



## Episode 152: How Perfectionism and Shame Lead to Stress and Burnout

with Dr Sandy Miles

Shame is part of being human, but it can be even worse for healthcare workers. You may feel shame for making a mistake, being different, or falling short of the perfectionist standards that you set for yourself.

Unfortunately, constant shame through the push for perfection will eventually lead to stress and burnout, so dealing with this is an important skill to learn, especially as a doctor.

This guide will help you learn more about shame and how to recover from it healthier and stronger than ever.

Listen to this episode and learn how to accept vulnerability and create a healthy response to shame.

### Podcast links

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### Guest links

Connect with Sandy:

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### Quote to remember:

*“... I will definitely always make some mistakes. And being able to be comfortable with that vulnerability is a really key attribute of being a doctor.”*

## What You Will Learn

No one wants to feel shame. It's an uncomfortable emotion, and can make you feel small, angry and insufficient. Over time, unresolved shame can lead to stress and burnout.

However, shame can be an opportunity as well. This activity can help you turn that feeling of shame into a chance to grow. You're not perfect — and you don't have to be — but that doesn't mean you have to stop getting better.

Awareness of shame and how it makes you feel is the first step to dealing with it. The activity will guide you in recognising shame and how you might respond. Once you understand the idea of shame, its roots, and how you experience it, you can also learn to reflect on the situation and gain insight into yourself.

You'll also explore perfectionism and how it can contribute to shame. Learn how you can be vulnerable to yourself and reflect on your situation. Become open to others — you might find that sharing your vulnerability can make the shameful load lighter. Take the first steps and find the right people who can support you and resolve your shame with the help of this activity.

## Activity: A Treatment Plan for Shame

Shame can be an uncomfortable emotion for people. However, it's essential to recognise what shame is and be aware when that's what we're feeling. That's the first step towards being able to resolve it.

**When do you experience shame?**



**What does shame feel like to you?** Describe, draw or add photos that can capture how it might feel to you.

Write statements that you might have heard from others or you might have said that are red flags indicating shame:

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

Remember that nothing is certain, you don't know everything, and you are human. You make mistakes. Accept your vulnerability.

**When have you felt most vulnerable?**



Sandy talks about three ways to respond to feeling shame: withdrawal, appeasement, and anger.

**How do you tend to respond to shame?**

Shame is a guardian of your values.

**What are your values? (Clue – what makes you angry?)**

Sitting with shame long enough can help you realise which of your values is being challenged. Think of a time you've experienced shame and take this moment to sit with it and reflect.

**What internal value did you break?**

Talk about the situation that made you feel shame.

**Who among your friends or colleagues can meet you with empathy?** These are also the people who see you not just as a doctor but value you as a human being.

Talk to them and share your story. During your conversation, challenge your negative self-talk and sense check it with your friend. Afterwards, think about how you feel now.



Maladaptive perfectionism is unfortunately common for many doctors and other high-stress professionals. Move the maladaptive to adaptive by taking small, safe risks. The next time you have to write an email, draft it here first. Make sure it has a spelling mistake before you send it!

**Send to:**

**Email:**

Have a growth mindset.

**What are the things which you might not be perfectly capable of right now, but you want to be able to do in the future? What steps do you need to take to get better at them?**

### **CPD time claimed:**

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