

SHAME

What is this developmental skill?

Children naturally experience guilt when they recognize that a behavior was wrong. Shame is different. Shame is the painful belief that I am wrong, bad, or unworthy rather than simply having made a mistake.

How does this normally develop?

Healthy caregiving helps children separate behavior from identity. Caregivers correct mistakes while reassuring children that they remain loved and accepted. This allows children to learn from errors without believing they are fundamentally flawed.

How can neglect interfere?

Neglected children often internalize their experiences. Rather than recognizing that adults failed to meet their needs, they may conclude, "There must be something wrong with me." These beliefs can become deeply ingrained and influence relationships, behavior, and self-esteem.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Become extremely upset after making mistakes.
- Hide errors or lie to avoid embarrassment.
- Say things like, "I'm bad."
- Reject praise or kindness.
- Expect punishment or rejection even after small missteps.
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Parenting Implications

Address behavior without attacking character. Replace statements like, "You're so irresponsible," with, "That choice wasn't safe." Help your child understand that everyone makes mistakes and that mistakes do not define who they are.

From Understanding to Attunement

Your child needs to hear, through both words and actions, that mistakes can be repaired and relationships can remain secure. This helps replace shame with resilience and self-acceptance.