

## Accepting:

### We acknowledge traumas that impact us.

Accepting traumas that we have endured is a gateway to healing. In later steps we will experience profound relief as we gain a compassionate understanding of how the trauma impacted us. We can only do this after accepting that these events really occurred and that the pain is real. Psychological "trauma" is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as "an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others." Examples include military combat, violent personal attack, natural or manmade disasters, and torture. For children, sexually traumatic events may include age inappropriate sexual experiences without violence or injury. (DSM IV, p. 424) Traumas we are healing may result from sexual, physical, emotional and/or ritual abuse. Those of us who have experienced environments that were neglectful, unsafe, or harsh often carry lasting wounds. There are many things that are not mentioned here that cause pain that deserves healing. Pain is pain, and all wounds are worth healing.

Accepting is a very gradual process. It's helpful to try to pace ourselves by looking at one piece at a time. It is a natural tendency for many of us to push acceptance as fast as possible to get rid of the pain. However, we can become aware of so much pain during the Acceptance Step that it is easy to become emotionally overwhelmed. It may seem paradoxical, but accepting in a way that is gentle and compassionate to ourselves enables us to actually heal more easily and quickly. When we try to force acceptance our protective mechanisms jump into action to prevent our being overwhelmed.

One of the most common protective mechanisms is denial. It helps us to prevent being overwhelmed and taking more extreme protective actions. Some events are so outside of our frame of reference that it is easier to deny them than to accept that such things can occur. Or we adopt and create myths to deny painful truths we didn't know how to deal with. Yet we're only able to process them once we understand enough about what happened and learn compassionate truths that help us heal.

Following are some common myths that may come up in us, or we may hear from others, as we accept the traumas.

<b>Myths</b>	<b>Truths the myths protect us from</b>	<b>Compassionate truth for healing</b>
<b><i>"It wasn't that bad."</i></b>	It hurt so much that it is hard to even let ourselves feel the pain from it today.	We deserved to be treated with respect and protected from harm.
<b><i>"I'm making it up" or "It didn't happen."</i></b>	This hurts too much to acknowledge that it happened.	Something did happen to cause this pain and the negative beliefs we suffer with.
<b><i>"It was my fault that it happened."</i></b>	We could not stop it, and there was no real meaning to what happened.	We were innocent.

<b>Myths</b>	<b>Truths the myths protect us from</b>	<b>Compassionate truth for healing</b>
<b><i>“I’m bad”, or “I deserved it.”</i></b>	The perpetrators of the trauma did it for their own twisted reasons. It was not about us.	Good people would never do this to someone else, no matter what.
<b><i>“I didn’t fight back” or “I went along with it.”</i></b>	It would have been worse to have fought back or not submit.	Protecting ourselves from something even worse is a logical and good response, even if it felt bad to do.
<b><i>“Some part of it felt good therefore I’m bad.”</i></b>	We had no control over our bodies’ feelings. We were manipulated in a way that took advantage of the way our bodies naturally react.	All people have needs and desires, AND we would have preferred for them to have been met in a way that felt all good.
<b><i>“It happened because of the way I look.”</i></b>	Believing that we can protect ourselves by changing our physical appearance makes us feel safer, by giving us the illusion it’s something we can control.	No matter how we look we deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.
<b><i>“I can’t face this or talk about it.”</i></b>	There is a lot of pain, and it’s natural to want to avoid it, but it only gets worse when it’s not healed.	It’s safe to accept this with enough support, compassion and gentle pacing.

There are some challenges to accepting – simply being human. We may not remember every aspect of what happened. Some of us remember images, but not emotions or vice versa. Some remember negative beliefs about self, but nothing else. Our brains have many reactions to traumatic memory that may make remembering difficult, such as suppression, repression, dissociation, depression, and minimizing. In short, suppression, repression and dissociation are mental/psychological dynamics that make it very difficult to remember or think clearly about certain topics or time periods.

It is easy to get caught up in trying to confirm every piece of a memory. Some of us bypass this challenge by focusing on simply having less pain and more joy.

Traumatic memories confuse the matter still further. They feel very different from other types of memories. They are stored in our brains differently and are accessed differently. Unlike other memories, they tend to come back with the same emotional tenor and potency for years and years. This can make it difficult to tell the difference between the emotions of a traumatic memory and emotions from current events. This can lead to the common misconception that when people are experiencing traumatic memories they are actually “dwelling in the past,” or “regressing,” or “going back.” Yet the reality is that we are in the present. We are experiencing feelings and beliefs that are both part of traumatic memories

and part of protective mechanisms. They also cause much more extreme reactions within us, particularly when we attempt to deny them. Understanding the way traumatic memories work makes it easier to face them, and then eventually learn to process them.

The more we gently accept the past, and compassionately process current impacts, the more we're able to allow ourselves to remember. Staying focused on that makes acceptance far easier. The pain we feel during acceptance is there, regardless of whether we look at it or not. But by accepting it we move from coping with the pain to opening ourselves for healing from it. In honoring all emotions and memories, over time we gain a greater sense of calm and clarity.

**Activities:** (The following activities can be done in a Healing Journal and/or with the support of others.)

**Activity 1:** Empathy for yourself: Look for examples of where you can see how hurt someone was by a traumatic experience, even more than they can see. Noticing others minimizing their experience helps you to understand the ways you do as well.

**Activity 2:** Analyze the incentive of the people who may prefer to either deny or minimize the importance of your memories. What do they lose if you're right? What do you gain from being right – if it's only the chance to heal then you're not making it up.

**Activity 3:** Look over the list of myths above, and talk with others about those myths that have stuck with you. Also talk about truths they were protecting you from and the compassionate truths. Talk about other truths the myths were protecting you from and compassionate truths that apply to these myths.

**Activity 4:** Make a list of myths not covered in the list above, and their corresponding truths. Talk about these with a safe person.