

Toxic

SHAME

**Twenty-Five Red Flag Symptoms
and Twelve Transformational Tools**



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Expressive Arts Chronic Pain, Grief, and Trauma Specialist



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EMBRACING YOUR LOVABLE FRIENDS



EMBRACING YOUR LOVABLE FRIENDS

Are you ready to embrace your lovable friends and pain, blame, and shame? In this booklet, you will learn how these negative feelings work together to create “toxic shame.” Toxic shame is usually the result of trauma or an underlying mental condition. It can be a friend and help us use our creative imaginations, live life with gratitude, and reach our goals. You can shift to become a courageous, creative conqueror and FACE, EMBRACE, and REPLACE toxic shame with creative action. Join me in a creative arts immersive as we effortlessly shift away from SHAME and choose to move from pain to gain.

WHAT ARE PAIN, BLAME, AND SHAME?

Pain, blame, and shame are uncomfortable, lovable aspects of toxic shame that motivate us to get back on track, align with our true purpose, and do what is best for ourselves, our families, our friends, and our communities. These three friends tend to hang out together. It’s our purpose and mission to manage pain, blame, and shame and choose love, forgiveness, and joy.



A WORLD WITHOUT PAIN



CAN WE LIVE IN A WORLD WITHOUT PAIN?

Let's look at pain. Some may think that chronic pain is unlovable. How can one find joy through pain? Pain is an unpleasant feeling. Joy is the opposite of pain. It is possible to experience joy while experiencing pain.

Adverse physical, mental, and emotional reactions such as blame and shame often attach to pain like fleas on a panting dog in high grass. When adverse reactions are created consistently without justification, it is toxic. This is when it is time to take our next positive step towards better health and well-being.

Pain is an essential tool for our safety. A child needs to feel pain to avoid dangerous situations. We fall, scrape our knees, bandage our wounds, and get up again. In doing so, we learn a thing or two, making us less likely to fall again. We can choose gratitude for the pain and receive the lesson it brings to our lives.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GUILT AND SHAME

It's important to note the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is generally a feeling that occurs when we recognize or imagine we have done something wrong. A child looks at the floor and mumbles, "I did something bad." He or she feels guilty. Shame is a feeling that we are defective. It differs from guilt because it is not necessary to have a direct connection to a specific situation. We can feel shame without doing anything wrong.



PAIN, BLAME, AND SHAME

No one needs to do anything to create shame. It is a judgmental evaluation we put upon ourselves or others. It is possible to consciously free ourselves of shame.

WHAT IS TOXIC SHAME?

Let's imagine this helpful scenario about toxic shame. Three teenage girls, Alicia, Amelia, and Andrea are beautiful. They giggle and laugh. A new girl at school, Nettie, sees them and imagines they are laughing at her. She is ashamed of the way she looks. The others did not cause Nettie's shame, yet Nettie blames them. Nettie and the others did nothing to cause shame.

Mild guilt or shame can be a temporary feeling when we do something wrong. These feelings help us take action to fix the situation. However, those who experience toxic shame feel ashamed regardless of situations, actions, or reactions from others. People who feel toxic shame generally compare themselves to an ideal behavior. They often have a distorted view of life and wrongly blame themselves or others for these feelings.

Research studies show that shame, more than guilt, embarrassment, or regret, is the most powerful motivator for change (Lickel, et al, 2014)



Anyone can replace pain, guilt, or shame using the creative imagination. But first, we must face it and embrace it.

HOW CAN THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION HELP?

Shame can be a powerful motivator to jumpstart us into action. Let's continue to look at the story about Nettie. Nettie has a choice. She can needlessly experience toxic shame or choose another option. Nettie decides to stop and feel the pain, blame, and shame. She pauses to accept the uncomfortable feelings. She uses her imagination to remember times when she felt the same way. Nettie imagines talking to her feelings, comforting herself, and being grateful for these uncomfortable feelings.

Then, Nettie imagines that the three teenagers were not laughing at her. She sees a different scenario: Alicia is telling Andrea and Amelia a funny story about Alicia's parakeet, Chippy, who dances to music, spinning on one foot while wearing a little hat. Now Nettie is smiling. She has learned to feel, reveal, and heal through creative storytelling. After this experience, she writes in her journal with joy and gratitude.

HEALING TOXIC SHAME



HEALING TOXIC SHAME WITH LOVE

I've had my fair share of shame, beginning in early childhood with chronic migraines and hypersensitivity, causing me to hide from social interactions. Later as a teenager and young adult, I experienced multiple physical, mental, and emotional traumas (assault by my teacher and my doctor, domestic violence toward myself and my son, assault by an escaped prisoner, and a policeman). These things resulted in living in a homeless shelter, promiscuity, eating disorders, multiple head injuries and concussions, post-traumatic stress disorder, long-term post-concussion syndrome, and social anxiety. There's much more, but you get the idea. I had the motherload of things to be ashamed of.

**Today I'm not ashamed of my life.
I love myself and share my story
without shame.**



In the beginning, it didn't matter how much I made amends or engaged in charitable efforts. I continued to hold on to shame in a toxic manner. Gradually I learned how to honor and accept a greater plan for me. I learned how to choose love instead of shame. How did I do that?



**Love is always here, even when
we experience guilt, blame, and shame.**

Just like Netti, I discovered that the experience of shame is a choice. You and I have the freedom to take responsibility for our lives, let go of blame and shame, be accountable for our actions and reactions, and use our creative imagination to see, hear, and feel love. I learned specific techniques to teach me how to love toxic shame. That changed my life.

Facing, embracing, and replacing shame helped me feel, reveal, and heal toxic patterns. I learned how to embrace joy and love every day. But first, I needed to face my patterns of toxic shame.



25 RED FLAGS FOR TOXIC SHAME

Some of the red flags or symptoms of toxic shame include:

1. Trouble maintaining relationships
2. Dishonesty and lying
3. Abusive behavior or neglecting self-care
4. Suicidal thoughts
5. Compulsive behaviors

25 RED FLAGS



25 RED FLAGS FOR TOXIC SHAME (continued)

6. Addictions (sex, food, drugs, gambling, etc.)
7. Workaholism
8. Abusive relationships
9. Chronic anxiety
10. Depression
11. Panic attacks
12. Undiagnosed health problems (digestive problems, headaches, fatigue, etc.)
13. Ongoing feelings of loneliness or isolation
14. Going blank, fragmented speech and thought
15. Chronic muscle tension and muscle fatigue (face, hands, shoulders, arms, legs, stomach, etc.)
16. Avoidance of eye contact
17. Having a defeatist attitude or saying, "I can't," or "He (they) won't" before exploring options.
18. Engaging in negative self-talk. "You're lazy." "You're a liar."
19. Eating disorders (food binging, bulimia, anorexia nervosa, etc.).
20. Feeling highly sensitive and out of control emotionally (lashing out at loved ones, crying uncontrollably, etc.)



25 RED FLAGS FOR TOXIC SHAME (continued)

- 21. Difficulty saying "No."
- 22. Sleeping disorders
- 23. Control issues: Needing to control. Feeling out of control. Relinquishing control.
- 24. Avoidance behaviors: Watching a lot of TV/streaming videos at night
- 25. Not answering phone calls, avoiding responsibilities

EXERCISE OF ACCEPTANCE, LOVE, AND GRATITUDE

Here is a helpful exercise to foster love. Write down the red flags that are true for you. Open your heart to **facing, embracing, and replacing** these symptoms with love and gratitude. What are these red flags telling you? How can you change your life to listen, love, and honor this insight? You might imagine being showered in light and love and telling yourself you are valuable and lovable. Try doing this your way. For example, you can imagine speaking to your symptoms, saying, "I am sorry I have ignored you. I accept responsibility for you. I love you and care for you now." You can write down one new way to care for yourself.



12 TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMING TOXIC SHAME

So how do we shift from toxic shame? Let's jump right in, shall we?

These tools have been successful for me, my clients, friends, and family, and they will most likely be helpful to you. The first one, love, is the most powerful of all the tools. All the other tools below will be substantially more powerful when each is infused with love.

1. Love the shame - Often, we resist or push away feelings too early before acknowledging them. This causes emotions to heighten and creates a potential emotional volcanic eruption. One technique is to go deeper with the feeling of shame. Take time out alone to experience it. Imagine loving it, embracing it, and comforting it. Imagine that you are a channel for the highest form of Divine Love.

2. Change the body position - When we are experiencing toxic or chronic shame, we often posture ourselves to be small (acting out the wish to escape or disappear). We hump our shoulders, curve the body in upon itself, lower the head, close the eyes, or look away. Instead, we must practice exhilarating and elating. Practice recognizing the body position and lifting the body up. Imagine a feeling of confidence, joy, contentment and love.

TWELVE TOOLS

To Transforming Toxic Shame (Continued)



3. Share your story - Shame grows when we live a life of secrecy. Practice sharing your story without shame. This may take some time if you have spent a lifetime burying it. Start slowly. Begin by relating to shame and putting a voice to the feeling. "I feel ashamed." Eventually, you will associate your shame with valuable lessons and blessings.

4. Write in a journal - Make a habit of listening to feelings, writing in a journal daily, and recognizing emotions. Stop sedating and start communicating.

5. Embrace the blessings - Stop blaming or berating. Begin equating and appreciating. You might choose to write a daily gratitude list before going to sleep each night. Be mindful of finding something to be grateful for in every instance, even when it is troublesome, challenging, or uncomfortable. A stubbed toe can be a valuable reminder to slow down and be more aware of one's surroundings.

6. Surrender your life over to a greater power. Stop deflating. Start inflating by filling yourself with the Holy Spirit. Trust in God, a spiritual guide, Jesus, Buddha, a guardian angel, or your higher power, whatever that might be. Find the path that works for you and believe in it. Know that more will be revealed. Relax and take it one step at a time with the help of inner guidance and divine revelation.

TWELVE TOOLS

To Transforming Toxic Shame (Continued)



7. Community Support Groups - A supportive community of like-minded friends can be of immeasurable help to healing and recovery from toxic shame. Shift from hiding and vegetating to associating and communicating. Build friendships and begin trusting others.

8. Give to others - Consistent charitable efforts can be highly satisfying and life-changing for those suffering from toxic shame. However, it's essential to recognize the difference between a "do-gooder," "advice-giver," or "fixer" who tries to change others for their self-gratification and someone who is genuinely allowing others to move at their own pace, with no hidden agenda. True charity doesn't seek acknowledgment or reward and is never forced upon another without permission. Stop degrading and start innovating. You are a world-changer.

9. Psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy - Psychodynamic approaches to therapy can help toxic blamers and shamers release and reframe negative thoughts. Reframing destroys shaming.

10. Sports and Physical Exercise - Those who engage in sports and physical exercise are less likely to experience depression and are better able to manage new mental health challenges. Physical activity is a safe, natural way to express and release stress and anxiety. If you are out of shape, it's wise to consult with a doctor, coach, physical therapist, activity therapist, or recreational therapist before beginning a new exercise regimen. Be smart, be wise, exercise!

TWELVE TOOLS

To Transforming Toxic Shame (Continued)



11. Expressive Arts - The expressive arts provide some of the safest, alternative coping strategies to allow others to release emotions. This can be achieved through various creative activities, such as wood crafting, needlework, creative writing, drawing, piano playing, photography, gardening, cake decorating, singing, dancing, dramatic arts, sculpting, doll-making, jewelry making, etc. Human beings are designed to create. When we stop creating, we are blocking the natural expressive flow. This natural expression can be easily seen in a young infant and toddler. Children begin singing, play-acting, scribbling, and dancing before speaking. So let's stop hesitating and start creating.

12. Educate yourself about toxic shame. Read everything, watch videos, listen to podcasts, etc. Many people have successfully stopped toxic shaming by taking it one step at a time. If you get stuck, I am here for you. You can find out more about me below and contact me for one free private session. We can work together to achieve your goals and dreams.

Lickel B, Kushlev K, Savalei V, Matta S, Schmader T. Shame and the motivation to change the self. *Emotion*. 2014 Dec;14(6):1049-61. doi: 10.1037/a0038235. PMID: 25401288.



ABOUT JEAN

Jean Voice Dart, MS, CATP, is a #1 Best-Selling Author, Expressive Arts Specialist, certified expressive arts therapy practitioner, certified coach, and credentialed teacher. She has experienced a lifetime of miraculous transformation with the creative arts, witnessing thousands and assisting hundreds of clients with emotional or physical challenges such as generalized anxiety disorder, PTSD, TBI, coma, neuropathy, paraplegia, domestic or sexual violence and assault, autism, memory loss, chronic pain, aging, ADHD, speech disorders, stroke, hearing loss, blindness, depression, and more.

People working with Jean learn to feel, reveal, and heal by identifying buried emotions and rediscovering abandoned or neglected pathways to healing. Jean assists others in accessing their creative imagination, embracing their unique positive power, and transforming their lives to discover joy. She lives near the ocean with her husband, Matt, and their dog Pumpkin.

ABOUT JEAN

(Continued)



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- Kappa Delta Pi Member, Honors Society in Education
- American Music Therapy Association, Professional Member
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- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Professional Member
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- International Expressive Art Therapy Association, Professional Member
- Music Teachers National Association, Member, Credentialed Teacher
- Illinois State University, Dean's List; BS in Music Therapy, MS in Special Education
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- Ordained Minister

ABOUT JEAN

(Continued)



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