

3 Guilt And Shame Messages Of Childhood Emotional Neglect And How To Defeat Them

By Jonice Webb PhD ~ 3 min read



Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN): Happens when your parents fail to respond enough to your emotions as they raise you.

Adults who were emotionally neglected in childhood can be quite perfectionistic and hard on themselves. But for many, it does not stop there.

Why? Because the messages of Childhood Emotional Neglect run deep. They go to the heart of the child, and stay with him for a lifetime. They not only damage his ability to understand and trust his own feelings, they damage his ability to understand and trust himself.

The messages of CEN are like invisible infusions of guilt and shame that happen every day in the life of the child.

- **The First Guilt/Shame Message of Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN): No one wants to see your feelings.**

When, because of emotional neglect, children receive the message from their parents that their feelings are a burden, excessive, or simply *wrong*, they take a highly effective, adaptive action. They naturally push their emotions down, under the surface so that they will trouble no one.

Believe it or not, this brilliant strategy usually works quite well. As a child, you become un-sad, un-angry, un-needy, and overall unemotional so that your parents are less bothered or burdened by you. Life becomes easier in the family, but life inside you becomes deeply lonely.

- **The Second Guilt/Shame Message of Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN):
Your feelings are shameful.**

As a child of CEN, you are set up to feel, on some deep level for your entire life, that you are a burden, excessive, or somehow wrong.

Because Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN) affects your relationship with your own feelings, it sets you up to feel guilty and ashamed for the very personal, inescapable human experience of having feelings.

It feels **wrong** to feel your feelings, and wrong to let others see your feelings. And it feels **right** to hide your feelings. You may even try not to have feelings at all. Yet your feelings are the most deeply personal, biological expression of your true self. They will not be denied.

Trying to deny your feelings is like the classic little Dutch boy trying to block the hole in the dike with his finger. It may feel like it works temporarily, but those feelings just keep coming and growing and pressurizing, like the water behind the dike. Being unable to control them and stop them altogether makes you feel weak and incompetent. And ashamed.

- **The Third Guilt/Shame Message of Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN):
There is something wrong with you.**

Since many emotionally neglected adults were not actively mistreated in childhood, they may remember their childhoods as fairly happy and carefree. When they look back on their childhoods for an explanation for their issues and struggles in their adult lives, they can't pinpoint any incidents or factors to explain their current problems.

Between a "happy childhood" and inexplicable emotions, they are left with the assumption that some deep part of themselves is seriously amiss. "It's my own fault. Something is wrong with me," is the natural conclusion.

Signs and Signals of CEN-Induced Guilt and Shame – From the *Book Running on Empty*

- **You sometimes feel emotionally numb**
- **You have a deep sense that something is wrong with you**
- **You feel that you are somehow different from other people**
- **You tend to push down feelings or avoid them**
- **You try to hide your feelings so others won't see them**
- **You tend to feel inferior to others**
- **You believe you have no excuse for not being happier in your life**

The Antidote For Your Guilt & Shame

I hope that as you read the Guilt/Shame messages above, you realized one glaring fact about them: THEY ARE ALL FALSE!

Now please read the three vital and true remedies below. If you absorb them and own them and follow them, they will change how you feel about yourself and your life.

- **Feelings are not subject to the laws of right and wrong.** You cannot choose your feelings because they're literally wired into your biology. It is essential to accept what you feel because that must be done before you can manage what you feel.
- **Your feelings are a sign of your health and strength.** Your emotions are the opposite of a sign of weakness. When others see what you feel, they instantly connect with you. And when others know your feelings they have an opportunity to respond to your true self. That is powerful.
- **There is nothing wrong with you.** The only thing wrong with you are the messages of CEN that your child self internalized. And you share those same messages with millions of other people. You are an intact, healthy person who can learn and change your beliefs, learn to manage your emotions, let go of your guilt and shame and heal.

Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN) is often invisible when it happens so it can be hard to know if you grew up with it. To find out [Take The CEN Questionnaire](#). It's free.