
parent cue

SHAMELESS



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WE'RE TEACHING THIS

Have you ever seen one of those really crazy celebrity headlines or photos on social media and thought, *How embarrassing?! Maybe you've thought, I would never do that! Or, I'd never say that. Or, I'd never wear that in public.* But the truth is, we've all done things that we wish we hadn't. We've all had a most embarrassing moment...or a few of them. There's nothing wrong with feeling a little red-

faced every once in a while, but when that feeling of shame carries over to how we see ourselves, how we treat others, and even what we think about God, it can be really harmful. As we explore what the Bible says about our best and worst moments, we may just discover that the best thing we can do with one of the worst feelings is to shame...less.

THINK ABOUT THIS

When is the last time your kid really messed up? Was it...

- a failure to make curfew?
- a \$200 data overage on the cell phone bill?
- a new dent in the family car?

Whatever it was, there's a good chance that you said *something* to them. Like any good parent, you probably corrected the bad behavior because you want them to grow up to be responsible, capable adults. And even if your teenager pretended not to listen or pretended not to care, you may have a sneaking suspicion that he or she really did feel bad about the whole thing. They felt guilty.

And *that's* a good thing.

Guilt helps us recognize that we've done something wrong, and the strong, uncomfortable emotion of guilt can assist a teenager in remembering to act differently next time. But as helpful as it may seem in the moment, guilt also has a dark

side. For teenagers, it's easy to move from believing they *did* something bad (guilt) to believing they *are* something bad (shame).

In her blog post, "Shame V. Guilt," author and researcher, Dr. Brené Brown describes the two this way:

I believe that there is a profound difference between shame and guilt. I believe that guilt is adaptive and helpful – it's holding something we've done or failed to do up against our values, and feeling psychological discomfort.

I define shame as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.

I don't believe shame is helpful or productive. In fact, I think shame is much more likely to be the source of destructive, hurtful behavior than the solution or cure. I think the



fear of disconnection can make us dangerous. I believe the differences between shame and guilt are critical in informing everything from the way we parent and engage in relationships, to the way we give feedback at work and school. I believe that if we want meaningful, lasting change, we need to get clear on the differences between shame and guilt and call for an end to shame as tool for change.

As parents, it can be tempting to use shame, as Brown says, “as a tool for change.” But, just like in our own lives, shame can produce some unfortunate side effects in our kids’ lives.

Specifically, shame separates, and as parents, that means shame separates us from our teenagers—a particularly detrimental effect at an age when they are already naturally pulling away.

Shame engages our natural instincts to hide, to cover ourselves, to pretend, or to distract. Shame keeps us stuck because it keeps us isolated.

Best-selling author and mom, Sherry Surratt, says, “I think as parents we use shame with our kids thinking it will somehow

reform their behavior, when actually all it accomplishes is distancing them from us. It’s the last thing we want.”

But how, in the moment, can we determine how to correct our child and guide them without heaping on the same shame that perhaps we’ve received?

One key is to **focus on the action, not the attribute**. When your teenager brings home an out-of-control cell phone bill or a walks in after curfew, keep the topic of conversation on the action, why it was wrong, and how to correct this situation next time. At the same time, try to avoid attaching the bad action to your child’s personality. Avoid phrases like:

- “Why are you irresponsible?”
- “You’re so lazy.”
- “That was really dumb.”

When we focus on a teenager’s actions instead of their attributes, it helps them understand that the problem is something that they can change. And it helps them remember that, while *what they did* wasn’t great, *who they are* will always be accepted by us.

TRY THIS

As parents, sometimes we use shame because it’s what we experienced as teenagers. When our kid messes up, we reach into our parenting toolbox and pull out whatever words and phrases our own parents passed down to us—which can be helpful sometimes, but not so helpful other times. But the best way to determine what we want to use with our own kids, is to name what worked and what didn’t when we were teenagers.

Sometime this week, **try answering the questions below and use your answers as a guide the next time you find yourself facing a kid who has messed up.**

1. What are some common words or phrases your parents used when you got in trouble as a kid?
2. Were those words or phrases helpful? How did they make you feel?
3. Which ones do you find yourself repeating with your own teenager? How does he or she respond?
4. What are some phrases you could use instead that would address the action without hurting your relationship with him or her?

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