SELF CARE

providing yourself

the love you deserve

Lovingly created by
Christina Enevoldsen

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Self-Care: Providing Yourself the Love You Deserve by Christina Enevoldsen



overcomingsexualabuse.com

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Introduction

LESSON 1

One of the biggest struggles of healing from abuse has been self-care. My childhood left me feeling like a dirty, lost lump of nothing. The emotional, verbal, physical and sexual violations to my value taught me I was undeserving of care and attention.

I learned to neglect and abuse myself the same way I'd experienced from others.

My beliefs about myself led to years of self-contempt and self-punishing treatment. Among many, many other things:

- I worked myself far too hard.
- I deprived myself of sleep and water.
- I stayed in abusive relationships.
- I tolerated financial instability.

> *"The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice."*
>
> Peggy O'Mara

When the neglect caught up with me through burnout and my body breaking down, I felt like a failure. That added another layer of resistance to self-care since I didn't think a failure deserved to be rewarded.

My wholeness has come from dealing with the root of my poor self-care, which is my belief system.

- what I believed about myself
- what I believed about the world and the way it works
- what I believed about what I did and didn't deserve

...and my beliefs became what manifested in my life.

This course is about dealing with those false beliefs that cause you to neglect yourself. There are 6 ways we'll address those through:

Exploration

Get to know the amazing individual you are under all the lies abuse told you. There will be opportunities to discover your preferences, perspectives and passions.

The better you understand yourself, the better you'll be able to care for yourself.

Appreciation

If you make it a practice to recognize your qualities, the things that make you wonderful and unique, it will be easier to see yourself in a positive light.

You'll find what you look for.

Attention

Value yourself by listening to yourself and seeking to understand. Create time for regular journaling--either in writing or by voice recording--and pay attention to your thoughts and feelings and responses to situations and relationships.

Intention

Love is an action. Give yourself permission to do 1-3 loving things for yourself everyday. Be intentional with a plan for doing those things. Loving feelings will eventually follow.

Confrontation

When you notice you're repeating something shaming about yourself, ask yourself where that came from. Where did you get that idea? Who told you that? What treatment led you to believe that? You learned shame from someone; it didn't originate within you. Confront it for the lie that it is because whether or not you have that weakness, there is no shame it that.

Affirmation

Tell yourself the truth. If those same shaming accusations were directed toward someone you love, what would you say in their defense? What is the truth about you? State that as a fact in the present tense even if you have trouble believing it.

No matter the form of abuse—emotional, verbal, physical, sexual—the main weapon is shame. Shame tells you there is something wrong with you at your core. But there is nothing wrong with you. Wrong was done TO you. You are lovable and valuable.

Maybe you've tried self care before and are wondering if you can ever change. Or maybe you're determined that, come what may, you WILL change. This may require you to look at your deepest pains since this is about a heart change, not about changing your to do list.

As you explore who you are under all your masks, your coping methods, the lies you've heard and told about yourself, I believe you'll fall in love with yourself.

Use these actions steps as suggestions, but you don't have to do all of them. Pick whatever speaks to you. (I suggest starting with exploration and 1-2 others.) Try to avoid making this just one more thing added to your "should" list for you to succeed or fail at. You're more than what you can do. Even for yourself.

Self-care is a process. It's one of the biggest challenges of the healing process but it's also brings some of the biggest rewards.

Prioritizing my own well-being creates a solid structure for a life I'm truly satisfied with.

An abundance of strength, creativity, wisdom and joy flow out of the love I first supply to myself and I’m better equipped to make a difference in the world.

When you care for yourself, when you are the priority in your life, when you live out of the conviction of your value, everything else falls into place.


Action Steps

Exploration

Take this personality test: 16personalities.com

When you get your results, learn more about your type through that site or other sources.

What is your personality type?

What part of this personality type particularly describes you?

What are the strengths and weaknesses for your personality type?



What are your personality type's needs and desires in friendships?

What are desirable careers for your personality type?



What does knowing your personality type help you appreciate about yourself?



What insights or clarity did you gain from discovering your personality type?



What are 1-3 needs specifically for your personality type you will implement into your day or life right now?

Confrontation

Is there anything about your personality type that you perceive as bad?

Where did you get that idea? Who told you that? What treatment led you to believe that?

Confrontation

Did that personality trait lead to pain in some way? What happened?

Can you imagine a situation where that personality trait might be a benefit?



Say this affirmation out loud and repeat as often as you need it.:

I embrace all the characteristics of my personality. I receive them as gifts to me and to others. I open myself to learn how to cultivate and refine my unique abilities and perspectives.

You're Special

You are special, In all the world there is nobody like you.

Since the beginning of time, there has never been another person like you. Nobody has your smile. Nobody has your eyes, your nose, your hair, your hands, your voice.

Nobody can be found who has your handwriting.

Nobody anywhere has your tastes - for food or music or art.
No one sees things just as you do.

In all of time there has been no one who laughs like you, no one who cries like you. And what makes you laugh and cry will never provoke identical laughter and tears from anybody else, ever.....

No one reacts to any situation just as you would react. You are special. You are the only one in all creation who has your set of abilities.

Oh, there will always be somebody who is better at one of the things you are good at, but no one in the universe can reach the quality of your combination of talents, ideas, abilities and feelings.

Like a room full of musical instruments, some may excel alone, but no one can match the symphony sound when all are played together. You are special. You are rare.

And, in rarity, there is great value to us here on earth,

Because of your great rare value, you need not attempt to imitate others. You will accept - yes celebrate - your differences.

You are special. And you are beginning to realise it's no accident that you are special. You are beginning to see that God made you special for a very special purpose. He must have a job for you that no one else can do as well as you. Out of all the billions of applicants, only one is qualified, only one has the right combination of what it takes.

That one is you.

Because .....

You are special!

Peta Crane



Attention

LESSON 2

Just the thought of having attention triggered feelings of danger.

When I was a child, one of the main occasions for attention was while my dad was sexually abusing me. As soon as it was over, so was my time.

As for my mother, she didn't have much use for me. I was invisible. She provided a nice-looking home and prepared our family meals, but to her, children weren't people; they were a burden.

When I had needs and my parents were tired or otherwise occupied, they shamed me with statements like:

"You're not the center of the Universe."

Asking for attention led to reminders I was undeserving and I was expecting too much. I felt worse, not better from requesting it.

So between the sexual abuse, the verbal abuse and the neglect,I formed some very negative ideas about offers of attention and asking for it.

> *"Don't judge yourself by what others did to you."*
>
> C. Kennedy


Action Steps



What do you wish someone would ask you about yourself? (It might be based on how you feel overlooked, unappreciated, ignored or unrecognized.)

How would you answer?



What is something about yourself you're proud of? Why?

Attention

Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

What do you think or feel about giving yourself attention?

What do you think or feel about attention from others?

Attention

Do you question someone's motives if they offer attention? Do you believe there is a price to pay for attention?

What do you think or feel about asking for attention?



If you fear asking for attention, what do you fear?

Intention

If you struggle with asking for attention, what is one thing you will ask for today?

Confrontation

If you have negative beliefs surrounding receiving attention, list those specific beliefs.

Were these beliefs formed from what was modeled to you, what was said to you, or how you were treated? Write down what you remember.

Confrontation

Can you explore the possibility that the messages you learned from those things could be false?

Affirmation

Say this affirmation out loud and repeat as often as you need it.:

I open myself to my nourishing attention. I'm worthy of my own focused energy. I listen to my thoughts and emotions with empathy, understanding and acceptance. I receive the abundant love I have to give to myself.



LESSON 3

“She just wants attention.”

When my mother said that about me, I shrunk in my own eyes. It was excruciating. Not even saying it *to* me, but about me. I was dismissed as a nothing.

As degrading as that was, it didn’t take away my need for attention. That put me in a vulnerable place and set me on a fruitless and self-destructive path.

I needed attention but I couldn’t look like I wanted attention. So I became a doer. My mom was happy with me when I was quiet and cleaning. I learned to do all kinds of things I thought she’d notice.

As I got older, I learned to do other things that were important to her, like working with her at church and being a “good Christian”. I chased and chased after her, all the while, I was only valued for what I could offer her.

I didn’t only seek attention from my mother. The most value I felt was from my dad. Sex was just the price to pay. I offered myself to other men and then acted as though I didn't want anything from them.

I demeaned and abused myself, hoping to finally be treated with value. But everywhere I went, the more I tried to work for my value, the more I was treated like I had none.

It wasn't until recognized my worth that I was free to enjoy it without the work. Now when I feel I'm not being valued, I don't need to prove my worth to anyone, including me. I honor my value by asking to be treated accordingly and by walking away from situations where I'm not.

"You are valuable because you exist not because of what you do or what you have done, but simply because you are."

Max Lucado

Action Steps

Exploration

I feel most valued when...



What quality about yourself do you appreciate or admire? Name something that is about who you are, not what you do or have done.



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

What have you done to try to earn your value? Achieve something? Do something useful? Own something special or have a certain amount of money? Look a certain way? Have a particular position or job?

When you tried to earn your value, did you feel truly valuable or like an imposter?



Does the thought of having intrinsic value give you relief or make you panic? Or both?



What are 1-3 ways you can express your value to yourself today?

Confrontation

What specific negative beliefs do you have about your value?

Where did you get those ideas? Can you think of a particular situation that taught you that?

Can you start to see those as lies?



Say this affirmation out loud:

I am a beautiful being, worthy of love and attention. My existence is proof of my value and there is nothing I can do, have, achieve, or offer that can make me more or less valuable. I am enough.



After being treated like a burden, I believed I was a burden and treated myself like a burden. Taking care of a burden didn't appeal to me at all. Even if I felt like it, what was nurturing, anyway? What does that look like?

The closest thing I had to taking care of myself was the way I tried to comfort myself when I felt lonely or sad. But that was just escape and those things weren't usually good for me.

In fact, there was something satisfying in those things being bad for me. I wanted to punish myself. I was saying, "Snap out of it so I don't notice what a pain you are to have around!"

When I started seeing how I was abusing myself, I still didn't know how to give myself what I needed. Then I learned about reparenting myself. I needed to give myself what I'd give my child. That helped to set clearer lines about what was abusive and what was truly loving.

Truly nurturing things are ones I still feel really good about the next day, not things that just make me feel better in the moment. If it has consequences later on, it's probably just coping, not nurturing. When I'm doing something that really is good for me, inside I say, "ahhhhh!"

I don't feel like a burden anymore. It took some time to transition from just committing to being good to myself and actually enjoying it. First, it was more of a duty but the more I did it, the more motivated I became.




Action Steps

Exploration

Discover your primary love language here: 5lovelanguages.com (For our purposes, take the “single” version even if you’re in a relationship.)

What is your primary love language?

What are some specific way you feel particularly loved?

On a scale from 1-10, (1 is completely empty and 10 is completely full) how loved do you feel right now?



What does knowing your love language help you appreciate about yourself?



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

Your primary love language is the fact-track to your heart. It's the way you're most likely to really feel love. The absence of that love language leaves a noticeable hole.

Conversely, you're particularly vulnerable to being wounded in the same way you receive love.

If your primary love language is physical touch, harmful touch is particularly violating. If it's affirming words, put-down are gut-wrenching.

With that in mind, how have you been wounded through your love language?



When have you been frustrated in a relationship from not having your love language spoken?

What is the most significant way you've been shown love in your language?

Who in your life has "spoken" your love language lately?

Intention

What does knowing your love language tell you about how you can express love for yourself more effectively?

How about how you can ask others to express love to you?

What is one of those things you will implement into your day or life right now?

Confrontation

Have you ever been shamed or felt bad for asking for love in a particular way?

What led you to believe that? Can you think of something in particular that you saw or that happened to you?



Say this affirmation out loud:

I'm attuned to my mental, emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs. I'm skilled at meeting my needs and I joyfully nurture myself.



Shame

LESSON 5

When I was seven, I started classes in preparation for my First Communion. In the Catholic church, Communion is an expression of unity with Christ. Girls dress up like brides in white dresses and veils, symbolizing their purity.

While planning for the day, I insisted to my mother that I couldn’t wear white. I absolutely refused. I couldn't lie to God by representing myself as pure and holy. God knew what I was; there was no hiding it from him.

Already knowing I was a burden, I felt guilty for causing my mother more trouble and for embarrassing her because her daughter didn't look like the other girls. Yet I was desperate not to be bride-like.

Reluctantly, my mother took me to Sears and we found a powder blue ruffled dress.

A few years ago, when I confronted my mother about constantly lying to me when I was a kid, “Well, I didn’t really have a choice. It was the only way to control you since you were so strong-willed.”

My mother’s belief that being strong willed was a character flaw was painfully clear to me as a child. Her disapproval convinced me it was a flaw too. I viewed that First Communion incident as proof of my badness. I was selfish and obstinate for insisting on my way and should be ashamed.

I bore the shame of my father’s sexual violation and then the shame of my mother’s disgust. I believed I was deserving of their shameful treatment. I absorbed the badness of the abuse into my being. I thought the badness *was* me.

Throughout my life, the shame expressed itself in what I did and didn't deserve. I deserved punishment; I didn't deserve honor. I deserved criticism; I didn't deserve respect. I deserved abandonment and rejection; I didn't deserve attention or love.

The truth is that there was nothing about me that deserves abuse. The shame was a manipulation to keep me compliant and controlled. It my abusers' way of coping with their actions and relieving themselves from shame's burden.

But it was never mine to carry. I didn't have control of what others did to me. Those abuses were their actions, not mine. I have nothing to be ashamed of and I AM deserving.

> *When we are in shame, we don’t see the big picture; we don’t accurately think about our strengths and limitations. We just feel alone, exposed and deeply flawed.*
>
> Brene Brown


Action Steps



Imagine for a moment that you had never experienced shame. What paths, relationships, activities or interests would you like to have pursued that you didn't because of shame?



In spite of what you've been through, how have you expressed yourself in strong, healthy ways? What are ways you've expressed your true self?



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

Do you feel particularly shameful about a certain part of you? Body parts? Personality? Habits?



Why do you think that is? What happened to impose that on you?



What is one loving thing you will do for yourself even if you feel undeserving?



If you have negative beliefs about what you do and do not deserve, write the specific beliefs.

Where did you get those ideas? Can you think of a particular situation that happened to you that taught you that you are undeserving?



Can you start to see those as lies? What is the truth?



Say this affirmation out loud.

I am a beautiful being, worthy of love and attention. I'm not what others have done to me. I give back the shame to my abusers. I am clean and whole. I'm deserving of all good things.



“You weren’t there for me.”

My mom sat across the table from me. A few years ago, after seven years of no contact, I'd suggested we meet to discuss her treatment of my daughter. But my mother shifted the conversation toward herself.

She told me how hard things were for her, especially after my dad died. That’s when she accused me of abandoning her.

In truth, my parents walked away from *me* when I started to find my voice and ask for better treatment.

And I felt guilty.

When I was still in my abusive 21-year marriage, my husband used to tell me I spent too much time away from home.

“You should focus on your family. That’s the only thing that really matters.”

“You have your priorities all screwed up. You’re being selfish.”

“Why are you spending so much time with your friends? They’re only trying to control you.”

The truth was I was married to a man who was jealous of anything that didn’t involve him and who only wanted to monopolize every part of my life.

But I felt guilty.

I thought the guilt was evidence I was doing the wrong thing. If I *felt* bad, didn’t that mean I was *doing* something bad?

I didn’t know it then, but it was false guilt I experienced. False guilt kept me running after other people’s priorities and responsibilities. It pulled me apart. It dictated all the “shoulds” and “should nots” and didn’t let me rest. I never did enough and was never good enough.

It wasn't only other people who were guilting me into doing too much, I never thought I did enough either.

Healthy guilt points me back to a right, loving and healthy connection with my true self and leads to my highest good. False guilt sends me running after the unattainable. With false guilt, there was no peace after I did whatever I was “supposed to do”. There was a moment of relief but then always more and more and more to do.

False guilt is powered by the expectations and standards that I’d accepted out of fear of disapproval. I took on responsibilities that didn’t belong to me. I overcommitted my time, energy, and

resources. Instead of taking care of me, I took care of others.

Now that I've escaped from the false guilt, my life belongs to me. I'm free to care for myself first and then give to others from my abundance--when I want to. I'm not motivated out of guilt anymore. .

I used to spend so much time reacting and responding to everyone else that my life had no direction. Other people's lives, problems and wants set the course for my life. Once I realized it was okay for me to think about what I wanted, remarkable things began to take place in my life.

Melody Beattie


Action Steps



What values are truly your own? What matters to you enough that you would be willing to sacrifice for?

If there was one thing you want your life to stand for, what would that be?



What is one way you assert yourself that you didn't do five years ago?



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

Are you involved in any relationships where you compromise your own values or joy to avoid conflict? How do you feel about that?

If you find yourself motivated out of guilt or fear of disappointing someone else, what do you fear will happen if you don't comply?



What are the consequences of living according to your own values?

What are the benefits of living according to your own values?



What is one expectation someone else has for you that you can remove from your shoulders today?

Confrontation

What beliefs do you have about asserting yourself vs. compliance?

What beliefs do you have about pleasing others vs. pleasing yourself?

Confrontation

Were these beliefs formed from what was modeled to you, what was said to you, or how you were treated? Write down what you remember.



Say this out load to yourself:

I take full responsibility for my own feelings, thoughts and actions but I'm not responsible for making others happy. I refuse to feel guilty because someone else disapproves of my feelings, thoughts, or actions. I love, admire and respect myself so I don't need to compromise my personal integrity to please others.



LESSON 7

Some years ago, I noticed something about myself. I'd wait to clean my bathroom until I had time to clean all of it—sink, shower, toilet, mirror, and floor. I'd put up with a dirty sink when it would have only taken me a few minutes to make it sparkle. I could have enjoyed having at least a part of my bathroom clean, but instead, I denied myself having any of it clean.

I knew I was a perfectionist. It was all or nothing with me. It showed up in other areas of my life. I liked my high standards, but with the all or nothing thinking that went with it, being a perfectionist didn't necessarily mean anything was better. A lot of times, like with my bathroom, things were actually worse.

According to Wikipedia, perfectionism means:

"striving for flawlessness"
"setting excessively high performance standards"

And is also accompanied by:

“overly critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations”

Yuck! It sounds like the abusive lifestyle I worked so hard to be free from!

Self-care is about loving myself whether I meet any given standard or not. It’s about gentleness, not punishment and criticism.

During this course, we’ve talked a lot about the past and how it’s shaped us. There are valid reasons why self-care is difficult and doesn’t come naturally. We’ve only scratched the surface of the feelings and beliefs that sabotage our self-care, but don’t let that stop you from moving forward.

Even if you haven’t started yet, don’t be discouraged. Self-care is an ongoing process anyway. This isn't the work of just a week; it's a lifetime's work. So don't worry about the timeline or how many lesson you’ve completed. This is about you and what's best for you, not about some schedule.

Some progress is better than no progress at all. Don’t worry about doing this perfectly; just do it. Start with where you are. If you quit or find yourself getting into some self-sabotaging habits again, just start again.

It’s not all or nothing. Don’t say, “I failed. I’m a failure. Failures can’t succeed so I may as well give up.” Your value doesn’t depend on your performance. If you have a really bad day and treat yourself horribly, don’t you need to be treated better, not worse?

Loving yourself means not keeping a tally of how many times you mess up. It means being patient with yourself as you learn. How many people do you know who do things perfectly as they are learning? Nobody I know. So give yourself a break.

You move in the direction you focus on so focus on what you're doing well and the progress you've made.

Commit to making self-care something you'll continue to grow in. Continue to journal, do daily affirmations and intentions. Keep progressing, keep reaching out for support. Keep loving yourself because you deserve it.


Action Steps

Exploration

I’m afraid if people know_____about me they wouldn’t love, accept or want me.

What would you do if you weren’t afraid of failure or success?



What skills, talents or qualities come effortlessly?



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

When you don't do things perfectly, are you tempted to quit altogether?

Do your standards or expectations of yourself sabotage you?

How has this impacted you?



What 1-3 loving things will you do for yourself today? What beautiful things will you invite into your life today?



Are you critical of yourself if you aren't perfect?

Where did you learn to do that? Can you think of a particular situation that happened to you that taught you that?



Create your own affirmation. What is a truth that you need to hear? Or use this one:

I accept and appreciate the progress I've made. I have the right to make mistakes, to be wrong, to be imperfect, to fail and be responsible for it. I love myself in spite of imperfections.



Emotions

LESSON 8

At times in my life, I was like a ghost, not a real person. Many of my experiences felt like a dream or as though they happened to someone else.

Feeling "unreal" was in large part because I was emotionally shut down. Emotions make our experiences “real”. Emotions are a sign of our presence. Without being in touch with my feelings, a big part of me wasn’t really “there”.

Shutting down from my emotions was survival. It would have been too much to fully feel and experience my abusive childhood, but coping only took me so far. It saved me in childhood but being shut down throughout my adulthood caused more harm than good.

My emotional disconnect kept me in abusive relationships. It kept me in positions and jobs that weren’t good for me. It clouded my awareness so I didn’t think things were as bad as they actually were.

This detachment from my feelings also made it difficult to know what I wanted and didn't want.

The process of getting in touch with my emotions has made me more fully alive, helped me to protect myself and better equipped me to give myself what I want and need. To really be good at self-care, I've relied on my emotions.

One of the first things I had to do was to give myself a vocabulary for identifying and naming my feelings. I've made it a regular practice to ask myself how I'm feeling on a regular basis so I'm equipped to make whatever adjustments are appropriate.

Doing so has allowed me to care for all parts of me on a more moment to moment basis.I don't get overwhelmed from my needs and wants mounting up from neglect.

Don't keep all your feelings sheltered--express them. Don't ever let life shut you up.

Dr. Steve Maraboli


Action Steps



What makes you angry?

What makes you sad?

What discourages you?

What delights you?



How have your emotions served you?



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

Set up a prompt to ask yourself several times per day, “How am I feeling?” or “How am I feeling about [current experience]?”

When strong feeling emerge, take a moment to step back but don’t run away from the feelings. Gain some stability and then reengage. Connect with your feelings. Experience them and express them.

Your emotions are one of the distinct things about you. Embracing them is part of embracing yourself. If you’re disconnected from your emotions, you might find a list helpful. I included a list of feelings at the end of this lesson.



What 1-3 loving things will you do for yourself today? What beautiful things will you invite into your life today?



If you have negative beliefs about having or expressing emotions, write the specific beliefs.

Where did you get those ideas? Can you think of a particular situation that happened to you that taught you that? Can you start to see those as lies? What is the truth?



Create your own affirmation. Using the present tense, what do you need to hear and express about your feelings? Or you can use this one:

I'm fully aware of my feelings. I accept them as part of my uniqueness. I embrace all of my emotions and I appreciate them as a gift to equip me to take care of myself.

Angry * Nervous * Depressed * Terrified * Furious * Jittery
Unimportant * Frightened * Antagonistic * Exasperated
Suffocated * Resentful * Irritable * Confused * Trapped
Bewildered * Devalued * Lost * Cherished
Bored * Oppressed * Uptight * Bitter * Tricked * Burdened
Desirable * Ugly * Deceived * Sad * Free * Picked-on
Pissed-off * Lonely * Attractive * Harassed * Insecure
Dumb * Capable * Wary * Inadequate * Foolish * Shy
Unappreciated * Useless * Cheated * Carefree * Worried
Violated * Generous * Tense * Abandoned * Proud
Compassionate * Invalidated * Shameful * Pitied * Helpless
Anxious * Cowardly * Weary * Hurt * Loved * Uncomfortable
Empty * Happy * Awed * Rejected * Tired * Joyful * Humble
Unwanted * Humiliated * Excited * Bold * Disgusted * Small
Invisible * Hopeful * Frustrated * Insulted * Grateful
Guilty * Restless * Confident * Lighthearted * Embarrassed
Jumpy * Accepted * Disappointed * Unfulfilled * Betrayed
Worthwhile * Afraid * Empty * Aloof * Important * Apprehensive
Overwhelmed * Belittled * Unworthy

Emotions 2

LESSON 9

Several years ago, I had a miscarriage. To be honest, the pregnancy was a shock. I thought it was menopause. I was 46 and my daughter-in-law and son had just announced the coming of our 6th grandchild.

My husband and I were just getting back on our feet after being homeless for 4 or 5 months and recovering from our marriage nearly crumbling. Just before that, my parents had filed a lawsuit against me for speaking publically about my sexual abuse, which threatened my website and the work I am so passionate about.

It just didn't seem like the best time to have a baby. The lawsuit brought more stress than I'd ever remembered feeling. It gave me a new awareness of how desperate my parents were to be rid of me.

And then I miscarried. I was completely devastated. It felt like a loss I wouldn't recover from. It wasn't only the loss of the life that was

forming in me. It triggered the loss of my childhood; the loss of my daughter, Bethany's, childhood; and the potential loss of my life's passion, Overcoming Sexual Abuse.

There were days when I just sat with my arms around me and rocked myself. I couldn't do anything else. I had nothing to give to anyone. I couldn't write articles, I couldn't comment on posts, I couldn't even answer emails.

The work that I loved was dying, even before I knew the outcome of the lawsuit.

And it felt like I was dying.

After a year and a half, my dad had died and their case fell apart without him. But with no energy left to give to my work, it felt like my parents won anyway.

For most of my life, I'd plowed through my emotions in favor of being "responsible". I dismissed my feelings as irrelevant.

But my rough treatment was a violation to my soul. I was forcing myself the way my father forced himself onto my body. I was imposing on myself the same way my mother imposed a "good attitude" onto me while I was being abused.

Thankfully, by the time of my miscarriage, I'd learned to listen to myself. I'd had enough experience with my healing to know that grief is the corridor that leads to new hope and possibilities. So I just sat with my feelings and gave myself the space I needed. Even though at times I felt impatient, I didn't push myself to get back to my life as usual. I honored my emotions and let my energy levels dictate what I was ready for.

Eventually, I found my way back through a lot of self-care.

Then, a few years later, I became unusually tired. No energy. Everything was an effort. Overwhelming stress. The level of stress didn’t seem to fit my current circumstances. And then the fear. Even panic. I was terrified I couldn't work anymore.

What was going ON???

I constantly monitor my emotions so I can respond to myself before things turn into a crisis or I’m overwhelmed. I knew WHAT I was feeling; it just didn’t make too much sense.

But I kept thinking about the lawsuit and my miscarriage and finally made the connection: My lack of energy triggered the past fear of losing “my baby,” Overcoming Sexual Abuse. I took on all the emotions of the past situation. It made sense.

So I faced another layer of grief and assured myself I wasn't losing my baby again.

But even before I realized all of that, I was taking care of myself. I was letting myself feel whether I understood my emotions or not. I was resting and comforting myself. I doubt I’d ever have known what I was experiencing if I’d pushed myself to work or dismissed my feelings.

Expressing your emotions is an act of self-love.

Panache Desai

Action Steps



The inner depth of my being is trying to tell me…



Write a letter to your emotions thanking them for showing you the unseen things inside of you.



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

What are 3-4 emotions you've felt today?

What thoughts or experiences did they spring from?



What 1-3 loving things will you do for yourself today? What beautiful things will you invite into your life today?

Confrontation

Do you accept some emotions as good and some as bad?

What experiences shaped that belief?



Create your own affirmation. What is a truth that you need to hear?



Even though I knew in my head leaving my abusive 21 year marriage was the right thing to do, I felt guilty. I felt like I was putting what I wanted and needed above everyone else. The “everyone else” was my husband, children and parents. None of them were in favor of a divorce.

I moved out in October and by November, I was adjusting to a more peaceful “normal”. Then Thanksgiving came around and my parents announced they were celebrating with my ex.

It shouldn’t have come as a surprise. My parents had sided with him for years, even though he harassed and degraded me right in front of them. I was hurt that they chose to spend the first post-marriage holiday with him, but I didn’t object or complain. Mostly, I understood.

I understood that I was the “low man on the totem pole”. I’d been there all my life. Accused of being selfish and of only thinking of

myself from the time I was 2, I knew “my place”. And it wasn’t as anyone’s priority.

I learned to put myself in my place too. I wasn’t even a priority in my own life. I’d coped all my life by serving others to earn a better place, but all with the mindset that I deserved to be last, even with myself.

Serving others was a way to feel better, more in control of “my place” because at least I was choosing it instead of it being forced on me. And I hoped that someone would notice my hard work and “promote” me to a better place by making me a priority.

But none of that gave me the results I was looking for. I was just over-worked and still the lowest priority in mine and others’ lives.

I had to go back to the root, the belief that I was selfish for considering my own needs and wants, and that it was noble to put others first.

The truth is that it wasn’t honorable to put everyone else in front of me. I didn’t do it out of a position of being empowered; I did it out of feeling victimized.

All along I was giving my power away to others, hoping they’d somehow make me feel important. I was giving them the responsibility that belonged to me.

I had to take responsibility for my life and the beliefs that powered my decisions. It’s my job to take care of me. It my job to convince me of my value and importance. I put myself first because that IS my place.

You have to love yourself first because no amount of love from others is sufficient to fill the yearning that your soul requires from you.

Dodinsky

Action Steps



A deep need within me that isn't being met is...

A deep desire within me that hasn't been fulfilled is....



Write a thank you letter to yourself for how you've shown up for yourself.



Use these questions as journal prompts. Don't only write the answers, but feel the answers. Be intentional about listening to yourself.

What are some ways you need to "promote" yourself in your own life?

Do you anticipate more internal resistance or resistance from others if you put yourself first?

What can you do about the resistance?



What are 1-3 ways you will put yourself first today?

Confrontation

If you have negative beliefs about making yourself a priority, write the specific beliefs.

Where did you get those ideas? Can you think of a particular situation that happened to you that taught you that you to put yourself last?

Can you start to see those as lies? What is the truth?

Affirmation

Create your own affirmation. What is a truth that you need to hear?