

Self Compassion and Empathy are the antidotes to Shame

Neurological benefits: Self-compassion is a powerful trigger for the release of oxytocin, the hormone that increases feelings of trust, calm, safety, generosity, and connectedness. Self-criticism, on the other hand, has a very different effect on our body and activates the bodies stress-response which sends signals that increase blood pressure, adrenaline, and the hormone cortisol. Over time increased cortisol levels lead to depression by depleting the various neurotransmitters involved in the ability to experience pleasure. The practice of self-compassion has been shown to decrease symptoms, including, self-criticism.

Psychological benefits: Self-compassion encourages us to begin to treat ourselves and talk to ourselves with the same kindness, caring and compassion we would show a good friend or a beloved child.

Relational benefits: Shame is alienating from others since it generates withdrawal or aggressive behaviors. Compassion toward self and others are attractive behaviors and help us enjoy the benefits of positive support and caring and feel less isolated and alienated from others.

Develop empathy for others: Shift your focus from yourself to the other. Ask yourself, “How can I understand how they are feeling? How can I address their feelings?”

Practicing self-compassion: *Be patient with yourself it takes time and understanding!*

- Begin to generate compassionate feelings toward yourself and soothe yourself in positive ways
- Begin to replace self-criticism with kind self acceptance and understanding
- Begin to create a nurturing inner voice to replace your cold, critical, bullying inner voice
- Begin to generate alternatives to your self-attacking thoughts, including stimulating underdeveloped pathways of the brain—pathways that stimulate inner support and warmth
- Help yourself to develop appreciation for yourself, including feeling pride in your accomplishments--pride is the opposite emotion from shame
- Encourage yourself to practice accountability versus self-blame, self-correction versus self-

Consult a therapist if professional help is needed.

Therapy for Individuals & Couples



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Overcoming Shame and Using Guilt to Build Self Esteem



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Shame and Guilt:

Both shame and guilt are negative affects associated with the self-appraisal that one has done something wrong.

Both are frequently linked to interpersonal transgressions or to situations (a person is hurt or harmed in some way by the other) or situations in which some social or culturally acceptable mores has been violated (e.g. public urination).

Both are methods of socialization and used in socializing children to obey social norms and treat other people in socially desirable ways.

Despite these similarities guilt and shame are distinctly different emotions that have differing impact on the self and our interpersonal relationships.

- ◆ One important difference is the **globality of focus**: Guilt is typically attached to a particular action and does not condemn the entire self, whereas shame spreads out from the particular misdeed to encompass the self as a whole
- ◆ Guilt may therefore be far **less debilitating and demoralizing** than shame. In guilt, the negative affect and remorse remain linked to the particular action; in simple terms, one can regard oneself as a good person who has done a bad thing.

- ◆ Guilt is linked both to empathic recognition of the other person's distress as well as to anxiety that one might lose the relationship/social bond with the other due to a transgression that hurt someone or because one's mis-deed's will lead to negative judgment rejection by others. It motivates **prosocial actions** that will lead to an escape from distress by repairing with others. Shame, in contrast, involves feeling that the entire self (rather than just one particular action) is bad. No simple apology feels like it would resolve such a far-reaching and complex predicament and talking about the situation would lead one to dwell on this latest reminder of one's deficient personhood and not lead to repair.
- ◆ Shame is **dangerous** in that the only responses that seems to minimize the subjective distress of shame are:
 - (i) to ignore the problem,
 - (ii) to deny one's responsibility,
 - (iii) to avoid other people, or perhaps
 - (iv) to lash out at one's accusers

Research shows that shame is linked to: substance abuse and other addictive behaviors, depression, relationship violence, aggression, bullying, suicide, eating disorders. Furthermore, guilt is inversely correlated with those things. The ability to hold something we've done, or failed to do, up against who we want to be is incredibly adaptive. It's uncomfortable, but it's adaptive.



Healing Shame

1. **Understand:** The first step is to begin to **understand where one's sense of shame came from and to appreciate the context in which it developed**. so that we can begin to attenuate the blame we automatically assign to the self and start to develop compassion and empathy for the self.
2. **Recognize and Face: Facing the shame requires recognizing how and when it gets stirred.** The recognition alone creates a gap between the experience of shame and the automatic behavior (withdrawal, attack, giving up, avoidance etc.) .Ask yourself: *If I could be compassionate toward myself, how would I support myself at this moment?* ”
3. **Use guilt: Convert your shame into mature guilt.** Shame is the feeling that you are not good enough and guilt is the feeling that in this particular regard you are not doing something you should be doing. Can you identify what it is you “should” be doing and find a way to support yourself to do it?
4. **Find support:** We know who we are (develop a sense of self) when we see the reflection of ourselves in the eyes of the other. **Surround yourself with those who think you are lovable, who support you.** However, more important than having these people around you is to allow them to influence you without discarding/minimizing/rejecting or otherwise ignoring positive feedback being offered. *No one can help us heal if we are not open to healing.*