

Vulnerability - week 4

12-26-22

6 mindset tweaks for healthy vulnerability

Now we get to the nitty-gritty. How would someone go about learning to be more vulnerable?

It all starts with your mindset. Here are 6 essential principles to approach vulnerability in a healthy way.

1. Identify why you're afraid of being vulnerable

As children, we tend to be open and free, sharing all of ourselves with others. But as we grow up, we learn that the world can be a very painful place. Not everyone is on our side, and not everything will go our way.

We start associating vulnerability with a host of negative feelings:

- Disappointment.
- Shame.
- Fear.
- Grief.
- Abandonment.
- Rejection.

So we learn to “protect ourselves” by putting up walls, denying our feelings, and trying to be different.

2. Be aware of your avoidance tendencies

It's clear by now that being vulnerable is healthy — but difficult.

Even when we set the intention to be vulnerable, the experience can feel so uncomfortable that we instinctively shut down, escape, or lash out. Our discomfort is so strong that we don't even realize we're avoiding vulnerability.

But later, you can think back and analyze the situation:

- What feelings did you feel?
- What triggered your reaction?
- What events led up to it?

3. Trust that you can deal with the outcome

You might think that closing yourself up is a way to protect yourself. Share nothing, and nobody can use your fears and feelings against you, right?

But actually, it's quite the opposite.

When you let yourself be vulnerable, it's like affirming that that part of you is worthy of being shared. You act on the belief that when you extend yourself to others, they'll accept you.

On the other hand, keeping everything to yourself is based on fear — that people will judge you, hurt you, or reject you. In doing so, **you're giving away the power to hurt you.**

4. Accept your own feelings

Vulnerability cannot happen if we don't first have awareness.

Imagine trying to share feelings while simultaneously trying to stuff them down. This kind of emotional tug of war is not only exhausting, but it also doesn't lead anywhere.

So a key step in being vulnerable is to be mindful. This means paying attention to your feelings and being honest with yourself about what they are. Notice or write down what you feel, when you feel it, and what triggers it.

5. Don't over focus on what other people think

Here's a truth that's hard to embrace — people think about us a lot less than we think. The spotlight effect has us believe that we're constantly in the spotlight of some musical play, where we are not.

This isn't anything mean. The fact is, all of us spend most of our day worrying about our own life — from what we should have said to that rude customer to how many slices of pizza we can fit into our diet.

And at the end of the day, this is a huge relief. People are not watching you nearly as close as you think — which really takes the pressure off you for always being put together.

6. Stop trying to be perfect

Vulnerability and perfectionism are complete opposites.

Vulnerability is about being honest about your feelings, flaws, and identity. Perfectionism is about glossing over or hiding it.

So to be vulnerable, you have to give up the idea of being perfect.

If you struggle with this, take some time to consider why perfection is so important to you:

- What fears are hiding behind this desire?
- What are you afraid people will think if you make a mistake?
- What feelings are you trying to bottle up?