Breaking the Cycle of Shame and Self-Destructive Behavior

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Shame is: “I am bad” vs. “I did something bad.”
Shame involves an internalized feeling of being exposed and humiliated. Shame is different from guilt. Shame is a feeling of badness about the self. Guilt is about behavior — a feeling of “conscience” from having done something wrong or against one’s values.

Shame underlies self-destructive behaviors:

- Hidden shame often drives self-destructive behaviors and other psychological symptoms such as rage, avoidance, or addictions.
- Self-destructive behaviors often are an attempt to regulate overpowering, painful feelings but lead to more shame, propelling the self-destructive cycle.
- Secrecy, silence, and out-of-control behaviors fuel shame.
- Shame makes people want to hide and disappear, reinforcing shame.

http://psychcentral.com/lib/breaking-the-cycle-of-shame-and-self-destructive-behavior/00015434#at_pco=smlrebh-1.0&at_si=552d15fdbc893476&at_ab=per-2&at_pos=1&at_tot=4
Shame is created in children through scolding, judging, criticizing, abandonment, sexual and physical abuse.

**Breaking the Cycle of Shame**

Breaking self-destructive habits requires action, not just willpower:

- Changing destructive behaviors requires trying out new, affirming behaviors to replace them.
- New behaviors that generate positive feedback and reward create new connections in the brain, creating the momentum for ongoing growth and change. (Learning on a neurobehavioral level)

Shame can be relieved and healed by:

- taking healthy risks to be seen and known authentically, acting from a positive motive and trying out new behaviors in a safe (nonjudgmental) setting.
- taking actions that generate pride — the antidote to shame.
- breaking secrecy with people who understand.