

The following list of “Negative Rules and Negative Messages” may help you understand how destructive, toxic shame has become a part of your life. Look over these phrases and identify those to which you relate. Remember, you may or may not remember specifically “hearing” these words, but if you operate or function, to some degree, with these beliefs in place, the message was communicated to you by some means.

NEGATIVE RULES

Don't express your feelings
Don't get angry
Don't get upset
Don't cry
Do as I say, not as I do
Be good, “nice,” perfect
Avoid conflict (or avoid dealing with conflict)
Don't think or talk; just follow directions
Do well in school (exclusively)
Don't ask questions
Don't betray the family
Don't discuss the family with outsiders; keep the family secret
Be seen and not heard!
No back talk
Don't contradict me
Always look good
I'm always right, you're always wrong
Always be in control
Focus on the troubled person's behavior
The troubled person's behavior is not the cause of our problems
Always maintain the status quo
Everyone in the family must be an enabler

NEGATIVE MESSAGES

Shame on you
You're not good enough
I wish I'd never had you
Your needs are not all right with me
Hurry up and grow up
Be dependent
Be a man
Big boys don't cry
Act like a nice girl (or lady)
You don't feel that way
Don't be like that
You're so stupid (or bad, etc.)
You caused it
You owe it to us
Of course we love you!
I'm sacrificing myself for you
How can you do this to me?
We won't love you if you . . .
You're driving me crazy!
You'll never accomplish anything
It didn't really hurt
You're so selfish
You'll be the death of me yet
That's not true
I promise (though breaks it)
You may me sick
We wanted a boy/girl
You _____
(fill in the blank)

(Negative Rules and Negative Messages developed by Charles Whitfield, M.D.)