

Presentation: Guilt & shame

Correlates with p. 40 of the Participant workbook.

What is guilt?

- Guilt is a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrongdoing, etc., whether real or imagined.
- Guilt is a judgement—a feeling we've done something wrong, even if we're not responsible.
- It can be a constructive feeling if it leads to mending damage done, but can be unproductive if the burden is taken on and isn't warranted.

What is shame?

- Shame is the standards we set for ourselves and our perception of ourselves.
- Shame often shows when we think we have done something dishonourable, improper, ridiculous, etc.
- The term covers both chronic ('I'm always a loser') and acute experiences of embarrassment, humiliation, and worthlessness.
- Shame is an inward feeling that can become an all-encompassing judgement of self—'I am damaged goods', 'This is what I am', 'I am bad', 'I am shameful'. This is in contrast to guilt, which involves a judgement of an action or actions—'I've done something bad'. If a person sees or believes themselves 'to be shameful', then, when problems present, their whole being can be threatened, and they can become quickly overwhelmed.

Points about shame:

- Shame is developed in early childhood (by age 3-5).
- Shame can exist before a child is verbal (thus hard to articulate).
- It is more arousing—a 'bigger feeling' than guilt.
- Shame suggests something wrong with me (vs. something I have done wrong).
- Shame provokes hiding (vs. making amends or reparations).

Pathways of shame:

Another way of understanding this concept is to understand how 'shame-prone' men cope with shame. The term shame-prone is used here given that the childhood abuse the men have experienced suggests that most, if not all, of the participants have experienced considerable shame in their lives.