Session 13: Guilt Says I Did Bad. Shame Says I Am Bad.

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Whiteboard (two-column guilt/shame chart); workbooks; the Session 13 handout (Translating Shame into Guilt)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Distinguish guilt (about behavior, can lead to repair) from shame (about identity, leads to hiding and use)
- Trace their personal shame cycle — trigger, hiding, use, more shame
- Describe how a settled worth — separate from behavior — answers shame without excusing behavior

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 2 — Healing. The one idea today is that guilt points at a behavior and can lead to repair; shame points at identity and leads to hiding. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Guilt and shame feel similar and work oppositely. Guilt points at a behavior and can lead to repair; shame points at identity and leads to hiding — and hiding leads back to use. Today we learn to tell them apart and to translate global verdicts into specific, workable facts.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: “When you have done something you regret, which voice comes first: 'I did a bad thing' — or 'I am a bad person'?” Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Guilt and shame feel similar and work oppositely. Guilt focuses on a behavior — I lied, I stole, I missed the visit — and its healthy function is repair: it points at something specific that can be confessed, owned, and where possible made right (Week 5 builds on exactly this). Shame focuses on identity — I am a liar, I am trash, I am the family disgrace — and its function is hiding: it drives us from people and from help, straight back into the cycle that caused it. Shame is therefore not humility and not a teaching tool; it is relapse fuel. The answer this program teaches is precise: the verdict on the person is settled — worth is not on trial — while the behavior is dealt with honestly, in the light, with repair. A program that shames people into change gets compliance in the room and relapse outside it.

- **Specific is workable, global is not** 'I missed Tuesday's visit' can be repaired. 'I'm a terrible father' can only be hidden from or numbed. We translate global verdicts into specific behaviors wherever they appear.
- **Shame needs secrecy; honesty needs light** Whatever stays hidden keeps its power. Paced honesty with safe people (Week 1) is shame’s direct antidote.

- **Worth is settled, growth is ongoing** Participants are not on probation for their personhood here. Behavior has consequences and repair is real work — and none of it is the price of belonging.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Honesty and safe disclosure are core coping topics in present-focused trauma and addiction work, taught without forced or graphic disclosure (Najavits, 2002). Key sources for this session: Najavits (2002); Koenig (2012). Evidence strength: Moderate; theological foundation for confession itself. Spiritual practice: Confession — correlates with structured self-disclosure and shame reduction; evidence: Moderate (Najavits, 2002; Koenig, 2012). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Where did you first learn shame as the response to failure — home, school, church, the street?
2. What does shame make you do in the first hour after it hits?
3. Is there a specific guilt you are carrying that is actually pointing at a repair you could make? (Sessions in Week 5 will prepare it — no rushing today.)

Skill practice (12 minutes)

In pairs, participants take one global shame sentence ('I am _____') and translate it together into guilt's specific, workable form ('I did _____; the impact was _____; a repair step could be _____') — or, if no behavior of theirs is involved (shame absorbed from others' actions), into its true form ('That was done to me; it describes an event, not my worth'). Share translations, not the original stories, with the group.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

This week, run the translation every time you catch a global verdict: write the 'I am' sentence, then the specific or corrected sentence beside it. Bring your best translation to Session 14. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Facilitators model the language discipline absolutely: no participant is called an addict as an identity label in this room ('person in recovery' is our usage), no story is met with visible shock, and no consequence in the program is ever delivered with contempt. If a participant discloses

something that triggers a reporting duty, follow program policy and the Crisis Protocol framing — calmly, privately, and the same day.

Closing (2 minutes)

Specific is workable; global is not. Run the translation every time a verdict lands this week, and bring your best one next session, when we take up receiving forgiveness — letting the verdict land.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐