

CoDA  
WORKSHOP

SHAME  
MANAGEMENT  
~ 101 ~

By Heidi A.

## ❖ What is Shame and where does it come from?

- Healthy shame is a feeling that lets us know when we're not living within our values
  - Webster's definition: *A feeling of guilt, regret or sadness that you have because you know you have done something wrong. Ability to feel guilt, regret or embarrassment.*
- Nature's way of keeping our balance in relationship to our HP, others and our lives
- Self-identity equilibrium / our moral compass
- Teaches us that we're empowered and vulnerable
- Not better than or less than
- Toxic shame develops due to childhood abuse, abandonment and neglect
  - CoDA Book, Chapter 2, *Our Spiritual Dilemma*, page 18: *"Shame causes us to believe we are "less than", stupid, foolish, worthless, inadequate or unwanted. It diminishes our true sense of identity and destroys our belief that we are loving human beings. It erodes our self-esteem and sense of equality in the world."*
  - Damages our sense of self; 'I am bad' instead of 'I did something bad'
  - Shame-based modeling and mirroring become how we see ourselves
  - Toxic shame becomes more of an identity instead of just a feeling

## ➤ Toxic Shame and Codependence

- CoDA Book, Chapter 2; *Our Spiritual Dilemma* - talks about controlling and avoiding people and circumstances as being some basic traits of codependency. These behaviors create unmanageability in our lives. What drives our need to control and avoid others? CoDA Book, page 18 – *"We behave codependently...if we allow fear or shame to dictate our lives, causing us to rely on past survival instincts such as control and avoidance."* CoDA Book, page 19 in 'Experiencing fear and shame as children', it says, *"As children, our identity as well as our relationships with our Higher Power, ourselves and others were damaged each time we were abused or neglected. We felt shame and naturally feared it's reoccurrence..."*, *"As we continued to experience abuse or neglect, our fear and shame intensified..."*, *"We learned survival skills in order to cope. We controlled or avoided potentially volatile circumstances."*, *"Over time, we learned how to alleviate our fear and shame by controlling and/or avoiding ourselves and others."* In 'Continuing this behavior as adults', it states, *"Without some form of help, we carry these emotional conflicts and survival patterns into our adult lives. " "In our adult relationships, we fearfully guard against any sign of shame, abuse or neglect. We become manipulative or avoid other people and circumstances. This fear can grow stronger than the shame itself."*

## ❖ Fear of Shame

- Becomes the driving force in our relationship with the toxic shame.
- Events and feelings often trigger the fear of shame to 'protect' us from the shameful feelings
- Believe I MUST not feel shame or else...I will die, be destroyed, be abandoned...
  - Exaggerated, unrealistic, terrorizing, devastating
- We will do almost anything to avoid the overwhelming painful feelings
- So, how do we survive the toxic shame?...

## ❖ Codependent Shame Management – Shamelessness

- When we avoid the shameful feelings and deny our shame-based reality, we become shameless
- Shamelessness creates the opposite effect of the toxic shameful messages;
  - less-than becomes **better-than**
  - stupid becomes **arrogant**
  - foolish becomes **proud**
  - worthless becomes **conceited**
  - inadequate becomes **egotistical**
  - unwanted becomes **grandiose**
  - Leads us to...

## ➤ Shameless Codependent Patterns and Characteristics

- Shamelessness drives many of these Codependent Defects of Character...
  - As related to Control Patterns: Care-Taking, Manipulation, Fixing, Attention-Seeking, Rescuing, Demanding, Projecting Shame & Blame, Rebelling, etc.
  - As related to Avoidance Patterns: Judgment, Intimacy Blocking, Manipulation, Addictions, Invulnerability, Push-Pull Tactics, Unemotional, Ungrateful, etc.
  - As related to Denial Patterns: One-Up, Lack of Humility and/or Empathy, Needlessness, Dishonesty, Passive-Aggressive, etc.
  - Also relates to Low Self Esteem and Compliance Patterns
  - Works for a while...

## ➤ Consequences of Shamelessness

- Creates the illusion of safety, control and feeling 'normal'
- In reality, it's self-abandonment and stuffing feelings, driven by the toxic shame
- Even while experiencing arrogance, entitlement, and pride, under the surface we're reinforcing the toxic shame because we've deserted our authentic self and neglected our needs
- Feelings and needs build up due to shameless self-abandonment
- Until eventually, it stops working...

## ➤ Shame Spiral

- The shameless 'fix' ends when repressed shame and fear start to flood in even though shamelessness is **escalating** trying to keep up (consciously or unconsciously)
- Shame is an emotion (energy in motion) and all energy answers to natural law
- Like denying gravity until eventually we fall
- Like holding your breath until your body forces you to take a breath of air
- Usually a triggering event tips the scales
  - Wall of denial is broken
- CoDA book, page 118: *"What is a shame spiral? When we experience overwhelming feelings of worthlessness, apathy, or panic, we may believe there is no solution or end to our pain. Our feelings/beliefs seem to take on a life of their own and we feel isolated, rejected, foolish or stupid. We may berate or push ourselves harder to meet someone else's expectations, engage in unhealthy sexual behavior, compulsively eat or starve ourselves, or try to escape from a situation by avoiding people. All of these behaviors cause our negative feelings to intensify and we feel more pain and confusion. We call this a shame spiral. Without intervention, our shame will spiral even more and may result in a crisis situation."*
- Lands us right back in...

## ➤ Escalating Toxic Shame

- Feeling deeper shamefulness than before due to the self-abandonment and acting out/acting in
  - Reinforces or 'proves' that I'm broken, bad, flawed, wrong, etc
- We eventually 'manage' our shame in auto-pilot... we're already in shamelessness before we have even recognized the shame or fear of shame occurred
- Shame spirals can be an hour, a day, or a decade
- Many shame management tactics can be at play at once or overlapping
- As shameless behaviors progress to keep the shame at bay...addictions can develop
  - Masks the real issue...Toxic Shame
- The higher we get with shamelessness, the further we have to fall and the harder we hit
- Shame has been carried, stuffed, & mis-managed over our lifetimes, amplifying it and increasing our tolerance to healthy levels of feeling realities, stunting our emotional development
- At some point we're acting out/acting in and not even getting 'fixed' anymore. Feel overwhelmed by life.
- Have to get even more shameless than before to 'fix' the shame
- There's another option.....

## ❖ Recovery Shame Management

### ➤ Intervening on the Shameful/Shameless Spirals

- Identifying when you're triggered (shameful or shameless) and putting yourself in time-out
  - Obsessing (positive or negative) while triggered does harm
- Neutralizing the shameful/shameless
  - Spiritual principles – humility, love, compassion, care, empathy, service, surrender
  - Get 'equal' with a person you're one-up/one-down with (especially if it's you)
  - 7<sup>th</sup> step instead of trying to control defects of character and addictions
- Addressing the toxic shame driving the shamelessness instead of 'fixing' it
  - Feel the feelings that are being stuffed
  - When identifying you're in shameful...ask yourself if/how you were shameless
  - Developing a healthy self-parent to lovingly hold yourself accountable and protect you from the toxic shame
  - Commitment to whatever it takes to recover...CoDA, other 12-Step meeting(s), counseling, etc

### ➤ Building Healthy Shame...Learn to be 'Right-Sized'

- Making friends with healthy shame and breaking through the toxic shame...rescuing my authentic self, my 'I AM'
- God's will for me keeps me right-sized
  - Taking care of my needs (air, water, food, rest, shelter, love, well-being, joy, support, health, companionship, safety, growth, etc)
- Accepting my humanness, my vulnerability
- Right-sized is relative, not absolute
- Practice appropriate levels of power in relationships (self, others, HP, etc.)
  - Responsibility vs. Control/Avoidance
- Moderation is a spiritual principal
  - Value for this as opposed to thinking it is pathetic or a waste of time
  - Arrests the 'all or nothing' symptom of codependence
- The closer we get to healthy shame, the larger the gap between the trigger and the behavior grows
- Affirmations: okay to make mistakes, doing the best I can, I love myself, equal to others



**CoDA WORKSHOP: SHAME MANAGEMENT – 101**

**WORKSHEET: IDENTIFYING PERSONAL SHAME MANAGEMENT PATTERNS**

1. I repeatedly have shameful feelings about \_\_\_\_\_  
*(examples; raging at my son, my weight, being late, my friend not calling me, overdrawing my bank acct, etc.)*
2. Make a list of the shameful messages (fears/beliefs) below *(examples; I'm bad, I'm not good enough, people will leave me, one-down, I'm pathetic, feel out of control, self-loathing, fear of judgment, I'll never get over this)*
3. What I usually do to 'fix' or control this is \_\_\_\_\_  
*(examples; promise myself I will be nicer, plan a diet/join a gym, commit to being 10 mins early everywhere, convince myself it doesn't bother me, swear to write down every penny spent)*
4. Make a corresponding list of the shameless messages (fantasies/expectations) below  
*(examples; I'll be a good person, feeling one-up or powerful, people will like me, feel in control, others will be jealous, I'll never have this problem again, this will fix everything)*
5. What actually happens (consequences) \_\_\_\_\_  
*(examples; raging escalates, binge/gain 5 pounds, get written up for being late, confronting with anger and losing the friendship, paying expensive late fees)*

**SHAMEFUL MESSAGES**

**SHAMELESS MESSAGES**

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**RECOVERY PLAN: WHAT I DO INSTEAD**

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