

Shame and Guilt

We feel guilt when we do something wrong and we feel shame when we believe we're flawed

related emotions & behaviors: embarrassment, humiliation, judgement, self-criticism, blame, perfectionism

What it feels like

You may feel **sadness, despair, hopelessness, anger**, or even **rage**.

You may feel **judged, embarrassed, ashamed**, or self-critical. You may feel small or weak.

You might think you are less valued than other people and that you don't belong.

Why you might be feeling it

If you believe that you have **done something wrong**, you are likely to feel guilt. **Guilt is a feeling that can motivate us** to do things differently than we have in the past.

If you believe that you are **flawed** and **unworthy of love** and connection, you are likely to feel shame. Shame can either **motivate us to connect** and **change** or disconnect and hide. It's usually better to connect than disconnect. We all need connection and belonging to survive and be healthy.



If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.

- Brené Brown



What it can look like

Pulling away and distancing ourselves from others.

Keeping quiet, hiding, and avoiding people.

Becoming **aggressive** or **defensive**.

Blaming ourselves for things we can't really control.

Blaming others for things they may not have done.

Using substances, food, or other behaviors to **distract ourselves** and **reduce our discomfort**.

How common is It?

Guilt and shame are common feelings that we all have at some time in our lives. These feelings can **help us learn from our mistakes** and help us connect with others. However, when we feel stuck in guilt and shame, we may be **at more risk for developing mental health complications**. 1 in 5 of us has mental health condition.



What you can do

- Practice **self-awareness** and **self-compassion**.
- Replace negative, self-critical thoughts with **truthful, more accurate** ones.
- If you feel triggered or activated, **take a step back**. Try to understand what you are experiencing.
- Notice what you need in these moments and **ask people for what you need**.
- **Reach out** to others and share what you're experiencing.
- Explore your feelings of guilt and shame and **where they come from**.
- Show **empathy** to **yourself and others**. Offer forgiveness when it feels like it's the right thing to do.
- **Apologize** and make amends **when you need to**.

Things you should know

Many of us struggle with self-doubt and self-criticism. **When things don't go as planned, we might think it's our fault**. But the bad things that can happen during our pregnancies, at delivery, and in the NICU are rarely anyone's fault. **Blaming ourselves doesn't change things** or make things easier.

When people treat us poorly or don't listen to us, we sometimes see how they treat us as **evidence that there's something wrong with us**. But **that's not true**. We all deserve to be **heard, understood, and respected** - especially when it comes to the care we need in the NICU. If you've been hurt or dismissed, tell someone. Then **advocate** for better treatment.

Therapies that can help

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)
- Compassion-focused Therapy (CFT)

Talking about SHAME and GUILT

It's normal to sometimes have feelings of shame or guilt. But if your shame and guilt start to be overwhelming or are keeping you from feeling the way you want to feel and doing the things you want to do, **ASK FOR HELP. You deserve to feel safe, valued, and respected**. You are not alone.