

REMOVING THE STIGMA – PART 2

WHAT CAN STOP OFFICERS FROM SEEKING HELP?

Officers can be reluctant to ask for help for many reasons.

FEAR

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

DENIAL

(these are just some)

STIGMA

A stigma is defined as:

‘Shame or disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person’

(Ref: Wikipedia, 2016)

- Negative connotation to it.
- Stigma can be a huge reason for officers **sweeping things under the carpet** as they don't want to be viewed as **damaged or wounded**, or **different** to others.



PERFECTION

‘Perfection is the birthplace of shame’

(Brown, 2014)



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Perfectionism is like *defence mechanism* that drives the thought process of:

***“If I do it perfectly,
– then I can avoid or minimise feelings of shame, judgement & blame.”***



It's driven from *external motivation* for doing something (**See 'Happiness' section*).

Perfection is not the same as 'Healthy striving'.

Healthy striving – is *internally motivated*. It's about wanting to:

do your best, not be the best.

Therefore, when an officer experiences something that can 'rattle their cage' – and causes them to see themselves as potentially being damaged or wounded, they don't like the thought that they may be stereotyped into the group of 'imperfect'.

STEREOTYPES

Stereotyping is 'labelling' or 'grouping' something or someone.

Unlike a stigma – stereotypes can have a:

Positive

Neutral

or Negative

connotation behind it.



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We can tend to stereotype people into all sorts of groups.

Examples:

- All Paramedics are trustworthy because they won the most trustworthy profession in a recent study.
- All people with tattoos must be tough
- All teenage mums must have had a tough upbringing
- All police officers have to be mean to do their job
- All managers are only in it for themselves

When in reality.....we know it's not true!



Stereotyping: Limits our ability to **build connection**

Forms a real **separation** (*which causes missed opportunities to get to know each other*).

SHAME

It can be fair to say that the majority of officers in the Emergency Services have probably felt that sense of **pride** of the position that they hold, at one point or another.



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That **pride** can be a major contributor to building your sense of **self-worth**.

Therefore, unwanted feelings such as feeling like you're potentially broken or damaged in any way – can lead to feeling enormous amounts of **shame**.

*'Shame is a **self-worth injury**. It is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed & therefore unworthy of acceptance & belonging.'*

-Brene' Brown, 2014-



Shame is about perception. It's about the negative perception of ourselves & what we perceive others will think of us as well.



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Examples of perceptions of a person who's experiencing shame:

- I am not _____
- I am a _____
- I am _____
- I am _____
- I am _____

Some feelings that are associated with shame are:

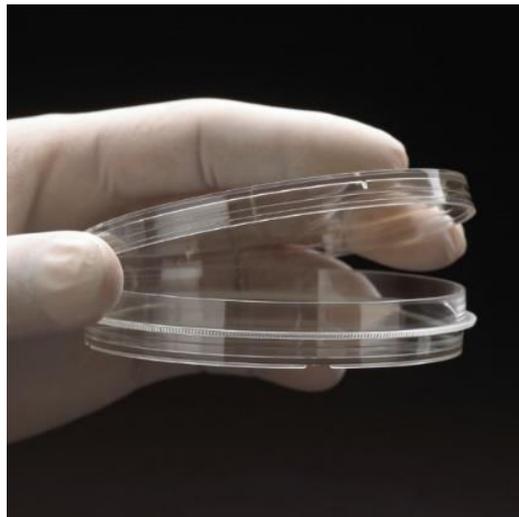
- Re_____
- Wo_th_____n_____
- Deg_____d

Shame is related to:

- More _____ abuse
- More self-_____
- More s_____s
- More d_____n
- More a_____n

For men – Shame is about not wanting to be *perceived as weak*.

For women – It's about having an *unobtainable expectation* about who they think they're *supposed to be*.



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HOW WE CAN CONTROL SHAME

Shame is fuelled by:

S _ _ _ _ _ Y
S _ _ _ _ _ E
J _ _ _ _ _ T

When we hide it, don't speak about it, and judge ourselves – it damages our self-worth even more.

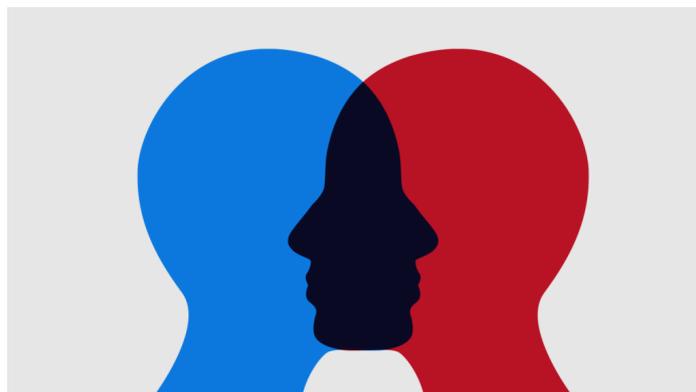
Therefore, if you were to imagine putting an amount of 'shame' into a petri dish and covering it with **secrecy, silence & judgement**....it would fuel it to grow even bigger.

Yet, if you put the same amount of 'shame' in a petri dish, and you covered it with **empathy**.....it wouldn't be able to survive.

'EMPATHY is the antidote to shame'

(Ref: Brown, 2014)

To have empathy, is to be able to understand and share the feelings of another person – as if they were your own. Essentially it is being able to *step into their world* and feel what it would feel like for them.



Empathy is different to 'sympathy'.



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To have sympathy, you feel compassion for the other person – but you don't necessarily share their feelings.

So to be empathetic, you take the compassion that extra step further.

YouTube: <http://bit.ly/1btB5XC> - Brene' Brown on empathy.

4 QUALITIES OF EMPATHY

- The ability to take the other persons perspective
- Stay out of judgement
- Recognising emotion in other people
- Communicating that recognition of emotion.

'Empathy is feeling with people'

COMPASSION

Compassion is feeling the pain of another, and wanting to help relieve that pain. Practicing our compassion, allows us to hear shame.

Compassion is a prerequisite to being empathetic.

VULNERABILITY & COURAGE

'Vulnerability is the being exposed or open to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.'

(Ref: Wikipedia, 2016)

Therefore, for an officer to stick their hand up for help when they may be struggling, it can be a natural reaction to hesitate – especially if they believe the **myth** of vulnerability being a weakness.

That only encourages the stigma that has been around for so long.

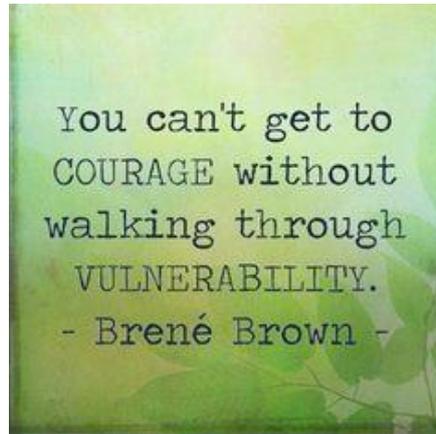
All of the fears that were mentioned earlier, can rear their head.



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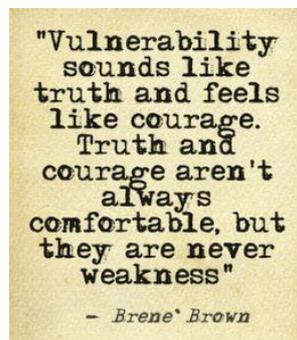
However, in reality –

'TO BE VULNERABLE, IS TO BE COURAGEOUS'



You can't have courage, without first being vulnerable.

(Ref: Brown, 2014)



It's feeling the fear....and doing it anyway!

Look at anyone who's ever succeeded at anything in life. Even yourself!

As a ***Police officer*** – did you first have to feel that fear and move through it in order to chase after that criminal with a weapon?

As a ***Firefighter*** – did you have to first feel the fear of that burning building around you before you went in and saved somebody?

As a ***Paramedic*** – did you first have to feel the fear of your patient potentially dying before you gave them those lifesaving drugs?



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Therefore – in order to be courageous, you need to feel the fear and move through it anyway even if it has the potential for outcomes to not be favourable (be vulnerable). You need to become uncomfortable – in order to grow.

*‘Courage is the ability to tell your story,
& like who you are in the process of it’*

(Ref: Brown 2014)

WHAT CAN WE ALL DO TO DECREASE STIGMA & HELP EACH OTHER?

- Realise our own **self-worth** (in all roles we play in life).
- Encourage **vulnerability**, & **praise** ourselves and other for practicing it.
- **Drop ‘perfection’** and practice **‘healthy striving’** instead.
- Be mindful of not **negatively stereotyping**
- Practice **empathy** – towards yourself & others, especially when you or others are being vulnerable.

Remember in ‘The power of your thoughts’ section, how when you think (or are surrounded by) loving or supportive thoughts – that it strengthens you?

Well, as an Emergency Services *‘family’* – ***it is important to all be supportive of one another by building our own and others self-worth, as well as practicing empathy.***

SHAME RESILIENCE

You can’t *avoid* feelings of shame, judgement & blame – it’s part of the human experience; however you can **build your shame resilience by building your self-worth.**



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- Understand shame:
 - Know what triggers it for you
 - Talk about it
 - Use the word
 - Tell your story
- Be authentic
- Live with a deeper sense of love & belonging
- Develop a much more resilient spirit

ACTIVITIES

1. What do you recognise as your **fears** around being vulnerable?

2. Now knowing the difference between ‘perfectionism’ & ‘healthy striving’, is there areas of your life that you needed to be **perfect** in? If so, how could you make changes towards a more **healthy** way of achieving those things in life?

3. To raise your awareness - what are some negative stereotypes that you may have placed upon groups of people in the past?

4. What are some ways that you could be more compassionate to yourself?



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5. What are some ways that you could develop your skills of empathy?

6. As we did in the *'Relationships' module*, it's important to build a strong relationship with yourself first. On the list below, finish the sentences with positive statements about yourself to increase your self-worth. Eg: I am kind, I am awesome.

I AM: _____

**I am worthy
because...**

...I am