Chapter 2 Homework 2: History related to shame and self-criticism

When to use:

After tracking self-critical thoughts exercises

This and the “History of Warmth and Compassion” exercise are the beginning of the functional analysis

Materials needed:

Handout: Understanding your history related to shame and self criticism

Instructions:

As children, we develop our views of ourselves through the way we believe we are seen by others. Another way to say this is that we “internalize” the views of those around us. For example, if we believe that someone important around us saw us negatively, then we are likely to develop a negative view of ourselves, at least in part. Thus, an important source of self-criticism can be found in the way that we were treated by our early caregivers. Keep in mind that it doesn’t necessarily take a lot of abuse or criticism as a child for a person to develop into a self-critical adult. A lack of warmth, expressions of love, or affectionate physical contact from others can leave a void that the mind can go on to fill with self-criticism and shame. It also doesn’t mean that these people were “evil” or all bad. It’s very likely they didn’t know how to treat *themselves* with kindness and care either.

So for this exercise, I’d like to have you take a closer look at some of the relationships and events that may have contributed to your feelings of shame and your self-criticism.

As you do this exercise, please keep in mind that it can be very painful to recall these past events. You may find yourself feeling sad, angry, or confused. You may also notice getting caught up in your own self-criticism and shame as you review these events. All of this is completely understandable and very common. As best as you can, try to be kind with yourself as you approach this exercise and maybe see it as a part of starting to develop a kinder way of relating to yourself.

You also may have a hard time recalling events that contributed to your current sense of self-criticism, being flawed, or inadequate. That’s quite alright. If you are not able to answer all of the questions on this handout or you are not ready to write the answers to these questions out on paper, feel free to just consider the questions for a while in your own mind and we can discuss them in our next session if you’re willing.

Do you have any questions?

Debrief at next session:

1. What was it like to do this homework? What did you notice?

2. Did you learn anything new here about what might have contributed to you developing the level of shame and self-criticism that you have?

3. How does it feel when you spend time thinking about and reflecting on these relationships and experiences that may have caused you pain?

Handout: Understanding Your History Related to Shame and Self-Criticism

*Please use this form so that we can get a better understanding of some of the relationships and events that may have contributed to your tendency toward self-criticism.*

1. Looking back on your childhood and while you were growing up, who you would say were the people you most depended upon as to take care of your emotional and physical needs? These might include parents, grandparents, other family members, or others who helped care for you. For the purpose of this exercise, we are going to call these people your “caregivers.” Please identify those people below and indicate how much warm/caring and critical/abusive/shaming they were. Also indicate how important you feel each of these people were in your life in terms of their impact on you. Just list as many as you feel are important.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship** | **Warmth/Care** | **Criticism/Shame/Abuse** | **Importance** |
| Person’s name  | How were you related to this person? | On a scale of 1-5 person how much warmth and caring did you feel from this person?***1*** *= not at all warm/caring****2****= rarely warm/caring****3****= moderately warm/caring****4****= frequent or somewhat strong warmth/caring****5*** *= consistently or intensely warm/caring* | On a scale of 1-5 how critical would you say this person was of you (e.g. would say mean things to you, was abusive or neglectful, would shame or humiliate you in some way)?***1*** *= not at all critical/shaming****2****= rarely critical/shaming****3****= moderately critical/shaming****4****= frequently critical/shaming****5*** *= consistently or intensely critical/shaming* | On a scale of 1-5 how important was this person to you in terms of their impact on you?***1*** *= not at important****2****= slightly important****3****= moderately important****4****= quite important****5*** *= extremely important*  |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |  |

*Of the relationships you’ve listed above, please consider which one you feel had the biggest impact on your own development of shame and self-criticism. If you are unsure, you might ask yourself who your self-critic sounds most like. Please answer questions 2-5 with that person in mind.*

2. How did this person respond to you when you were distressed? Did they soothe you and express empathy for your experiences? Did you feel that they understood what you were feeling and expressed that it was ok to be feeling that? Or did they try to get you to change what you were feeling or tell you shouldn’t be feeling that? Did they ignore what you were feeling or humiliate you further? Was this person predictably warm or predictably shaming, or was it hard to know what to expect from them? Please describe how this person responded to you when you were distressed:

3. What happened when your wants/needs conflicted with what that person wanted? Did this person show enthusiasm and excitement for the things that you were inherently interested in? Or did you feel like they had expectations of what you should want and who should be that you needed to live up to? Please write about this below:

4. Did this person neglect, bully, or abuse you? If so, in what ways?

5. Do you remember this person ever humiliating you making you feel ashamed? If so, how did this occur?

6. Sometimes events that happen later in life that don’t involve your primary care givers can be significant contributors to self-criticism and shame. These often include times in which you may have been humiliated, experiences with bullying, or sexual or physical assaults. Have you ever experienced any other events that have made you feel degraded, humiliated, worthless, or helpless? If so, record those below.