

# Working with Shame

## online training



by Carolyn Spring



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## Session summary – what will you learn?

- Understanding a framework for understanding shame that is based in its neurobiology
- Understanding that to work effectively with shame there is a neurobiological sequence, from changing our state to changing our stance to changing our story
- Exploring how trauma and shame share certain neurobiological correlates
- Examining the phenomenological role of 'shame gremlins' in our lives
- Exploring the concept of shame resilience in terms of daily life mode (approach) rather than danger mode (avoid)
- Introducing a technique for modulating distress
- An overview of the lived experience of shame
- Exploring the need in working with shame to sit with distress, and the importance of not exacerbating shame

## Reflection Questions

1. What do your shame gremlins say to you?
2. What was your emotional and physical response to hearing my shame story?
3. Why do you think that treatment for shame often exacerbates it?

## Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

- Introducing a roadmap for the course content based on a non-triggering approach to shame (state, stance, story)
- Introducing the concept of shame not as 'a bad thing' or as dysfunction but as an essential survival mechanism
- Introducing polyvagal theory in terms of a 'trauma traffic light' and shame as a 'red zone' instinctive physiological and neurobiological response
- Examining behavioural responses to shame linked to the trauma traffic light (moving away, moving towards, moving against)
- Introducing the concept of shame's impacts on relationships via a shutdown of the 'social engagement system'
- Introducing the idea of developing a 'drill' (a pre-planned sequence of responses) when shame is triggered

### Reflection Questions

1. What are the kinds of things that trigger you into a shame storm?
2. What does it feel like, physically and emotionally, for you in shame?
3. What is (or could be) your drill when you are in shame?

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

- Introducing the concept of 'neuroception' and shame as a response to unsafety in terms of relational threat
- Understanding shame behaviours in terms of strategies to attain relational safety
- Applying this understanding in terms of the importance of the therapist communicating safety to a client at both a conscious and unconscious level
- Exploring the idea of the medical model as an implicit shame trigger
- Exploring ways in which judgment of the client can trigger shame

### Reflection Questions

1. What are your 'safe', 'dangerous' and 'life threat' behaviours for trying to stay safe relationally?
2. What obstacles are there for your clients before they even start the session?
3. How can you be non-superior with your clients, given the power differential?

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

- Exploring the idea of safety as the neural basis for the green zone of ‘social engagement’
- Examining different instinctive physiological responses to connection bids (e.g. smiling) based on prior experience
- Exploring the impact of prior trauma on state regulation, and framing resilience as the ability to shift fluidly and contingently between states
- Understanding crossover physiological states of amber/red (intimacy, vulnerability) and amber/green (play, courage)
- Understanding the red zone as disconnection and the green zone as connection
- Further understanding the green zone as home to compassion, empathy and attunement, and the relevance of this for healing from shame
- Exploring the dual stages of a compassionate response, via an amber zone response which can result in empathic distress, or pushing through to a green zone response which results in true compassion
- Exploring skills for developing true compassion, including mindfulness and ego-boundary distinction, and the importance of avoiding rescuing
- Exploring the profound effect of compassion on changing neural architecture and even immune response

### Reflection Questions

1. What are your barriers to compassionate presence? How easy do you find it to ‘sit with’ rather than ‘fix’ someone’s pain?
2. Have you ever felt that you’re not doing enough when sitting with someone’s suffering?
3. Are you ever tempted to be a helicopter or snowplough?

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

- Practical guidance from the research on how to communicate compassion
- Exploring the dogma of 'no touch' and counter arguments
- Exploring the suitability of the 'standard therapeutic frame' for working with complex trauma and embedded shame
- Exploring the need in working with shame to meet rather than shame needs and how such needs can be met ethically
- Introducing the concept of shame and stuckness as being neurobiological correlative states
- Addressing the drive towards quick solutions which exacerbate the shame of being stuck

### Reflection Questions

1. Is there a mismatch between what you are able to offer and what your clients need?
2. If so, do you think there is anything that can be done about that practically?
3. How else could you work with clients for them to experience love and belonging?

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

- Exploring the concept of ‘changing the stance of the self’ as established in the attachment literature and in relation to shame
- Exploring the phenomenological experience of shame and self-hatred and the cycle of numbing and attack
- Exploring the concept of reframing shame from being ‘the enemy’ to being ‘our friend’
- Understanding the evolutionary survival advantage of shame as a brake on behaviours that risk our exclusion from the tribe
- Exploring the physiological correlates of shame (and ‘unshame’) in terms of posture

### Reflection Questions

1. What is shame protecting you from – in your life?
2. Are you ‘engineering smallness’ in your life?
3. In what ways do you ‘puff up’ or ‘shrink back’ as a result of shame?

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

- Exploring the concept, having focused firstly on changing both state and stance, of changing the ‘story’ survivors have around shame
- Exploring the role of developing self-compassion rather than continuing to self-shame
- Understanding the ineffectiveness of shame in behavioural change
- Exploring tools to develop self-compassion and other-compassion on the road to healing from shame

### Reflection Questions

1. Do you feel “not good enough” because you’re not an ‘expert’ or psychiatrist?
2. Are your boundaries regulating for both you and the client?
3. How easy or hard do you find it to hold a boundary against shame-rage?

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

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- Exploring the role of developing self-compassion rather than continuing to self-shame
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### Reflection Questions

1. What are your barriers to self-compassion?
2. Do you have any shame that needs transmuting into guilt so that it can be resolved?
3. What are your practices for discharging shame?

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session



### Session summary – what will you learn?

- Exploring the phenomenological experience of shame in the context of relational breakdown
- Exploring how the emotion of shame can block the processing of all other feelings
- Exploring the concept of using the 'accelerator' as a counter to the 'brake' of shame
- Exploring the concept of sharing our shame stories to defuse them, but only to people who have earned the right to hear them
- Distinguishing between the courage to share shame stories in person (in therapy) versus to strangers on the internet
- Exploring the idea of shame offering the safety of a prison cell, whereas healing from shame requires compassion, courage and a sense of purpose

### Overall Learning Reflection from this session and the course as a whole



## SESSION 1

- '95% attention on your left foot' – Robert Cusick: <https://thecompassiontrain.com/>

## SESSION 2

- *Music and the heart* by Stefan Koelsch and Lutz Jäncke:  
<https://academic.oup.com/eurheartj/article/36/44/3043/2293535>
- *The effects of auditory stimulation with music on heart rate variability in healthy women*:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3715016/>

## SESSION 4

- *Connecting minds and sharing emotions through mimicry: A neurocognitive model of emotional contagion*:  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149763416306704>
- *Sniff and mimic – Intranasal oxytocin increases facial mimicry in a sample of men*:  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0018506X15302105>
- *A neuroendocrine account of facial mimicry and its dynamic modulation*:  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0149763416306984>
- *Embodied emotion perception: amplifying and dampening facial feedback modulates emotion perception accuracy*:  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1948550611406138>
- *Time, touch, and compassion: effects on autonomic nervous system and well-being*:  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22560756/>
- *Attachment style, vagal tone, and empathy during mother-adolescent interactions*:  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2011.00762.x>
- *Heart rate variability during adolescent and adult social interactions: a meta-analysis*:  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301051114002695>
- *Is low therapist empathy toxic?*:  
<https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fa0030274>
- *The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education database: empathy*:  
<http://ccare.stanford.edu/research/compassion-database/empathy/>
- *Compassion training multimedia e-book*:  
<http://www.compassion-training.org/>

## SESSION 9

- *When leaving your ex, love yourself: observational ratings of self-compassion predict the course of emotional recovery following marital separation*:  
<https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/Sbarra.pdf>
- *Listening to shame* by Brené Brown (TED talk):  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_listening\\_to\\_shame](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame)



## Info and links

### **‘Working with Shame’ online training by Carolyn Spring**

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