

DR. DIANE POOLE HELLER'S  
**HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE SHAME?**



*Symptoms of Toxic Shame  
Checklist*

Shame is an incredibly powerful emotion that can cause us to fall into depression, sabotage relationships, fuel addictions and make it difficult to ask for the help we need.

Since shame can come in many forms, the following checklist can help you identify some of the most common symptoms of shame.

Please rate the severity of your symptoms using the assessment questions below. Be sure to answer all the questions.

“0” means no difficulty, or no negative effect, while “5” is severe difficulty, or a high level of interference with your life.

### Emotional Symptoms (How does shame make you feel?)

	<i>NONE</i>					<i>SEVERE</i>
<b>1.</b> Isolated, alone	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>2.</b> Unwanted	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>3.</b> Like you are bad or unworthy	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>4.</b> A need to hide parts of yourself	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>5.</b> Confused and disoriented	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>6.</b> Constantly judged and scrutinized	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>7.</b> Often irritable and angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>8.</b> Like you don't have the right to exist	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>9.</b> Wanting to disappear	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>10.</b> Resentful	0	1	2	3	4	5

	<i>NONE</i>					<i>SEVERE</i>
<b>11.</b> Fear of spontaneity	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>12.</b> Frozen by decision-making	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>13.</b> Like a fraud or imposter	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>14.</b> Not “good enough”	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>15.</b> Like you don’t belong or fit in	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>16.</b> Crying or anger in response to embarrassment	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>17.</b> Unconfident, doubting your ability	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>18.</b> Ostracized	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>19.</b> Blamed by others	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>20.</b> Fear of trying new things	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>21.</b> Fear of failing	0	1	2	3	4	5



# Mental Symptoms (How does shame affect your cognition and focus?)

	<i>NONE</i>			<i>SEVERE</i>		
<b>22.</b> Difficulty expressing yourself: fragmented thoughts or speech	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>23.</b> Brain fogginess	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>24.</b> Critical of self	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>25.</b> Critical of others	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>26.</b> Constantly trying to outperform others	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>27.</b> Perfectionism	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>28.</b> Concerned with achievement over connection	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>29.</b> Criticism focused on yourself rather than the event (Not: "I made a mistake," but: "I AM a mistake.")	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>30.</b> Indecisive	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>31.</b> Fragmentation or brokenness of memory	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>32.</b> Harsh self-talk	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>33.</b> Believing something is wrong or broken in you	0	1	2	3	4	5



## Physical Symptoms (How does shame manifest in the body?)

	<i>NONE</i>					<i>SEVERE</i>
<b>34.</b> Blushing, flushing or rush of heat	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>35.</b> Time feels slowed down	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>36.</b> Slouching—shoulders rounded or hunched	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>37.</b> Want to hide or run away	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>38.</b> Urge to fight or argue	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>39.</b> Feeling frozen, can't speak or move	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>40.</b> Sweating	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>41.</b> Inability to make eye contact; gaze aversion	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>42.</b> Increased heart rate	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>43.</b> Hiding your face	0	1	2	3	4	5



## Interpersonal Symptoms (How does shame make you behave in relationships?)

	<i>NONE</i>					<i>SEVERE</i>
	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>44.</b> Blame others for your problems	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>45.</b> Placate others	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>46.</b> Shut people out or avoid getting too close	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>47.</b> Difficulty letting go of resentment	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>48.</b> Take on responsibility for other people	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>49.</b> Chronic apologizing	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>50.</b> Repetitive behaviors	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>51.</b> Try to control situations or others	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>52.</b> Lie, feel the need to deceive others	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>53.</b> Need to have the last word	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>54.</b> Difficulty apologizing	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>55.</b> Evasive	0	1	2	3	4	5

## ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Review your answers and highlight the symptoms you marked 4 or 5. These scores point to places in your life that would be a good starting point for additional exploration—or where you might benefit from professional support and attention.

Because shame is a difficult emotion to pinpoint, it can be useful to share these symptoms with your therapist or support person. Ironically, sharing your negative, self-critical thoughts with another person is often one of the best ways to counter shame.

Finally, it's also helpful to re-take this symptom assessment periodically, so you can track changes and evaluate your progress.



**Dr. Diane Poole Heller**  
SOMATIC ATTACHMENT & TRAUMA EXPERT