

Shame & Harsh Self-Criticism

Moving from global self-judgment toward accountability, learning, and self-respect.

Guilt and shame

Guilt often says, “I did something I regret.” Shame tends to say, “I am bad, defective, or unworthy.” Shame can lead to hiding, defensiveness, overcompensation, people-pleasing, or giving up.

A more useful response

- Name the specific behavior or outcome rather than condemning the whole self.
- Ask what repair, learning, or boundary is needed.
- Notice whether harshness is improving behavior or simply increasing avoidance.
- Use the same standards of humanity you would apply to someone else who was taking responsibility.

Self-compassion is not excuse-making

Compassion can coexist with consequences. The goal is to respond to mistakes in a way that increases honesty, repair, and future effectiveness rather than paralysis.

Try this reflection

If you removed the global label about yourself, what specific behavior, need, loss, or lesson would remain?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.