

What is the difference between shame and guilt?

'Guilt' typically refers to an uncomfortable emotion that we experience when we feel like we 'have DONE something bad' - moved away from our core values, acted unlike the sort of person we want to be.

'Shame' typically refers to an uncomfortable emotion that we experience when we feel like not only have we done something bad, we ARE bad; so it includes a lot of fusion with harsh negative self-judgment: "I am a bad person".

If shame were no longer an issue for you...

- What would you stop doing or start doing, do more of or less of?
- How would you treat yourself, others, life, the world, differently?
- What goals would you pursue?
- What activities would you start or resume?
- What people, places, events, activities, challenges, would you approach, start, resume or contact - rather than avoid or withdraw?

Past Functions of Shame

Reducing punishment or hostility: If you are obviously ashamed, then in some contexts, this will lessen the punishment, hostility, criticism, judgment of others.

Eliciting support or kindness: If you are obviously ashamed, then in some contexts, this will elicit sympathy, kindness, support or forgiveness from others.

Avoiding pain: Often, 'in the grip of' shame, people avoid all manner of people, places, situations, events and activities that 'trigger' difficult thoughts, feelings and memories. So in the short term, shame helps them to escape or avoid pain. A common example: the downcast eyes of shame helps many clients to avoid the anxiety of eye contact with others - anxiety usually fueled by a fear of negative evaluation, rejection, or hostility.

Sense-making: Shame helps people to 'make sense' of their experience: "These things happened because I am bad". This can enable some children to make sense of abuse or neglect in a way that spares them from the terrible reality of her caregivers.

Addressing Shame In The Present

Consider the role that shame has played for you in the past--the functions of shame - to normalize and validate the experience - it's important to highlight the present functions. While shame may still have some of the 'beneficial' functions it has had in the past, in the present it clearly now also has some detrimental functions.

Self Compassion and Shame

1. Acknowledging pain,
2. Validating pain,
3. Accepting pain,
4. Defusion from harsh self-criticism,
5. Self-kindness in thought, word and action,
6. Connectedness with others.

Acceptance and Shame

Acceptance of the unwanted feelings, sensations, thoughts and memories that comprise shame, often begins with validation & normalisation. We acknowledge that shame is a common and natural response for people (particularly those who've been through trauma) and the "I'm BAD" narrative is part of this protective response. We then can start 'noticing, naming & allowing' the various thoughts, feelings, sensations and memories that make up shame.

You Are NOT In Trouble

Internalized shame in adulthood can often trace its roots back to experiences of frequent criticism during childhood. Whether this was overt and you experienced punishment or negative consequence, was communicated via parents expressing disappointment, or approval and validation was only provided as a result of achievement. When a child is consistently subjected to judgments and reprimands (real or perceived) they can internalize these negative messages, forming a core belief that they are inherently flawed or inadequate.

This persistent sense of being wrong or not good enough can seep into your adult identity, manifesting as deep-seated shame. As an adult, you may struggle with low self-esteem, excessive self-criticism, not feeling worthy of having your needs met, and an overwhelming fear of making mistakes, all stemming from the internalized notion that they are fundamentally unworthy or defective

Present Moment Mindfulness and Shame

Connecting in the present moment can include...

1. **Grounding and centering**
2. **Engagement, connection & expansive awareness**
3. **Body posture** - noticing body posture and the effects of it, and experimenting with changes in body posture to promote engagement, centering, grounding, connection, vitality etc. -
4. **The initial noticing and acknowledging of thoughts & feelings** that paves the way for diffusion or acceptance.

Be Aware of Avoidance and Shame

What can avoidance look like?

1. **Experiential Avoidance**- Avoid the thoughts, feelings and memories that comprise shame, .
2. **Overt Avoidance**- Avoid the situations, people, places, events and activities that trigger shame.

Notice Your Younger Self

Since much of our internalized shame is based in childhood experiences, it's important to acknowledge our inner child as adults, to provide them with the security, validation and acceptance they may not have had the opportunity to receive.

This might look like...

Addressing your inner child, giving yourself permission/validation/grace etc, practicing self compassion, attending to your needs, making time for "play" and more.

Anti-Shame Tool Box

People and Places that make me feel good

Lined area for writing about people and places that make one feel good.

Mindfulness and Grounding Activity Options

Lined area for listing mindfulness and grounding activity options.

Activities that make me feel good

Lined area for listing activities that make one feel good.

Ways you can act in congruence with values instead of shame.

Lined area for writing ways to act in congruence with values instead of shame.

Ways to move your body

Lined area for writing ways to move the body.

Mantras

Lined area for writing mantras.