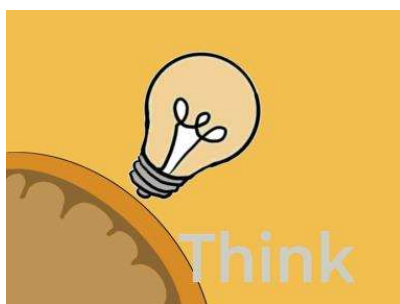


Shame

When we experience shame, we may feel that we are flawed, we do not belong and are unworthy of love, respect or attention. Shame is an intensely painful emotion that can prevent us from connecting with other people. We may feel shame because of how we have been treated by other people or because society stigmatises our way of being in the world.



When we feel shame, we may experience physical responses such as intense blushing, a pounding heart or sweating. We may have negative thoughts that keep going round our mind in a loop. Shame may make us feel powerless. Shame may make us feel the need to distance ourselves from other people or worry incessantly what other people think of us.



Shame may radically undermine our self-worth. Shame can make us hide our authentic self and feel that, if we show people our real self, we won't be accepted. Autistic people are often misunderstood, discriminated against and bullied – this can make us feel that we are somehow at fault simply for being ourselves.



Shame can give rise to autonomic flight, fight or freeze responses. We can reduce the shame experienced by others by being compassionate, accepting and forgiving. It is also important to develop our capacity for self-compassion and self-care. Alongside this, proactive regulation and seeking out supportive relationships can make a positive difference.