

From Shame to Remorse

Finding Empathy for Those We Harm

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built using Claude AI

What This Workshop Covers

This workshop focuses on shame that arises when we've caused harm to others.

The NVC self-empathy process we'll practice works for **all types of shame**:

- Body, appearance
- Performance, competence
- Identity, belonging

But today we're specifically exploring how to transform shame into remorse so we can repair relationships and take genuine accountability.

What stops us from taking genuine accountability when we've caused harm?

Often, it's not a lack of care.

It's shame.

What Is Accountability?

Punitive System

- **Accepting consequences** for rule-breaking
- **Serving time** or paying fines
- **Focus on the offender** and their punishment
- **"Paying a debt"** to society

Restorative Justice

- **Understanding the harm** you caused
- **Taking responsibility** for specific impact
- **Actively working to repair** relationships and damage
- **Focus on those harmed** and their needs

Why Shame Blocks Accountability

Brene Brown video on Shame & Empathy ([link](#))

"I'm bad, I'm terrible, I'm unworthy"

When shame floods in:

- We become self-focused on OUR worth, OUR identity
- We literally cannot see what happened to the other person
- We defend, minimize, make excuses

Shame makes it difficult to access empathy for the impacted person

Shame vs. Remorse

Shame

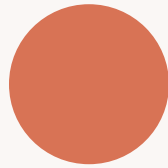
"I'm bad"

- Self-focused
- My intent
- About my worth
- Defensive, self-protective
- Blocks empathy for the other

Remorse

"I caused harm and I care"

- Other-focused
- My impact
- About their pain
- Open, wanting to know
- Enables empathy



The Key Proposal

Accessing empathy for those we harm is difficult until we've worked with our own shame

The NVC Self-Empathy Process

Four movements to transform shame into remorse:

- Notice the shame voices
- Find the feelings under the shame
- Connect to your needs
- Self-empathy opens the door

Practice Activity

Select something with a very low intensity for the sake of learning.

Step 1: What Happened?

What is an action you took that impacted someone else in a way you want to find genuine remorse for?

Selecting something with a very low intensity for the sake of learning.

Step 2: Notice the Shame Voices

What stories does shame tell us?

"I'm such a terrible person"

"I always mess everything up"

"I shouldn't have said/done"

"I don't deserve love or connection"

Practice: Name the judgments you have about yourself

Step 3: Find the Feelings Under Shame

Shame often covers deeper, more vulnerable feelings:

Fear

Sadness

Regret

Pain

Anguish

Heartbreak

"When I think about what I did, I feel scared, heartbroken, anguished..."

Step 3: Connect to Your Needs

What needs were you trying to meet? What needs matter now?

What drove my actions?

"I was trying to take care of my need for safety / rest / autonomy..."

What needs are alive now?

"I deeply value integrity, connection, mattering, contribution, repair..."

This isn't excuse-making—it's humanizing yourself so you can breathe

Step 4: Self-Connection Opens the Door

From this grounded place, we can finally turn toward the other person

"Of course I feel anguish—I value connection and I damaged it"

"Of course I'm scared—I care about this relationship"

Once shame loosens, empathy becomes possible

The Shift: From Self to Other

Now we can hold the Restorative Justice questions:

Who did I harm?

What might they be feeling?

What needs of theirs were affected?

What repair might they need?

Practicing Accountability from Remorse

When we're grounded in remorse (not shame), we can:

Acknowledge impact

"I hear that I hurt you"

Take responsibility

"This is what I did" (without defense)

Express genuine care

"It matters to me that you were hurt"

Ask about repair

"What do you need from me?"

Resources for Continued Learning

Restorative Justice

The Little Book of Restorative Justice by Howard Zehr

NVC & Restorative Circles

Restorative Circles by Dominic Barter

Shame & Vulnerability

Brené Brown's work on shame resilience

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg

The Possibility

When we can work with our shame, we can finally extend genuine empathy to those we've harmed.

And from that place, real accountability and repair become possible.
