

# SHAME



What is it, how it affects us and how we can develop shame resilience

## What is it?

According to Brene Brown, who has done extensive research on the shame emotion, defines shame as "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." In her research, she describes shame as a universal emotion that affects all people to varying degrees. Shame is often accompanied by feelings of fear, worthlessness, and the belief that one is fundamentally flawed or inadequate.

## How it affects us

**Mental Health:** Shame is strongly linked to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. It can contribute to a negative self-image and feelings of worthlessness.

**Physical Health:** The stress and negative emotions associated with shame can have physical effects on the body, such as increased cortisol levels (stress hormone), which can impact overall health and well-being.

**Behavioral Patterns:** Shame can influence our behavior in various ways. It may lead to avoidance behaviors, where individuals try to avoid situations that trigger shame. Alternatively, it can manifest in overcompensating behaviors, such as perfectionism or people-pleasing.

## How it affects us continued

**Interpersonal Relationships:** Shame can affect how we relate to others, leading to difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships due to issues with self-image and self-worth.

**Sense of Belonging and Connection:** Shame can create a sense of isolation and detachment from others. It may lead individuals to believe they are unworthy of connection and belonging.

**Professional Life:** Shame can impact performance at work or in academic settings. It may lead to feelings of inadequacy or imposter syndrome, affecting job satisfaction and career advancement.

**Decision-Making:** Shame can influence decision-making, leading individuals to make choices based on avoiding shame rather than what is truly best for them.

**Overall Well-Being:** Shame can have a significant impact on overall well-being, contributing to stress, unhappiness, and a decreased quality of life.

# How it affects us as dispatchers



**Mistakes and Errors:** We may experience shame when we make mistakes or errors in handling emergency calls, especially if these mistakes lead to negative outcomes or harm.

**Critical Incidents:** We may feel shame or guilt after critical incidents, such as a failed CPR instruction or a miscommunication that leads to delays in response times.

**Lack of Control:** We may feel shame when we perceive a lack of control over a situation, particularly when we are unable to provide immediate assistance or resolve an emergency quickly.

**Secondary Trauma:** Constant exposure to traumatic events can lead to feelings of shame or guilt, especially if we blame ourselves for not being able to prevent or mitigate the trauma experienced by our callers or responders.

**Perceived Judgment:** We may internalize perceived judgments from callers, responders, or supervisors, leading to feelings of shame about our performance or abilities.

**Self-Expectations:** We may have high expectations for ourselves due to the critical nature of our job, and falling short of these expectations can result in feelings of shame or inadequacy.

**Workplace Culture:** The culture within a dispatch center can also influence how shame manifests, with a lack of support, recognition, or understanding potentially exacerbating feelings of shame among dispatchers.

## Shame Resilience

Shame resilience refers to the ability to recognize, process, and move through feelings of shame in a healthy way. It involves four key elements:

**Recognizing Shame:** Being able to identify when shame is present and understanding its triggers and effects.

**Understanding Shame:** Developing an awareness of how shame operates in one's life and recognizing the difference between shame and other emotions like guilt or embarrassment.

**Connecting with Others:** Sharing experiences of shame with empathetic and understanding individuals who can provide support and perspective, thus reducing the power of shame.

**Cultivating Empathy:** Developing the ability to empathize with oneself and others, recognizing that imperfection is part of the human experience and that everyone is worthy of love and belonging.

Shame resilience is seen as a key component of building emotional strength and well-being, allowing individuals to develop a more positive self-image and stronger connections with others.