Reframe Shame

Dr. Brene Brown, research professor and expert leader in the study of courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy, provides the following definitions:

Shame:

Shame is an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance, love, and belonging. Shame is a fear of disconnection, and can make you feel isolated or alone.

Guilt:

Guilt is a remorseful awareness of having done something wrong. Guilt is uncomfortable but helpful as you can heal from and change when you do something bad by apologizing, communicating, and using empathy.

Shame says, "I am bad."

Guilt says, "I have done something bad."

The difference between shame and guilt is a difference between "being" something negative and "doing" something negative.
"I am a mistake" is shame.
"I made a mistake" is guilt.

Building Resilience to Shame

Identifying Shame in Your Body

Practice identifying feelings of shame, and how they manifest within your body. Answer the questions below.

I physically feel shame in or on my _____.

Shame feels like _____.

I know I'm ashamed when I feel _____.

If I could taste shame, it would taste like:

If I could touch shame, it would feel like:

If I could smell shame, it would smell like:

If I could see shame, it would look like:

Critical Awareness

Practice Critical Awareness to improve your self-empathy. Empathy is the strongest antidote for shame.

Contextualize

See the big picture: What is my bigger picture in life? What are the great things I have done for the team, my family, and friends? What are the positive impacts I have had? What else is going on in the room, in this building, with your family, in your city, in the world?

Normalize

Realize you are not alone or the only one who has experienced the same situation through research or conversation.

Demystify

Understand the origin of your shame and share it with others, like your therapist or a trusted person, or journal to reflect on it. Shame cannot survive in the light.

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Read more about Overcoming Shame here: