



Shame, Guilt and the Power of Empathy

Seedling's January Mentor Training brought mentors together to explore guilt and shame. Highlighting the work of research professor Dr. Brené Brown, our presenter, Austin therapist Amy Ashorn, shared tools mentors can use to support their mentees, reversing the destructive impact of shame with empathy.

The words guilt and shame are often used interchangeably, but there are major psychological differences between the two: **Guilt** is a common feeling of emotional distress that signals us when our actions or inactions have caused or might cause harm to another person. Guilty feelings relate to others. **Shame** is that painful feeling or experience that makes us feel like we are flawed. It informs us of an internal state of inadequacy, unworthiness, dishonor, regret, or disconnection. Shame is a clear signal that our positive feelings have been interrupted. Shameful feelings relate to self.

Dr. Brown has identified three key factors about shame:

1. We all have it! Shame is universal and one of the most primitive human emotions that we experience.
2. We are afraid to talk about it. Being vulnerable invites people closer in and allows a stronger connection.
3. The less we talk about shame the more control it has over our lives.

Sharing her research and the impact of shame, Brené Brown talks with Oprah Winfrey in this 4 minute [video](#)

Shame creates fear of disconnection and isolation. While we cannot stop someone from feeling this way, we can help children and adults bounce back from it by showing empathy. Brené Brown clarifies the differences between empathy and sympathy in this 3 minute [video](#)

Tools for Mentors

What's beneath the anger? To help our mentees identify what is causing secondary emotions like anger or apathy we can encourage them to look what is beneath the surface. So many feelings can result in someone feeling angry, shame is just one of them.

To view the Anger Iceberg click [here](#)

Mentors can sometimes feel at a loss of what to do. Fear not, empathy is always at hand if you remember this [5 Finger Rule](#)

To view the full January Training Power Point click [here](#)