

## **A Few thoughts on shame and guilt vs remorse**

All shame and guilt are from the past, it's over. It doesn't live in the present unless we bring it into the present. Our subconscious brings it into the present to heal it. But we often hide from this kind of healing because it's still deep in our subconscious.

In working the steps, we consciously bring guilt and shame to the forefront to be permanently healed. The present is where we find the next right action.

Here are situations where guilt or shame may show up.

1. When you have a compulsion or addiction to something, You usually feel shame if someone sees you use it. You try to hide it. (Example: You stayed up till 2 AM watching porn and walked into work telling everyone you couldn't sleep)
2. When you look to someone or some ideology to tell you if I am good or bad. When you look to someone else to validate you, you always fall short. (Example: You go on Instagram to watch videos of people who are living the life you want to live and then hate yourself and your life afterward)
3. When you act in a way that you don't believe in. (For instance: you believe in non-violence, but you impulsively slap your partner when angered)
4. When you do something inconsiderate for completely self-serving reasons. When you retaliate. (For example, you break up with your partner so they can experience how much you are hurting)
5. When you say you are not going to do something and then you do it. When you can't stop yourself from doing things that hurt you. (Example: you say you will not go back to your sex-addicted partner, but then you end up calling them on a Friday night when you feel lonely)
6. When you look and act as if you have it together, but you really don't. Fraud syndrome. (Example: you post pictures of yourself and your partner on social media as if you have the best relationship in the world, but you fight all the time and secretly you want out.)

Like fear, guilt, and shame close off the heart. Behind shame and guilt, fear lurks. "Will I be found out? How will others see me?"

Shame and guilt are ego-based. In that way, there is something false about them. These are thoughts that spin back on themselves. They are thoughts we want to get away from before they destroy us (or rather destroy our idea of ourselves—our identity). We will hide in addiction to escape these thoughts. We would rather be unconscious than face what we believe we did. We believe we are unforgivable. We believe there is something wrong with us. We believe that our Higher Power sees us as unworthy. We can spend our whole life living small so no one will see how terrible and bad we are.

In this way, shame and guilt are self-centered emotions. We are trying to play God, to control our ego-centric instincts. We have lost faith in ourselves and believe God has lost faith in us. We feel that we should always be punished, that we could never do enough to make recompense. We are defective and others will see this. We don't trust ourselves and we don't trust others. We don't

trust God. We marinate in distrust until we have to use media or something else to numb our feelings.

Shame and guilt are not real emotions. Much like pity, shame and guilt are synthetic imitations of heart-centered emotions like compassion, regret, and remorse. Shame and guilt close off the heart, and regret and remorse open the heart. When the heart opens, the love of God can get in. When it closes, intuitiveness and answers become unavailable. When the heart closes, self-love is ineffectual. We lose ourselves.

The butterfly does not look back at the caterpillar in shame, just as you should not look back at your past in shame. Your past was part of your own transformation. —Byron Katie

We need to call out guilt and shame for what they are. They are not a part of our true nature. We must be rid of these so we can forgive ourselves. Ultimately, if we are to be useful agents for our Higher Power's purpose—if we are to be recovered media addicts—self-forgiveness is the culmination of sincerely and fearlessly working all 12 steps. Self-forgiveness is the final release and relief.

The antidote for shame is confession. Shame grows in the petri dish of silence and secrecy. When we admit and confess to another what we have done (or what was done to us), shame begins to melt away. (Steps 4-5)

The antidote to guilt (I did something wrong) is self-acceptance, self-compassion, and responsibility. Give your defects of character to the God of your understanding then take action. (Steps 6-7 and 8-9)

When we take healthy responsibility (rather than perpetual self-condemnation) we can begin to find ourselves ultimately feeling remorse. Remorse allows our hearts to open to the person we have harmed (this includes ourselves) and we begin to see clearly what we need to do to make amends. Remorse naturally moves us into action, to make right anything we may have done wrong. Remorse is other-centered. Shame and guilt can be self-centered. Remorse brings us into connection with others rather than hiding. Connection to God rather than feeling unworthy. It helps us place principles before personalities, (we can even start to place principles before our own personalities.) (Steps 11 and 12)

Written by Cindy B on 6/1/22

## **Guilt and Shame in Recovery**

### **Dealing with Guilt & Shame in Recovery**

From Heart Land House

<https://heartlandhouse.org/sud-resources/dealing-with-guilt-shame-in-recovery>

People who battle with addiction or have family members who struggle have witnessed how much it hurts. It hurts the person who struggles, but it also hurts the people around them. It can break up families, ruin relationships, break down self-confidence, and cause problems in all areas

of life. After a relapse, one can experience a ton of emotions. In the aftermath of a relapse, some experience guilt and shame. But, you don't have to let shame and guilt take over. Some are able to overcome or remove feelings of guilt and shame.

Shame vs. Guilt: What's the Difference?

Did you know that there's a difference between guilt and shame? It seems like people usually speak about these in the same light, though they are different. They are both common feelings which can come from addiction or drug abuse.

When people feel guilt, it means that they regret the choices they've made. Guilt is a remorseful feeling. But, it's also a responsible feeling. People who feel guilty about something will do what it takes to make things right. Guilt isn't necessarily a good thing, though. It can cause people to feel an unhealthy amount of regret for things they can't control. It may also make them feel terrible even after they've done everything they could do to make amends. Experiencing forms of guilt is kind of like saying to yourself, "I've done something really wrong. I've made a bad choice."

Now with shame, it's more of a feeling of humiliation. It can bring embarrassment, sadness, heartache, suffering, etc. When a person feels shame, they can become isolated. So instead of trying to fix things like some people do when they feel guilty, people experiencing shame try to avoid things and life itself. They just run away from the issue. Shame can make people feel like they are just hopeless. So, they decide to just escape. Having shame is kind of like saying, "I've done something really wrong and I'm a horrible person."

Guilt can bring the voice of, "You did something bad and you know it," and then Shame says, "You are something bad and those around you know it."

There is a difference there. Shame and guilt are parts of addiction and recovery that are quite common but can be repaired with time and work. If one dwells in these feelings though, the creation of self-doubt can lead to furthering relapse or causing it to reoccur. It is important to try to become more self-aware of your feelings and work on them.

How To Deal with Guilt during Recovery

Guilt can tear you up inside. It is a problem that some people fight for the rest of their lives. It can sneak its way into your world, grab a hold of things so tight, making you feel drained and burnt out emotionally. Guilt is just another layer on top of a struggle that is big enough on its own.

## Appropriate and Inappropriate Guilt

It's normal and appropriate to feel guilty when you have done something wrong. If you have hurt someone, done something that goes against your personal values, or have done something you promised you'd never do again, guilt is the appropriate response.

In fact, if you didn't feel guilty for doing wrong, it could be a sign of much deeper psychological issues such as Antisocial Personality Disorder:

Antisocial personality disorder, sometimes called sociopathy, is a mental condition in which a person consistently shows no regard for right and wrong and ignores the rights and feelings of others. People with antisocial personality disorder tend to antagonize, manipulate or treat others harshly or with callous indifference. They show no guilt or remorse for their behavior. – Mayo Clinic

If it is inappropriate guilt, try to let it go. Realize there are some things you just can't control. If it is appropriate guilt, make an effort to change the behavior that causes you to feel the guilt. Once you stop doing those things or taking actions that cause you to feel remorseful or sorry, the feelings can go away or not have a chance to show themselves.

Guilt is ok when it is warranted for the right reasons but when it consumes you and your emotions, it can get in the way of your healing & recovery process.

## How To Deal with Shame during Recovery

Shame and substance abuse aren't a good mix, though they commonly occur especially in early recovery. When someone feels shame, they may look for a way out to escape the feeling and go to something that masks the feelings to get away from the world for a while. Substance abuse is one way people achieve this, even if it's for just a short time.

Shame and recovery can be just as dangerous. Shame can keep you from getting back to helping yourself and moving forward. It may thwart the motivation or progress being made during recovery as you will continue to feel like a "bad person" who needs to escape or deserves to be hidden away. But once you can free yourself from those feelings, you can get back on track to the good life that recovery brings. There are ways to unlock the struggle door, opening a way to remove shame and get back towards your freedom from addiction or substance abuse. Forgiveness is the key!

Being able to forgive removes the shame and feeling that you can move on. Forgiving ourselves or others and releasing that choking experience of guilt is crucial to overcoming a relapse or pushing through on your journey of recovery. It's important to forgive others too, as when you do so, you let go and accept. It may not make things right or just, but it means you are willing to let mistakes that happen, happen and you don't want to feel responsible for the things you can't control.

Forgiving the people in your life that have wronged you helps you heal. Perhaps you need to make amends for things you've done wrong to them as well; and, if so, making amends can be a freeing experience. If you can't make direct amends or forgive them in person, write about it or journal your feelings of forgiveness.

Sometimes forgiving ourselves is the hardest part. We are the seasoned critics, we have lived our whole lives trying to look inward and identify who we are and what we are doing feeling all the mistakes on the deepest level.

Remember that no one is perfect. Not your best friends, your favorite aunt, or even your most loved celebrity. Everyone has flaws and everyone makes mistakes. It's ok! Just don't give up on becoming a better you, that is what's important.

Speak and think positively. You are valuable and you can get past the shame of your past. Forgive yourself. Let others forgive you. It's the way to healing and freedom from self. Don't punish yourself. Make things right. Make Amends. Hold yourself accountable for your choices. But, don't be so hard on yourself it becomes negative explosions.

The rearview mirror is always clearer than the windshield, it's easy to look back but looking ahead and staying positive is always worth it. Life can be amazing, just keep progressing and make adjustments along the way.