

The Connection Between Shame and Addiction

What is Addiction?

Substance addiction is an often-lethal progressive [neurological disorder](#) characterized by the compulsive use of a substance even though that behavior has consistently led to negative, even disastrous consequences. Addiction leads to lasting changes in a person's central nervous system that make recovery challenging, but far from impossible. In fact, addiction responds well to treatment, and many people are able to live full, satisfying lives once they are in stable recovery.

Common Negative Feelings in Addiction

Addiction is a miserable disorder that creates many negative emotions. These emotions are often so powerful they get in the way of a person seeking help or making changes to get out of their situation.

The most common negative feelings in addiction include:

1. **Guilt.** People feel guilty over the things they've done or failed to do because of their substance addiction. Substance abuse guilt can be overwhelming and seem so monumental a person may feel unable to make any changes.
2. **Hopelessness.** Hopeless in addiction arises from people feeling powerless to stop using addictive substances.
3. **Fear.** Addiction is filled with fear—fear of being without the addictive substance, fear of the consequences of being unable to control one's drug use, and even the fear of getting into recovery can all make it difficult for a person to
4. **Shame.** People often feel shame for who they are, as opposed to what they've done, while suffering from active addiction.

What is the Difference Between Guilt & Shame?

Guilt is centered on how we perceive our actions. When we act contrary to what our personal moral code considers right or good, we feel guilt. Guilt can be a negative feeling, but it can also inspire us to become better people and to right our wrongs. In contrast to shame, guilt is somewhat more precise and can be narrowed down to specific actions—or inactions.

Shame is all about a person's worth. People experience shame because they believe they have little worth or are "less than" other people. Shame deals with a person's whole being and is destructive to a person's self-concept and self-esteem.

When a person feels shame, they feel as if they are unworthy of love, unworthy of happiness. They may feel as if they don't deserve respect or kind treatment. These feelings are tremendously painful and can lead people to use addictive substances to dull their emotions.

The Shame Cycle

Some people are [prone to feeling shame](#) before they ever use addictive substances. People who've survived [trauma](#) are also at risk of feeling misplaced shame, as are adults who experienced [abuse or neglect as children](#).

When people abuse substances to suppress their feelings of shame or to cope with stress, anxiety, or other pressures, feelings of shame get worse, causing more stress. Shame is such a powerful and painful emotion people try to suppress it through any means they can. Abusing addictive substances is one of the most common of these maladaptive coping mechanisms.

As a person continues to use substances to manage their negative emotions, they experience more consequences of their substance abuse, which leads to ever-increasing feelings of shame, decreasing self-esteem, and more emotional stress.

What is the Connection Between Shame & Addiction?

Shame and addiction drive each other; each makes the other worse. People who grow up in families where addiction or untreated mental illness are prominent often bear a heavy burden of shame. Children in these situations may be criticized, humiliated, abused, or neglected, and don't learn how to cope with these emotions in a healthy fashion. As a consequence, they grow up with deep feelings of toxic shame.

Toxic shame is internalized self-hatred that generates tremendous emotional pain, which can lead to depression and anxiety. People who feel toxic shame will often abuse addictive substances to self-medicate their distress. Although addictive substances dull this emotional pain, substance abuse won't do anything about the root causes of a person's suffering and will generate only more shame.

Ways to Combat Negative Emotions in Addiction

Emotional dysregulation is a part of the shame/addiction cycle, but it's hard for a person to fight negative emotions during active addiction. However, recovery from addiction allows a person to learn how to experience their emotions without being a victim of them.

Is There Treatment for Addiction & Mental Health at the Same Time?

Addiction and mental health issues often occur together. Some of the more common mental health disorders that accompany addiction include depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. When psychological issues and addiction co-occur, it's referred to as a [dual diagnosis](#) condition.

[Dual-diagnosis](#) care is the most effective way to treat addiction with a co-occurring mental health issue. In dual-diagnosis treatment, both drug use and psychological conditions are treated simultaneously. This approach is essential to recovery because both conditions fuel each other.

[Contact the Agape professionals](#) today to discuss your treatment needs privately and create a treatment plan tailored to those specific needs. By completing detox and withdrawal in a safe, clean, and comfortable environment, the strongest foundation for recovery can be created.

References

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