

## UNDERSTANDING EMPOWERMENT

The next step in moving beyond your shame is to understand what empowerment is and to commit yourself to making empowerment-based living an integral part of your day-to-day life.

**EMPOWERMENT** is a way of looking at yourself and others and the world around you and a way of living your life based on awareness, conscious decision-making, respect (for yourself and others), accountability, proactivity, and optimism. Empowerment is closely connected to a more positive and affirming thought process that you actively create and nurture as you go through your day. Empowerment allows you to take healthy responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (including those that hurt yourself and others) and promotes self-understanding, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-respect, and the potential for personal growth and intimacy in your relationships with others. You are the person who is responsible for doing what is necessary to help yourself become more empowered in your adult life by re-writing the damaging and destructive “life script” that your original shammers foisted on you.

The following chart clearly distinguishes the important differences between shame-based and empowerment-based ways of viewing yourself and the world around you. Look at the lists and see where you fit.

### A SHAME-BASED SYSTEM

Attacks and condemns “you” as a **person** (which leads to negative and painful feeling about who you are at your core)

Presumes that you are bad/worthless/inadequate/defective/flawed/unloveable and that nothing will ever be different

Presumes that you are not responsible for your feelings and actions through the use of psychological defenses like blaming, denial, minimizing, and justifying

Is based on a system of perfectionism which breeds isolation, despair, fear, discouragement, and, ultimately, more and more shame

Involves an external locus of control leads to continually you are seeking outside approval and validation and often feeling powerless, helpless, victimized, and and completely “out of control”

Attacks uniqueness and individuality (you have to be the same as others and to do what is “expected” of you)

### AN EMPOWERMENT-BASED SYSTEM

Evaluates and assesses your **behavior** (which may, at times, lead to negative and painful feelings about your actions)

Presumes that you are human, that you have “flaws,” problems, and shortcomings, and that you will make mistakes at times (which you can then remedy if you choose to do so)

Presumes that you are responsible for your thoughts, and actions (and your inaction!), which includes your mistakes

Is based on a system of accountability which leads to personal growth, healing, and a respect for your own and others’ rights

Involves an internal locus of control leads to a belief that “in charge” of yourself and your life and have the ability to stay aware, see your options, and make conscious and healthy choices in your life

Affirms uniqueness (you and others have the right to be different from one another and to be “your own persons”)

## **A SHAME-BASED SYSTEM**

Leads to increasing rigidity, the development of an “image” or a “facade,” and an intense desire to control yourself and others and what happens around you

Creates no possibility of repairing the “damage” done to others and relationships are always “in jeopardy,” leading to a profound sense of terror, loneliness, and alienation

Leads to being reactive toward the world around you

**The purpose of shame is to avoid change, to judge and punish yourself and others, and to perpetuate the shame cycle**

**The shame-based system screams out: *“I am a bad and rotten person and I will never truly be okay”***

## **AN EMPOWERMENT-BASED SYSTEM**

Leads to compassion and empathy for yourself and others, increased flexibility, and a deepening and modification of positive core values learned as a child

Leads to amends, remedies, conflict resolution, forgiveness, intimacy, and enhancement of your relationships with others

Leads to being proactive in the world around you

**The purpose of empowerment is to produce change, growth, and healing in yourself and those around you**

**The empowerment-based system states clearly and assertively: *“I am a worthwhile, competent, and loving person, even when I make mistakes and have parts of me that I need to work on, change, and improve”***