

RESOURCES BY ILANA JACQUELINE PATIENT ADVOCACY

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COPING WITH SHAME AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Have you ever had a doctor appointment where the physician was dismissive, rude or insensitive? Did the appointment leave you feeling a sense of shame or guilt? You're not alone, and those feelings don't have to haunt you forever. Here are some guidelines for coping with these feelings.

Speak out. Shame is best diluted by sharing it. When we bottle up that feeling, it festers, it grows bigger and uglier in our heads. And it isolates you. The reality is that everyone feels shame and medical shame is no different. So, whether you post about your experience on a Facebook support group or with your friend or caregiver on the way home from that terrible appointment, get it out there.

Fight back. During some of my more traumatic doctor appointments I didn't feel like I could do or say anything in the moment to defend myself. It all happened so fast and I was so overwhelmed. By the time the doctor walked out of the exam room I hadn't said a word in my own defense. Sometimes we don't feel brave enough in the moment to say what needs to be said. It may help you to know that there is a way to say what you need to say: through online reviews. It is important that you don't get too enraged in your response. Don't curse. Don't go "full capslock"—just write about the reality of what happened and give other patients fair warning about this doctor's bedside manner.

Work it out. Sometimes a phone call with a friend, a post on social media, even leaving a negative review in your defense isn't enough to clear out those feelings of shame. It's important for patients with chronic illnesses to go to therapy and shame should be something you discuss at length. Whether you need to act out the scenario again, cry it out, or just take a moment to pull all of your feelings on the table—Therapy helps.

Mitigate triggers. If you know you have to follow up with a doctor who has brought you shame in the past, don't go alone. Bring a friend or family member to speak up on your behalf and to be there to comfort you. Doctors tend to alter bad behavior when a patient has an advocate in the room.

Seek support. You are not alone in having felt guilty or emotionally violated by a medical professional. It happens to patients of all kinds, every day. One way of coping with it is to connect with other patients and be a support to them. You can find plenty of first-person stories about the topic on TheMighty.com, find your tribe on Inspire.com or even join local support groups in your area.

Shame can either be a fleeting emotion or a deeply buried one. The choice is yours on how you want to deal with it—but choosing *not* to deal with it is the only bad choice you can make.