

STEPPING OUT OF FEELING/SHAME BINDS

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Did you play cowboys & Indians or cops & robbers games when you were a kid? The kids in my neighborhood did. Somebody was always the Loser who then got his/her hands or feet roped up, usually with great gusto by the Winner.

The binding by the rope is intended to reflect superiority in the Winner and inferiority in the Loser. Partial paralysis and a feeling of helplessness (however playful in the game) follow. That's the way shame binds work too. Shame makes us feel not only inferior, and defective, but also inhibited. Bound up inside and unable to move forward.

We can experience this bind which can prevent us from acting upon, or expressing:

- Feelings (anger, love, fear, joy, sadness, etc.)
- Drives (hunger, thirst, intimacy)
- Needs (Including: survival, safety, touching, attention, validation, guidance, listening, being authentic, participating, acceptance-belonging, growing through grieving, support, loyalty & trust, accomplishment, creativity, making a contribution, sexuality, fun, freedom, nurturing, unconditional love)

A common feeling/shame bind can occur when an authority figure hurts our feelings. We may understandably feel anger-which quickly changes or is covered over by feeling shame. Then too, we may become afraid and confused. All of these feelings swirling around may make us feel overwhelmed and we may think we are losing control, so we quickly try to suppress the feelings. The suppression then makes us numb.



We may become dysfunctional while this is happening and for several minutes afterward. Then we may become further shamed by feeling so dysfunctional. Even worse it's in front of the other person.

Here is one 40 year old computer programmer's description of her process.

"Last week I went to visit my father and within 5 minutes of arriving he started joking about my job. "Here's the Big Shot Geek Squad." I felt confused, anxious, angry and helpless- as if I were 5 years

old! I hung my head and went numb and wanted to go to my old room to get away. How hatefully familiar that all felt!

“Thankfully, I was able to use what I’ve been learning here. Number one, I was able to observe what was happening. Then, I started taking slow deep breaths, the way we have practiced, to calm and clear up the confusion. Then I stood up and moved around the den. The simple act of moving- not allowing myself to be bound physically *really* helped. I went for my purse and dug out my car keys, reminding myself that I don’t have to stay in his presence. I’m big now. I can get away- something I couldn’t do when I was 5.

“Next time, if he- when he- does the same thing, I’ll set limits with him. I’ll tell him, “I don’t like it when you joke about my career that way, and if you keep doing it, I won’t visit you anymore.” Boy, does that feel powerful!”

To summarize the steps she took to break out of the bind:

- She observed what was happening, both his behavior, and her feelings
- She practiced controlled breathing
- She moved around the room
- She comforted herself with self-talk that reminded her that she could get away now- with a concrete physical object
- She started setting boundaries on his behavior

You don’t have to stay stuck in the shame quagmire. It takes work, but [Freedom from Shame](#) is available. You learned to inhibit yourself and feel inferior and you can learn to break the binds too.

Dr. Jane Bolton, a marriage and family therapist, master life coach and contemporary psychoanalyst is dedicated to supporting people in the fullest expression of their Authentic Selves. This includes Discovery, Understanding, Acceptance, Expression, and Self Esteem. Call 310.838.6363 or visit www.Dr-Jane-Bolton.com .