

Summary

Digital Symposium «Family Group Conference and Shame», 27.01.2022

www.familienratschweiz.ch

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- **Shame is a very universal issue and a strong emotion for various groups of people** (e.g., shame because of poorness, age, illness, unemployment, nationality, race, colour of the skin, belonging to a minority,)
- Shame is a **hard and deep emotion**, difficult to talk about or to notice the feeling, it is a **taboo to talk about** shame, and most people feel fear or panic (traumatic shame) with obvious symptomatic reactions
- The basic **development of shame starts in the early childhood** at the age of about two years with the idea, that things are wrong or right, good or bad. (The development of values, moral decisions). Children develop values, try to judge and to differentiate between right and wrong (e.g., fairy tales)
- For the feeling of shame, **the personal view and the personal** experience are very important. It is existential that other people, parents, teacher, etc. look at the child, see, accept, and love it
- Shame is a very **individual feeling**, people can feel it often and strongly, it only takes small moments for some to feel ashamed. These people do not have a high resilience. Others show more tolerance, they feel safe and fine by themselves, so they are not easily touched by the feeling of shame (Picture of a *glass of water* you fill: some people seem like small glasses, others like big glasses)
- The **feeling of shame relates to strong physically reactions** like blushing or turning pale, feeling afraid and losing control. The heartbeat can suddenly rise, some people collapse, and some look down on the floor or keep the head down without eye contact as if they want to flee or to hide themselves.
- **Reactions in the brain** connected with the feeling of shame can be measured. The moment of shame is like a shock for the human brain and the reaction resembles a traumatic reaction which makes human beings want to **flight, fight, hide or freeze**. The functions of the upper regions of the brain are then off, only basic functions of the human brain work and give the commands for reactions.
- **Shame can be a unique moment, a unique situation**, experienced only once or the experience of shame can represent a **chronic situation**, like a basic feeling, experienced in a lot of situations of daily life or during the whole life.
- We know that shame can be experienced as a **transgenerational feeling**, that children and grandchildren in a family system notice the experience of shame of their parents and grandparents. That perhaps the belonging to a minority or to certain group of the society produces a feeling of shame over generations.
- In some **systems, school or political measures initiate strong feelings and moments of shame in order** to bring children or people to subdue themselves under an authority.
- The experience of shame produces **various reactions**, a lot of “**masks of shame**”

- On the one hand the reactions can be **aggressive**, violent, loud, (**fight**) and on the other hand reactions can mean that people hide themselves, want to flee (**Flight**) or do not want to be seen, make themselves small and unimportant, laugh about themselves, make things small and unimportant, make situations ridiculous, they retreat, perhaps some of them lie or do not tell the truth, want to leave at the moment and make themselves invisible, play things down. Others are ironic, they use sarcasm and cynicism.
- We can find a lot of various reactions caused by shame. And we all know a lot of moments in our daily or professional life, where people react in a strange way, and it might help to find out if they feel ashamed in a way, we have not been aware of.
- In lot of moments in our professional work the social worker might unconsciously cause or touch a trigger of shame which makes the clients react with one of the strategies of defense of shame. As a consequence, they put their aggression or their depression on the table of the social worker, other specialists and helping persons

How to deal with that knowledge? What can we do?

- One of the most important ways to support or to help people is by **being sensitive to the issue of shame**. We need to be aware if somebody could be ashamed or injured and feel ashamed by a certain reaction. We must respect the feeling and change our own attitude.
- We **can talk about** shame if it is possible, can tell stories about it, which help people to talk about their feelings. We **can open a place, where people can be with their feeling** of shame. We can support them to overcome the feeling of shame by offering them protection, dignity, respect, honest appreciation, or the feeling of belonging, and we can support them in their integrity or to stand by their values.
- We must learn not to judge people because of their way of living, their culture, their religion, and their nationality to secure that people feel accepted the way they are.
- The feeling of **shame can also be a healing moment**, it can produce energy to overcome a certain difficult situation and to transform it in an experience of strength and competence.
- At the end the **experience of shame is a deep and strong emotion for everybody**. The **reactions are various (aggressive or depressive)** and we have try to find a connection between the behavior of someone and the experience of shame to better understand and, if possible, to open up places where the feeling of shame can be shown.
- Perhaps we can open doors and **emotions of shame can be turned into a helping and healing energy** to overcome the feeling of being ashamed and move on in a way of power and self-consciousness.
- One **connection between the issue of shame and working by FGC interventions** might be, that with the way of thinking, the attitude, and the view to the client by working in the sense of FGC, can clients empower and feel themselves responsible and able to handle their situations and their problems. So they perhaps feel stronger again and not ashamed about their difficulties or their problems.

- FGC interventions mean that clients **have the right and the competence to plan and think about their solutions** and that might be **one way to overcome experiences of shame**, especially in difficult und vulnerable life situations.