

Shame	Guilt
<p style="text-align: center;">Focus on self - "I am bad."</p> <p><u>Example:</u> I sleep in by accident because I stayed out too late and am late for work. I think to myself "Gosh I'm so stupid, I'm such a loser. I can't even get to work on time."</p> <p>Shame is an evolutionary response that comes from 150,000 years of history on our planet where most of that time being rejected by our group would mean certain death. Shame is an emotion that's purpose was/is to prevent us from taking actions that would cause our group to reject us. As a result, it triggers a body response that is similar to experiencing trauma. Our fight, flight, or freeze mode (sympathetic nervous system) is triggered and we feel it overwhelmingly in our bodies. Our rational and critical thinking part of our brain turns off.</p> <p>Shame is so uncomfortable that we are often desperate to get out from under it and turn to actions/emotions like rationalizing our behaviour, blaming, and anger. Shame usually makes us feel like withdrawing, isolating ourselves, and shutting down. However, beneath that is a desire to reconnect with others.</p> <p>Two reasons we might subconsciously choose shame:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If we see ourselves as the defective one, then we believe we have the power and control to fix what's going on or prevent it from happening again. This is very common with trauma.</li> <li>2. If our parents didn't do what was needed to care for us, it's safer to see it as being defective (which we have control over) versus that they were defective (which we both can't control and could threaten our survival, which we depend on our parents for when young).</li> </ol> <p>Correlated with addiction, violence, aggression, bullying, depression, suicide, eating disorders, perfectionism, etc.</p> <p>Many of us are raised with shame-type language: "You are silly" or "You are immature" or "You are a bad boy/girl/person" or "You are messy."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Focus on behaviour - "I did something bad."</p> <p><u>Example:</u> I sleep in by accident because I stayed out too late and am late for work. I think to myself "Gosh I can't believe I did that. That was a stupid thing to do."</p> <p>Guilt is a healthy and helpful emotion (when used in moderation – a small dose goes a long way). It holds what we've done up against who we want to be. It pushes change, drives good behaviour, and leads us to making amends. It helps us strive to be the person we want to and reminds us of who that person is when our behaviour is incongruent with it.</p> <p>The more we experience guilt instead of shame, the less likely we are to experience addiction, depression, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, and perpetrate violence, aggression, and bullying etc.</p> <p>Language more conducive with self-worth is "Your behaviour is immature/silly/bad/messy right now" – although making others feel guilty is not the goal, it is language to describe something you don't like about someone else's behaviour that will be less likely to induce or reinforce shame.</p> <p>Guilt is a reminder of our humanity and that as humans we all make mistakes.</p>

**Other self-conscious emotions:**

*Embarrassment* - "Shoot, I wish I wouldn't have done that."

Example: Someone tells you not to call someone named Christopher "Chris" because he doesn't like "Chris" and then we call them Chris by accident anyways.

Fleeting and sometimes funny (eventually); we know that we are not the only one to have done this

*Humiliation* – "Somebody treated me poorly and I was not deserving of it."

Example: A teacher purposefully points you out in front of the class and then proceeds to berate you in front of everyone and you think "That is the most rotten teacher ever. I did not deserve to be treated like that."

What separates humiliation from shame is the feeling that we do not deserve to be treated the way we were when we were humiliated. Shame and humiliation tend to have the same physical response in our bodies. With humiliation, we are more likely to share this story with others who are close to us ... "Can you believe what \_\_\_\_\_ did ..."

\*Everyone experiences all of the above emotions, including shame. It is a normal experience that we can learn to move through in a way that helps us stay true to ourselves and protects ourselves from the harmful effects of shame.

\*See also handouts on shame resilience, self-compassion, working with your inner critic, reframing shame, and perfectionism, which are related to this process.