

A Positive Way to Process Shame

HANDOUT: An Example

Situation:

college student, failed a major exam. When she receives the she feels deeply ashamed, thinking, "I'm stupid, I'll never succeed, and everyone will judge me." This thought triggers of anxiety, self-doubt, and isolation. She wants to avoid telling about the exam because of the shame she feels.



Sarah, a grade, feelings anyone

Step 1: Acknowledge the Emotion

of ignoring or suppressing her feelings, Sarah pauses and acknowledges that she feels ashamed. She recognizes that this emotion is linked to her perception of failure and not a reflection of her overall worth as a person.

Instead

Step 2: Practice Mindfulness

Sarah takes a few deep breaths and practices mindfulness by focusing on the present moment. She observes her emotions without judgment, noting how her body feels (tightness in her chest, tense shoulders) and the thoughts passing through her mind. She refrains from labeling herself as "stupid" and simply notices that the shame is an emotion, not her identity.

Step 3: Reframe Negative Thoughts

Sarah challenges her initial thoughts by asking herself, "Is this grade really a reflection of my abilities, or is it just one setback? Everyone fails sometimes. What can I learn from this experience?" She replaces the thought, "I'm stupid" with, "I didn't do well on this exam, but that doesn't define my intelligence or future success."

Step 4: Self-Compassion

Sarah practices self-compassion by reminding herself that it's okay to fail and that she deserves kindness, just like she would offer to a friend who made a similar mistake. She says to herself, "I am doing my best, and it's okay to stumble. I can grow from this."

Step 5: Seek Support

Sarah decides to reach out to a classmate for support. They talk about the exam, and she finds comfort in realizing that many others are facing similar challenges. This helps her feel less isolated and more connected.



Result:

By using these techniques, Sarah transforms her experience of shame into an opportunity for growth. She feels more confident, knowing that she can overcome setbacks with a balanced perspective and self-compassion.

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