

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO SHAME IN CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE FOR PARENTS/CARERS

We need to set limits and say 'no' in order to protect children from hurting themselves or others. Whilst it can sometimes feel difficult to say no, limit-setting is helpful for children. Not only can it help keep them and others safe, but it can help your child understand that:

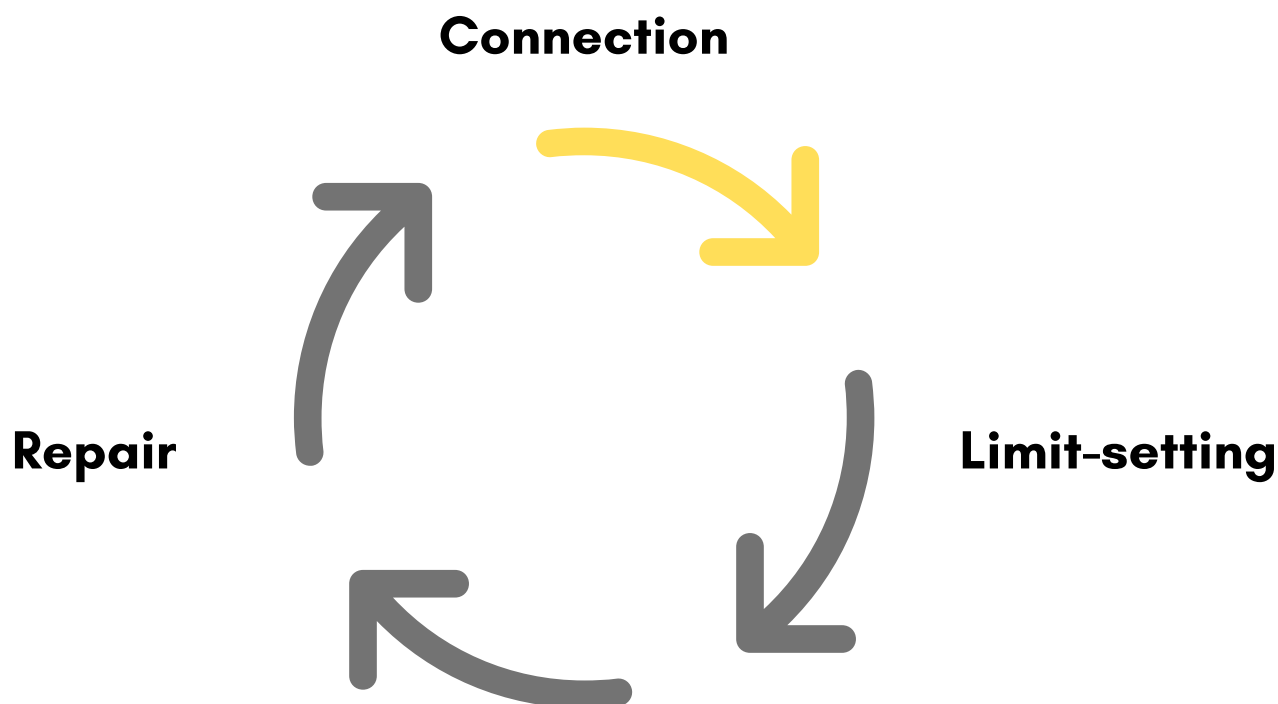
- "We give different responses in different situations"
- "If I behave in certain ways, I can avoid the experience of shame"
- "My behaviour affects others", which is the start of the development of empathy

Children can experience feelings of shame when they interpret limit-settings meaning that they are bad rather than the behaviour is bad. When children experience shame, they often become quiet or try to hide. Some children might also deny they did anything wrong, become angry, or blame others to reduce feelings of shame (see Shield of Shame section). You can recognise these behaviours and reconnect instantly by repairing the relationship, soothing your child, and showing them how to do the activity appropriately. By doing this, children experience small manageable amounts of shame.

This is the easiest time to teach them:

**"It's not you, it's
the BEHAVIOUR"**

The process of managing feelings of shame is done through connecting with your child, setting limits when needed, and repairing any relationship difficulties through love and acceptance.



However, the experience and impact of shame are very different if a child has a history of difficult experiences and/or traumas. Some difficult experiences (e.g., being screamed at, being bullied, being left out or left alone) can leave children feeling that “there is something wrong with me” and they can develop a lasting feeling of shame.



The Shield of Shame

Experiencing shame is difficult for children, especially if the repair does not happen after limit-setting. They do not learn that “I am not the problem; the behaviour was the problem”. If they constantly experience feelings of shame, or those feelings become unmanageable then children develop ‘a shield of shame’ to protect themselves from it.

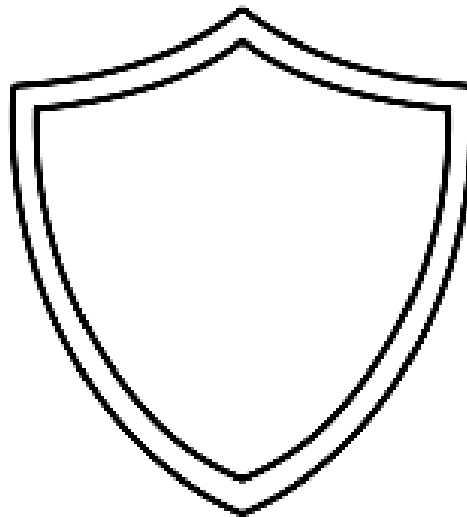
The shield can involve minimising what they did “it wasn’t that bad”, blaming others, denying what they did, acting tough “I don’t care”, and becoming very angry. When children have a shield of shame, they find it very difficult to learn from their behaviour or consider other points of view.

Blame

‘It’s HIS fault.’

Lie

‘I didn’t do it.’



Minimise

‘It wasn’t so bad.’

Rage

‘You always blame me.’

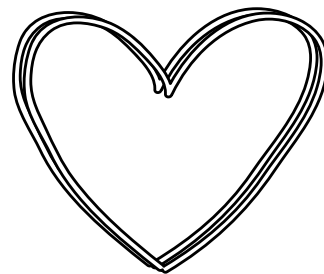
‘I’m rubbish.’

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE SHAME

When your child is doing something inappropriate or dangerous (e.g., hits the cat), it is normal to set boundaries (e.g., saying “You must not hurt the cat. We do not hurt animals in this house”). This will naturally result in your child experiencing feelings of shame (e.g., they might go quiet, look away, make themselves smaller, or hide). This is the right time to repair the relationship, to help reduce your child’s experience of shame.

Things you can say to repair:

- “I hope you know that Daddy loves you lots”
- “Thank you for talking with me, I’m so proud of you”
- “I think you were trying to tell me that you were upset earlier. I got all confused, didn’t I! I wonder if you were feeling upset because...”
- “Shall we go and play outside, Mummy loves doing that with you!”
- “I really am sorry that I shouted at you. I know that can be really upsetting.”
- “These next five minutes are all yours. What shall we do together?”
- “I know it’s not a very nice feeling when we fall out. It makes me feel sad, and I’m wondering if it makes you feel sad too.”



Things you can do to repair:

- Use a *PACE-ful approach (of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) to convey continuing and unconditional love and acceptance of your child, regardless of their behaviour. Try to view their behaviour as a form of communication – what feelings or needs are they trying to express? This is likely to enhance the empathy you feel for them, and allow for more nurturing interactions. However, you can find more information on how to use PACE in other resources created by the Resilience Project.



- Support your child to regulate themselves, prior to reasoning with them. Focus on strategies that calm them (and you) down, before you talk with them about their behaviour. If you see them respond with the shield of shame (with lying, denial, rage, minimising or blaming responses) then you likely need to focus on strategies that calm and relax them first. Helping them feel seen, heard, loved and believed in is more important than creating a plan of action in regards to their behaviour right now.



- Repair the relationship and re-connect with your child after the rupture in the relationship. This is a really important step, as it allows your child to understand that it was their behaviour that you disliked, not them as a person.



- Remember that is OK to say " sorry" first if you are responsible for part of the rupture. It is ok to admit, apologise, say how you are feeling, tell how you'll fix the situation, and promise your child you'll do differently next time.

- Cook their favourite meal or give them a give them a nice snack
- Do something you both enjoy (e.g., play together, draw or bake a cake)
- Ask your child for a hug, or to hold hands
- Surprise them with something they like
- Listen to songs you both like together
- Watch their favourite film or TV programme together
- Leave them a note with kind words on (e.g., "Thank you for helping me tidy out today ")
- Take a walk in the park, linking arms or do cycling together



On the Resilience Project CAVUHB website, you can find more resources, training, and videos for education staff, parents/carers, and children and young people.

If you have any other questions you can contact the Resilience Project by email; resilienceproject.CAV@wales.nhs.uk

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg