

RECOVER ARRIVE BECOME

CLINICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

SHAME AFTER TRAUMA

WHAT HAPPENED IS NOT THE SAME AS WHO YOU ARE

Trauma can leave people judging themselves with information, power, and perspective they did not have in the moment.

SHAME VS. RESPONSIBILITY

- Responsibility asks: What did I do, and what can I repair or change?
- Shame says: Something is wrong with who I am.
- A person can take responsibility for their own choices without taking responsibility for another person's abuse, coercion, or violence.

WHY SELF-BLAME HAPPENS

- The mind may replay events searching for a way the outcome could have been prevented.
- Hindsight makes past choices look clearer than they were at the time.
- Self-blame can create an illusion of control: 'If it was my fault, maybe I can make sure it never happens again.'

QUESTIONS TO REALITY-CHECK

- What did I actually know at the time?
- What choices were realistically available to me?
- Was I afraid, pressured, dependent, threatened, injured, young, or overwhelmed?
- Am I holding myself to a standard I would never use with someone I care about?

USE MORE ACCURATE LANGUAGE

- Instead of 'I should have known,' try 'I understand more now than I did then.'
- Instead of 'I let it happen,' describe the other person's behavior and the pressures you faced.
- Instead of 'I am weak,' identify what you did to survive, protect, endure, leave, seek help, or recover.

WHEN RESPONSIBILITY IS YOURS

- Healing does not require pretending every choice was perfect.
- If you harmed someone, accountability can include naming the behavior, making repair when safe and appropriate, and changing future actions.
- Accountability is most useful when it is specific; global self-condemnation rarely teaches what to do differently.

SUPPORT HEALING

- Talk with people who can hold complexity without blaming or minimizing.
- Practice self-compassion without forcing forgiveness or positivity.
- A trauma-informed clinician can help with persistent guilt, shame, intrusive memories, or self-blame.
- Call/text 988 if shame becomes a crisis or you feel unsafe.

You can tell the truth about the past without turning yourself into the problem.

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