



## Active Mind & Body Newsletter - Issue No.5 June 2007

### “Feeling Your Way Into Health and Happiness”

Emotions are often described as mysterious and difficult to cope with. Regular readers of my newsletters, however, have previously heard me speak about demystifying emotions by using a set of core universal principles to better understand them. Understanding these principles allows us to use emotions in the way they were intended – to enhance our health and happiness.

I have covered these core principles in previous newsletters and you can find this information at [www.activemindandbody.com.au/news.html](http://www.activemindandbody.com.au/news.html)

In the next four editions, I will focus on how to use these universal principles on the following four specific primary emotions\*:

1. Shame
2. Fear
3. Guilt
4. Sadness

(\* Primary emotions sit beneath secondary emotions, or emotions at the core of a situation)

While I'm sure most of us have not had trouble with all the emotions listed, it is still useful to discuss and understand them!

In my practice, I have found that one of these four primary emotions was at the heart of emotional and psychological difficulties for almost every client. And my own situation in the past was no different ... so it makes sense for us to turn the spotlight on to these four emotions.

Have you ever felt...

1. like you wanted to fade into the background?
2. like you wanted to be swallowed up by a big hole?
3. like everyone was looking at you and you were totally exposed?
4. like you wanted to disappear?
5. or that something was wrong with you or what you have just done?

These are examples of the shame response.

As you can see, the shame response is unpleasant. Fortunately, however, shame does have a healthy and useful purpose and can be used positively in your life.

What is shame and what is healthy shame?

Shame and guilt are responsible for helping us manage boundaries and relationships. (I will discuss guilt in the next edition).



Shame only occurs in a relationship. The more we care about the relationship, the more vulnerable we are to shame and its relatives such as shyness, embarrassment and self consciousness.

The purpose of shame is to help let us know how well we are being received by the people around us, thus the emotional logic of shame is about being received. When we – particularly our needs and goals – are received well, we feel supported and can allow these needs/goals to be expressed and met.

When shame goes wrong!

Sometimes the people around us can send a very different message, e.g. “You are not ok!” As a consequence, we may feel our needs or goals are not OK, and that we are not being “received well” by the people around us. The result is we may feel that there is something wrong with us.

When this situation occurs continually, the particular need or goal that is not being “received” becomes linked with shame. So, every time we have this need or goal, we feel the shame response and cannot meet that need. And this is where things start to go wrong!

This situation is not uncommon in our families and culture. For example, a young boy feels very scared about something new in his life (a very common response in young boys) and needs support. However the people around him (parents, school teachers or culture) let him know that men don’t feel or express fear and that his need to be supported is not ok. If this happens often enough, fear and shame become linked, leading to a habitual shame response. This is a very common cause of emotional difficulties, as the boy in this example will never be able to work through his fear in a positive way.

Shame has the potential to happen in any relationship and with any emotion or need.

Can you see how a habitual shame response caused by negative past experiences (not being “received”) can have such a detrimental affect on our lives?

The key to changing habitual shame responses (which most of us have to a greater or lesser degree) is to:

1. become aware of the shame response and when we are having it
2. identify the original need that has not been met in the situation
3. work through that in the context of the shame
4. meet that original need

When these steps have been followed a few times, the habitual shame response is then broken and we finally get to meet the need in a positive way.



However, doing this can be very difficult for people because, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, we can only transform an emotion when we are feeling it. This means we have to be feeling the shame and the need linked with it to have any hope of changing the pattern and this can be very difficult, even in the context of supportive counselling.

Shining a light on shame and its impact on our lives can be very powerful for people. While it's not easy, it allows us to finally understand why we do certain things and when this knowledge is also linked to the original childhood pattern, the insight can be positively life-changing. And, because shame follows universal principles, when we understand these principles, we can then apply that emotional logic to any situation, greatly increasing our emotional intelligence.

I hope you have found this useful.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone who may be interested, email or call me with any questions you may have or better yet send me stories about how you have used these ideas to make positive changes to your life.

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Coming Soon  
In the next newsletter we will be looking at guilt.

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