Shame at Work, at Home & in Love

Shame tends to hit hardest in the places we care about most. Here's what it often says, what may really be going on, and something to try instead.

	WHAT SHAME SAYS	WHAT'S OFTEN HAPPENING	TRY INSTEAD
At work **59%** of ND adults in a 2024 US survey worried disclosing would hurt them at work.	*"Everyone else can handle this. I'm lazy, or I'm faking it."* *"If they find out, they'll know I don't belong here."*	Workplaces are often built for one kind of brain: open offices, vague tasks, back-to-back meetings. Masking all day burns the energy you'd need for the work itself.	**Name the need, not the flaw.** "I do my best work with written follow-ups." **Treat supports as tools,** not cheating. **Find one safe person** at work, or outside it.
As a parent **88%** of 1,016 parents of autistic children in a UK survey felt blamed for their child's behavior.	*"I'm failing my kid. A good parent wouldn't lose it like that."* *"I passed my brain down to them. It's my fault."*	Parenting asks for constant planning, switching and calm, often from a parent who is ND too. ADHD and autism run strongly in families. Outside judgment ("just be firmer") adds blame on top.	**Repair over perfection.** "I got loud. That wasn't okay. I'm sorry." **Say your self-talk out loud, kindly.** Kids learn how to treat their brain by watching how you treat yours.
In relationships **~1 in 2** adults with ADHD in one study expected to be treated unfairly if they told someone they were dating.	*"I'm too much. Too hard to love."* *"I forgot again. I'm a terrible partner and friend."*	ND traits get misread as not caring: forgetting looks like "you don't love me," quiet looks like "you're upset." Communication gaps run both ways. They're nobody's character flaw.	**Separate impact from intent.** "I forgot, and I care. Let's build a reminder together." **Share how your brain works** before the hard moment, not during it.

The thread that runs through all three

Shame says the struggle is proof of who you are. Usually, it's proof of a **mismatch** between your brain and what the setting expects, plus years of being told the mismatch was your fault.

Sources: Understood.org / Harris Poll Neurodiversity at Work survey, 2024 (518 ND adults); Running & Jata-Hall, *Parental Blame and the PDA Profile of Autism*, 2023 (self-selected UK sample); Masuch et al., *ADHD Atten Def Hyp Disord* 2018 (104 adults). Educational only, not therapy or medical advice.

From Shame to Repair

Shame says "I am the problem." Guilt says "something happened, and I can do something about it." Guilt is the one you can work with.

THE SHAME → REPAIR TRANSLATOR

SHAME SAYS (ABOUT ME)	GUILT SAYS (ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED)	ONE REPAIR OR NEXT STEP
"I'm useless. I missed the deadline again."	"I missed the deadline. My time estimate was off."	Tell my manager early next time, and ask for check-ins.
"I'm a terrible mom. I yelled."	"I yelled when I was overloaded. That's not how I want to respond."	Repair with my kid, and plan a sensory break for that time of day.
"I'm too much. No wonder they're tired of me."	"I talked a lot when I was excited, and I'm not sure how they felt."	Check in instead of assuming: "Was that a lot? Tell me honestly."
Mine:		
Mine:		

Not every moment needs repair. Sometimes the guilt step is simply: "That was hard for my brain, and nothing was wrong with me."

SAY IT WITHOUT SHAME: THE SOLA I-STATEMENT

For partners, kids, coworkers or friends

When I...	I think...	I feel...	I want / need...	I will...
what I sensed: saw, heard	the story in my head	the emotion	the need underneath	my part, my next step
...see the dishes still in the sink	...I forgot again and you're upset	...ashamed and a little defensive	...a system that doesn't rely on memory	...set a nightly alarm. Can we try it this week?

At work

A need I've been hiding at work is...

One support I could try without asking permission:

At home

Something I do well as a parent (or caregiver) that shame skips over:

What I want my kid to learn about mistakes:

In relationships

Something I wish the people close to me understood about my brain:

Who could I share this with first?

Shame-to-guilt framing draws on June Tangney's research on shame and guilt. If these prompts bring up a lot, pause, ground, and reach out to someone you trust. Educational only, not therapy.