

Audio File Transcript

Self-Compassion Break for Body Shame

This practice is the self-compassion break for body shame. It's the third version of the self-compassion break for shame in this program and since the program is all about self-compassion, we'll be bringing compassion to ourselves in relation to our bodies. So people experience all sorts of emotions in relation to their bodies, such as pride or grief or anger. In this practice, we'll focus primarily on the emotion of shame in relation to a single part of the body. So as you proceed through the practice, please remember the three L's, lean in, lean back, or let go. So if mild distress arises, you can lean in and you can explore what's going on inside of you. However, if you feel overwhelmed, that's a signal to stop what you're doing and to shift your attention to a pleasant activity, such as watering your plants or playing some music or take a walk, talk with a neighbor. So if you'd like to try this practice as usual, please begin by finding a comfortable position. And you can let yourself feel how your chair is solidly supporting your body. You can also feel your body breathing. Dropping into the present moment, even if you like, offering yourself some compassionate touch, again as a reminder that we're bringing not just awareness but loving awareness to our experience. To further embody this practice, if you like, you can slowly move your body a little bit in your chair, maybe even rolling your shoulders or gently twisting your trunk. You know, feeling any sensations that may arise in your body as you do so. And then please allow the purpose of this practice to arise in your mind, namely that we'd like to be a better friend to our bodies. Maybe even using the language of, may I learn to be a better friend to my body just as it is. Taking a moment to let that intention sink in. Being a better friend to the body, to your body. And now please bring to mind a part of your body that makes you feel embarrassed, even mild to moderately ashamed, but not overwhelmed.

To help you find a suitable part of your body to work with, you might consider a part of your body that doesn't look like you want it to or doesn't function like you wish it would or maybe is injured or unwell or missing. But again, please choose one part of your body that causes you some embarrassment or shame but doesn't hijack your attention, does not cause any trauma or emotional overwhelm. So with that preparation, let's start with the first component of the self-compassion break, namely mindfulness. So now that you've identified a part of the body that's associated with shame, see if you can mindfully lean into the experience of shame associated with this body part. So is there anywhere in your body where you sense the emotion of shame? Perhaps there's a sense of tension or hollowness or queasiness. And shame is often felt actually in a different part of the body than the part

you're ashamed of. So just taking a look at the whole body. Is there anywhere that shame expresses itself the most? And if you have a sense of that, it doesn't have to be very specific but a general area, you could also just validate the experience of shame like, this is where I feel shame. Or, shame is here. This is how I feel shame. This is shame. Again, doing this in a kind way, as you might for a good friend who's struggling. Yes, shame is here. And are there any other emotions that arise with shame? Again, maybe grief or sadness or fear. If so, again, gently naming the emotion as you might for a friend, like, oh yes, I'm feeling sad about this part of my body. I have some grief. Yeah, it's true. I feel angry at this part of my body. So making a lot of room for your experience, knowing your experience, just allowing it to be so, knowing that you've come by it honestly. You may not know all the causes and conditions, but it is here. And you are human. So is there a particular judgment that arises in your mind when you think about this part of your body? Is there an adjective that you use to describe it? A judgment word? If so, what is that word? Or what phrase do you often say to yourself. Maybe there's no words at all, just a sense of anger or disgust, frustration. But nonetheless, it might be helpful all under the umbrella of mindfulness to validate the pain of judging yourself. So you're saying, for example, it hurts to have a critical attitude toward my body. Is this true? Can you feel it? If so, can you name it? Yes. This is painful. I wish to have a warmer, friendlier, accepting relationship with my body. So just going ahead and validating the discomfort of an adversarial relationship with your body. In other words, making room for the experience of body dissatisfaction or shame to the best of your ability. This is so for most of us, but definitely for me. So this is mindfulness, simple, open, curious, non-judgmental knowing.

Part 2, common humanity. So remembering Again, that shame is a universal human emotion. But also that body dissatisfaction and body shame are also very common expressions of shame. And very common among human beings. And again, when we feel shame, we tend to feel alone. So, as you think about your body, perhaps in an unaccepting way. You might feel uniquely alone. But please remember that other people have similar problems with their bodies, similar attitudes toward their bodies, similar difficulties, and they also feel some dissatisfaction or shame. So though you may feel alone with this difficulty, alone with this attitude you're probably not as alone as you think. And also that the reason we feel shame about our bodies is simply because we all wish to be loved. We imagine that if our bodies were more perfect we would be more fully loved and accepted. So can you get in touch with the motivation behind shame, can you feel that you, just like everyone else, wish to be loved and appreciated and respected and valued and included? Just for a moment, can you Let go of shame and feel the motivation behind shame. The reason why you feel shame. The reason why you even focus on your body in this way. Understanding that the motivation behind shame is innocent, that it was with you since birth. You were not born with body dissatisfaction or shame. You learned it, as we all learn it.

You were born with the wish to be loved and the fear that we may not be loved for one reason or another. And finally, after reflecting in this way about our common human experience, do you feel a little more connected to others or not? So if you still feel isolated and alone, that too is an expression of common humanity because when we feel shame, we feel alone. So if you're still feeling shame, chances are you feel alone. That too is common humanity.

And now finally, part 3, self-kindness. So again, you'll have a chance to offer kindness to yourself for how you've struggled and also Offer kindness to your body for how it has suffered. So first, to evoke the warmth of kindness, you can offer yourself some compassionate touch, perhaps feeling the warmth and the gentle pressure of your hand. You can also bring to mind if you like a compassionate person who reliably makes you happy, makes your heart happy. Or you can think of your compassionate friend. And are there any words that you might like whispered into your ear? Words that would be a genuine comfort to hear, particularly regarding how you relate to your body. So for example, perhaps a compassionate friend would say to you, I know you've suffered a lot over this. I know how much pain you have felt. Or, please don't blame yourself for how you feel. Please don't blame yourself. Body dissatisfaction is so common. It's part of our culture. It's part of our upbringing. It's not your fault. Or maybe just being reminded that your body is doing the best it can and so are you. Here we are. I love you. Maybe you need to be reminded you are a good person. You are lovable and worthy just as you are. So are there any words that come to mind? Words that could bring you little comfort, not to make any distress go away, but simply as a response to stress, kindness. So if any words come up for you, you can repeat them a few times to yourself, maybe making some room so that they can land somewhere inside of you. Next, to offer yourself a little more kindness if it feels right to you, try placing a hand over the particular part of your body that you feel ashamed about. And you can imagine kindness and compassion flowing through your fingers into that part of your body. And finally, are there any words that you might like to say to that part of your body or to your entire body? So maybe you would like to say to your body or to that part, it's not been easy for you. I know how hard you've struggled. Or you're doing the best you can. I know that. Or you never meant to do me any harm. I know that now. Or I'm so sorry that I've been giving you trouble. Please forgive me. I didn't know. better. Or just thank you. Thank you for working so hard on my behalf. Thank you for trying. Thank you for struggling. Thank you for sticking with me. Any words you'd like to say to your body or to a part of your body. that captures something of your compassionate heart. And then when it feels like the right time to do it, you can gently release the practice. You can allow the practice to settle. You can allow yourself to settle into your chair, feeling how the chair is supporting you. Allowing this practice to have been just as it was, allowing whatever echoes from this practice are resonating through you to be there, and allowing yourself to be and your body to the best of your ability to be just. as it is in this

moment, just like this. And then before getting up from your chair, it's often helpful to take some notes on your experience to reflect on the different parts of the practice, mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness. Whether any aspect of it particularly resonated with you? Whether there was any language you'd like to remember, whether there was any aspect that you would like to repeat in daily life when you feel this stress about this part of your body or some other part. Anticipating the future, was there anything here that you might like to remember? And again, thank you for your practice.