

When Feeding Becomes a Source of Guilt, Make Sure You Do This

by Maryann Tomovich Jacobsen, MS, RD on October 4, 2013



I was visiting a new food blog with a mom cooking some amazing gourmet meals when the guilty thoughts started to flood in:

“I need to spend more time in the kitchen,”

“I should really try more recipes.”

But then I notice those thoughts turn to:

“I’ll never be a good cook, I am a...” I am finally learning to stop.

I have found that if I can change course at that moment, I can change the outcome for the better.

Guilt vs. shame

In today’s world there is a lot to feel guilty about when it comes to feeding a family. Whether it’s cooking-related, health-related or being [a healthy role model](#), food can way too easily become a source of guilt and anxiety.

Before reading [Brene Brown's](#) book, *Daring Greatly*, I used to think guilt and shame were the same thing. Brown, a shame researcher known for her famous [TED talk](#), sums up the difference in her book:

How we experience these different emotions comes down to self-talk...The majority of shame researchers and clinicians agree that the difference between shame and guilt is best understood as the difference between "I am bad" and "I did something bad."

Guilt=I did something bad

Shame =I am bad

So a little guilt might be good, especially if there really is some stuff you need to work on. But when that internal talk moves to shame, that's where the trouble begins.

Why shame is so destructive

There are still people who believe that a little shame will motivate people, which is not supported in the literature. For example, researchers from Florida State University's College of Medicine found that adolescents and adults who experienced weight discrimination were more than twice as likely to be obese four years after the fact. The teens in the study reacted to discrimination by eating more and skipping workouts.

Brene Brown explains the general research in this area:

Shame is highly correlated with addiction, violence, aggression, depression, eating disorders and bullying. Researchers don't find shame correlated with positive outcomes at all — there are no data to support that shame is a helpful compass for good behavior. In fact, shame is much more likely to be the cause of destructive and hurtful behaviors than it is to be the solution.

Think about what happens when your thoughts start to color your self worth. For the person dealing with weight, it might be something like "Why even try, I'm never going to be as thin as X" or "How could I eat that, I might as well finish it off...what a loser."

If someone is going through a difficult feeding stage, it might be "Feeding is never going to get better...maybe I'm just not good at it," or "Her kid eats that, I must be doing something wrong."

When we put ourselves down, the same way a bad boss or toxic person in our life does, it results in zero motivation to do better at the very thing we are challenged with.

Self Compassion: the antidote

But if we talk to ourselves like a good friend would, that changes everything. So in that moment my thoughts turn on me, I remind myself that I am certainly not the first parent to feel this way. I have come a long way when it comes to cooking and I still have a long way to go, but overall I've done pretty well. I remember the goals I have and make a plan for next steps. That helps me feel hopeful and even a bit inspired.

It's the same way I feel after getting off the phone with a good friend who sympathizes with me and encourages me. Instead of feeling deflated, I feel ready to tackle what needs to be done.

So when food or feeding becomes a source of guilt and you find yourself being hard on yourself, try some [self compassion](#). No matter what it is that is eating away to you, just remember that you are not alone.

Anyone in this boat lately?