Questions Asked During Live Webinar Broadcast on 6/22/19

*Healing Addiction and Shame through Self-Compassion*

Presenter: Sarah Buino, LCSW, CADC, CDWF

Do you practice these concepts one-on one or in a group setting? Does one work more than the other for substance abuse treatment/prevention?

A: Both! I think both modalities are important in recovery from addiction for different reasons. In groups, self-compassion work can help clients understand they’re not alone, while individual work can be used to address whatever specific issues a client may face with self-compassion.

I work in foster care with kids who often come into because of their parents addiction. Would some of the activities that you do also work the kids affected by this?

A: Absolutely. Since kids are not my speciality, I’d encourage you to brainstorm with others who do specialize in that population. But self-worth and self-compassion are concepts that can only support positive growth when a child is introduced to those concepts earlier in life along with a safe adult who can help foster those skills.

Is recognizing my own shame necessary to deal with transference countertransference?

A: Yes. 100%. Absolutely. We can only take clients as far as we've come, so we must do our own work in this area. I've yet to meet a client who didn’t have a struggle with shame, so my own experience with shame has only been an asset in supporting my clients in their shame-resilience.

Narcissism: at the core of a person who is narcissistic is a lack of sense of self. How would you work with a person who is in denial that he/she lacks a sense of self?

A: I believe I answered this live, but I’ll say again that I wouldn’t overtly tell a person struggling with narcissism they had no sense of self. If we’d established a solid therapeutic relationship, I would only share this information if I thought the client could tolerate and understand it in order to create psychic change. With denial in general, I want to create a sense of curiosity for a client. I invite them to open to the idea that there may be aspects of their personality or behavior of which they’re unaware. I’m usually able to accomplish this by sharing my knowledge of how shame remains hidden – sharing stories of past clients – to which I know they may relate. Once they hear “their story” in connection with someone else, there’s a buy in that maybe I (as the therapist) have some credibility and they’re more willing to be open to what I have to share.

I was wondering is it different with children. Children deal with a lot of their own problems as well as what problems they endure in their house. What type of mediation would you recommend or is it the same?

A: Not being an expert on children, I would encourage you to do a quick google search on children and meditation. I do know meditation creates positive changes in the brain, so I can't imagine this would be any less effective for children. A friend of mine is a meditation instructor and has had her children meditating since they were very young – so it can be done! You may just want to connect with some meditation communities in your area to get some more ideas for this population!

Would you suggest advising a client to use a less harmful substance, or would you just accept that idea if it's something that they bring it up themselves?

A: The topic of harm reduction is a bit out of the scope of this lecture, but as it connects to shame and self-compassion; my main goal is to get a client to create awareness of how their behaviors impact the way they feel about themselves. If
substance use is something that creates shame, I would support a client making shifts that will decrease shame. That being said, I do tell my clients that I’m happy to support them in harm-reduction strategies, but I will also tell them when I think it’s not working and I think abstinence is the best option. My personal caseload tends to largely come from treatment centers; clients who struggle with chronic relapse, so those folks are often working towards abstinence before they even get to me.

Can covert shame through lack of family connection affect self worth?
A: Yes. A disconnected family creates a less secure holding environment for a child. That lack of holding, creates insecure attachment, which is a breeding ground for feelings of not being good enough (shame).

Brene Brown has often said, "Shame cannot survive being spoken." If someone has shame about a past experience or actions, does this mean that 100% of the time that that person must share with another human? Is there ever a space for keeping an experience to oneself and working on forgiving oneself?
A: That’s a great question…I don’t know that I have THE answer to this, but I’ll share what came up for me as I read the question. In my experience, there is a great relief when someone shares an experience of shame and they’re met with love and empathy. I think of the 5th step – where I hear over and over “I thought my sponsor was going to think I was awful, but they just laughed and said they’d done the same thing(s).” That said, is ANYTHING 100% true or false? I don’t like to live in dichotomies, so I imagine there must be a time when it’s not necessary…but then again, that might not be shame. As a therapist, I don’t require my clients to tell me everything. If there’s something they want to remain silent about, we can talk around it until they’re comfortable sharing. Ultimately, I find they want to be relieved of carrying shameful secrets. And self-forgiveness is an important part of the process. I suppose one needs willingness to practice self-compassion in order to create space for self-forgiveness. I believe forgiveness is something that happens over and over, not just a one and done situation. So really, this question is too complex to give it all justice in a few sentences, but I hope this is helpful.

How do you improve your ability to stay out of judgement?
A: Oooh, another great question! This is truly where I’m focusing my self-work at the moment. It’s one of my Alanonisms that creates a lot of discomfort for me. The first step is definitely awareness. Can I recognize when I’m judging that person for cutting me off in traffic? Or when someone isn’t walking as fast as I want on the sidewalk? Or taking up too much space in the aisle in the grocery store? My personal reaction tends to be “they’re doing it wrong. If they would just do it the ‘right’ way, it would be better for everyone.” But really, I want it better for ME. In these scenarios, judgment is my reaction to discomfort. Rather than recognizing how uncomfortable I am and think of what I need to do to change it, it’s easier to point outside and blame someone else. So, my technique is to try to notice when this is happening, then check with my body. Usually my body will be tense in reaction to this. So when I notice the tension, I try to physically soften. Lately I’ve also begun to repeat the mantra “I am ok, despite the behavior of others.” That has helped me shift the focus back to me and off of the subject of judgment.

Do you have meditation tools that you use or recommend to clients?
A: Yes! Insight Timer is my favorite phone app. It has everything: music, guided meditations, classes, etc. It’s even free!!! There are plenty of apps out there and lots of free tools on youtube. The important thing is helping the client find what type of meditation works for them and helping create a daily plan so they can actually stick to it.

What would you suggest the therapist say to help the person to address the shame issue with their parents?
A: I’m not 100% sure I understand this question, but what I think it’s about is addressing the shame caused by parents? Truly, it depends. Is it something a client is currently experiencing or is it historic? Historically, I’d create space to experience the loss of not getting what they needed from their parents. If it’s a current issue, I’d discuss boundaries. It’s hard to address this question adequately without knowing more information, so please contact me directly if there’s a case you’d like to discuss.
How do you help someone who has a hard time with meditation, and finding something good about themselves to relax and have positive feelings?

A: First, I don’t want to create positive feelings that aren’t there. I want to invite a client to hold both the positive/negative at the same time. More often than not, we dismiss the positive and focus on the negative. Self-compassion creates room for both. Why does the client have a hard time finding something good about themselves? I often find that there are clients who have some subconscious investment in beating themselves up. Maybe being a victim/martyr was the only way to get attention as a child? In this case, I often share my own experience struggling with wanting to play victim. When I share this about myself, a client who thinks/feels this way often responds with “me too!” And then we have a shared goal to work with, so in the future I can address that victim part of the client without defensiveness from the client. This isn’t a simple fix, by any means. I find with this mentality, there are often very deep subconscious messages to keep people stuck. There are energy psychology tools that can address this (visit www.energypsych.org) to check this out.

As for having a hard time with meditation, that’s different. Often, it’s due to a lack of understanding of what meditation actually is. Meditation is returning to the anchor when the mind wanders. NOT clearing the mind. I highly suggest therapists practice meditation so they have the same experiences that clients may ask questions about. Then you won’t need to know the answer, but you can describe your experience that a client may relate to.