

Flexible Mind SAGE:

A Practice for Dealing with Shame,
Embarrassment, and Feeling Rejected or Excluded

S use **Self-enquiry** to determine if shame is warranted.

A if shame is warranted or partially warranted, then **Appease**.

G if shame is unwarranted, then **Go opposite** from urges to hide.

E show embarrassment to **Enhance** trust and socially connect.

S

*Use **Self-enquiry** to determine if shame is warranted.*

- **During the event:**

- In the heat of the moment, when immersed in a shame-eliciting social interaction, get into the habit of asking “**What is it that I might need to learn from my emotion?**” before you do anything else. Look for a good question, not an exact answer.

- **After the event:**

- Following the shame-eliciting event, use the **RO DBT Self-Conscious Emotions Rating Scale** (pgs. 7-10) to determine the extent to which your emotional reaction was warranted.

A

*If shame is warranted or partially warranted, then **Appease**.*

- **Take responsibility** by admitting your wrongdoing, without justifying or defending yourself.
- **Signal integrity** by not falling apart.
 - Falling apart, sulking, pouting, and harsh self-blame are phony responsibility behaviors.
 - Expect to suffer, and then decide to **learn from it**. Warranted and partially warranted shame alert us to the very areas in our life that we may need to grow the most. Willingness to learn from shame (rather than avoid it) is an act of courage.
- **Out yourself** by revealing your wrongdoing to others.
 - Cheerlead yourself - people who openly admit warranted shame or guilt are universally perceived as prosocial.
 - Block attempts by listeners to validate your behavior.
- **Vary your social signaling** (pg. 5) to match the severity of your transgression.
 - **Signal shame** if your shame was warranted.
 - **Signal appeasement and regret** if your shame was only partially warranted.
- Regularly signal non-dominance and openness **after you have successfully repaired the relationship** by combining appeasement signals with cooperative, friendly signals.
- Nondominance signals are especially important if you are in a **power-up position** to the person(s) harmed.
- **Signal embarrassment** when your transgression involves violation of a culturally specific social norm (i.e., misspeaking, poor table manners, stepping on someone's shoe, etc).

G

*If shame is unwarranted, **Go Opposite** from urges to hide or appease.*

- Behave as if **you haven't done anything wrong** - because you haven't.
 - Don't apologize or appease.
 - Signal confidence.
- **Balance signals** of dominance (confidence) with signals of non-dominance.
- **Out yourself to a friend** about your shame experience being unwarranted to identify blind spots. Be open to critical feedback or disagreement about your shame being classified as unwarranted.
- **Identify potential disguised toxic social environments** that may trigger unwarranted shame using the following questions. If there are more NO responses than YES responses, then your environment may be toxic.
 - i. *Do I trust the other person's or persons' true intentions or motivations? YES/NO*
 - ii. *Do I trust them to tell me what they really think? YES/NO*
 - iii. *When in their presence do I generally feel calm and safe? YES/NO*
 - iv. *Do I have any evidence or past experience suggesting that they have my best interests at heart? YES/NO*
 - v. *Do they allow me time to express my inner feelings or ideas? YES/NO*
 - vi. *Are they open to me giving critical feedback or differing opinions? YES/NO*
- **If you believe the environment may be toxic, then...**
 - Expect to experience more unwarranted shame.
 - If possible, talk to the person(s) involved about your feelings. If you fear an extreme reaction, ask an independent person to be present.
 - If the toxicity involves a long-term relationship, seek independent counseling.
 - Use self-enquiry to examine how you may have contributed to the problem, without harsh self-blame.

E

Show Embarrassment to enhance trust and socially connect.

- Allow for **authentic expressions of embarrassment.**
- Don't feel embarrassed about getting embarrassed.
 - It means you care about other people (and your tribe).
 - Plus, people trust and like people who show embarrassment. We feel more connected with people who authentically show embarrassment because it signals that they care about social transgressions (i.e., hurting someone's feelings).
- **Expressing embarrassment is appealing.** For example, people display embarrassment signals when flirting (coy smile, blushing). People prefer to spend more time with people who reveal intense embarrassment rather than inhibit it.
- **You don't have to feel safe on the inside to socially signal safety and trust on the outside!**

Social Signaling



Cooperative/Friendly

- warm smile
- eyebrow wags
- eye contact



Confidence/Dominance

- stand or sit with your shoulders back
- keep your chin up
- maintain eye contact
- speak with a matter-of-fact tone of voice and normal volume



Shame

- lower head
- averting gaze
- frown when apologizing



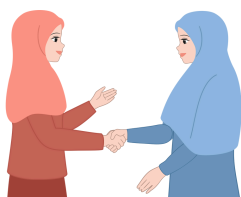
Appeasement/Regret

- slight bow of the head
- display prolonged shoulder shrugs
- use open-handed gestures
- maintain eye contact with the other person (to signal your confidence and commitment to change).



Embarrassment

- smiling
- nervous face touching
- blushing



Non-Dominance

- combine appeasement with cooperative-friendly

8 Steps for Relationship Repair

1. Signal deference and relinquish control when you make a repair by being polite, not talking over them, keeping voice volume low, allowing them control over the pace and content of the conversation.
2. Accurately identify the harm done and communicate this to the person(s) involved.
3. Confirm your perception of the harm done as valid from the person(s) harmed. Let go of arrogantly assuming you already know what it was—practice listening to their perspective without interrupting.
4. Block automatic rationalization or justification of your behavior.
5. Make a genuine effort to repair the actual damage done (for example, not just saying “I’m sorry” if one has damaged a wall, but finding a way to repair the wall itself).
6. Commit to genuinely working to not harm the person(s) again in a similar manner and promise to be more candid with them in the future.
7. Actively take steps to prevent future harm (for example, bring in an independent auditor to check on your progress; take a class or get professional help).
8. Forgive yourself for having harmed the other person(s), using Flexible Mind Has HEART skills to facilitate this (see lesson 29).

The Self-Conscious Emotions Rating Scale

Step One) Identify the event, circumstance, or interaction triggering shame or other self-conscious emotions that you wish to evaluate.

Step Two) Identify the specific behavior you displayed or failed to display during the event that you believe may have caused or contribute to your shame or self-conscious emotional response.

Step Three) Use the event and specific behavior you have just identified to answer each of the questions that follow with YES or NO.

Step Four) Add up the number of YES responses, and use the scoring guidelines at the end of the handout to determine the extent to which your shame was warranted, partially warranted, or unwarranted.

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| 1. Did I purposefully lie, fabricate, or fail to disclose important information in order to achieve a goal or benefit myself? | YES/NO |
| 2. Did my behavior significantly damage an important relationship and/or result in serious injury to other tribal members or the community itself but benefit myself? | YES/NO |
| 3. Did my behavior result in severe physical or psychological injury to another person and/or my tribe as a result of my negligence, greed, envy, malice, or overconfidence? | YES/NO |

****Note: If you answered YES to any one of the three preceding questions, your shame or other self-conscious emotion IS WARRANTED. If you answered NO to all three questions, then answer the questions that follow to determine the extent to which your shame or other self-conscious emotion is likely warranted, partially warranted, or completely unwarranted.****

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| 4. Have I been (or would I be) reluctant to make public/reveal, to the other persons involved, my hidden intentions during the event that triggered shame to get what I want or make things difficult? | YES/NO |
| 5. Have I avoided repairing the damage my behavior may have caused the other person(s) involved? | YES/NO |
| 6. Do I believe it would be important to correct a child if they had behaved similarly to how I did? | YES/NO |
| 7. Did my behavior betray or violate a prior agreement, commitment, or unspoken understanding between myself and the other person(s) involved? | YES/NO |
| 8. Was I in a position of power or authority over the person(s) involved when the event that triggered my shame or other self-conscious emotions occurred? | YES/NO |
| 9. Have I tried to justify or defend my actions/lack of action with people who were not present at the event or who were at the event but are in a power-down relationship with me? | YES/NO |
| 10. Would objective observers consider my behavior inappropriate, irresponsible, or unethical, given my position, my role, or my job at the time it occurred? | YES/NO |
| 11. Does my shame, embarrassment, or guilt refer to the actual situation I was in rather than to similar past events? | YES/NO |
| 12. Have I engaged in this type of behavior before and been told by others (or known myself) that it was inappropriate or morally/ethically wrong? | YES/NO |
| 13. Have I in any way purposefully avoided answering YES to any of these questions? | YES/NO |

Scoring Guidelines:

- If a YES response was recorded for items 1, 2, or 3 (the first three questions), then shame or other self-conscious emotions are warranted.
- Add up the YES responses for the remaining questions (items 4–13).
 - A score of **7 to 10** YES responses = *shame and other self-conscious emotions are most likely warranted.*
 - A score of **4 to 6** YES responses = *shame and other self-conscious emotions are partially warranted.*
 - A score of **0 to 3** YES responses = *shame and other self-conscious emotions are most likely Unwarranted.*