

Shame vs. Worthiness Guidelines

Purpose: To establish clear boundaries in the relationships between teachers and students, as educators create classroom settings that allow students to explore creative outlets, while remaining emotionally safe and free of shame.

Desired Outcome: To encourage teachers of all subjects and grade levels to maintain secure classroom environments in which educators attempt to refrain from causing shame altogether, as to avoid eliciting emotions in students which may ultimately be counterproductive in an academic environment. Teachers will be provided with alternative methods of delivering student discipline, as well as a variety of approaches and specific steps to take when providing students with positive feedback or praise.

Background: Shame, by definition, can be described as a painful feeling of humiliation or distress, whether it is caused by self awareness of wrongdoing, or is elicited by a peer, loved one, or teacher. However, shame in classroom settings has become a prevalent issue throughout recent years, acting as a barrier between productive student-teacher relationships. In a study performed by author and licensed clinical social worker Brené Brown, data was collected to show that as much as “85% of men and women interviewed remember something so shaming during their school experience that it changed how they think of themselves as learners.” These statistics have proven the lasting negative impact that shame can have on students of all ages, potentially resulting in an excessive amount of self-doubt, and ultimately creating reluctance to learn in any learning environment. However, there are extensive amounts of research providing alternative methods of discipline, which will be highlighted throughout the Shame vs. Worthiness Guidelines.

Alternatively, praise in a classroom has the potential to alleviate tension between students and teachers, as positive feedback encourages students to continue acting in an acceptable manner through the extent of their academic careers. However, methods of delivery of praise have not always proven to be effective for each student. While some may benefit most from direct verbal delivery of praise, others may be more responsive to a physical and/or tangible object, such as a sticker, token, or simple pat on the back, showing that they were rewarded for positive behavior. Appropriate use of praise has been found to increase long term intrinsic motivation in students. The Shame vs. Worthiness Guidelines will provide further detail.

Avoiding Shame

Background: While eliciting shame in students is not typically the specific intent of a teacher in a classroom setting, this issue has become increasingly abundant throughout learning environments of all types, grade levels, and subjects. Shame can be an unintentional result of a teacher's response to any student misconduct, as human nature causes many to respond negatively to a situation that contradicts what is expected. The Shame vs. Worthiness Guidelines will provide specific scenarios or situations in which shame may be elicited and the ways to resolve any later tension.

Scenarios and Solutions: There are many factors that can play into delivering student discipline for misconduct and misbehavior. These guidelines are intended to assist educators in evaluating and revising their methods of administering discipline, in a greater and more effective attempt to avoid shameful phrases and actions.

Watching our Words: In many instances, teachers may be quick to lose their tempers or become frustrated with students who may not be specifically obeying rules that have been previously set and discussed in a classroom. While initially becoming angry with students for this type of behavior is justifiable, these feelings can often grow over time if not addressed properly, and have the potential to result in eliciting shame in students. When addressing the poor behavior of students, it is important for a teacher to ensure that their feedback is delivered in a constructive manner, rather than in a shaming way. For example, if a rule was set stating that students must keep their hands to themselves, but one student has decided to bother one of his or her friends by touching their arm, an educator might choose to address the student by simply saying "Your hands are for writing your math problems right now, not for touching your friends."

Seeing One's Self as 'Not Good Enough': Because the majority of Texas schools have shifted their focus to emphasize preparation for standardized testing, many students have begun to have reduced benefit from their education systems. The primary goal of the Texas Education Agency is to ensure that students will excel on the statewide tests. However, it is typical for a handful of students to receive much lower scores than expected, possibly resulting in a feeling of shame. In a situation such as this, it is crucial for an educator to remain aware and respectful, as to encourage students rather than increase the negative emotions that they may be experiencing. In this instance, a teacher will be able to utilize the "Different Kinds of Smart," which will be provided in the following page.

Different Kinds of Smart

Use: The Different Kinds of Smart were created by American developmental psychologist Howard Gardener to assist individuals in identifying the various areas of intelligence that they may excel in, as well as those in which they may need assistance.

Verbal-Linguistic: Word Smart

- Excels in finding words to express what one means

Logical-Mathematical: Logic Smart

- Quantifying
- Making and proving hypotheses

Visual-Spatial: Picture Smart

- Visualizing the world in 3-D

Bodily-Kinesthetic: Body Smart

- Coordinating mind and body

Musical-Rhythmic: Music Smart

- Discerning sounds
- Pitch, tone, rhythm, timbre

Naturalist: Nature Smart

- Understanding living organisms
- Reading nature

Interpersonal: People Smart

- Sensing feelings and motives of others

Intrapersonal: Self Smart

- Understanding one's self
- What you feel
- What you want

Delivery of Praise

Background: Praise in a classroom setting is generally well received by students, and is often rewarded in a single way by teachers. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that not all students respond to specific methods of delivery of praise. Because of this, teachers have not been able to receive a uniform response to this praise from students, therefore resulting in a disconnect as some students continue to misbehave, despite the praise that they or others have received. While an excessive amount of praise in the classroom has the potential to be counterproductive and create more issues, an appropriate delivery and use is key in allowing students to feel accepted and worthy in a learning environment. The Shame vs. Worthiness Guidelines will provide specific methods of delivery of praise, in order to allow educators to form the ways that they praise students specifically for each student's preference.

Delivery Methods: When delivering praise, it is crucial for a teacher to understand the various methods of delivery, in order to encourage and continually receive productive behavior. It has been proven that students tend to respond to praise in a wide variety of ways, based on the type of delivery that they have received. Because of this, educators must learn and apply different approaches to praise.

Token or Sticker: Some students respond best to tangible praise, involving physical rewards, such as a small token or sticker. The ability to see, feel, and show that they received praise for performing well in class allows a student to be reassured that this positive behavior was appreciated and noticed, encouraging repetition.

Check-in Sheet: A check-in sheet is typically utilized to provide daily updates and reports based on the behavior of a specific student in each class, recorded by each various teacher for every course. This type of documentation can be used as a form of praise when a positive report has been given. Based on the teacher's decision, students can earn a small incentive for receiving a satisfactory report.

Verbal Praise and Appropriate Physical Contact: While a physical object is well received by some students when they are praised in a classroom or learning environment, others respond best to verbal praise or physical contact. A simple acknowledgement of satisfactory behavior tends to encourage repetition. Because society today has become incredibly sensitive to physical touch between students and teachers, praising by touch, such as a pat on the back, may at first appear risky. However, extensive research has proven that many individuals respond positively to this type of praise, when used appropriately as it has been shown to act as a form of affirmation.