There’s No Shame in Trying

Presented by:
Diane Wagenhals, M.Ed., CFLE
Website:  www.lakesidednet.com
Course Goals

We expect to help participants:

- Consider the situations in which anger leads to aggression
- Discover the connections among shame and anger and aggression, as well as ways to reverse destructive patterns
- Appreciate the profound premise that unhealthy anger that can lead to aggression; violence originates from shame and the implications of this premise
- Define healthy shame versus toxic shame and differentiate toxic shame from guilt
- Connect shame and rage, the social and economic system, punishment
- Recognize and understand shame-based parenting
- Promote pride, self-esteem and self-respect
- Consider shame as a relational dynamic
Observations about Anger, Aggression, Hostility and Violence

- Violence is defined as intentional use of physical force to purposely injure somebody or damage something.
- Violence can also be reflected in language that attacks, humiliates, threatens, terrorizes or causes another person to freeze, flee or fight back.
- Most aggression involves some degree of violence.
- Not every intentional, physical, forceful behavior is considered violent or aggressive.
- The motivation behind the behavior determines the category under which the behavior falls.
- Some people do not believe corporal punishment is a form of violence.
- It appears merely observing violence can have the same harmful results for children as when violence is directly experienced.
- Violence and aggression can be considered neurologically and bio-chemically, as well as behaviorally.
Other Qualities of Anger

- Anger varies in frequency.
- Anger varies in intensity.
- Anger varies in duration.
- People express their anger experiences differently.
- Anger can be confused with hostility and aggression, with some authors using the terms interchangeably.
- Most believe there is a connection between anger and aggression but that each are distinct in nature.
Anger and Aggression

- Only 10% of angry responses recorded by Averill in his studies were described as leading to aggression.
- This means that 90% of the time when people experience anger it does not result in an aggressive reaction.
- Averill also reported that more than 50% of anger episodes involved a loved one or someone well-known. Only 13% involve strangers.
- In 85% of cases, subjects described the cause of anger to be a perceived injustice by another that was preventable and voluntary.
Definitions

- Anger is an emotional state.
- Hostility is the underlying attitude that can fuel the intention to do harm or the angry affect.
- Aggression is an overt behavior, either physical or sometimes verbal, may be intended to bring harm to another person, object or system.
- Very young children may be aggressive as a primitive response to frustration.
Three Types of Overt Aggression

- Instrumental
- Emotional or Hostile
- Thrill and Adventure Seeking
Truths About Aggression

- Ways to prevent and respond to anger, aggression, hostility, and violence can be considered on continuums.
- Aggression has its’ place
- We need to respect the legitimacy of behaviors
The Profound Premise

- Unhealthy anger that leads to aggression and violence originates from shame.
- If we more directly attend to, reduce and prevent shame, the potential exists to dramatically reduce and prevent aggression and violence.
- If we effectively help adults become more aware and better equipped to address their own shame issues, it is more likely they can interrupt trans-generational messages and behaviors that are shame-based.
- If we can effectively reduce and eliminate shame-based processes, we can be agents of change who literally change the families of tomorrow for the better.
Subject Acknowledgements

- This information can evoke and perhaps provoke powerful reactions for those on the receiving end of it.
- Once an educator understands, absorbs, and integrates this information, it can deeply change how he or she looks at anger, aggression, hostility and violence.
- As educators learn in more detail about shame and some of its’ opposites such as respect, pride, and high, healthy self-esteem, they are encouraged to appreciate the connections these subjects have to anger and anger management.
- Exploring topics that are more related to underlying causes of problems as opposed to managing symptoms equips educators with ways to respond to students in deeper and meaningful ways.
- While it is necessary to treat symptoms, real change is more likely to occur if and when we can effectively identify and respond to deeper causes.
Appreciating What We Cannot Know about People

- Educators are not encouraged to provide therapeutic processes to students, parents, caregivers and other adults.
- At the same time, educators are encouraged to consider the degree to which their own childhood experiences and inner beliefs around shame might impact their interactions with children.
- Educators with underlying issues around shame might be influenced by those issues which then can spill into their behaviors and overall communication style with colleagues, parents, caregivers and in classrooms; especially when children require discipline.
Defining Shame

- John Bradshaw in *Healing the Shame that Binds You* states that shame is a normal human emotion unless it takes over a person’s whole identity, creating beliefs that he or she is flawed or defective as a human being.
- He calls this “toxic shame.”
- Healthy shame lets us know we are limited, which is part of our humanity.
- Healthy shame signals us about our limits and moves us to get basic needs met.
- Healthy shame helps us stay grounded and provides a basic metaphysical boundary that gives us permission to be human.
Defining Shame

- By knowing our limits, healthy shame can give a person a form of personal power.
- Healthy shame does not allow us to believe we know it all, often serving as a motivator that allows us to be open to our own creativity and learning.
- By knowing we are not perfect or always right, we continue to strive to grow and discover.
- Healthy shame is what Bradshaw calls “The psychological ground of our humility.”
Healthy vs. Toxic Shame

- Healthy shame becomes toxic shame when it moves from being an emotion that signals limits to one that is a state of being or a core identity.

- Bradshaw states, "Exposure to oneself lies at the heart of toxic shame."

- Toxic shame can be at the heart of many psychological syndromes such as neurosis, character disorders, political violence, wars and criminality.
Differentiating Toxic Shame from Guilt

- Healthy guilt is the emotion triggered when we behave in ways that are contrary to our beliefs and values.
- Guilt requires internalized rules and develops later in life than shame does.
- Guilt does not directly reflect someone’s identity and does not diminish a person’s sense of personal worth.
- Guilt involves the painful feeling of regret while taking responsibility for one’s action.
- With guilt there is the possibility of repair as well as learning and growth.
Differentiating Toxic Shame from Guilt

- With toxic shame, because it is a reflection of oneself, there is no possibility for repair.
- Bradshaw states, “Guilt is the emotion which forms our conscience. To be shameless is to have no conscience. The emotion of guilt moves us to change.”
- “A guilty person fears punishment and wants to make amends. A shame-based person wants to be punished.”
- James Gilligan notes that, “Punishment simultaneously intensifies feelings of shame and relieves feelings of guilt.”
Criminal Behavior as Reenactments

- Alice Miller explains that much criminal behavior is really acting out behavior, also called “reenactment.”
- By this, a criminal offender is behaving in the same ways he or she experienced as a child.
- As Gilligan concludes that shame is the primary underlying source of violence, both Miller and Bradshaw concur that criminals are usually acting out their own abandoning shame.
- Miller believes that, “Every crime contains a concealed story which can be deciphered from the way misdeed is enacted and from its specific details.”
Criminal Behavior as Reenactments

- Miller notes that when a child is being hurt in some way, the normal reaction is to cry out in anger and pain.
- When the anger is forbidden and the pain denied, the child is forced to repress his or her feeling and eventually identifies with the aggressor while repressing the specific memories of his or her abuse or neglect.
- Miller states, “Someone who was not allowed to be aware of what was being done has no way of telling about it except to repeat it.”
Connecting Shame and Rage

- Bradshaw believes that rage is the most naturally occurring cover-up for shame because it acts as a primary ego defense.
- He says that, “…when rage is used as a defense, it becomes a characterological style.”
- Rage protects by either keeping others away or by transferring the shame to them.
- If the person who has internalized rage acquires power, the result can be violence, revenge, vindictiveness and criminality.
Connecting Shame with the Social and Economic System

- Gilligan points out that one way shame spreads is via social and economic systems.
- There is humiliation associated with being assigned into an inferior social or economic group.
- The most powerful predictor of the homicide rate is the size of disparities in income and wealth between the rich and poor.
- Gilligan states, “Why do economic inequality and unemployment both stimulate violence? Ultimately, because both increase feelings of shame.”
America’s Caste System

- A “caste system” is defined as a system that divides people into classes according to their race, wealth, profession or status in society.
- Gilligan believes we have an unacknowledged caste system in America based on skin color and ethnicity that also provokes violence for the same reasons social and economic inequities do.
- Educators benefit from appreciating these thoughts even if their roles do not directly involve addressing these issues.
Connecting Shame with Punishment

- Gilligan proposes that one reason people are not able to understand underlying causes of violence and effective approaches for prevention is because we think in traditional moral and legal terms.
- If we focus on how evil a particular act of violence is and how much punishment the perpetrator then deserves, there is a fundamental flaw in the process that does not take into account underlying reasons and ethical justifications for violence.
- Gilligan states, “...punishment is the most powerful stimulus to violent behavior that we have yet discovered... Punishment does not prevent violence, it causes it, in addition to being a form of it.”
Connecting Shame with Punishment

- Gilligan encourages society to think about violence not as a moral or legal problem, but more as a problem of public health that deserves preventative medicine.
- He notes that, “…we treat illnesses, we do not punish them.”
Shame-Based Parenting

- Educators are invited and encouraged to nurture the parents who may seem to deserve it the least.
- These are the parents who most likely have so many deep wounds with a foundation of shame that they parent in an almost robotic way, even though it seems to be so passionate.
  - For example - A parent might be extremely sensitive to hearing anything they perceive as negative about their child depending on where they, themselves, are on a continuum of shame-based messages they received.
- The process of shaming or punishing parents who have shamed or punished children most likely perpetuates a vicious cycle.
- Educators have the potential to profoundly address these issues by looking beyond outward behaviors.
“Mid-Streaming”

- Appreciate that we are “mid-streaming” with thee issues.
- “Mid-Streaming” is a way to describe and validate that often educators are “jumping in midstream” when addressing any issue.
- This is because it is already actively in place within families, social systems’ belief systems and/or ways of behaving; factors that greatly contribute to how resistant or receptive people may be to new information or approaches.
Raise Awareness and Understanding

Consider the following basic questions in order to raise own awareness and understanding of the nature of shame:

~ What can people in general feel ashamed about?
~ What treatment by others can evoke shame in people?
~ What are some reasons parents, caregivers other adults and educators shame children?
~ What might educators do to address pre-existing shame-based beliefs in themselves or in children in their care?
Raise Awareness and Understanding

Consider the following basic questions in order to raise own awareness and understanding of the nature of shame:
~ What might educators, parents and caregivers do to proactively prevent themselves and children in their care from receiving and internalizing toxic shame messages?
~ What might it “cost” parents and caregiver and other adults to stop shaming their children?
~ How can educators intentionally address these “costs?”
~ What might be some of the potential benefits to adults and to the children in their care when educators can attend to, reverse, and prevents shame-based methods of interacting?
Strategies to Address Shame

- Consider the potential to activate shameful beliefs that already exist as they attempt to help parents.
- Clearly addressing shame-related issues requires a great deal of sensitivity and sophistication.
- Start with considering where you (as an educator) are respect-wise.
- Consider the degree to which each educator is able to respect each parent regardless of how they treat their child.
Practical Strategies to Address Shame Issues

Educators can:

- Raise awareness and understanding of beliefs that are the opposite of toxic shame
- Promote a healthy and appropriate sense of shame, pride, self-respect, self-esteem and who embraces his or her lovability and capability
- Intentionally affirm parents’ worth, potential, intentions, needs, rights, connection, gifts, talents, and struggles to do better
- Teach the principles that explain the process of infusing shame
Practical Strategies to Address Shame Issues

- Educators can offer guidance and suggestions for reversing toxic shame.
- Educators can invite parents to process life experiences that may have produced toxic shame within them (carefully respecting the line between education and therapy).
- Educators can encourage parents to seek outside professional help if issues become too painful to explore in the context of an educational setting.
- Educators can serve as role-models.
Connecting Spirituality with Shame

- No pressure or expectation that faith-based messages become part of an educator’s repertoire when interacting with parents or children
- Acknowledge that spirituality is an important dynamic for many educators, parents and children
- Bradshaw uses the 12-step program from Alcoholics Anonymous to focus on the connection between shame and a faith in God
Principles and Properties of Shame

- Often shame is the underlying cause of violence and aggression
- Shame is often insidious, sometimes disguised as self-righteousness, arrogance, prejudice, cluelessness, defiance or pseudo-confidence
- Shame tends to be complex
- Shame tends to be elusive
- How a person experiences, interprets and expresses shame is unique to each person
- Shame comes in degrees
Principles and Properties of Shame

- Once shame exists, the shame itself makes it difficult to reverse, undo, recover or heal
- The accumulation of shame occurs as a result of interpretations from outside sources
- Shame can be expressed in many ways
- Shame often begets shame within a person
- Shame often begets shame between two shame-based people
“Think About” Homework

- Educators are encouraged to raise their awareness with regard to shaming messages being transmitted around them and the possible impact these messages may have.
- Educators are encouraged to consider if and how the information presented relates to their own life experiences and ways to better understand themselves personally and professionally.
- Educators are invited to consider strategies they might apply to attend to and reverse shame-based beliefs in themselves and for the parents, caregivers and other adults with whom they work.
Recommended Reading

- *Anger Disorders: Definition, Diagnosis and Treatment.* Howard Kassinove, 1995.
- *Healing the Shame that Binds You.* John Bradshaw, 2005.
- *Preventing Violence.* James Gilligan, 2001. *(out of print)*