

TOXIC SHAME - WHEN CHILDREN LEARN TO FEEL LIKE THE PROBLEM

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Toxic shame is when a person learns to believe that something is wrong with who they are, not just with what they did. It is different from normal shame.

HEALTHY shame says:
"I did something wrong.
I need to put it right."

TOXIC shame says:
"I am wrong. Something
is wrong with me."

Children begin to develop toxic shame when they repeatedly hear messages such as:

"What is wrong with you?"

"You are too sensitive."

"Stop being dramatic."

"You are the problem."

"Why can't you be like other children?"

Instead of learning about behaviour, the child learns something much deeper:

They begin to believe:
"There is something wrong with me."

What toxic shame can look like later in life

A person may:

blame themselves for things that are not their fault

feel not good enough, even when doing well

apologise all the time

feel easily embarrassed or exposed

believe they are burden to others

Children need adults who say:

"That behaviour is not OK - but I still care about you."

"Everyone makes mistakes."

"Your feelings matter."

"Let's work out what happened."

Children learn who they are from the way adults speak to them.

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