

Shame: Is It Healthy or Toxic?

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..Like most things, *it depends*. Shame is felt in response to social disconnection or perceived lack of belonging. Depending on how we learn* to relate to shame, it can support [re]connection or keep us feeling stuck and alone.

Here are some ways to discern a healthy relationship to shame from a toxic one:

Healthy Shame	Toxic Shame
Helps develop social connection & awareness (prosocial)	Limits social-connection & awareness (anti-social)
Inhibits anti-social behavior to connect with others	Reinforces anti-social behaviors; feeling unworthy of connection
Behavior centered. Ex: “I’m ashamed of <u>what I did</u> .”	Self or identity centered. Ex: “I’m ashamed of <u>who I am</u> ” or “ <u>I am</u> unlovable”
Says “I can learn from mistakes and behave differently next time.”	Says “I’m worthless and stuck being a bad person.”
Increases sense of safety and belonging	Increases sense of isolation and separation

*Toxic shame is a learned response modeled for us as early as childhood. While we may internalize early experiences of toxic shame, we can also learn to reorient and rewrite those narratives with support. Remember, “Your worth is not up for debate” and you are always worthy of connection.

For more visit: www.rootedhalotherapy.com/resources

References:

Kain & Terrell (2018), *Nurturing Resilience: Helping Clients Move Forward from Developmental Trauma--An Integrative Somatic Approach*
Preston (2025), *Hustle, Flow, or Let It Go?: A Guide to Shame-Free Wellness That Honors Your Reality and Gives You Life*