

## Why I had to stop judging myself to start healing from childhood trauma

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"I now see how owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do." ~Brené Brown

A few years ago, when I began recovering from childhood trauma, the first thing I learned was that I needed to master the skill of self-awareness.

However, becoming aware came with some pretty hard truths about who I was, what I did, and how I acted because of what had happened to me.

Although I eventually found the courage to face some challenging experiences from my past, I wasn't ready to forgive and accept myself.

When I acknowledged the impact of my past trauma and abuse on my current life, I immediately started blaming myself. It was difficult to accept that I pleased people to gain validation and stayed in toxic relationships since I didn't feel worthy or lovable. Therefore, I went straight for what I knew and was accustomed to—judgment, guilt, and shame.

As Bessel van der Kolk explained in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*:

"While we all want to move beyond trauma, the part of our brain that is devoted to ensuring our survival (deep below our rational brain) is not very good at denial. Long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger and mobilize disturbed brain circuits and secrete massive amounts of stress hormones. This precipitates unpleasant emotions, intense physical sensations, and impulsive and aggressive actions. These posttraumatic reactions feel incomprehensible and overwhelming. Feeling out of control, survivors of trauma often begin to fear that they are damaged to the core and beyond redemption."

Although self-awareness is the first step toward nurturing change in our lives, many of us reach for judgment when faced with uncomfortable truths about ourselves and our past experiences. Ironically, the lack of self-acceptance blocks us from healing and moving past what happened to us.

Is it possible we sabotage our healing by being overly hard on ourselves?

For example, victims of sexual assault are often held hostage by the shame they carry around. Since speaking about the assault is terrifying, they remain silent while secretly taking responsibility for the abuse.

If guilt and shame are predominating emotions we carry inside, how can we move toward successful recovery and accept our wounded inner child?

We do it by letting go of judgment for what happened to us and, instead of taking responsibility for the harm we experienced, we become responsible for our recovery.

I remember when I was about seven years old, my father got angry because my brother and I were playing around the house and making noise. He slammed our bedroom door so hard that the glass shattered. As he was moving toward me with his face red and furious, I urinated.

Any time I looked back at this experience, I felt an overwhelming sense of shame and promised myself that I would never get weak and scared of anyone.

As I got older, I adopted a survival mechanism of being a toughie. I would put on the mask of a strong woman while suffocating on the inside since I felt fragile, weak, easily offended, and anxious.

However, I couldn't stand facing my weaknesses.

Anytime I felt sad, vulnerable, or emotional, I would judge myself harshly. In a sense, I became my biggest internal abuser.

After I got divorced, I was haunted by self-judgment and felt worthless because of what I allowed while being married. Disrespect, pain, neglect, and lies. How can a worthy person allow such things? I couldn't stop judging myself.

Eventually, I began working on my guilt through writing and daily forgiveness meditations. Although I started to understand the importance of acceptance and forgiveness in my healing and recovery, I was only scratching the surface.

The real challenge arose when I confronted who I was because of what happened to me. My focus started to shift from blame to self-responsibility. Although it was a healthy step forward, it was a long and intimidating process. Since I was deeply absorbed in my victim mentality and filled with shame and judgment, accepting myself seemed like a dream I would never reach.

It was difficult to admit that I had stayed in a toxic relationship by choice, manipulated people with my tears, and created chaos and drama in my closest relationships to gain attention and feel loved. However, the discomfort I felt was a sign that I was on the right track. If I was willing to keep my ego at bay, I could achieve progress.

Here's how I overcame self-judgment and began healing my childhood wounds.

1. I began to open up and speak the truth.

At first, I had to face how disgusted I felt with myself. Once I began talking about what happened to me while finding the space of refuge with my therapist, coach, and close friends, judgment began subsiding and acceptance took over.

My favorite piece of advice from Brené Brown is to share our story with people who deserve to hear it. Whether you speak to a therapist, a coach, a support group, or a very close friend or a family member, make sure this person has earned the right to hear your deepest and most vulnerable feelings and memories.

Speaking our truth in the space of acceptance is one of the most beautiful ways to heal and process traumatic memories and experiences. A safe space and deep connections are fundamental when healing ourselves, especially if we get hurt within interpersonal relationships.

2. I acknowledged what happened to me.

The breakthrough during my recovery happened after I read a book by Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Bruce Perry titled What Happened to You? Suddenly, so much of my behavior started to make sense.

I wasn't the sick, disgusting, heartless human being I considered myself to be. I was a wounded adult who didn't address her traumatic experiences from her childhood while acting from a place of survival and fear.

When we begin healing ourselves and find the causes behind our (often) unconscious and self-sabotaging behaviors, we become more understanding of who we are and move away from judgment. There is a power in asking, "What happened to me?" instead of "What is wrong with me?"

Understanding yourself from an open and compassionate place allows you to reach for the love and acceptance your inner child craves. I don't believe that we are broken or need to be fixed. We are worthy and whole souls whose purpose is to find our way back to ourselves and reconnect with who we are at our core. *[The only way to truly find self-acceptance and healing after trauma is by knowing that we DO need to be fixed because we were broken. I know without a doubt, she's referring to self-loathing and disgust from abuse and trauma, and I 100% agree that you are/were not damaged goods because of what happened to you. There's nothing inherently wrong with you that deserved or deserves any abuse. But there is an underlying problem existing within humanity called sin. It infected us from the curse in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3, Romans 5:12) . Because of that, exists dysfunction and disorder, broken relationships, pain, and suffering. God, our Creator, created us to know Him and be known (loved) by Him, however, the effects of the curse have tainted us and caused separation from Him. That's the price of free will. Bad choices breed consequences. And the wages for sin is death (physical and spiritual) eternal separation from God in hell. (Romans 6:23)]*

*The bible says that we've all sinned and fallen short. (Romans 3:23) If you don't think you're a sinner or have sinned, I challenge you to answer these simple questions [\[here\]](#). Some people*

*have sinned greater than others (rapists, serial killers, and abusers) but we're all guilty before God (**Romans 3:9-20**) There's not one person who's ever led a perfect and sinless life. Nobody could fulfill the law of righteousness (**Galatians 3:11, Romans 3:20, Romans 8:3-4**) And so because God loved us and wanted to restore us back to Him, he took on flesh as a human to fulfill that law and die in our place since nobody could. For we were dead in our trespasses (**Ephesians 2:1**). But in His grace, mercy, and loving-kindness, God sent His Son to die on the cross and take the penalty of our sin, reconciling us to God and making eternal life with Him possible. What was lost at the Fall is reclaimed at the Cross. He did it because He loved us so much and wanted a relationship with us. It wasn't forced, it was by choice! The only way to find true healing, freedom, and acceptance is by reconciliation to God. To do that, you must acknowledge you're a sinner and repent. By trusting in Jesus Christ alone to save you and surrender your life to Him. You can't save yourself. None of your efforts or works will save you. For it is only by God's grace you are saved, so that no one can boast in his or her righteousness, which is like filthy tampons or rags according to His righteousness. (**Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, Isaiah 54:6**)*

*By confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (**Romans 10:9**) When you surrender your life to him, you become a child of God created with a new heart and mind (**2 Corinthians 5:17, Ezekiel 36:26, Jeremiah 31:33**) and learn about your new **[identity]** and walk it out with purpose and meaning. It doesn't mean your life will get easier or you won't struggle. But what it does mean is you'll never be alone or forsaken as God will be with you always and you'll see a transformation take place in your life. (John 6:28-29, Romans 12:1-2, 1 John 1:8)]*

3. I learned to silence my inner critic.

Learning to recognize the little mean voice inside my head was challenging. My thoughts of judgment were so subtle that they passed by me without awareness.

The easiest time to spot critical thoughts was when I was meditating. Even during meditation, I judged myself: "Sit up, make sure you focus on your breath. Oh, come on, Silvia, do it better. You aren't good at meditating. Your mind just wandered again!"

Since we have about 60 000 thoughts in a day, I decided to focus on my feelings. By observing my emotional state, I became better at identifying what I was thinking and was able to step in to change it .

I remember one particular night when I was feeling very depressed and hopeless. I asked myself, "What am I thinking that's making me feel this way?" The answer I observed was, "No one will ever truly love you." It was the first time I decided not to believe these thoughts. I sat down and made a list of people who showed me love, care, and compassion.

If you often judge yourself, you may need some practice and loving patience. However, if you are working on your healing, understanding and accepting yourself is a way of telling your inner child, "I love you, I am here for you, and there is nothing wrong with you."

Once I discovered the positive effects of self-acceptance on my recovery, I realized that being overly hard on myself had nothing to do with healing but everything to do with the trauma I'd experienced.

Today I understand that the little voice inside my head giving me all the reasons to stay stuck in survival mode is my inner child screaming, "Someone please love me." And I am ready to do just that.