



UNDERSTANDING SHAME AND GUILT

For adult survivors of child sexual abuse

Understanding shame and guilt

Extreme feelings of shame, which often follow child sexual abuse (CSA), is one of the greatest challenges faced in therapy treatment. The degree to which a survivor internalises extreme feelings of shame and worthlessness is destructive to a person's sense of self and their place in the world. The effects of shame can be incredibly debilitating, disempowering, upsetting and painful. Therefore, it is essential that we understand how shame affects you and the steps you can take in gaining control over it.

Shame is not to be mistaken with guilt, which is the negative response to making a mistake relating to behaviour. Shame is a negative judgement against the self. How you are feeling is valid. The purpose of this workbook is to empower you through knowledge to take control by validating your feelings with the support of tools that will help you on your journey.

This workbook contains lots of information, so please take it at your own pace. If you would prefer to view this information online, or view interactive information, visit My Support Space (mysupportspace.org.uk). If you need to speak to someone for support, you can call our free confidential service, Supportline, any time on **08 08 16 89 111**.



What is shame and how does it affect me?

The shame caused by the subordination, power and control that CSA entails can cause a person to feel:

- Blame towards themselves for the abuse.
- Humiliated at the acts of abuse and their inability to stop it.
- A lack of self-worth and low self-esteem – these feelings can create a cycle in which a survivor feels inferior, leading to negative experiences that continue to enforce such feelings of shame and lack of self-worth.
- Poor mental health – shame can cause a person to bottle up their suffering, and this can lead to a greater degree of psychological ill health and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Shame can even cause physical pain. Some common symptoms that survivors may experience are chronic pelvic pain, irritable bowel syndrome, and fibromyalgia in the neck, shoulders and back. Shame has also been associated with a weakened immune system.
- Sexual relationships – survivors of CSA may associate sexual acts and sexual arousal with shame.
- Relationships – shame causes survivors to be concerned about how they are viewed by others. Hiding their abuse from partners as well as concealing distress and suffering can create difficulties in connecting with others on a personal level. Shame arising from CSA may cause a person to believe that they deserve to be treated badly by others.

THINKING TIME

With how many of the impacts of shame listed left do you feel that you identify? Do you feel like you need additional support?



Two thirds of children do not disclose their abuse during childhood

Shame and guilt are also significant factors that contribute towards a person's inability to come forward and disclose their abuse to others. Research shows that two thirds of children do not disclose their abuse during childhood and only 25% disclose this as adults after an average of 24 years from when the abuse took place. Understanding shame and finding ways of healing the inner child that was hurt by the abuse is an important step in preventing shame from taking control over your life and your ability to move forward.



Healing your inner child

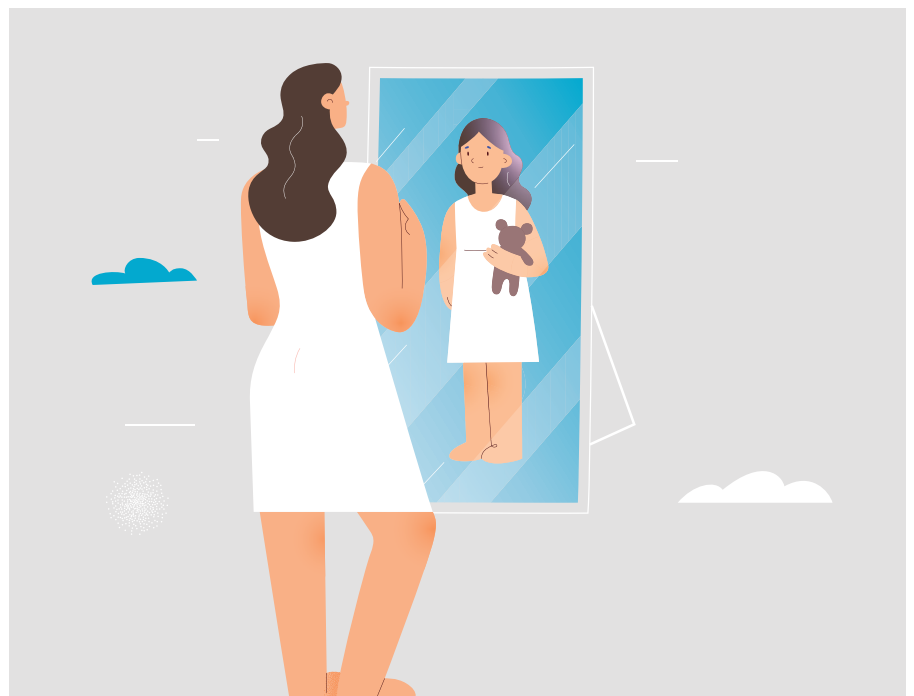
Trust – in order to support your inner child they need to feel supported, and they need to trust that you will be there for them to provide validation of the experienced abandonment, abuse and neglect. This is the first step to essential pain work.

Grief – it is normal to mourn the betrayal committed against you by your abuser and mourn the person you feel that you could have been if it were not for the suffering that you have endured, what your family could have been like, and what your childhood could and should have felt like. You have a right to grieve for your loss. Burying grief keeps you in it and makes you incapable of moving forward.

Sadness – it is healthy and important to accept the sadness for your inner child's pain, the suffering you faced as a child, the loneliness, potentially the feeling that there was something, somehow, wrong with you.

Shock and anger – shock is the beginning of grief and it is normal to feel angry as the next stage. You have the right to be angry and it is essential to understand the importance of anger if you want to heal your wounded inner child. Anger may be a healthy response through which healing can begin.

Validation – if you're still inclined to minimise and/or rationalise the ways in which you were shamed, ignored, or used to nurture your parents, you need now to accept the fact that these things truly wounded your soul.



Top tips for ways to heal

Dear inner child – write a letter to your inner child in which you talk about your memories relating to your childhood abuse, but with the insight you have gained as an adult. By doing this, you can potentially soothe the pain you feel as well as providing comfort and reassurance to the child inside. By opening such a dialogue, you are opening yourself up to healing.

Start a journal – journaling can be a powerful way of channelling your thoughts, sorting your memories and making sense of confusing experiences. It can help you recognise patterns in your behaviour that stem from your experiences as a child. The journal does not have to be written from you as an adult, it can be written from the perspective of your inner child. It's important not to think too hard about what you are writing. Instead, just let your thoughts and feelings flow as they come to you.

Talk to a therapist – therapists are important support guides that can help you to channel your emotions through the creation of a safe space and empower you with strategies to help heal your inner child. Inner child therapy works specifically on this, but all forms of therapy require a person to recall and explore past events.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a highly effective form of treatment, which focuses on your experiences in the present. It works on the principle of breaking the vicious circle between a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviour and physical symptoms. This form of therapy helps people understand how their thoughts influence anxiety and avoidance. By doing this, they can then start to challenge their fears. CBT is a talking therapy that works on identifying the original trigger of your thoughts, feelings, and anxiety with you then becoming aware of your beliefs and emotions surrounding these. CBT works on challenging these issues and participating in exposure work using coping strategies.





Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR)

therapy is a process that uses eye movements, sounds and repetitive motions to help clients process and come to terms with traumatic memories more quickly than talking therapy alone. Interactive psychotherapy techniques are used to relieve psychological stress. During EMDR therapy sessions, you will be asked to revisit traumatic or triggering experiences in brief doses while the therapist directs your eye movements. EMDR is thought to be effective, because recalling distressing events is often less emotionally upsetting when your attention is diverted.

EMDR is not usually recommended for anyone who has a pending court trial.

Body-centred psychotherapy

helps you to gain access to memories, emotions and beliefs that are otherwise beyond words and cognition. If you have struggled to understand how your body and mind are seemingly on different pages, body-centred psychotherapy can get them communicating again. By paying closer attention to the messages our body and mind are expressing, you can begin to lead a healthier life, both physically and psychologically.



Top tips for challenging shame and building resilience

Challenge any critical thoughts – you feel overwhelmed and critical of yourself, questioning if you are doing things correctly or if you have the skills to do a certain job.

IDEAS TIME

Write down all the things you are feeling and try to explain what it is about the situation or the task that is overwhelming you. Unpick these feelings with your support worker.



Self-compassion and self-esteem

Low self-esteem can lead to difficulties in trusting your own judgement, feeling your views are not important or being unable to express them, feelings of guilt, overwhelming shame, and staying in a relationship that is not good for you. Let's look at how you can begin to tackle these feelings and remind yourself every day how amazing you are. You can start by doing the following:

- 1) Stop your inner critic – when your inner critic starts talking, telling you negative things, say STOP or NO. Refocus on the positives and remember your daily goals.
- 2) Use healthier motivation habits – the inner critic can motivate you but, at the same time, may drag your self-esteem down. Choose a healthier alternative. Remind yourself of the change you want to make and the goals you want to achieve.

IDEAS TIME

Write down three goals and three changes that you want to make. Stick them onto your wall, so you can see them every day.



Three changes I want to make:

MY FIRST GOAL

MY SECOND GOAL

MY THIRD GOAL



- 3) Take a two-minute self-appreciation break – if you spend just two minutes on this every day, it can make a huge difference.

THINKING TIME

Take a deep breath and ask yourself this question: 'what are three things I can appreciate about myself?'



IDEAS TIME

Write the answers down in a journal and add to the list as often as you can to give yourself an appreciation boost.



IDEAS TIME

Write a list of all the things you would like to try. They don't all have to be big things like skydiving. These could simply be taking an online course, having a go at drawing, trying a new type of exercise class, or getting a pen pal.



- 4) Look after yourself – when you do so, you raise and strengthen your self-esteem. Eat breakfast, go for a brisk walk, shower, chat to friends. Make sure you start your day off in a positive way to set the tone for the rest of the day.
- 5) Try something new – when you try new things and challenge yourself, your opinion of yourself goes up. Think about how you feel when you achieve something or finish something. You may not have done what you intended to do, but at least you tried and that in itself is an amazing achievement.
- 6) Spend time with positive and supportive people – limit how much time you spend on social media and avoid reading information that will affect your perspective on life in a negative way. Use your free time to be with uplifting people and read sources that will lift you up, not bring you down.
- 7) Remember why – remember the most important reasons why you are doing this. To stay motivated to make your self-esteem an essential priority, you should remind yourself that this will help you to live a simpler, lighter, happier, and more stable life, to self-sabotage less and practise self-compassion.

Resilience

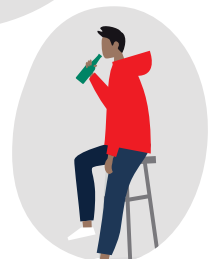
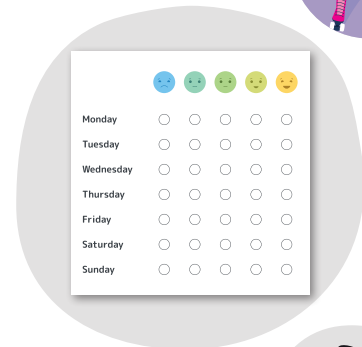
Resilience is the capacity to recover from difficulties and tough situations as well as managing crisis and upset. Think about how long it takes for you to get back to feeling like yourself. Do you bounce back easily or do you struggle?

Top tips for building resilience

- 1. Journal** – journaling helps you to process everything you may be feeling and going through by putting this onto paper. This will help you feel less weighted down and will help you to move on quickly with your day.
- 2. Build a support system** – support can be online or in person. This could also be a counsellor or a support worker.
- 3. Take care of your basic needs** – this includes being tired, hungry and your health. If you are hungry, you need to eat. If you are tired, you need to sleep.
- 4. Notice yourself talk** – check your confidence and feelings, notice if you are being kind and compassionate, or if you are being angry and aggressive. You could use your journal to write down what you like about yourself and what you don't like in relation to that day to help you process your feelings.
- 5. Live with purpose – a big one** – this is a lot simpler than you think. Raise awareness of a cause, get involved with sports, join a book club, go walking, research anything you have an interest in or start a short course.
- 6. Become friends with your feelings** – feelings can be easy to ignore and can build up to a point where they finally explode. Track them often and try to carry out a feelings chart. Try to notice three to five feelings you are

feeling each day. Once you've identified them, use your journal to describe why you feel the way you feel (back to step 1).

- 7. Manage impulses** – get to know your impulses. These could be urges to shop online, use alcohol or sabotage a relationship. Once you know what they are, you can use an impulse log – what do you want to do, what happened, what is it that you want to feel or do and what can you do instead?
- 8. Learn to problem solve** – overcoming obstacles can be difficult. Write out what the problem is, what you feel and ask yourself what is the worst thing that could happen, what do you want to happen and what is the best thing that could happen. Read over the steps – what can you control and what can you not control? Let go of what you can't control.
- 9. Develop a list of healthy coping skills** – these are things you can do instead of using unhealthy coping skills. Make time to do these and check them regularly. Make sure they work and change them if they don't; it will help you build more and more resilience each day.



THINKING TIME

Thinking about these top tips, which ones do you find the easiest and which ones do you find the hardest? Ask yourself why you find them hard.




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Take a few minutes to jot down any of the tips and techniques that you think you'll find useful and think about how you might introduce them into your daily routine.

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- using Next Generation Text (add **18001** before any of our phone numbers)
- Online: **victimsupport.org.uk**
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