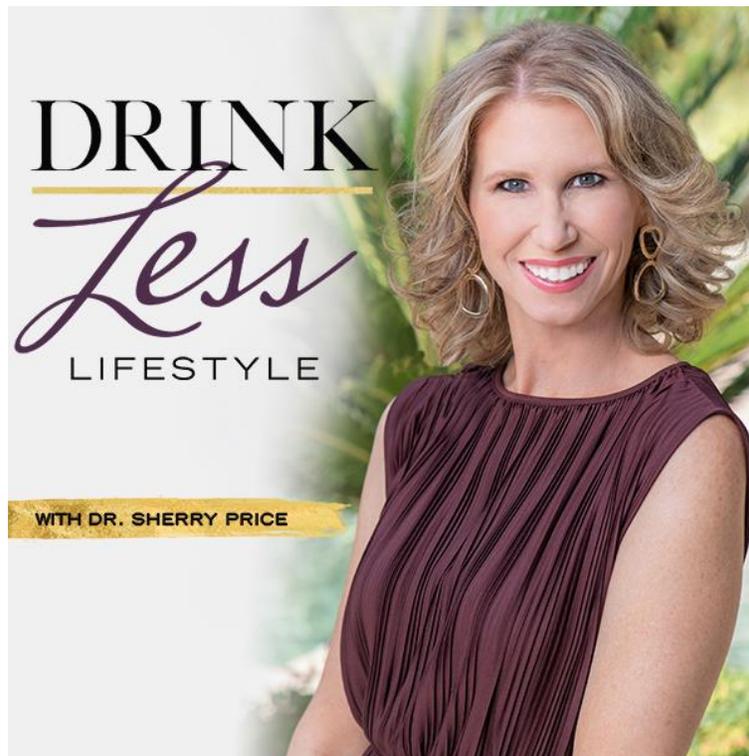


Ep #23: Ending the Shame Cycle



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. Sherry Price

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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle Podcast* with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 23.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Well hello my friends. It is March. Can you believe it? I don't know about you but to me the year of 2021 seems to be flying by. We are 60 days in and I can't believe it's March already. Well, I know for me it might be because I am so busy with work and outside of work.

I think I mentioned to you in the beginning of the year we started our kitchen remodel and that is just finishing up. So it's been managing all of that, picking out the things, the door handles, everything that we wanted, getting it ordered, having it here, getting new appliances, the appliances come, getting those installed, taking phone calls, running downstairs seeing if they're putting things together appropriately.

So a lot of interruptions but it's really caused our family to plan on a whole different level because we don't have a kitchen, so we don't have a fridge. And our backup fridge is a smaller fridge so it requires us to be very considerate to what we purchase at the grocery store because we only have limited storage. And I don't know but our salad dressings and all the condiments, that takes up a lot of room. So we've been focusing on meal planning a lot more because we only buy so much because only so much can get refrigerated in the freezer section.

And all of that has led to us planning more, which I do with my clients all the time. Planning out your life, I think I've been more effective and more free time on my hands because of that, because I'm so diligent with the planning. And this is something that I work on with my clients because I know a lot of us tend to resist planning. We think that takes the spot media

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of things. We think if it's on my calendar or I plan it I'm not going to want to do it and then what? And that makes me feel bad.

This is the area we dive directly into because it really is a factor that can really up-level your life across the board. It is the one skill that I find really takes my life to the next level. So I find whenever my clients are resisting any type of planning for their benefit I always want to dive into that with them because they're resisting it, I find that they are missing out on so much opportunity with using your planning system effectively. And that's not to mean you have to plan all time to be tied up.

I also plan my downtime. I plan my vacations. I plan my free time. I plan my me time, all of that goes on the calendar. And to me life is just so much more enjoyable knowing I'm going to get to that, knowing I'm going to get to rest, knowing that now is my time of productivity and creativity and doing a podcast, and recording this for everyone. And then I'm going to get some free time after this. So I just want to offer that to you. I think planning is magical.

Now, before we dive in today's topic I want to give a listener shout out. I haven't done this in a while. And I really just love hearing from you and letting others know how this podcast or this work has changed their relationship with their drinking or changed their life. And I also love sharing this because I want you to know I'm not a special unicorn, and that change is possible, not just with my drinking relationship but other people who have accomplished this as well. So the review comes from Beach Mom 46.

"Dr. Sherri has changed my life. I searched for a podcast that sounded like me, someone who just drinks to relax and feels terrible about it in the morning and it's become this vicious cycle. I was searching for a podcast to be inspired and was only finding stories of women ruining their lives and stepping over their own vomit every morning. I cannot tell you how I look forward to your podcasts. You have an amazing soothing voice and you speak volumes to me. Thank you. I'm 52 days alcohol free. I'm enjoying the

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person I am becoming. I now jog, knit and drink tea, I used to just drink, so thank you.”

That is so awesome Beach Mom 46, thank you for writing that in. I know your story is wonderful for you and I'm so proud of you. And I also know that your story is going to inspire and encourage other women, so thank you for taking the time to write me that review. And I'd love to hear from you, please, go ahead, rate the podcast, write a review. And I would love to give a listener shout out to you in the future.

Okay, so now diving into today's topic which is going to be about shame. Now, I know every other drinker out there can relate to this one, feelings of guilt, shame, sometimes embarrassment. And I really want to dive into that and give you some tools to help you with it. And here's what I think, I may be wrong but I find that shame seems to run really deep particularly for us women. Now, I do get emails from men that listen to this podcast which is amazing and you're welcome to listen. But I think shame really affects us women tremendously on a whole different level.

So to begin I just want to start off and get us all on the same page and defining what shame is. So what is shame? Shame is an unpleasant emotion associated with a negative evaluation of self. Shame leads to feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness. Shame focused on the person, not the behavior. And it's not that we did something bad, it's that I am bad. Shame gives us that sense that we don't measure up to others, we're defective or some of us can think of us as damaged goods.

Okay, so there is a lot in there I want to talk about. And you know from a previous podcast episode that I am a big believer that we are not powerless. We are powerful. We are powerful beings. We have the power of choice. We have the power to create things in our life. We have the power to be the force for good in the world. We have the power to show up as the woman we want to be. And just like I talked about just a few episodes ago we have agency in our life. And that means we can make powerful decisions all the time.

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So the concept that we are powerless totally doesn't apply, I think it's false. I mean think about how much power we have in our families and at work, and all the things that we do, and give, and contribute, and all the good that we put out in the world. As women we fight for what we believe in, we fight for our kids, our families, and we want to do naturally what's right, and fair, and just. And I know all of us can find examples of this in our lives, 100%. So we are not powerless nor are we worthless. Where does this come from?

We were created to be here on this Earth at this point in time, in this place, in this moment. I firmly believe that, we were created for a purpose. We were created for a reason. And even if we get lost about that purpose for some period of time or we're in an in between time or phase in our life, we still have meaning and purpose for being here. And we are worthy. Our worthiness is inherent in being a human. You don't have to work for it.

Your worth is not based on who you know, or what you do, or what you don't do, or how much you've contributed or not contributed, or the words you've said, or the words you didn't say, or how many letters are after your name, or what degrees you've collected, or which degrees you didn't collect. None of that matters to your worth. You are worthy inherently just because you were born. Life is precious, you are worthy, it's inherent. And I want to say that 16,000 more times because I know we may know it but a lot of us need to take time to believe it about ourselves.

So you are worthy and you are powerful. To think the opposite is just not compatible with human beings. Okay, so I'll get off my soapbox there. Now back to shame. So remember the definition was that shame focuses on the person, it's that negative feeling that we feel about ourselves. Now, I want to compare this to guilt and how guilt is defined is that it's thinking that you've done something wrong. Guilt now focuses on the behavior, not the person.

Now, when we over-drink I think it's more appropriate to say we may have guilt about that. And I know some people say, "I feel shame about that."

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Because they feel they shouldn't be doing it. And they're reflecting it more on themselves rather than the behavior that they're doing. Now, either way they're words, you may just say they feel the same, they're just emotions and yes, intellectually I should know that but what I feel is what I feel. And I get that, I completely understand because I was there. So just to go back to these emotions, we know that all emotions come from our feelings.

So just to go back to these emotions of guilt and shame, we know that these emotions come from our thoughts. Our thoughts are feeling unworthy, our thoughts are feeling not enough, our thoughts are feeling I shouldn't be doing that. So these thoughts like I shouldn't have drank that much and why do I drink so much? And why can't I just have one? Or why did I open a whole bottle? Because I know I can't stop myself once I get started, or I know that one drink to lead so many more so why do I keep doing this to myself and my family?

Or this isn't the version of me that I like but I can't seem to get over this habit of over-drinking. Some of us think, when will I ever change? Some of us think, when will I ever get a hold of this? All of those thoughts don't produce feelings that are uplifting, don't produce feelings that we're proud of ourselves. If we are talking to ourselves this way, if we are thinking this way, of course thinking this way is wagging the finger at ourselves. It's saying, "When are you going to shape up? When is this going to stop?"

And it's kind of that negative self-talk where it just makes us feel worse, the feelings of shame, the feelings of guilt, the feelings of embarrassment, the feelings of disappointment. For me I had feelings of even disgust like why? Why does this keep happening? It's so irritating, so frustrating. And I like to think about it as the more I thought about this the more I felt like the spin cycle on a washing machine, it just kept going over and over.

I just kept ruminating on these thoughts and they kept causing more negative emotion and more negative emotion, to the point that what do you do when you have negative emotion? You want to escape it. And what's a quick fix to escape negative emotion? Of course, a drink. So I just want you

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to see it's really not about the alcohol. It's always about our thoughts. And having these thoughts are not helpful because they're not generating feelings that feel good.

Now, I'll often work with my clients and they'll hear me say this and they'll think that they're doomed because like oh. But I just keep having these thoughts and they won't change, they won't go away. I don't see how I can make them go away; they've been here for years. And yes, I know, I totally hear you. I had those same thoughts for years as well and they don't feel like they're changeable, they don't feel like how are you going to get rid of them? How are they going to go away?

I completely hear you and I completely understand. But you know what? The brain is malleable, that means it can change and it can also learn new things. And you know what can learn new things, we see it and we expect it in our kids but we often don't expect it from ourselves. Teachers go to work teaching kids. They're expecting them to learn math, and science, and literature, and all the things. But how come we don't have the same expectation on ourselves?

So please think back to the time before when smartphones came out. When they first came out did you know how to use them? Did you know how to place a call? Did you know how to text when a smartphone first came out? And please tell me, did you learn how to use the podcast function on a computer or a phone? The answer is yes if you're listening to this. Our brains learn new things all the time.

And with Covid we are learning new ways to teach kids. Teachers are learning new technologies to reach out to them, new ways to engage them, new ways of doing things if they're not in the classroom. And life constantly gives us opportunities to learn and grow at our jobs, if we want a promotion, we want to climb the ladder, we want to change careers. We have that ability because our brains can learn new things. It's how we were designed.

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Just think about it, think about this, what if your brain just stopped learning today? That means it couldn't learn any new thing for the rest of your life. So new features come out on our phone or a new app, you can't learn it. New technology comes out, maybe something better than a computer, something different than an iPad. Yeah, your brain can't learn it. What if now we're all driving electric cars? No, your brain can't understand how to plug it in, keep it charged, no, can't learn it.

Or maybe a new baby is born into your family and you're like no, can't learn a new name. I just can't learn the new name. That would really stink wouldn't it? Luckily our brains aren't like that. They are learning and processing information all the time whether you're reading the news, watching a new movie, binging out on Netflix, learning how to survive a shelter-in-place lifestyle, learning how to make the best of Covid in these times.

We are always adapting, adjusting, and learning, and processing, and growing. So that's an absolute fact that our brains learn and change. And I love that. I love the reminder that we're not fixed and we're not set in stone. So what we do today, and what our patterns, and our habits are today doesn't determine what they will be in the future because our brains are malleable.

And that's so uplifting for me because there's so much more I want to learn, and do, and achieve, and become, because I'm only 40 some years young. I can't wait to see what the next decades look like for me. I can't wait to see what the world is going to present and the opportunities that are going to be available to me because change is constant in life. Change is the constant in life and we see that in all life forms. There is seasons of change with nature, and the leaves, and trees, and butterflies, and cocoons, and everything changes.

As we age we notice our skin changes and our hair color can change, and maybe even the texture of it changes, our metabolism certainly changes, and our kids grow and change, everything changes in life always. But

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here's the thing, you know what holds us back from change? Guilt, shame, fear, don't you notice when you are filled with those kind of feelings, you don't want to change? And it promotes that same stuck feeling. Here I go again, overdrinking, here's how I end my day with a drink. It's the same stuck feeling pattern.

Now, according to Brené Brown and her research, she identifies three things which keeps shame alive. And they are silence, secrecy and judgment, oh boy, those are three that I owned fully when I was an overdrinker. I didn't want anyone to know. I wouldn't talk to anybody about it. I wouldn't even acknowledge it, not even to myself. I mean I'd have some internal dialog about it, the guilt and the shame but I certainly wouldn't talk to anybody else about it, so it kept it my secret.

And then I judged myself so harshly, so harshly, so much so that I couldn't tolerate anybody else judging me. Has anybody else told you about your overdrinking? It probably infuriates you if they do because you are probably judging yourself so harshly that any other additional judgment sets you off. I know it did for me. So think about that.

And those three criteria, a lot of us with Covid and not being out and about with people, so we've been suffering in silence even more so. And of course we don't want anybody to know, if we have guilt and shame, and we're so harsh with ourselves, of course it's going to keep us being in secret about it. Not getting help, not reaching out for support, not looking for ways that we can get over this and put it behind us, and put it in the past.

So I just want to run a few quick ideas by you that may help you if you feel you're in the shame cycle. So the first idea is knowing intellectually what shame is and what it isn't, so knowing that shame is a feeling, that's negative, that we are thinking that we are defective or unworthy. And we know that that's not true. There is no human that is unworthy. We know humans are lovable and they're worthy just because they are born and exist, end of story, it's inherent.

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So I like to think of shame as being a lie, it's really not true, although my brain would like me to think it's true, it's really not true. And so I love to just think about it intellectually at first because any time we start arguing with our thoughts, that's how we start to change our emotions. Because it always starts with the think, feel, act cycle, so thinking first, then our feelings come along, and then our actions change. So even if you just know about shame and the definition intellectually, and you start changing that conversation in your head, eventually you will find that your emotions catch up.

So I even say, even as an intellectual experience, just knowing that, that you are not broken, you are not defective, you are powerful, and you are worthy starts to break the shame cycle. And I love to just remind my brain that all patterns in life, all behaviors, all habits, all things that we do, they can change.

Change is inevitable. It's a natural part of life. And I also like to remind my brain that change is expected, so not to get mad at it when there's changes that don't happen, like maybe a slower metabolism. But then I need to adjust to that and that's okay because I was meant for change. Now, if change is inevitable and it's expected then what holds us back? It's the feelings, it's always the feelings holding us back because we may fear change per se even though it's our nature.

And the funny thing is we probably don't fear the change because let's face it, most of us want to change our drinking patterns. We want that other side where we're not controlled by alcohol. We're in control of it. So what is it that we truly fear? We fear failure. We fear that we're not going to get there. And so the interesting thing is that if we fear failure and don't do anything what are we actually creating in the moment? Failure, if we're not willing to change and we're not taking steps to change then we're actually creating the failure now.

And so here's what I want to share as a truism I find in my life, maybe you'll find it in yours as well, working to make a change feels better than doing

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nothing at all. Let me say that again, working to make a change feels better than doing nothing at all. If you're just sitting there waiting for things to change, that kind of feels defeating a lot, that feels like it's really not going to happen, I'll start tomorrow. But if you're actually involved in the change it feels better than doing nothing about it.

Alright, so the next idea I have is to try and let the shame go. Now, here's the thing about letting it go. I'm going to give you first an example and then I'm going to describe it. So imagine you're holding something, clenching it in your fist, say you have some change, you're hanging on to some dimes and some nickels and you're clenching it in your fist. Now, what do you have to do to let it go? You have to open up your fist. You have to flare out all five fingers and turn your hand upside down and then the change falls.

So the process of letting it go is an active process and I think a lot of us think that when we say, "Let it go", that it's just naturally going to happen, that there's no active process to letting something go. No, letting something go is an active process. You have to release your grip of it. So I think it's very misunderstood when we say, "Let it go", that you think it's just going to roll off your back or it's just going to take care of itself, and that's not what I'm saying.

So when the feeling comes we name it, there you are guilt, there you are shame. Yes, I understood where you're coming from because I over-drank last night. I get it. I'm not going to let you take up space in my head, lay on the couch in my head and just ruminate about how bad it was that I over-drank last night. I'm not going to allow that. I want you to get up and I want you to leave. You're talking to yourself, you're active in the process of letting it go, it's not a passive process.

And sometimes I'll even say it to my guilt or shame back then, "I need to get on with my day now, are you done because you're going to go away?"

Okay, another idea I have for you is to find likeminded groups of people on the same journey that you are on. Because we know from the research,

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doing this alone and in secret, and listening to our harsh judgment makes the process harder and it keeps us stuck. And we don't want to be stuck. We want to be free.

And so that's exactly why I created my free and private Facebook group, nobody knows you're in it except the members that are in the group. Nobody can see your posts from the outside, just the members inside the group. Because I wanted a space where we can have dialog about this, that's supportive, encouraging, that can help get you solutions that work. And the women in there one of the rules is you have to be supportive. If you're not, you don't get let into the group. If you post a negative comment you get ousted from the group.

This is supposed to be a supportive loving group because we already know we have enough harshness on ourselves that we don't need more judgment. And judgment never helps solve the issue. Wagging your finger at yourself or at your kids, do you notice that it doesn't motivate them to do what you want them to do? It never works. Love, compassion, curiosity, understanding, and then problem solving can happen and it happens so much quicker. And you don't feel stuck and terrible on the process.

We make homework time here fun at our house. It's not ruling and drudgery like it used to be because I didn't know another way. But no, you'll find your kids want to learn if it's fun, and engaging, and entertaining. That's the process of cutting back as well, supportive, uplifting, and solution oriented, that's what I offer in my Stop the Overdrinking Habit community to the women in there. So come along, join us if you want.

Another tip, just know that the brain is going to experience all sorts of emotions and it's natural. There's nothing wrong with you, just because your brain has some guilt, guess what? Brains across the world have guilt as well, and some of them may experience shame because we're human.

And what comes along with being human? Having emotions, and I like to think of emotions as just data, it's just showing me my pain points. It's just

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showing me what I believe in. It just shows me what I like and don't like, and how I want to be treated, because that's what anger will show me, what my boundaries were crossed. They just tell us something about the way we're thinking and the way we're experiencing life, they're nothing more than data and they don't have to be acted on, that's the crazy thing. We don't have to act on our emotions, we can just let them be.

So here is the kicker too, knowing that it's natural to have all the emotions. And when I say it's a kicker it's because we don't want to experience the negative emotions, but what are we sucking down? We're sucking down a depressant, alcohol is a depressant to the nervous system, so that means the nervous system will experience more depression, more anxiety, more stress, more lack of motivation, more unproductivity because it's a depressant. It's going to suppress the feelings of joy, and happiness, and love because it is a depressant long term.

Now, short term you might get some of those happy chemicals, but long term like the next day, later that night, all of that, it becomes a big depressant. That's why people get stuck, because if you have feelings of depression, you have feelings of more anxiety, you have feelings of more guilt and more shame, what are those feelings going to lead you to do? Stay there, because you don't feel you have the energy to change. You don't have the motivation to change. You're not motivated because you have lack of energy from the chemical that's been floating in your blood.

So I like to think of alcohol as a way to flat line our positive emotions. And for some people they stay there for years. And what shocks them awake or what wakes them up is actually a severe event, or a very tragic event. It could be a DUI, it could be a car accident, it could be being told that you have sclerosis of the liver or whatever. We kind of just keep going on autopilot until something shocks our nervous system and wakes us up. And we don't have to wait to have that rock bottom event.

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So knowing that our feelings are natural and then the more alcohol we take, we're going to actually experience more negative feelings because that's the nature of alcohol.

Alright, and finally is to be cognitively focused sometimes rather than emotionally focused. And here's what I mean by this. We often look to others to meet our emotional needs and when we don't get it then we can turn to substances like food and drink to meet those emotional needs because we haven't learned to do that for ourselves.

And so that's a real big reason why a lot of women over-drink, we want that comfort, we want that reward, we want that relief, it's part of our ritual. But we find that it provides temporary relief because in the long term we feel in bondage to the alcohol, we feel more trapped by it, we can't escape it. So it actually causes the direct opposite effect of relief.

So at times it may be easier that when you're in the moment is not to focus on your feelings so much and to focus more on your thinking, what's going on for you inside your head that's producing the feelings of desire, or want, or maybe the feelings of guilt, or shame, or unhappiness that you're wanting to escape from. Going inside cognitively is where the solutions are going to be.

And for some of us when we go inside cognitively we are able to get some distance from what's going on for us emotionally. And that distance can be good because then we don't feel we need to act on those emotions, that we need to run to alcohol in that second, or else we're going to die.

And what I love about this one is it helps us understand our mental processing unit, that is our brain. It helps us understand why it is that we are getting swallowed up by our emotions and why we're choosing to run and escape from them. It's like kind of peeling back those layers of the onion, try to really identify what's going on inside my brain that's leading to feelings of desire for the alcohol and it's causing me to over-drink, it's back to the think, feel, act cycle. And this is where you get solutions.

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Okay, so those are some of the ways that can help you manage some guilt and shame should you experience it. So those are some of the ways that can help you manage the guilt and shame. Guilt and shame can be a real doozy and I just want to offer that they can be present but we can choose not to let them interfere with our bigger goals. And this gets easier the more it is practiced.

Alright, that's what I have for you this week my friends. I'll see you next week. Bye.

Thanks for listening to *Drink Less Lifestyle*. If you're ready to change your relationship with drinking now check out the free guide, *How to Effectively Break the Overdrinking Habit* at sherryprice.com/startnow. See you next week.