To Shame or Not to Shame is Not the Question

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Course Goals

We expect to help participants:

- Understand typical developmental processes of children and how shame is part of these processes
- Appreciate the power of words
- Comprehend the impact attitudes of superiority can have in anger and aggression
- Explore some protectors and antidotes to shame
- Refine and build their appreciation for the connections among discipline, punishment, shame, anger and aggression
Shame as Developmental Process

- According to Eric Erikson the psychosocial task for children ages 15 months to 3 years is to strike a balance between autonomy and shame and doubt.
- During this time children are involved in physical, emotional and relational explorations.
- Children may experience intense episodes of anger including temper tantrums as educators and other adults respond to their explorations.
- When educators and other adults respond in healthy ways as children explore, children can begin experiencing healthy shame.
Shame as Developmental Process

- If educators and other adults are unable to provide firm, but compassionate, limits the foundations for toxic shame are laid for children.
- Erikson states that in the next stage of development, children have the task of finding a balance between initiative and guilt.
- Just as shame can be toxic or healthy, guilt can be toxic or healthy.
- Unhealthy guilt occurs when someone takes unfair responsibility for something or someone.
Shame as Developmental Process

- James Gilligan in *Preventing Violence* notes, “...punishment simultaneously intensifies feelings of shame and relieves feelings of guilt.”
- It can be helpful for adults who work with children to understand that when children feel ashamed, being punished only adds to that shame.
- Conversely, when children feel guilty, they appreciate punishment because it can absolve them of that guilt.
The Power of Words

- James Gilligan in *Preventing Violence* states that one of the key principles for preventing violence is to “…give people a chance to talk, remembering that the only alternative to action - including violent action - is words.”

- There are many positive outcomes that can lessen feelings of anger and potential aggressive behaviors when educators provide opportunities for children to share stories and verbalize feelings.
The Power of Words

- These positive outcomes include:
  ~ Trust and safety can be promoted in the relationship.
  ~ Respect is received, which can serve as an antidote to violence.
  ~ Release and relief may be experienced from being allowed to express feelings and being invited to process.
  ~ As adults deepen their understanding, there is a growing appreciation of the child’s perspective.
The Power of Words

- Greene in *The Explosive Child* notes that children may experience explosive episodes because of their struggles with language skills.
- Language skills set the stage for many forms of thinking.
- Development of vocabulary including feeling words raises a child’s sense of confidence and willingness to put effort into managing emotions.
Attitudes

- Attitudes regarding beliefs of superiority can impact the degrees to which shame is imposed on those believed to be inferior.
- When someone believes they are superior (or another person or group of people are inferior), a dynamic enters the relationship that can promote shame.
- Assuming inferiority is different from understanding people can be different from one another.
- Authentic respect for differences and diversity decreases the imposition of shameful attitudes.
Beliefs about superiority and inferiority may often be grounded in shame-based beliefs.

This attitude and the accompanying disrespectful, humiliating behaviors temporarily allows one to feel superior, relieving some of their own shame-based sense of inferiority.

According to Clemes and Bean, a sense of power is one of the four essential components of a person’s self-esteem.
Attitudes

- When power is claimed in healthy ways a person is simultaneously able to respect that others deserve a fair degree of power and that it can be fairly shared based on each person’s right and needs.

- At a surface level bullies believe they are superior to others often because they struggle deep down with feelings of inferiority and shame.

- When someone deep down knows they are being unfair, it can increase their own sense of shame.
When Children are Considered Inferior

- Adults sometimes believe children are inferior beings because they are physically less capable as well as immature on many other levels, incapable of matching abilities with adults.
- This can be part of a family’s belief system and can connect with family legacies that dictate how children are treated.
- Other community or societal systems may also perpetuate this belief.
- This belief can make it more difficult to inspire adults to discipline in firm and gentle, nurturing ways.
Protectors and Antidotes to Shame

- Key protective factors and potential antidotes to shame include:
  - Respect
  - High, healthy self-esteem
  - Pride
Respect

- Promoting respect through interactions with adults and children may lessen violence because this indirectly addresses and reverses shameful feelings, attitudes and beliefs.
- Educators are invited to raise their self-awareness with regard to when and how they show and feel respectful toward themselves, those with whom they work and toward others in general.
Defining Respect

- Respect means a person has and shows a high positive regard for the worth of someone or something.
- Respect is a way to honor and appreciate someone or something.
- Respect is often the resulting attitudes and behaviors when someone has a high opinion of someone or something.
- Sometimes respect involves a decision to obey rules or directives put into place by authorities.
Qualities and Principles of Respect

- Respect is both an attitude and a set of behaviors.
- Genuine respect involves a deep belief that someone or something deserves to be valued, honored and appreciated.
- Respect is not the same as liking someone or something.
- Respect is owed to the person or thing.
- A person can decide to treat someone respectfully. He or she may not genuinely respect the other person, but can decide to treat them with respect.
Qualities and Principles of Respect

Respect takes four major forms, all of which are important:

~ Respect for self
~ Respect for others
~ Respect for all forms of life and the environment
~ Respect for principles and truths
Qualities and Principles of Respect

- We can respect ourselves and others, life and our world, and principles and truths, in a variety of ways.
- There are times when it is appropriate and wise to show respect for someone or something, even if that person or thing has not earned your respect.
- We can respect certain positions of authority.
- While most of the time people are worthy of our respect, there are times when someone in one of these positions does things that do not honor the position.
- Real, deeply felt, genuine respect is similar to trust in that it needs to be earned and maintained.
What People Often Respect

It is often fair and responsible to respect:

- Personal rights
- Rights of others
- Personal needs
- Needs of others
- Rules
- Policies
- Laws
- Principles
- Accepted truths
- Facts
- Credentials
- Status
- Personal beliefs
- Beliefs of others
- Personal goals
- Goals of others
- Past
- Own feelings
- Others’ feelings
- Impact of pain
- Personal values
- Others’ values
- Abilities
- Weaknesses
- Struggles
- Forces of nature
Some Other Categories of Respect

- Fire
- Speed {i.e. Driving in a car}
- Power of love to help someone heal
- Authorities in a person’s life {i.e. Boss, parent, law officer}
- Family rules
- Laws of community, state, government
- Court system
- Religion or faith organization’s principles, beliefs, values
- Friends
How People Show Respect

- There are some specific behaviors that are considered respectful.
- It is important to know how to behave respectfully.
- This information can be especially helpful to adolescents who are often criticized for not being respectful and yet may not have clear information about the behaviors that project respect.
- For each behavior that is respectful, there are other behaviors that would be the opposite.
How People Show Respect

- When speaking with someone in a respectful way, a person:
  ~ Faces the person
  ~ Makes and keeps eye contact
  ~ Uses facial expressions that are friendly and match what is being said
  ~ Uses body language that is open and accepting
  ~ Stands or sits straight up
  ~ Stands or sits about 18 inches from the other person
  ~ Gives the other person time to express thoughts, feelings, needs, values, issues, and concerns
How People Show Respect

- When speaking with someone in a respectful way, a person:
  ~ Uses I-messages to share opinions
  ~ Maintains his or her cool
  ~ Speaks with a firm but calm voice
  ~ Speaks slowly
  ~ Does not interrupt
  ~ Uses polite terms
  ~ Knows when circumstances require certain language (i.e. “Yes, Your Honor”)
How People Show Respect

- Within certain social groups there are specific rules for showing respect.
- The closer and safer people are in relationships, the less formally they need to practice outward respectful behaviors.
- When people are respectful of each other, it becomes less likely for there to be hostile, angry or aggressive interchanges.
High, Healthy Self-Esteem

- Educators can benefit from understanding the core principles and properties of self-esteem and ways to intentionally promote self-esteem in adults and children.
- There is more detailed information on this subject.
- We are going to focus on the importance of promoting “CUPS.”
  - Connectiveness, a sense of belonging
  - Uniqueness, a sense of being respected for individuality
  - Power, a sense of having the right to certain power
  - Sense of role models, ways to imitate those held in high esteem
High, Healthy Self-Esteem

- Educators can intentionally promote high, healthy self-esteem in others by attending to each of these components.
- Shame tends to form its own blockade to healthy, non-shaming messages.
- Educators can help others learn to intentionally promote high, healthy self-esteem in children while simultaneously avoiding shame-based messages.
- Those who have developed relatively high, healthy self-esteem are better able to manage their anger and are less likely to be aggressive when they are angry.
Healthy Pride

- Healthy pride, as opposed to arrogant, self-aggrandizing, competitive pride that emphasizes a presumed superior status, involves a stronger degree of respect.
- Healthy pride is recognition of a quality or ability that is being used in a positive or impressive way.
- The previous list of specific categories of respect invites educators to consider areas for which they also feel pride, how that pride is expressed and how it adds to overall sense of self-worth, self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.
Connecting Discipline, Punishment, Shame, Anger and Aggression

- Educators are encouraged to consider:
  - The degrees to which they understand similarities and differences between each
  - What the principles, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors often are
  - Which ones tend to promote emotional and relational health
  - Which ones damage or detract from emotional and relational health
  - When and how they might apply each when interacting with others
  - When and how to present the information to others.
“Think About” Homework

- Educators are encouraged to raise their awareness with regard to the typical developmental processes of children and the impact of shame on these processes.
- Educators are invited to consider the power of words and how they might convey this information to children and other adults.
- Educators are invited to explore the protectors and antidotes to shame.
- Educators are encouraged to consider if and how the information presented relates to their own life experiences both personally and professionally.
Recommended Reading

- **Healing the Shame that Binds You.** John Bradshaw, 2005.
- **How to Raise Children’s Self Esteem.** Clemes & Bean, 1985.
- **Preventing Violence.** James Gilligan, 2001. *(out of print)*
- **Website:** [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)