Shame or Guilt?

Guilt says “I did something bad.” Shame says “I am bad.” Knowing which one is talking changes what helps.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1 Two different feelings

Read across. Most people feel some of both.

	Guilt	Shame
Focus	On what I did	On who I am
Inner voice	“I did a bad thing.”	“I am bad.”
Body	Tension, regret, an ache	Shrinking, heat, wanting to vanish
Urge	Fix it, say sorry, do better	Hide, deny or blame someone else
Helps when	It fits the facts and leads to repair	Almost never as a lasting state

2 Sort the thoughts

Circle G for guilt (about an action) or S for shame (about the whole self)

1. I snapped at my friend and I want to make it right. (G) (S)
2. I'm such an idiot. Of course I messed it up. (G) (S)
3. I forgot the deadline. I'll tell my boss today. (G) (S)
4. Nobody would like me if they really knew me. (G) (S)
5. I broke my promise, and I can make up for it. (G) (S)
6. I'm disgusting. I should just disappear. (G) (S)
7. I lied about it, so I'll go back and tell the truth. (G) (S)
8. Something is wrong with me at the core. (G) (S)

Answers: G = 1, 3, 5, 7. S = 2, 4, 6, 8. Shame thoughts judge the whole person.

3 Check the facts

Think of one moment when you felt bad about yourself

What happened: _____

What I am telling myself about me: _____

Did I act against my own values? (yes / no / partly): _____

Would people I care about truly reject me if they knew? _____

What would I say to a friend in the same spot: _____

So this feeling is mostly (guilt / shame / both): _____

Does it fit the facts? (yes / no / partly): _____

My next step (repair, or an opposite move): _____

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My Repair and Self-Compassion Plan

Repair what I did. Be kind to who I am. Both can be true at once.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1 If guilt fits: my repair steps

When I did act against my values

I own it, in one sentence: _____

Who was affected and how: _____

My apology (no "but"): _____

How I can make it right: _____

What I will do differently next time: _____

2 If shame does not fit: opposite moves

Shame says hide. Tick two moves to try instead.

- ☐ Tell one safe person what happened
- ☐ Stay in the room instead of leaving
- ☐ Put a hand on my chest and breathe slowly
- ☐ Separate the act from the person
- ☐ Write what I would say to a friend
- ☐ Keep my head up and make eye contact
- ☐ Name it: "This is shame, not a fact."
- ☐ Talk to myself like a good friend would
- ☐ Do one small task I value today
- ☐ Notice: everyone makes mistakes

3 A kinder sentence

Rewrite the shame thought about the action, not the whole self

The shame thought: _____

A kinder, truer version: _____

4 My practice log

One line on the days shame or guilt showed up

Day	What happened	Guilt, shame or both?	What I did
Mon		☐ G ☐ S ☐ Both	
Tue		☐ G ☐ S ☐ Both	
Wed		☐ G ☐ S ☐ Both	
Thu		☐ G ☐ S ☐ Both	
Fri		☐ G ☐ S ☐ Both	

For therapists and clients

1. Guilt that fits the facts is useful: it points to repair. Shame about the whole self rarely helps change.
2. Normalize first. Shame grows in secrecy, so saying it out loud in a safe relationship is part of the work.
3. Watch for shame turning into blame or anger at others. It is often a shield, not a lack of caring.
4. Strong shame linked to trauma, self-harm or hopelessness needs a full assessment, not a worksheet alone.

In the US, call or text 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) any time, day or night.

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