

Overcoming Shame for Addiction

Shame is a deeply painful emotion that often fuels the cycle of addiction. It's the belief that you are fundamentally flawed, unworthy, or incapable of change. Shame creates a sense of isolation and self-loathing, driving you to seek relief or escape through substances or addictive behaviors. This creates a vicious cycle: addiction temporarily numbs the pain of shame, but the consequences of addictive behaviors—such as damaged relationships, missed opportunities, or physical harm—often intensify feelings of shame.

Overcoming shame is crucial to recovery because it allows you to reconnect with your humanity and see yourself as more than your struggles. Through creative exercises like drawing your "shame monster" and practicing self-compassion, this worksheet will guide you in exploring feelings of shame and recognizing that addiction doesn't define your worth.

PART 1: Identify Shame

Understanding what shame looks, sounds, and feels like for you is a first step toward healing.

What does shame look like for you?

Is there a particular facial expression or posture you associate with feeling ashamed?

What actions or behaviors do you engage in when you feel shame (e.g., withdrawing, avoiding eye contact)?



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What does shame feel like for you?

How does shame manifest in your body (e.g., tightness in the chest, heaviness, a pit in your stomach)?

How does it affect your energy levels (e.g., feeling drained, wanting to hide)?

What does shame sound like for you?

How would you describe the “voice” of shame in your mind?



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PART 2: Draw Your Shame Monster

Drawing your shame monster can help you visualize this emotion and see it as something separate from yourself.

Grab some markers, pencils, stickers, or any other art supplies you have on hand. On the blank space provided, draw what your shame monster looks like. It doesn't need to be a perfect drawing; the goal is to capture how you perceive your shame. Think about what colors, shapes, and features represent your shame. Is it big or small? Does it have a voice? Is it looming or hidden?



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PART 3: Journal Questions for Reflection

Journaling can be a powerful tool for processing emotions and shifting your perspective. If journaling feels overwhelming, try setting a timer for maybe 10 minutes, and come back to this part as needed. Use additional paper as needed.

How has shame shown up in your life related to your addiction?

What are some beliefs or messages you tell yourself when you feel shame?

How has shame impacted your recovery journey?

What would it look like to respond to yourself with compassion instead of shame?



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PART 4: Practicing Self-Compassion

Shame often thrives when we are too hard on ourselves. Self-compassion is about treating ourselves with the same kindness and understanding that we would offer a friend.



Replace self-critical thoughts with compassionate ones.



Use gentle physical touch to comfort and soothe yourself.



Journal your thoughts and feelings with a focus on self-compassion.



Observe your thoughts and feelings without judgment.



Speak to yourself with the same kindness as you would a friend.



Practice gratitude, focusing on what you appreciate about yourself.



Pamper yourself with some over the top self-care



Surround yourself with people and animals who love you



Protect your well-being by setting boundaries - say no when you need to.



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PART 5: Positive Affirmations & Mantras

Positive affirmations and mantras can be used to counteract shameful thoughts.
Circle one or two that resonate and repeat them daily.

1. I am so much more than my addiction.
.....
2. I did my best today, and that's enough.
.....
3. Mistakes are a natural part of growth.
.....
4. I am worthy of compassion and understanding.
.....
5.
.....
6.
.....
- 7.

PART 6: Action Plan

Write down four steps you can take when you notice shame arising. Make the action plan as specific as possible, keeping in mind where you are and what is available to you.

Situation Description #1:

Self-Compassion Practices:



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Situation Description #2:

Self-Compassion Practices:

Situation Description #3:

Self-Compassion Practices:





Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



300+
Companies Reviewed



2,350+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,150+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.

