**PURPOSE OF GROUP:** to understand the difference between guilt & shame

to increase emotional awareness

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** pens/pencils for each group member

piece of paper for each group member

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1. Facilitator opens group by introducing topic, **guilt & shame**. You can start with an activity by breaking the group up into two “teams”.

   * Ask each team to pick a team leader, and give him/her a pen/pencil & piece of paper
   * Tell one team to discuss what it means to feel guilt. Tell the other team to discuss what it means to feel shame
   * Note that the terms are often used interchangeably, but they are different!
   * The team leader will write down a definition, examples, etc. (can do bullet-points) and will present what they came up with to the rest of group after each team is done brainstorming

   - After they present, tell group members we will review guilt & shame to learn the differences between the two (and see how well each team did!)

2. **Guilt:** feeling responsible or remorseful for something
   
   - **Examples:** Feeling guilt after you forgot to wish your friend a happy birthday, feeling guilt after you yelled at your partner, feeling guilt after you drove home drunk

   - Ask group members to share times in which they have experienced guilt
- Feeling guilt is not always a bad thing. Guilt can motivate us to make positive changes.
  - Example: John feels guilty every time he does something hurtful while drunk, so he has decided to cut back on his drinking
  * Ask group members, “What is a positive change you’ve made due to guilt?” and “What is one thing you want to change to avoid guilt?”

3. Before you define shame, it might be interesting to try this quick activity:
   - Give each group member a pen/pencil & piece of paper
   - Ask them to write down every word they can think of when they think of themselves
   - Give them a few minutes and then ask them to put the paper aside for now

- **Shame**: feeling like a failure; feeling inferior
  - Example: Pam feels she is worthless & unimportant. She feels she is a mistake.

- Note the difference between guilt & shame (you can re-read the definitions of each)
  - In a nutshell: Guilt = “I’ve done something bad”; Shame = “I am bad”
  - Guilt focuses more on the behavior while shame focuses on the self

- Come back to the activity you did before defining shame. Ask group members if they wrote down words like unworthy, stupid, unlovable, lazy, etc. This can indicate shame.
  * You can ask group members, “Why do you think you wrote down those words?”

- Some common reasons why we develop shame include:
  - The way we were treated or talked to throughout childhood
  - Our tendency to self-blame
  - Having unrealistic expectations/standards
Shame can lead to things like substance abuse, depression, eating disorders, & low self-esteem.

- Shame can turn into **bullying** because a bully’s behavior is often just a projection of their own insecurities and feelings of shame & inadequacy (**hurt people hurt people!**)  
- In fact, shame can turn into aggression/violence because of the resentment & anger it causes a person to feel

4.

- Facilitator can conclude group by going over **ways to address feelings of guilt & shame.**

  **- Guilt:**
  a. Take responsibility for the things you’ve done (stop rationalizing your behaviors!)
  b. Ask for forgiveness from those you’ve hurt
  c. Forgive yourself & accept that you cannot change the past
  d. Make positive changes so you don’t repeat harmful behaviors (it’s important to determine the catalyst to your behaviors)

  **- Shame:**
  a. Allow yourself to be vulnerable (open up to someone- a family member, a friend, a support group, etc.)
  b. Practice self-compassion
  c. Accept & embrace your flaws
  d. Practice mindfulness (helps you distance yourself from your obsessive, negative thoughts)

*You can ask group members to name other ways to address feelings of guilt & shame

- If you want to, you can end by asking a volunteer to once again review the differences between guilt & shame.