

Trauma and Shame—A Short Primer for Carers

Howard Bath, PhD We hear a lot about the need for children in care to learn how to self-regulate emotions and impulses. Anger/rage, anxiety/fear, and sadness/grief are well understood emotions, but shame is frequently left out of the picture despite it being a key driver of challenging behaviors such as self-harm, substance abuse, and aggression. A prominent therapeutic specialist has claimed that children in the care system are “enveloped” in shame, yet we hear so little about it and its impacts. In this presentation, Howard will touch on the prevalence of shame amongst our children and young people, how we might detect it, and what we might do about it.



Trauma and Shame

A short primer for carers

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Howard Bath
Allambi Care, Australia



How we experience
the world, relate to
others, and find
meaning in life depend
on how we learn to
regulate our emotions

Daniel Siegel

Emotions



happy



sad



angry



excited



afraid



shy



guilty



tired



jealous



loved



hopeful



bored



proud



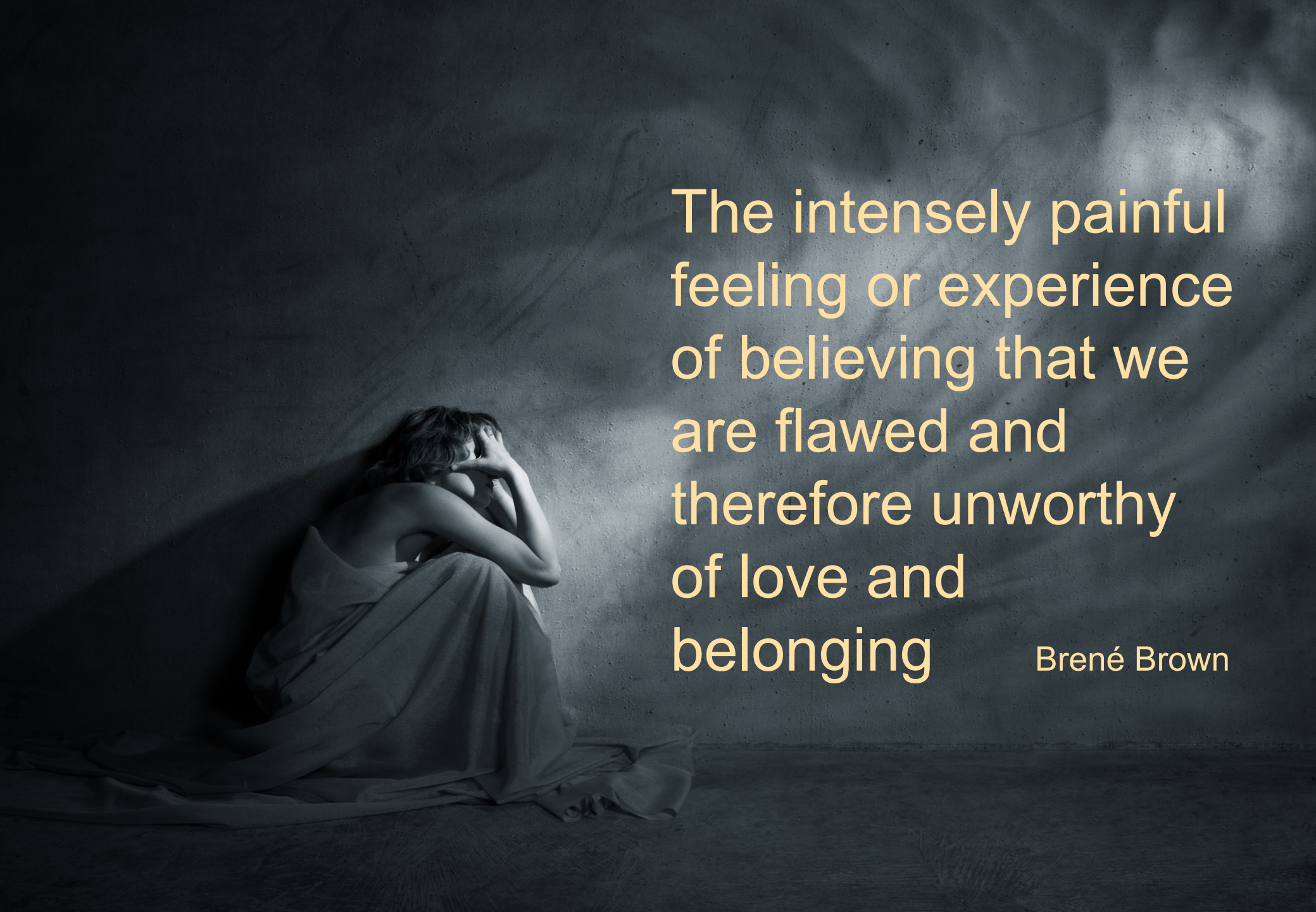
sorry



embarrassed



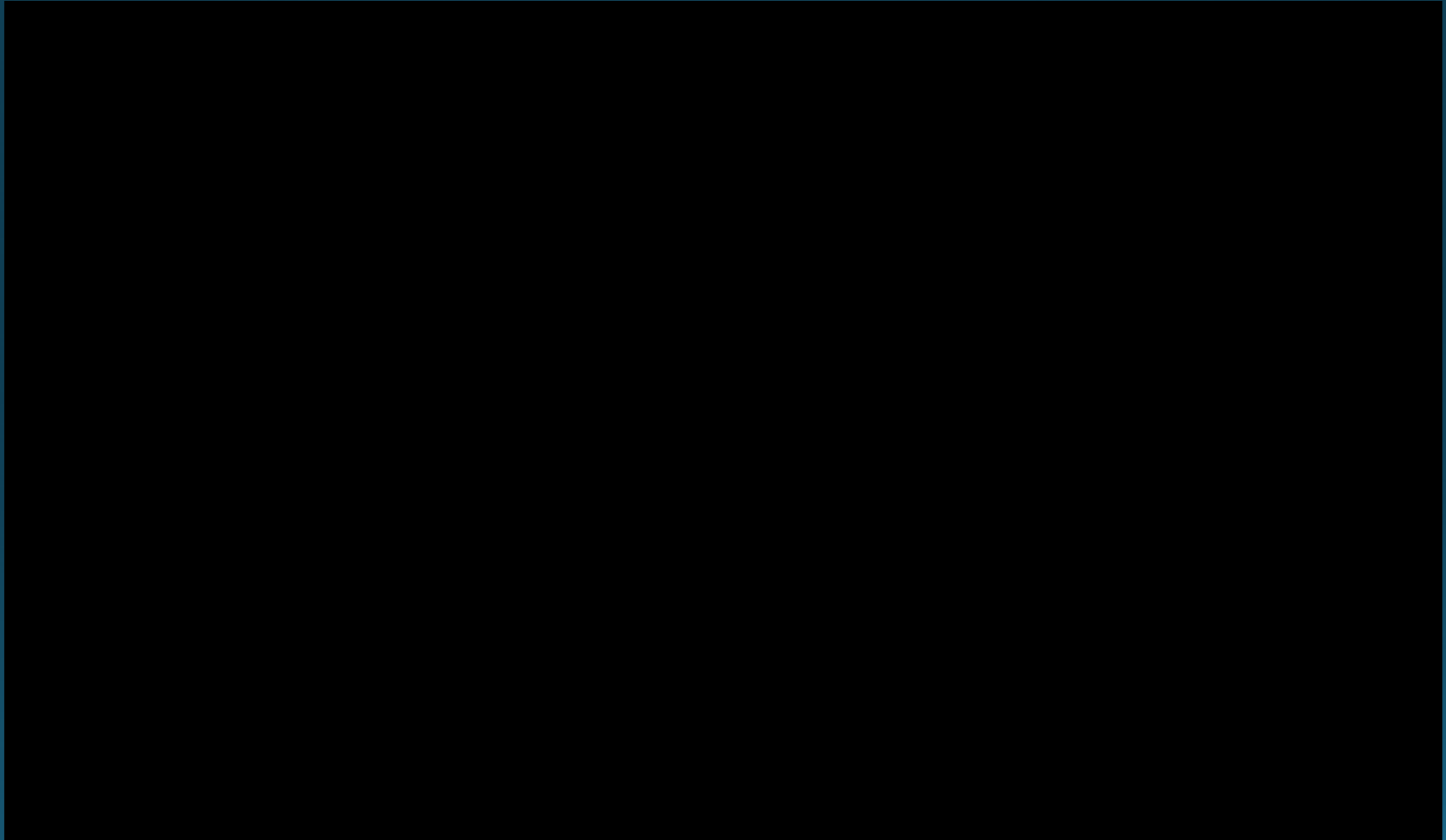
surprised



The intensely painful
feeling or experience
of believing that we
are flawed and
therefore unworthy
of love and
belonging

Brené Brown

Brene Brown on Shame





I always felt I was different. Not good different; not unique-in-a-positive-way different; not proud different as in marching to my own drum; but shameful different. I felt as if I was somehow less in nearly every way than my peers.

John Seita

Private Logic



I am ...bad, worthless, stupid, helpless



**The dreaded states
of shame and
humiliation can feel
like a black hole, a
bottomless pit of
despair, in which the
self is lost...forever**

Daniel Siegel

Core Shame

The emotional unavailability of a parent is experienced as a rejection as, 'I'm not important, valuable, or lovable enough to be secure in my membership of the family...the expectation of connection in a child is met with inattention, indifference, or anger. The absence of adequate parenting is interpreted by their young brains as an absence of their own value


Cozolino, 2016, p. 122-23

Core Shame

At the heart of core shame is an inner certainty that of being a defective person combined with the fear of this truth becoming public knowledge

It is an instinctual judgement about the self, and it results in a sense of worthlessness, a fear of being found out, and a desperate striving for perfection

Louis Cozolino



The essence of trauma
is feeling godforsaken,
cut-off from the human
race

van der Kolk

Shame versus Guilt

We might experience **Guilt** when ***we have done something*** we believe is wrong. Guilt focuses on actions

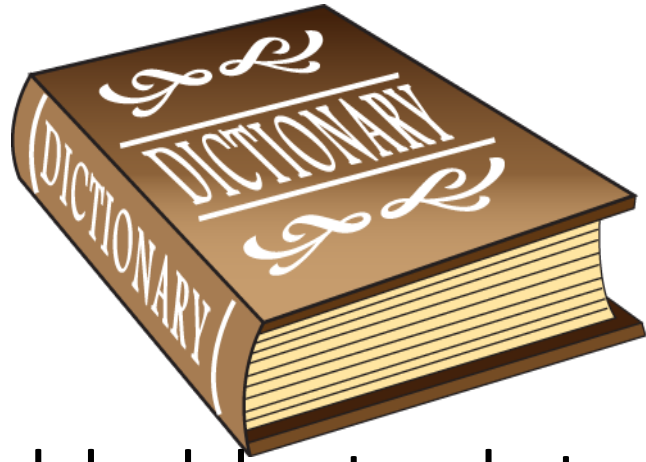
Shame is a sense that ***we ourselves*** are deficient in some way, defective, not good enough, different, abnormal, damaged goods, less than

Appropriate Shame

Appropriate shame supports the development of conscience, deepens our empathic abilities, and allows us to have mutually supportive relationships.

Louis Cozolino





Words of Shame

Awful, bad, beaten, betrayed, clumsy, contemptable, criticized, defeated, defective, deficient, demoralised, dirty, disappointed, discouraged, disrespect, embarrassed, envious, exposed, failure, fake, flawed, foolish, guilty, helpless, humiliated, hurt feelings, hurt pride, ignored, imposter, impotent, inferiority, inhibition, insecurity, jealous, lose face, loser, low self-esteem, modesty, mortification, poverty, rejected, self-conscious, self-doubt, shyness, sick at heart, sluttish, stupid, ugly, uncool, untrustworthy, vulnerability, weak, wimp, whore.

Common Shame Themes

1. **Personal characteristics.** size, strength, ability, competence, intelligence, age, ethnicity
2. **Personal attractiveness** – feeling ugly, deformed, unacceptable, damaged, smelly
3. **Powerlessness** – feeling inadequate and helpless
4. **Social defeat** – abused, neglected, subjugated, ignored, insignificant
5. **Sexuality/gender identity** – feeling sexually inadequate, different
6. **Fear of closeness** – feeling unlovable, unworthy



The other kids seemed far more together than I was, in the sense that they were actual kids... It was the feeling that I was different that gnawed at me in the classroom, pressing me deeper into my exhaustion...I was always grateful for the end of the day, when I could finally go

Liz Murray

Disguises or Masks of Shame

- The Quest for Normality
- The Imposter Syndrome
- Projective Identification
- The Compass of Shame

Once I began to realise what normal people do and compare myself to them I learned to lie to myself and others about who and what I was

Everyone wants to be normal – whatever that means

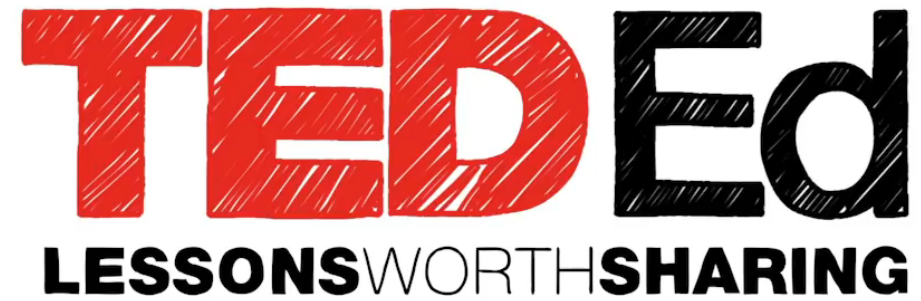
I felt really different from the other students...I felt like a freak at times

Young people formerly in care

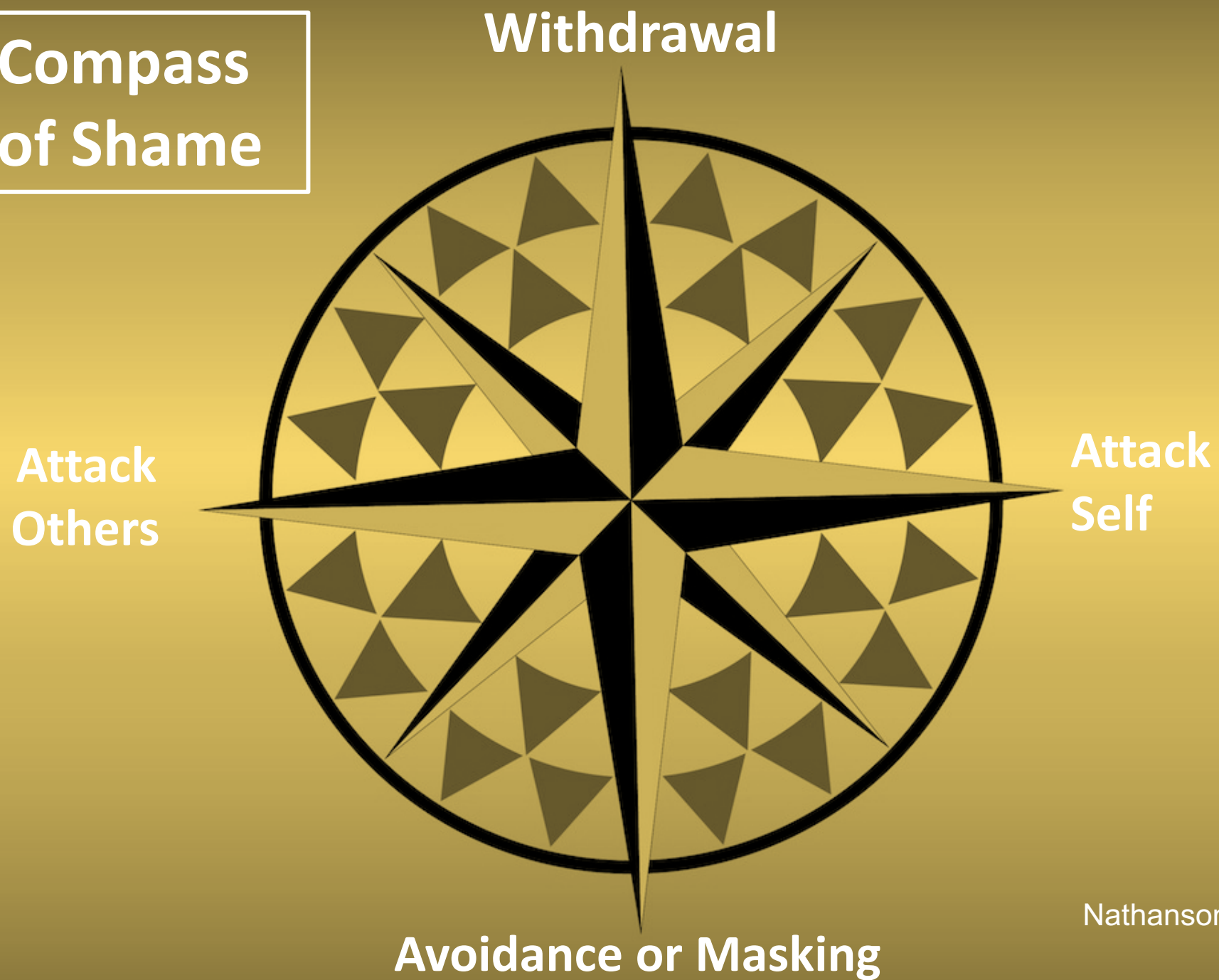
The Quest for Normality



Impostor Phenomenon



Compass of Shame



Nathanson

Common Consequences of Shame

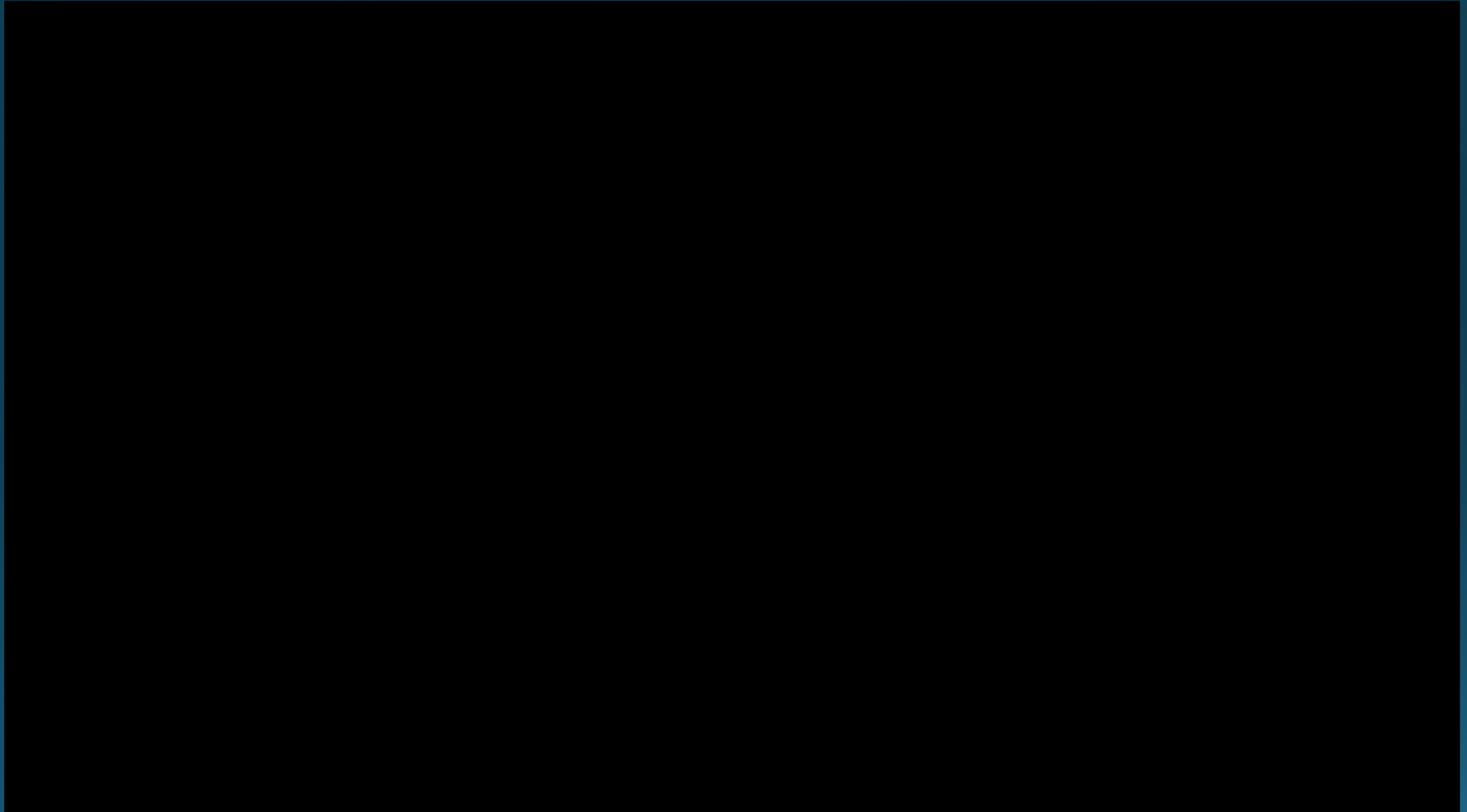
Psychological consequences – depression, low self-esteem, self-blame, anger , hostility, envy, blaming others

Interpersonal consequences – conflict avoidance, compulsive apologising, superficial overconfidence, intermittent rage

School performance – perfectionism, reduced pride in response to success, fear of negative evaluation, intense shame in failure



Overcoming Shame



Code words and phrases for shame

- *I'll never be able to do that*
- *I won't be part of the performance*
- *There's something wrong with me*
- *I'll never get any friends*
- *They'll never pick me*
- *I'm not clever/smart/pretty/ enough to do that*

While trauma keeps us dumbfounded, the path out of it is paved with words...

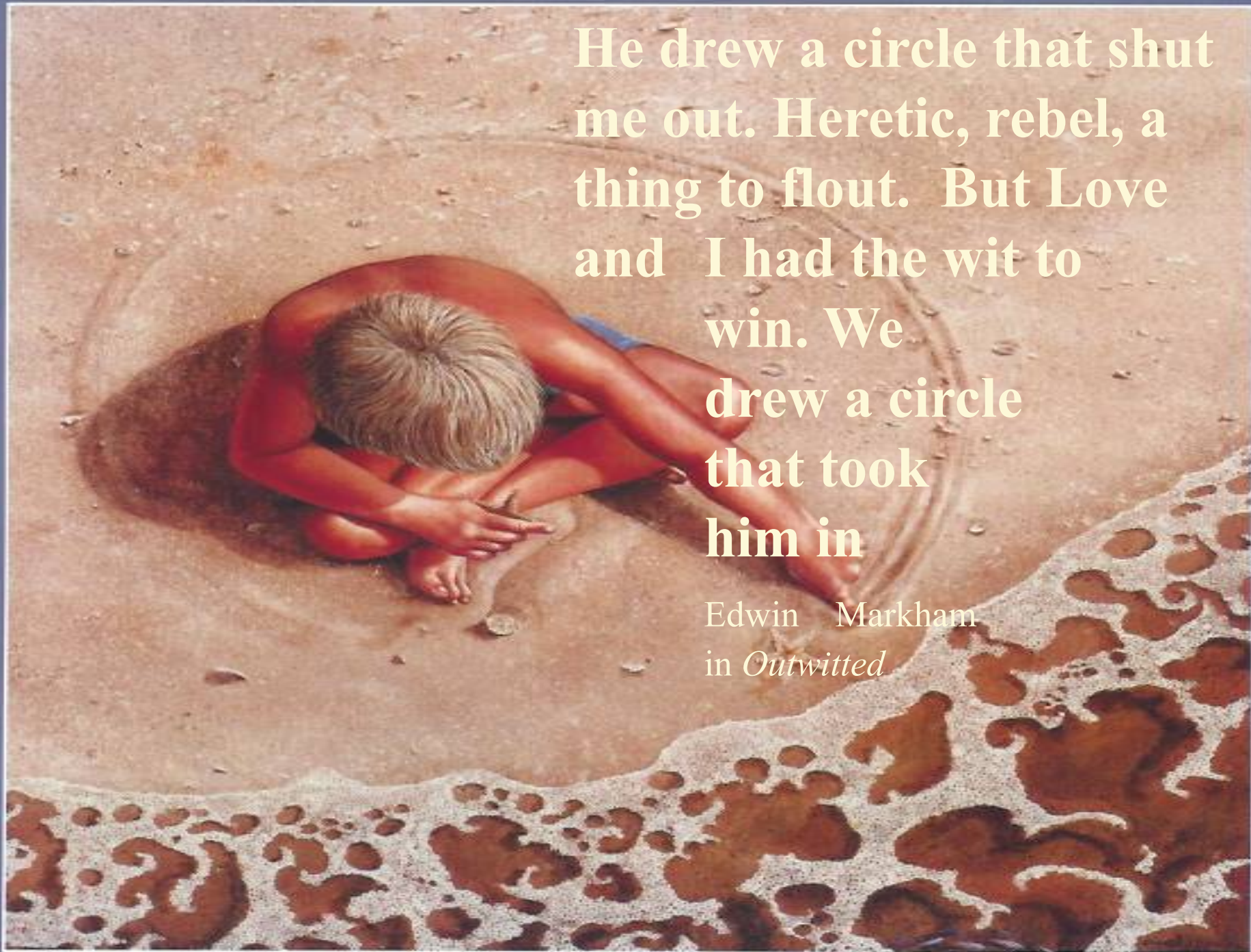
Bessel van der Kolk

Putting Shame into words

- *You don't feel good about yourself*
- *It makes you feel you are not as clever as the other kids*
- *When you read that you felt you would never be good enough*
- *You don't want them to know that you don't live with your mum and dad.*

He drew a circle that shut
me out. Heretic, rebel, a
thing to flout. But Love
and I had the wit to
win. We
drew a circle
that took
him in

Edwin Markham
in *Outwitted*





It is worth any sacrifice...

To see eyes that were
listless light up again;
To see someone smile
who seemed to have
forgotten how to smile;
To see trust reborn in
someone who no longer
believed in anything, or
anyone

Dom Helder Camara