



Healing the Wounds of Inner Shame

- Shame is a painful emotion that can cause you to have negative thoughts about yourself. These thoughts can come from many sources and cause you to feel that you are flawed or less than. Sometimes shame comes from someone else's perception of what they think of you. This perception may cause harm to your pride and your own thoughts about yourself. Shame can make you believe that who you are, is not enough or that you are broken, wrong, or unworthy. Shame can negatively shape how you view yourself and how quickly you can start to feel better.
- Shame and guilt are two different emotions that can be confused with one another. When you experience shame, you are feeling that your whole self is wrong. When you feel guilty, you are recognizing that you have done something wrong. Shame makes it difficult to find a resolution when you are believing that you are the problem. Guilt describes something you have done that you do not feel good about. Shame refers to an identity or how you view yourself as a whole person.
- There are physical and emotional reactions of feeling shame.
- Negative early life experiences or expectations can be a shame trigger.
- Shame can be a reason why someone chooses to participate in behavior that can be bad for their overall wellbeing.
- Feeling shame is a signal that your positive feelings for self have been disturbed and it is important to recognize the source of those feelings. The following are warning signs that shame may be taking over:
 1. You have a sense of low energy; you feel tension in your body.
 2. You feel anxious and tentative.
 3. You feel irritable and have sadness.
 4. You are critical of others to avoid your own feelings of discomfort.



Tools for Identifying and Understanding Your Shame:

- **Patience** – The wounds from shame can be deep and long lasting. If you rush the healing process of your shame, you could end up creating more shame in the process.
- **Awareness** – Notice the signals that your body is giving you. You can also listen carefully to your thoughts. Take notice of your actions. Are you distancing yourself from others?
- **Consider your defenses** – It is common to try and block out your shame. You might do this by developing defenses. You may find yourself resorting to anger as a defense. Or, you might become critical of yourself and others.
- **Identifying the source(s)** – Knowing the source of your shame can help you to create healing strategies. You may even discover that there is more than one source to your shame.
- **Acceptance** – You must accept your shame before you can move towards healing it. It is important to understand that acceptance of your shame does not mean that you like it. Accepting your shame means respecting that it exists.

How to Heal Your Shame Through the 3 Elements of Self-Compassion:

- **Mindfulness** – This is a non-judgmental state of mind. It requires you to observe your thoughts and feelings as they are without trying to deny them or push them away.
- **Gentleness** – It is important to be gentle with yourself as you are healing. Many adults struggle to have compassion for themselves. Try to consider what a child might need or want in a hurtful situation and apply that to yourself.
- **Connectedness** – Shame may cause you to withdraw from others. Shame is best addressed when you communicate with others. This will require you to have courage and take risks. Understand that it is important to find a trustworthy person to share your shame with.

Reflecting on Progress towards Healing:

- It is important to reflect on your progress. Remember that the healing process is not linear. You can expect to experience ups and downs. Ask yourself what you need. Most importantly, be gentle with yourself on this journey.