

Stressed Out? Therapist Isabelle Shook Shares 3 Techniques for Self-Compassion

By: [greenwichfreepress](https://greenwichfreepress.com) | March 9, 2023

Everyone from Greenwich knows it's a lovely town with many amenities and beauty. But also, a certain level of success is both the norm and expectation.

Isabelle Shook

Isabelle Shook, a licensed professional counselor in Connecticut and Arizona via Telehealth, grew up in Greenwich and sees the town as having a unique culture.

"I grew up in that culture, and I can relate to the pressure and desiring to succeed," she said. "It's a culture within the culture of New England." counselor in Connecticut and Arizona via Telehealth, grew up in Greenwich and sees the town as having a unique culture.



Isabelle Shook and Salsa.
Photo: Kelly Eileen Shroads

"Therapy is about living a more joyful, fulfilling, and connected life."

– Isabelle Shook

And while some stress is healthy, and the internet is full of admirable compassion and empathy, constant self-imposed pressure can rob us of positive emotions, especially self-compassion, and joy.

"When we live in heightened stress consistently or chronically, it can be foreign and uncomfortable to our nervous system to be in joyful, connected states and even be present in the moment," she explained.

She explained that when something is so overwhelming to a person's nervous system that they're stressed for days, weeks, or even years, that experience can be over-generalized into all areas of their lives, and nothing is fun anymore.

But Shook is optimistic.

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“People have a baseline of happiness that’s natural to their systems, but happiness, like anything else, can be grown and developed and increased,” Shook said.

Before starting her teletherapy private practice, Shook worked for 15 years in residential treatment centers, the highest level of mental health care short of a mental health hospital. As a result, she has a great deal of experience working with teens from places like Greenwich.

“It’s important to focus on the good,” she said. “Practice self-compassion. It’s one of the best tools available. It’s the remedy for addressing shame and perfectionism.”

Shook shared some of her favorite techniques for self-compassion.

One. Breathing.

A technique you can practice is putting your hand on your heart area, breathing in for two seconds, and breathing out for four seconds.

“That’s essential for calming the sympathetic nervous system: the fight, flight, and freeze response, or chronic stress,” she said.

Two. Focus on something pleasing.

“Next, look around the space you’re in, whether it’s your office or home, and let your eyes wander, gaze around the room, and find something that feels pleasing. Focus on that object or animal, and it will start calming your nervous system.”

“I have a plant on the other side of my office where I always look. So now it’s become a cue to calm my system,” Isabelle said. “But it could be anything: the trees outside the window, a photograph of someone, or a piece of art in your house.”

Three. Talk to yourself like you would talk to your best friend.

“Look at yourself in the mirror when you wash your hands and say kind words. Or spend a moment with your hands on your chest and give yourself healthy, nice touch from you to you.”

Bonus. Practice gratitude.

Focus on the positive, no matter how small.

“If you want something more in your life, maybe more kind people or to become better at something, every time you have success with it, no matter how small it is, keep track of the positives,” she suggested. “Write it down in a journal. It amplifies what’s going right.”

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Equine Guidance®

In addition to teletherapy, Shook does horse work in Arizona's Sedona Verde Valley area. At [Equine Guidance®](#), she offers an innovative equine therapy experience with her three American Bashkir Curly Horses, Mimi, Penny, and Salsa.

She explained the horses get results, turning insight into action in a way that talk therapy sometimes cannot.

"Sometimes trauma is not caught in our mind – instead, it's caught in our nervous system," she said. "The horses can help with dissolving the stuck energy."

"Many of my clients are adults who have had a lot of success and are world traveled, but then they wonder what's next. You've got everything you've worked hard for; there can be a 'success crash.'"

"With my equine therapy business, most individuals are in their 60s; they fly to Sedona and are so grateful after spending 3 hours with the herd. They say, 'Wow, you gave me the gift of joy again.'"

At Equine Guidance®, the idea is not about making the horse do anything, and it's not traditional equine therapy either.

"It's about being with the horse and moving into 'horse time' and allowing the horse to support and guide not only insight but nervous system balancing and restoration from trauma and stress," Shook explained.

"It looks as exciting as watching paint dry," Shook laughed. "It would look like a horse and a client standing together." However, tremendous shifts happen in that space within the client's nervous system and brain.

In her Equine Guidance® business, Shook incorporates Dr. Peter Levine's work, internationally renowned in the Trauma Informed Care arena, the author of the international bestselling book, *Waking the Tiger*, and her years of trauma training.

"Trauma and stress get caught in our body, and sometimes there's not enough insight to help," she said. "You can't heal trauma and stress with more trauma and stress: you need a safe, calm relationship. That's the space that the horses and I create."

Over time, this unrelenting stress can turn into illness, inflammation, and other chronic issues, which Dr. Gabor Mate addresses in this international bestselling book *When the Body Says No*. So, that's another critical reason to clean up our Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI).

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Shook said that what horses want more than anything is harmony. For all mammals, the states of fight, flight, and freeze are supposed to be short-lived. You will see horses wholly and naturally shake it off, so they don't learn to live with it as humans tend to do.

"Horses want harmony with whoever is in the herd. Clients working with me are in the herd that day."

More information on Isabelle Shook MC, NCC, LPC, SEP, NARM, BCC, is available on her [website](#). She offers individual, couples, and teen counseling. Tel. 203-660-0827

More on [Equine Guidance](#)® is also available online. Schedule a session or free consultation here: <https://equineguidance.clientsecure.me>



Isabelle Shook, MC, NCC, LPC, SEP, NARM, BCC
Equine Guidance® Since 2004 * Sedona AZ



Isabelle Shook, LPC, MC, NCC, SEP, NARM, BCC
15 Years Experience - Teletherapy Psychotherapy for Adults, Teens, & Couples
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