

Step Out Of The Scapegoat Role

by Leanne Matton

Scapagoat Recovery Guide

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WELCOME TO THE SCAPEGOAT RECOVERY GUIDE

This guide is a combination of information to help you determine if you have been scapegoated and if so, what to do about it so you can start to heal, along with more general information to increase your understanding of this phenomenon.

Never waste your time trying to explain who you are to people who are committed to misunderstanding you.

~

Shannon L. Alder



Each section contains information about a different aspect of scapegoating. It would be useful to start a journal where you can reflect on each section as you read.

I hope you will feel less alone as a result of reading this guide, and know that you have much more value than you've been led to believe.

WHAT IS A SCAPEGOAT?

Scapegoat (noun)

1.

a person who is blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others synonyms: whipping boy, fall guy, patsy

2.

(in the Bible) a goat sent into the wilderness after the Jewish chief priest had symbolically laid the sins of the people upon it (Lev. 16)



WHAT IS A SCAPEGOAT?

The word 'scapegoat' came originally from a ceremonial practice where a goat was sacrificed for the sins of the people, and another goat was then loaded up symbolically with these sins and sent out into the wilderness alone to perish.

The goats themselves were considered pure, and the shame and sin of the people were transferred on to these innocent creatures to carry.



The practice of scapegoating allows uncomfortable feelings such as anger and guilt to be projected onto a more vulnerable person.

In this way, the person doing the scapegoating never has to take responsibility for their own shortcomings and difficulties

SIGNS YOU ARE A SCAPEGOAT



- You are made responsible for family issues, disagreements and conflicts, even when these occur as a result of other people's actions.
- Other family members have been verbally, emotionally or physically abusive towards you
- You are disbelieved and called a liar if you try to defend yourself and explain what really happened
- People outside the family system go along with the bullying or look the other way when you ask for help
- You're expected to help other family members out but cannot expect the same help in return
- You find yourself asking 'what did I do now?'
- You notice that the person accusing you of bad behaviour is the one actually engaging in this behaviour, eg. accuses you of being rude while they are repeatedly rude to you
- Your achievements are minimised or turned into something negative, eg. you mention you got a good grade on your last assignment and you're told 'you think you're better than us'.

WHY WERE YOU SCAPEGOATED?

Scapegoats are the innocents who carry the blame for others. It allows groups of people, families, workers, even whole countries, to project their own shortcomings away from themselves. It's a very painful role to play, however family therapists believe the scapegoat is often the healthiest of everyone because they aren't complicit in denying the dysfunction. The scapegoat is carefully chosen, although probably not consciously. He or she is the one who rocks the boat in some way, either through being

different (artistic when the rest of the family is intellectual, for example) or through being very sensitive and therefore unable to pretend along with everyone else that the family dysfunction is not happening. The people who scapegoated you had their own agenda and they needed you in this role to help them avoid dealing with their own problems. to sidestep the pain of their own challenges. The decision to scapegoat you was based on their own needs and had little to do with who you are at all.



THE COST TO YOU

If you find yourself as the ‘black sheep’, the ‘outcast’, or the ‘bad guy’, your self-esteem is likely to be so damaged that you find yourself actually exhibiting the negative descriptions you hear about yourself.



This might take the form of not living up to your potential, not reaching your true earning capacity, having unhealthy relationships with people who don't treat you well, and not reaching for your dreams.

You may have grown up lacking the ability to comfortably interact with others, engage in team activities and sports, etc, and this in turn leads you to avoid opportunities to move forward personally and professionally.

HOW THIS MAY AFFECT YOU



Because of the projection involved in scapegoating, it's likely that the depth of self-loathing and shame you feel are not actually yours. These feelings belong to the people who thought you were a useful dumping ground.

Nevertheless, the damage resulting from this should not be dismissed. It's a debilitating experience that has long-reaching implications. Many scapegoats are left with disenfranchised grief—a grief that is not seen as legitimate and therefore cannot be worked through.

UNDOING YOUR PROGRAMMING

Try not to fall into magical thinking – feeling not good enough doesn't mean you aren't good enough. **It's a feeling, not a fact.** Remind yourself of all the kind things you've done, the praise and support you've had from others, the achievements you've reached.

We all have both good and bad points, the focus on yours has been out of balance towards 'all bad' – remind yourself of all the good points too, you do have them and good friends have probably been trying to point them out to you for years!

Let go of explaining and justifying yourself to people who are invested in seeing you as 'bad'. Doing this keeps you stuck because this is a reflection on them, not you. Ask to be treated respectfully, keeping in mind that doing this is likely to be viewed as more evidence of your 'badness'.

This is not the truth. You are entitled to make statements along the lines of “ The way you just spoke to me is not acceptable, please don't speak to me like that again” and “ If you want to speak to me, please do it civilly or I won't respond .”



WHAT DO YOU NEED NOW?

As a child, you had no choice, but as an adult there are choices. The best choice you can make is to decide every day that you will live according to the person you truly are inside, rather than who other people say you are or want you to be.

Make a commitment to learn how to trust and respect yourself. You will be less likely to back down in the face of other people's accusations and insistence that you are out of line if you believe you deserve respect.




WHAT DO YOU NEED NOW?



Stepping out of the scapegoat role can sometimes mean that unfortunately you are unable to continue a relationship with some of the people in your life. If they are determined to keep you in this role, you may need to limit or even cut contact with them. This may cause pain, but it will be less painful than staying in this role.

Make a regular practice of treating yourself with loving kindness and self-acceptance. It will feel unfamiliar and false, even impossible, at first but that's because it's a new experience. Keep going until it becomes a habit. This is your best protection against being exploited and victimised in the future.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leanne Matton

Like you, I know about being scapegoated, about underachieving and living down to expectations. My school reports all said 'Leanne would do well if she tried'. As an adult I tiptoed around trying to avoid attention. I could never ask for help with anything, so I became wary of taking on anything that I might not be able to work out by myself.

Working through this with professional support, I began to recognise that other people are not my family, that my scapegoat status is obsolete, and that I needed to acknowledge my achievements. Doing this helped me be kinder to myself and really started to turn things around for me. I want to help turn things around for others as well.

