

From Shame to Healing

RYCNC Lunch & Learn Series 2026

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SHAME

1. What comes to your mind?
2. What purpose does it serve?
3. What if you never experienced shame?

Answer in the chat

Guilt & Shame

- **Guilt is tied to actions**
 - *"I did something wrong."*
 - *"I made a mistake."*
 - Guilt prompts individuals to acknowledge their wrongdoing, take responsibility and seek to make amends.
 - This helps youth learn from their mistakes and develop a sense of accountability.
- **Shame targets the self**
 - *"I am wrong."*
 - *"I am a mistake."*
 - Shame can create an identity around "badness."
 - It can lead youth to feel inherently unlovable and flawed, causing them to experience negative mental health outcomes.





Common Triggers of Shame

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Criticism or Harsh Discipline

Conditional Love

Public Humiliation

Neglect or Overprotection

Shame often arises when a youth feels disconnected from their caregivers or when their sense of self is challenged.



Understanding the correlation between shame, guilt, and mental health is crucial in addressing these issues effectively.

The American Criminal Justice System



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- Adults and juveniles were treated the same until late in the 20th century.
- Social reforms from the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) established Balanced and Restorative Justice (1995) among other reforms.
- Shaming punishments failed to promote goals of recidivism or even intervention.
- Also, shaming can place the youth in emotionally and physically vulnerable positions.
- They also undermine confidentiality.



Shaming Punishments

A few examples



Blind in One Eye

- 1996 – a fifteen-year-old boy hurled a rock into the windshield of a passing car, blinding the car's passenger in her left eye.
- The court sentenced him to one year in the county jail, ordered him to pay restitution, be on probation for 29 years, and to wear an eye-patch for his waking hours while in jail.
- This was to reinforce what the person harmed will experience.



Sorry Sign

- Two youth stole a baby Jesus from a nativity scene and defaced it.
- They were court ordered to walk through their town with the donkey from the nativity scene, wearing a sign stating: “Sorry for the jackass offense.”
- This was intended to bring them some public humiliation.



Toga Party

- Police busted up a toga party and charged the host with underage drinking.
- He was court ordered to don his toga and stand in front of the police station for hours.
- This exposed him to the public and risked the potential for verbal and physical abuse.

Why your role matters

- Our youthful offenders carry guilt as a matter of the process. It is a normal emotion.
- You can help identify if they are carrying shame.
- Early recognition and help from you can:
 - Address healthy guilty feelings by providing accountability and taking responsibility
 - Intervention to prevent mental health issues around deep shame



#1 Shame

Shame can create a vicious cycle.

You behave in a way that makes you feel ashamed, then you do things to cover up your feelings, which leads you to feel even more ashamed.

You shove your shame deep into your bottomless bag of emotions, and you pile on top depression, anxiety, anger and more shame.

#2 Shame

Healing from shame begins by confronting it.

Shame thrives in secrecy but bringing it into the open weakens its grip.

This process requires vulnerability – the willingness to face our imperfections and acknowledge the parts of ourselves we've hidden.

#3 Shame

We, as a society, don't set out to intentionally shame youth, but we often don't protect them from shame when it occurs, either.

We, as professional restorative justice facilitators, offer youth a restorative process that allows them to experience an outlet to process the experience.

Identifying Shame – What to look for

Behavioral Changes

Any significant changes in behavior, such as increased irritability, mood swings, or sudden shifts in personality.

Self-Degrading Statements

Pay attention to self-deprecating or negative statements made by the youth, as this indicates strong feelings of shame.

Avoidance of Eye Contact

Youth may avoid eye contact, as they may feel a sense of embarrassment or unworthiness.

Excessive Apologizing

Constantly apologizing, even for minor mistakes, can be a sign of guilt and a desire to seek reassurance.

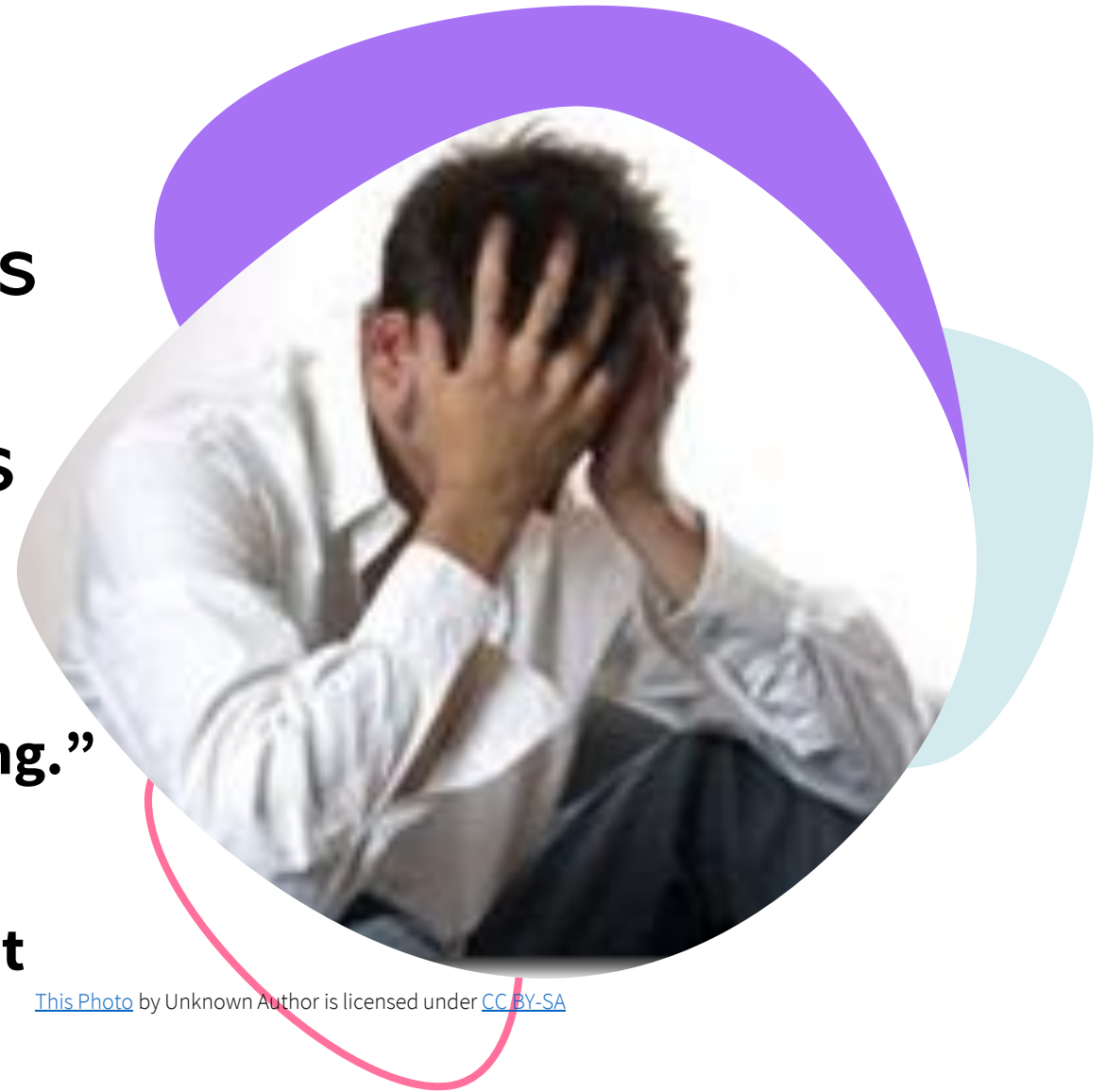
Negative Self-Image

Youth struggling with shame and guilt may have a negative perception of themselves, constantly focusing on their shortcomings or perceived faults

Example: When a youth bows their head and looks down, we need to recognize this as the classic shame response.

Avoid saying: “look at me when I’m talking.”

Rather: help them by creating an opportunity for them to make things right and restore their relationships



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Compass of Shame



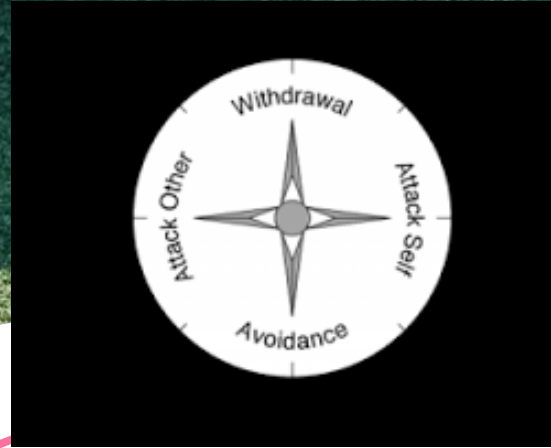
Withdrawal



- **Isolating oneself**
- **Running & hiding**
- **Disconnect in-place**
- **Retreating to avoid further shame**

- **Flight-freeze defense response**
- **“I can’t face anyone.”**
- **Emotions: sadness, fear, anxiety**
- **Feeling uncomfortable with others**

Avoidance



- **Denial**
- **Abusing drugs and alcohol**
- **Distraction thru thrill seeking**
- **Perfectionism**
- **Video game addiction**

- **Flight/Freeze defense response**
- **“let’s not talk about it.”**
- **“It’s not a big deal.”**
- **Doesn’t acknowledge their part**
- **Thoughts include very little awareness of shame, shameful actions, faults or negative characteristics**

Attacking Self



- **Self put-downs**
- **Internalizing the shame**
- **Directing negative feelings inward**

- **Fight defense response**
“It’s all my fault.”
- **Emotions: self-directed anger, contempt or disgust**

Attacking Others

- **Blaming others**
- **Lashing out verbally or physically**
- **Projecting shame outwards**
- **Attempting to make someone else feel worse**
- **Sarcasm**



Fight defense response
“It’s all your fault.”

- **Motivation is to bolster the self-image and externalize the shame**

Why is it important to understand the Compass of Shame?

Youth who are “acting out” often are deep in shame, and we only see the behavior and not the reason behind it.

When a youth goes through a restorative process, it is essential that we “walk them out of shame.”

The background features a large, irregular purple shape on the left and a pink shape on the right. A thin blue circle outline is positioned at the top center, overlapping both shapes. The text is centered within the purple area.

How have you seen
youth experiencing
shame?

Live Circle Discussion

Strategies to Walk Out of Shame

Encourage Self-Reflection

- Are we guiding them to identify and acknowledge their positive qualities, talents and accomplishments?
- Can we help them shift from self-criticism to self-appreciation.
- IDEA: Creative Expression

Cultivate a Supportive Environment

- Are we providing a program where they can express their emotions and share their experiences?
- Are mistakes/offenses seen as a part of growth and learning?
- IDEA: Circles & Networking

Teach Self-Compassion

- Do we encourage them to treat themselves with kindness and understanding?
- Do we help with positive and affirming statements?
- IDEA: Journaling & Positive Acknowledgement



5 R's of Restorative Justice



What do the 5 R's have to do with Shame?

Example: When a youth acts inappropriately, gets arrested, and fractures his relationship with his school.

We provide a process where both positive and negative emotions are shared, allowing the youth to graciously take accountability, move beyond his shame, and be able to reconnect with his family, peers, and school.



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Australian Criminologist John Braithwaite

book: Crime, Shame and Reintegration

- Traditional question: “Why do people commit crimes?”
- He asked: “Why do most people do the right thing most of the time?”
- A judge’s lecture is ineffective because the offender has no existing connection to that individual, but a mother’s tears are a powerful influence because of the youth’s long-standing relationship with her.

Australian Criminologist John Braithwaite

- He urges us to “separate the deed from the doer” by acknowledging the worth of the person while rejecting the unacceptable behavior.
- He warns against stigmatizing the youth by labeling them in a way that sustains their sense of shame and alienation.
- He emphasizes restoring relationships by reintegration into the family, the school, the community.

Australian Criminologist John Braithwaite

- If a youth cannot restore their relationships, they will seek new relationships with others who also feel alienated from society and join the negative subculture of wrongdoers who see themselves as outside the mainstream.
- The RJ process reintegrates the youth by creating an opportunity for them to move beyond their shame, make things right and restore their existing relationships.

Closing remarks

Restorative practices allows the act (unacceptable behavior) to be rejected because the person failed to meet expectations...

While acknowledging the intrinsic worth of the person and their potential contribution to society (their school, their family, and their community).





Final Discussion Question

References Used

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