

Audio File Transcript

Self-Compassion Break for Shame

This practice is the self-compassion break for shame. It's probably the most popular self-compassion practice both in the mindful self-compassion program and the self-compassion for shame program. And it's based on the three components of self-compassion, namely mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness. And it gives you a direct experience of each of these components. Once you learn this practice, you can do it on the spot in daily life whenever you feel shame. Some people find that one or more of the components might be more helpful than others. So after you learn the practice, please trust your own experience and customize the practice in a way that works best for you. But I'm going to guide this practice more as a contemplation or a meditation. But that's not necessary in daily life. In daily life, shame comes to us whether we like it or not, and you can respond any way you like. So if you would like to have a taste of this practice, please find a comfortable position in a comfortable chair or lying down. And then close your eyes partially or fully. And take some nice, deep, relaxing breaths, settling into the present moment, settling into your body. And for the sake of the practice right now as training for daily life, I'd like you to please bring to mind an event in which you felt mildly ashamed. In other words, a three or a four on a scale of 1 to 10. And also let it be a past event, one that's over and done. You know, so for example, maybe you were at a social gathering and you emotionally overreacted. and feel bad about it. Or maybe you were speaking with someone and you said something that was disrespectful or seemed inappropriate at the time. You feel shame as you reflect on it. Or you could have been in a public place and very embarrassingly stumbled and fell. So think of a situation mildly shaming or embarrassing and a past event. Later on, you can apply this practice to more difficult events. And also, as you go through this exercise, if you start to feel more than mildly ashamed, please take a pause and you can even shift to a less challenging situation because we'd like you to actually experience the contents of this practice.

So if a situation has come to mind, just for now, please bring it closer into your awareness, perhaps a remembering words that might have been said by you or others, who was there. And most importantly, just for now, see if you can remember how you felt at the time or if shame mostly occurred afterwards or even now, how you feel as you think about it. So drop into your body and sense what you're feeling. And if the feeling of shame arises, try labeling the experience for yourself in a gentle and a kind way, perhaps as you would for a friend, like shame. Oh, this is shame. This is how shame feels. I'm feeling shame. See if you can name it in a kind and respectful way. But it's possible that there's another emotion that's even

stronger than shame but is connected to shame. And if so, if that's a dominant emotion that comes up when you think of this situation, try labeling that emotion in the same spirit, like, oh, anger, even, oh, rage, or fear. Validating the experience for yourself. And then again, dropping your awareness inside your body, noticing how shame feels there, noticing how this situation feels in your human body, and seeing if you can identify if you're feeling shame, where you feel shame the most in your body. So is it in your head or your face or neck or maybe your heart region, your solar plexus, your abdomen? Where do you feel it the most? And probably it's an unpleasant feeling. But see if you can just for now allow the experience to be just as it is. In other words, just make a little more room for it. Because this is part of being human. This is the way you know when you feel shame. So allowing it to be there just for this moment. So everything we've been doing so far, labeling, finding it in your body, making room, these are all mindfulness practices. And we'll do one more.

If you like, you can give a label to your thoughts, particularly if you're afraid what others might think about you or what you might be thinking about yourself. The language of shame is self-criticism. If there are any critical thoughts going through your mind, are you able to see them, identify them? Perhaps you're having thoughts like, oh, I'm a mess, or I'm insensitive, I'm worthless, I'm stupid, or you're stupid, you're worthless, you're insensitive, whatever thoughts may be going through your mind, would it be possible to step back just a little bit and say, these are my thoughts, self-critical thoughts, shame thoughts, validating them for yourself in a kind way, as you might for a friend. And now the next component of self-compassion is common humanity. So when we feel shame, a common characteristic of shame is to feel isolated and alone. That actually tells us that we're feeling shame. But interestingly, we're not as alone as we feel. In a moment of shame, we're actually experiencing a universal emotion. Everyone feels shame. Shame actually connects us to others in a certain way. So right now, perhaps just taking a moment to reflect on that, to remember that whatever you are feeling right now is part of the human experience. And taking it a little further, certainly there are some people who if they had the same experience as you, would probably feel just as you do. So in that respect, you're also not as alone right now as you may feel. And in spite of everything that we've just mentioned about common humanity, you may right now still feel alone. And if that's so, know that in that experience you are also not alone. It just means that you're feeling shame.

And the last component of self-compassion is self-kindness. So we're going to see now if we can respond to shame in a new way. In other words, can you give yourself some kindness not to make any discomfort go away, but simply because you are feeling shame or something like it. In other words, kindness simply because of the uneasiness or the distress that we feel inevitably in our lives. So if you like, you can try placing a compassionate hand on the part of your body that feels shame the most. Just feeling the sense of touch, maybe the warmth of

your hand. And if you like that sensation, see if you can even send kindness through your fingertips into that part of your body. That part of your body that holds shame for you. If you like you can even gently massage that part of your body. all expressions of kindness in response to the experience of shame. So this is kindness through touch. We could also bring kindness to our experience through words. So consider for a moment what you would most like to hear in a moment like this, either when this happened or as you reflect on it now. If someone were to whisper some words into your ear and you would say, oh, thank you, your heart would rest. You would feel ease. Even in the midst of shame, what would those words be? What do you need to hear? What would you love to hear? What would be so good to hear? Perhaps you would hear, it's okay to make mistakes. I'm here for you. I trust you. You're doing the best you can. I believe in you. I love you. What words would allow your heart to rest, even in the midst of shame? And when some words have come to mind, you can repeat them to yourself over and over again. Let them roll through your mind, like a blessing. Permission to receive the words, like receiving a gift. Permission. And you can also offer yourself compassionate touch at the same time, even massaging the part of your body that holds shame. Kindness in touch, kindness in words, but mostly giving yourself permission to do so. And then when it feels like the right time, when you're ready, you can gently release this practice, self-compassion, break for shame. And you can let it settle inside of you. Still with your eyes partially or fully closed, just allowing yourself to feel whatever you're feeling inside your body. allowing the practice itself to be just as it was. And most importantly, if only for this one moment, allowing yourself to be just as you are, fully human, just like this.

And then gently open your eyes. And as is helpful to do with all these practices, taking a little moment to reflect on what you noticed, what you felt, what stood out for you, what you might like to remember. And then if you like, writing it down so that you can build on your experience. So in this practice, was there a particular part of the practice that was most impactful? Is there any part of this practice that you'd like to remember such that as you go through your life when you feel shame, you could do this? Or maybe the entire practice. Maybe you'd like to continue to do the entire practice. So you decide. You're your own best teacher. Thank you.