

# The Journey towards Living Well with your Experience



**WALKING ALONGSIDE  
THOSE WHO HAVE  
EXPERIENCED  
ABUSE AND TRAUMA  
WITHIN FAITH.**

**GET SUPPORT.  
GET INVOLVED.**

**[www.replenished.life](http://www.replenished.life)**



## The Journey to Living Well with your Experience

### 1. How do I respond well if I have been hurt but it isn't spiritual abuse?

If you want to double check that it isn't Spiritual Abuse please do phone the support line to discuss your experience.

The first point here that it is ok to feel hurt by someone else's actions or behaviour but in the long term it is not healthy to stay hurt. We would advise that you explain the impact of someone's behaviour or actions, to the person who has hurt you, using a mediator if necessary. Leadership in your organisations should be able to help you within the processes available in your faith.

**This should only be done if you feel safe and where there is no criminal offence or safeguarding issues.**

### 2. Treating ourselves kindly, self-care and self-compassion

It is vital that we see our journey to living well with our experiences as not being one direction of travel. As survivors of spiritual abuse we have good days and not so good days. At times we can take two steps forward and one step back. As a good friend of ours often says this is not going backwards this is just doing the cha cha cha! There will be times when we will go round in circles and revisit bits of our recovery journey and this is all ok. The dance still goes on whether it is the two steps forward one step back of the cha cha cha or the circular motion of the waltz.

We do tend to be our own worse critics and can be particularly harsh on ourselves whilst we are recovering. Learning to be kinder to ourselves is all part of the journey. Here are some useful questions to ask yourself if you are being overly self-critical or not being as kind to yourself as you should be.

- Would I say that out loud to another person?
- What would I say instead?
- If a friend had been through what I have been through what advice would I give them?

## Developing Self Compassion

Having compassion for oneself is really no different than having compassion for others. Think about what the experience of compassion feels like.

First, to have compassion for others you must notice that they are suffering. If you ignore that homeless person on the street, you can't feel compassion for how difficult his or her experience is.

Second, compassion involves feeling moved by others' suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to "suffer with"). When this occurs, you feel warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way. Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly.

Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realise that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience. “There but for fortune go I.”

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a “stiff upper lip” mentality, you stop to tell yourself “this is really difficult right now,” how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?

Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings – after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?

You may try to change in ways that allow you to be more healthy and happy, but this is done because you care about yourself, not because you are worthless or unacceptable as you are.

Perhaps most importantly, having compassion for yourself means that you honour and accept your humanness. Things will not always go the way you want them to. You will encounter frustrations, losses will occur, you will make mistakes, bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals. This is the human condition, a reality shared by all of us. The more you open your heart to this reality instead of constantly fighting against it, the more you will be able to feel compassion for yourself and all your fellow humans in the experience of life.

**Below are the three elements of self-compassion:**

### **i). Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment**

Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable, so they tend to be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences rather than getting angry when life falls short of set ideals. People cannot always be or get exactly what they want. When this reality is denied or fought against suffering increases in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism. When this reality is accepted with sympathy and kindness, greater emotional equanimity is experienced.

### **ii). Common humanity vs. Isolation.**

Frustration at not having things exactly as we want is often accompanied by an irrational but pervasive sense of isolation – as if “I” were the only person suffering or making mistakes. All humans suffer and make mistakes, however. The very definition of being “human” means that one is mortal, vulnerable and imperfect. Therefore, self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience – something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to “me” alone.

### iii). Mindfulness vs. Over-identification.

Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. This equilibrated stance stems from the process of relating personal experiences to those of others who are also suffering, thus putting our own situation into a larger perspective. It also stems from the willingness to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental, receptive mind state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. At the same time, mindfulness requires that we not be “over-identified” with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.<sup>1</sup>

We will explore some exercises and ideas on how to develop a more compassionate response to yourself in the Self Care section at the end of this handbook.

### 3. Beginning your Journey (or moving on from where you are)

With these principles of self compassion in mind we can now discuss some of the first steps of the journey.

The first step is recognising that this journey is yours and whilst others may advise and support you along the way, that ownership and decision making around your journey remains with you.

That step in itself can seem scary especially when you have experienced coercion and control and perhaps don't have the confidence around your decision making because of your experience. It is important that you remember to break the journey down into smaller steps and use those that understand to support you in that decision making. Replenished Life support line can talk through your next steps but will always ensure that the journey and decision making is yours.

It may be necessary to get some counselling or other therapeutic input to help you in your journey. We would strongly advise that this support is from a qualified practitioner who understands the experience and impact of spiritual abuse.

The following websites are a useful starting point to finding a private counsellor. Alternatively counselling can be accessed through your GP (there may be a waiting list).

- Non Faith – British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy <https://www.bacp.co.uk/>
- Christian – Association of Christian Counsellors <https://www.acc-uk.org/>
- Muslim – Muslim Counsellor and Psychotherapist Network <https://www.mcapn.co.uk/counselling-directory>
- Jewish – Raphael Jewish Counselling <https://www.raphaeljewishcounselling.org/>
- Buddhist – there are a number of Buddhist counsellors across the country which can be found through an online search. We would advise checking that they

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<sup>1</sup> <https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/>

belong to a professional body or association as we would any counsellor or psychotherapist.

- Hindu – there are a number of Hindu counsellors across the country which can be found through an online search. We would advise checking that they belong to a professional body or association as we would any counsellor or psychotherapist.
- Sikh – the Sikhyourmind appears to be a good source of advice regarding mental health issues in the Sikh community <http://sikhyourmind.com/>

### **a). Where am I now?**

Any journey must start from where we are. As painful as it may be we need to understand what we are feeling and the impact of our experience before we can effectively make any change. It is useful to check this question regularly.

### **b). What do I want to change? What are the priorities?**

It is important to be able to prioritise here as there will be many things that you may wish to change. It is important to be realistic about how much can be changed at once.

### **c). Where is the destination I want to get to? Setting goals**

It isn't necessary to do the whole journey in one go, so set staged goals which are realistic. What does the destination look like when the change has been made?

### **d). What help do I need to reach the goals?**

We all need help along life's journey and it is no different on this journey. Building a support network of people who understand is really important. That support network can be friends, family as well as professionals. A common theme that we hear through the support line is that it is important to ensure that a support network also includes those who understand your experience and the impact of that experience.

### **e). What help can Replenished Life offer me?**

Replenished Life are here for you whatever stage of the journey you are on. We can offer a safe space to talk and discuss any of the above points, to be a point of reference or just simply to listen whether you are having a good day or finding things difficult. We can provide advice, support and a listening ear from a place of understanding.

### **f). Where else can I find support?**

As previously mentioned counselling or therapy may be an important part of your journey. It may however, take a little time for you to be ready.

There will be a wide variety of situations you may need help with. As each individual journey is different we can discuss any extra support needed and sign post you to appropriate resources.

#### **4. How can I help my children and family?**

It is likely that there will be people around you who are also travelling a similar journey. This can add to the complexity of your journey as often others will be at different places at different time. This can lead to conflicts of feelings and disagreements. Disagreeing with someone is ok but we must ensure that we disagree well and maintain family relationships. We need to understand that different people have had different experiences, have different perspectives and that these will differ over time. People will travel there journey at different speeds and may have to cover different ground and issues.

Whether you are supporting children, siblings or parents it is vital that you protect time for yourself and that you don't neglect your own needs. However, from experience, we know this is easier said than done.

There are occasions where it will be necessary to put some boundaries in place. It is important that all those who you are supporting get some external help or counselling as soon as they feel able.

We are planning to develop a Spiritual Abuse Survivors Supporter's handbook in the near future and we are able to discuss how you can support others around you if you wish to ring the Replenished Life supportline.

If you become aware of a child that is at risk of harm then you need to seek some advice from children's services in your local authority area and make a report if this is necessary. If you become aware of an adult who is at risk of harm then you should encourage, empower and support them to seek appropriate services.

#### **5. How should an organisation respond? What Survivors should expect in response?**

Thirtyone:eight have some useful information about understanding spiritual abuse and developing healthy cultures. We would advise signposting any organisations to thirtyone:eight through the website [www.thirtyone:eight.org](http://www.thirtyone:eight.org) or their helpline 0303 003 11 11 during office hours or if it is an emergency that can't wait until the next working day then there is an Out of Hours Service on this number.

Some faith organisations now recognise Spiritual Abuse within their Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. These should be available through the Safeguarding Co-ordinator or on the organisations website.