

Comforting Words to Help Release Shame

It took a long time to release the shame I acquired from all the abuse I was subjected to as a child and as an adult. There is one counseling session that stands out in my mind when I look back. I was bent over in my chair with my face in my hands, crying out loud after I'd blurted out my shame story, in painful detail, of when I was gang raped. I was so ashamed of what I said and did to survive. I had been reliving this traumatic event in my mind over and over, feeling the pain again and again. The nightmares made me reluctant to fall asleep. The relief I felt from my counselor's calming presence was the key in calming my anxiety. She didn't show disgust or shock like others had. She didn't judge me or blame me. I leaned on her strength as she patiently listened and received me with warmth and concern and my mind stopped spinning. I felt like I had taken a huge risk in trusting her but because of the caring way in which she responded to me, I found dignity in telling her my story. It was like the world was lifted off of my shoulders.

It was so hard to revisit the pain but I know now I had to re-open the wounds and revisit the trauma in order to process them and heal from them. She educated me on the difference between shame and guilt and I applied it to my own situations. (Shame is a focus on self, guilt is a focus on behavior. Shame is, "I am bad." Guilt is, "I did something bad.") She often pointed to the positive, written affirmations she had on her office walls. She worked at a rape crisis center and

she told me stories of her own personal experiences working with police and other rape victims. Hearing these stories helped me to take myself out of the equation. I felt compassion for the other rape victims and I was ultimately able to feel compassion for myself too. I then placed the blame and shame back on the abusers, where it belongs.

I was able to lower the expectations I had put on myself and when I did, the negative belief that said, "I'm an awful person because of what I said and did to survive." I changed to, "I'm only human and did the best I could in a frightening situation." What Dr. Brene Brown says about shame is so true, "Shame cannot exist when spoken."

Comforting Words

- We all make mistakes
- You did the best you could or knew how
- What you did and said IS the reason why you survived
- It wasn't your fault
- You didn't know his true intentions. There is no shame in not knowing.
- You were terrified. There is no shame in fear.
- You are only human.

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