

Shame - Definitions

“Shame is a feeling deep within our being that makes us want to hide. We feel suddenly overwhelmed and self-conscious. The feeling of shame is of being exposed, visible and examined by a critical other. It is the sense that the “examination” has found the self to be imperfect and unworthy in every way. We hang our heads, stoop our shoulders and curve inward as if trying to make ourselves invisible.”

Shame and Guilt: Masters of Disguise - Jane Middelton-Moz

“Shame is the feeling you have when someone smears their emotional feces all over you” ~Client

“Shame on you. The words are a curse, a spell others cast on us. It’s a spell we learn to cast on ourselves. The creepy, crawling, muck drips like black ink from our heads to our toes. Whether the spell is cast with a look, certain words, a tone of voice, or an old message inside our heads, it’s there until we do something about it. The spell says, “What you did isn’t okay, who you are isn’t okay, and nothing you do will change that.” Shame on you.”

Beyond Codependency - Melody Beattie

“Shame is an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self judging the self. A moment of shame may be humiliation so painful or an indignity so profound that one feels one has been robbed of her dignity, or exposed as basically inadequate, bad, or worthy of rejection. A pervasive sense of shame is the ongoing premise that one is fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not fully valid as a human being.

A shame-bound family is a family with a self-sustaining, multi-generational system of interaction with a cast of characters who are (or were in their lifetime) loyal to a set of rules and injunctions demanding control, perfectionism, blame and denial. The pattern inhibits or defeats the development of authentic intimate relationships, promotes secrets and vague personal boundaries, unconsciously instills shame in the family members, chaos in their lives and binds them to perpetuate the shame in themselves and their kin. It does so regardless of the good intentions, wishes and love which may also be part of the system.”

Facing Shame: Families in Recovery. Merle Fossum and Marilyn Mason

“To feel shame is to feel seen in a painfully diminished sense. The self feels exposed both to itself and to anyone else present. It is this sudden, unexpected feeling of exposure and accompanying self-consciousness that characterize the essential nature of the affect of shame. Contained in the experience of shame is the piercing awareness of ourselves as fundamentally deficient in some vital way as a human being. To live with shame is to experience the very essence or heart of the self as wanting.”

Shame. The Power of Caring - Kaufman, Gershen