

## **SOME POTENTIAL EFFECTS IN COMING FROM A SHAME-BASED ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING A SHAME-BASED LIFESTYLE**

**If you have grown up in a family where you have needed to abide by the rules of a shame-based system or you were shamed or ridiculed by others outside your family, the effects on you and your life can be devastating and debilitating. This does not mean, however, that you cannot change the ways that these messages affect you in the present. Below are listed some of the possible effects that can arise from experiencing shame and not being allowed to be the person you actually are. Read through these and look for the specific ways that you (or others) may have been affected by the childhood experience of being exposed to toxic shame.**

You actively take on shame from your parents and your family-of-origin and carry it on in your thought and behavior patterns in the present

You become a delegate of the family system and find or create other shame-based systems in your own life (as a way to preserve your “loyalty” to the family and the messages you received)

Your thoughts, emotions, wants, and needs that were discounted and shamed in your family of origin frequently “trigger” shame and other intense emotional reactions in the present for you as an adult

You allow the shame to spread and grow so that it takes on “a life of its own,” and you no longer even need an actual activating event in the present to experience shame in your daily life

You hear and take in shaming messages in relationships, at school, at work, and other areas of your life even when others do not intend to be shaming with you

You stunt your emotional development and you never quite feel that you have “grown up,” matured, and become “a real adult” (this is actually true until you start to address your shame directly)

You live in spiritual deprivation (shame and God or a Higher Power cannot coexist) and you have little or no belief that you are truly part of and connected to a larger universe

You become a “partial person” by cutting off important parts of who you are and who you could be ...e.g. your spontaneous, playful, and emotional “inner child”

You allow your negative or “shadow” side (i.e. what you don’t like to admit to yourself or others about who you really are inside) to control you and how you react to others because you are unwilling to acknowledge and address these aspects of your character in a direct and straightforward manner. As a result, these parts determine your behavior rather than your being in charge of them and how they affect you and those around you.

You live with an intense sense of fear, anxiety, and dread that you attempt to lessen by trying to control and manipulate others and by seeking “quick fixes” that only create more shame in your ongoing life (e.g. alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, shopping and spending, being abusive, working continually, making money)

You frequently live in isolation with an inner sense of emotional disconnection and loneliness, no matter how you try to appear to other

You have a distorted sense of appropriate boundaries with a tendency to violate others' boundaries and to allow others to violate yours or to stay completely detached and disengaged with little or no real emotional connection to anyone in your life

You experience an enormous fear of being abandoned or rejected by those around you  
...i.e. you often say to yourself, *"if others ever know or find out who I really am, they will undoubtedly leave me and have nothing to do with me"*

You become self-absorbed, self-centered, self-critical, and self-destructive in an attempt to hide who you really are as a human being

You attempt to suppress your anger which is then expressed either:  
...by being punishing, explosive, or abusive;  
...by being passive-aggressive, sarcastic, and manipulative; and/or  
...by being passive and turning the anger in on yourself which can create depression, anxiety, and other emotional disorders

You become ashamed about the shame you experience, refuse to acknowledge when it is present, and become angry and contemptuous toward yourself, especially when you feel insecure and inadequate  
...i.e. this creates self-hatred, the ultimate in self-initiated shame

You believe that your thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and behaviors actually prove your defectiveness, worthlessness, and unlovability (i.e. the idea that *"there is something really wrong with me"*) and you are unwilling to share these important parts of who you are with others, even those close to you

You often believe that you are "out of control" or that things in your life "just happen" to you

You are completely unwilling to take healthy responsibility for yourself, your mistakes, and your problems or you tend to take on too much responsibility for things that may not even have much to do with you  
...i.e. it's either: *"I have absolutely no responsibility for anything that happened"* or *"It's all my fault"*

You attempt to completely avoid legitimate pain and suffering in your life (at any personal and relationship cost to you) and consequently lapse into self-pity and feelings of victimization, powerlessness, and hopelessness

You never fully accept positives or compliments about yourself from others (i.e. saying to yourself *"if they only knew who I really was, they wouldn't have said that to me"*) and you are unwilling to give yourself credit for the positive things that you do accomplish in your life

You never allow yourself to feel satisfied, contented, and fulfilled by others meeting your needs and say things to yourself like *"it doesn't really count because they don't really know who I am and, if they did, they wouldn't have been willing to help me or be there for me"*

You struggle with disbelief and mistrust and tend to undermine yourself when you do begin to make healthy and positive changes in your life by saying to yourself that the changes are *"not real"* or *"won't last very long"*