleagues have developed this area of work and you can find lots of additional information on the website CompassionateMind.co.uk. As with many of the ideas on this course, this is a starting point, please ask for additional support and information.

Compassion is a complicated idea. But it starts with being able to be aware of and tolerate your feelings and not judge and condemn yourself. There are 2 main strategies that will feel familiar at this stage in the course

- ✓ Reducing your self-attacking
- ✓ Increasing your self-soothing

10 strategies for developing compassion for yourselves

1. **Moment of relaxation:** Imagine breathing in warmth and contentment as you practice your relaxation techniques. This is a step on from normal relaxation/breathing, imagine you are increasing your levels of contentment as you breathe.
2. **Half Smile:** Try it-somehow it is difficult to be as harsh and critical on yourself when you half smile.
3. **Imagine a time when someone has soothed you or you felt warmth for someone.** Try to recreate that feeling. But if you can't remember a real time, try to imagine a compassionate friend and how they would respond to you and your distress.
4. **Imagine being compassionate:** (self-soothing and not attacking yourself). Even if you don't feel it, pretend. What does that feel like?
5. **Have empathy with your own feelings of distress:** *'It is understandable that I feel sad and angry when I think about being hit by my mum/dad, that is a normal way to feel when remembering sad events'*.
6. **Compassionate acceptance:** This is when you stop giving yourself a hard time for your thoughts and behaviours and accept that this is how you react at the moment *'I am sorry that I give myself such a hard time when I make a mistake, but that is because of the way my dad used to react'*
7. **Compassionate attention:** Chose to pay attention to times when you have managed or when people have been helpful.
8. **Compassionate thinking:** Practice saying to yourself what you think a good compassionate friend might say *'you are doing as well as you can, this is a hard road and it will have bumps along the way'*
9. **Compassionate behaviour:** What would I do right now if I was being compassionate to myself?
10. **Social connection:** Seek out people who will be warm and accepting.

(Adapted from www.compassionatemind.co.uk)

Some people see compassion as self-indulgent or weak. In reality it is about facing difficult feelings. Deborah Lee, a leading author and teacher in the field of compassion states 'this is not your fault, but it is your problem'.

The way shame and guilt affects me is:

This is how I understand why I feel ashamed and guilty:

The strategies I am going to try to:

1. Stop my self-attacking:

2. Increase my self-soothing:

Preparation, Practice and Patience.